Name of Candidate   :   Pō'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea

Degree   :   Doctor of Philosophy

Department/School   :   School of Education

Institution/University :   The University of the South Pacific

Thesis Title   :   AKO MO E VA'INGA
A Tongan Conceptualisation of Play and Learning in the Early Years

Date of completion of
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AKO MO E VA'INGA:
A TONGAN CONCEPTUALISATION OF PLAY AND
LEARNING IN THE EARLY YEARS

By

Pō'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Faculty of Arts, Law and Education
The University of the South Pacific

July, 2017

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Statement by the Author

I, Pō'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea, declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published, or substantially overlapping with material submitted for the award of any other degree at any institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the text.

Signature: _____ **Date**: July 31, 2017

Name: Pō'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea

Student ID No. S11068027

Statement by the Supervisor

The research in this thesis was performed under my supervision and to my knowledge is the sole work of Ms Po'aloi Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea.

Signature: _____ **Date**: July 31, 2017

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ABSTRACT

Time and again, the echo of adult voices is heard in the small island Kingdom of Tonga uttering the almost arbitrary expression, "*Tuku e va'inga' mo e maumau taimi!*" (Stop playing, it is a waste of time!). Often harsh and at times gentle, the instruction is the same. Past and present early learning discourse advocate play as an extensive and profound element of learning in the early years. It is a unique form of development and the natural way children learn about themselves and the world that exists around them (Leaupepe, 2010).

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is widely accepted as the foundation for all future learning, rendering it most critical in the development phase of young children (Li, Park & Chen 2016). Learning theorists advocate play as a means to develop children's understanding of the world; a context in which complex social structures are constructed and rehearsed; a key role in the formation of personality and early socialisation; and a zone in which children's mental capabilities are extended (Hamilton & McFarlane, 2005). As an outcome, it further prevents impaired brain development, lack of social skills, depression and aggression when children are deprived of play (Hughes, 2003). To understand play in its entirety, its practice should not be interpreted outside the cultural, political and historical context from which it emerges (Docket & Fleer, 2003). Unfortunately, some Pacific ECE teachers fail to recognise and accept the importance of play for child development and learning and rather focus on preparing students for year one by prioritising subjects such as English (Puamau, 2008).

This doctoral dissertation applied a qualitative study to find out how the practice of young children's (0-8 years) structured and free play are conceptualised within the context of Tongan families and early childhood centers. It utilised the indigenous tools of *talanoa* (a combination of storying and semi-structured interview) and *tālanga* (focus group) to acquire insight into Tongan parents' and preschool teachers' perceptions of and behaviour towards childhood play. This generated authentic socio-cultural scenarios of the assumptions as to why play is often neglected and undervalued as a learning tool. Challenges include a lack of: adult awareness/support; teacher preparation, practice, training; curriculum development, educational policy/planning; proactive stakeholders to push early learning into a privileged position; failure of education systems to recognise play as an asset to

learning and development; misconception that formal instruction alone yields learning outcomes; and the dearth of local research to navigate decision making and good practice that is culturally appropriate, structured and empirically defined.

Research findings showed that play is a natural physical activity of enjoyment rather than a meaningful form of learning. It is not valued and understood for its learning attributes but limited to children's free time and often frowned upon as a waste of time. Free play is purposeless, boisterous and disrupts communal living within constricted settlement structures as opposed to structured play where teacher initiated activities are purposeful and a worthwhile activity. It is less strenuous, favourable and generates minimal noise level. As a child activity, adult inclusion and engagement is undervalued hindering play support and provision. The sacredness of the father's body, restrictions on female children and the overbearing Sunday law confines children's ability to express play in its entirety. It calls for understandings between culture and the natural need for children to play so that both needs are observed. After all, play finds a way to strengthen adult and child relationships; it breaks barriers and paves a way for further academic success.

A new taxonomy and model map the context for play in Tonga guided by teachers and parents who are at the centrefold of child nurturing and learning. Their ability to provide and engage in play paves a way to understand the culturally-inclusive ways children learn and develop through available play forms. The multiple skills harnessed through play ensures children ascertain a manifold of aptitudes that are vital to future formalised learning and life in general. Play equips and empowers children towards a multiplicity of prospects because career paths do not always culminate white collar jobs or further education. Play ensures alternate pathways are available and future interests are recognised to inform appropriate support, school programmes, subjects, teaching and learning approaches that are pertinent and culturally suitable for the child. Consequently, the findings accumulate to the wider discourse of early play and learning and bridges the pedagogical gap of knowledge and practice that has plagued the nation and wider region for decades.

Ki he fāmili mo e kāinga 'eiki hoku hoa' ki 'Ohonua, 'Eua; 'Uiha, Ha'apai pea mo Fāhefa, Kanokupolu, Pahu, Kolofo'ou, Tongatapu. Fakamālō mo e faka'apa'apa atu ki si'omou poupou mo e lotu na'e fai mai ki he ki'i feinga' ni. Ma'u ha 'ofa lahi atu kiate kimoutolu hono kotoa.

To my late dearly departed grandparents who nurtured and raised me as an infant. I have reached this far through your collective hopes and dreams. To my paternal grandparents, Sione Fa'oliu Langi and Mele Pōhiva 'Akau'ola; my maternal grandparents, Tēvita Lonitenisi and Katalina Supileo Vaioleti – *He'ikai ngalo kimoutolu 'i ha taimi. 'Oatu 'eku 'ofa lahi ki ho'o mou ngaahi fofonga' ki fa'itoka.*

Thank you as well to my church family in Suva, the First Assembly of God Church – to Pastors Lote Kama, Sepuloni Lolohea and Paula Fisi'ilose for the continuous and consistent spiritual and moral support. Also to the families who prayed for and encouraged this endeavour let alone your assistance in material donations. You are all included in this vote of thanks – *Vinaka vakalevu.*

To my Landlord, Mr. Raven Kumar and Laleena. No one could ask for a better homeowner to dwell amongst these past three years. Thank you for opening up your lovely safe-haven for my family and for your consistent love and support. Words cannot express my gratitude for you both and your precious children – *Dhanyavaad.*

To one of my best friends and colleagues, Tavai Vikilani. Thank you for pushing me to apply for this scholarship and for your ultimate faith even when I didn't believe in myself. True friends really do exist and you are a living testimony. *Mālō lahi e 'ofa mo e poupou – 'Ofa lahi atu.*

A special thank you is due to another dear best friend and close colleague, Mele Tonga 'Alatini-Fīnau. Your critical input and friendship paved a way, fostered originality and gave life to my chapter theme – for that I am truly thankful. As my informant back home in Tonga, you did a great job to ensure my needs were attended to and looked after. *'Ikai ha lea fe'unga ke fakamālō'ia'i 'aki ho'o 'ofa – Mālō 'aupito, loto hounga'ia mo'oni.*

I thank my 'study buddy' in Laucala, Ms Elenoa Kamanalangi Seru, or should I say, Dr Seru? Our humorous friendship enabled us both to embark and reach the finish line together. The prolonged days and late nights at the center, our funny conversations and the rides back home at daybreak are deeply cherished. *Vinaka* for

being that driving force that kept me both reasonable and nonsensical. *Mālō 'aupito 'i he tokoni mo e poupou kotoa pe – Loloma levu Noa.*

I wish to thank my graduate research family at the FALE postgraduate and research center. The center became our home and our collective company, our family. Thank you so much for the chain of support, the love and for sharing of experiences, stories, food, coffee and fine wine. May your journeys take you where your dreams aspire. I shall miss you all – *'Ofa lahi atu.*

To my countless number of friends, colleagues and families who have supported, encouraged and stood by me from day one. I cannot mention you all but know from the depths of my heart, I love you all. Thank you for being there, for sharing my daily experiences, for rejoicing in my good times and for the sincere friendship that eased and soothed the hard times. *Mālō e fakakaungāme'a lelei, ho'o mou 'ofa', fakalotolahi', lotu' mo e poupou' - 'Ofa lahi atu.*

To all the students and teachers I have/had the pleasure and honour of teaching – thank you all for making my teaching experience a memorable and pleasant one. Engaging in your learning fostered the stimulation to accomplish this study for the future students of Tonga and for an improved learning for our people. *'Ofa lahi atu pea fakatauange ke mou ma'u ha kaha'u lelei.*

- *Tu'a 'ofa atu*

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Experiencing a childhood in two different countries had a profound impact on my learning development. It is precisely these encounters, the people involved in my early rearing, and my own motherhood experiences, which impact not only my early learning practises but somewhat determined my teaching fate and passion for learning in the early years.

In 1977, I was born the eldest child to my parents, Kava ki Lo'āmanu Fa'oliu and Losalia Luvu Vai-Fa'oliu. Together with my paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, we all lived in a single compound within the urban outskirts of Fanga-'o-Pilolevu in Tonga. This form of extended living is customarily referred to as *nofo 'a kāinga*. I was raised by my extended paternal family and indoctrinated in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Sunday school became a weekly routine and although an infant, the informal exposure and structure of activities helped shape and pave the way for early formal learning. Associating with a wider group of people and discovering more about the world also initiated at this time.

My maternal family comprised of my late grandmother, Katalina Supileo Vaioleti, my aunts and their children. This bloodline descends from a strong Roman Catholic lineage hailing from the rural village of Vainī. My grandmother's frequent visits to take me to the village enabled me to distinguish how life and relationships differed amongst my two village and family roots. My paternal family were very organised, unified and structured unlike my maternal family who seemed to take each day as it came. It is my experiences amongst these two extremes that I find my identity as an individual. I feel I am able to adapt to both a structured and flexible environment which impacts how I associate with and relate to people.

The fond memory of my late paternal grandfather, Sione Fa'oliu Langi, a retired police officer is limited to the first three years of my life before his passing. He had a firm and methodic nature especially when he waved his *tokotoko* (walking stick) to discipline his *fanga mokopuna* (grandchildren). The *tokotoko* saga thus developed and instilled the core value of *'ulungaanga lelei* (good behaviour). My late paternal grandmother, Mele Pōhiva 'Akau'ola-Fa'oliu, was a cautious individual. Her careful yet unusual nurturing is what raised me as an infant. I am constantly reminded by my father how she often tied me to the dinner table to avoid my running across the street.

Through her early rearing I learnt to appreciate and value the importance of life, well-being and security.

In 1980, at the age of three, my immediate family which included my baby sister, migrated to Sydney, Australia. Although very young, I was mindful of the dynamic changes to the living environment I was in and as much as I was overwhelmed with this foreign country, I was happy to have moved there. My young school encounters in this country moulded my early learning experiences. I recall how my mother translated my kindergarten teacher's every word as I could only speak my mother tongue at the time. In order to fit in, I hastily adapted and within a year was able to effectively verbalise with my teachers and playmates.

The manner in which my teachers involved me in normal kindergarten routines and their gradual contribution to my early learning development fostered stimulation for further formalised instruction. I was engaged in a range of childhood play during indoor and outdoor activities which revolved around painting, drawing, colouring, singing, dancing, miming, building blocks, arranging wooden puzzles, pushing baby prams, dressing up and so forth. These activities provided an avenue to develop vital cognitive skills as counting, speaking, identifying and experimenting with colors, letters and shapes. It also developed physical and sensori-motor skills, coordination, rapport and involvement.

With an extensive imagination, I remember playing pretend teacher with my sister while our mother gathered our toys and positioned them as students. She also allowed me to dress up in her clothes, wear her high heels and put on her lipstick. My father, too, was instrumental in being a pretend student that I became so engaged in this sort of play. The teaching impulse of behaviour management emerged whenever my sister misbehaved so I disciplined her in the manner my *pālangi* teachers did – with verbal confrontation and oh, such firm body language. As humorous as it may seem, this became one of the ways play was practised in our household and although my parents were not aware of its learning and development attributes, their engagement, involvement and how they created an environment conducive to my play needs indirectly contributed in nurturing and moulding my early learning.

I also remember being so passionate about this pastime it became an infatuation. I preferred to play pretend teacher in all my free time, when I was watching television, feeding our dog or even when I went to bed at night. There was always an imaginary

student who I was constantly teaching, talking to or disciplining. Another imaginative character was being a pretend mother. Observing how mothers who came to my preschool center were so careful and gentle with their children was appealing, so I frequently switched to being one. My pretend children of course were the collection of dolls my father bought me and at times, I would create them using pillow cases, baby clothes and spare blankets.

Returning to Tonga prior to beginning high school revealed the variation in education and learning between the two countries. Initially, I concluded that learning difficulties were a result of poor teaching, lack of resources and improper teacher training. I later realised through my own teaching experiences that a large part of the problem is the reliance on decontextualised Western pedagogies which are to some degree, culturally insensitive to our specific learning needs. As a novice action researcher, I felt compelled to do something.

My previous tertiary studies and current role as teacher educator unearthed Lev Vygotsky's *Social Development Theory* (Vygotsky, 1978) and Howard Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (MI) (Gardner, 1993) which gave meaning not only to my childhood fascination but in identifying my own intelligences and the important role culture plays in the education of children. I was able to apply that knowledge in my teaching and better realise the different capabilities every child is gifted with and the specific learning styles and needs of Tongan children. Thus, teaching and learning for me regulated and was inspired from these learning theories.

Now that I have children of my own, my past experiences and passion for learning is tailored towards their unique learning needs. The opportunity to undertake doctoral studies in the area of culturally-inclusive learning pedagogies is my predestined fate to help bridge this barrier. In retrospect, being a teacher educator and mother places me at a metaphorical crossroad where the concern for both my own children and the children of Tonga's learning needs mutually and reciprocally impact each other.

DEDICATION

I affectionately *luva* (dedicate) this piece of work as a legacy for my children, nieces and nephews. May this study empower your young learning and hopefully inform an enhanced learning pathway for you into the future.

For

Peni Hausia Alexander Essence of Bethlehem Jr Havea
Melenaite ʻOfa ki Sacramento Quintessa Selina Jr Havea
John Nicholas Faʻamanuia Alofa i le Upu Moni Jr Havea
Losalia Luvu Lupe Philadelphius Catherine Elizabeth Jr Havea
Poliana Fakakoloa Mei Loto Tatau Catalina Evangelica Jr Faʻoliu
Graceabella Mary Magdalene Esmeralda Faʻoliu
Melissa Nadarlia Alexandra Jr Faʻoliu
Cresantian Jabez Barnabas Faʻoliu
Asenath Melody Patricia Kolo
Hadassah Victoria Fonua
William Kava Jr Faʻoliu
Sione Asher Kolo

With all my love

...And for the young present-day and forthcoming learners of Tonga, I pray this study is embraced by your guardians and teachers for your unique learning needs.

– Tuʻa ʻofa atu

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

3A2S	A Framework for learning in the early years which emphasises accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability and social justice
ACC	Australian Council of Churches
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BELS	Basic Education Life Skills
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
CEARTs	Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning Teachers
CRC	Conventions on the Rights of the Child
DE	Director of Education
DFL	Distance and Flexible Learning
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
EAU	Examinations and Assessment Unit
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
Ed.	Education
EFA	Education for All
EHCI	Early Human Capacity Index
EMIS	Educational Management and Information System
EU	European Union
EYL	Early Years of Learning
Eys	Early Years
F	Female
FALE	Faculty of Arts, Law and Education
FBEAP	Pacific Islands Forum Basic Education Action Plan
FedMM	Forum Education Ministers' Meeting
FICs	Forum Island Countries
FM	Framework Method
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
FWC	Free Wesleyan Church
GA	Graduate Assistant
GERs	Gross Enrolment Ratios
GoT	Government of Tonga
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IBID	In the same source
IKSs	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
IOE	Institute of Education
Km's	Kilometers
LMS	London Missionary Society
M	Male
MDGs	Millenium Development Goals
MET	Ministry of Education and Training
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCVK	Nederlands Comite Voor Kinderpostzegels
NERs	Net Enrolment Rates
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
NZAID	New Zealand Agency for International Development
PICs	Pacific Island Countries
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPC	Pacific Pre-school Council
PRC4ECCE	Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Care and Education

PRIDE	Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education
RPEIPP	Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative by and for Pacific Peoples
SEA	South East Asian
SLEP	Sustainable Livelihood and Education in the Pacific
SOEd	School of Education
Sq	Square
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
T	Teacher
TIOE	Tonga Institute of Education
TPA	Tonga Preschool Association
TSGP	Tonga School Grant Project
TVET	Technical, Vocational Education and Training
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USP	The University of the South Pacific
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association of Fiji
ZAD	Zone of Actual Development
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER ONE | INTRODUCTION

'Ofa 'aufuatō (Compassionate love)

TEU – is the preparatory stage before the actual 'work' or *toli* begins. For a *kakala*, the stringer or *kakala* maker takes into consideration who the *kakala* is for and the nature of the occasion in which the garlanding is involved ~ (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 53).

Overview

This doctoral dissertation centers on learning (*ako*) and development (*tupulaki*) through play (*va'inga*)[1] – key elements associated with 0-8 year old children, collectively coined as the early years of learning (EYL). It examines an array of classical and contemporary learning development theories that support and promote the pedagogical benefits of free and structured *va'inga* particularly its capacity to generate learning in young children from as early as conception in the womb to lower primary school years (class 1 to 3). Fleer (2014) explains, "*Play in the early years has generally been conceptualized in relation to its value as a pedagogical tool for supporting the development of children's learning*" (p. 1). It nourishes every aspect of child development – physical, social, emotional, intellectual and creative (Hewes, 2006). The learning in play is "*integrated, powerful, and largely invisible to the untrained eye. Much of this learning happens without direct teaching. It is learning that is important to the learner. Play has an intrinsic value in childhood and long-term developmental benefits*" (p. 4).

While the study advocates for *va'inga* and the wide range of empirical and practical evidence substantiating its benefits for children's holistic development (Leaupepe, 2013; Ministry of Education, 1966), it refrains from arguing *va'inga* as the sole means of early learning. It is pointed out, play "*should not be interpreted as being against other forces that compete for children's time. Academic enrichment opportunities are vital for some children's ability to progress academically, and participation in organized activities is known to promote healthy youth development*" (Ginsburg, 2007. p. 183). It is therefore important to ensure a variety of programmes are made available to meet the needs of children and their families (ibid).

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) partnership workshop held in March 2007 in the Solomon Islands between ECE development partners identified some of

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[1] Notes on the use of Tongan words & spelling throughout the dissertation is detailed in Appendix A.

the challenges Pacific Island nations faced in regards to ECE. A concern is the misapprehension between formal instruction and learning through play and that play is not entirely appreciated by some ECE teachers (Puamau, 2008). This subjective belief claims formal instruction the only means of worthwhile learning exchange between teacher and student. The assertion reinforced the need to conduct this local study to help bridge the gap so that Tongan children are better catered for and to inform best ways parents and ECE teachers may support children through more culturally inclusive methods of parenting and teaching. Furthermore, specific training on the theories and importance of play as a rigorous aspect of early learning and teacher training curriculum as well as the national education policy frameworks for ECE should be promoted (Taulava, 2015, Personal Communication).

In conceptualising *va'inga* as a valuable mechanism for early learning in Tonga, the study acquired the perceptions of selected Tongan adults and measured them against the advocacy of mainstream early learning discourse in an attempt to drive *va'inga* into a privileged position particularly within the public domain. This was necessary because Tonga has yet to fully embrace and accept the paradigm shift of *ako* and *va'inga* as a fundamental contribution to the learning and development of its youngest populace. This formed the basis of support for the researcher's argument that *va'inga* in its entirety and socio-cultural understanding yields remarkable learning outcomes and builds essential life skills that form strong foundations for further formalised and lifelong learning. Essentially, play is the "*balance in children's lives that will create the optimal developmental milieu to prepare our children to be academically, socially, and emotionally equipped to lead us into the future*" (Ginsburg, 2007. p. 183).

This introduction chapter presents the purpose, rationale, aims and objectives, research questions, assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study. It precedes an overview of the research site, the research design in light of the bricolage approach that guides the study, the positioning of ontology and epistemology, methodology and methods, analysis of data and ethical considerations. The latter part discusses the conceptual framework followed by the thesis structure with a brief synopsis of each chapter within the chapter theme[2]. The central ethos of core Tongan

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[2] Hala Fononga 'a Mata'ikoloa´ – Journey of a Valuable Emblem (detailed in Appendix B).

values sustaining the chapter theme embeds the beliefs and value systems of the people, owners and holders of the Tongan culture. It is symbolic to the Kakala Research Framework[3], the study's methodological framework, where **TEU** directs this first chapter signifying the preparation stage of the study.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to generally explore into the significance of *va'inga* for the early years of learning and to generate understanding of the Tongan socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes that shape the culture of child play. This in turn helped forge a scenario of how *va'inga* is viewed as a natural activity of children and an attribute to early learning. It also sought to obtain these insights through an advocacy for more culturally inclusive approaches to learning and indigenous ideas that provide a platform for relevance and a context for quality education.

1.2 Rationale of the study

A major catalyst for this undertaking is based on personal interests and professional practice in the area of ECE and early learning particularly while the researcher was actively involved in the training of early childhood teacher trainees at the Tonga Institute of Education (TIOE), the national provider for teacher education. Another decision that influenced this study is the fact that ECE in Tonga has not kept abreast with 21st century developments in early learning pedagogy let alone, play pedagogy. The formal inquiry is deemed necessary to enhance professional competencies in the delivery of knowledge, practice and training. In addition, it provides relevant research data to the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) which may suggest learning reform, to provide empirical insight into the adult role in nurturing young learning. Given education in the early years is the foundational basis for all future learning both in and out of school, the investigation was fueled by a genuine desire to rethink ways to improve current conceptions of early education in the Tongan learning contexts. An additional justification for the study is the need to provide empirical evidence of the appropriate age of preschool readiness and what activities and programmes are favourable to stimulate early learning development. This in turn justifies the overall aim of the study in its advocacy for a heightened awareness and practice of play in Tonga.

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[3] See *Thesis structure* (p. 14). Also discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

There is very limited literature on ECE, learning and play from the Pacific region and Tonga. As such, the study contributes to research and empirical support in the area of ECE while the findings add to the current discourse of early play and learning. In the foreseeable future, this will help contextualise aspects of 'good' pedagogical practices and purposefully align them to the underlying philosophy, which advocates for a more cultural-inclusive shift in thinking and practice.

The study is exclusive and is the first conducted in Tonga on the role of play to enhance ECE learning. Given also that an indigenous methodological approach was utilised, it offers a contextual frame within which meaningful engagement with participants may occur, and provides contextually derived data on beliefs, understandings and attitudes towards play from a uniquely Tongan perspective. This dissertation makes a contribution to the national, regional and international discourse on relevant, quality education in two main ways. First, it provides scholarly critique of Tongan conceptions of learning and play and, second, it theorises a Pacific socio-cultural taxonomy and model of play, learning and early childhood development. Both of which enriches the discourse on quality learning in the early years while presenting an alternative pathway for ECE practice in Tonga with the potential to inform similar studies and undertakings in other Pacific islands and indigenous contexts.

1.3 Research aims

The research aimed to show that:

1. Parents and teacher perceptions and attitudes towards play influences their willingness and ability to meaningfully engage in play as a pedagogical tool to improve and enhance learning in the early years;
2. Tongan conceptions of play have potential to inform teaching and learning in the early years; and
3. It is both possible and necessary to develop a contextual socio-cultural taxonomy and model of play, learning and development for teaching and learning in the early years in Tonga.

1.3.1 Goal

The primary research goal was to examine Tongan conceptions of play by situating these within both international and Pacific discourse, to develop a socio-cultural model of play, learning and development that contributes to improving contemporary understandings of learning in the early years. To do this, adult perceptions, attitudes

and behaviours towards play was investigated; the learning tools involved in play was also examined; and, existing forms of play practised in Tongan homes and in early learning centers; and adult engagement and support in children's play; and to assess implications for early learning ECE curriculum development, policy and planning, teacher training and pedagogical practice, adult education and proactive stakeholder engagement was explored.

1.3.2　Research questions

1. How do Tongan adults conceptualise children's play?
2. To what extent is play a learning and development tool?
3. In what forms of indoor and outdoor play activities do children engage?
4. How do adults engage and support play?
5. What implications do the findings suggest for early learning, ECE curriculum development, policy and planning, teacher training and pedagogical practice, adult education, and proactive stakeholder involvement?

1.3.3　Assumptions

The study is premised on the following assumptions:

i. In the Pacific, generally and in Tonga specifically, ECE continues to be driven and informed by traditional Western practices of early learning;

ii. There is a need to align current ECE practices to the empirical shift in contemporary early learning discourse to that of play and learning as development;

iii. There is a need to contextualise the knowledge and practise of *ako* and *va'inga* to ensure a culturally inclusive approach is adhered to and made available for Tongan children, teachers and parents;

iv. The adult perceptions of *va'inga* vary according to social-cultural contexts and beliefs as well as socio-economic status; and

v. The Early years of Learning (EYL) channels through a different mode of learning as opposed to formalised/didactic learning and formal instruction and must be dealt with in a different manner. The pathway for the EYL postulates *ako* and *va'inga* go hand in hand and are interchangeable with one another to yield worthwhile learning harnessing a sequence of development skills that are holistic, inclusive and life-long.

1.4   Limitations

This study:

i.   Was limited to Tongan parents and teachers of young children within the EYL who reside and work within the proximities of Nuku'alofa, Tongatapu the main island of Tonga;

ii.   Was limited to ECE centers around Nuku'alofa, the capital of Tongatapu where the majority of ECE centers are situated;

iii. Did not require or obtain the discernments of other ECE stakeholders, as its main objective was on the perceptions of parents and ECE teachers and the varying *va'inga* practices of children in their care. Parents and ECE teachers were seen as the most important and involved in children's day to day *ako* and *va'inga*;

iv.   Did not provide a comprehensive account of formal instruction or didactic learning. It focuses solely on the notions of *ako* and *va'inga* to understand its perceptive value and customary practice; and

v.   The study does not argue for major pedagogical reformation or a complete change in curriculum praxis to a pure play-based approach nor does it argue that play pedagogy is the only means of learning for the early years. It merely brings to the forefront of Tongan education, the transformed shift in pedagogical practices around the world to emphasise how early learning discourse has moved away from traditional forms and pedagogy and of its restoration to earlier forms of play-based learning and curricula.

1.5   Delimitations

The limitations of the study were addressed in the following:

i.   The island of Tongatapu is home to roughly 75% of the ECE centers in Tonga while almost 50% alone are located within the vicinities of the Nuku'alofa area. The enclosed setting of centers vary in provision enabling an easy access point for the researcher into each research site while providing primary access to the diverse curriculum programmes and pedagogical practices each center follows and implements. Most of these programmes are not available for public reference but gaining access to them while on site was agreed to. The variations in ECE teachers, programmes, centers and provision were consider suitable to represent the whole ECE population in Tonga. Similar

research to the outer islands is an impending and ongoing prospect and is encouraged to other researchers or persons with similar interests. The city locale also provided convenient and trouble-free access to on-land travel and ongoing communication mediums within the country and back to Suva, Fiji, where the researcher was based;

ii.   While wider ECE stakeholder involvement was not a direct or immediate necessity for the study, certain ECE officials from the MET and the Tonga Preschool Association (TPA) were approached to provide crucial information surrounding the background, history and current situations of ECE in Tonga. The study does not delve into formal instruction, instead it argues against its dominance within the national ECE curriculum and otherwise, advocates for a prospective and aligned play-based approach and philosophy for the future of EYL. Sole focus centers on the benefits of *ako* and *va'inga* to understand how its relationship is perceived and valued by Tongan adults while practicsd by young Tongan children. It further informs good and best practices for enhanced learning in ECE, pedagogical praxis for current ECE teachers, teacher training for future ECE teachers, curriculum development for ECE centers and teacher training, educational policy and planning to inform future ECE frameworks and guidelines as well as adult education for public access and reference; and

iii.   Although the study does not argue for pedagogical reformation or a revolutionary shift in curriculum praxis to a play-based approach, it otherwise attempts to bring to the foreground of Tongan education, vast empirical evidence and international perspectives that support the pedagogical practice of free and structured *va'inga* for young children. It also advocates *va'inga* within the wider Tongan community so that parents, teachers and caregivers are made aware of this knowledge and information for home and personal practice.

1.6 Overview of research site

Tonga was specifically selected as the research site for this study based on the assertion "*the socio-historical and cultural context in which play can occur – that is the institutions, the social and cultural systems, the political and historical practices and activities of particular communities which give rise to or which shape how play*

may be enacted" (Fleer, 2009. p. 9). Likewise, play contributes to optimal child development in all children yet there needs to be an advocacy for these changes to meet children's social and environmental contexts which enhances play opportunities (Ginsburg, 2007). In other words, play and the practice of it should not be interpreted outside the cultural, political and historical context from which it emerges (Docket & Fleer, 1999). For this reason *va'inga* has not been empirically investigated as a rigorous element of early learning in Tonga, provided the impetus to undertake this study. The context also offered a suitable point of entry for easy contact and access to study participants who are located around and within the proximities of Nuku'alofa. It provided further accessibility to the MET for readily available primary resources and information for the purpose of document analysis. Tongatapu[4] is also homel to the researcher bringing the research inquiry close to heart.

1.7 Research design

1.7.1 Bricolage

Given the complexities that surround the nature of *ako* and *va'inga* and to understand its mutual relationship, it was imperative to embed the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks within a paradigm that recognises multiplicity. It is suggested, to "*acknowledge the complexity of children's development and learning, we need to consider the contribution made by multiple theoretical perspectives*" (Raban et al, 2003. p. 21). The eclectic *bricolage* – a critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical and multi-methodological inquiry approach (Rogers, 2012) seemed most fitting and appropriate to conceptualise the research design. It furthermore, allowed the researcher to integrate complex relationships by adopting a flexible and pluralistic behaviour (ibid). The multiplicities were stipulated as points of triangulation within data sources, investigator involvement, methodology and methods, theoretical positioning and data analysis (Thurmond, 2001). Bricolage[5] enabled holistic triangulation as "*increasing confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem*" (Jick 1979, cited in Thurmond, 2001. p. 244).

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[4] A more detailed exploration into the historical and geographical background of Tonga and the history and developments of ECE in both Tonga and the Pacific region are thoroughly examined in the next chapter.

[5] Note a comprehensive account on the use of bricolage is discussed in Chapter 4 as well as the Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks.

1.7.2 Ontology and epistemology

Establishing the research paradigm or framing the study is essential to research design. A clear-cut definition of its philosophical underpinnings and requirements is, "*one's view of reality and being is called ontology and the view of how one acquires knowledge is termed epistemology*" (Mack, 2010. p. 5). Establishing this positioning early in any research undertaking helps determine what angle the researcher, as a neutral figure in the study, situates his or her beliefs. These ontological beliefs further inform the epistemological assumptions, which in turn, influences methodological choices giving life to the appropriate methods and tools of data collection (Mack, 2010). In this study, the ontology of play and learning rests on the assumption they both coexist in the world although perceptions and interpretations of their meanings and practices are either parallel or in variance with each other. Following this, the research epistemology underpins the social reality of play and learning best understood using multiple approaches to research inquiry. Social constructionism and interpretivism through an eclectic bricolage approach was therefore, most appropriate to ascertain a comprehensive look into the play and learning phenomena within the context of Tonga. The theoretical embedding of the intended methodology and methods also birthed a stronghold triangulation of data collection tools specifically *talanoa* and *tālanga* most suitable to obtain culturally-rich qualitative data.

1.7.3 Methodology and methods

The study applied a qualitative approach to research inquiry, which allowed a more in-depth and inclusive process of acquiring subjective information to describe the context or natural setting of variables under consideration. It drew from both phenomenology and ethnography in which the phenomenon researched is *ako* and *va'inga* and conducted in the natural setting of Tonga within home and school environments. Furthermore, phenomenology allowed an examination of the Tongan notions of *ako* and *va'inga* in the early years – a critical area of study in the 21st century. Suitable holders of knowledge and practice relevant for the study point towards Tongan parents and ECE teachers within Nuku'alofa. They were purposefully selected based on their availability and suitability for the study. The selected sample groups contained twenty (20) sets of parents and ten (10) ECE teachers. The Kakala Research Framework structured the methodological process

bearing intricate core Tongan values also adhered to in strengthening and upholding the trustworthiness of both data collection and analysis procedures. Triangulation was achieved through a combination of dynamic research tools including (1) *talanoa* (semi-structured interviews), (2) *tālanga* (focus groups), (3) participant observation, (4) document analysis, (5) field notes and (6) visual ethnographies.

1.7.4 Analysis of data

The qualitative data attained through the main tools of *talanoa* and *tālanga* were analysed using the Framework Method devised by Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer (Gale et al, 2013). Of its defining features, it provided a "*structure into which the researcher can systematically reduce the data, in order to analyse it by case and by code*" (p. 3). The Framework Method is "*most commonly used for the thematic analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts...although it could, in principle, be adapted for other types of textual data, including documents, such as meeting minutes or diaries, or field notes from observations*" (ibid, p. 3). Its seven (7) stages (step-by-step guide) allowed the data to filter through an analysis procedure that helped categorise and code ideas for further analysis and henceforth, the results and discussion chapter[6]. Added to this, are the essential requirements of qualitative research – replicability, transferability, credibility and confidence. Member checking was an important component where the findings and interpretations were forwarded to study participants for a thorough assessment of accuracy. This increased the trustworthiness of research findings and enhanced the validity of description, interpretation and theoretical application (Maxwell, 2005).

1.7.5 Ethical considerations

For ethical guidance, clearance and approval to conduct research under the University of the South Pacific (USP) required adherence of the USP Human Ethics procedure. This aided the reliability of the pre-designed research structures and more importantly to safeguard every affiliation between the researcher and research participants. The study also referenced important aspects of the Pacific ethics system outlined by the Otago University in New Zealand as well as Pacific research ethics (Sanga, 2014). It further acknowledged Tongan research ethical considerations (Johansson-Fua, 2014). These ethical channels were contextually strengthened with

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[6] Chapter five (5)

reference to the ECE Educator's Code of Ethics by the MET as part of the Tonga National Early Childhood Education Policy Framework (2013). They ensured the researcher adhered to proper expectations in approaching (*fakafe'iloaki*), dealing (*fakafeangai*) and working (*ngāue*) with ECE teachers during the *tālanga* process and in research visitations to ECE centers. It further framed how to *fakafeangai* with parents and the community during the sequence of *talanoa* especially of children when researcher was present within the school premises. This was extremely helpful and necessary during the process of participant observation.

1.8 Curriculum foundations as conceptual bricolage

A conceptual framework is described as a "*system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform your research*" (Sitko, 2013. p. 1). Furthermore, it identifies research variables, and clarifies relationships among these variables (McGaghie, Bordage & Shea, 2001). Above all, a conceptual framework sets the stage for the presentation of a research question and in driving discussions of the study. The specific framework for this study positions *ako* and *va'inga* at the centerfold of research inquiry. Bricolage is not only viewed as multiple methods of inquiry, but also diverse in the theoretical and philosophical understandings of its many elements in research (Kinchelo, 2001). It couples the interdisciplinary, multi methodological and theoretical perspectives also manifested within the theoretical framework[7] surmising, "*critical bricoleurs employ historiographical, philosophical, and social theoretical lenses to gain a more complex understanding of the intricacies of research design*" (ibid, p. 679). Essentially, bricolage is grounded on the epistemology of complexity where "*bricoleurs act upon the concept that theory is not an explanation of the world – it is more an explanation of our relation to the world*" (Kinchelo 2004, p. 2). In conceptualising the research framework, the foundations of curriculum – *philosophy, sociology* and *psychology* by Print (1993) was considered most suitable. In the developing stage of curriculum, it is crucial to observe planning and design within its philosophical underpinnings, sociological influences, and psychological behaviours. It is warned, "*neither philosophy, nor sociology, nor psychology, can on its own justify a curriculum or be used as the sole basis for curriculum planning*" (Lawton, 2012. p. 5). Figure 1.1a illustrates the complexities that surround the task.

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[7] Chapter three (3)

Figure 1.1a the Philosophical criteria
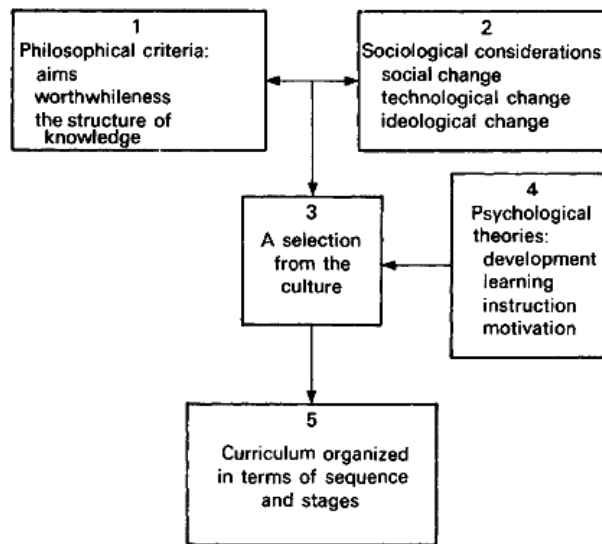
(Lawton, 2012. p. 5)

The philosophical assumptions are concerned with making sense of what is encountered in life (Print, 1993). Philosophical influence therefore, is found in the way curriculum developers handle philosophical matters and in how they;

> perceive the world, and hence education, may be determined by posing three philosophical questions: what is real? What is good? What is true? Individuals will perceive and answer these questions in different ways and hence individual philosophies emerge. In turn, different philosophies will affect how individuals perceive and relate to the curriculum (Lawton, 2012. p. 5).

In order for a comprehensive view on curriculum practice, it is imperative to use a holistic approach that incorporates all its theoretical and practical elements (ibid)[8]. Figure 1.1b stipulates the role of multiple curriculum foundations. It also suggests there should be equal consideration of all the three most popular curriculum theories – the *child-centered view,* the *subject-centered* and *knowledge centered view* as well as the *society-centered view*. It is further surmised as a:

> [A] Comprehensive theory of curriculum planning would recognize the individual nature of the pupils, and also recognize the value of education in its own right. But if we are to plan a programme of compulsory activities we will have to take into consideration the three kinds of view expressed above, i.e. the child-centered, the knowledge-centered and the society-centered. Whilst each one of them is incomplete on its own, each one may have something to contribute to planning a curriculum as a whole (ibid, p. 4).

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[8] See figure 1.1b

Figure 1.1b the Role of curriculum foundations

Philosophy   Sociology and culture   Psychology

Curriculum developers

Conceptions of curriculum
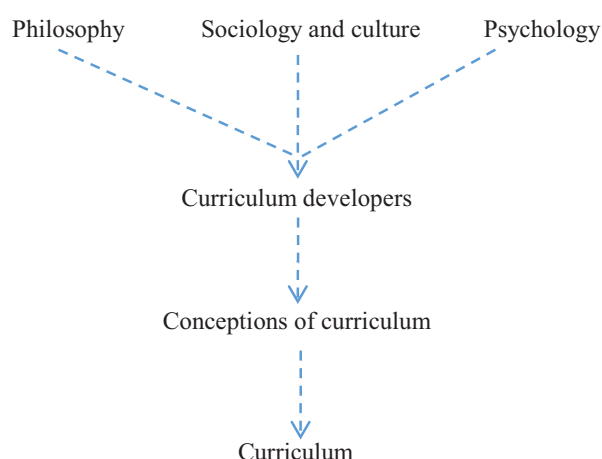
Curriculum

(Adapted from Lawton, 1978 cited in Print, 1993. p. 33)

In figure 1.2, the magnifying glass represents an enlarged approach to a holistic understanding of *ako* and *va'inga* through multiple lenses within the foundations of curriculum. The additional dimension of *history* (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2014) secured a robust pathway to ensure *ako* and *va'inga* are inclusively represented. The framework is bordered by both classical and contemporary learning theories of play to inform sound theoretical and practical applications for a better understanding of the curriculum underpinnings involved in promoting and advocating for *va'inga* in Tonga. Therefore, *ako* and *va'inga*, alongside the general ideas of inquiry were framed within this enclosure.

Figure 1.2 Conceptual Framework – Curriculum foundations as conceptual bricolage

Psychology   History

AKO and
VA'INGA

Classical and
Contemporary Play
Theories

Classical and
Contemporary Play
Theories

Sociology   Philosophy
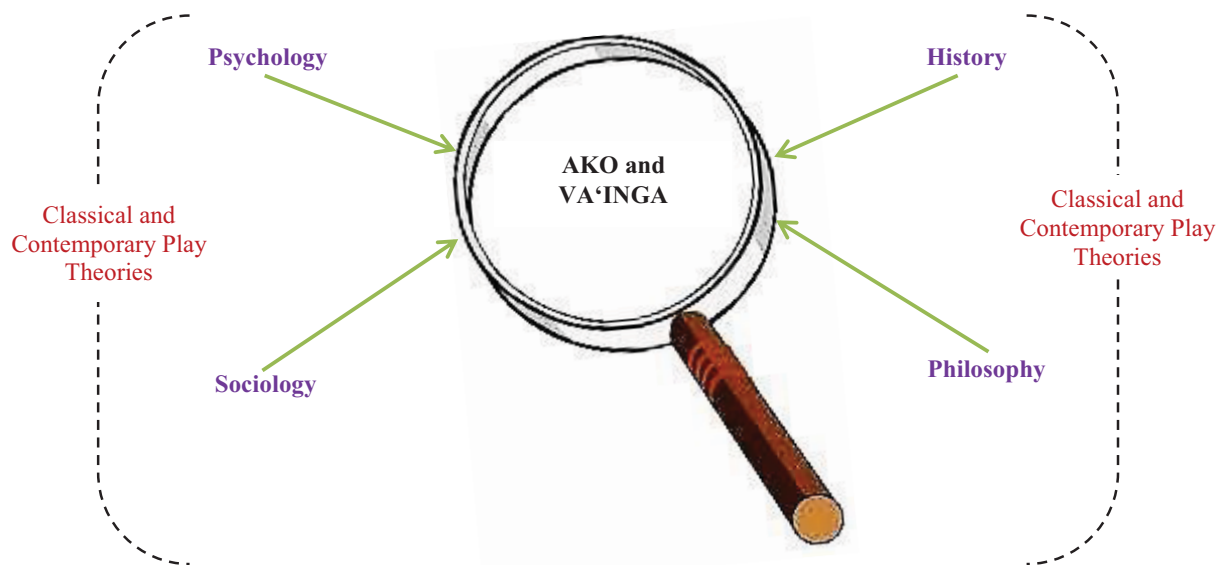
Thesis structure

This thesis is structured in alignment with the Kakala Framework. Figure 1.3 is an explicit depiction of the thesis structure and how each of its seven chapters are constructed within the methodological framework – the Kakala Research Framework [blue] (Johansson-Fua, 2014). In essence, the *kakala* is rooted in the practice of making and later garlanding (gifting) of traditional Tongan floral flowers. It emulates the process of *toli* (picking and sorting flowers – data collection stage), *tui* (stringing flowers together – analysis stage), and *luva* (gifting of the garland – reporting and disseminating information). It later transpired into a framework suitable for Pacific research in what is known today as the Kakala Research Framework further coupling the extra tiers of *teu* (preparation - conceptualisation), *mālie* (expression 'bravo' or 'well done' – relevancy and usefulness) and *māfana* (warmth – application, transferability, sustainability). The Chapter Theme – *Hala Fononga 'a Mata'ikoloa´* (Journey of a Valuable Emblem) [green] is premised on a metaphorical and familial narrative guided by a series of core Tongan values pivotal to child rearing in Tonga. Details are to be drawn from Appendix B. The figure follows a detailed account of each chapter structure as they unfold within the study.

Figure 1.3 Thesis structure
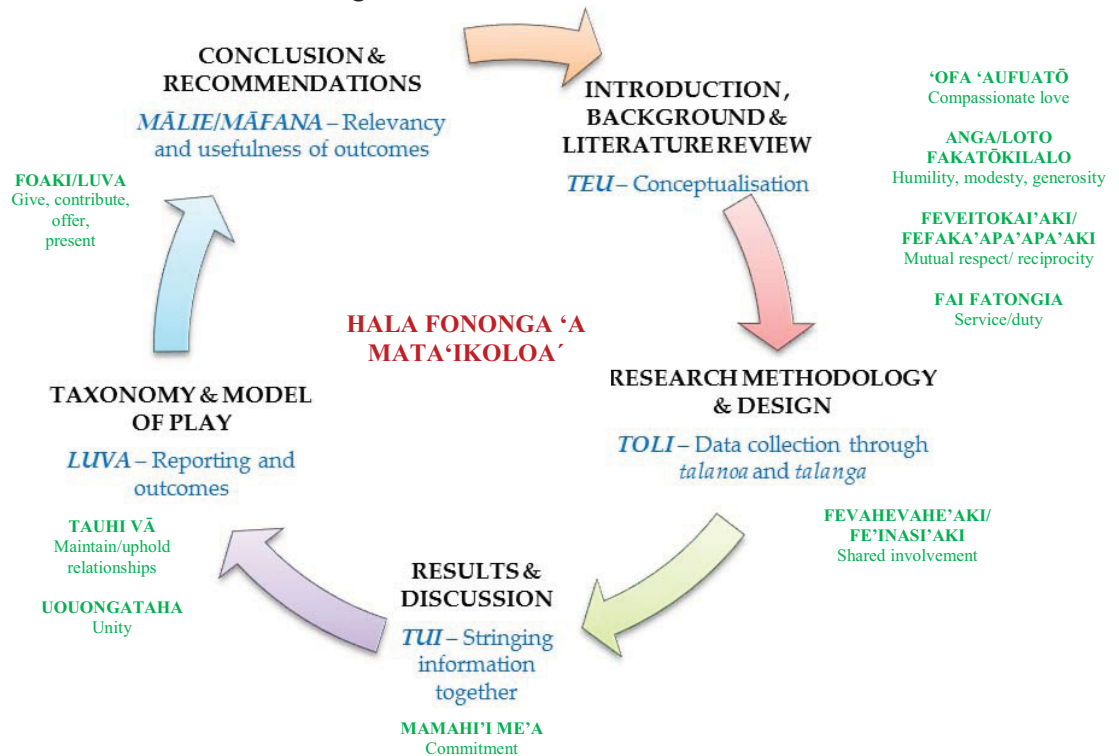
TEU - Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the entire study and details the conceptual framework that guides the study within a bricolage frame. It represents the initial research process of **TEU** – the preparation stage where conceptualisation, design and planning interplay accompanied by the core value of *'ofa 'aufuatō* (compassionate love) figurative of the researcher's grounded position, passion and involvement towards the study purpose.

TEU - Chapter 2: Background and Context

Chapter two provides a bird's eye view of the contextual site of the study and a detailed background of ECE in Tonga and the Pacific region. It too follows the research process of **TEU** and is figurative of the core value of *anga/loto fakatōkilalo* (humility/modesty) embodying the art of gifting or imparting valuable knowledge often stored within cultural reservoirs. This knowledge and deep understanding of place can only emerge through the eyes and stories of a person grounded within that specific culture – in this case, the researcher at hand.

TEU - Chapter 3: Literature Review

Chapter three introduces the study's theoretical framework through an extensive investigation into a selection of past, emerging and contrasting theories that conceptualise a worldview of play. It also aligns with the research process of **TEU** and is emblematic of *fefaka'apa'apa'aki/feveitokai'aki* (mutual respect/reciprocity) and *fai fatongia* (service/duty) echoing the delicate nature of acquiring subtle information, its honest treatment and the rightful acknowledgement it is due.

TOLI - Chapter 4: Methodology and Design

Chapter four provides a detailed description and justification for methodological choices. It marks a shift in the research process to the phase of **TOLI** or picking/gathering symbolic of the rigorous task of data collection. *Fevahevahe'aki* or *fe'inasi'aki* (sharing/shared involvement) directs this chapter representing the researcher's personal and social immersion into the study through participant interaction and shared involvement. It allows the task of data collection and at the same time, an equal adherence of *poto he fakafeangai* (skilled in personal/face-to-face communication and deliberation) – a virtue most significant and imperative when discerning Tongan research ethics.

TUI and LUVA - Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

Chapter five drew out the insights and valuable contributions of the study participants examining the socio-cultural behaviour and practice of play in Tonga to determine how learning is generated and further supported for young children. It carefully strings together a discussion of the study findings and measures them against the ideas and concepts within the research questions and literature review. It marks a further shift in the research process to **TUI** and **LUVA** – stringing information while at the same time, reporting and disseminating the wholesomeness of the obtainable information. It is depictive of *mamahi'i me'a* (commitment/loyalty) signaling extreme caution of the treatment, representation and integrity of findings.

LUVA - Chapter 6: Taxonomy and Model of Play

Chapter six extracts and reports the results, findings and discussions. It also fleshed out key aspects of play, learning and development that are culturally inclusive and development-specific for young Tongan learners. It presents a socio-cultural taxonomy and model of play, learning and development for the early years. It moves on to the research process of **LUVA** and is figurative of *tauhi vā* (maintain/uphold relationships) and *uouongataha* (unity) also taking to account the accurate and delicate representation of findings especially of researcher-participant integrity so that *vā* is valued and maintained beyond the study purpose.

MĀLIE and MĀFANA - Chapter 7: Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications

The final chapter presents a summative overview of the study and re-examines its significance justifying the relevance and appropriateness of the eclectic bricolage approach. It outlines a number of recommendations and the need for research on play. The chapter closes as the final research process of **MĀLIE** and **MĀFANA** culminating *foaki* (gift, contribute, offer). The summary is imbued with the warmth of *mālie* and *māfana* in the knowledge while the final dissertation presentation is of personal academic achievement to the researcher, the journey is both rewarding and valuable to her people and country.

CHAPTER TWO | BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Anga/loto fakatōkilalo' (Humility/modesty)

TEU – is the preparatory stage before the actual 'work' or *toli* begins. For a *kakala*, the stringer or *kakala* maker takes into consideration who the *kakala* is for and the nature of the occasion in which the garlanding is involved ~ (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 53).

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a background to the context site of the study. It is divided into two parts – *Part one* presents an overview of the contextual landscape of the Kingdom of Tonga, its geographic and historic background, its unique and enriched culture and the history, development and impact of formalised schooling. *Part two* provides a general exploration into the history, role, development and challenges of ECE in Tonga and the Pacific region. It is important to note, most parts of this chapter are indebted to a small group of writers frequently referenced throughout certain sections.

PART ONE: RESEARCH CONTEXT

> Tonga, unique among Pacific nations, never completely lost its indigenous governance. The archipelagos of 'The Friendly Islands' of Nations in 1970. Tonga remains the only monarchy in the Pacific (Central Intelligence Agency (Ed.), 2015. p. 749).

A few things led to the decision of selecting Tonga as the research site for the study. Foremost, it is home to the researcher where work and interest towards the pedagogical practices for ECE developed through involvement in teacher education and training at the Tonga Institute of Education (TIOE). Pursuing postgraduate studies in education at the USP Tonga Campus fostered insight of the need to contextualise inclusive styles of learning and teaching that are culturally relevant and meaningful for Tongan teachers and learners. At first, it seemed trivial but with further inquiry and curiosity, the reality of the cause is predicted to generate and revolutionise enhanced learning and teaching pedagogies for ECE. The study heeds towards the RPEIPP[9] initiative and the testimonies of its expansion by the prominent Pacific scholars who birthed it, fostering a leaning towards culturally inclusive approaches to education, teaching and learning for Oceania.

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[9] Detailed in Chapter 3.

2.2 Geographical background

The expression 'Oceania' was introduced in addition to the common name, 'Pacific Islands' (Hau'ofa, 1994). In specific, Oceania is used interchangeably with Pacific Ocean, islands and people. It "*connotes small areas of land surfaces sitting atop submerged reefs or seamounts*" (ibid, p. 8). Oceania, in its vast occupation of diverse peoples, islands and cultures is "*a sea of islands with their inhabitants. The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea*" (ibid, p. 8). It entails the expression *moana* often used in Tongan mythology to depict navigational journeys of legendary personalities such as the beautiful Hina from Samoa and Sinilau from Tonga. Also of civil war voyages of early Tongan chiefs and kings who navigated the vast Pacific *moana* in search to extend its rule and expand its territory. The universal name 'Pacific Ocean' was bestowed by Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan when he explored the 'South Sea' waters in 1519. To European explorers, it was originally "*Mar Pacifico (Pacific Ocean) because the waters seem very peaceful (Pacific)*" (Crompton & Goetzmann, 2009. p. 89). The following account of the geographical background of Tonga was mostly taken from the latest version of country facts documented in the Central Intelligence Agency (Ed.), (2015) report. The report presents a detailed account of Tonga's geography, people, society, government and economy.

In the midst of the central south-west Pacific Ocean sits the Tongan archipelago at approximately two-thirds of the way between Hawaii and New Zealand within the estimated coordinates of 20 00 South and 175 00 West (Daly, 2009; Tuqota & Tuqota, 2012). The vast islands that make up Tonga, spread over approximately 700,000 square km, between 15° and 22° south and 173° and 175° west. It lies 20 degrees south and 175 degrees north of the equator and is about 1, 800km north of New Zealand and 800km east of Fiji (ibid). Tonga has an area total of 747 square (sq.) kilometers (km's) that is four times the size of Washington, DC. For clarity, figure 2.1 shows the physical location of Tonga within Oceania. It also shows the positioning of Tonga just east of the Fiji Islands suggesting proximity within which the navigational and historic ties the two countries have with each other.

Figure 2.1 Map of Tonga
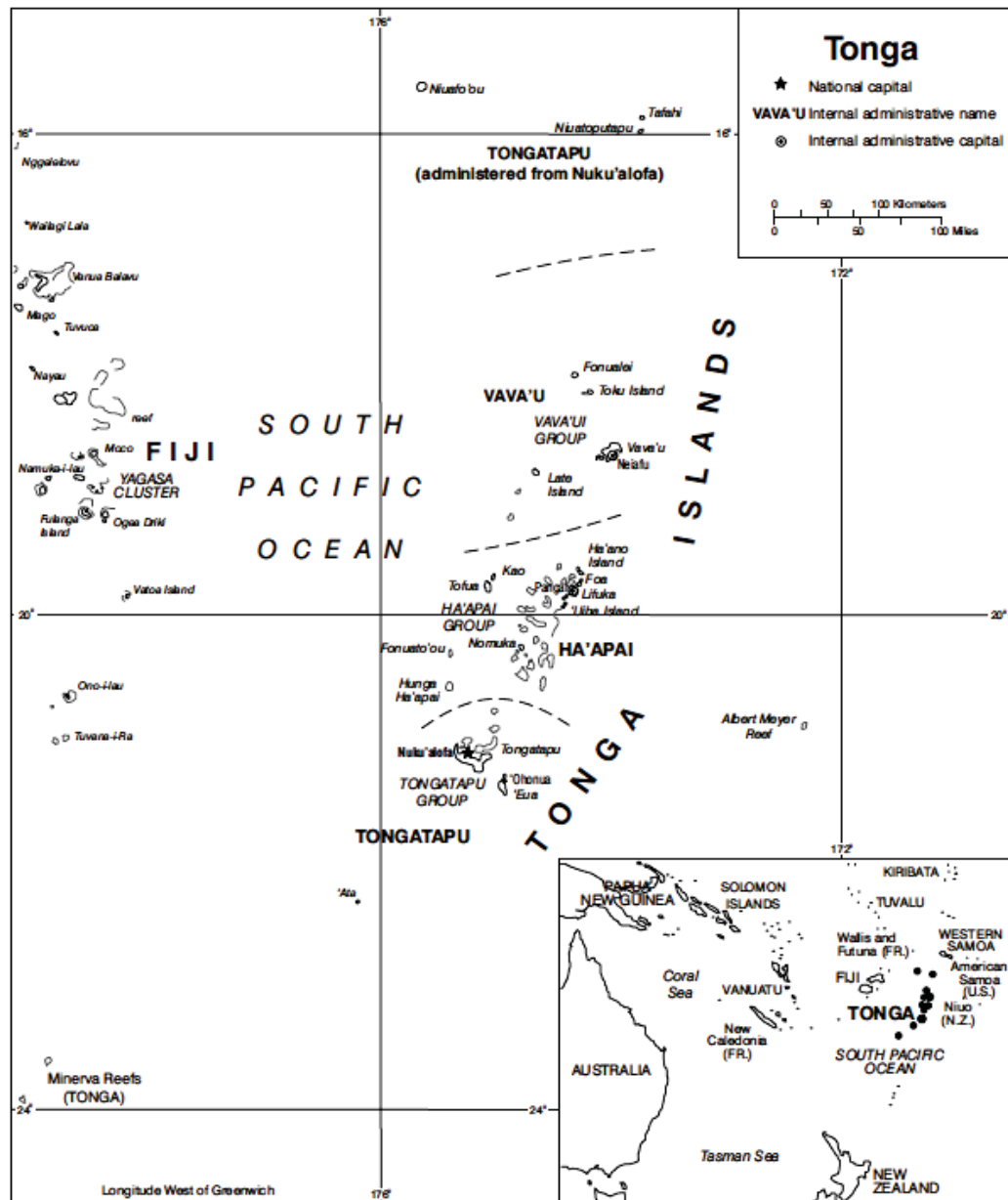
(Evans, 2001. p. 1)

An approximate 717 sq. km of the area surrounding Tonga is land mass while the remaining 30 sq. km is water. The 169 scattered islands are mostly made up of active volcanic craters while other islands are either raised or low coral atolls (Woodcock, 1975). There are 36 inhabited islands that narrowly belong to five (5) larger groups of islands – the main and largest island Tongatapu – *Sacred Tonga* or *Sacred South* (ibid). Its capital city is Nuku'alofa – the contextual site in which this dissertation study is centered. Other main islands include Ha'apai, Vava'u, Niua Toputapu and

the farthest island of Niua Fo'ou. In terms of island formation, "*most inhabited islands are coral limestone formations lying on the eastern non-volcanic chain sitting atop the submerged Tonga Ridge*" (Connaughton, 2007.p. 201). The island of 'Eua lies to the east of Tongatapu making it part of the main island. However, some people from the island prefer to be recognised as a separate part of the main island claiming they have their own nobility, title of land ownership; are physically detached from the main island and have their own separate voting constituency.

Another important feature to note is that Tonga situates to the east of the 180° meridian along the infamous, International Date Line "*Tonga time is Greenwich Mean Time plus thirteen hours, one hour ahead of New Zealand and Fiji, thus Tonga had the best claim, despite some creative claims by others, to be the first country in the world to see in the new millennium*" (Daly, 2009. p. 1). Significant also, is Tonga's geological positioning on top of the converging Indo-Australian and Pacific Plates within the sequential Pacific Ring of Fire "*Tonga also lies along the eastern edge of the Australia-India plate, beneath which the westward-moving Pacific plate sub ducts into the Tonga Trench*" (Burley and Dickinson, 2001. p. 341). This renders the nation and other countries sitting on top of the horse shaped Circum-Pacific Belt in a series of continuous earthquake activities from oceanic trenches, volcanic arcs, and volcanic belts and/or plate movements. The Pacific Ring of Fire is described as;

> The Ring of Fire is the result of plate tectonics. Tectonic plates are huge slabs of the Earth's crust, which fit together like pieces of a puzzle. The plates are not fixed but are constantly moving atop a layer of solid and molten rock called the mantle. Sometimes these plates collide, move apart, or slide next to each other. Most tectonic activity in the Ring of Fire occurs in these geologically active zones (National Geographic, 2016. p. 1).

2.2.1 People and society

The nationality of the people of Tonga is Tongan with an estimated population of 106,501. An approximate 25, 000 of the total population reside in the capital city of Nuku'alofa (July 2015). There exists the following ethnic groups where the majority are Tongan nationals making up 96.6% of the total population. Part-Tongan make up 1.7%, while others at 1.7%. An unspecified category amounts to 0.03%. The age structure in Tonga is reported as follows:

0-14 years: 35.06% (male 18,971/female 18,370)
15-24 years: 19.44% (male 10,605/female 10,103)
25-54 years: 33.6% (male 17,880/female 17,901)
55-64 years: 5.61% (male 2,924/female 3,047)
65 years and over: 6.29% (male 3,050/female 3,650)
(Central Intelligence Agency (Ed.), 2015. p.749).

The official and national language usage is English and Tongan 87%, Tongan (official) 10.7%, English (official) 1.2%, other 1.1%, while the 2006 report specifies some unspecified language usage of 0.03% (Central Intelligence Agency (Ed.), 2015). Religious groups comprise of – Protestant 64.9% (includes Free Wesleyan Church 37.3%, Free Church of Tonga 11.4%, Church of Tonga 7.2%, Tokaikolo Christian Church 2.6%, Assembly of God 2.3%, Seventh Day Adventist 2.2%, Constitutional Church of Tonga .9%, Anglican .8% and Full Gospel Church .2%), Mormon 16.8%, Roman Catholic 15.6%, other 1.1%, none 0.03% (ibid). Some unspecified groups make up at 1.7% (ibid). Tongan people are further known for their sense of community – a structure also common in Pacific Island Countries (PICs). The *nofo 'a kāinga* structure of living is attributed to the close-knitted settling patterns throughout some urban but mostly, rural villages.

2.3 Historical background
2.3.1 Overview of prehistoric Polynesia

Of the contrastive theories that suggest the origins of Polynesian peoples and settlements into respective islands, the study recognises the South East Asian (SEA) theory. The theory suggests that around 3000 years ago, an Austronesian migration group of seafarers known as the *Lapita* people migrated west through the Malay Peninsula to the isolated islands of the East Indies and dispersed themselves into the untouched islands now known as the South Pacific. Although traces of these so-called ancestors are slim, existence of certain artefacts they may have used such as the finely decorated *Lapita* pottery earthenware, linked their settlement patterns throughout Polynesia. The argument is supported;

> Western Polynesian culture developed from a founding Eastern *Lapita* base and succeeding Ancestral Polynesian Society. The most visible cultural marker distinguishing these ancestral Polynesians is plain earthenware pottery, which characterizes archaeological assemblages for a millennium following the *Lapita* phase (Kirch & Green, 2001 cited in Connaughton, 2007. p. 199).

One of the behaviours the *Lapita* people brought with them was their "*mixed economy of horticulture and marine exploitation and that, in their explorations, they transported the basic suite of Oceanic food crops across the Pacific*" (Kirch, 1997 cited in Burley, 1998. p. 349). One of these settlements is positioned at the entrance to Fanga 'Uta Lagoon indicating it the oldest *Lapita* settlement in Tonga even though a span of the *lapita* pottery is found around other sites within Tongatapu and in the islands of Vava'u and Ha'apai to the north. These findings further affirm Tonga's prehistoric status amongst one of the founding settlements of Western Polynesia.

> The fragments of pottery exotic to Tonga are the first ceramic objects providing physical evidence for maritime linkage between eastern and western oceanic region settled near the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E. by Lapita peoples, culturally ancestral to modern Polynesians (Burley & Dickinson, 2001. p. 1).

Figure 2.2 shows the 'Polynesian Triangle' stretching from Hawaii in the north to New Zealand in the south and across to the Easter Islands in the west. It clearly indicates how Tonga is situated along the western edge of the triage.

Figure 2.2 Map of the Kingdom of Tonga & its position in the Polynesian Triangle
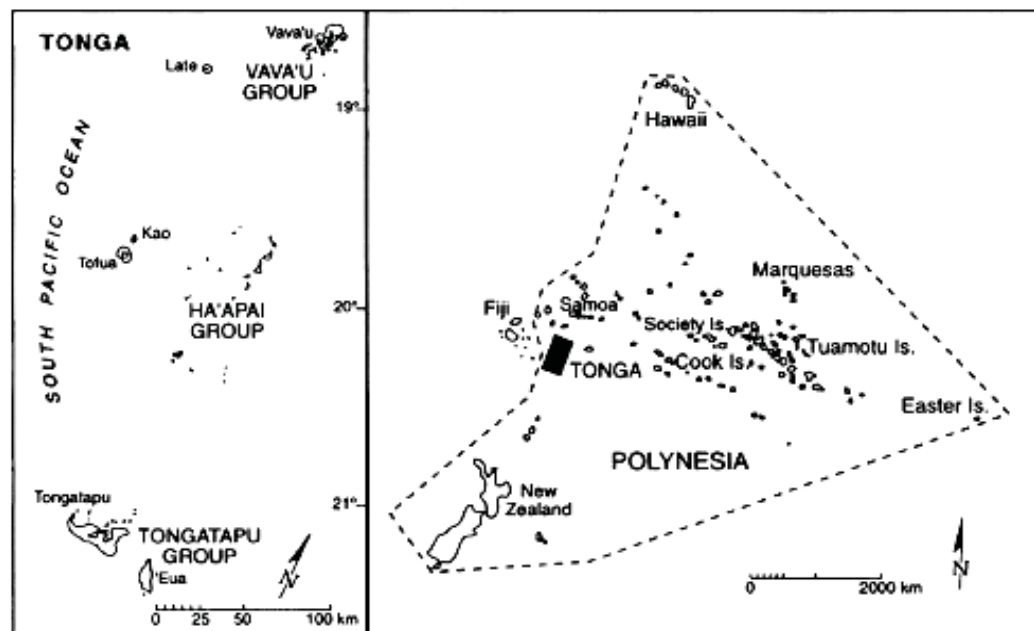
(Burley & Dickinson, 2001. p. 338)

2.3.2 Tongan history – Early period

Written documentations of Tonga's history are relatively recent although there is a rich reservoire of oral narratives and stories as well as artifacts and old photographs.

An overview account tells that by the 12th century, Tonga was probably the most powerful nation in the South Pacific (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). The etymology of the actual word Tonga is 'south' denoting the country's southerly geographic location in central Polynesia. Its conventional name – 'Kingdom of Tonga' or in short 'Tonga' officially translates to *Pule'anga Fakatu'i 'o Tonga* marking the country's political position as a 'Heredity Constitutional Monarchy'. Tonga is moreover recognised by the epithet 'Friendly Islands' (*'Otu Motu Anga'ofa*) a name graciously bestowed to the isles through Līfuka in the Ha'apai group by renowned 18th century English explorer Captain James Cook. It came about as a result of the 'friendly' *'ulungaanga faka-Tonga* (Tongan way/behaviour) towards him during his frequent voyages in the 1700s. The oral story behind this is that Cook inadvertently arrived in Tonga during the *'Inasi Festival* (festival of offering/giving) an annual gifting of fruits to the island chiefs. The jubilant invitation by the locals to join the festivities may have influenced his decision. Preceding Cook in the 17th century were the first explorers to reach Tonga. Dutch sailors Schouten and Le Maire first sighted Tonga in 1616 and later Abel Tasman who charted the southern island in 1643 followed by Cook's subsequent and more influential voyages in 1773 to 1777.

2.3.3 Missionary impact

Tonga was ruled by a chief known as *Tu'i Tonga* (King Tonga). Civil wars plagued the region throughout the 15th and 17th centuries. After these eras, the London Missionary Society (LMS) known as the first missionary contact arrived in Tonga on April 12, 1797 only to encounter a chain of unsuccessful events (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). They soon returned for fear of losing their lives after three missionaries were killed in a civil war crossfire set off by widespread hostility when a Tongan chieftain was murdered by political rivals (ibid). This followed another unsuccessful attempt to Christianise Tongans when the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) sent Walter Lawry in 1822. Lawry's short-lived experience in Tonga resulted from the "*antagonism the islanders displayed toward his efforts to replace their traditional religion with Christian gospel*" (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013. p. 241). It was not until four years later in June 1826, when the arrival of two missionaries, John Thomas and John Hutchinson also from the WMMS, did Tonga take heed of the evangelical purpose missionaries carried to the isles (Daly, 2008). Through the help of Tonga's first king, Taufa'āhau Tupou (King

George Tupou I) and his unified nation, missionary presence was permanently established and in the span of a few decades, almost the whole country was converted to Christianity (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). The transformation to Christianity in Tonga was the greatest catalyst for change in the nation's history (Spurway, 2002). Following Tupou I's ascension to the Tongan throne, "*he was able to combine his power with full titular authority. His perceived role as a champion of Christianity, a champion with both military muscle and traditional authority, created a potential for stability that had not existed in Tonga for more than 50 years*" (p. 13).

2.3.4 Monarchial sovereignty

Past centuries have seen Tonga through prolonged lines of monarchical succession and lineages. Proceeding from the *Ha'a Tu'i Tonga* line who ruled from years 950 to 1470; the *Ha'a Takalaua* line in 1470 to 1600; and finally, the *Ha'a Tu'i Kanokupolu* line from 1600 to the present. The word *ha'a* however, pertains to lineage (Thaman, 2008). It elaborates as "*class, the largest socio-political unit in Tonga – a loose confederation of genealogically related chiefs and their peoples*" (Lātūkefu, 1974. p. 12). Founder of the last dynasty Taufa'āhau Tupou, later known as King George I, unified the kingdom by conquering all of its main islands. In 1875, Tonga was declared a hereditary constitutional monarchy and granted a constitution by a coalition of Tongan leaders and European missionaries.

Later in 1900, King George II, grandson of George I, signed the treaty of friendship with Great Britain declaring Tonga a protectorate nation. Its protectorate status guaranteed British protection in return for Tonga's support during the World Wars while Tonga was able to retain its internal independence. The treaty was revised in 1959 and Tonga later became an independent nation on 4 June, 1970. To this day, the nation is known for its ability to solely withstand colonial imperialism in the Pacific. It is described in its capacity to be the only remaining "*monarchy in the South Pacific which has never lost its indigenous governance*" (Tuqota & Tuqota, 2012. p. 2). Tonga's current reigning monarch, King George Tupou VI (Kingi Siaosi Tupou VI) is the prevailing heir to the *Tu'i Kanokupolu* line and is the sixth (6th) sovereign ruler of his lineage to occupy the Tongan throne.

2.3.5 Tongan government

As mentioned, Tonga's monarchial status presents the platform for a Hereditary Constitutional Monarchy form of government since it adopted its constitution in 1875 under its first king (Campbell, 2005). Since then, Tonga has undergone very little political change to its system until people started to push for a more modern and democratic political system in the early 1980s. By 2010, the push for political reform had intensified to a stage where "*the government was elected by a much more representative parliament, with the king no longer appointing the prime minister and cabinet, but instead leaving that to the elected representatives*" (Campbell, 2005. p. 1). This followed the historic decision by the Legislative Assembly to amend the Constitution of Tonga (*Konisitūtone 'o Tonga'*) "*to shift most of the executive powers of the state from the Monarch to a Cabinet of elected leaders*" (Powles, 2014. p. 1). As a result, the first elected people's representative, Dr Feleti Sevele was appointed Prime Minister and head of government in 2010. Four years later, on the 27th November, 2014, Tonga saw the dawning of a new era when elections favoured a democratic led government appointing the nation's first people's representative, Mr. Samiuela 'Akilisi Pōhiva, the democratic party leader, to the office of Prime Minister – a title, Honourable Pōhiva holds till this day.

2.3.6 Culture

Culture is defined as a "*shared collection of symbolic forms of traditions. It includes all the rules of appropriate behaviour, including language, learned through membership in a particular community. It brings members together while separating them from other communities of people*" (Jones & Cooper, 2006. p. 39). In terms of pre-historic culture, the *Lapita* culture became the ancestral base from which many Pacific societies were birthed including Tonga (Burley 1998). From a post-colonial standpoint, the Tongan culture is described as being one of a 'compromised' nature attributed to its combination of both Polynesian and Western elements (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). Polynesian culture and the culture of Tongans to be exact, resemble the behaviour of prehistoric Austronesian-speaking *Lapita* people. These ways and behaviours specifically influenced social transformation and cultural adaptation. Certain aspects involved settlement dispersal, population growth and development of dry land agriculture (Burley and Dickinson, 2001). "*This ancestral culture was the template for later Polynesian societies who eventually explored and*

ultimately colonised all of the islands of the Polynesian triangle" (Kirch 2000 cited in Burley & Dickinson, 2001. p. 1).

The Tongan way of life and behaviour is also believed to mirror the neighbouring Polynesian islands of Samoa and Fiji who share the *Lapita* ancestry. Distinct aspects of language formation is a major comparison between Polynesian cultures as well as family settling patterns, food, cooking methods, dress and so forth. Another strong resemblance is the extensive adoption of the missionary home culture – the British culture. This was prevalent in the villa housings, language use and accent, schooling, dress, food and formalised schooling. An inclusive definition of culture is presented;

> The way of life of a people that includes their language, accumulated knowledge and understandings, values and beliefs…In the Pacific Islands, culture is conceptualised locally as shared values and beliefs and ways of doing and behaving. Hence, the *faa Samoa* (the Samoan way), *faka Tonga* (the Tongan way) and *vaka Viti* (the Fijian way). Such idealized ways and emphases are commonly used by the people concerned to explain their (collective) values and behavior, and those of others, as well as the way they see and organise their world (Thaman, 2003. p. 1).

This study however, values the latter part of the definition of culture being a body of accumulated knowledge and understandings, skills, beliefs and values.

2.3.7 Formal schooling – 1880s and 1980s

An important aspect in Tongan history relevant to this study includes the history of formal schooling through early European missionaries and later, colonial governments (Thaman, 2009). The missionaries were not just ordained ministers but skilled "*carpenters, bricklayers, tailors, weavers, shoemakers, a cooper and a smith among those sent out, though these artisans clearly regarded themselves primarily as missionaries rather than as teachers of their trades*" (Morrell, 1946. p. 101). However, it is important to note that before missionary influence, the prospect and practice of formal schooling or *ako* was non-existent. The only means of acquiring knowledge of proper personal behaviour, social structure and occupational skills were through day-to-day family and village interactions (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). Learning also occurred, "*informally within the contexts of a variety of social, political and economic purposes*" (Thaman, 1988. p. 127).

The outset of missionary work in Tonga prioritised in fostering education to the local population. Its first school was established in 1828 with an admission of 20 students, most of whom were adults (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). The missionaries

learned the Tongan language through orthographies which helped them write out everything they taught because instruction was mainly in the Tongan language. William Woon arrived in 1831 with a manual printing press device to aid in reproducing written material to meet the enthusiastic demand and eagerness of Tongan readers (ibid). School books were also published in the local language and by the mid-1830s, school enrolments increased with almost "*1,000 students enrolled in Tongatapu schools and 3,051 more in Haapai's 50 schools staffed by 485 teachers, an enrolment representing 40 percent of the total population of the Haapai district*" (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013. p. 242). Furthermore, the early establishment of printing played an important role in elevating local learning which is why, Tonga has held one of the highest literacy rates in the world (Daly, 2008). In their quest to convert Tongans to their Christian faith, the missionaries were challenged not only by the local Tongan priesthood, but also from the strong French Catholic presence that arrived in the late 1830s (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). The Catholic church otherwise, established their own school system in the late 1940s, which continue to operate today reaching the outer islands of Vava'u and Ha'apai.

Towards the mid to late 19th century, schooling gradually showed structural foundations of modern-day education (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). In 1841 and in adjunct to the establishment of early primary education, a training school for local primary school teachers was also set up in the northern district of Vava'u and yet another establishment in Tongatapu later that year (ibid). Tupou College, the nation's first local secondary institution was established in 1866 and was optional for young men prospective to serve in future church and state positions. This school is also known as *Toloa* and continues to function as a prestigious all-boys school under the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWC) or *Siasi Uēsiliana Tau'atāina 'o Tonga*. A decline in school enthusiasm prompted the nation's 1862 Code of Laws to declare schooling a compulsory component and a fine of ten (10) dollars was incurred to parents who failed to send their children to school (Lātūkefu, 1974). This monetary accumulation was used to construct new schools in the villages monitored by an attendance officer. Parents who often breached this regulation were prosecuted by the police and only reasons of illness were excused (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013).

In 1882, an education act to normalise education throughout the nation was issued where all existing schools befell to the government (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). Government resilience and commitment to religion manifested in daily school activities especially to start and end the day with prayers, of daily Bible reading and of ministers from different denominations giving spiritual instruction every Wednesday for the duration of one hour. School age was declared compulsory for children aged 5 to 16 followed by the revised education act of 1927 declaring compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14. The 1882 education act served as the foundation for the revised act of 1927 and later consolidated in 1947. In terms of curriculum design and implementation, the Tongan primary and secondary school curricula were both traditional and colonial while the Tongan language was mostly compulsory as the functional language of instruction.

In the early 1970s, the local curriculum comprised of fixations with the three Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic yet it lacked awareness of the social role of schools to prepare future Tongan citizens as well as a sense of connectedness between the school and community contexts (Thaman, 1974). For example, the social studies curriculum taught to students of faraway places had no direct link to the reality or knowledge of their home country (ibid). However, there were progresses in the late 1970s of localising the social studies subject when The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) team of experts worked alongside Tongan educators to formulate a new social studies curriculum for the secondary school level "*Implementation of the reformed course of study began in 1976, with social-science concepts illustrated through use of examples from Tongan and Pacific societies as well as from Western nations*" (p. 250). It also made schools "*more relevant to the kinds of decisions and tasks Tongans can be expected to face in their daily lives, whether these lives be lived in traditional island agricultural settings, in the Westernized urban center of Nukualofa, or overseas in New Zealand, Australia, and elsewhere*" (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013. p. 250). With the aid of USP courses through their faculty, Tongan teachers were able to use it as a basis for developing their own curricula (ibid). The same expert assistance by the Australia's Macquarie University was given and trialed by Tongan teachers in the 1980s for primary school level programmes such as environmental studies and English language studies (ibid).

Around the 1980s, conflicting sides stirred in the influence given to curriculum development (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). One side pushed to maintain current curriculum topics while the other, opposed and vouched for a more inclusive curriculum that mirrored the skills and knowledge of their communities. An estimated 70 percent of these communities were skilled in agriculture and fishing. This tension provides a clear understanding of the problems Tongan educators at the curriculum development level face. In light of this study, it shows the nature of conflicted interests within the previous Ministry of Education's (MoE) administration. The tensions hindered the prospect of adopting curricula and pedagogies that form an alignment to cater for both current and future societal needs as well as provide a clear pathway into the wider scholarship of further education.

Thomas & Postlethwaite (2013) ascertained that the Tongan monarch desired to maintain the prestigious outcomes attached to Western colonial academia – the ability to acquire intelligence and knowledge through the Western book. The popularity of this form of education was enforced through monarchical influence and of their personal experiences and privileges to study abroad in Western scholarships "*the present king (King Taufa'āhau Tupou IV) who, after he earned university degrees in Australia in the 1940s, became the minister of education and accelerated the use of overseas examinations as guides to curriculum development*" (ibid, p. 249). The 'Western book' as the authors called it, was an avenue to higher education abroad or to secure a good job in the government service or private sector. The children of nobles especially the eldest son were given special privileges in school but was always seen as taking less of a liking to it. While the eldest noble son would automatically inherit his rank and academic privilege, the common man had to earn a diploma in order to rise into a higher socio-economic status.

The progress of education specifically in curriculum development, showed gradual focus and attention to improving the efficiency of instruction in the traditional academic subjects of mathematics, English language, physical science and social science (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013). Attention in strengthening the teaching of these subjects towards the goal to make school more relevant to life in Tonga was slowly developing while examinations otherwise, mirrored practices of the traditional colonial system and had no direct reflection of everyday life in Tonga.

Although the language of instruction was bilingual and predominantly Tongan in delivery, curriculum content was very foreign and thus served a great mismatch between the teaching and learning exchange as well as assessment (ibid). Hence, secondary education was seen in the official annual report of the mid-1960s as;

> Largely "academic." The objective of students is to acquire a certificate and if possible the opportunity for study overseas. The value of the achievement is too frequently seen as the claim to government employment rather than ability to do a particular job well or, in the case of the majority, to be capable developers of the agricultural resources, or artisans (Report of the Department of Education, 1965, cited in Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013. p. 248).

By the early 1980s, the secondary school entrance examination was administered for class six (6), the higher leaving examination for form four (4) as well as examinations that qualified students for "*(1) New Zealand school certificate, (2) New Zealand university entrance, (3) New South Wales (Australia) higher school certificate, and (4) New South Wales school certificate*" (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 2013. p. 251). It is clear that during these decades, education in Tonga was predominantly governed and driven by the MoE and the curricula and assessments of its Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) and Examinations and Assessments Unit (EAU) (ibid). Even so, education fundamentally continued to be culturally undemocratic "*an educational environment or policy that does not recognize the way in which students have been socialized or their right to remain identified with their culture and language*" (Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974 cited in Thaman, 2003. p. 2).

2.3.8 Schooling and cultural change

Prior to the introduction of formal schooling in the Pacific and specifically in Tonga in the 19th century, "*education had been largely informal, although there is evidence of non-formal education aimed at teaching specialised skills and knowledge, such as those relating to warfare and navigation in the case of males, and various craft-related skills for females*" (Thaman, 2009a. p. 68). In the colonial quest to civilise and convert ancestors to mirror their Western ways of life, thinking, beliefs and values, the missionaries used the medium of formal education and schooling. Through both the enacted and hidden curriculums, European cultural knowledge, values and ideologies were imposed. Unfortunately also, "*the foreigners tried to teach them to reject those aspects of Pacific cultures which they regarded as detrimental to their purposes, whether motivated by religious faith or economic gain or both*" (Thaman, 2009a. p. 68).

Post-colonial or contemporary schooling from primary to tertiary continues to be concerned with "*training peoples of Oceania*[10] *for careers in the urban, industrial sector, or more generally, in the cash economy*" (Thaman, 2009a. p. 69). Thaman argues that the school curriculum is not concerned with cultural development nor is it concerned with cultural inclusiveness or teaching and learning for cultural democracy (ibid). Formal education was also seen to ensure the demise of culture rather than its renewal. With this, comes several consequences such as "*urban drift; primary school-leavers dessert the villages for the towns, secondary school-leavers move to the capital cities to find work, and graduates from tertiary institutions choose to use their new-found skills in metropolitan countries*" (p. 69). Leaders also deemed formal education the base for modern development and the key to success in the global economy and so, indigenous cultures were undermined as "*having little contribution to make towards the achievement of economic goals*" (ibid, p. 69). For the most part, those elements of culture that is regarded potentially important for economic development are valued. For example*, "certain types of traditional rituals, ceremonies, modes of dress, crafts and performing arts that are used to promote tourism*" (ibid, p. 69).

2.3.9 Tongan notions of education

Education is intended to mean an "*introduction to worthwhile learning; informal education is unorganised, non-institutionalised learning; non-formal education is organised, non-institutionalised learning; and, formal education is organised, institutionalised learning*" (Thaman, 2009b, p. 68). It is also the "*way of life of a group of people, and is inclusive of its education system, language and worldview*" (ibid). Formal schooling once again, is at the forefront, affecting the Tongan notion of "*what education and the educated person are which in turn can affect what we consider worthwhile to learn and to teach*" (p. 69). Thaman explains there remains disparity in how societies transmit what they believe is worthwhile knowledge to their young. Later, the colonial government used schooling to mobilise labour such as clerical work, teaching, nursing and so forth (ibid). As previously mentioned, education was of an informal and non-formal nature meaning unorganised yet, worthwhile learning. It aimed for "*continuation of the social order and the maintenance of the status quo*" (p. 69). Shipman (1971) coined this as "*cultural*

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[10] Pacific people

continuity" (cited in Thaman, 2009b. p. 69). It included learning within the *'api* (household), the wider community and from kinsfolk. To impart learning was also through mediums such as "*myths, legends, dance, poetry, song, proverbs and certain rituals as the 'Inasi*" (p. 69). A more comprehensive account and overview of this vernacular type of learning is;

> For over three hundred years, this type of education prepared Tongans to fit into their societal roles and to keep their desires and knowledge within the limit of their social positions and island environments. Where learning was organized (as in the case of some members of the aristocracy) the values did not conflict with those of the larger society. In fact, they reflected the nature of that society (ibid, p. 69).

This mirrors the context where "*persons were instructed in the specific knowledge and skills of acceptable behavior, as well as in the practical skills needed for survival and the continuation of culture*" (Cummins, 1977 cited in Thaman, 2009b. p. 69). The colonial era not only brought new European knowledge, but the existing indigenous ways of learning had to be widened to accommodate this new form of domination in which knowledge was acquired predominantly from books and the institution of schooling. Within schools, as previously mentioned, missionary and colonial values were reflected in their perception of good, pious and an economically productive life (Thaman, 2009b). These values were often in "*basic conflict between the values promoted by the school and those of the pupils' culture*" (p. 70). The Tongan values underpinning all aspects of life are: "*spiritual, supernatural; rank and authority; kinship and interpersonal relationships; 'ofa or compassion; specific and context-related behavior; and restraint*" (Thaman, 1988 cited in Thaman, 2009b. p. 70). The tension perseveres to this day as well as in other parts of Oceania creating a wider learning gap as that experienced in the past (Little, 1990; Ninnes, 1995).

PART TWO: ECE HISTORY & GROWTH IN TONGA AND THE REGION

2.4 ECE in Oceania

ECE or the preferred Pacific regional term, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for 0-8 year old children spans almost 60 years back to the 1960s (Puamau, 2008). It emerged through efforts of "*concerned educators, parents, community members and stakeholders, such as NGOs and church organisations*" (p. 6). Although international organisations assisted to improve and enhance region-wide ECCE development and basic education, a major drawback is the extensive funds required in which most Pacific Island Countries (PICs) cannot afford or are willing to

commit for ECCE activities. "*ECCE continues to be community-based, privately run initiatives with little government oversight*" (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016. p. 187). There is slight improvement in ECCE advocates from ministries/departments of education in the region with attempts to push ECCE into a more prominent position in terms of developing ECCE policies and guidelines and other national level related activities (ibid).

Even though regional programmes were initially established, they were poorly documented and thus, insufficient records are available. Therefore, only a few documented accounts were drawn on regional ECCE history and development. Minor information or data of its establishment existed until the first formal regional ECCE meeting in Suva, Fiji, 1980 with the exception of Fiji whose obtainable records date back to the 1930s (Toganivalu, 2008). Within the span of 27 long years (1980-2007), three regional meetings were held as a result of the newly established Pacific Preschool Council (PPC) supported by UNICEF[11] due to "*little government support and lack of coordination between community-based and/or privately owned ECCE services*" (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016. p. 188). Particulars of each meeting are further discussed to elaborate on important aspects such as roles, developments and challenges.

2.4.1 First Regional ECCE Meeting: Suva 1980

The meeting organisers – the Young Women's Christian Association of Fiji (YWCA) South Pacific Area Office and the USP Extension Services, Continuing Education and Institute of Education considered an ECCE convention was imperative. It aimed to bring together collaborative regional efforts to help address current situations and prolonged challenges faced by PICs in terms of development. They managed to pursue and secure funding assistance from the Nederlands Comite Voor Kinderpostzegels (NCVK), a non-government agency in the Netherlands, and the Australian Council of Churches (ACC). Pioneer member countries in this initial meeting were the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Palau, Pohnpei, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Western Samoa, New Zealand and Australia. The meeting generated harmony and a voice to PICs in their quest to "*bring together people active in ECCE to share their stories and*

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[11] United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

aspirations, focus their attention on ECCE in their own and neighbouring countries, and identify issues of common interest and concern, as well as common problems" (Toganivalu, 2008. p. 20). A significant achievement of the meeting was the initiation of the workshop as the region's first icebreaker to stimulate and motivate shared perspectives on ECCE in Oceania focusing on current national issues.

The workshop also generated the first ever-formal documentation of ECCE data in the region. Highlighted within these documents were the situations of ECCE in each member country in terms of enrolment, pre-school center establishments, operative programmes, different types of progammes and how they are organised, structured and timetabled (Toganivalu, 2008). The workshop revealed collective concerns of the existing gap between knowing the learning theories of Piaget, Eriksson and Montessori which influenced a Western developmental perspective but failed to situate and relate it to the 'Oceanic' child and pre-school programme. It also queried its appropriateness for Oceanic children and questioned misalignment with the traditional values rooted and embedded within Oceanic cultures. It concluded that a unique programme should emerge to mirror the different learning styles and socio-cultural contexts represented by the diverse cultures of the children of Oceania (ibid). Another observation was the impact and influence of the wide range and diverse cultural values and practices Oceanic cultures had on children, their learning and socio-cultural relationships. Its complexity is mentioned as;

> ...family values and communal hierarchical values; the status of chiefs versus commoners, with some people in the community having more rights than others; the extended family and decision-making, with males holding the dominant role; and male and female roles in general. Religion was viewed as very important in almost all countries. Shaming children to discourage anti-social behaviour was a popular way of discipline (ibid, p. 21).

Alongside this was the emerging and inevitable force of change in terms of family solidarity and interdependence that affected familial structures.

> Children who lived in villages were members of extended families and were used to being part of a large social group, at the same time individuality was also emerging as a common trend. Clan membership was valued, while multiculturalism was identified as respected among communities. Respect for elders, chiefs and parents, as well as for culture and language, was seen as highly important for Pacific people. Cooperation, sharing and encouraging self-reliance, and equal opportunities and rights were noted. Pre-school teachers were adopting many of the new child development theories in their centres and mentioned that treating all children as equal was important for them, given the hierarchical chiefly structure that some children represented (ibid, p. 21).

Regional governments were but, slightly instrumental in ECCE basically contributing to licensing matters and minor supervision. This void further contributed to problems associated with funding and financing of ECCE such as;

- Low wages for the teachers, or they worked as volunteers
- High cost of equipment, especially if not available locally
- Difficulty in collecting fees from parents
- Burdensome fund-raising activities to meet costs; and
- Limited training opportunities for teachers in the islands (ibid, p. 23).

The global instrument, Education for All (EFA) prioritised ECCE as its first goal to expand and improve services especially to vulnerable and disadvantaged children in terms of promoting cognitive and brain development for better primary learning (UNESCO, 2015). The Pacific report (2000-2010) shows an increase by more than 80 per cent participation in pre-primary education "*and in 2012 the average gross enrolment ratio (GER) across the Pacific was higher than the world average (54 per cent)*" (p. 12). It also highlights three major gaps and challenges for ECCE in the region highly associated with the (1) lack of accurate, disaggregated data and relevant information; (2) lack of local/national action plans; and the (3) need to address access to ECCE for the marginalised, vulnerable and disadvantaged children. In light of these challenging issues, the workshop put together seven recommendations optimistic of initiating a basis for further discussion with development partners. This became a driving force for international contribution to the regional initiatives through funded assistance and to help mirror global ECCE events with the expectation to improve regional ECCE levels. The recommendations were (ibid, p. 24);

- People who are active in pre-schools be brought together to share programmes, information and common problems;
- The use of local, inexpensive materials be encouraged, and people involved in ECCE be trained in how to make teaching aids;
- Written materials for Pacific island pre-school teachers be created and shared;
- The writing of children's books, using the writers' own Pacific backgrounds and languages, be encouraged;
- More learning about child development patterns in the south Pacific take place;
- A Pacific pre-school teacher training course be established; and
- A regional pre-school council be established.

2.4.2 Regional Instruments

In light of the outcomes of the first regional meeting, internationally funded regional initiatives were adopted to help improve the development of basic education featuring ECCE as a major component and focal point. Simultaneously, global

initiatives materialised in Oceania and influenced the impetus development of ECCE. The initiatives categorically stressed the universal importance of children pushing government responsibilities and support in the participation, commitment, care, development, education and protection of children. First and foremost, efforts and objectives for PICs was the right of the child to basic formal education. Unfortunately, other than being mere signatories, government responses and progress towards global instruments were gradual. Local governments also failed to develop national strategic plans, policies, guidelines or indicators to help progress national initiatives. Nonetheless, global instruments intervened to ensure and enforce the advancement and development of ECCE and basic education in the region. The initiatives are listed (table 2.1) followed by a detailed account of the regional initiatives including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2015.

Table 2.1 Global initiatives

Year	Initiative
1979	The International Year of the Child
1989	The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
1990	The World Conference on Education for All (EFA)
2000	The Dakar Framework for Action Education for All
2000	The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
2015	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

(Adapted from Toganivalu, 2008. p. 25)

i.   Pacific Pre-school Council (PPC) in 1985-1995

The PPC initiated wider ECCE involvement upon becoming a member of the World Forum (WF). Its life span of 10 years aimed to provide updates of regional member countries in teacher practice especially the utilisation of well-developed teaching and learning resources. With the aid of UNICEF, the council was able to establish non-formal ECCE programmes and courses for pre-school teaching certificate and diploma qualifications at the USPs Continuing Education programme. This helped create cultural inclusive courses to complement the Pacific context and to develop and strengthen the organisational structure and advocacy of national ECCE associations through "*the production of materials, including a trainer's manual, a toy-making handbook, brochures and posters, plays and videos for advocacy and training, newsletters and supporting Pacific regional and in-country training workshops*" (Toganivalu, 2008. p. 25).

ii.   Basic Education Life Skills (BELS) Regional Project (1993–2001)

Basic Education Life Skills (BELS) was aimed at basic education, a multi/jointly-sponsored collaboration between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, UNICEF, Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID). It was carried out by USP. It targeted certain EFA goals such as literacy, assessment and community support. With community support and as a request from member countries, an important ECCE feature geared towards literacy education with a focus to improve the learning and development of children in the early years. Member countries were scheduled and encouraged to receive quality pre-school programmes through the support and effort of competent teachers and empowered communities.

iii.   Pacific Islands Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) – 2001

The Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) was developed through the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) Forum Education Ministers' Meeting; a forum of 14 PICs that comprise member education ministers with the aim of collaborative deliberation in how to help facilitate the implementation of basic education in Forum Island Countries (FICs) for all education levels – ECE to primary, secondary and Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET). During the 2002 meeting, efforts were made to implement the goals, frameworks and processes of the Dakar Framework (2000) as well as to endorse an inclusive Pacific vision for FIC members such as "*to achieve universal and equitable educational participation and achievement, and to ensure access and equity and improve quality outcomes*" (Toganivalu, 2008. p. 27). In terms of ECCE, the provision of quality education services in terms of required resources, teacher training, status and employment through collaborative stakeholder effort became a prime focus.

iv. Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education (PRIDE) Project (2004)

The Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education Project (PRIDE) Project is funded by the European Union (EU) and NZAID and implemented by Institute of Education (IOE) at USP. It too tailored towards basic education and was devised by regional ministers of education to help carry out aims of the FBEAP particularly, to adopt support for educational reform throughout all forms and levels of schooling – early childhood, primary, secondary, TVET, formal and non-formal education.

2.4.3 Second Regional ECCE Meeting: Suva 2004

A gap of 24 years passed before the next regional meeting was held in Suva, Fiji. Sponsored by UNICEF and USP's Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL) Support Center, it aimed to generate collaborative awareness of the significances of child development in the early years (ages 0-8 years). Specifically, this stage is critical in developing certain skills that cultivate children's ability to holistically grow.

> The first three years of life are seen as the most crucial period for brain development and the development of cognitive, language, social, motor and emotional skills of the child. It is also a time when young children face the greatest risks to their survival, health, and emotional and physical growth (Tonganivalu, 2008. p. 31).

The outcomes of that meeting indicated that most of the regional ECCE centers catered for programmes for children between ages 3-6 years especially those enrolled in a preschool center. Little emphasis or awareness was paid to the earlier years (ages 0-3) except for some countries who established programmes such as day cares, playgroups or play centers. Participants arrived at the conclusion that any programme for this age group prior to entering a center-based programme, should be addressed in an integrated and multi-sectoral manner in order to address "*the needs of very young children involves bringing in expertise from civil society, local government, donors, families and communities to be responsible for health, social welfare, rural development, finance and planning, and education*" (ibid, p. 32). Action plans for ages 0-3 were developed by representing countries as a result of this meeting.

Other issues in the meeting geared towards country updates, the role of parents and teachers, certain case studies and to current and on-going capacity building programmes for ECCE personnels. An interesting emphasis was the worldwide concern for children's rights through the UN's *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC). A significant aspect of the CRC most relevant to the study is the right for children to play "*Article 31 - (Leisure, play and culture): Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities*" (Sheet, 2011. p. 4). This meeting also marked the first collaborative gathering where an innovative approach to enhancing child development in the home environment prior to entering a center-based ECCE programme was established. This is another most important and significant aspect in the study in terms of parent education and awareness and the importance of active engagement and involvement.

Families and parents could improve on this if they are genuinely supported through multiple channels and wider stakeholder assistance (Toganivalu, 2008).

> Parents and care-givers benefit if they are supported in child-rearing and care-giving responsibilities to promote a positive environment for the sound early growth and development of infants and young children. Children need to be nurtured in a loving and caring environment, to be physically healthy, mentally alert, socially stimulated and intellectually able to learn and develop to their full potential (ibid, p. 32).

2.4.4 Third Regional ECCE Meeting: Honiara 2007

A follow up Regional ECCE workshop was held in the Solomon Islands in 2007. The workshop attempted to bring into perspective the importance of a collective collaboration for ECCE on international, regional, national and local levels. The shared perspectives helped bring to focus current ECCE situations in the region as well as a way forward in all levels. The workshop theme – *Supporting learning from 0-8: creating the future*, forms part of the basis and idea in which this study was articulated. The workshop was strengthened in the opening address by the Solomon Islands' Minister for Education, Hon. Derek Sikua in which he praised the initiative as an open door to creating "*opportunities and avenues for our regional educators and carers of children aged 0–8 years to contribute to the body of knowledge of best practice for the Pacific, rather than relying solely on speakers from outside the region*" (Sikua, 2008). The workshop also aligned with expectations highlighted in the FBEAP. This meeting not only gathered its usual stakeholder representatives from both government and non-government organisations (NGOs), as well as key ECCE pioneers from the region.

In addition, the meeting established a "*developing vision, policy, curriculum guidelines and appropriate learning environments and facilities for 0–8 year-olds; strengthening national and regional networking of stakeholders; and sharing assessment techniques used for 0–8 year-old children*" (ibid). As an outcome of this meeting, the future directions for ECCE in the region will depend on how individual countries choose to address pressing issues and challenges related to: cultural context, learning philosophies, curriculum choices, formal instruction as opposed to play, teaching and learning, transparency, articulation of the three stages of early childhood, parent partnership awareness, leadership in ECCE, inadequate finance, lack of teacher training, lack of resources as well as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic, violence

and abuse against children and women, substance and drug abuse, poverty and effects of television and technology. The recommendations were suggested by proactive participants and subsequently endorsed by member country ministers for education in a FEDMM meeting later that year. The recommendations (PIFS, 2007 cited in Puamau, 2008. p. 13) were that;

- Each Government work with stakeholders to develop its national policy for early childhood care and education with age parameters to be set nationally;
- A national advisory body is established to advise on early childhood matters;
- A regional council is established to coordinate professional and community issues relating to early childhood in the Pacific;
- Early childhood curriculum, teaching pedagogies, assessment strategies,
- Resources and teacher education are grounded in local cultures and languages; and
- Data for 0-8 year olds in both licensed and unlicensed centres are included in the education management information system.

2.4.5 Further establishments

In 2010, the Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Care and Education (PRC4ECCE) was established at the Forum Education Ministers' Meeting (FedMM), PIFS in Papua New Guinea following the acceptance of the *ECCE in the Pacific* paper, which requested the first UNICEF Pacific as secretariat (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016). Its key role was to support the PRC4ECCE through ongoing mentoring of the *Pacific Guidelines* at the country level within its five system quality components (figure 2.3) – the core for quality ECCE implementation by the region. As a way forward for PICs, in 2013, the PRC4ECCE pursued to complete the *Pacific Guidelines for the Development of National Quality Frameworks for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): Programming for Ages 3-5* (ibid). Yet again in 2014, the FedMM in the Cook Islands:

Unanimously endorsed the *Pacific Guidelines*, which signaled a regional stand by the education ministers for improving the quality of ECCE services. It provides a user-friendly guide with ideas and thought-provoking questions, to provide a starting point for the countries to develop a national quality framework on ECCE that reflects the unique and cultural priorities for the individual country, incorporating regional and international benchmarks in developmentally appropriate quality services (ibid, p. 189).

Figure 2.3 Guidelines, quality components and subcomponents
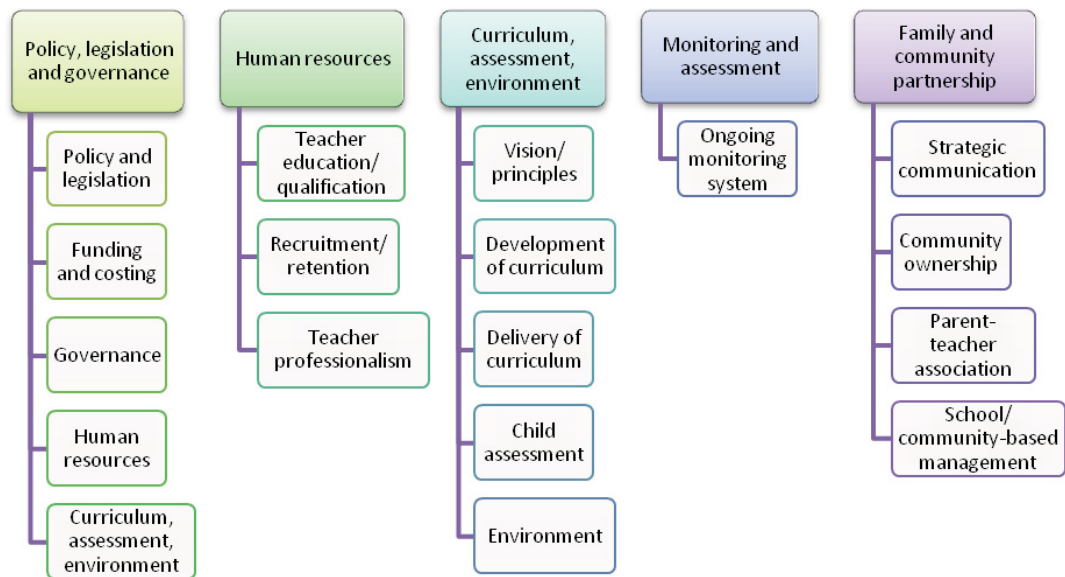
(Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016. p. 190)

2.5 ECE in Tonga

Throughout Oceania and more specifically Tonga, early learning within the context of preschool or early childhood settings has become a matter of importance to parents, teachers, communities and relative stakeholders. His late Majesty, King Taufa'āhau Tupou IV initiated ECE in his kingdom when he established the first local preschool center in 1965 (Tonga National Early Childhood Education Policy Framework, 2013). This followed a decade later in 1976 when the first non-government early childhood organisation still known today as the Tonga Preschool Association (TPA) was established upon request by the late Queen Mother, Her Royal Highness, Halaevalu Mata'aho (Pene, 2008). Since then, ECE responsibilities and developments channeled through private sectors which include international and in country church groups, parents and local communities. Much of the ECE popularity tailors towards the education gains this type of formal schooling offers on a long-term basis. Parents foremost, are the main supporters and play a major role in supporting local ECE developments, a rare occurrence in the past. Participation rates have soared and within the span of 30 years, a significant number of local preschool centers have been established around the main island Tongatapu and in the outer islands of Ha'apai, Vava'u, 'Eua, Niuatoputapu and recently, Niuafo'ou. In 2007, more than sixty ECE centers were established throughout these islands and by 2013,

provider numbers escalated to 74 (Tonga National Early Childhood Education Policy Framework, 2013. p. 7). The latest statistics indicate an increase in ECE provisions to a total of 80 registered centers (Taulava, 2015. Personal Communication). Table 2.2 specifies the latest ECE data obtained at this stage of the write up.

Table 2.2 Early Childhood Education Data, Tonga, 2015

Early Childhood Education Data, Tonga, 2015							
District	# Institutions	Enrolment			# of Teachers	Teacher Student Ratio	# of Qualified Teachers	Qualified Teacher Ratio
		Boys	Girls	Total				
Tongatapu	45	808	787	1595	139	11	61	26
Eua	7	89	83	172	20	9	9	19
Ha'apai	9	67	43	110	15	7	2	55
Vava'u	15	156	161	317	32	10	10	32
Niuas	4	33	27	60	8	8	5	12
TOTAL	80	1153	1101	2254	214	11	87	26

 (Adapted from the Ministry of Education and Training (EMIS/MET), Tonga, 2015)

Although ECE has proven to be a rapidly increasing education field in terms of demand, the Government of Tonga (GoT) was not actively involved in its development until 2007 when the MoE established a regulatory ECE Policy Framework to guide early childhood policy, planning and programme development in Tonga (World Bank, 2012). It also provided "*guidelines and strategies that cater for the holistic needs of young children in Tonga, particularly those aged 3-5 years*" (p. 6). This was later legislated in 2011, emphasising specific focus on ECE development through:

> Prioritising and appointing ECE officials, conducting surveys on national preschool provisions, registration, reviewing ECE curriculum, developing culturally appropriate learning materials, developing and implementing teacher training programs, setting up pilot projects for community-based ECE centers and developing a policy for the provision of subsidies for ECE (Pene, 2008. p. 53).

2.6 3A2S Framework – Status, benefits and challenges

The status, benefits and challenges of ECE in Tonga are discussed under the 3A2S theoretical framework – *accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability* and *social justice*. The framework aided in guiding the analyses of target education policies in various Asia-Pacific countries including Tonga (Li, Park & Chen (Eds.), 2016). While there is little written documentation of the challenges of ECE specifically for Tonga and the broad mentions within the Tonga National Early Childhood Education Policy Framework (2013), a Senior Inspector of Schools (Primary) within the MET who also oversees ECE, provided some of the input. The

results and discussion chapter explores these challenges from the perspectives and experiences of local ECE teachers.

2.6.1   Accessibility

According to Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga (2016), the Gross enrolment ratios (GERs) of Tonga in 2012 show a significant increase of almost 40% from 2000 (figure 2.4). With Net enrolment rates (NERs), Tonga scored 39.9% in 2014, which on the whole, indicates "*there are many young children aged 3-5 across the regions who are not receiving early childhood services*" (p. 192). Adding to this, Taulava (2015, Personal Communication) talked of the vast amount of under resourced facilities around the country despite its increased provision and focus. The 2013 national ECE statistics showed that only 70% of children were in attendance at school while the remaining 30% had yet to enroll or join a nearby center. Reasons rendered to the high tuition fees of some church and private ECE centers and the probable lack of understanding of the benefits of ECE for children (Prescott & Johansson-Fua, 2016). It is predicted, the imminent government initiative to bring ECE under one umbrella controlled by the MET will help alleviate this problem so that families are more able to afford ECE education for their young children and thus, increase in participation rates (ibid).

Figure 2.4 GER in the Pacific region
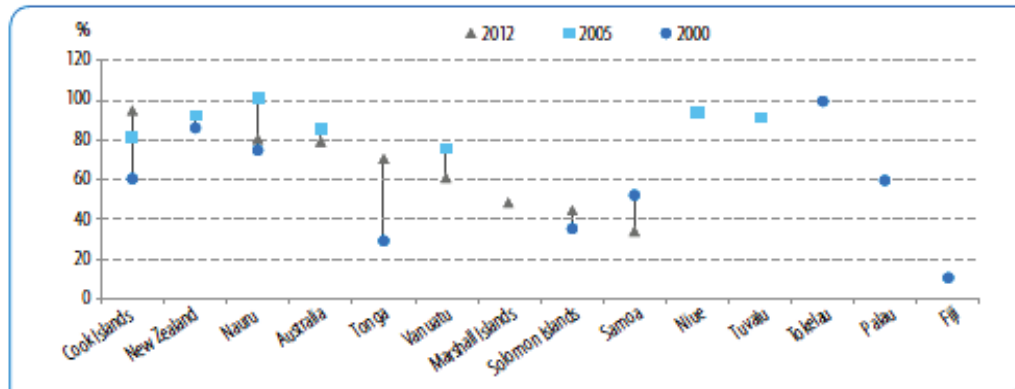
(UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014. p. 13)

In distribution, five main umbrella organisations with twelve private-owned ECCE providers coexist around the country. These main organisations are the: "*Tonga Pre-Association, Free Wesleyan Church ECCE department, Catholic Church ECE department, Salvation Army ECCE department and the Lavengamālie ECE department*" (Tonga National Early Childhood Education Policy Framework, 2013.

p. 7). Prior to 2015, these umbrella organisations operated independently, using their own philosophy, curriculum and policy according to their central beliefs and values of early childhood education. While this was standard, the ECE Policy Framework identified the "*missing element between these organizations is a connection tool that is strong enough to encourage and build a strong quality ECCE sector for Tonga*" (ibid, p. 7). To date, the Tonga National ECE Policy has been developed to bridge this gap "*with the purpose to effectively connect all ECCE umbrella organizations and ECCE providers in Tonga*" (ibid, p. 7). Underlying this initiative, is a push for all persons in ECCE to work collaboratively to promote high quality delivery, curriculum and school readiness programs for all 4 and 5 year old children (ibid).

2.6.2   Affordability

In order to foster successful ECE implementation, the core strategy is a significant amount of funding, costing assistance and allocation (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016). In Tonga, they are provided by a "*Tonga School Grant Project (TSGP) of 50.00 per student to all ECCE centers, regardless of whether they are registered or not*" (p. 195). Like most PICs, the reliance on donor aid, agencies and community funding is significant. It places the ongoing financial security and sustainability of ECCE activities in a potentially fragile state "*should donors be decreased/eliminated or should communities be unable to afford the financial burden*" (ibid, p. 195). In other words, a dependence on government funds meant that ECCE was usually the first area to receive a budget cut if there were limited allocations. The decentralised budget also meant ECCE was not an initial priority area to start with (ibid).

2.6.3   Accountability

In 2012, Tonga was amongst a few PICs to add ECCE to its Education Act in terms of policy, legislation and governance (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016). There also exists an ECCE policy specifically addressing the nation-wide implementation of ECCE which collaborates MET and National ECCE Committee/Council plans and aims to "*strengthen the ECE council, establish a multi-sector network, and develop a quality framework as stated in the strategic plan*" (p. 197). The World Bank too completed a System's Approach for Better Education Results-ECD (SABER-ECD). However, a major challenge that also cuts across PICs is the synchronised potential of ECCE policies with regional *Pacific Guidelines* "*most important for systems*

development and implementation and establishes the foundation for strong, quality programmes" (p. 195). Like other PICs, Tonga faces little to no monitoring of performances with "*limited accountability and consequences for poor performance*" (ibid, p. 198). Most teachers do however, meet minimum standards while there are certificate, diploma and degree programmes available at the USP Tonga Campus as well as the TIOE to cater for registration and qualification requirements.

One of the pressing challenges of accountability is the shortage of teaching staff as well as the existence of a small pool of teachers who to date, have not achieved an ECE teaching certification (Taulava, 2015, Personal Communication). However, these two providers are making collaborative and separate efforts to house teachers and ensure they attain teaching credentials. The scholarship not only aims to accredit and certify teachers in their practice but to ensure they are well equipped with the necessary educational and learning theories imperative to their practice. Taulava (2015, Personal Communication) also raised the concern of teacher retention as the rate of exiting qualified teachers to find better-paid jobs is high. Recruitment is another a problem as remuneration rates are low leaving behind a pool of unqualified teachers. There is an urgent need for incentives to retain certified teachers for their skills demand is very high. This will be the case for some years until there are sufficient teachers to meet increased demands. These challenges and suggestions were also highlighted in the regional report by Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga (2016).

ECCE teacher professionalism is also undermined and is at the lowest level of the professional scale where teachers are misconceived as 'babysitters' and 'mother helpers' "*ECCE is more than a job; it is a profession. As such, teachers should be expected to act as professionals, while at the same time, they deserve to be treated as professionals by communities, management and MOE*" (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016. p. 200). Tonga has specifically developed a National ECCE Curriculum coupled with Minimum Service Standards (MSS) with indicators to measure ongoing quality assurance. Regardless of the diverse curriculums in the region, they are required to be "*child-centered, uses a play-based methodology, and encourages active participation and exploration of the learning environment*" (p. 202). Puamau (2008) praised Tonga for her ability to draft the Tonga Education Policy Framework 2004-2019 paving a way for ECE at the national level specifically in aspects of

policy issues and outcomes, government policy responses and of new investments towards ECE. In the case of high rates of investment return from ECE especially the importance in laying foundations for primary school and equity dimensions of marginalised children. Puamau (2008) noted before that, the following policies and strategies (Tonga Ministry of Education, 2004. p. 33) were adhered to:

- Form national working parties to survey and report on ECE provision in Tonga;
- Formal registration of all pre-schools;
- Development of an early childhood education curriculum;
- Production and dissemination of culturally appropriate learning resources;
- Provision of pre-service and in-service training and professional development;
- Support for parent education initiatives.

Various assessments such as the Early Human Capacity Index (EHCI) are also in place to evaluate children's progress and performance in terms of observations, portfolios and child development (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016). The gap however, is that insignificant "*information was provided to determine how countries offer ongoing developmental monitoring of their young children and what they do with the findings/results*" (p. 203). Assessments must also be ongoing to ensure "*individual child growth and intervention outcomes; diagnose, assess and monitor individual progress; and pragmatic monitoring and intervention outcomes and impact*" (ibid, p. 204). Environments must include both indoor and outdoor settings, infrastructures and appropriate height of furniture to accommodate young children, their learning resources, books, toys and games. It expects "*teachers can effectively implement the curriculum in a child-directed, play-based way*" (ibid, p. 204).

2.6.4   Sustainability and Social justice

To undergo certain quality assurance measures for performance, monitoring and assessment "*helps identify areas where improvement is needed and what is working well so it can be continued*" (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016. p. 205). When monitoring is linked with action plans, it is an avenue to identify definite people accountable for specific tasks especially *what*, *how* and *who* will conduct the monitoring. In Tonga, the EMIS Unit within MET carry out annual monitoring visits yet, "*their monitoring systems need strengthening and improvement*" (ibid, p. 208). In terms of social justice – family and community partnerships, the *Pacific Guidelines* emphasised on strategic partnerships with community stakeholders. Tonga is reported to work alongside the World Bank on the Pacific Early Age

Readiness and Learning (PEARL) programme inclusive of national mapping of EHCI development outcomes. Specifically, the PEARL is a "*project driven towards preparing children for school*" (Buckley, 2016. p. 1). In core, the regional pilot "*served as an initial way to determine how children are developing at the village level and served as a tool for awareness and advocacy for increased parent involvement and a call for improved ECE services*" (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016. p. 210). Education Practice Manager from the World Bank stated: "*Early childhood experiences can make a big difference to education outcomes for children…Through the PEARL programme, we're piloting a range of new teaching and learning methods for reading fluency and comprehension in the Tongan language*" (Loop Administration, 2016. p. 1). There is vast community ownership of ECE in Tonga where 100% are community-based. The government is now reaching out and to "*create stronger ties with communities, which hopefully will be strengthened through various awareness programmes*" (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016. p. 211).

Chapter summary

Like other Pacific island countries, Tonga's remote location within Oceania results in the development of its own ECE affairs with added regional and international support. Within the region, ECE developments are expanding and initiatives are in place to help support, aid and ensure collaborative networks are established. The PRC4ECCE provides the A32S Framework to help assess early years' learning emphasising on accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability and social justice. Over the years however, the dispersed major islands within Tonga have gained more transport and communicative access to the main island Tongatapu enabling a robust web of local networking to improve local ECE developments in terms of provision and participation. The nations newly introduced national ECE curriculum is currently under its trial phase while there is positive anticipation and evaluation it will serve the nation's growing population with the provision of an early learning programme that is holistic and culturally inclusive for children's development, growth and learning. The local initiative has paved a way for the requirements within the PRC4ECCE making Tonga one of the leading Pacific countries to proactively support ECE in the region.

CHAPTER THREE | LITERATURE REVIEW

Feveitokai'aki/fefaka'apa'apa'aki (mutual respect/reciprocity); *fatongia* (service/duty)

TEU – is the preparatory stage before the actual 'work' or *toli* begins. For a *kakala*, the stringer or *kakala* maker takes into consideration who the *kakala* is for and the nature of the occasion in which the garlanding is involved ~ (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 53).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of select relevant international and Pacific literature to examine some of the developing and contrasting theories that conceptualise a worldview of play. Particularly, how it is culturally viewed and practised as a mechanism for early learning. The review covers an extensive body of information drawing on perspectives from diverse disciplines. While some sources fall outside of the usual 10-15 year frame, these are included as critical to understanding play and play pedagogy discourse. The emerging themes revolve around four major parts premised within the general ideas of inquiry embedded within the research questions. It examines the positioning of play in ECE, the meaning of play; the history and theories of play; the culture and context in play; the learning elements of play; the challenges of play; ways of promoting play; and the indigenous ideas of play. The chapter concludes with the theoretical framework synthesising the philosophical underpinnings of *ako* and *va'inga* within the scope of eclectic bricolage.

PART ONE: POSITIONING PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

3.2 Early Childhood Education

In situating play within ECE, it is important to first interrogate the meaning of ECE. Of its many accounts, ECE is an area of educational theory that involves the education and care of young children before they start compulsory/primary education (Nuttall, 2003). ECE is an "*interdisciplinary approach, holism, use of the outdoors for learning, integration of care, development and education, learning through concrete experiences and real life projects, and involvement of parents and communities*" (Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008. p. 13). It features many names such as – preschool, kindergarten, childcare, day care, nursery school and early education, play centers, child-minding facilities, prep classes, day-care centers, schools of nine (Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008; Toganivalu, 2008). Its delivery mode varies from urban, suburban and rural communities or in center-based, home-based or local public school-based communities (Nuttall, 2003). Programs are offered part time, part of the

year or full-day and full-year serviced and are conducted privately, non-profit or for profit or operated by a local school system or a nationally funded program (ibid).

In Tonga, the various terminologies for ECE, early learning, preschool, kindergarten and so forth all translate to *ako tokamu'a*. In context, *tokamu'a* refers to an 'early', 'first' or 'foremost' occurrence. In principle, it means, laying strong foundations for young children mainly for primary school readiness (The Tonga National Early Childhood Education Policy Framework, 2013). The Tonga Education Lakalaka Policy Framework (2012) ensures that building a strong foundation for early childhood children blends well with the overall MET vision and mission to "*provide equitable, accessible, relevant and sustainable quality education for all Tongans that will enable Tonga to develop and become a learning and knowledgeable society*" (p. 28). In universal terms, the stage/period between birth and 8 years of life are known as the early years of learning (EYL). Moreover, the EYL is the "*development of children from birth, through pre-school/kindergarten to grade/class two, and that it should be holistic, embracing their physical, emotional, psychological, cognitive, spiritual, cultural and social development*" (Puamau, 2008. p. 5). Understanding this concept was integral as to why this study harnessed these years.

In Pacific regional discourse, the terminology has shifted to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a result of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) rendered in 2001 by education ministers marking a political recognition and support of the importance of early learning in fifteen of the region's countries. ECCE is described as encompassing education that aids holistic development – *physical, emotional, psychological, cognitive, spiritual, cultural and social* from birth to class/grade two (Puamau, 2008; UNICEF, 2012). Likewise, in Australia, ECE in general is considered inclusive of children from birth to age eight (Fleer, 2010). This serves as the rationale behind the focus on play for early learning, given an extensive range of literature supports child play concluding that it contributes to the holistic growth of children in terms of cognitive, social, physical, creative and emotional developments (Brown et al, 2001; Hewes, 2006; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Hence, the study advocates for a wider recognition of play for early learning in Tonga, and not a substitute for the current ECE curriculum programme and approach.

PART TWO: THE MANY FACETS OF PLAY

Part two examines the multiple facets of play within the literature search in terms of its diverse meaning, its characteristics (Lester & Russell, 2010; White, 2012; Wood, 2004) and its role in regards to the heated debate between free and structured play as well as outdoor (Brown et al, 2001; Sheridan et al, 2010). To confine and categorise play enabled a more clear and detailed interpretation of its important elements, multifaceted meanings and complex behaviour.

3.3 The origin and root of the play definition

Greek antiquity provides the etymology of play, games and sport (*paidia*) which stems from the same root word as education/culture (*paideia*), children (*paides*), and pedagogy (*paidagogia*) (Livescu, 2003). These words are synonymously used in the same context (ibid). The central aim of Greek *paidagogia* was to "*encourage learning as a form of play (paidia) which is the most persuasive and effective approach to learning for the free citizens in a society which honors philosophers*" (ibid, p. 2). *Plega*, the Anglo-Saxon word for play, means the context from which it derives (McLean, Haurd & Rogers, 2011). It is to game as in a sport or to skirmish as in to fight, or to battle. It relates to the Latin word *plaga* meaning to strike, blow or thrust an instrument like a ball (ibid). The German term *spielen* and Dutch *spelen* both see play inclusive of games, sports and musical instruments "*play is traditionally considered a child's activity, it is recognized that people of all ages take part in play*" (McLean, Haurd & Rogers, 2011. p. 26). In a dated but critical discussion, Mitchell & Mason (1948) provide some scholarly definitions of child play displaying its diverse meanings, understandings and interpretations (table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Early scholarly definitions of play

Early thinkers	Scholarly definitions of play
Seashore	Free self-expression for the pleasure of expression.
Froebel	The natural unfolding of the germinal leaves of childhood.
Hall	The motor habits and spirit of the past persisting in the present.
Groos	Instinctive practise, without serious intent, of activities essential to later life.
Dewey	Activities not consciously performed for the sake of any result beyond them.
Schiller	The aimless expenditure of exuberant energy.
Spencer	Superfluous actions taking place instinctively in the absence of real actions.
Lazarus	Activity in itself free, aimless, amusing, or diverting.
Shand	A type of play directed at the maintenance of joy.
Dulles	An instinctive form of self-expression and emotional escape value.
Curti	Highly motivated, free from conflicts, is usually not always, pleasurable.

(Adapted from Mitchell & Mason, 1948. pp. 103-104)

3.4 The ambiguity of play

Play could be viewed as describing almost all the activities young children engage in (Fleer, 2002). Yet, on the outset, a universal definition of play remains a baffling and difficult task prolonging the gap in understanding of its broader concept (Ailwood, 2003; Bruce, 2002; Casey, 2010; Duncan, 2015; Eberle, 2014; Else, 2014; Fein, 1981; Gleave, 2012; Leaupepe, 2011a; Santer et al, 2007; Sutton-Smith, 2008; Whitebread et al, 2012). In one view, play is assumed 'individual' and 'elusive' and therefore, difficult to generalise or to retain a fixed definition of (Holme & Massie, 1970). Similarly, the word 'play' is used too often it connotes little meaning or a complex array of meanings (White, 2008). Specifically, "*no one definition of play can encompass all the views, perceptions, experiences and expectations that are connected with it*" (Kernan, 2007. p. 5). Play is also context dependent and because contexts vary, so will the definitions and conceptions of play (Wood & Attfield, 2005). The obscurities of play further provoke doubts of its learning influence (Adams & Fleer, 2016; Shields, 2015). This poses the first challenge some play professionals face in promoting and advocating for play (Palmer, 2009). The "*ambiguities surrounding the definition of play have done little to substantiate claims that children learn through play or that play-based curriculum is the best or only approach to support early learning*" (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 2).

Fleer (1996) brought to the forefront of early learning discourse the argument of what constitutes play in this modern day and contemporary era. The aspect of cultural influences and the globalised economy through mass media have broadened horizons regarding play and what was once considered play has been dramatically altered today. It is argued, the play frameworks of prominent theorists and researchers are not fitting and applicable to all cultures and cultural groups instead, "*the 'play' activities of children – regardless of their type – are culturally defined, valued and interpreted. They exist as a result of cultural practices*" (ibid, p. 16). In play activities, she uses *representational play* as an example as it is "*characterised by the fact that a certain imaginative play theme is the mainspring of activity*" (Feitelson, 1977. p. 6). Specifically, representational play is under make-believe play or imaginative play (ibid). It is defined by others as socio-dramatic, thematic, symbolic, free flow, free, pretend or lucid play (Bruce, 1991; Feitelson & Ross, 1973; Gaskins & Goncu, 1988; Singer, 1973; Smilansky, 1968). In describing the

play activities in different cultural communities, Fleer (1996) posits that a majority did not reflect the ideas within Western theories thereby posing a mismatch between the theoretical reference and practice of cultural-based ECE contexts.

Play is nonetheless argued to be a "*jumbo category that encompasses a multiplicity of activities, some of which are conducive to learning, but many of which are not*" (Hutt et al 1989 cited in Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 2). This is due to the continuous back and forth movement of differing activities with diverse ways of acting, interacting, and communicating. Much of the argument pertains to the "*overemphasis on attainment targets and testing*" (Santer et al, 2007. p. xii). Given these obscurities, utilising the bricoleur approach was necessary to obtain an inclusive view and definition from multiple sources particularly the basics framed within the study's Conceptual Framework as discussed in chapter one.

3.5 The characteristics of play

One way to understand play is through its various essential and nonessential characteristics that are used to conceptualise its behavioural manifestations, internal states/dispositions (e.g. playfulness) or its situational factors (Johnson et al, 1987). While there is a wide range of play behaviours, different contexts may have multiple meanings of it for children and adults (Wood & Attfield, 2005). In terms of this study, there are five common ways of thinking about play – as action, interaction, activity, disposition and context (Hendricks, 2015). Of the 'Behavioural manifestations', play is fun, enjoyable, spontaneous, voluntary, meaningful, symbolic, pleasurable and episodic (Fromberg, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek et al, 2008). *Play is pleasurable* in that children must enjoy the activity or it cannot be considered as play (Fromberg, 2002; White, 2012). *Play is fun* because children are able to choose their activities and playmates and are free to draw on their own motivational ideas (Meckley, 2002). *Play is symbolic* as a sense of pretense and imagination in children's play that enables them "*to transform reality into symbolic representations of the world; to experiment with the meanings and rules of serious life; to try out different ideas, feelings and relationships with people*" (Kernan, 2007. p. 9).

The 'Internal dispositions' of play such as *Play is intrinsically motivated* infers play is otherwise not externally driven or motivated with impulses such as hunger and goals as gaining power or wealth (Hewes, 2006; Johnson et al, 1987; White, 2012). It

is however, a drive that emerges from within and pursued for its own sake. In addition, "*Children engage in play simply for the satisfaction the behavior itself brings. It has no extrinsically motivated function or goal*" (White, 2012. p. 6). Moreover, *Play is concerned with the process rather than product* implies that children's play do not focus on the outcomes or goals but rather on the activity itself – the means are more important than ends (Dewey, 1993; Hewes, 2006; Garvey, 1990; Johnson et al, 1987; White, 2012). The "*absence of pressure to achieve a goal frees children to try many different variations of the activity and is a major reason play tends to be more flexible than goal-oriented behaviour*" (White, 2012. p. 6).

Meckely (2002) argues that the actual process or activity of play is where learning occurs and uses the example of the relationship between language development and play. In this case, through play "*children use more complex language than in conversations with adults. Children frequently make their first attempts at reading and writing when they are playing, by acting as if they are competent readers and writers*" (ibid, p. 4). *Play that is non-literal* coincides with *Play as pretend but done as if the activity were real*. This refers to the pretense and make-believe nature of children's play that separates the play from everyday experiences (Garvey, 1990; Hewes, 2006; Johnson et al, 1987; White, 2012). As such, "*within this play frame, internal reality takes precedence over external reality. The usual meanings of objects are ignored, and new meanings are substituted. Actions are performed differently from when they occur in nonplay settings*" (White, 2012. p. 16).

The 'Situational factors' of play make the connections between what play is and what it does for the child as well as how the child makes links between his/her inner and outer worlds (Meckley, 2002). *Play is child-invented* in the sense that activities are not only chosen by children but designed by them as well. The new and innovative creations children add to play may seem trivial to adults, but to children they "*are new because they tried and completed something they never did before*" (ibid, p. 4). Additionally, "*in play, children are the inventors and experimenters: they take risks to try something they have never tried before or think an idea they have never thought before. Through play, they are developing creativity and thinking skills*" (ibid, p. 4). *Play is done by the players not the adults* refer to the play activities of children without the inclusion of adults such as parents or teachers (Garvey, 1990; Hewes, 2006; Meckley, 2002). It is not only something children

choose to do, but something they prefer to do (Meckley, 2002). Adults on the other hand can help plan and support children's plans and play given they "*provide the proper environment, support, the rules, the safety, so that children can obtain the maximum learning from playing*" (ibid, p. 4).

3.6 The role of play – Free play versus Guided play

The most contested debate between play and learning is possibly that of free/spontaneous play versus guided/structured play (Chein et al, 2010; Fisher et al, 2013; Weisberg et al, 2013a; Wood, 2009). Understanding their distinct and mutual roles also helps bridge the elusive gap of play definitions.

3.6.1 Free play

Free play is also known as 'spontaneous play', 'active play' or 'unstructured play' (Brown et al, 2001; Sheridan et al, 2010; Sutton-Smith, 2009; Veitch et al, 2010). It is simply the absence of adults in child play (Kernan, 2007; Sheridan et al, 2010). It is also a flexible avenue for children to be active, physical, to learn who they are and what they can do, in their own time, to engage in fantasy and to learn about others (Brown et al, 2001; Hirsh-Pasek et al, 2008; Santer et al, 2007; Sheridan et al, 2010; Veitch et al, 2010; Yarosh et al, 2010). The amount of time children spend in free play is vital to cognitive development and in developing socio-cultural and emotional competencies (Holmes, Liden & Shin, 2013; Pagani et al, 2010; Weisberg et al, 2013a; Yarosh et al, 2010). In the case of school readiness, academic achievement and school adjustment, free play allows children to "*practice language skills, perspective taking, representational thinking, problem solving, and taking turns as they work hard to keep their games going*" (Perry & Branum, 2009. p. 195). One study showed that children who prefer unstructured play activities tend to achieve academic success coupled with thinking styles that correlate to their cultural values (Holmes, Liden & Shin, 2013). Free play also ensures there are positive outcomes in language and literacy learning (Lillard et al, 2013; Weisberg et al, 2013a).

Free play has its fair share of drawbacks. One most common drawback is the passive adult role and its little influence or control in the learning situation "*although this approach allows children the maximum amount of freedom, it also means that children are likely to have difficulty achieving the learning goal, because they are not being encouraged to focus on the appropriate dimensions*" (Weisberg et al, 2013a. p.

105). Another unfortunate factor revealed in an extensive study is that free play is in fact declining for reasons such as increased television time and prolonged hours of digital play (Singer & Singer, D'Agnostino & DeLong, 2009).

3.6.2 Guided play

Guided play is otherwise an active process where adults are able to follow children's lead yet still allowed the liberty to freely engage in their own learning and maintain a significant degree of control over it given it falls within a well prepared environment with subtle scaffolding (Goldbeck, 2001; Weisberg et al, 2013a). Guided play is a form of directed or guided approach to child's play particularly used by preschool teachers to plan for indoor and outdoor play activities. It is perceived as a nexus between free play and formal instruction or didactic instruction (Golbeck, 2001; Lilliard et al, 2013; Weisberg et al, 2013a). Interestingly, although free play and guided play are widely debated, guided play has proven to outshine traditional methods (Stipek et al, 1995; Stockard & Engelmann, 2008). Utilising a range of play-based evidence has proven preschool children benefit from a curriculum that is structured and rich in cognitive stimulation (ibid). Such an approach "*leads not only to gains in content knowledge and school readiness skills, but also to gains in some of the less obvious areas of development such as self-regulation, motivation, and creativity*" (ibid, p. 105). Educators are able to collaboratively construct learning within a general curricular goal aimed to foster and stimulate children's natural curiosities and explorations (Fisher et al, 2013; Hirsh-Pasek et al, 2009).

3.7 Play pedagogy

A good free and guided play approach teachers and parents can resort to is play pedagogy or play-based pedagogy. It is not so much how and why children learn through play, but mostly of the adult roles in planning for play that is child-centered and child-initiated. It is described as, "*ways in which early childhood professionals make provision for play and playful approaches to learning and teaching, how they design play/learning environments, and all the pedagogical decisions, techniques/strategies they use to support/enhance learning and teaching through play*" (Wood, 2008. p. 27). Free play and free choice are difficult for teachers and adults to work their way around but in deeply understanding the theoretical and policy shifts in the distinctive purposes and nature of play in education settings, the task should be more effortless. Play pedagogy is not only a school and teacher

practice but can also extend to the home environment where "*children act as playful pedagogues in their self-initiated activities*" (ibid, p. 27). Play pedagogy founder Gunilla Lindqvist, embeds her approach in Vygotsky's *Imagination and Creativity in Childhood* (Baumer, 2013). This cultural approach to play argued for play-based pedagogy, which include conjoint adult-child pretense and dramatisation of texts from children's literature and the production of visual art (ibid).

3.8 Outdoor play

In addition to the debate and research for and against the roles of free play versus guided play, spaces for play is controversial (Weisberg et al, 2013a). The outdoors is where "*the spontaneity and freedom of play outdoors in contrast to the predominant character of their school day which they view as being under adult control and surveillance*" (Kernan, 2007. p. 7). It also proves true for home environments (ibid). On the other hand, indoor play is increasing due to the upsurge in digital games, "*indeed, the play space for many children has most expanded indoors, in particular, within their own bedrooms where indoor play technologies such as television, video, DVDs, game consoles and computer games have proliferated*" (Buckingham, 2000 cited in Kernan, 2007. p. 5).

3.8.1 Traditions of outdoor play

There are three traditions of outdoor play in the early years, which have influenced ECE practices around the world (Cohen, 2007; Garrick, 2009). Fröebel, in his *garden of children* philosophy *represents the spiritual needs of the young child in which he insists is necessary* (Garrick, 2009). His educational work centered on providing a real experience for children. In essence, "*to encourage children to grow up in harmony with nature*" (ibid, p. 15). Fröebel's main aim was to nurture spiritual awareness in children through exercise play, songs, movement games, rhymes and circle games (ibid). Secondly, Margaret McMillan (late 19th century – early 20th century), was a prolific journalist, fiction writer, adult educator, socialist politician and social reformer who emphasised children's physical health and emotional well-being (Garrick, 2009). Influenced by Fröebel and her personal experiences of harsh and unhealthy homes including the lives of children of working-class families, she came to understand the healing effects of the outdoor environment and its potential to transform the lives of the young working-class (ibid). She developed her ideas of a nursery garden and within the next two decades, established a beautiful nursery

garden for impoverished children in the South London community (Steedman, 1990). Lastly, Susan Isaacs, a trained infant teacher, a qualified philosopher, psychologist and practising psychoanalyst focused on a young child's intense intellectual and emotional life (Garrick, 2009). She adopted this standpoint through observation and an analysis of children's learning. This in turn, informed her teaching and the publication of three influential books about children's learning (Drummond, 2000). Isaacs found that children between ages 2 and 8 had an unusual degree of freedom at the school she taught at with a lot of "*opportunities to explore expansive outdoor environments*" (Garrick, 2009. p. 17). Her writings provided empirical evidence of the "*ways in which children's intense investigations and thinking about biological and spiritual concepts, including death, can be supported by unconstrained experiences outdoors*" (ibid, pp. 17-18).

3.9 The right to play

On the international scene, play is an important condition for the welfare and legitimate right of children. Since 1989, Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognises and protects the significance of play in the lives of children acknowledging it as a natural entitlement, in addition to and distinct from the child's right to recreation and leisure (Carvalho, 2013; Casey, 2010; Gada, 2008; Ginsburg, 2007; Hewes, 2006; Lancy, 2015; Leaupepe, 2011a; Lester & Russell, 2010; Mayne, Howitt & Rennie, 2015; Samuelsson & Pramling, 2013; Sheet, 2011; Smith, 2013; UNICEF, 2011). The convention ushered worldwide efforts to ensure the UNCRC rights are observed and implemented including the right to play. The UNCRC assures children all over the world have the benefit of a satisfying play life (Brown & Freeman, 2001). Later works stimulated an appreciation of the "*importance of free, self-initiated, and spontaneous play to the child's healthy, mental, emotional and social development*" (ibid, p. xvii). The author's beliefs shifted to that of "*in the end, a playful childhood is the most basic right of childhood*" (ibid, p. xvii).

It is important to note that this 'right to play' may not be shared by other cultures and can become problematic (Fleer, 2003a). A few have sought to resolve this view through the influence assumed by developmental psychologists of preschool pedagogy that a potentially new universal paradigm where the child's experiences

become central is critical (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). UNCRC has aided to address pressing concerns such as the increase in play deprivation in the early years (Hughes, 2003; Kernan, 2007; Louv, 2005; Pellegrini, 2005). It argued that "*chronic play deprivation, particularly during the period between birth and seven years, has been linked to impaired brain development, lack of social skills, depression and aggression*" (Hughes, 2003 cited in Kernan, 2007. p. 60). Such misfortunes are supported through the convention in their resilience and corroboration with international governments (Kernan, 2007).

PART THREE: THE BRICOLAGE OF PLAY

Part three presents the bricoleur bearings of the study in which the philosophical underpinnings of play interact alongside the guiding research questions. They expressly feature in the study's theoretical framework premised on the foundations of education and curriculum – *philosophy, sociology* and *psychology* (Print, 1993) with the additional dimension of *history* (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2014) as well as anthropology and development. These informed the bricoleur theoretical framework used in this study – *theorising bricolage as multiple theoretical lenses* bordered by classical and contemporary theories of play. It is supported as "*critical bricoleurs employ historiographical, philosophical, and social theoretical lenses to gain a more complex understanding of the intricacies of research design*" (Kinchelo, 2001. p. 679). It is important to note that while the review attempted to discuss the different perspectives of play within the bricolage frame, some aspects overlapped and mutually corresponded with each other. This further confirmed the complexities that encompass the nature and behaviour of play.

3.10 A historical perspective

Due to the long-established tradition by which play in early learning and development is premised, play traditions in early childhood can be traced back to classical times (Bennett, 1997). There are three main traditions of the of play discourse particularly outdoor play (Cohen, 2007; Garrick, 2009; McLean, Haurd & Rogers, 2011). Traditions are believed to be the main reason why the literature surrounding play is fragmented. In particular, after the 19th century, the research on play branched out in three directions – the cognitive value of play, the emotional value of play and the social value of play in animals (Cohen, 2007). Prior to that, the main historical perspectives and traditions of play date back as far as Greek antiquity

to modern structuralist and poststructuralist theories; from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to the mid-19th century where literature of children's play escalated. Some of these perspectives are found in the works of Fröebel, Pestalozzi, Freud, Dewey, Montessori and Rousseau (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). The diversity of perspectives on play support the significance of the bricoleur approach.

3.10.1 Ancient Greek – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle

Classic Greek philosophers such as Plato, Socrates and Aristotle considered play as the characteristic mode of behaviour of the young child (D'Angour, 2013; Kernan, 2007; Krentz, 1998; Livescu, 2003; McLean, Haurd & Rogers, 2011; Saracho & Spodek, 1995; Smith & Gosso, 2010). It was a natural expression of the spirit of infancy hence, the very definition and key feature of childhood itself (Fromberg & Bergen, 2006). Plato theorised play as a means of learning for his republic through the connected relationship between play (*paidia*) and education (*paideia*) (Krentz, 1998). He aimed to "*show that philosophical 'play' is the best pedagogical means to educate a just citizenry and to prepare philosophical leaders to govern*" (Krentz, 1998. p. 1). Socrates believed play was the best method of instruction and should be freely and not randomly practised. He did not see play as being work but the opposite (Livescu, 2003). Aristotle on the other hand, believed the improvisations of comedy, as a form of prayer was something children could do in their play connecting their activities to adult activities such as rituals, prayer and drama. In retrospect, for the Greeks, play is an integral element of education and a means of stimulating positive character development and the teaching of Greek values (McLean, Haurd & Rogers, 2011). This mirrors the purpose of play as the foundation and means of social existence in hunter-gatherer societies (Gray, 2009). For children, they "*were free to play and explore, and through these activities, they acquired the skills, knowledge, and values of their culture*" (p. 476). From approximately ages four to mid-teen years, children spent a significant amount of time away from adults where they played and explored with groups of other children (Gray, 2009; Gray, 2012). Figure 3.1 depicts a chronology of the main play thinkers highlighting the exact time period and sequence in history each figure and idea emerged.

Figure 3.1 Chronology of main play thinkers

1	• Rousseau (1712-1778)
2	• Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1774-1827)
3	• Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852)
5	• John Dewey (1859-1952)
6	• Maria Montessori (1870-1952)
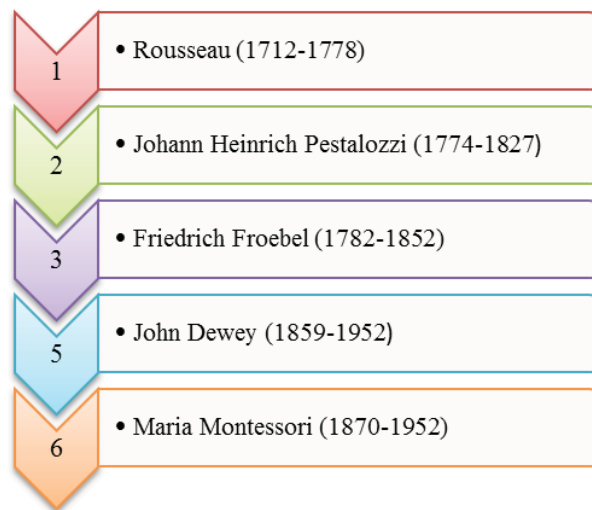
(Adapted from Cohen, 2007; Garrick, 2009; McLean, Haurd & Rogers, 2011)

3.10.2 Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Fröebel

A more discernible historic account underpinning educational play dates back to the 18th century in the philosophy and works of German educationist Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröebel [1782–1852] (Allen, 2001; Herrington, 2001; Moore, Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie & Boyd, 2014; Provenzo Jr, 2009). Fröebel, a respected and celebrated educator pioneered and theorised the notion "*play was not trivial, nor was it a preparation for life – rather, he regarded it as the highest phase in the child's functioning, and for this reason, considered it to be a spiritual activity*" (Bruce, 1991 cited in Docket & Fleer, 2003. p. 26). His philosophy, in general, was inspired and influenced by neo-humanist educational theories predominantly those of his mentor Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi [1774-1827], as Swiss educationist who emphasised that instead of rote learning, children should learn through practical experiences and in their contact with objects (Smith & Gosso, 2010). Both Fröebel and Pestalozzi's works were significantly inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau [1712-1778] who proclaimed the innocence of children and who was amongst the few to declare child-centered education and the notion that nature requires children to be children first (Moore et al, 2014; Smith & Gosso, 2010). Together, they formulated the notion that through play, children learn to live in harmony with each other and with nature (Platz & Arellano, 2011). Rousseau's philosophy on the other hand was "*children should have time to explore the natural world. He believed that play was a child's right and that there was no antithesis between this and work*" (Santer et al, 2007. p. 2). He

strongly emphasised the importance of play as a tool in developing the senses and that through sensory experiences and contact, children are able to exercise judgment (ibid). Prior to Rousseau however, it is believed play was not given serious consideration (Fleer, 1996).

Returning to Fröebel, he is hailed the father of *kindergarten*. His German concept simply translates to a 'Garden of Children' or 'Children Playing in the Garden' (Allen, 2006; Dockett & Fleer, 2003; Herrington, 2001; Provenzo, 2009). In essence, the words *kinder* (child) and *garten* (garden) derive from *child-garden* (Headley, 1965; Smith & Gosso, 2010). Fröebel summoned German women to assemble and support his kindergarten movement especially of the outdoors or garden environments where he metaphorically illustrated children as plants while their teachers as gardeners (Headley, 1965). Fröebel developed his original kindergarten as a medium for education in which he used and promoted play (Leaupepe, 2011b; May, 2001; Saracho & Spodek, 1995). His kindergarten curriculum comprised manipulation such as wooden blocks and wooden and woolen balls in which he called *Gifts* (ibid). He also created what he called *Occupations* because he believed "*children should engage in craft activities…*[and] *included paper weaving and paper folding*" (ibid, p. 132). Furthermore, his curriculum involved "*children's songs and games, which he called the Mother's Plays and Songs*" (ibid, p. 132). Fröebel's curriculum was of activities and materials that had spiritual meanings and symbols, which he aspired for children (Saracho & Spodek, 1995).

Contrastingly, it is argued play as an *object* is 'what' children play and learn; and play as an *act* is 'how' children play and learn (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). They disputed Fröebel's theory focusing on play as an *object of learning* where play activities are the child's inner drive and that it is separated from learning and work – something he referred to as 'free time'. They do however, acknowledge the usefulness of Fröebel's objects of learning as effective in the pedagogies of religion and mathematics. The authors add that in later developmental pedagogies, play is an *act of learning* or 'how' children play and learn. These ideas were later discovered through the developmental learning theories of Piaget and Vygotsky[12].

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[12] This is discussed further in a later part of this section.

3.10.3 Dewey and Montessori

The play ideas of John Dewey [1859-1952], are mostly seen in its influence within the Reggio Emilia approach in Italy by Loris Malaguzzi (Freeman, 2011; Gandini, 1993). His ideas couple the socio-constructivist influences of Piaget, Vygotsky, Gardner and Bruner (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011; Freeman, 2011; Gandini, 1993). Their socio-constructivist model states, "*both children and adults co-construct their knowledge through interactions with people and the environment*" (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011. p. 236). Educators of Reggio Emilia argue however, that "*preschool education is a right not a privilege; that all children have the potential to learn; and...that children are architects of their own learning*" (Rinaldi, 2005 cited in Dodd-Nufrio, 2011. p. 236). Educators also consider their work as an approach rather than a model for other countries to follow but not replicate (Freeman, 2011).

Maria Montessori [1870-1952] was Italy's first qualified female medical doctor who took an interest in treating mentally handicapped and disadvantaged children (Cohen, 2007; Gutek, 2004; Kramer, 1976; Lillard, 2013; Smith & Gosso, 2010). She noted at that time, "*mental retardation was not categorically defined but included a range of children, including those who were physiologically impaired as well as those who were referred to as 'laggards,' delinquent, and emotionally disturbed children*" (Gutek, 2004. p. 8). She found that children became frustrated when teachers expected them to read and write and therefore saw the "*value of self-initiated activity for young children, under adult guidance*" (Smith & Gosso, 2010. p. 23). She emphasised that children need to be engrossed in the environment and to learn about real life so she constructed play materials that helped aid sensory discrimination and in colour and shape matching (Montessori, 1995; Smith & Gosso, 2010). Montessori believed this encourages self-discovery and social development such as when children learn to respect the work of others in the environment as they consistently encounter situations (Montessori, 1995).

3.11 A philosophical perspective – Theories of play

Continuing from the major historical perspectives of play, significant to it are the philosophical underpinnings that embed ideas and thoughts of play. The rationale in referencing and using the theoretical perspectives of play was to aptly understand and apply them so they inform appropriate teaching and learning practices for home

and preschool use. Also, as no single theory can explain children's play behaviours, using multiple lenses helps to understand the motivations behind these behaviours as committing to any one theory while excluding others is limiting (Wood & Attfield, 2005). The main classical and contemporary theories of play are framed with additional reference to relevant literary works to support each theory (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Santer et al, 2007). In fact, classical theories are ideas developed about the value of play prior to the 1920s while theories and ideas developed after this decade are known as contemporary, modern or modern-dynamic play theories (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Mellou, 1994; Saracho & Spodek, 1998). Figure 3.2 group the classical and contemporary theories of play.

Figure 3.2 Classical and contemporary play theories
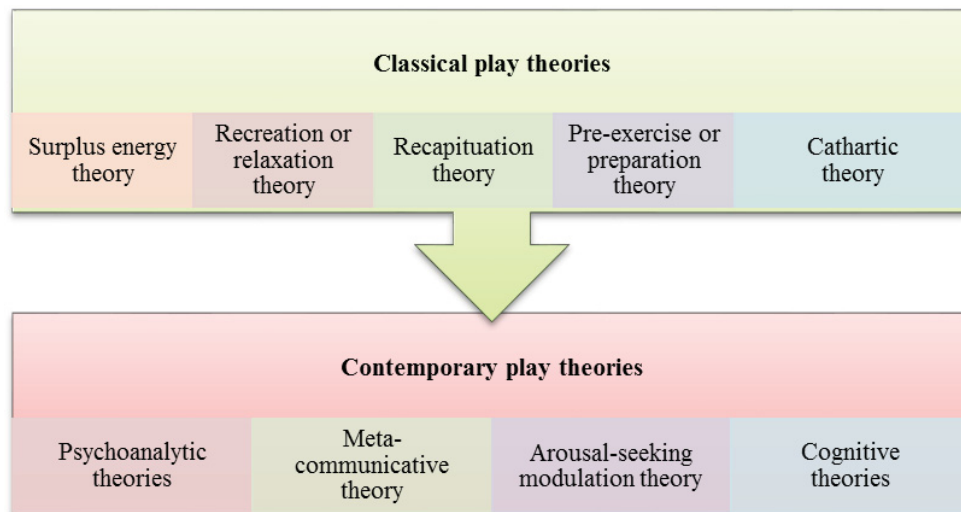
3.11.1 Classical theories

The *Surplus Energy Theory* by Friedrich von Schiller [1759-1805] an 18th century German poet, historian, and philosopher and later Herbert Spencer [1875], a British philosopher (Saracho & Spodek, 1995) saw play as a way of releasing or eliminating excess energy (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Fleer, 2009; Mitchell & Mason, 1948; Santer et al, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 1995). In other words, play is used to blow off steam (Docket & Fleer, 2003). Schiller thought of it as an aimless expenditure of exuberant energy where an overflow of energy needs to be burned and consumed. Spencer on the other hand, who referred to an uncontrollable desire to play, also considered play as a superfluous activity (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). In contrast, German poet, Moritz-Lazarus [1883], chief exponent of the *Recreation* or *Relaxation Theory*

ascertained play as a means to restore energy (Choo, 2016; Saracho & Spodek, 1995; Wood, 2012). It is exactly the opposite of how it is accounted for in the *Surplus Energy Theory* – an occupation engaged for relaxation or the conserver if not, restorer of energy (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Saracho & Spodek, 1995; Wood, 2012). Here, play is a form of relaxation and a source of energy before work continues (Santer et al, 2007). It is characterised as an activity of revitalisation when energy has been consumed during work without draining off excess or surplus energy (ibid).

The *Recapitulation Theory* by Stanley Hall [1844-1924], an American psychologist in the early 1900s supposed by impulse, children play out the stages of human evolution from animal, savage, nomad, agricultural and tribal (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Santer et al, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Children's tendency to climb and swing is typical of the animal stage while rough and tumble play is typical of the savage stage (Docket & Fleer, 2003). One view is, "*play reflects the course of evolution and is a migration through primitive stages in order to prepare for the endeavours of modern life*" (Santer et al, 2007. p. 4). This links to the *Preparation Theory, Instinct/practice Theory* or *Biological Theor*y by Karl Groos [1901] a Dutch student of human and animal behaviour in the 19th century (Cohen, 2007) where play is an instinctive way in which children prepare themselves for adult life (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Piaget, 1962; Santer et al, 2007). As such, children rehearse or imitate adult skills and roles in their play. It therefore, becomes an essential need of childhood given it reinforces the instincts that allow children to prepare for future roles such as acting out parental tasks especially in their pretend play (Santer et al, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 1995).

In light of emotional play, the *Cathartic Theory* (from the Greek theater *Catharsis*) saw play as a way to harmlessly express disorganised or painful emotions (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Mallick & McCandless, 1966). Sigmund Freud, founder of the theory, categorised it as part of the *Psychoanalytic Theories*[13]. Freud speculated that play allows children to rid themselves of negative emotions particularly traumatic events and personal conflicts in order to achieve greater emotional stability (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). He argued, "*without the catharsis provided by play, children might feel the effects of negative feelings and trauma all of their lives*" (p. 139). Play is therefore seen as a safe and acceptable outlet to release negative emotions (Docket &

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[13] See Contemporary Theories

Fleer, 2003). It resonates in developing and harnessing children's emotional skills often by taking their emotions out on their toys or playmates. For example, children can re-enact their punishments by scolding or screaming. It is argued that, "*this perspective that children can work through issues in their play is widely accepted, and is the basis of contemporary psychoanalytic theories*" (ibid, p. 24).

While classical theories are relevant, there are limitations to their descriptions as they merely explain reasons as to why play exists (Ellis, 1973; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1987; Saracho & Spodek, 1998). The theories are disputed as lacking evidence-based verifications and founded on sheer philosophical reflections (Ellis, 1973). Hence, with the current knowledge of energy, instinct, evolution and development, the classical ideas have been critically judged as deficient (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1987). Despite this, classical theories are hailed as providing a basis and foundation for modern or contemporary play theories (Rubin, 1982).

3.11.2 Contemporary theories

Contemporary or modern dynamic theories inquire into the content and function of play (Docket & Fleer, 2003). They center on the views of Freud, Berlyne, Bateson, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner and Gardner (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Santer et al, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 1998). The theories are segregated according to the extent in which each idea describes play and its role in child development (Docket & Fleer, 2003)[14]. *Psychoanalytic Theories* stem from the works of Sigmund Freud [1938], also a prominent figure in the classical theory of *Catharsis* and later, Erik Erickson (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Freud's play ideas developed out of a clinical practice where clients are assisted by a therapist to describe prior experiences to identify and cope with various problems (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). One of the clinical applications of the theory is play therapy, allowing children to naturally express themselves and act out feelings such as tension, fear, and insecurity while a play therapist tries to understand children's level of thinking by communicating at their level to draw out feelings (Axline, 1974; Marks-Tarlow, 2014). This aids in observing and interpreting children's difficulties in order to help them deal and overcome them. Children are also meant to learn to control their feelings and become more secure (Axline, 1974). Similar to the cause of play in the

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[14] See Figure 3.3

Preparation/Instinctive Theory, instead of rehearsing or imitating adult skills and roles in their play, children dramatise the past, present, and future through their play to help resolve conflicts (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Similar to Freud's classical *Cathartic Theory,* children are able to use play to shed negative emotions that associate with uncontrollable events in their lives including traumatic experiences and conflicts (Fleer, 1999).

In Gregory Bateson's [1955] *Meta-communicative Theory* of play, actions are designated within play frames particularly within make-believe and real life situations (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Saracho & Spodek, 1995). As such, children use various communicative devices to indicate they are actually engaged in some sort of play either within the context of play while others occur outside the play frame (ibid). In doing so, children learn to function concurrently on two levels when they play: "*(1) make-believe purposes of objects and actions and (2) authenticity of life (e.g., actual identities of players and actual purpose of objects and actions*" (Saracho & Spodek, 1995. p. 141). Bateson argued that both play and fantasy serve equal importance in children's cognitive development (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Significant to the theory is the role of communication and context in play, "*within the play frame, communication relates to the roles and rules adopted and enacted*" (Docket & Fleer, 2003. p. 47).

The *Arousal-Seeking Modulation Theory* by Daniel Ellis Berlyne [1960] argued play maintains a balanced level of arousal in children (Docket & Fleer, 2003). It assumes there exists a drive of optimal level of arousal in play when organisms or in this case, children, are subjected to excessive stimulation while on the other hand, some activities reduce arousal levels (ibid). Similar to the contrast between the *Surplus Energy Theory* and the *Recreation* or *Relaxation Theory*; when there is excess arousal, children play to reduce it and when there is not enough arousal, children play to build it to an appropriate level (Docket & Fleer, 2003). In essence, play is considered a leveling or modulation device (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Play is furthermore, a "*stimulus-seeking activity that provides children with opportunities to manipulate objects and actions in new ways*" (Saracho & Spodek, 1995. p. 141). Essentially, play raises both stimulation and arousal levels and therefore, requires a sense of balance.

3.11.3 Cognitive theories

The relationship between play and cognitive development is of particular interest to child development theorists, educators and researchers (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Jean Piaget and Lev S. Vygotsky are the two main theorists whose works help further understand the complexities of child play (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). They complement the works of Howard Gardner and Urie Bronfenbrenner. Figure 3.3 illustrates selected cognitive theories followed by an account of each. The psychological perspectives of play are also covered within this section.

Figure 3.3 Cognitive play theories

Jean Piaget	• Construction of knowledge • Assimilation and accommodation • Stages of cognitive development
Lev Vygotsky	• Cultural-historical theory • Social development theory • Zone of Proximal Development
Howard Gardner	• Multiple Intelligences Theory (MI)
Urie Bronfenbrenner	• Ecological System's Theory

Jean Piaget [1896-1980], was a Swedish psychologist with a fundamentally biological orientation (Campbell, 2006). Of his many theories, the main contemporary Piagetian theory most pertinent to child play centers on the *Construction of Knowledge Theory*. It has influenced developmentally appropriate practices in term of the view children naturally learn through active play while the teacher features as a facilitator of play opportunities (Moore et al, 2014). This view is foundational in guided play (Goldbeck, 2001; Weisberg et al, 2013a). Piaget's *Theory of Assimilation and Accommodation* derive from the notion, individuals must adapt to their environments (Blake & Pope, 2008). *Assimilation* is the "*process of using or transforming the environment so that it can be placed in pre-existing cognitive structures*" (Blake & Pope, 2008. p. 59). *Accommodation* on the other hand, is the "*process of using or transforming the environment so that it can be placed in pre-existing cognitive structures*" (Campbell, 2006. p. 10). Piaget reasoned that development is a balance between assimilation and accommodation, also known as equilibrium (Blake & Pope, 2008). Piaget's constructivist theory, the *Stages of*

Cognitive Development saw learning as construction (Dahl, 1996). His theory "*purports the process of coming to know and the stages we move through as we gradually acquire this ability*" (Blake & Pope, 2008. p. 59). Of Piaget's stages are: *sensory-motor, pre-operational, concrete-operational, and formal-operational* (Blake & Pope, 2008; Huitt & Hummel, 2003; Nicolopoulou, 1993). These stages are summarised in table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Piaget's stages of cognitive development

Stages	Description
Sensori-motor stage	From birth to age 2 years. During this stage, infants and toddlers acquire knowledge through sensory experiences and manipulating objects.
The pre-operational stage	From age 2 to about 7 years. Children learn through pretend play but still struggle with logic and taking the point of view of other people. They also often struggle with understanding the ideal of constancy.
The concrete-operational stage	From age 7 to 11 years. Children at this point of development begin to think more logically, but their thinking can also be very rigid. They tend to struggle with abstract and hypothetical concepts.
Formal-operational stage	From adolescents to adulthood. Involves an increase in logic, the ability to use deductive reasoning, and an understanding of abstract ideas. At this point, people become capable of seeing multiple potential solutions to problems and think more scientifically about the world around them.

(Adapted from Blake & Pope, 2008; Cherry, 2016)

Recent studies indicate imaginary play follows a different path and is sometimes learned in families regardless of age or stage of development (Gaskin, Haight & Lancy, 2007; Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013; Smilansky, 1968; Ugaste, 2005). Laboratory based studies found that *some parents have to signal and teach pretense in play to their infants* (Lillard, 2007). The variations in play cultures across communities contests the common ideology that all children naturally play in the exact same way (Goncu, Jain & Tuerer, 2007; Pellegrini, 2011; Roopnarine, 2012).

Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory dwells on the importance to understand the cultural-historical context in which an individual resides in order to actually understand the individual (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Fleer, 2009). Vygotsky theorised "*play provides a space for the conscious realizations of concepts*" (Fleer, 2009. p. 4). The theory also implies the development of play is culturally constructed and not just an indication that a child is able to move from one age or stage to another where focus is on the process of development rather than its product

(Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Fleer, 2014; Veresov, 2010). In fact, it is useful to holistically understand the ways children develop in their respective communities (Wong & Fleer, 2012). Vyogotsky's developmental theory however, revolves around the concept of cognitive learning zones in what he coins as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It posits that learners are able to internalise what they learn and how they think before they are socially mediated by adults (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003; Wertsch, 1990). In other words, it requires the assistance of adults or peers when the student can no longer complete an assigned task on their own (Blake & Pope, 2008; Daniels, 2001; Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003; Wertsch, 1990). It bridges the gap between what learners are able to do on their own, and what they will need help in to accomplish their goals (Daniels, 2001). These experiences surface when children are able to negotiate in order to improve their ability to organise and express thoughts (Tharp & Gallimore, 1998). Contrary to Piaget, Vygotsky believed development is a socio-cultural construct that includes an interpersonal exchange of ideas in which learning is circumscribed by a range of capabilities (Fogarty, 1999; Kozulin, 2003). It contradicts Piaget's development theory in that "*every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)*" (Vygotsky, 1978. p. 57).

In terms of innate and learned behaviour, Howard Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (MI theory) comprise of nine types of intelligences or competencies that involve a person's set of capabilities and unique aptitude and ways they demonstrate intellectual capability (Gardner, 1993; 2011). Intelligences in this respect are, "*a broad range of abilities that humans possess*" (Armstrong, 2009. p. 6). It helps to further explain the development of human potential beyond the three general learning styles – auditory, visual and kinaesthetic (ibid). In terms of play, the MI theory provides a wider range of learning styles teachers and parents need to be aware of in order to encourage and provide a repertoire of children's play let alone identify their strengths and weaknesses for intervention purposes.

Coupled with the cognitive theories of play is Urie Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological System's Theory* developed to explain how everything in children's environments affect how they grow and develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Following the ideas of

Vygotsky, the *Ecological System's Theory* is a clear representative of how child's play is being influenced by different levels of his immediate and extended environment. This awareness is important to understand not only how the environments interplay but that they are taken into consideration when considering aspects of child rearing, classroom interaction and curriculum practice. The microsystem, most closest to the child, is his immediate environment such as the family, school, peer group and workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). It is a "*Pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting which particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment*" (p. 39).

The mesosystem extends to more complex connections and "*comprises of linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the development person (e.g., the relations between home and school, school and workplace, etc.*" (ibid, p. 40). The exosystem extends further into the indirect environment especially the family, the school and the peer group while the macrosystem extends into more specific social and psychological structures that "*ultimately affect the particular conditions and processes occurring in the microsystems*" (ibid, p. 40). The final environment dimension is the chronosystem representing the changes over time. It encompasses "*Change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives (e.g., changes over the life course in the family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, place of residence, or the degree of hectiness and ability in everyday life)*" (ibid, p. 40).

3.12 An anthropological perspective

Ethnographic studies explain young human beings play in all societies (Kernan, 2007; Schwartzman, 1982). "*Ethnographic and anthropological studies which have studied family and community groups in many cross-cultural settings provide some useful and interesting data on the 'play' activities of children*" (Fleer, 1996. p. 15). However, it is important to note the differing types and forms of child play and the amount of play children engage in in terms of age, gender, cultural contexts and the environmental characteristics of play settings (Armitage, 2005; Bloch & Pellegrini, 1989; Smith & Connolly, 1980; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Play is something which humans of all ages from diverse cultures engage in, although the purpose for and the

type of play may be different across ages and cultures (Kennedy & Barblett, 2010). The anthropological view sees play as an activity in its own right where children play spontaneously, voluntarily, pleasurably, flexibly and positively with little or no adult supervision or engagement (Kernan, 2007; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008).

3.13 A sociological perspective

The sociological ideas of play stem from anthropological perspective. It also looks at the socio-cultural factors of play as well as the perspectives of young players themselves (Hendricks, 2016; Hewes, 2006). As a social medium, play is seen as a recurring social activity where young children develop cognitively and socially in order to prepare for later formal schooling (Farver, et al, 1995). It enables children to organise and make sense of their social worlds as they engage actively with people, objects and representations (Hewes, 2006; Farver, et al, 1995; Phillips, 2010). Comparably, play is a significant catalyst for learning and development reflective of the social and cultural contexts in which children live (Dockett & Fleer, 2003; Gaskins, Haight & Lancy, 2007). Although playing and learning are natural components of children's everyday lives, education and society heavily promote learning rather than play. This attitude is elaborated as "*learning is seen as a result of a practice or activity initiated by an adult*" (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008. p. 623).

3.13.1 A socio-cultural perspective

Like every human activity, it is argued, the concept of play is to be observed within specific cultural, political and historical contexts as its practice and value assumptions may not essentially apply to all cultural contexts (Cannella & Viruru, 2002; Delpit, 1993 & King, 1992; Dockett & Fleer, 2003; Fleer, 2003b; Leaupepe, 20011b, 2010a). Scholars alike have turned their attention towards seeking a deeper understanding of the playing child through a sociocultural lens (Fleer, 2003b; Carr, 2001; Duhn, 2006; Leaupepe, 2013; Rogoff, 2003). In doing so, how the image of the child is socially constructed is understood (Duhn & Craw, 2010) while contexts becomes central when considering the debates and contradictions surrounding play (Dockett & Fleer, 2003; Leaupepe, 2011a).

In fact, culture is the main key factor in "*determining how people in different nations view play*" (Izumi-Taylor, Samuelsson & Rogers, 2010. p. 1). To account for these variations, cultural-context models of child development stress the role of specific

cultural practices in shaping and organising the environment in which children's social interaction and play activities take place (Farver, Kim & Lee, 1995). In particular, the differences rest on complex socio-cultural aspects of behaviour and relationships such as adult behavior and attitudes; the links between children's play and adult social roles; time and limitations for play; space and amount of proximity to play; access to objects and materials; diversity and how play creates a culture amongst children with rules of engagement and rites of passage (Carvalho, 2013 & Hewes, 2006; Farver et al, 1995). Human beings are biologically sociocultural and every activity is permeated with and affected by culture (Carvalho, 2013). The same could be said for play, "*culture permeates and is affected by…creative assimilation/interpretive reproduction of meso and macro-cultural aspects of the social environment (routines, rules, values); and construction of shared meanings and routines that constitute the micro-culture of peer groups*" (ibid, p. 1).

3.13.2 Adult perspectives

Adult perspectives either indicate how play is being practiced and the behavior of parents and adults which also demonstrate the general hindrances faced by families in terms of childhood play. Play is either seen by adults as a spontaneous activity accompanied by adult participation or spontaneous but limited to accomplish other so-called *important* activities (Carvalho, 2013). In general, the outcomes of play are reproduced and specified according to children's cultural environments predominantly according to the grown-up perspective of it and how it affects their adult social roles. In other words, it can be concluded that children's social environments are structured by adult beliefs about play as well as the arrangements for play that they think are necessary or desirable (Farver et al, 1995). Consequently, cultures value and react differently to play (Smith, 2013).

3.13.3 Children's perspectives

An interesting perspective is the actual articulation and conceptualisation of play by the players themselves – children (Duncan, 2015; Hewes, 2006; Kernan, 2007; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Santer et al, 2007; White, 2012). It is believed, "*children have their own definitions of play and their own deeply serious and purposeful goals*" (Hewes, 2006. p. 2). Children are not often consulted on their opinions and concerns regarding their play experiences, environments, and the

materials and resources used in their play (Santer et al, 2007). However, when given the opportunity, they convey, play is having fun, being outdoors, being with friends, choosing freely, not working, pretending, fantasy, drama and playing games (Corsaro, 2012; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Friendships, peer cultures, play opportunities and choices are vital to children (Corsaro, 2012; Holmes, Liden & Shin, 2013; Santer et al, 2007). In core, children's play preferences "*can help school policy makers decide the extracurricular activities and the types of play they should encourage*" (Holmes, Liden & Shin, 2013. p. 219).

Children also enjoy play and would like more choice in their play activities particularly of outdoor play opportunities (Cohen, 2007; Garrick, 2009; Santer et al, 2007). Some common child definitions are, "*in the eyes of a young child, running, pretending, and building are fun*" (White, 2012. p. 5). Fun, enjoyment, being with friends, choosing freely, using open-ended materials and being outdoors are dominant in the way children's play thoughts are characterised (Brown et al, 2001; Hirsh-Paseket et al, 2009; Kernan, 2007; Sheridan et al, 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997; White, 2012). These features emphasised aspects of a child's playful behaviour, which is distinctive to any other form of behaviour and are "*meant to apply to all forms of play, including but not limited to pretend play, construction play, exploratory play, and physical play*" (Weisberg et al, 2013a. p. 105). To children, there is little emphasis on the kind of growth, development or learning in play as what adults have in mind. Instead, it is the absence of adults and the presence of peers (Chick, Yarnal & Purrington, 2012; Hewes, 2006). Sometimes children initiate their own forms of play and contest and negotiate such play with adults (Kawash, 2011).

In play spaces, the aid of observations and visual ethnographies of different age groups were useful to capture and explore children's perceptions and preferences of play areas (Kernan, 2007). Within the first year of life, play is the enjoyment of "*exploring the immediate environment in the security of being held, which provides physical warmth and security*" (p. 6). These children especially under the age of three are not comfortable with wide-open spaces and prefer the small-scale space and presence of a nurturing, intimate and familiar adult figure (Kernan, 2007). Older children ages three to six years expressed a play context preference to the outdoors especially when they are within the proximities of the preschool or home settings

(ibid). As children get older especially the stage of transitioning from preschool to early primary school, their sense of play particularly of free play whether indoors or outdoors becomes an inclined preference.

3.14 The changing culture of play

An important aspect to consider is the fact that the world we live in is constantly changing and these changes produce alterations to children's play culture (Cross, 2008; Kalliala, 2006). The changes are consequential of the continual changes in societal structure indirectly affecting adult and child life further influencing the way children play (Kalliala, 2006). Reasons for these changes are shaped by changes in work and time at work of adults; the transformation of play activities by emerging technologies and commercialisation; and the changed meaning of play, childhood and families (Cross, 2008). Figure 3.4 illustrates a relationship diagram to show the cultural changes impacting on children's play culture as a result of societal change.

Figure 3.4 Fundamental cultural changes influencing children's play culture

children's play culture

Childhood and adults in transition

Changes in society
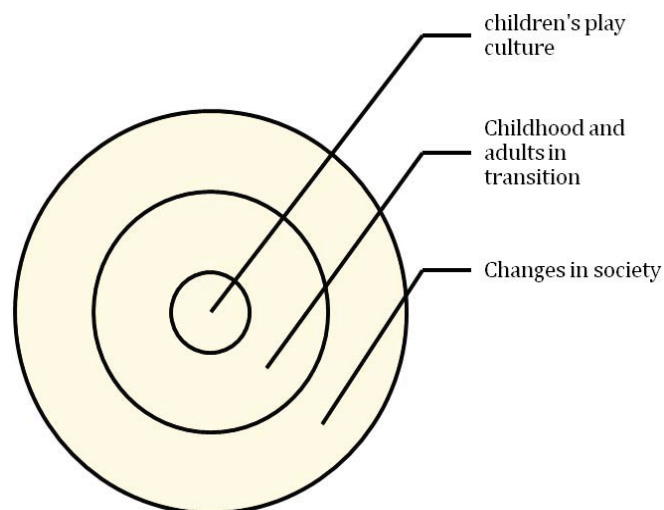
(Adapted from Kalliala, 2006. p. 11)

3.15 A psychological perspective

Play is also a universal trait of human psychology providing a context of early learning development and features as an important role in young children's education where they are able to engage in meaningful contexts for learning in early literacy concepts and skills, ability to revise and refine different conceptions of the world (Burghardt, 2010; Calvalho, 2013; Christie & Roskos, 2013; Bergen, 2015;

Samuelsson & Pramling, 2013). While the previously mentioned cognitive theories covered most of the psychological ideas of play, it is argued, play has traditionally belonged to developmental psychologists (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Furthermore, it couples cognitive psychology, a focus on mental processes, which involve the ways people think, perceive, remember, and learn (Blake & Pope, 2008; Burghardt, 2010; Garner, 2008; Vanderschuren, 2010). In terms of neurology, the intuitive and natural reaction to play is part of the brain's understanding through its neurological mechanisms to trigger play (Pellis, Pellis & Himmler, 2014; Stevens, 2014; Vanderschuren, 2010). It is called the "*brain circuits and neurotransmitters that underlie the pleasurable aspects of play*" (Vanderschuren, 2010. p. 315).

According to brain development and function, physical activity fuses physiological stress with balanced recovery to promote adaptation and growth and to preserve brain function which further enables the brain to respond to potential challenges (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Lester & Russell, 2008; Pellis, Pellis & Bell, 2010; Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009). Of the outdoors, "*there is an emerging body of evidence on the developmental significance of contact with nature and its positive impact on children's physical and mental well-being*" (Hewes, 2006. p. 6).

3.16 A developmental perspective

In terms of child development, its influence and dominant pedagogical discourse include play stages, growth, natural development, readiness and needs (Burman, 1994; Kernan, 2007). Within such a discourse, "*the progressive and universal nature of children's play is a powerful construct and is understood both to represent the quintessential child developmental activity*" (Kernan, 2007. p. 16). Development is considered a sign of maturation in children or of the maturing of their play (Scarlett, 2005). Play is essential to development because it contributes to the holistic growth of children's cognitive, physical, social, creative and emotional well-being (Broadhead, 2006; Ginsburg, 2007; Hewes, 2006). Play is associated with the development of intellectual skills, creative skills, language and literacy skills, creative skills, problem solving skills, divergent thinking skills, social skills, mathematics skills, functioning skills such as naming geometric shapes, knowledge of roles of community members, naming letters, sight-reading, number recognition, naming numbers, divergent thinking, language, abstract thought, conversation, counting, classification, and sorting (Christie & Johnsen, 1983; Golinkoff, Hirsh-

Pasek, & Singer, 2009; Jellison & Wolfe, 1999; Kennedy & Barblett, 2010; Maxwell, Mitchell & Evans, 2008; Smith, 2013).

These developmental skills correlate with the different play types/forms although they are not restricted to a single relationship. Play types or forms are varied and include features that are associated with the development of certain life skills in children. What differentiate these forms of play from each other are the "*different types of activities that children engage in: putting a doll to sleep as opposed to building a block tower*" (Kernan, 2007. p. 19). *Hutt's Typology of Play* is examined first to project the different behaviours of play – epistemic, games with rules and ludic in which helps categorise play forms into a more comprehensible sequence (Hutt's, 1979). The complexities of these relationships are structured in the following section alongside the skills of physical, social, emotional, cognitive/intellectual and creative development. It signifies the developmental aspects and forms of play interrelate and overlap with each other and are not definitive to a single relationship as structured in later sections.

3.16.1 Forms of play

The forms of play gathered range from exploratory play, object play, construction play, physical play (sensory-motor play, rough-and-tumble play), dramatic play (solitary pretense), socio-dramatic play (pretense with peers, also called pretend play, fantasy play, make-believe, or symbolic play), parallel play, language play, games with rules (fixed, predetermined rules) and games with invented rules (rules that are modifiable by the players) (Hendricks, 2010; Hewes, 2006; Maxwell, Mitchell & Evans, 2008; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Wood & Attfield, 2005). The account by Hewes (2006) is predominantly utilised in the study to frame the forms and types of play representing the ideas and contributions of her play accomplices.

i.   Physical development

Physical, loco-motor/sensory motor, exercise, functional, rough and tumble play

Physical play is also known as loco/sensory-motor, exercise or functional play in addition to rough-and tumble play. Physically, it involves a lot of bodily activity such as running, climbing, chasing, play fighting as well as pretend play (Harris & Jalloul, 2013; LaFreniere, 2011; Løndal, 2011; Perry & Branum, 2009; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). Evidence shows, "*strenuous physical activity is not only healthy*

for students but improves their academic performance" (Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009. p. 365). There is a link between early movement and children's ability to develop and learn given the opportunity to do so while they are young (Gordon, 2014; Pells, 2016). Physical play activities also help to sustain muscles for strength, endurance, physical coordination and healthy growth (Gordon, 2014; Hyndman, Benson & Telford, 2016; LaFreniere, 2011; Løndal, 2011; Pells, 2016; Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009). In terms of mental health, play therapy however, is a widely accepted developmentally appropriate intervention to sustain children's mental health (Homeyer & Morrison, 2008; Marks-Tarlow, 2014). Physical play is the best form for serving developmental functioning although it has been a neglected aspect in child development (Fagen, 1981; Løndal, 2011; Smith, 2013). There is "*growing evidence that strenuous physical activity is not only healthy for students but improves their academic performance*" (Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009).

ii. Social development

Social play, dramatic (social pretense), socio-dramatic (pretense with peers), fantasy, symbolic, make-believe, imaginary, parallel and solitary play

Social development is possible through social play in the forms of dramatic play, socio-dramatic play, fantasy, pretend, symbolic, make-believe, or imaginary play. There are slight differences in the value and focus of these social play forms but they are used interchangeably (Fein, 1981; Smith, 2013). Social play refers to playful and cooperative interactions of children with themselves, with other children or with parents and caregivers (Cohen, 2011). At the age of two, children prefer to play with at least two children or with adults (Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong, 2011; Gray, 2011a; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). It is also known as parallel play – when children play next to others without much interaction (Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Some children prefer to play alone known as solitary play also common in 2-3 year olds. Play stimulates self-regulation and self-realisation (Berk & Meyers, 2013; Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong, 2011; Hendricks, 2016).

As children get older (3 or 4 years), they begin to play in groups of three or more participants (Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Gray, 2011a; Fein, 1981; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Piaget refers to this change of occurrences specifically in pretend play as the Onset-Offset stage through the illustration of an inverted U-shaped curve. The idea showed how pretend activities begin to emerge

during the second year of life, increase over the following three or four years, and then decline (Fein, 1981). According to Piaget, "*play becomes more realistic as thought becomes more logical. Piaget also predicted a rise and fall in pretend play roughly between the years of 1 and 6*" (ibid, p. 1097). In games with rules play, children's ability to negotiate these rules, "*intrinsically involve their social identities that are real and those that are imaginary*" (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009. p. 60).

Through social play, children acquire social coordination skills, understand others children's meanings, understand complex language constructions, develop social, narrative, novel and intricate story line skills and negotiate meanings and roles (Gargano, 2010; Nicolopoulou & Ilgaz, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Within this form of play, children act out verbal and physical roles through the two key elements of make-believe and imitation (Fiorelli & Russ, 2011). They take on these roles by pretending to be someone or something else or that an object or an action is something else other than what it actually is (Fiorelli & Russ, 2011; Gargano, 2010; Gopnik & Walker, 2013; Hart & Tannock, 2013; Rosen, 2012; Russ & Wallace, 2013; West, 2010). Children emulate a certain person or animal and use real speech patterns or imagined props (Berk & Meyers, 2013; Gopnik & Walker, 2013; Maxwell, Mitchell & Evans, 2008; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Hart & Tannock, 2013). For example, "*a banana is a telephone…pretending to sleep or putting dolly to bed…*" (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013. p. 3). Imaginative play is "*vital to creativity in any medium and is fundamental for optimal human development*" (Rosen, 2012. p. 310). To maintain an imgaginative self, children need to switch modes from the outside world via conceptual maps once they coordinate sensory, affective, cognitive, imagistic, and behavioural systems (Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Marks-Tarlow, 2010). If they manage to achieve full social orientation, "*their imaginations remain for them portals to reality throughout their lives*" (p. 31).

Dramatic and constructive play fosters higher order play behaviours because as children develop, their play and thinking processes become more complex (Maxwell, Mitchell & Evans, 2008). An example of constructive play to illustrate this is "*…children building or creating objects with a specific goal in mind (e.g., a bridge, a house)*" (Parten 1932; Piaget, 1962 cited in Maxwell, Mitchell & Evans, 2008. p. 1097). Social play also prepares children for the future – a "'*pathway' that offers distinctive opportunities for experiencing life and for discovering 'self-locations'*"

(Hendricks, 2016. p. 225). In cultural variations, some "*children's pretence may involve imitating adult behaviours rather than transforming them imaginatively*" (Fleer, 1999. p. 74). It also shows that the highly imaginative play encouraged in Western pre-schools may be unusual and inappropriate in other societies particularly adults who are more concerned children engage in play in which they are able to rehearse real-life roles (Cohen, 2011; Fleer, 1999; James, 1998).

iii.   Emotional development

Pretend/fantasy play

Pretend play and fantasy play are the major play forms manifested in emotional development especially in children ages two to three who are not yet able to regulate their emotions (Clark, 2013; Hendricks, 2016; Kris, 2015; Power, 2011; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). It particularly enhances emotional security and helps children bring together or act out their ideas, feelings, relationships and physical life (Bergen & Davis, 2011). Emotional play further helps children understand things about the world and people they meet and to recreate their lives; practise the future; contemplate on the past; and get their thoughts, feelings, relationships and physical bodies under their own control (Bergen & Davis, 2011; Hendricks, 2016; Leaupepe, 2011a). When children are emotional, pretend and fantasy play help them master competence to face the world and to cope with it developing their positive self-esteem and influences the growth of their personalities (ibid). Unique discoveries in Freud's play therapy helps train children's emotional intelligence so that they are able to act out their feelings and dilemmas through fantasy play which in return, gives a real representation of their concerns (Bergen & Davis, 2011; Clark, 2013; Kris, 2015; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Play is therapeutic and allows children to deal with negative feelings in ways they are not alienated from adults (Elkind, 2007).

The human brain in its basic structure and system is biologically primed to connect to the reality of spirituality (Geula, 2004). Spiritual development is linked to emotional development in that there exists "*an emotional relationship with the divine or personal object of one's worship and devotions*" (p. 2). Spirituality is an important dimension in the holistic development of young children just like autonomy, resilience and responsibility. It is not to be confused with religion but a sense of spiritual self or inner spirituality (Lin, 2014). The Tonga National ECE Curriculum

(2015) document refers to it as *fakalakalaka fakalaumālie mo faka'ulungaanga.* It is a major strand in the holistic development of young children and pertains to learning and embodying Christian moral teachings and ways through Bible stories, good behaviour, Bible verses, and a Christ-like life. It couples behaviour development (*faka'ulungaanga*) and the ability to choose right over wrong and good over bad.

iv.   Cognitive development

Language, socio-dramatic, symbolic and solitary play

In relation to the psychological perspectives of play, intellectual or cognitive development starts from brain development (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Lester & Russell, 2008). Play allows children to explore, identify, negotiate, take risks and create meaning of things in their surroundings (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Han, Moore, Vukelich & Buell, 2010). While the intellectual and cognitive benefits of play are well documented, "*children who engage in quality play experiences are more likely to have well-developed memory skills, language development, and are able to regulate their behavior, leading to enhanced school adjustment and academic learning*" (Bodrova & Leong, 2005 cited in Barblett, 2010. p. 1). Language play through socio-dramatic, symbolic and solitary play forms help improve and develop children's pre-literacy oral and written language skills such as talking, writing, speaking and reading (Batt, 2010; Galeano, 2011; Roskos & Christie, 2013; Shields, 2015; Weisberg, Zosh, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2013b). In a study of linguistics and literary play, the use of narratives help the production of meaning in both oral and written forms (Bongartz & Richey, 2010).

Play is believed to be the nexus where language and emerging literacy behaviours converge and interact (Roskos & Christie, 2013). In the case of pretend play, "*children spontaneously produce a varied repertoire of novel words to meet and expand the needs of their imaginative or pretend play*" (Nwokah & Graves, 2009. p. 429). Children are also able to link objects, actions, and language together in combinations and narrative sequences and furthermore, generate a language that is suited to different perspectives and roles (Christie & Roskos, 2013; Hewes, 2006; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). One example is children's ability to transform pretend forms of oral and written language to other symbolic forms further predicting their emergent writing status (Christie & Roskos, 2013; Han et al, 2010). Tonga

encourages the comprehensive use of the vernacular mother tongue in ECE to help promote and safeguard the Tongan language and to avoid its swift overtake given the inevitable English language ideology as medium of instruction in some schools (Taufe'ulungaki, 2000). Mathematics play on the other hand, enable children to explore patterns and shapes, compare sizes, and count things (Sarama & Clements, 2009; Susina, 2010). Marble play for instance, is a historical and worldwide activity practiced by many children (Lancy & Grove, 2011).

More recently, digital games and games with rules play are also assumed to contribute to learning and intellectual development through play (McFarlane, 2004; Susina, 2010). "*Computer games are today an important part of most children's leisure lives and increasingly an important part of our culture as a whole*" (ibid, p. 1). It increases through offered games, an interest in pleasurable learning, learning through doing and learning through collaboration. It is ascertained, game play is "*one of the seven metatrends that continue to affect pedagogy, evolving to include virtual worlds, augmented reality, and massive multiplayer modes*" (Hlodan, 2008. p. 1).

v.   **Creative development**

Object (explorative/sensory), construction, socio-dramatic and pretend play

Creative development in children's play is highly contributive in object, constructive, socio-dramatic and pretend play forms (Clark, 2013; Moller, 2015; Ness & Farenga, 2016; Power, 2012; Power, 2011; Russ & Wallace, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Creativity in terms of imagination and innovation is the process of having original ideas that have value and helps children develop a more playful attitude (Moller, 2015; Robinson, 2015). In the Pacific, people are dominantly right-brained bringing out a lot creative, holistic, circular and people-centered thinking (Taufe'ulungaki, 2002). The emphasis on imagination means it is the root of creativity and brings to mind things that are not yet present in our senses (ibid). In terms of specific fields such as science, mathematics and engineering, creative and innovative thinkers require playful learning methods. It ultimately assists "*students in developing the intellectual abilities required for excellence*" (Bergen, 2009. p. 413). Object play also known as exploratory and sensory play, is similar to constructive play in the sense that in object play, children at the ages of 0-2 years begin to explore objects and environments such as touching, mouthing, tossing, banging, dropping, squeezing and manipulating objects (Hewes, 2006; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). As children mature

to ages 3-8 years, they move on to constructing things from play objects which associates with pretend and socio-dramatic play such as building a house or feeding a doll (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013).

Children build and construct things with commercial toys as building blocks, Lego's, tinker toys, jigsaw puzzles, cars, dolls, found and recycled material such as cardboard boxes, plastic tubing or with a variety of modeling media such as clay, play dough, plasticine and so forth (Garcia, 2013; Hewes, 2006; Ness & Farenga, 2016; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). They engage in this type of play across this age range in solitary pretense or in groups (Hewes, 2006). Using jigsaw puzzling as an example, it "*helps us better understand leisure activities in general by allowing us more effectively to distinguish serious from casual leisure, explore the relationship of work to play, assess the importance of rules, investigate the relationship between product and process in play, and identify some of the intrinsic rewards that motivate play*" (Garcia, 2013. p. 308). Playing with objects allows children to try out new combinations of actions and may help develop problem-solving skills (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Any benefits of object play need to be balanced against those of instruction, bearing in mind the ages of the children, the nature of the task, and whether learning is for specific skills or a more general inquisitive and creative attitude. The more marked benefits are for independent and creative thought, though the evidence is equivocal (ibid).

vi.   Digital play
Virtual, construction, cognitive play

Digital play and games in general, have a profound impact in the manner people and children play, learn and interact with each other (Eichenbaum, Bavelier & Green, 2014; Monnens, Armstrong, Ruggill, McAllister, Vowell & Donahue, 2009). Children's play spaces have expanded much to the indoors, particularly in their bedrooms by reason of the proliferation of television, video games, DVDs[15] and computer games (Kane, 2005; Kernan, 2007). Extensive literatures discuss the effects of digital play in young children, which have an equal share of pros and cons (Witherspoon & Manning, 2012). A few perspectives are used in the following. Often these indoor virtual spaces are deemed safe and authentic compared to the

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[15] Digital Versatile Disc

outdoors, which is seen to slowly diminish (Kernan, 2007). Virtual play is hailed as "*offering adventure, freedom, mental and imaginative activity, in a space where players can navigate within networks*" (Kane, 2005. p. 5). Furthermore, some good commercial video games may foster deep learning and problem solving while some games promote mastery (Eichenbaum, Bavelier & Green, 2014; Gee, 2008). It is argued that a number of questions have been raised regarding the effectiveness of digital play for children in general and for their learning (Graham, 2010; Kernan, 2007; Scarlett, 2005). Virtual play also involves playing in "*a non-tactile, non-organic, non-sensual world, dis-embedded from physical space and a concrete sense of community, where the 'real' world is distorted and new worlds are created*" (Kane, 2005. p. 5). In retrospect, digital play like other play forms is endangered in terms of electronic decay and intellectual neglect (Monnens et al, 2009).

The risks of digital play however, is mainly content exposure from internet access such as the violence of electronic play and the effects of technology on parent-child relationships (Graham, 2010; Kernan, 2007). In bridging the two extremes so that they complement each other within households particularly for young children and their learning, a balanced approach is needed (Kernan, 2007). One way is that technology should be used wisely and appropriately with children with close monitoring and censorship (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 1996). It should not be used as a "*replacement to the first hand, direct, multi-sensory experiences offered by other forms of play, technology has been demonstrated to enhance young children's cognitive and social abilities*" (ibid, p. 6). It also suggested that "*assistive technology can also play an important role in the successful inclusion of young children with additional needs into ECCE settings as well as supporting their learning and development*" (ibid, p. 6). After all, to completely remove digital or internet play, "*we would finally succeed in destroying the culture of childhood. We would prevent children from educating themselves in the ways that they always have*" (Gray, 2016. p. 1).

3.17 The challenges to play

The challenges to play are as multifaceted as its definition. The four key areas associated with challenges to play are: defining play, insignificance of the play status, the play/work divide and life-long play and learning, space time and limitations to play and gender disparity in play (Anning & Cullen, 2006; Bennett,

2005; Hayes, 2006; Kernan, 2007; Nwokah, Hsu & Gulker, 2013; Pramling Samuelsson, 2004; Witherspoon & Manning, 2012; Wood & Attfield, 2005).

3.17.1 The complexities of play definitions

The ambiguity of play is extensive and therefore a major challenge in the discourse of play. It contributes to the confusions of and claims that play is attributive to learning *"the definition of play have done little to substantiate claims that children learn through play or that a play-based curriculum is the best or only approach to supporting early learning"* (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 2). The different play experiences children face at home and at school poses a problemetic where: *"on transition to school, children will be expected to play in certain ways, and at certain times, so that play in school can encompass different experiences from play at home and in the communities"* (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 2). In the Pacific, there exists a gap between knowing early learning and play theories, which influence Western developmental perspectives and ideas of the 'Oceanic' child and pre-school programme (Toganivalu, 2008). Hence, the appropriateness of programmes were queried in whether they are aligned, rooted and embed the different learning styles and socio-cultural contexts of Oceania (ibid).

Another example is the aversion of certain outdoor play activities that are promoted at school. Not all play and games are considered productive and safe as some provide *"opportunities for conflict, aggression, bullying, and other anti-social behaviours"* (Toganivalu, 2008. p. 30). Another example is that playfulness is often *"seen as naughtiness when it disrupts work"* (ibid, p. 30). Instead, serious play is respected and encouraged by teachers. In retrospect, not everything young children do together is classified as play and regards it as *"an attitude or orientation that can manifest itself in numerous kinds of behavior"* (Garvey, 1991 cited in Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 3). Furthermore, *"play cannot easily be defined or categorized because it is always content dependent, and the contexts are varied"* (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 5). There are various reasons surrounding the ambiguities of 'learning through play' or 'play as learning' specifically within the context of preschool (Kernan, 2007). Once one attempts to *"articulate an agreed pedagogy of play to describe play in practice, and to demonstrate its efficacy in terms of positive learning outcomes, the position of play as the main context for learning in ECCE settings becomes more problematic"*

(p. 10). The issue of orderly and disorderly play is also a factor and how some adults categorise children's play according to cultural, social, and psychological sources of order (Hendricks, 2009). The varying understandings of play or what counts as play is different amongst and across ECE settings (Kernan, 2007). They are influenced by factors related to historical and socio-cultural traditions and values; dominant political discourse; whether services are located within the formal education sector or within the care sector; the age to which early childhood curricula or guidelines are targeted; as well as regulatory frameworks (ibid).

3.17.2 Insignificance of the play status

There are challenges to the discourse of play as an idealised status in ECE (Anning, 1997; Nicholson, Bauer & Woolley, 2016). It is defined as "*trivial by a male dominated society which emphasizes the power of rational thought*" (p. 9). Moreover, the major cause of the misconceptions of play is that "*work is the serious, rational business of life, while play is for leisure and fun*" (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 9). Its centrality as a learning attribute is undermined and taken for granted (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Play is otherwise assumed a mismatch between teacher's aims and practices (Bennett & Kell, 1989; Nicholson, Bauer & Woolley, 2016). However, Wood & Attfield (2005) identified the gap between rhetoric and reality in play in the relationship between teachers' thinking and classroom practice showing "*while all the teachers defined play as child-initiated, play was structured by time, resources, the learning environment, the planned or anticipated learning outcomes and downward pressures from the national curriculum*" (p. 10). Hence, the reality of play in classroom settings and in teachers' beliefs proved to be an utter mismatch and while teachers "*valued play as a medium for learning, other curriculum priorities meant that they did not involve themselves as co-players, and they spent little time assessing and understanding learning through play*" (ibid, p. 10). Contrastingly, children see play as to "*have a life of its own because it belongs to the private worlds of children and is often invested with a mystique that is integral to childhood*" (ibid, p. 10). Adults see play differently and mostly seek to control and manipulate both indoor and outdoor play in the home (ibid).

In terms of societal influences, formal schooling has been based on the assumption that "*earlier is better*" (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 10). Parents also prefer children to

join school clubs that are safe and less risky that traditional and outdoor play. Digital games are encouraged "*which can be used outside the controlling gaze of adults*" (ibid, p. 10). This decrease in physical activity in turn gives rise to increasing levels of obesity in children. Undermining play in ECE is another problem faced with the status of play "*because there is relatively little research to inform practitioners how children's play progresses as they get older, and how the school curriculum can support progression through play*" (ibid, p. 11). Play is also assumed less relevant as children get older beyond the age of five confining it to childhood and thereby underestimating its implication for life-long learning (ibid).

3.17.3 The play and work divide

Play as work; and, play and academic learning is another highly controversial aspect of concern (Adams & Fleer, 2016; Hayes, 2006; Pramling-Samuelsson, 2004; Wood & Attfield, 2005). In fact, "*Play has been viewed as a free and joyful experience for children, with little educational value, where educators are not usually involved. By contrast, learning is structured, organised by the educator and presented through learning-focused activities*" (Adams & Fleer, 2016. p. 3). Additionally, "*Play can be viewed both as the natural vehicle by which young children learn and yet may be sidelined in favour of 'work' or used as a reward for 'good' work*" (Anning & Edwards, 2006 cited in Kernan, 2007. p. 10). In an informal ECE setting such as a pre-school playgroup, "*play can be seen as preparatory to 'real' learning in 'big school*'" (Kernan, 2007. p. 10). However, once a child is in primary school, parents and teachers may not take play seriously anymore except perchance in the case of introducing interesting elements of formal education (Hayes, 2004; Kernan, 2007; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Hence, the seriousness of play tends to be viewed according to the way serious academic work is planned (Pramling Samuelsson, 2004). It may be difficult to manage play especially in free play because within educational contexts, play can change the nature of power relationships (Brown & Freeman, 2001; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Also, the "*locus of control is with the children, rather than with the adult*" (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 16). In the case of adults, "*creating a continuum between life-long playing and learning is even more critical in the 21st century as economic success becomes dependent on people who are creative, flexible, innovative, imaginative and playful in the workplace*" (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 16).

3.17.4 Life-long play and learning

It is suggested, "*If play and growing are synonymous with life itself, then life-long playing can be seen as the important aspect of life-long learning*" (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 13). Many adult activities are based on the ability and opportunity to play. For example, role play techniques for training programmes, invented scenarios to act out feelings and emotions, incentives towards a reward for successful performance, leisure in video games and so forth (ibid). Play is an "*inherent need throughout our lives, whether organised or spontaneous, sedate or chaotic*" (ibid, p. 14). This brings to light the argument of the disparity between Western philosophers as to "*whether play is basically orderly and rule-governed, or a chaotic, violent and indeterminate interaction of forces*" (Sutton-Smith, 1997. p. 3).

In linking play in childhood and adulthood, the "*imaginary worlds constructed in childhood can last through adolescence into childhood, and become more structured*" (Cohen & MacKeith, 1991. p. 14). Furthermore, "*Playfulness, imagination and creativity are inextricably linked in our playing and working lives*" (Wood & Attfield, 2005. p. 15). As adults, the games they engage in differ in forms of play such as "*playing with ideas, roles, and words, media, meanings, and with relationships between events, people, concepts, materials and systems*" (ibid, p. 15). As for young people, they exist between childhood and adulthood as they "*gradually play their way into the net stage of their lives by projecting images and adopting roles that are often influenced by the media and popular culture*" (ibid, p. 15). For adults, "*play is still a deeply enjoyable experience, and maintains the possibilities for change and transformation*" (Chazan, 2002. p. 15).

Notwithstanding, some challenges also involve child labour, exploitation practices, war and neighbourhood violence, as well as the limited play resources of children living in poverty (Ginsburg, 2007; Nwokah, Hsu & Gulker, 2013). Even children with abundant resources do not receive full privilege (Ginsburg, 2007). In general, many of these children are said to be raised in "*an increasingly hurried and pressured style that may limit the protective benefits they would gain from child-driven play*" (ibid, p. 182). Coupled with this is the "*increased focus on the fundamentals of academic preparation in lieu of a broader view of education*" (ibid, p. 182). To alleviate such problems, it is suggested that "*because every child deserves the opportunity to develop to their unique potential, child advocates must*

consider all factors that interfere with optimal development and press for circumstances that allow each child to fully reap the advantages associated with play" (ibid, p. 182)[16]. One issue beyond the scope of the study is disability in play[17] (Buchanan, & Johnson, 2009; Nwokah, Hsu & Gulker, 2013; Wolfberg, Bottema-Beutel & DeWitt, 2012). A snippet of social and imaginary play in children with autism and how special children are marginalised in terms of social and pretend play, make it difficult for some children in the risk of being excluded by peers (Wolfberg, Bottema-Beutel & DeWitt, 2012). Yet, it is argued, "*play appears to be as necessary to the quality of daily life for young children with disabilities as it does for all young children*" (Buchanan, & Johnson, 2009. p. 42). While play is mostly assumed good, "*some uncanny objects like dolls, automata, robots, and realistic animations may become monstrous rather than marvellous*" (Eberle, 2009. p. 167).

The place of play in the curriculum is problematic particularly due to contentions about its role, purpose and value (Wood & Attfield, 2005). In addition, "*what counts as play is contested, and there are ongoing debates about the relationship between playing, learning and teaching*" (p. 1). Play and learning in the context of traditional schooling are often viewed as unrelated (Adams & Fleer, 2016; Pramling-Samuelson & Johansson, 2006). There is a "*subsequent flow of educational policies which have see-sawed between an anti and pro-play ethos*" (Adams & Fleer, 2016. p. 3).

3.17.5 The decline of play

The space, time/limitations and amount of proximity allocated to play also vary across cultures affecting the frequency, duration and nature of play activities (Gray, 2011b; Witherspoon & Manning, 2012). The time permissible for play activities widely differs in different contexts. Often cultures demand and expect children to assist in daily household responsibilities placing a limit to the time they are permitted to play (Carvalho, 2013). Nonetheless, children most often find ways to include play when they are engaged in these social roles. It becomes a part of how they perform and accomplish these tasks (ibid). The following accounts are examples of the listed

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[16] This focus is discussed in detail in a later section.

[17] In scope, this calls for a special focus. The study purposefully omitted disability in play contemplating an extensive coverage of it in a follow up study.

problems faced by some specific cultures such as African-Brazilian 'quilombos' and South-American Indian groups (ibid, p. 3).

A study of Kenyan children confirmed levels of dietary intakes often controls child behaviour "*Play takes energy, so the nutritional state of a child, for example, seems to be a factor in regulating his or her level of play*" (Siviy, 2010. pp. 299-300). Contrastingly, in modern societies, children's play is habitually limited due to safety reasons and parental fear and concerns for sudden accidents (Sandseter & Sando, 2016). The availability of parents also limits the time they are able to engage in child play or take their children to the playgrounds. These parents are more likely to keep their children safely at home where they are immersed in the form of playing videogames or watching television. However, in other circumstances, when these electronic devices are not available within the home environment, children tend to spend more time engaged in other forms of play. Examples of the differences in playtime in two different cultures are provided, "*The time spent in play by Japanese boys outside the house is inversely proportional to the time spent in video games*" (Carvalho, 2013. pp. 3-4). However, with South American Indian children and those who live in rural areas*, "even with some access to the media, often have more freedom, little adult intervention, large spaces and many available companions, factors which favour the occurrence of play*" (ibid, pp. 3-4). In line with this, the space and amount of proximity for play is a cross-cultural factor particularly in terms of access and availability of space to play. Again, this is informed by the degree of realism in parents' representation of play activities specifically pretend play (Carvalho, 2013). Children who live in rural areas "*typically engage in more free play and have access to larger spaces for playing*" (Smith, 2013. p. 2).

3.17.6 Gender disparity

The manner by which children themselves create a culture of play amongst themselves in terms of engagement and rites to passage also differ across cultures but many of these behaviours are otherwise, common (Mechling, 2008). Specifically, these child acculturations are viewed through diversity – gender differences, gender preferences, gender roles, ability, disability and socioeconomic class (Forman-Brunell & Eaton, 2009; Fouts, Hallam & Purandare, 2013). However, it suggestively requires the importance for adults to respond to children's interpretations of diversity in their play especially if or when they wrong or upset other children (Carvalho,

2013; Hewes, 2006). Gender differences and preference in regards to choice of play partners is behaviour attributed to the processes of social identification, of which gender identity is one of the main aspects, and tends to increase as children deepen their understanding of gender differences (Carvalho, 2013; Fouts, Hallam & Purandare, 2013). At the ages of 3-7, children tend to prefer play companions of the same gender as they share similar preferences for play activities. Some children are even resistant to adult encouragement to inter-gender imitation and most likely occur when there are limited age partners to associate in play with. This infers interaction with varied age companions. In larger groups, children of the same gender and age similarly tend to be drawn together to form play subgroups (Carvalho, 2013). Space and types of activities also differ between the two genders;

> Boys occupy larger spaces, play in larger groups farther away from home, and engage in activities that involve gross movements. Girls occupy internal or restricted spaces, play in smaller groups, near their houses and with themes related to social and domestic activities. Pretend play are more varied among girls than boys, which may be due to lack of male models in some cultural contexts: even when mothers work out of home, they still offer female models of domestic chores (ibid, pp. 2-3).

3.18   Supporting and facilitating play

Regardless of the drawbacks and challenges on play, this study advocates for play in learning in Tonga. The study draws on Vygotsky's (1966) cultural-historical theory, which posits play and learning for young children are inseparable and critical to their development and growth. To overcome the dichotomy of the challenges to play, one solution is to "*refocus attention away from arguing how play serves development to reformulating the playing/working child or playing/learning child where dispositions and processes common to both playing and learning or playing and working are identified*" (Pramling-Samuelsson, 2003 cited in Kernan, 2007. p. 11). The following elements are imperative for "*both play and learning: creativity, 'as if', mindfulness, and possibility thinking*" (ibid). Parents and adults are able to support and facilitate learning through play by developing comprehensive knowledge and adopt the willingness to harness various practices to help children develop their play-related skills (Weisberg et al, 2013a). These advantages can be achieved through (1) understanding play; (2) valuing home play; (3) creating play environments; (4) providing opportunities to play and free play; (5) involving and encouraging children's play; (6) providing opportunities for different kinds of play and (7) play support for home and across home cultures.

3.18.1 Understanding play and valuing home play

Parents and teachers require an understanding the essence of play and its benefits for young children's development (Adams & Fleer, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002). According to Tonganivalu (2008), if parents, families and caregivers are supported in child rearing and care giving practices that promote positive environments for early growth and development, children would greatly benefit. Children "*need to be nurtured in a loving and caring environment, to be physically healthy, mentally alert, socially stimulated and intellectually able to learn and develop to their full potential*" (Toganivalu, 2008. p. 32). In terms of emotional play, parents and teachers can foster children's emotional literacy by: engaging in reflective listening and putting a name to emotions; normalising emotions into good or bad and that everyone has feelings; developing simple and memorable strategies; read fictional pictures to promote empathy; and practicing mindfulness to improve emotional self-regulation (Kris, 2015). In creative play, a study found that children felt most creative in learning environments that gave them the "*freedom to explore that led them to be increasingly engaged and allowed them to forge connections that allowed them to be more creative*" (Schwartz, 2014. p. 1).

In classroom practice, teachers need to stay abreast with the learning theories of play and children's different learning styles – auditory, visual and kinaesthetic (Gilakjani, 2011). Teachers need to "*teach as many of these preferences as possible. Teachers can incorporate these learning styles in their curriculum activities so that students are able to succeed in their classes*" (p. 104). Historical studies and longitudinal research establish thatthe parental pedagogical practice of play has an advantage as they are more informed of children's interests and experiences (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002). This natural knowledge "*may initiate positive pedagogical exchanges. Further, at home, the child has agency over her/his learning and the parent may be a source of information for the child's interests*" (Adams & Fleer, 2016. p. 3).

3.18.2   Creating play environments and opportunities for play

A stimulating and creative happy environment fosters children's learning and enables them to flourish (Bourke & Sargisson, 2014; Christie & Roskos, 2013; Hewes, 2006; Jarrett, French-Lee, Bulunuz & Bulunuz, 2010; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Wilson, 2011). The adult "*sets the stage, creating and maintaining an environment conducive to rich, spontaneous play, and interacting in ways that*

enhance children's learning in play, without interrupting the flow and direction of play" (Hewes, 2006. p. 5). A collaborative adult group approach is required as it functions to achieve "*shared goals in general terms, and groups attempting to empower play*" (Wilson, Marshall & Iserhott, 2011. p. 523). Creating an enriched literacy play setting can "*result in at least short-term gains in young children's knowledge about the functions of writing, ability to recognize play-related print and use of comprehension strategies such as self-checking and self-correction*" (Christie & Roskos, 2013. p. 2). Providing essential play materials and encouraging different forms of play also contribute to the enrichment of children's learning in many other ways (Hewes, 2006). The view is also supported as, "*Play can be enhanced by providing paper, crayons, and plastic letters. Exercise benefits of play can be enhanced by providing challenging forms of climbing apparatus. Creative play can be enhanced by providing lego-type bricks to stimulate creative construction activities*" (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013. p. 10)[18]. In order to further create environments where children are able to learn through play parents and adults "*must have time to play in order to learn through play*" (Hewes, 2006. p. 5). There should be good opportunities for genuine free play that are structured and guided in favour of the children (Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). It also needs to be uninterrupted with knowledgeable adults who show their support in their attentiveness to the notion of children's right to play. It further enables "*the development of self-expression and independence in children with and without disabilities*" (Smith, 2013. p. 3).

3.18.3   Involve, encourage and expand play repertoires

A significant way to facilitate and support children's learning through play is for parents, adults and teachers to become actively involved in children's play and to encourage it (Lynch, 2015; Nicholson, Bauer & Woolley, 2016, 1989; Weisberg et al, 2013a). In structuring play activities;

> There is good evidence to support the positive benefits of some active adult involvement in children's play. When skillfully done, adult involvement results in longer, more complex episodes of play. They support children's learning in play by becoming co-players, guiding and role modeling when the play becomes frustrating for the child or when it is about to be abandoned for lack of knowledge or skill. Based on their observations, they provide new experiences for children to enrich and extend play (Hewes, 2006. p. 6).

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[18] It should be noted that these specific practices may be applied in the home by parents or at school by teachers.

A study in Northern Trinidad showed that parental impact on child-parent play was important because "*they constitute the early nucleus of the economic and social lives of young children in most cultural communities and for whom data are most available*" (Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015. p. 230). In order to facilitate and support play, adults should practise creating play environments, opportunities for free and guided play, involve and encourage children's play and provide opportunities for different kinds of play (Hewes, 2006; Nicholson, Bauer & Woolley, 2016).

3.18.4 Play support for home and across home cultures

In preschool contexts, teachers must take into account the different ways play is valued in homes of children in their home countries or of expatriate children, children who migrate from other cultures and so forth. They also need to understand children's past play and learning experiences (Adams & Fleer, 2016; Brooker, 2002; Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015). There is a need for clear collaboration and communication with parents, teachers and communities so that these stakeholders are informed of the curriculum content to better support, optimise and encourage play and play discussions at home and in the communities (Ali, 2008; Billman et al, 2005). This relationship helps to bridge the problems migrating or expatriate families will face (Adams & Fleer, 2016; Mathur & Parameswaran, 2015). The relationship will help prevent cultural dissonance and tensions between the play practices at home and at school as well as bridge the negative conflicts that often take over parent and children relationships (Ali, 2008; Billman et al, 2005; Hedegaard, 2011; Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015).

3.18.5 Delayed kindergarten enrolment

A more extended perspective situates the issue of delayed kindergarten enrolment in exposing children to formalised academic programmes which academically focused kindergarten critics caution as developmentally inappropriate (Bassok, Latham & Rorem, 2016). In some parts of the world, early childhood educators noticed a perplexing trend in kindergarten enrolment in the late 1980s as a lot of parents were delaying kindergarten entry (Elder & Lubotsky, 2009; Graue & DiPerna, 2000). The root of this decision stemmed from the change in school expectations. Instead of children acquiring readiness skills at school, they were expected to already be developmentally equipped from home (Graue, 1993; Kagan, 1990). The pressure was

then on teachers who resorted to the first grade curriculum to engage children in "*abstract workbook tasks rather than developmentally appropriate activities*" (Bredekamp, 1987 cited in Graue & DiPerna, 2000. p. 509). As Bassok, Latham & Rorem (2016) put it, "*accountability pressures*" (p. 4). The escalated curriculum raised fear in teachers and parents that young children were susceptible to fail.

In contrast, another study showed that, rather than boosting children's human capital development, "*delayed entry simply postpones learning and is likely not worth the long-term costs, especially among children from poorer families and those who have few educational opportunities outside of the public school system*" (Kagan, 1990. p. 642). Evidence that "*exposure to academic content in kindergarten (and particularly exposure to advanced content) can be beneficial for student learning*" (Bassok, Latham & Rorem, 2016. p. 14) also contributed to this controversy. In fact, "*there is substantial debate among parents, educators, researchers and policymakers about the potential benefits and risks of orienting early childhood learning experiences more squarely towards academic content*" (ibid, p. 14). In terms of children's mental health benefits and in predicting educational outcomes for children, one of the most convincing evidences to support kindergarten delay to at least six years old was found in a recent study;

> Delaying kindergarten for one year reduced inattention and hyperactivity by 73 percent for an average child at age 11, and it virtually eliminated the probability that an average child at that age would have an 'abnormal,' or higher-than-normal rating for the inattentive-hyperactive behavioral measure (Dee & Sievertsen, 2016. p. 1).

The delay benefits in improving emotional and social skills as well as to allow more time for socio-emotional, intellectual, or physical growth (ibid). These interventions come about not only through policy changes, but also by the increased redshirting from parents (Bassok, Latham & Rorem, 2016; Dee & Sievertsen, 2016; Elder & Lubotsky, 2009; Graue & DiPerna, 2000).

3.18.5 Increase recess and lunch intervals

Recent studies show that kindergarten children have fewer opportunities for play or physical activities and are at greater risks of health problems such as childhood obesity (Bassok, Latham & Rorem, 2016; Holmes, 2012; Huberty, Siahpush, Beighle, Fuhrmeister, Silva & Welk, 2011; Lynch, 2015; Panksepp, 2008; Pellegrini, 2008). According to Pellegrini (2008), there is "*clear evidence that recess has*

beneficial effects on children's social competence and academic performance" (p. 181). In a study by Huberty et al (2011), the "*Ready for Recess intervention was feasible and provides promising evidence that modifying the recess environment through staff training, recreational equipment, and playground markings can increase MPA (moderate physical activity) and VPA (vigorous physical activity) during recess and the school day, respectively*" (p. 255). A goal-oriented perspective sheds light into the kinds of thinking behind decreased recess playtime:

> Play has fallen into some disrepute. School administrators and teachers—backed by goal-oriented politicians and parents—broadcast the not-so-subtle message that these days play seems superfluous, that at bottom play is for slackers, that if kids must play, they should at least learn something while they are doing it (Elkind, 2007. p. 2).

PART FOUR: INDIGENOUS IDEAS OF PLAY AND LEARNING

This final section reviews the theoretical and practical ideas of play and learning within indigenous contexts emphasising the case of Tonga and Tongan education. It presents a snapshot of the perspectives of cultural communities towards play as an activity of young children and an attribute to their growth and learning. The essence of child play in Tonga is otherwise, documented in chapter six in a discussion of the contribution that this study of play makes to the wider discourse.

3.19   Tongan notions of play (va'inga)

The Tongan-English Dictionary defines *va'inga* as "*to play, to have a game; to indulge in recreation or amusement or diversion, or in a past time or in a hobby*" (Churchward, 1959. p. 536). Tongan synonyms for *va'inga* are *fakavā, maa'imoa, munomuna, fakauloula, faka'ulungamanu,* and *fakava'iva'inga* (ibid). The actual word *va'inga* is officially associated with commoners also traditionally called *keinanga 'o e fonua′* (eaters of the land). It is customary that a specific language usage is directed to the king, to his nobles and to the commoners (the majority of the population). This unique aspect alone plays a major role in distinguishing Tonga's social class status even more. However, the term *maa'imoa* pertains to the king alone and to his nobles respectively when they independently associate in play.

Apart from the rich oral accounts of play in Tonga, there exists little written documentation let alone its relationship or connection to learning. A few school textbooks briefly mention the forms and types of play activities of children at school and in the home and communities, yet there are no records of the current forms of

play to indicate the changing culture of play. In particular, Pongia (2009) in which he urges a nationwide attempt to safeguard the practice and knowledge of these forms of play as their practice has declined considerably. It is gathered however, that most of these games are carried out outdoors fostering an assumption of the predominant or preferable Tongan play context. Pongia (2009) writes in the Tongan language so no direct quotes were made except for some common play chants, which were translated with the assistance and approval of a cultural and language advisor.

3.19.1   Early forms of play

i.   Langatoi

A common traditional Tongan game is *langatoi* which mirrors a form of hide and seek. Children of both genders and of all ages and at times adults, find a place to hide while one counted to a certain number then tried to seek out or find where the others were hiding. The following is the common and often repeated chant by the seeker while he/she anticipated the others to hide;

Langa toi, kumi toi,	(Go hide, seek hide)
'Ofa pe ke u 'ilo'i,	(I wish to know)
Ha taha 'oku toi,	(Someone hiding)
'I he lalo mohokoi,	(Under the *mohokoi* tree)
'Alu koe 'o toi (Pongia, 2009. p. 34)	(You go and hide)

It was a form of social, physical and games-with-rules play, where children ran and chased each other back to base negotiating whom the next seeker will be. The new seeker was usually the first child that was sought out or the first one who failed to run and tag back to base before the seeker. The seeker however, upon spotting a hider was often heard calling out "[Child's name] *mate koe, mo'ui au!*" (You die, I live! or, You are out, I am in!). The game was mostly carried out in the outdoors where children had the freedom and opportunity to hide in various spaces. It could be played both during the day and at night preferably during a full moon or moonlit evening. Pongia (2009) however, advises against this for safety and security reasons especially of female children and suggests it is a game befitting for boys.

ii.   Fūfū

Fūfū is a hand game that usually involves two young female children although boys frequently played as well while adults occasionally joined in. One child/person had a small item ordinarily a small wooden object or rock in one hand shuffling and clenching it behind his/her back then places it forward for the opponent to guess. The

child or person hiding the object then hums a chant and if the chant ended with the selected hand, the players trades places. If not, the game continues until the exchange occurred and henceforth. In fact, *fūfū* was a form of social and games with rules play where children played, associated and negotiated with each other. It was mainly carried out indoors and sometimes outdoors especially under trees. Players often kept scores where each win is equivalent to one score. The child to reach ten (10) scores first was hailed the winner.

iii.   Hiko

Hiko is a form of juggling where children and adults especially young women used two or more small sized fruits or unripen candlenuts to juggle with although some jugglers used an assortment of miniature objects. Young women used the game mostly as a form of competition. It started with one young woman throwing one or two objects into the air and catching it again with the same or the other hand. The competition heated up as more objects were added to the juggler. Meanwhile, the other young women repeatedly chorused a chant called the *hiko* until the competitor drops an object and is replaced by another juggler. The *hiko* chant has become a common national *faiva* (group solo dance performance) by young girls. In fact, the transition from *hiko* as *va'inga* to *hiko* as performance seemed inappropriate for children as they engaged in the activity merely as a form of play and enjoyment (Pongia, 2009). *Hiko* was seen as solitary play where a child engaged in play on his/her own or in groups with others.

iv.   Lafo

Lafo, another game, resembles the contemporary shuffleboard. It was very popular in the past and was often carried out as a family and sometimes, communal event involving players of mixed age and gender. Generally, there were separate events for adults and children and was mostly carried out in spacious fields such as open playgrounds or flattened bush allotments. If carried out indoors, large family homes or town/community halls were ideal. Certain equipment were required such as a *paenga* (large mat – usually 15 feet long), *tupe* (round flattened coconut shell pieces) *konga holo* (large piece of cloth) and *lolo Tonga* (Tongan coconut oil usually inside a large empty clamshell) (Pongia, 2009). The *paenga* is folded inward in a horizontal position to create a long board like platform. The *tupe* are polished with the *konga*

holo and *lolo Tonga* so that they slide easily on the *paenga.* There are usually two teams with four players (two from each) with a representative of each team on different ends of the *paenga.* In other words, one player from both teams on different ends of the *paenga.* One player thrusts the *tupe* while his team mate from the other end gives instructions of what angle the player needs to position himself for a good aim. Meanwhile, in the middle of the *paenga*, five different sized *tupe* are positioned in which the first player slides a *tupe* across the *paenga* aiming to push a middle *tupe* further down towards the other end. The players usually have five subsequent turns until a particular *tupe* gets pushed as far as the end of the *paenga* known as *tu'u matafala* or *ope matafala*. When a thrusted *tupe* strikes a *tupe* within the *paenga*, it is called *tongi tupe*. This continues until the team with the most *tu'u matafala* or *ope matafala tupe* wins. According to Pongia (2009), the middle *tupe* should increase to ten for a lengthier competition. Scores should read six for the *tupe* furthest to the *matafala* and five for the next and so on. The original scores were six for the most furthest and one score for each subsequent *tupe.*

v.   Kasivaki

Kasivaki is a game on the verge of extinction in practical Tongan communities and cultural memory. It originated from the island of Ha'apai whose closeness to the ocean birthed the game along its shores and within its waters. History has it that the *kasivaki* was more of a communal event that occurred only on certain and special occasions. It was popular amongst male nobility with the inclusion of interested relatives. Before a *kasivaki* event, a *fono* (village meeting) was summoned where people prepared a shelter for the *hou'eiki* (noble) whose village hosted the *kasivaki* as well as food for the entire village. The *kasivaki* started with a *kava* ceremony (traditional drink) welcoming and well-wishing the players. The *va'inga* was more of a competition each team with five players who had a turn to play simultaneously with the five members of the other team. *Kasivaki* was carried out in a vast ocean space with large heavy rocks. One player would move into the water and indicate the readiness of the two competing teams as the nobles around the *kava* bowl signaled the games to start. The first group dived into the ocean and hid their stone while the other team searched for it. Scores were kept in how many stones the opposing group could gather. The game continued until all ten members had a turn. If a team failed to recover a hidden stone, the host group would retrieve it and add a score to their team.

After the *kasivaki*, the *matāpule* (talking chief) summoned the teams ashore. The nobles and relatives around the *kava* bowl then informed the games have finished and of the final score. The players were honoured with a special *kava* ceremony while the winning team was announced. This followed a feast prepared by the village women and a night of merry making and dancing (Pongia, 2009).

3.19.2 A waste of time

An interesting notion of play in a study of selected Tongan and Samoan student teachers in New Zealand, found that play is often frowned upon as a waste of time (Leaupepe, 2010). This reflects the general parental perception that "*children could be engaged in something more productive and constructive*" (p. 8). Productive and constructive particularly pertain to household chores – a cultural obligation expected of Samoan and Tongan children as part of their rearing. Placing herself within the study, the author reflects on her own personal childhood experiences;

> I also remember adults calling to me to 'come in', that 'that was enough playing', 'stop playing', 'it's getting too dark', 'you're making a mess', and 'you'll get yourself dirty'. I felt as if I was being punished or denied my privilege of wanting to play and the effects this would have on me (Leaupepe, 2011a. p. 26).

Regionally, early childhood stakeholders generally regard formalised instruction the sole means to acquire learning. This position discloses the general attitude of Pacific ECE teachers and their perceptions of the practice of play being less significant to children's learning while they "*place a premium on preparing students for class one by, for example, teaching them English or arithmetic*" (Puamau, 2008. p. 13). The misconception is exaggerated as;

> Play is sometimes contrasted with 'work' and characterised as a type of activity which is essentially unimportant, trivial and lacking in any serious purpose. As such, it is seen as something that children do because they are immature, and as something they will grow out of as they become adults (Whitebread et al, 2012. p. 1).

These perceptions hinder the mutual understanding between parents and ECE teachers of the importance of play to children's learning as they generally favour formal instruction while play becomes a mere activity of free time.

3.20   Tongan notions of learning (ako)

A contextual theorisation of *ako* from a Tongan viewpoint accredits to the work and definition, "*To study is ako, a term that is also used for education, which I define as an introduction to worthwhile learning*" (Thaman, 2003. p. 2). Furthermore, the

notion many Tongans acquire is that, learning in school is considered "*important not for developing one's intellectual capabilities per se, but as part of the process of achieving poto (knowing what to do and doing it well). The achievement of poto is, in the Tongan sense, the equivalent of being educated*" (Thaman, 1990. pp. 4-5). According to Thaman, "*poto* in the context of Tongan education (*ako*) may be achieved through the appropriate use of *'ilo*. Therefore, *poto* may be defined as the positive application of *'ilo* (knowledge and understanding), and the educated person (*tokotaha poto*) as the one who applies *'ilo* with positive successful results" (Thaman, 2009b. p. 72). *Poto* coupled with *ako* (to teach or to learn) and *'ilo* are identified as the *Tongan educational ideas* (Thaman, 2009b; 2013). It is however, argued the Tongan theory of *ako* (education) is both intellectual and critical and involves vernacular transformations of reasoning from *vale to 'ilo to poto*, "*a circular movement of the human mind from ignorance to knowledge to skill*" (Māhina, 2008. p. 84). From another view, learning or *ako* is "*all kinds of learning throughout one's life as such reflecting a life-long approach to learning*" (Johansson-Fua, 2004. p. 1). These definitions embrace a generalised Tongan worldview of knowledge, learning and understanding. The key concepts are further discussed in detail to forge an understanding of the ideas that underpin Tongan notions of *ako*, *'ilo* and *poto*.

3.20.1 Ako (learning)

Pronounced "*aco*", the Tongan form *ako* means "*to teach or to learn*" (Martin, 1827 cited in Thaman, 2009b. p. 70). It is "*a term used to denote teaching and learning in a society where everyone was expected to perform certain roles in accordance with various predetermined hierarchies which we express through the complicated network of relationships, largely kinship-based*" (Thaman, 2009b. p. 70). A person is said to learn through observing, listening and imitation and the imparting of certain knowledge skills as navigation, warfare etcetera by proficiently skilled individuals (Thaman, 2009b; 2013). *Faiako* (teacher) or *kau faiako* (teachers) particularly of a formal education disposition are derivatives of *ako* and pertain to teachers, masters or instructors. *Fai* means doing or making something happen while *ako* means learning. It can equate to 'doing' and 'learning' or 'learning through/by doing' (Prescott & Johansson-Fua, 2016). In terms of thinking and ways of thinking, a concrete form of thinking is confirmed "*the act-of-relating, in this context, the 'ata, images, which are*

themselves self-manifesting in the direction of, and freely presented to, the knower as genuine knowledge" (Māhina, 2008. p. 81). The traditional Tongan way of thinking is mostly circular or spiral unlike the linear and logical form of thinking entrenched in scientific methods underpinning Western education systems (Wood-Ellem, 2007).

3.20.2 'Ilo (knowledge)

'Ilo has multiple uses in Tonga – "*as a verb, it means to find, to recognise, to discover, to know, as well as to understand. As a noun, it refers to information about something or someone, as well as to different types of knowledge and skills*" (Thaman, 2009b. p. 71). It also refers to the process of knowing and knowledge (ibid). In other words, *'ilo* as a verb can be passed from adults to young people through observation and imitation while *'ilo* as a noun is more personal and therefore, restrictive (ibid). It is also defined as 'seeing' – a common use amongst Polynesians (Koskinen, 1968). Koskinen suggests, "*ilo may be obtained naturally through active searching, studying or learning*" (cited in Thaman, 2009b. p. 71). To have *'ilo* means that he/she has "*gone through a prior state of either searching, learning or studying, hence 'ilo may be said to be the end result of ako (learning)*" (ibid). To *'ilo* means one is to be insightful as some kind of serious acquisition or studying has taken place. *Ako* is an "*important necessary condition of 'ilo*" (ibid).

3.20.3 Poto (cleverness/skillfulness)

Poto pronounced "*boto*" in pre-contact Tonga meant cleverness or skillfulness (Thaman, 2009; Thaman, 2013). It is a fundamental concept of education in Tonga (Kavaliku, 1966; McCrae, 1986; Thaman, 1988). The *Tongan Dictionary* defines *poto* "*to be clever, skillful; to understand what to do and be able to do it*" (Churchward, 1959 cited in Thaman, 2009b. p. 71). The *Functional Tongan-English, English-Tongan Dictionary* includes the aspects of "*intelligent, knowledgeable, skillful, clever and wise*" (Schneider, 1977 cited in Thaman, 2009b. p. 71). Nowadays, Tongans use *poto* to refer to a person "*who knows what to do and does it well*" (Thaman, 2009b. p. 71) particularly if they are deemed *'atamai poto* (good minded or intelligent), *fakapotopoto* (someone who wisely uses his/her limited resources) or the wise use of *'ilo* (ibid).

3.20.4   Ako Fakatupulaki (learning as development)

In regards to early learning and the notion of *learning as development* (*tupulaki*), further conceptual analysis is needed for a holistic definition and connotation. In order for this conceptualisation to occur, the effort to decolonise local mindsets through utilising IKSs is imperative and necessary as they offer culturally appropriate meanings and definitions to relationships. The notion is supported "*What we might perceive to constitute Pacific studies (knowledge) therefore constitutes a type of power exercised over those who are 'studied' or 'known,' and those who produce the discourse (that is, we) have the power to enforce its validity and its scientific status and make it 'true'*" (Thaman, 2003. p. 3).

One study presented the findings of the Sustainable Livelihood and Education in the Pacific (SLEP) pilot study (Johansson-Fua, 2006; Taufe'ulungaki et al, 2007) in which learning for Tongan children is said to involve *sio* (observation); *ala* (touch); *fanongo* (listen); *and tā* (perform or act). In essence, it means a "*teacher would need to be able to demonstrate (fakatātā), important knowledge and skills, working together with the student (kaungā ala), interacting with them (talanoa) and closely observing their performance (sio)*" (Johansson-Fua, 2006 cited in Thaman, 2008. p. 7). An effort towards this is found in the Tongan definition or translation *tupulaki* or *fōunga ako fetānaki'aki* (Tonga National Early Childhood Curriculum, 2015). It resonates with holistic development but is contextualised for Tonga in terms of social, speech, physical, spiritual, behavior, cultural knowledge, cognitive and emotional development (figure 3.5). It ultimately aims to prepare children for futuristic learning and to acquire necessary skills for sustainable living.

Figure 3.5 Holistic development
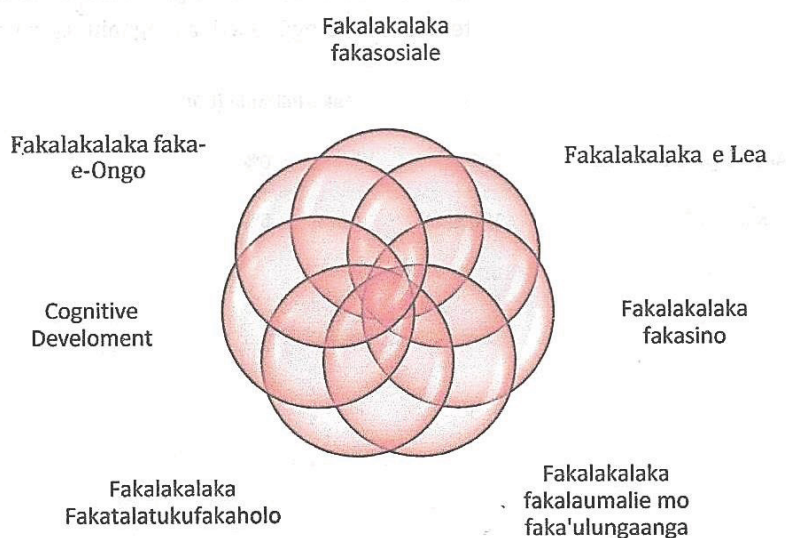
(Tonga National ECE Curriculum, 2015. p. 19)

3.21 Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for and by Pacific Peoples[19]

The Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for and by Pacific Peoples (RPEIPP) also known as *Vaka Pasifiki*, fosters culturally inclusive education and indigenous ideas. It was founded in 2001 bringing together Pacific culture, teaching curriculum and assessment (Thaman, 2009). Being able to reclaim and maintain ownership of indigenous knowledge, methods and ways of teaching and learning as well as the ability to formulate new and appropriate approaches and pedagogies for education in Oceania is of vital importance to the cause and to those who birthed it. The collaborative efforts of Professor Konai Helu Thaman, Dr. Ana Maui Taufe'ulungaki and Dr. Kabini Sanga and others theorised the RPEIPP as "*furthering the 'relevance' agenda by Pacific people's re-thinking of past and current educational practice seen as necessary for meaningful change in basic education, teacher education, leadership and research*" (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2013. p. 4). The initiative is also an outpouring of decisive views signaling an importance to rethink and reconsider Pacific education for and by Pacific people (Puamau, 2005). It began as a:

> Partnership of donor agencies (main one NZODA), higher education institutions (Victoria University and USP), and a network of Pacific Island educational researchers and educators, acts as a catalyst for change as well as provided leadership to several Pacific countries in the past ten years (Thaman, 2009. p. 4).

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[19] RPEIPP

The initiative was further birthed through an interest in "*documenting current practices in Pacific education (especially in leadership and research); look at ways to better contextualize the traditional knowledge systems into formal education; and offer non-formal workshops to develop skills for these*" (Koya-Vaka'uta & Lagi, 2014. p. 15). The RPEIPP advocates for "*culturally appropriate analyses of Pacific education systems and assisting Pacific educationists to re-focus their planning on Pacific values and knowledge systems*" (Thaman, 2009. p. 4). This is encouraged by engaging and assisting Pacific teachers in action research where they are able to theorise education as well as to develop and use culturally inclusive contents and pedagogies in their teaching. The initiative emphasised an "*importance of Pacific values and Pacific thought as a foundation for Pacific education and development*" (ibid, p. 4). Of the progresses and achievements of the RPEIPP, advocacy, research and leadership helped achieve its goals "*since 2001 many symposia and conferences have been organised in different PINs including Fiji, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, and Vanuatu. The proceedings of these as well as other RPEIPP publications have been widely distributed throughout the region*" (ibid, p. 4).

3.22 International and indigenous play perspectives

Select regional and international examples are presented to exhibit how play is defined and exemplified in different cultural contexts. It includes readily available indigenous perspectives of play and learning.

3.22.1 Cultural differences and play perspectives

Some major theoretical underpinnings of child play do not consider the "*wider socio-cultural elements that define and shape play*" (Nicolopoulou, 1993 cited in Fleer, 1996. p. 16). For instance while Vygotsky looked into the socio-cultural dimensions of play, his view is in some ways, limited and inadequate (Fleer, 1996). For this reason, it is clear that "*more needs to be understood about the 'play' activities of children in relation to their cultural practices and the cultural meanings enacted through play*" (p. 16). The following are collections of ethnographical scenarios depicting the differences in play as reflective of certain cultures. The snapshots portray how the play behaviours and activities of developing countries differ from Western theoretical pedigrees. These are diverse indicating a need to "*understand and value the differing types of 'play' that take place across cultures, as well as the*

cultural meanings enacted through 'play'. If we do not, then we are at risk of utilising a deficit model for our observations of non-Western children" (ibid, p. 16)[20].

The stages of cognitive development (Piaget, 1962) may also prove to be a mismatch within differing cultures regardless of its biological underpinnings. Another example is the disparity between children from non-Western cultures and those from higher socio-economic groups such as Middle Eastern and North African countries (Smith, 1977). The researchers "*were, however; astonished to learn that children from low socio-cultural strata play very little and most of them do not participate in socio-dramatic play at all*" (Smilansky, 1968. p. 4). Children in small homogeneous agricultural communities in Africa and India preferred to use their free time for representational play rather than free play, "*children in ascriptive game cultures imitate the behaviour of the elders: they replicate but do not transform*" (Feitelson, 1977 cited in Fleer, 1996. p. 15). From the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, Argentina, Bali, East Pakistan, Katanga, Kamba, East Africa and Taleland (Fortes, 1938; Feitelson, 1977; Mead, 1946; Nzioki, 1967) a similar pattern emerged and "*play activities…are short in duration, and when compared with that of their Western peers there is discontinuity and lack of complexity in the play episodes of these children*" (Feitelson, 1977 cited in Fleer, 1996. p. 15).

The children of Manus, despite the sufficient free time and natural resources that were available for play, did not engage in imaginative play (Mead, 1930). Moreover, in Middle Eastern communities, "*mothers not only did not model play or provide play objects but felt called upon to interfere actively when imaginative elements cropped up in the play situation*" (Feitelson, 1977 cited in Fleer, 1996. p. 15). Likewise, one research showed that the "*important aspects of the content, structure and development of individual and social play are not universal, but culture-bound*" (Ariel & Sever, 1980 cited in Fleer, 1996. p. 15). Coupled with the research that argues for the difference in play across cultures is attributed to the examples of the different representations of play for Mayan and American children;

> First, Mayan play themes are exclusively about adult activities that are frequently observed... Secondly, there is little elaboration or introduction of variation or complexity during the course of play. Scripts and roles are repeated over and over almost ritualised. Mayan children do not pretend to be something other than people.

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[20] Note this quote also featured in the opening section of chapter one (1).

They do not create imaginary people or things in their play. They rely on objects or co-players to fill symbolic roles (Gaskins & Goncu, 1992 cited in Fleer, 1996. p. 15).

It is posited that "*Mayan adults do not participate in or seem to be entertained by children's symbolic play. They do not encourage their children to pretend, do not offer props or suggestions for their play, nor reward them for it with praise or attention*" (cited in Fleer, 1996. p. 15). However, the study was scrutinised for being non-specific about the "*context in which the observations of the children and adults took place*" (Fleer, 1996. p. 16). Play is not described or valued in the Mayan culture, "*Men usually prefer to see their children engaged in some productive activity. Women typically tend to permit their children to play some, but they value play only for the work time it provides them, not for any particular value that play might have for the children*" (Gaskin & Goncu, 1992 cited in Fleer, 1996. p. 15). In summary:

> The studies establish that not only were there great differences in the quality of representational play among children growing up in different societies but that in some societies this mode was almost non-existent. The style of play was by no means a random occurrence but was closely linked to its social make-up and the role of young children in it (Feitelson, 1977 cited in Fleer, 1996. p. 15).

There is still a strong yet varyingly cultural influence on how adults and cultures regard certain types of appropriate play for boys and girls in choice of play activities. Much of this closely mirrors adult practices (Farver et al, 1995). The historical and cross-cultural factors that restrain children from playing despite it being a natural activity are physical inability and cultural restrictions such as harsh living circumstances, limited opportunities, deprived circumstances, abusive restrictions, boredom, distress, illness, disabilities, continuing health condition, and absence of play resources (Lindon, 2006).

In the case of Aotearoa or New Zealand, indigenous Maori view play as a way to acquire certain skills for cultural survival (Smith & Smith, 1993). In contemporary New Zealand, however, play is seen through the eyes of the multicultural Pacific ethnicities that make up the nation (White et al 2009). It is also often seen as a game or leisure activity (ibid). In Chile, play is mostly considered in the context of playing games or a game specifically two kinds of games that involve socio-dramatic play and free play or free game (Huizinga, 1971). Whereas for China, play is perceived in the studies of children's play perceptions since the 1990s (Rao & Li, 2009). In a study by Liu (1995), children preferred group lessons to free play which was

criticised due to the possibility of biaseness. A later study proved it was fabricated and that most children preferred to play instead (Liu, Pan, & Sun, 2005).

In Sweden, parental views of play are very positive although they have little knowledge of what happens in preschool activities (Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2009). Parents and teachers alike describe children's play as "*active, leaders of games, talkative and creative…shy, quiet, enjoying solitary play, or in conflict with other children*" (p. 136). In the case of Japan, parental views of children's play at home was mostly of individual or solitary play inside or indoors (Mori et al, 2009). When referring to their children's play in childcare settings, their responses was of a social play nature yet mostly still indoors. However, they valued play as a means to "*interact with other children, and to develop communication skills. In addition, they valued outside play at child care settings for fostering physical strength*" (p. 127). As for Wisconsin, play is defined through relevant research based definitions (Wineberg & Chicquette, 2009).

Some of the different ways play is perceived and valued in different cultural home contexts and in homes across cultures also gives an insight into the dynamics of play perceptions. In a comparative study of Asian and Euro-American parents in international schools in Malaysia, the value of play for its educational and learning benefits was observed with Euro-Americans while the opposite was happening with Asian parents (Parmar et al, 2004). Asian parents instead preferred structured academic learning (ibid). The same was seen in Hong Kong immigrant families in Australia (Wong & Fleer, 2012). Comparatively, Indo Carribean immigrants to the United States, "*mothers and fathers held discrepant beliefs about the value of play, and maternal beliefs about the cognitive benefit of play affected the relationship between the amount of time children play and their cognitive performance*" (Roopnarine & Jin, 2012. p. 441).

Closer to home, the Cook Island ECE curriculum is governed by the New Zealand *Te Whäriki* where both "*emphasize the need for children's play to be valued as 'meaningful learning' and the need for teachers to acknowledge the importance of spontaneous play*" (Leaupepe, 2011a. p. 23). Teacher perceptions suggest that play was "*being pleasant, joyful, fun-filled moments of laughter, excitement and freedom*" (ibid, p. 25). As a Pacific islander herself, Leaupepe reflects:

I can vividly remember playing and feeling as if I could do anything I wanted and be anyone I wanted to be. I remember the laughter, the competitions, the 'crowds' – my childhood play memories involved groups of children playing together, socializing, negotiating and problem-solving; although, at the time, I would not have identified the types of learning that would occur during my play (ibid, p. 26).

In the Solomon Islands, Watson-Gegeo (2001) describes play in its fantasy and reality form from the perspectives of young children. Because children spend most of their time working as a form of play, the play activities they position as play and work differ to the meaning generated by their parents. She calls this the adult-mode and child-mode. It is argued, child work is identified with child labour and resonates with forced labour or abuse (Nieuvvenhuys 1996; Watson-Gegeo, 2001). In terms of games and types of play primary school children in Fiji engage in, the types of activities and the levels of social interaction of some children in terms of solitary, parallel and social interactions were observed (Dorovolomo, 2009). The actual activities amounted to conversation, vigorous play, sedentary play, fantasy play, chasing/catching/seeking, racing, ball games, jumping skipping, games with materials and verbal games. Dorovolomo (2009) also allocated an 'Other' category for "*activities that are not covered by nongames or games above (e.g., musical statue, please Mr. Crocodile, hopscotch)*" (p. 4). It was concluded, that play in fact, is a major part of children's lives in Fiji although there is a need to investigate whether adult perceptions may be hindering or encouraging play.

In Hawaii, caregivers recognise the importance of child play and development for the variety of benefits it encloses for children (Holmes, 2012) connecting the value of play to culture in forms of play that fostered social skills such as cooperation, sharing, and group play. Certain types of play are discouraged especially those that are deemed harmful or may injure children. Finally, in Tonga, an outsider's view of child play examined play through the observations of child play amongst children in a certain village (Morton & Lee, 1996). That study included observation of a group of young family of related girls who would play outdoors in a self-contained playgroup and only on occasions would play with the neighbourhood children. The forms of play they engaged in ranged from "*Hand-clapping or juggling games with much laughter and teasing…they played noisy games of marbles in the dust or threw a ball onto our roof and caught it as it rolled off. They were loud, sometimes irritating presence, but they were an even-cheerful bunch, often breaking into the harmonised singing…*" (ibid, p. 1).

3.22.2 Educator perceptions

From an educator's perspective, play as the process of learning, a source of possibilities, empowerment, creativity, child's work and fun activities are derived from some international perspectives in a comparative study (Izumi-Taylor, Samuelsson, & Rogers, 2010; Lynch, 2015). This section presents a range of international and regional play perspectives of educators and caregivers. In Japan, teachers saw play as a source of multiple possibilities and empowerment and offered unstructured or free play to children. They otherwise, perceived adult play or structured play was important to foster a state of heart, state of mind and positive feelings (Samuelsson & Fleer (Eds.), 2008). According to Mori et al (2009), they found that Japanese teachers and caregivers' share similar views that the "*role of play in the day care setting is to provide children with a chance to interact with others to find fun and happiness. Some teachers talked about the relationship between children's play and moral development*" (p. 128). As for China, a third wave of ECE curriculum has seen the importance of play for learning in its curriculum (Rao & Li, 2009). Play has become "*an important means of promoting holistic development*" (Wong & Pand, 2002 cited in China, Rao & Li, 2009. p. 100). In one set of discussions, Swedish teachers were presented as viewing play as children's work. They were said to not consider play as empowerment nor did they see it as something attributive to ones state of heart and mind. They did however see playfulness as promoting positive feelings (Samuelsson & Fleer (Eds.) (2008). In contrast, Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan (2009) presented on the positive perceptions of Swedish teachers of play being something positive in which children can "*play, fantasize and get involved in something for a long time*" (p. 138).

Comparatively, in the United States, play was seen as children's work and something that fosters a state of heart, a state of mind and positive feelings. Teachers did not see play as a source of possibilities for children, empowerment nor do they offer or value unstructured or free play. The educators play perspectives derived from a selection of studies saw play in a diversity of ways as well (Samuelsson & Fleer (Eds.) (2008). Here, play has been largely influenced by John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, The Waldorf School, Reggio Emilia and many others who created a melting pot of theory and philosophy (Wineberg & Chicquette, 2009). In Wisconsin for example, teachers and parents alike promote play and learning

although there is "*a lack of understanding regarding the depth and complexity of play and learning*" (p. 169). Likewise, in the Chilean state curricula, play is one of the main tools for learning (Aedo et al, 2009). Specifically, *"playing activity and learning experiences is a very important common characteristic that is clearly stated in Chilean curricula"* (p. 84).

Within the Pacific region, teacher perspectives present a similar picture. According to Fleer et al (2009), Australian teacher perceptions of play are highly influenced by the works of Parten and Piaget. Teachers also saw play in terms of the types and forms of play such as "*pretend play, creative play, fantasy play, role play, social play, constructive play, cooperative play, solitary play, onlooker play and dramatic play*" (p. 68). However, some teachers thought play is limited to the curriculum and would like to expand their teaching and learning repertoires of it.

In New Zealand, there is cognisance of the cultural dynamic of learning and play, where "*play is closely associated with ideas about freedom; freedom of expression and creativity are linked to play*" (p. 23). It resonates with the free kindergarten notion in the sense of free of costing the freedom of free play. Through the establishments of Maori kindergartens or *Te Kohanga Reo* in the 1980's, play was a means of "*supporting appropriate way of transmitting culture and language*" (Royal-Tangare, 1997 cited in White et al, 2009. p. 21). ECE professionals strongly advocate for the rights of the child to play as well as seeing play as "*the most appropriate platform from which learning can take place*" (p. 24). To this end, the ECE curriculum document *Te Whäriki* weaves play as part of learning within the principles of family and community, holistic development, empowerment and relationships (Ministry of Education, 1966).

Finally, in the case of Samoa, the culturally conflicting aspects of play and learning for ECE is applicable to most Pasifika cultures equally battling with similar challenges to accept play as a worthwhile element to young learning and development (Paleai & Amituanai-Toloa, 2015). Play is defined mostly by its physical attributes locally known as *ta'alo* (ibid). However, while Samoan ECE teachers value the developmental benefits of play for young children's learning and growth, gender relationships and the segregation of play between boys and girls are amongst some of the culturally conflicting affects that hinder holistic play and the

opportunity for spontaneous play. Nonetheless, Paleai & Amituanai-Toloa (2015) argue that understanding these limitations assisted in ECE curriculum development and teacher practice for a more culturally inclusive approach to play in Samoa.

In summary, the commonality gathered in both international and indigenous contexts is that although there is a wide variation of child play activities around the world, the concept or idea of play in childhood is generally a physical-bodily pastime children engage in as part of early life. The difference mainly situates on the perceptions of play by societies and cultural communities namely parents, adults and early childhood educators. Play is context-dependent and embodies the beliefs and attitudes of its host country and culture. In Western contexts, play is more liberated in terms of freedom, duration, resources and complexity. In indigenous Pacific contexts, adult perceptions dictate how play is viewed as an activity of physical engagement, enjoyment, socialisation practice and domestic household work/chores.

3.23   Theoretical framework

The study is theoretically grounded within the concept of eclectic bricolage. It allows a multiple range of philosophical lenses to conceptualise play and learning through Western and indigenous lenses within both classical and contemporary play theories. Adding to the conceptual bricolage and drawing from the literature findings, Figure 3.6 illustrates a basic radial visual indicating the core aspects and disciplines governing the foundations of curriculum (Print, 1993) bringing history (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2014), anthropology and development into the study's theoretical framing. It is recognised that these disciplines have their own distinct and shared philosophical standpoints of play and its significance to child behaviour and learning. They also bring cultural-specific assumptions governing the dynamic social behaviours accountable to either serving or harming children's play.

Figure 3.6 Theorising Bricolage as Multiple Theoretical Lenses
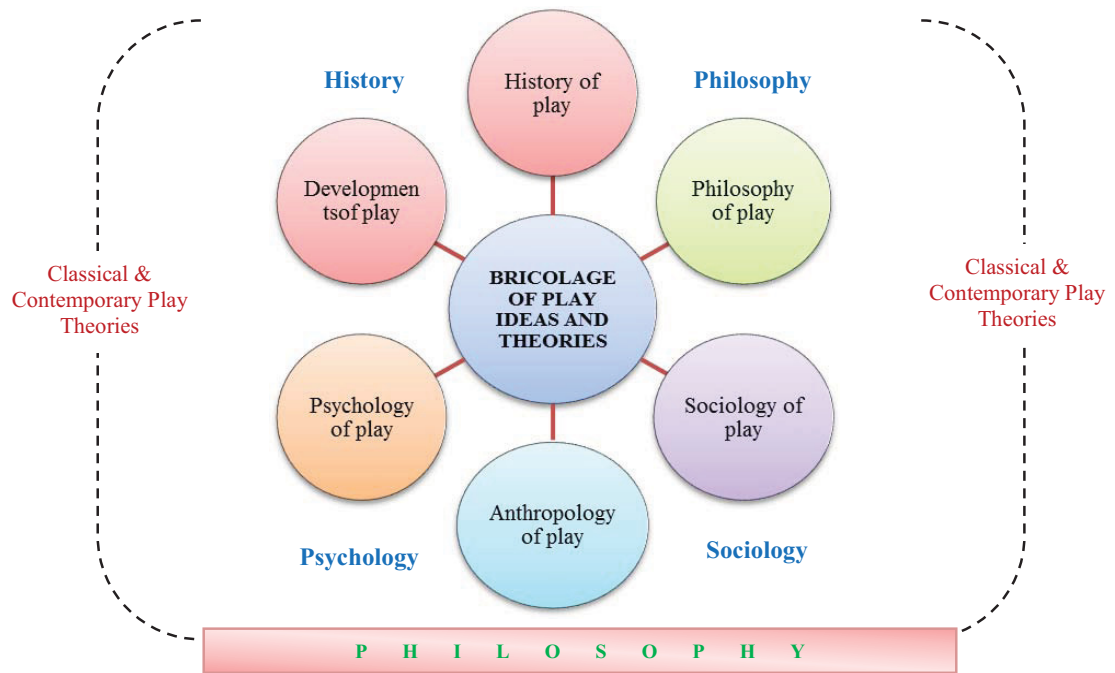
Chapter summary

Current discourse on the history, philosophy and psychology of play as well as play and development are largely and fundamentally grounded within Western mainstream ideas. A multiplicity of these play ideas filter through both classical and contemporary theories informing how play is contributive to child behaviour, development, learning and socialisation. The sociology of play couples cultural and anthropological bearings from a wide range of Western and indigenous Pacific ideas and practices enabling a comprehensive view of play from similar and contrastive perspectives. In terms of development, a plethora of prospects are documented around the world further supporting play theories, ideas and cultural practices. However, very little has emerged or is documented on indigenous Pacific ideas of play and learning while some indications are fragmented. As such, this study is a significant contribution to the construction of Pacific indigenous knowledge, theory and practice in the early years. It couples the ideas and practices in the recently nationalised ECE curriculum in Tonga outlining, initiating and paving a way for play and learning given play pedagogy is strengthened in areas of teacher training and curriculum, community acceptance and research output. In its culturally-inclusive efforts, the study makes a pioneer contribution to growing RPEIPP.

CHAPTER FOUR | METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Fevahevahe'aki/fe'inasi'aki (Sharing/shared involvement)

TOLI *– Is a critical stage in the research process…this is the data collection stage. Just as young girls gather flowers from different gardens around the village, field researchers will need to know how to approach participants and seek information ~* (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 53).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an extensive account of the methodological procedures of the study. *Part one* explains the qualitative approach elaborating the researcher's ontological and epistemological standpoint within an interpretivist and constructionist paradigm. It explores phenomenology and ethnography, and details the bricoleur approach within the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks. It further confirms the study's methodological framework supporting the indigenous approach to research. The core Tongan values underpinning the methodological framework clarify elements of the chapter theme that guides each chapter. *Part two* explores the methodical qualitative tools or data collection instruments necessary to acquire and obtain primary data through the socially constructed knowledge and information emanating from the research questions[21];

1. How do Tongan adults conceptualise children's play?
2. To what extent is play a learning and development tool?
3. In what forms of indoor and outdoor play activities do children engage?
4. How do adults engage and support play?
5. What implication will the findings suggest for early learning, ECE curriculum development, ECE policy and planning, ECE teacher training and pedagogical practice, adult education, proactive stakeholder involvement?

PART ONE: RESEARCH DESIGN

Part one discusses the research design by means of its theoretical and methodological underpinnings within the study's epistemological standpoint, its theoretical perspective and methodological approach.

4.2 Research framework outline

To initiate and develop a research design most suitable for the study, the four basic questions by Crotty (1998) were used as a guide:

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[21] See Appendix G for sub-research questions.

i.   What methods will be used;
ii. What methodology will be employed;
iii. What theoretical perspective will support the research proposal; and
iv. What epistemology will inform the research proposal? (p. 3).

This simple approach provides an easy yet comprehensive roadmap to help guide and establish appropriate decisions to ensemble a research design inclusive of a befitting theoretical framework and methodology. Although the study followed this reversed process for simplicity, it is otherwise systematically presented in its standard logic flow illustrated in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Research Framework Outline
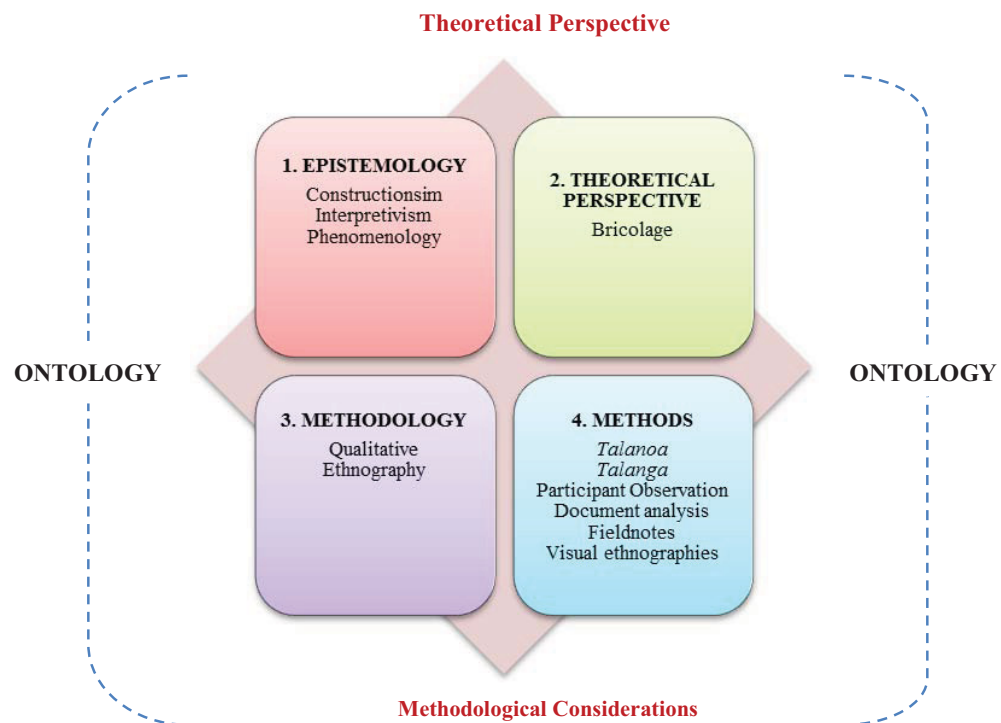
4.2.1 Ontology

To establish researcher position in the study, conceptualising an ontological and epistemological standpoint was crucial. Ontology concerns the nature of reality inquiring into 'what is real'? (Print, 1993). It is the embedded theory of knowledge within theoretical perspectives that give rise to methodological considerations and furthermore, suggests appropriate methods and data collection tools (Crotty, 1998; Mack, 2010). In terms of origination, ontology derives from the Greek words *onto* (being) and *logos* (the science or study of/the science) or the study of being or existence and contemplates how things exist (Gegeo, 2015). In essence, it is the study of;

i. What is or what exists – the study of things or entities
ii. What it is to be or to exist – the philosophical and scientific study or attempt to say What entities or kind of things exist
iii. What are the kinds of things that exist in the world or make up social reality? (ibid, p. 28).

The stipulative definition used here is that by Grix (2004) of ontology being the "*study of claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other*" (p. 59). That is, what is meant when something is said or believed to exist (Mack, 2010). More importantly, is the question – why is one's view of knowledge and social reality important in research undertakings? It suggests what the researcher's intentions, goals and philosophical assumptions are and how they are inextricably linked with their research (ibid). In other words, it informs "*how one views the constructs of social reality and knowledge affects how they will go about uncovering knowledge of relationships among phenomena and social behavior and how they evaluate their own and other's research*" (ibid, p. 6).

The ontology of play and learning rest on the assumption they both coexist in the world although perceptions and interpretations of their meanings and practices are context and culturally specific - either parallel or in variance with each other. In this case, play and learning are familiar variables embedded within a Tongan notion of social reality. They emerge from the collective constructs of tangible and real lived experiences, beliefs and value systems. What constitutes as reality within a specific social sphere is the meaning given to it by specific societies made up by a group of people who foster similar beliefs and values. In retrospect, every person acquires a specific and unique personal ontology "*within one's field or knowledge or epistemic influence and awareness…different societies perceive reality in different ways as do the individuals who constitute those societies*" (Print, 1993. p. 29). This determined the necessary interactions with people who belong to a specific society and culture and therefore, acquire and hold unique belief systems in which the study requires.

4.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is differentiated from ontology in that "*one's view of reality and being is called ontology and the view of how one acquires knowledge is termed epistemology*" (Mack, 2010. p. 5). Epistemology is derived from the Greek words *episteme* (knowledge) and *logos* (logic, rationale, and the study of theory of

knowledge) – a branch of philosophy concerned with 'how we know' (Gegeo, 2015). It is the "*philosophical problem that deals with the nature of knowledge and the nature of knowing is called epistemology*" (Print, 1993. pp. 35-36). In curriculum work, he added that what is advocated becomes the basis for student learning in which teachers are centrally concerned with the nature of knowledge and how it is known to be such knowledge (ibid). Furthermore, epistemological questions about curriculum pertain to;

    i.   What is true?
   ii.   How do we know the truth?
  iii.   How do we *know* that we know? (Gegeo, 2015. p. 36).

Epistemological focus was underpinned by the social reality of play and learning which is best understood through multiple approaches to research inquiry. An inclusive understanding of the dynamics of play and learning and of their special relationship, cultural significance and practice can be understood through multiple interactive dialogues with people directly involved in early learning and child rearing. In other words, the research attempts to ascertain the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of specific Tongan adults who are actively involved in harnessing play and learning for young Tongan children. Children acquire knowledge through play in the interactions they have with the things in their surroundings and not through adult structures, rules of engagement or interactions. It is affirmed as "*young children learn the most important things not by being told but by constructing knowledge for themselves in interaction with the physical world and with other children – and the way they do this is by playing*" (Jones & Reynolds, 1992. p. 1). It is important to enquire what constitutes as play because while it may seem as such in one society may differ in another and the same may be said of learning.

In the quest to advocate for a play-based curriculum in Tonga, it was imperative to examine the perceptions, beliefs, and cultural insights of parents and ECE teachers of the reality of play and the best possible practice of it in homes and early learning centers. In other words, in order to arrive at a culture-specific definition and perception of play and learning from a Tongan point of view, there was a need to harness the knowledge and insights of adults who actively engage with young children on a constant and daily basis. These deliberations required careful interaction where researcher and participants exchanged meaningful ideas and

opinions adding rigour to the study purpose. To facilitate this, the researcher adopted a subjective qualitative approach to research where meanings and interactions were purposefully interpreted and constructed to ensure an all-encompassed and enriched response was achieved.

4.3 Qualitative research

Methodology in research refers to the science or theory of methods (Crotty, 1998). And in determining the best methodological approach, the ontological and epistemological standpoints of the study were used as guides for the selection of the theoretically and methodically appropriate qualitative approach to this research inquiry. This approach allowed for an in-depth and inclusive process of inquisition to attain acquired subjective information to describe the context, or natural setting of the variables under consideration. The qualitative research is described as, "*an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explored a social or a human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting*" (Creswell, 1998. p. 15). Selecting an appropriate research methodology involved careful understanding of the philosophy sustaining the basis of the research. Research inquiry was often carried out as part of specific paradigms which are philosophical stances or worldviews that underlie and informed a particular style of research (Sapsford, 2006). It was moreover, seen as a set of beliefs that guide action as well as outlining the worldview of the researcher. In order to acquire a deep and cultural understanding of *va'inga* and *ako* in the early years, the research was situated within a social constructionist paradigm positioning the variables within the lens of phenomenology and ethnography.

4.3.1 Social constructionism/interpretivism

Social constructionism has many facets. Researcher positioning takes on board the notion that knowledge is sustained by social processes and derives from the "*daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated*" (Burr, 2015. p. 3). Hence, knowledge is constructed through the encounters of people's everyday lives with one another. It also considered that other sources of knowledge involve experiences, observed facts, and reality (Johansson-Fua, 2014). Similar opinions are shared in people's communal

lives as they are self-defining and socially constructed. "*There are no pre-defined entities within them that objective methods can seek to delineate but, rather, our ways of making sense to each other are constructed to yield quite different ways of being selves*" (Lock & Strong, 2010. p. 7). Figure 4.2 details an internal architecture of interpretivism as an analytical approach mapping how it stems from a set of basic ontological assumptions that inform epistemological possibilities which lead to a set of methodological assumptions and choices.

Figure 4.2 Interpretivism's analytical trinity

Ontology —————— **Epistemology** —————— **Methodology**

What's out there to know about?

What can we (hope to) know about it?

How might we acquire that knowledge?

- meanings and beliefs guide action;
- beliefs and practices are co-constitutive – neither are reducible to the context in which they arise;
- social and political realities are encountered through our interpretations of them;
- agency is situated;
- actors are embedded (ideationally) in inter-subjective traditions on which they draw;
- these provide resources for the interpretation of social and political realities;
- they provide meaning and orient beliefs (offering ways of looking at the world);
- traditions are open-ended and evolve through the encountering and resolution of dilemmas.

- knowledge is perspectival (the world looks different from different vantage points) and provisional;
- no unmediated knowledge of social and political realities is possible;
- knowledge claims are socially constructed, and hence (inter-) subjective;
- understanding is key to the explanation of social and political phenomena;
- understanding entails establishing the beliefs and meanings which inform actions/practices;
- political analysts offer interpretations, interpretivists interpretations of interpretations;
- the value of aggregate concepts can only be judged practically.

- the goal of political analysis is to capture the meaning to political actors of their actions and practices;
- this entails embedded research and an ethnographic method – a 'political anthropology of court politics', for instance;
- political analysis should proceed inductively rather than deductively;
- textual analysis and the analysis of social and political practices as texts is the key to understanding (and hence explanation);
- whilst knowledge is provisional and subjective, situated observation allows for the generation of knowledge claims that are robust, comprehensive and consistent;
- though a focus on beliefs and meanings may entail a certain practical preference for qualitative techniques there is still value in the use of quantitative methods.

(Hay, 2011. p. 169)

In order to authentically story in depth perceptions of a group of people's reasoning of a specific phenomenon and its different practices required deep understanding of how they generally make sense of the world and to understand what social reality they share common grounds in. The word research to a Tongan means to dialogue or interview participants or to carry out scientific experiments in a laboratory (Johansson-Fua, 2012). Therefore, using the qualitative approach through social construction and interpretation was a useful methodological approach and paradigm because people expect discussions as a natural part of the research process. However, it was in the authority of the researcher to make sure proper cultural protocols of *talanoa* were observed when approaching a person for an interview and during the course of the actual *talanoa*.

In conceptualising *va'inga*, the indigenous researcher needs to "*dig deep before you can emerge with old traditional knowledge but newly crafted in the contemporary setting*" (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 52). This coincides with social constructionism/constructivism "*where we are given space to think from our own context, to construct the world as we know it from experiences, observed facts, and reality*" (ibid, p. 52). In the art of interpretivism, it is believed reality is not objectively determined but socially constructed because when placed in their social contexts, there is a higher chance people will understand their perceptions and activities more (Husserl, 1965; Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).

4.3.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is best described in the works of Edmund Husserl where he argued, "*knowledge is constructed through having experience, in the sense of being conscious*" (Lock & Strong, 2010. p. 30). He deemed it wrong that knowledge was merely to obtain an understanding of the relationships between observation, evidence and conclusion. In fact, he believed knowledge was of a conscious experience in things that a person attains prior to his/her quest for specific knowledge. In Hussler's view, phenomenology is the consciousness of man 'from the inside' "*the fact of his own conscious experience, which could be interrogated to elucidate the founding conditions for the possibility of knowledge*" (Lock & Strong, 2010. p. 30).

In this study, a deep and prior belief and consciousness in the rigorous relationship of play and learning for young children existed through past personal experiences and

child rearing practices. Traditional knowledge of the world through play also existed before epistemological observation and evidence surfaced. Examples were shared by participants and are discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.

4.3.3 Ethnography

Ethnography within the qualitative approach to research has gained richness and power as a social science process (De Laine, 2004). Ethnography being an original aspect of the anthropology discipline is referred to by Shirley Heath as "*ways of living*" (Watson-Gegeo & Ulichny, 1988. p. 75). It is the study of people's behaviour in real settings and situations, with a focus on cultural meaning (Firth, 2013 cited in Watson-Gegeo & Ulichny, 1988. p. 75). In terms of real setting situations, "*we mean those in which people actually live and work, in contrast to laboratory settings or testing situations set up by the researcher*" (ibid, p. 75). Ethnography was important for this particular study because it too required an in-depth look into people's ways of living, their perceptions and behaviours of play and learning. It also required actual face-to-face social interaction to build trust and cultural understanding so that knowledge is freely and genuinely shared. The ultimate goal of ethnography is to "*elucidate what people take to be shared-including culture, language, and rules of social behavior*" (Watson-Gegeo & Ulichny, 1988. p. 75). To understand ethnography in its entirety, five (5) of its common characteristics are offered;

1. A focus on a discrete location, event(s) or setting.
2. A concern with the full range of social behaviour within the location, event or setting.
3. The use of a range of different research methods which may combine qualitative and quantitative approaches but where the emphasis is upon understanding social behaviour from inside the discrete location, event or setting.
4. An emphasis on data and analysis which moves from detailed description to the identification of concepts and theories which are grounded in the data collected within the location, event or setting.
5. An emphasis on rigorous or thorough research, where the complexities of the discrete event, location or setting are of greater importance than overarching trends or generalizations (Pole & Morrison, 2003. p. 3).

4.4 Bricolage

Due to the complexities and intricacies that surround the subjective qualitative approach to research, eclectic bricolage was further harnessed to articulate the density involved in the theoretical and conceptual aspects of the study. The etymology behind bricolage derived from the French word *bricoleur*, the telling of a "*handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task*" (Kincheloe, 2001. p. 680). The metaphor pertained to "*methodological practices*

explicitly based on notions of eclecticism, emergent design, flexibility and plurality. Further, it further signified approaches that examine phenomena from multiple, and sometimes competing, theoretical and methodological perspectives" (Rogers, 2012. p. 1). Bricolage stemmed from the idea of complexity theory specifically the attempt to explain complex systems, how they emerge and are maintained (Nelson, 2011). It focuses on "*webs of relationships instead of simply things-in-themselves*" (Kincheloe, 2005. p. 1) while the bricoleur's task is to construct objects of the study in a more complex framework in terms of processes, relationships, and interconnections among phenomena. It is elaborated as "*seeing phenomena as operating in a 'whole' rather than through an isolated lens*" (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2013. p. 8). In detail, bricolage is articulated as;

> Concerned not only with divergent methods of inquiry but with diverse theoretical and philosophical understandings of the various elements encountered in the act of research. The insights garnered here move researchers to a better conceptual grasp of the complexity of the research act—a cognizance often missed in mainstream versions of qualitative research. In particular, critical bricoleurs employ historiographical, philosophical, and social theoretical lenses to gain a more complex understanding of the intricacies of research design (Kincheloe, 2001. p. 679).

Bricoleur advocates such as Denzin, Lincoln, Kincheloe and Berry conceptualised bricolage as an inquiry approach that is critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical and multi-methodological (Rogers, 2012). It features as multiple theoretical and methodological points of entry that enable a deeper understanding of a subject (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2013). A specific aspect of bricolage is articulated in Levi-Strauss's theory of Bricolage on the Plane of Speculation (Hatton, 1989). This emphasized the science of the concrete (including humans) is a mode of thought employed to "*serve as intellectual tools to express abstract notions of relationships*" (p. 76). The idea capitalised on the methodological tool of human interference (*talanoa*) to obtain perceptions of learning and play. Bricolage also provided an abstract mode of thought within broader mainstream and indigenous theories motioning the process tool of document analysis. This particular study chose to aid the critical bricoleur approach to qualitative research – a breakthrough idea that "*criticalize[s] and rigourize[s] the traditional ways in which to do multi-methodological research*" (Kincheloe, 2001 cited in Steinberg, 2011. p. 176).

In an attempt to acquire a holistic understanding of the multiplicity of *ako* and *va'inga,* there was a need to consider the multiple facets at play to offer a more all-

encompassed meaning of the two variables. Therefore, the study was guided by the multiple lenses within the study disciplines, methodologies and theoretical perspectives. With reference to figure 4.3, the disciplines were grounded on the foundations of curriculum which emerged during the literature search. It further supports the notion that "*critical bricoleurs employ historiographical, philosophical, and social theoretical lenses to gain a more complex understanding of the intricacies of research design*" (Kincheloe, 2001. p. 679). In carefully selecting historical accounts, theoretical literature and the sociological and psychological aspects of play and learning, the study sought a holistic theoretical network that associated play with a range of classical and contemporary play and learning theories. The intricacies further assisted to inform the necessary methodological approaches and tools pivotal to this chapter and the study in general.

Figure 4.3 Bricolage as multi-theoretical/methodological approach to inquiry

Disciplines
Philosophy
History
Anthropology
Sociology
Psychology
Development

Theoretical perspectives
Classical play theories
Contemporary play theories

Methodologies
Qualitative
Ethnography
Phenomenology
Constructionism/ interpretivism
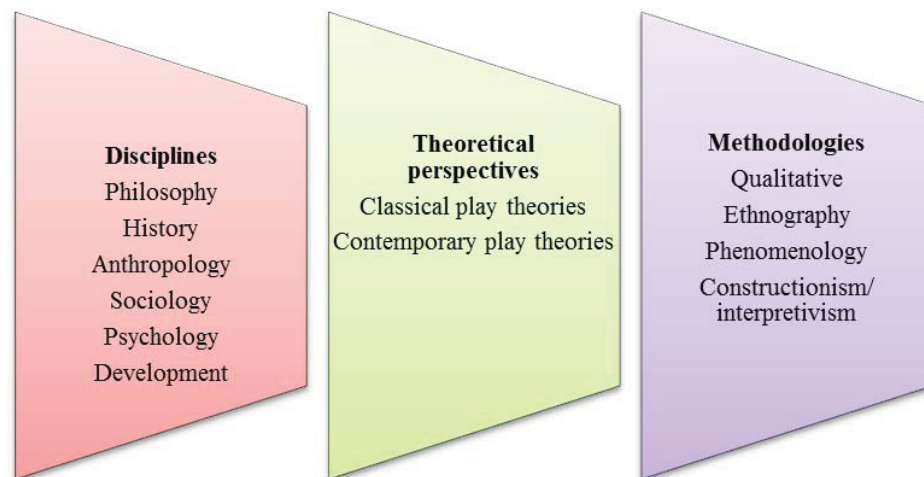
4.5 Validity and reliability

The study itself being interpretive in nature and position and the researcher as insider challenged the very nature of validity and reliability. In many aspects, the task and process was continuously questioned in terms of authenticity, consistency, and trustworthiness. The ability to self-discipline researcher roles and responsibilities to ensure valid data was achieved ensued from adopting and assuming an attitude of respect, critique, reflection and ethical awareness similar to the research expectations of an outsider (Smith, 1999). Self-discipline for an insider according to Smith (1999) also requires humility as being part of the community even though roles, relationships, status and position are different. Similarly, the specific insider role and

responsibility of a Tongan educator obligated significant reference of the key core Tongan beliefs, values and philosophies formally known as the *fāa'i kavei koula* (four golden pillars). The embodiment of *loto 'ofa* (love), *ngāue māteaki* (commitment), *ngāue fakataha* (team work) and *anga fakamatāpule* (respect) ensured validity and reliability were valued and upheld for the research process and to maintain *feveitokai'aki* and *fehavevahe'aki* (maintaining relationships/mutual reciprocity) to the holders of the acquired knowledge and practice. This must be coupled with the ability to accept and withstand collegial critique from supervisors and education officers in Tonga who assisted the ethical formalities of the study such as principal consent to avail teachers to part take in focus group discussion, their centers and children for observation purposes. It also required parental consent minimising chances of any misrepresentation and falsification. Tongan research ethics discussed in later sections of this chapter, helped ground the researcher within proper cultural protocols in Tongan relationships and the entire research process.

The knowledge and practice obtained through the *talanoa* and *tālanga* are examples of collective knowledge following set rules, conventions, norms and common sense expressed through the core Tongan beliefs, values and philosophies of knowledge. "*When producing sense or meaning, the most relevant aspects are those of collective knowledge. These aspects are shared by individuals (via rules, conventions, norms, common sense) and via expected expectations enable social acting as well as are being confirmed in it (knowledge about knowledge)*" (Schmidt, 1994 cited in Poetschke, 2003. p. 5). Validity is defined as a measurement mechanism or instrument to test how valid and accurate something is (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). To maintain consistency by using the tool of *talanoa* (discussed in detail later), aspects such as replicability, consistency, transferability, credibility, trustworthiness and confidence were necessary. Reliability, also a careful aspect of research was considered. It pertained to "*the consistency with which a measuring instrument yields a certain result when the entity being measured hasn't changed*" (ibid, p. 29). To ultimately achieve validity and reliability, this study utilised the Kakala Research Framework as its methodological structure unfolding the study within a culturally appropriate process of *teu, toli, tui, luva, mālie* and *māfana*.

4.6 Methodological framework

4.6.1 Pacific methodologies

Reasons for selecting indigenous Pacific methodologies were inspired by the foregoing work and efforts of Pacific educators instrumental in the RPEIPP as well as the works of Smith (1999). Indigenous knowledge is seen to "*comprise a specific way of knowing based upon oral tradition of sharing knowledge. It is akin to what different indigenous researchers, the world over, identify as storytelling, yarning, talk story, re-storying, remembering*" (Kovach, 2005. p. 40). In order to truly and rightfully embrace and ground indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems within the authentic spaces in which they emerged, the approaches and methodologies used to obtain these bodies of knowledge must be indigenously based and substantiated. In decolonising research methodologies that were culturally inclusive to our Pacific ways of knowing and doing, Smith (1999) strongly argued indigenous researchers need to "*claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce*" (p. 1). In line with this thinking, the methods or data collection tools selected utilised current available tools that are in fact indigenously Tongan such as the *talanoa* and *tālanga*.

4.6.2 Kakala Research Framework

Selecting a specific methodological framework that best fits the purpose of the study was not a difficult task considering the extensive recognition of the Kakala Research Framework as a conventional tool for Pacific research and specifically, its intricate Tongan origin. Initially known as the *kakala* (garland) framework by Tongan educator Professor Konai Helu Thaman to conceptualise teaching and learning within a personal philosophy of teaching (Johansson-Fua, 2012. p. 58). Thaman explains the framework as, "*a philosophy (as well as methodology) of teaching and learning, which although rooted in my culture (Tonga), can be adapted to other cultures and other contexts*" (Thaman, 2009a. p. 6). The *kakala* emulates the cultural Tongan practice of making and later garlanding (gifting) of floral flowers following the process of *toli* (picking and sorting flowers – data collection stage), *tui* (stringing flowers together – analysis stage), and *luva* (gifting of the garland – reporting and disseminating information). It has encouraged other Pacific academics to conceptualise their own worldviews to birth and value Pacific philosophies, values and customs (Johansson-Fua, 2014).

The *kakala* framework later evolved from a "*philosophy of teaching to a research and evaluative framework. It details processes involved in garland making in alignment with research practice and emphasized the values, ethics and relationship within these processes*" (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2013. p. 8). Over time and through expansions of the original conception it has transpired into a framework suitable for Pacific research in what is known today as the Kakala Research Framework. It couples the extra tiers of *teu* (preparation – conceptualisation), *mālie* (expression 'bravo' or 'well done' – relevancy and usefulness) and *māfana* (warmth – application, transferability and sustainability). It is summed up as:

> A framework for understanding Pacific learning and learners. It is a way for contextualizing the content as well as the teaching/learning process and making these more culturally inclusive. Additionally, for me at least, *kakala* provides Pacific educators with a useful alternative to the totalizing framework of Western scientific and reductionist thinking that continues to dominate our work in higher education institutions (Thaman, 2009a. p. 6).

Figure 4.4 illustrates the Kakala Research Framework[22] from a Tongan artist's impression depicting the laborious garland manufacturing process particularly its original form – *toli, tui* and *luva* before the additional tiers of *teu*, *mālie* and *māfana* were added. It follows a detailed account by Johansson-Fua (2014) specifying the processes within the Kakala Research Framework.

Figure 4.4 The Kakala Research Framework

Toli **Tui** **Luva**
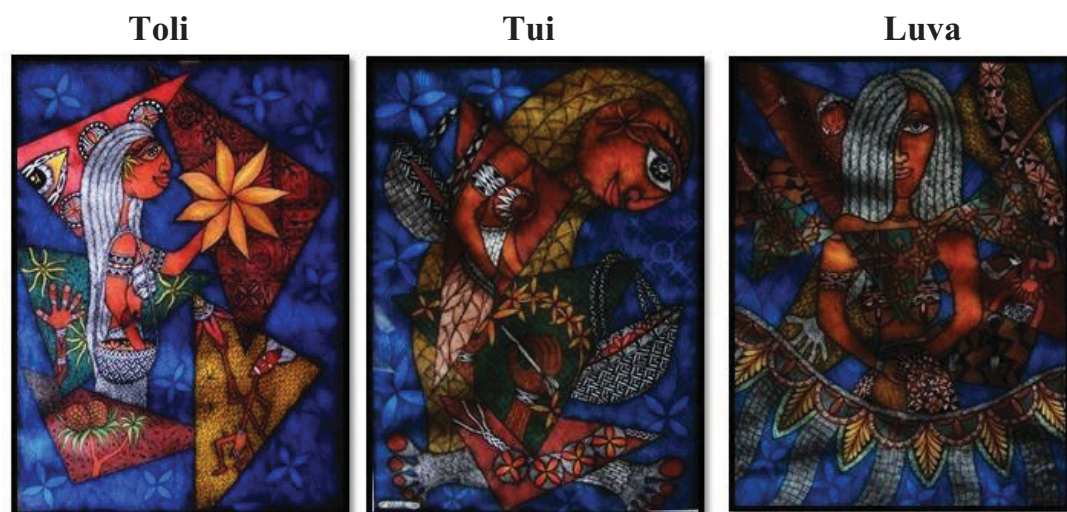
(Vaka'uta, L. (2006). *Kakala Series, Artwork, Ink on Paper*)

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[22] Note, while the chosen illustration did not rigorously picture the specifics of the research process, readers are to draw specifications from Figure 1.1d (*Thesis structure* in p. 19) in Chapter One for clarity.

i.   Teu

Teu is the preparatory stage before the actual 'work' or *toli* begins. For a *kakala*, the stringer or *kakala* maker takes into consideration who the *kakala* is for and the nature of the occasion in which the garlanding is involved. This helps determine what type of *kakala* is to be made as floral assortments especially in Tonga are ranked. A *kakala* for a guest of honour may not be the same as a *kakala* for a person performing a cultural item. It can be concluded that the weaver's epistemology and discretion is a vital part of this process. Within this initial phase, conceptualising, designing and planning of the research takes place asking questions such as, *How do we define it? What does it mean for us? What is our source of conceptualisation? Who? Why?* The author theorises it as the conceptualisation on stage. In a *kakala*, 'who' is to be garlanded is often foremost considered during this planning stage.

ii.   Toli

Toli is the process of purposeful and careful selection and picking of flowers or fruits for the *kakala* as chosen and planned through the aspired design set out during the earlier stage of *teu*. It is the "*collection and selection of flowers*" (Thaman, 2009a. p. 6). It characterises the research process of data collection, a critical stage of the study. Field researchers need to master the ethical manner of how to approach and seek information from participants "*as such, the process of data collection and the ethics used to access the knowledge are critical to obtaining authentic and accurate data*" (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 53). During this stage, the methodical tools of *talanoa* and *nofo* (dwell among) were developed to clarify Tongan research ethics (ibid). *Talanoa* as a data collection tool for this study is discussed in detail later on.

iii.   Tui

Tui is the process of stringing flowers together to make the *kakala* often in a simultaneous pattern where older women string the *kakala* while young girls gather flowers. It is the process of "*making or weaving of the kakala*" (Thaman, 2009a. p. 6). During this process, both parties are engaged in constant negotiations and corrections. In some cases, girls will be sent out to gather more flowers or other types of flowers depending on the critical discernments of the stringers who may change the design as they string or manipulate the original design with new touches and creativity. It is also possible that a shortage of available flowers may trigger some

decisions. The *tui* in all its entirety embodies the complexities of the data analysis stage where patterns are constantly pursued within the data "*in a research analysis process, we are looking for patterns in the data, as we look for similarities, variations, and new emerging patterns*" (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 54). It is a stage of "*negotiations, passing information, and readjusting initial plans depending on the information received from the field researchers*" (ibid, p. 54). Questions during this stage are, "*Does the information make sense? What is the context behind the context? Where is the solution? Are emerging solutions meaningful, sustainable strategies for addressing real problems?*" (ibid, p. 54).

iv. Luva

Luva literally translates to offer, give or present. In other words, to *foaki* as a gift or token. It is the "*giving away of a kakala to someone else, an act that could be referred to as 'garlanding' someone special*" (Thaman, 2009a. p. 6). The *kakala* gifting "*means that the gift is given with heartfelt sincerity, humility and honour. It is also associated with the notion that much work and sacrifice has been required to create the gift being given*" (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 54). *Luva* symbolises the process of outcomes, reporting and the dissemination of information with the prime target to honour and acknowledge crucial knowledge sources whose lives the study must foremost benefit. The reporting process "*must give voice to the Pacific people, and the report is done with care, with respect and always to protect Pacific knowledge systems, ensuring that it serves the needs of Pacific people*" (ibid, p. 54).

v. Mālie

Mālie is an expression that associates with feelings of captivation, mesmerised by an outstanding performance worthy of a standing ovation. It is "*when an audience appreciates a performance; it is an expression of 'bravo' or 'well done'. It means the audience, at least in the Tongan protocols for performing arts, has not only understood, but appreciates the inter-play between the music, the dance, the costumes, and the performers*" (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 54). Such appreciation requires certain levels of understanding the music, the costume, the performers, and the narrative expression behind the performance. When there is a "*shared understating between the audience and the performers and when this is executed well, there is mālie*" (ibid, p. 55). In the research process, *mālie* epitomises the

constant evaluation given throughout the stages of research to monitor, reflect, correct and alter existing approaches to ensure the "*key ideas of utility, applicability, and relevance to the context*" (ibid, p. 55) are observed.

vi.   Māfana

Māfana is also an expression associated with a warmth and overwhelming sensation "*something that is heartfelt and has touched one emotionally*" (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 55). An example is the willingness to be a part of something exciting as the following example, "*in the context of a Tongan performance, one observes māfana, when a member of the audience, in the appreciation of the performance, joins the performers, either dancing with them or putting money or tapa cloth around a performer*" (ibid, p. 55). In the research process, *māfana* represents the final evaluation process where there is discernment whether transformation, application and sustainability of the transformation has taken place. Meaning that the "*researcher and the knowledge giver are both transformed and in that transformation they have created a new solution or a new understanding to an existing problem*" (ibid, p. 55). It is important to note that "*part of the transformation is the willingness to step forward and be part of that solution or be part of the movement towards reaching that solution. This transformation phase is also empowering and recognizes people's ability to resolve their own problems*" (ibid).

4.6.3 Core Tongan values

In essence, the Kakala Research Framework is underpinned by fundamental core Tongan values essential to an ideal *tangata'i fonua* (Tongan citizen). The values of *Faka'apa'apa* (respect), *lototō* (humility), *mamahi'i me'a* (commitment, sacrifice), *feveitokai'aki* (reciprocity), and *'ofa* (love) all interplay within the Kakala Research Framework. Not only did the framework help frame and guide Pacific research within proper ethical standards, it aided to foster and maintain validity and reliability if researcher willingly adhered to the simple yet sentimental values pivotal in the framework. Tongan cultural values "*explain their own and others' behaviour include emphases on the supernatural, rank and authority, kinship relationships, concrete and specific contexts, and restraint behavior*" (Thaman, 1988a cited in Thaman, 2009a. p. 4). This differs to the academic traditions of the West, which emphasises "*secularism, equality, individuality, universalism and criticism*" (ibid, p. 4).

The main core Tongan values pivotal in the framework and to the study in general were: as *faka'apa'apa* (respect), *mamahi'i me'a* (commitment), *lototō* (humility) and *tauhi vā* (maintaining relationships). The original core values were *faka'apa'apa* (respect); *feveitokai'aki* (reciprocity); *loto-tō* (humility); and, *tauhi vaha'a* (maintaining relationships) (Johansson-Fua *et al*, 2011). They reflect "*valued contexts of thinking*" (Thaman, 2008. p. 8). The study further coupled the additional values of *'ofa 'aufuatō* (compassionate/ unconditional love), *fai fatongia* (service/duty), *fevahevahe'aki/fe'inasi'aki* (sharing/shared involvement), *uouongataha* (unity), and *foaki* (give, contribute, offer) which were considered equally significant in the research process and of the researcher's delineation of the research journey and ethics. The core values are also reflective of Christian principles that play a major role in Tongan culture (Johansson-Fua, Tuita, Kanongata'a & Fuko, 2011). It was interesting to note that a series of studies[23] ascertained the "*practice of these core values changing, marking a shift in people's beliefs about their relevance*" (p. 12).

4.6.4 Validation for using the Kakala

The Kakala Research Framework has been used effectively as a guide for Pacific research assisting Pacific researchers in their strenuous task to seek alternate frameworks that best serves Pacific research inquiry. It "*has been used successfully in community-based research projects in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands*" (Thaman, 2008. p. 7). One successful indicator of the Kakala Research Framework was the SLEP pilot study in which "*Tongan research methodologies of talanoa and nofo were the main tools for information gathering from the various communities that participated in the project; and Tongan research ethics guided both the preparation and conduct of the project*" (ibid). According to Taufe'ulungaki et al (2007), the data from the Tonga project was "*robust, rich and informative on several educational fronts…relating to knowledge, skills & values associated with sustainable livelihoods in Tonga…students' learning styles, team strategies, evaluation and monitoring processes and their implications for teaching and learning*" (cited in Thaman, 2008. p. 7). The simple yet complex structure that underpins *kakala* also paved a way for other indigenous frameworks such as the *Vanua* and *Iluvatu* Frameworks of Fiji, the *Tivaevae* Framework of the Cook Islands

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[23] Taufe'ulungaki, Fua *et al*. (2006); Cox, Kavaliku *et al.* (2009)

and from Tonga, the *Lakalaka* Educational Policy Framework and *Langa Fale Ako* Framework for Teacher's Professional Development (Johansson-Fua, 2014). The Kakala Research Framework also ensured the phenomenological and ethnographic nature of interactions with participants through *talanoa* and *tālanga* as formidable efforts to determine human behaviour and characteristics.

4.7 The Layered Garland Model

From the unified ideas, processes and core cultural values within the Kakala Research Framework, the study harnessed and birthed the Layered Garland Model. It also embeds the Blended Garland Model by Koya-Vaka'uta (2013) whose study also applied the Kakala Research Framework. The blended model constitutes a mainstream of core Tongan and Samoan values introduced as an approach to disclose the correlation of Samoan and Tongan relationships within the core principles most significant in each culture (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2013). Entrenched in this model were six (6) main core values and principles – love/compassion (*alofa/'ofa*), reciprocity (*fesuiaiga/mealofa/ feveitokai'aki*), relationships (*vā fealoai/vā*), service (*tautua/fai-fatongia*), respect (*fa'aaloalo/faka'apa'apa*) and humility (*loto fakatōkilalo*). These blended forms coexist alongside the additional core Tongan values of *fevahevahe'aki/fe'inasi'aki*, *mamahi'i me'a*, *tauhi vā*, *uouongataha* and *foaki/luva* prevalent in the Kakala Research Framework and henceforth the Layered Garland Model and Chapter Theme.

4.7.1   Garland florals

The Layered Garland Model (figure 4.5) is represented by the native Tongan *heilala* and *pipi* floral conjoined in a double layer to fashion the *heilala fakava'e pipitongi* garland. As almost everything in Tonga is ranked even its floral garlands (Johansson-Fua, 2014), the *heilala* and *pipi* are amongst two of Tonga's highest-ranking flowers outranking an assortment of traditional garlands. Of the two, the *heilala* often coined as *kakala 'eiki* (garland of royalty/nobility) supersedes the *pipi* in rank and significance due to the complexities that surround its cultivation and maturity. The *heilala* was mostly worn by royalty and nobility but the changes in time also saw a change in floral garlands and garlanding. The *heilala* is no longer constricted by rank although it is still valued the most significant of garlands. Today, the prized floral is

bestowed (*luva*) to any person considered worthy of its value usually under the discretion of the garlander.

Figure 4.5 the Layered Garland Model[24]

4.7.2 Heilala

The *heilala* (red flowers) is a collection of single yet small *heilala* units strung together to create the top layer of the garland. As Thaman (2015a) articulates, it is only when many *heilala* flowers are combined to make the garland does the significance of the highest ranking floral emerge. On its own, the *heilala* is but an insignificant formation of tiny red petals. The idea is figurative to the cliché 'no man is an island' culminating the Pacific sentiment of collective, communal and shared livelihoods. In essence, it represents the Tongan ways of being and doing capitalising on the significance of culture. It is therefore, assumed the Layered Garland Model represents a culturally structured model and framework that guides research within a culturally ethical process. It carries the Tongan meaning and virtue of *fakamahu'inga'i* (a significance to/of) symbolic to the value of *heilala*. The garland is a prototype of an authentic version emblematic of the study's aspiration to merge

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[24] Photographed by Mele 'Ahota'e'iloa Lea'aetoa, Auckland, New Zealand.

existing Western discourse with indigenous ideas and learning theories. Hence, the entities that forge the garland may be of a Western epithet yet its outlook and basis remains purposely and essentially Tongan.

4.7.3 Pipi

The *pipi* floral (grape-like flowers) borders the *heilala* ensuring a stronghold of its entities within a constricted space. The core Tongan values congruent to unity (*uouongataha*) frames the research process within *teu, toli, tui, luva, mālie* and *māfana* so that the researcher is reminded of the enriched purpose that birthed and initiated the study. It resembles the core Tongan values pivotal to maintaining relationships and essential to societal living. In specific, it represents an *'ofa 'aufuatō* (compassionate love) and *feinga mālohi* (hard work/dedication) attitude to reach the end mark and further provokes the researcher and future researchers of the importance to build on local indigenous knowledge systems and practices that serve a higher contextual purpose. The *pipi* ultimately guards the study so that cultural validity and reliability are rightfully observed and, aptly applied.

4.7.4 Three-dimensional base

The garland name *fakava'e pipi tongi* or more specifically, *fakava'e* is the basis of the garland and takes on the form of *tongi* (circularly carved). The three-dimensional base represents the unseen and often unspoken efforts that toil behind the scenes in almost every research undertaking. The base is concealed because it dwells beneath the surface, yet it is acknowledged because beyond the dimensional layers exist a stronghold of resilience and optimism impelling the entire research process. The knitted *fau* (pandanus) connecting the *kakala* is symbolic to all the underlying factors that support the researcher's rigorous tasks. The twisted and curved shape of the *pipi* represents conundrum exemplified within the struggles families of researchers are challenged with in terms of resettlement, new adaptations, culture shock, financial instability, and more pressing, the longing-ness for home. The basis reminds the researcher of the obligated role and duty to honour pride and happiness to loved ones, to the chain of support from *kāinga* (extended kin), good friends, and the Tongan community at large who also shoulder the journey through relenting hopes and prayers. In a nutshell, the holistic nature of the layered floral encompasses all the

seen and unseen facets of the research spectrum culminating *feongo'i'aki* (empathy), *poupou* (support) and *'ofa* (love).

4.7.5 Compliance with Tongan research ethics

Important in the Layered Garland Model is its adherence of the Tongan research ethics although the ethical considerations are general University research requirements and protocol regardless of culture. A Tongan researcher must adhere to the following: observe proper ethical conduct in cultural contexts; constantly monitor ethical practices; ensure ethical conduct guides relationships and is the relationship between researcher and participants; held accountable to the knowledge gathered from participants; that research is used for the benefit of the participants; and that as Pacific islanders valuing Pacific knowledge, it is important that "*we apply a more rigorous standard in ourselves and others who choose to do research in our region*" (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 59). The core values pivotal to Tongan relationships, knowing, being and living were therefore imperative in its role in the Layered Garland Model.

4.8 Chapter theme – Hala Fononga 'a Mata'ikoloa´

Emerging from the Kakala Research Framework and the Layered Garland Model is the chapter theme – *Hala Fononga 'a Mata'ikoloa* (Journey of a Valuable Emblem) that guided each chapter. This takes the study to the 'wristlet' (*vesa*) gifting story (Appendix B). The essence of the ideas within the spiral gifting were emblematic of the values of *'ofa 'aufuatō*, (compassionate love), *anga* or *loto fakatōkilalo'* (humility/modesty/generosity), *feveitokai'aki or fefaka'apa'apa'aki* (mutual respect, reciprocity), *fai fatongia* (service, duty), *fevahevahe'aki'/fe'inasi'aki'*, (sharing, shared involvement), *mamahi'i me'a'* (commitment), *tauhi vā* (maintain, uphold relationships), *uouongataha* (unity), and *foaki'/luva'* (give, contribute, offer, present). Alongside these values are the methodic elements of the Kakala Research Framework – the process of *teu, toli, tui, luva, mālie* and *māfana*. Table 4.1 details the chapter theme yet a comprehensive account can be drawn from Appendix B.

Table 4.1 Explicit interpretation of Hala Fononga 'a Mata'ikoloa´

Research Process	Conceptual Component	Interpretation
1. **Introduction** Conceptualisation **TEU**	*'Ofa 'Aufuatō* (Compassionate/ Unconditional Love)	**Purpose – *'ofa 'aufuatō*** Endowment (*foaki*) of gift (*me'a'ofa*) by *mehikitanga* (aunt) to her *fakafotu* (niece) shows purposeful love and compassion between one person to another. The *mehikitanga's* additional/equal role of *fa'ē* (mother) aids to generate and instil the natural affection to convey compassionate love (*'ofa 'aufuatō*). Symbolic to the purpose of research in which a specific intention is outlined to gear the study towards a particular goal or focus. It also outlines the nature and involvement of the person carrying out the study (researcher). The *mehikitanga* and *fa'ē* represent the researcher while the *fakafotu* represents the study purpose and outcomes.
2. **Background & Context** Conceptualisation **TEU**	*Anga/ Loto Fakatōkilalo* (Humility/ Modesty)	**Social status (*tu'unga*) – *mehikitanga, fa'ē, fakafotu*** The status of *mehikitanga* in Tonga signifies high rank in societal living. Her role as social titleholder and an individual must be established in order to understand the nature and purpose of her gifting. Her equal role as *fa'ē* (mother) plays an important part in her *foaki*. It contributes to the act of humility (*anga/loto fakatōkilalo*) – a rare expectation. The study background, context and previous focus must be established in order to determine the appropriateness and usefulness of the study. It also helps inform the ensuing review of literature that follows.
3. **Literature Review** Conceptualisation **TEU**	*Feveitokai'aki/ Fefaka'apa'apa'aki* (Mutual Respect/ Reciprocity) *Fai Fatongia* (Service/Duty)	**Duties/roles – *mehikitanga, fa'ē, fakafotu*** The intricate embodiment and service/role (*fatongia*) of mehikitanga as *fa'ē* and vice versa stimulate a cyclic channeling of the gift to a series of nieces/holders/bearers (*fakafotu*). The mimicry strengthens *'ofa 'aufuatō* and enhances the relational ties of *feveitokai'aki* and *fefaka'apa'apa'aki* (respect/reciprocity). The complex stringing and weaving involved in the literature review mirrors this bond as information and holders of information that form the structure of the study are utilised and appropriately accredited.
4. **Methodology and Design** Data collection **TOLI**	*Fevahevahe'aki/ Fe'inasi'aki* (Sharing/ Shared Involvement)	**Sharing – *fōunga'*** The structure or manner of gifting is through shared (*fevahevahe'aki*) so that others may experience equal involvement, ownership and bearing (*fe'inasi'aki*). Since the *fakafotu* and her fellow gift bearers and holders represent a younger and growing generation, they appropriate the gift by ensuring it is sequentially distributed to others to prolong virtues passed down by the *mehikitanga* and *fa'ē*. The methods/tools relevant to the nature of the study (methodology) are thus appropriately selected to help obtain relevancy and accuracy

		of information. As *fevahevahe'aki* and *fe'inasi'aki* are selected in the theme, so are the tools of *talanoa* (semi-structured interviews), *tālanga* (focus groups), participant observation, document analysis, field notes and visual ethnographies used in the study.
5. **Results & Discussions** Analysis Reporting and outcomes **TUI** **LUVA**	*Mamahi'i Me'a* (Commitment/ Loyalty)	**Delicate/fragile – *pelepelengesi*** The cautious and committed (*mamahi'i me'a*) behaviour of the gift bearers ensured the gift was in safe hands and available for the holder that followed. The behavior of treating the gift with delicacy and fragility (*pelepelengesi*) indicates its significance and worth. As like the information obtained, the delicate process associated with the findings and data analysis phases must be treated with extreme precaution. This helps avoid any maltreatment or loss of information and helps to maintain its wholesomeness for the next stage.
6. **Taxonomy and Model of Play** Reporting and outcomes (cont') **LUVA** (Cont')	*Tauhi vā* (Maintain/ Uphold Relationships) *Uouongataha* (Unity)	**Maintain/uphold – *tauhi/hokohoko*** In taking precautions with the gift, relationships (*tauhi vā*) are strengthened and upheld to bring *uouongataha* (unity) to family ties and connections. As in the task of discussing the information gathered, the process requires deep precaution and accuracy of presentation and representation.
7. **Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications** Relevancy and usefulness Application, transferability and sustainability **MĀLIE** **MĀFANA**	*Foaki* (Give, Contribute, Offer)	**Return/give back – *fakafoki'* and Reoffer – *toe foaki*** *Fakafoki* (return/give back) and toe *foaki* (reoffer) are both forms of *foaki* (giving/gifting). The returning of the gift by the bearers to the original and rightful owner the first *fakafotu* represents the essence of *luva* (presenting). The choice to reoffer the gift by the *fakafotu* to another generation of gift bearers and holders signify the moral values instilled and passed on by the *mehikitanga* and *fa'ē* are fruitful and effective. *Fakafoki* and toe *foaki* are thus symbolic to the presentation stages of the study or the 'for whom' purpose(s). The continuous possibility for further research and focus represents a recurring cyclic – *Fōunga Fefokifoki'aki 'o e Fekumi´* (Recurring Research Process) – in follow up studies to come.

PART TWO: RESEARCH METHODS & ETHICS

Part two explored the research methods and tools used in the study. The strenuous task of data collection - 'fieldwork' is the researcher's physical presence and involvement in the research process particularly that of *toli* – obtaining primary information and data from interactions (*fengāue'aki*) with real life people. Fieldwork is a task imperative to both qualitative and quantitative studies and is carried out within the proximities of specific research sites and contexts. It is expressed that in a

qualitative study, fieldwork requires researchers to "*engage in face-to-face contact with subjects, rather than assume an impersonal detached approach of positivism and quantitative research*" (De Laine, 2004. p. 1). The production of knowledge is said to position the fieldworker in close contact with research participants although such close relationships create issues pertaining to the management of anonymity and confidentiality. The ethical concerns to address such issues are discussed in later segments of this chapter.

4.9 Research methods and triangulation – primary sources

The methods of data collection considered appropriate for this specific study ranged from semi-structured interviews (*talanoa*), focus groups (*tālanga*) and participant observation as the main research tools coupled with document analysis, field notes and visual ethnographies as supplementary tools. The application of these tools helped forge substantial triangulation for the study further strengthening the bricolage approach. It suggested a "*decrease the deficiencies and biases that stem from any single method creating the potential for counterbalancing the flaws or the weaknesses of one method with the strengths of another*" (Thurmond, 2001. p. 254).

4.9.1 Semi-structured interviews (talanoa)

Emerging as a common tool for qualitative data collection in the Pacific contexts, the *talanoa* method conventionally known as semi-or un-structured interview was amongst the main methods applied. It helped obtain useful, relevant, yet face-to-face information from selected participants who seemed most fitting in their capacities as 'holders of contextual knowledge' – knowledge the study was seeking. The context of *talanoa* provided an informal yet open space where the conversation became spontaneous about whatsoever emerged. *Talanoa* is a "*conversation, chat, sharing of ideas and talking with someone*" (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 56). It is used for purposes such as to "*teach a skill, to share ideas, to preach, to resolve problems, to build and maintain relationships, and to gather information*" (ibid, p. 56). As a skill, *talanoa* is pivotal to Pacific indigenous research where knowledge embeds the "*values and the behaviour that are associated with the talanoa, and it is the context of the particular talanoa that determines the appropriate behaviours and values for it*" (ibid, p. 56). In essence, *talanoa*:

> Is a shift in thinking from semi-structured interview; it is seen as the loosest type of data gathering tool. *Talanoa* approaches the participant with an idea that the

participant is asked to muse, to reflect upon, to talk about, to critique, to argue, to confirm, and express their conceptualization in accordance with their beliefs and experiences" (ibid, p. 56).

Talanoa is also the Tongan term for "*people who engage in conversation*" ('Otunuku, 2011. p. 45) with *'tala'* meaning to tell or talk while *'noa'* means anything or anything in particular (ibid). It infers the *talanoa* was of '*noa*' – a mere spontaneous dialogue with no significant purpose but to engage in free conversation (*talanoa tau'atāina*). Often a topic or issue gradually emerges and guides the *talanoa* to a specific goal but sometimes it is not the case and the *talanoa* remains afloat until the companions part way. It also emphasises *'noa'* as 'void' or 'nothing', which accounts for the acutely flexible and informal nature that epitomises *talanoa* (Fletcher et al, 2009). Vaioleti (2006) adds that *talanoa* is "*a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations*" (p. 21). He suggests it "*allows more mo'oni (true, pure, real, authentic) information to be available for Pacific research than data derived from other research methods*" (p. 1). Another effective aspect of *talanoa* is that it:

> Provides a culturally appropriate setting whereby the researcher and research participants can talk openly and spontaneously about the research topic. The conversation flows freely with very little intrusion of a formal structure with predetermined questions. In the process, a shared understanding of ownership and research directions are incorporated (Leaupepe, 2008. p. 20).

As a culturally appropriate means of communication, it is inferred, because oratory and verbal negotiations are deeply rooted in Pacific cultures, *talanoa* is therefore a preferred means of communication (Otsuka, 2005; Prescott, 2008). It is seen as conveying personal and formal knowledge, stories, views and feelings and of discussions that result in common understandings (Prescott, 2008; Prescott & Johansson-Fua, 2016). As other research methods may not require personal researcher-participant affiliation, the relationship thread is central in *talanoa* where there is no separation between researcher and participant. The trust and co-operation is said to facilitate a free flow of information (Vidovich, 2003). Although the strategy seems rewarding, the author cautioned that *talanoa* as dialogue may be confusing to those outside its culture (ibid). *Talanoa* is therefore a tool suitable for researchers who embrace and are part of its ethos.

During the course of data collection, participants were encouraged to exercise the freedom and flexibility of *talanoa*. It not only allowed for spontaneous dialogue, but

of consensus building. Particularly to differentiate researcher position as facilitator of *talanoa* and not to influence its flow towards unintended or intended information. The structure of questions, sub-questions (Appendix G), time and the opportunity to converse and reflect on the value and benefits of play for child learning and development allowed for mixed and changed reactions to occur. In other words, an alteration of initial responses were expected as questions, sub-questions and the course of *talanoa* developed. The pilot study conducted in 2014 confirmed that this sequence of questions projected such an impact providing more robust and detailed accounts for the study.

i.   Building relationships

To build research trust and relationships in Tonga requires the building of long-standing affiliations and friendships (*faka-kaungā me'a*) that do not transpire after a research undertaking. These relationships are perpetual and should be mutually observed (Prescott & Johansson-Fua, 2016) and valued likewise by researcher and participant regardless of personal and ethnic background – foreign or local. The ability to maintain this virtue demonstrates a willingness to show *faka'apa'apa* (respect) for knowledge and *tauhi vā/vaha'a* (maintain/uphold relationships). The space of '*noa'* or void where dialogue was of everything else but of the research questions was the actual *va*-point where trust and *maheni* (acquaintance) was formed. The core value of *fevahevahe'aki* (sharing) branched from the researcher's ability to show *faka'apa'apa* (respect) when participants were invited to join the *talanoa* to the actual *talanoa* discussion.

In doing so, these relationships (*vā/vaha'a*) were maintained (*tauhi*) through further *talanoa* mediums and settings such as email correspondence, social media connections, telephone calls, a simple greeting on the street, in villages or the town square. To shun away any forms of interaction no matter how insignificant will be frowned upon as arrogance, taking knowledge and relationships for granted and somewhat, exploitation. To uphold participant *falala* (trust) and *mahu'inga'ia* (importance/value) of the study and of researcher credibility and integrity, these relationships must be sustained to serve its full purpose. This indicates the delicate sacredness of relational spaces and is a virtue researchers need to adhere to.

ii.   Tauhi vā/vaha'a

Vā or *wah* is articulated in many Polynesian cultures as a common reference to "*both a physical as well as a metaphorical space that defines and sanctions inter-personal as well as inter-group relations*" (Thaman, 2007. p. 56). In a later account, Thaman discusses the importance of *vā, tauhi vā or tauhi vaha'a* as a basis for Tongan interaction "*reflected in the high regard people place on rules governing different kinds of interpersonal relationships and social interaction*" (Thaman, 2008. p. 464):

> When *vā* is used to denote interpersonal relationships, there are behavioural expectations involved. The bases for these relationships may be kin related, work related or friendship related. Nevertheless, the persons involved understand their roles in the relationships, which are generally contextual, and act appropriately. The contexts for their actions vary whether they are between individuals, families, villages, governments and even nations (ibid, p. 465).

Likewise, the concept of *vā* signifies relationships in the Tongan culture:

> Literally means 'space'. But in Tongan communities, relationships or the space between any two individuals or groups, or between communities and nature, are defined by the context in which the interaction occurs. Thus, when the context changes, the relationship changes also, evening the case of the same two individuals or groups and maintaining, nurturing and developing that *vā* so that it remains strong and flexible… (Taufe'ulungaki, 2004. p. 6).

These relationships being relational in nature require careful nurturing and protection in terms of *tauhi vaha'a* (Thaman, 2007). It aids to look after or "*protect the spaces between two or more persons or groups who are related to each other in some way*" (Coxon, 2007. p. 465). It is cautioned, there needs to be an imperative understanding of *vā* as socio-spatial connections if one is to embrace the complexities that surround it (Kā'ili, 2005). In retrospect:

> The word *vā* is not unique to Tonga, for cognates are found in many *Moanan* languages. *Vā* can be glossed as 'space between people or things'. This notion of space is known in Tonga, Samoa, Rotuma, and Tahiti as *vā*, while in Aotearoa and Hawai'i it is known as *wā*. *Vā* (or *wā*) points to a specific notion of space, namely, space between two or more points (ibid, p. 89).

Vā is "*closely associated with balance and harmony in relationships and the natural order and aesthetic of human interconnections and relationships*" (Mila-Schaaf, 2006. p. 8). The relationships are mutual or interchangeable within an aesthetic balance in relationships (ibid). However, overall, "*fundamental to Tongan culture is an understanding of the intricate network of relationships that guides Tongan behaviour, socialisation and interaction*" (Johansson-Fua et al, 2011. p. 14).

4.9.2 Focus group (tālanga)

Another common Pacific research tool was that of focus groups currently modified in Pacific research as *tālanga.* It differs to *talanoa* in the number of participants required. While *talanoa* focused on the simultaneous engagement of participants, *tālanga* utilises multiple participants often by using an equivalent selection criteria. A focus group is a "*technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being 'focused' on a given topic*" (Rabiee, 2004. p. 655). It is also a form of group interview centering on generating data through effective communication between researcher and participants (Kitzinger, 1995). Unlike *talanoa*, the discussion was "*meticulously planned and designed to acquire certain perceptions and insights towards a specific area of interest or concern*" (ibid, p. 299). In retrospect, participant responses bounced off one another to create a chain of conversations:

> Instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a questions, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's' experiences and points of view.' The method is useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and to examine not only what people think but how and why they think that way (Kitzinger, 1995. p. 299).

A focus group is further defined as "*using a semi structured group session, moderated by a group leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of collecting information on a designated topic*" (Carey, 1994 cited in McLafferty, 2004. p. 187). Focus centers on the element of interaction to generate data. This gives more purpose to the interview approach. The importance of interaction depends on three major components "*(1) a method devoted to data collection; (2) interaction as a source of data; and (3) the active role of the researcher in creating group discussion for data collection*" (Morgan, 1996 cited in McLafferty, 2004. p. 187). The context site for a focus group is to be an "*accommodating and non-threatening environment/setting/venue*" (Kitzinger, 1995. p. 229).

In the Pacific context, *tālanga* is presented as a "*purposeful, directed form of conversation best suited for directed communication between researcher and participant focus group contexts*" (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2013. p. 144). During the actual data collection phase, ten (10) ECE teachers from the Nuku'alofa area took part in a *tālanga* session at the TIOE ECE center. This venue is a familiar and comfortable

space for participants to engage in a pre-planned and designed discussion which included activities of brainstorming and active interactions where teachers freely expressed their views of *va'inga, ako* and *tupulaki*. It specifically aimed to obtain teachers' conceptual opinions and perspectives of the research questions (1-4).

Like the *talanoa*, the *tālanga* allowed for changed reactions to occur because of its open and flexible nature. The structure of questions and sub-questions permitted teachers time to further ponder and reflect on their initial responses to play and the value of play adding more rigour to the group discussion. The fact they were given the opportunity to feed off ideas and contributions within the group also added to the richness of the gathered research data. The *tālanga* strategy nonetheless is familiar teacher practice in Tonga particularly during staff professional development and in-service training. The outcomes represent the growing ECE teacher population in Tonga as well as current issues pertaining to *va'inga* as a pedagogical tool.

4.9.3 Participant observation

A contextualised method of participant observation is *nofo* acquiring the Tongan meaning of 'to stay' or 'to dwell among' (Johansson-Fua, 2012). The researcher was required to procure a decentered position to serve relational and inter-subjective purposes, which were also prominent within *talanoa* and *tālanga.* The method also required researchers to "*account for their relational, research, and narrative choices in their writing*" (Trainor & Graue, 2013. p. 85). The following is a clear perspective on the meaning and value of the participant observation tool:

> Participant observation is a qualitative method with roots in traditional ethnographic research, whose objective is to help researchers learn the perspectives held by study populations. As qualitative researchers, we presume that there will be multiple perspectives within any given community. We are interested both in knowing what those diverse perspectives are and in understanding the interplay among them (Mack et al, 2005. p. 13).

It is argued, of the multiple levels of participation, pure observation and pure participation should be distinguished. This shifted focus to the authors' argument in that the "*degree of participation, membership role, and the amount of emotional involvement that ethnographers bring to the field will have an important impact on the kinds of data collected and the sort of analysis that is possible*" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010. p. 6). Due to the dynamics of family living – time, availability and the comfort and willingness of the parent/child to engage in *va'inga* while being

observed by a stranger seemed impractical. It was also assumed the *va'inga* engagement would not be unique and authentic providing a problem for any justified validity and reliability towards the method. The pilot study previously manifested these signs and was taken as an evaluation indicator in fine-tuning the main study.

The situation differed however, within school environments where children seemed more comfortable having a stranger observe and partake in their play activities. This stemmed from the familiarity of being greeted and introduced to strangers and visitors in the school setting. Children willingly although unknowingly demonstrated undisturbed play behaviours with teachers and friends. The school setting further provided an environment opportunity for observation. Being personally engaged at this stage not only helped develop rapport with teachers and students but enabled sharing of personal ideas and practices that helped generate a deeper understanding and appreciation of the importance and challenges of *ako* and *va'inga* in a Tongan preschool setting. In turn, the whole task itself provided genuine ethnographic perspective and epithet of *va'inga* in the context of Tonga and early learning. The selected venues for the observation tasks were the same centers of the ten (10) teachers in the *tālanga* sitting. This allowed for a more productive relationship with teachers and to link and connect theory and practice in what they shared during the *tālanga*. It was also an easy entry point for the researcher to obtain ethnographic images of children's *va'inga*, another methodical tool utilised in the study.

4.9.4 Document analysis

A strenuous task during the data collection phase was that of analysing relevant documents that helped support and validate useful facts for the study. Of the types of analysis heeded, the study considered descriptive/interpretive analysis and content analysis suitable for the task. In fact, it is defined as a "*systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material*" (Bowen, 2009. p. 27). Documents in specific are "*text (words) and images that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention*" (Bowen, 2009. p. 27). They are also "*social facts, which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways*" (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997. p. 47). In addition, data is examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, to gain understanding and to develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The particular documents for analysis initially aimed at the curriculum documents of the selected ECE centers in the study. However, during the course of data collection in 2015, the newly introduced National ECE Curriculum by the MET was currently under trial in all ECE centers for nationwide implementation. Therefore, it was more appropriate to solely focus the analysis on this new document to determine its situation and value of *va'inga*. It specifically aimed to examine the extent *va'inga* is featured in the document in terms of motivation, intent and purpose. In other words, to ascertain how *va'inga* is represented and valued as a learning and development tool and not just an activity of free play. The analysis also examined the degree of stakeholder involvement to determine the root and context of curriculum choices and decisions within the new document.

4.9.5 Field notes

Field notes were selected as a research tool based on its ability to capture immediate short hand documentation during the stages of *talanoa* and *tālanga.* The method also featured as a critical-reflective tool within daily evaluations marking a review of certain undertakings that did not go as planned or the next step in progressing with initial fieldwork plans. These field notes helped discern between good practice and arising challenges throughout the entire fieldwork process. The word 'field' depends how different researchers conceptualise it according to the influence of their assumptions and practices of it (Mulhall, 2003). For a qualitative researcher of an ethnographic nature, field notes are defined as "*something we construct both through the practical transactions and activities of data collection and through the literary activities of writing field notes, analytic memoranda and the like*" (Atkinson, 1992 cited in Mulhall, 2003. p. 310).

Field notes are furthermore, "*documents with the security and concreteness that writing leads to observation…are written for an audience usually of one…that stimulate the re-creation, the renewal of things past*" (Sanjek, 1990. p. 92). What the researcher considers important and interesting will feature in the field notes reflecting on professional and personal worldviews (Mulhall, 2003). It is argued, although field notes are a vital part of ethnographic research, its practical detail and application has been given little attention (Wolfinger, 2002). Nonetheless, the challenges mainly pertain to the ethnographer's approach in terms of the values they

place on them and of the outcomes encompassed in his or her gaze, what is omitted, overlooked and what is written (Atkinson, 1992). As every ethnographer has their own preferred strategy for recording data from observations, the following personal schema (Mulhall, 2003. p. 311) provides an example:

- Structural and organizational features – what the actual buildings and environment look like and how they are used
- People – how they behave, interact, dress, move
- The daily process of activities
- Special events – in a hospital ward this might be the consultant's round or the multidisciplinary team meeting
- Dialogue
- An everyday diary of events as they occur chronologically – both in the field and before entering the field
- A personal/reflective diary – this includes both my thoughts about going into the field and being there, and reflections on my own life experiences that might influence the way in which I filter what I observe.

The study however, chose to use the distinction of the two types of field notes – (i) descriptive field notes and (2) reflective field notes (Lodico et al, 2010). Both were necessary in gathering on-site and evaluative written transcripts during the fieldwork process and in post-observation sittings.

i. Descriptive field notes

Descriptive field notes are what the researcher has summarised in much detail about what was possibly seen and heard during the observation (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010). Comments however, must be kept minimally subjective. The researcher should also include in his/her notes "*detailed descriptions of what persons do and how they interact; in-depth descriptions of the settings and materials used by participants; and verbatim conversations and direct quotes*" (p. 118). During the course of *talanoa, tālanga* and participant observation, reflective notes were roughly imprinted on a miniature-sized notebook so that a large notebook does not extend a message of over formality putting the participant(s) in an uncomfortable position. The task was kept invisible as possible by using shorthand to condense any long focus on writing and to maintain eye contact with participants. Frequent efforts to glance away to jot down quick notes was necessary also to minimise any sign of disrespect for the *talanoa* at hand. This empathised with the researcher's weakness to recall particular thoughts tied to exact moments of critical reflection even during the audio replay and transcription stages that followed soon after.

ii.   Reflective field notes

Reflective field notes are notes and descriptions contemplative of the descriptive field note records. It is a description of:

> The observer's feelings and thoughts about what he or she is observing. These are often recorded as comments at the bottom of the recording sheet or as separate entries in a field notes log after observations. Reflective notes allow researcher to reflect on own feelings, values and thoughts in order to increase awareness of how things might be influencing their observations (Lodico et al, 2010. p. 118).

As a common teacher tool to evaluate and reflect on one's lesson and work for better improvement and enhancement, the same logic applied to the application of reflective field notes. It allowed the researcher to re-evaluate and re-think the process once it was over to find loopholes that need to be addressed before the work continues. Often, these reflective notes point to an incomplete task or thought, which was immediately remedied. On one occasion, in sitting down to record the day's encounters, it occurred that after the first visitation to invite participants for the *tālanga*, the changed date for the meeting differed from the actual date given in the information sheet to participants. Using the telephone contacts participants provided upon agreeing to partake in the study, they were hastily called to relay the typographic error. The reflective field notes also enabled personal feelings to surface, which was often used as a platform for discussion with a close network of friends, and family who provided moral support and advice to ease the pressure.

4.9.6 Visual ethnographies

The final method of data collection included the acquisition of photographed images of child *va'inga* in the home and school environments. It is a useful and important visual source to display the reality of *va'inga* in Tongan. Selecting this tool as a suitable research method required critical inquiry into the "*social practices surrounding photographic production and use*" (Schwartz, 1989. p. 119). Capturing these images helped elaborate what *va'inga* looked like in real life; in its real setting. It offered an authentic portrait into the cultural Tongan community where *va'inga* is interacted at its own pace, its own nature and its own free will. There are two distinct perspectives of visual ethnographies:

> A historical two-headed view of photography as 1) an art and 2) a precise machine-made record of a scene or a subject. In the first view, the primary concern is the vision of the photographer-artist who uses the technology to produce a creative photograph of which the photographer is the source. In the second view, the primary

concern is the accuracy with which the subject is recorded on film, in which case the subject is the source (Schwartz, 1989. p. 79).

The latter view was central in utilising this tool qualitatively and is thus pivotal to providing "*purposeful presentations of meaning relating to social occurrences*" (Pink, 2010. p. 988). Some preschool centers made it part of their school policy to restrict outsiders from obtaining ethnographic images of children. Instead, they were invitied to provide a copy of their own records of children's *va'inga* for the researcher. A challenge faced with participant observation was that of taking ethnographic images of children while in their home settings. This was seen as a possible discomfit on the child's/children's behalf where the process of a researcher photographing play could potentially hinder the observation of genuine *va'inga* as a natural part of play activities. Tongan children also tend to get excited and pose for a clicking camera rather than go about naturally in their *va'inga*. In view of the time frame for data collection, parents were asked to otherwise capture these images in their own free time when and where children feel more comfortable and when they can naturally demonstrate *va'inga*. Ethnographic images of the school settings were retrieved during the data collection process while images from parents required more time. In doing so, a restricted Facebook album created within the researcher's personal page allowed participants to load images of their children for later reference. Choosing this medium resulted in a consultation with parents on the best possible and trouble free way to retrieve these images. Therefore, Facebook as a social media space seemed the easiest and simplest option. Most participants did not own an email account nor are adept to using it as a means of virtual communication making Facebook the most appropriate tool reserved for this purpose alone.

4.10 Sampling

4.10.1 Selection criteria

Participant selection and criteria was predetermined on the ability of individuals to socialise and interact with young children aged 0-8 years on a daily and regular basis. It all narrowed down to two groups of adults, parents and ECE teachers – parents being child nurturers in the home environment and teachers at school or preschool centers. In retrospect, these two groups of people hold access to the valuable knowledge and practice that encompass child *va'inga* – knowledge and information most vital for the study purpose, which the researcher was seeking to understand and

make meaning of. The findings became a platform to suggest simple and appropriate implications for young learning and development. The implications from these perceptions are not something a so-called professional child educationist claims to know of let alone in terms of how children behave, learn and grow in the context of Tonga. Participants did not require demographic specification of age, gender, occupation or academic background as these were not considered important or necessary qualifiers for participation in the study. That is, "*the sampling in qualitative research is not designed to be representative of a wider population, but purposive to capture diversity around a phenomenon*" (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid & Redwood, 2013. p. 6).

As a result of this selection process, a total of twenty-four (24) participants were female while the remaining six (6) were male. Ten (10) of the female participants were ECE teachers who participated in the *tālanga* session while the remaining fourteen (14) female and six (6) male participants were parents. They took part in the one-on-one *talanoa*. In one case, both parents asked to join the *talanoa*, which was agreed to seeing there was no harm or threat posed to the validity of the study. The selected number of participants was useful to acquire and yield an array of varied contributions towards parental and adult perceptions and attitudes of *va'inga* and how it is practiced within each participating household and school setting.

4.10.2 Convenience and snowball sampling

Of the two different groups of people that were selected, one major sampling procedure was necessary – Convenience Sampling. It was used to obtain key respondents or the study participants with an allocation of Snowball Sampling to acquire a chain of suitable teacher respondents from the initial respondents. Convenience Sampling is also referred to as Accidental Sampling and "*includes participants who are readily available and agree to participate in a study*" (MacNealy, 1999. p. 8). A total of twenty (20) parents and ten (10) ECE teachers were conveniently preselected given their availability to partake and the fact they currently reside within the research site, Nuku'alofa area. Teacher participants who were selected through snowballing currently taught in ECE centers in Nuku'alofa. Snowball Sampling is also Chain Referral Sampling and "*yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest*" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981. p. 141):

When the researcher accesses informants through contact information provided by other informants. This process is, by necessity, repetitive: informants refer the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer her or him to yet other informants, and so on. Hence the evolving 'snowball' effect, captured in a metaphor that touches on the central quality of this sampling procedure: its accumulative (diachronic and dynamic) dimension (Noy, 2008. p. 330).

The procedure was also used in the event that initial respondents were not available in terms of unforeseen reasons. It was also used as a backup strategy or Plan B as existing participants would be more discerning to select additional members to the group should someone bail. In this case, it was most fortunate as one of the teachers made a sudden trip to an outer island and was then replaced by another representative nominated by an existing member. This reflected "*the knowledge of insiders to locate people for the study*" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981. p. 141).

Using Convenience and Snowball Sampling also enabled a diagnostic assessment of some of the possible respondents to determine those most suitable to provide rich data for the study. They were selected on the basis they were available, are currently raising or have reared children, are familiar with teacher performance and practice and are willing to *fevahevahe'aki* (share). This was based on prior interactions and assumptions during ECE visits to various schools around the main island to assess students on practicum in 2009 and 2010. Hence, the behaviour of *fefalala'aki* (trust/confidence in) assured the data obtained was reliable and valid given the amount of teaching experience and age of each teacher. This also ensured their contributions were based on a lengthy term of service in ECE.

The ethnographic approach required the researcher to earnestly and objectively adopt a strict personal discipline in researcher roles to master *fakafeangai* (professionalism). It was imperative to self-train and discipline oneself to become confident and well versed with the core Tongan values of *faka'apa'apa* (respect), *loto fakatōkilalo* (humility), *fe'ofa'aki* (love, compassion), and *feveitokai'aki* (caring, generosity) (Johansson-Fua, 2014). The researcher also needed to be prepared and willing to accept collegial critique in order to ensure through such professional input, researcher role of *fakafeangai* was rightfully and appropriately observed.

4.11 Ethical considerations

When considering information access and quality research, a key factor was the adherence of researcher conduct and ethical guidelines to direct the research study

(Johansson-Fua, 2012). In its broadest sense, ethics pertains to the study of what is good and bad. It is generally accepted that being "ethical" means to be good, "*set of rules that is used to guide one's behaviour in relating to others and to one. Ethical conduct is often used to describe a desirable behaviour – good and right behaviour that is sought after*" (p. 21). For Tonga, the principle core values of love, reciprocity, humility and commitment all embody love (ibid). The fact that ethics is culturally and contextually based means different cultures have different value meanings and need to follow specific ethical guidelines explicit to particular research contexts.

In line with the USP Human Ethics procedure, the study was granted ethical approval by the university's Research Ethics Committee. All participants were asked to sign a predesigned consent form agreeing to take part in this research[25]. The consent specifically informed participants of the ethical adherences that would be taken to serve their best interests and anonymity in terms of respect; safety; sensitivity; cultural competence; meaningful engagement; utility; privacy, confidentiality; equality, justice and equity; nondiscrimination and non-stigmatisation; social responsibilities and sharing beliefs (USP Research Office, 2009. pp. 1-3). The researcher was careful to treat all participants with equal consideration ensuring that there was no intrusion of personal bias in engagement with each individual and group. It also assured that all observations and findings remained confidential unless participants agreed to be made known and directly acknowledged. Selection was not based on any of personal connections or affiliations but on the basis of participants' suitability and availability for the study as per the sampling procedure. All interviews and observations were accurately represented and no data or conclusions were manipulated.

4.11.1 Pacific ethical system

Of issues emerging in contemporary qualitative research, an important focus rests in what was considered to constitute ethics. An emerging issue was that of the extension of traditional ethical models to deal with ethical concerns in conventional research (De Laine, 2004). Pacific research protocols from the Otago University emphasizes, "*Pacific societies and communities are extremely varied and researchers should remember this. Pacific values, ways of living, and beliefs are*

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[25] See Appendices C-F

certainly not uniform" (Bennett et al, 2013. p. 105). Common Pacific values underpinning Pacific research ethics were "*respect, reciprocity, family links and obligations, community oriented – the good of all is important, collective responsibility, older people revered – gerontocracy, humility, love/charity, service and spirituality, most commonly associated with Christianity*" (ibid, p. 106). In the effort to rethink indigenous research ethics in a Pacific Island context suggested attention be drawn to the problems indigenous research ethics face as opposed to conventional research (Sanga, 2014):

> Indigenous peoples are challenged to reclaim their indigenous knowledge and ethical systems and their rightful places within a global knowledge economy…Western research institutions are challenged to recognize the value, contributions, and legitimacy of indigenous knowledge systems and to renegotiate an approach to research that is ethically appropriate, dignified and respectful (ibid, pp. 148-149).

These challenges are addressed through cultural and education mediums including the research works of Pacific educators and scholars who founded the RPEIPP[26].

4.11.2 Tongan research ethics

On the rationale for ethics as culturally and contextually based, Johansson-Fua (2012) provides a summary of the Tongan research ethics illustrated in Table 4.2. These ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study for reliability and validity purposes.

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[26] Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for and by Pacific Peoples

Table 4.2 Tongan research ethics

Tongan research ethics	Description
To access knowledge	Some context specific knowledge require special treatment and ethical approaches for it to be willingly shared.
To build relationships between the researcher and the participants	Researcher-participant trust is important for shared knowledge to occur. If not, it usually implies the researcher is not using culturally appropriate ethical conduct.
To ensure that the knowledge is authentic	In taking a Tongan ethical approach to seeking knowledge, reliable and trusted knowledge can be access.
To ensure that knowledge accessed is understood within context	There should be equal justice to both the 'giver' of knowledge and the 'borrower' of knowledge.
To ensure that the knowledge is used for the benefit of the giver of knowledge	The participant must be appropriately acknowledged and represented for his/her contribution and shared knowledge.
To ensure that the research process is constantly monitored according to the research ethics set out	The whole research process embeds within the Tongan ethical guidelines & not just some parts of the research process.
To ensure that the research ethics is also set in place to guide how researchers relate to participants	Ethical observation must also apply to other involved researchers.
To ensure that the research ethics is displayed always	In terms of behaviour, speech, dress code, body language, gifting et cetera.
To ensure that the researcher is also held accountable to the people from whom he/she has collected the data	This can be done through reporting back to the community, giving them access to the research or through different kinds of reciprocity.

(Adapted from Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 22)

The indigenous tool of *talanoa* and *tālanga* provided a space that enabled cultural and context specific access to Tongan research. In regards to the Kakala Research Framework, one of the important elements of research for researcher and participants is the task of *fakafeangai*, which often determines *falala'anga* (trustworthiness) (Johansson-Fua, 2014). It further elaborates:

> To access knowledge, particularly traditional knowledge systems that can often be protected and guarded by families, it is critical that the right ethical conduct is applied in order to gain trust. As most Pacific people know, there is some knowledge that can be easily shared and other knowledge that is *tapu* to outsiders. With the right ethical conduct, a researcher can build relationships that will establish trust and thus gain access to information that participants are willing to share. Understanding ethics also means that, as a researcher, one knows when to respect and leave *tapu* knowledge alone (p. 58).

Also significant to Tongan research ethics include ensuring the knowledge obtained and gathered are authentic and accurate. The *talanoa* and *tālanga* are spontaneous activities allowing both formal and informal dialogue to occur. Thus, the Tongan tendency to tell stories and speak in metaphors may be misleading so the researcher must make sure to separate the figurative and literal aspects in the discussion in order

to obtain accuracy and authenticity. Doing this seemed difficult if one failed to *fakafeangai* in the appropriate Tongan manner of *feohi* (relate, associate). The necessary behaviours are the very core in which Tongan research ethics are founded upon. They include *faka'apa'apa* (respect), *loto fakatōkilalo* (humility), *fe'ofa'aki* (love, compassion), and *feveitokai'aki* (caring, generosity) (Johansson-Fua, 2014). The Tongan research ethics also informed the procedures of consent and permission, protocol and code of behavior as well as the treatment of findings.

i.   Consent and permission

In recognition of the Tongan research ethics, it was important and imperative as an inside researcher to adhere to the ethical guidelines by Johansson-Fua (2014). This grounded researcher position and professionalism was adopted so that any forms of unethical behaviour were avoided while proper research ethics were strictly observed. It also prevented any chances of taking local knowledge and relationships for granted. However, being a Tongan national by birth enabled an open gateway into the Tongan context. Hosted by the MET during the fieldwork and being a current staff member of the TIOE also provided an easy access point. A written letter requesting a station allocation within the TIOE compounds for the duration of data collection and fieldwork was issued to the TIOE Dean. Permission was granted through an initial oral *talanoa* culminating *falala/falala'anga* (trust and confidence). The TIOE hall for ECE functions was also included in the request as a potential venue for the forthcoming *tālanga* session. With direct participants however, to maintain ethical standards and to uphold research ethics, information sheets were dispersed explicitly explaining the purpose of the research in both written English and Tongan translation[27]. Upon face-to-face contact with participants, they were verbally briefed for clarification and to settle any inquiries regarding the *talanoa* and *tālanga*. Immediately after agreement was established, participants were given a formal consent form to sign formalising their involvement.

ii.   Protocol and code of behaviour

Being a proficient bilingual speaker of the Tongan and English languages removed the need for a translator in the cultural Tongan setting. However, to ensure protocol was exclusively observed and the accuracy of the Tongan language use throughout

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[27] See Appendices C-F

the study, professional opinions were sought from cultural education officers within the MET. This removed the potential for incorrect assumptions that may lead to any form of misappropriate undertaking. The core Tongan values within the *Hala Fononga* conceptual theme were also strictly adhered to in order to rightly observe and maintain an ethical, professional and cultural-sensitive behaviour. In approaching participants, the cultural dress code was observed and maintained especially wearing the *taovala* around the waist – the utmost form of respect and humility. Formal language use was necessary especially upon first approach. This aided in gaining trust and openness. A researcher who fails to seek this is deemed arrogant and disrespectful. Familiarity with the participants eased the *vā* (relationship building) and the language of communication became more informal and casual. Taking the time to *talanoa* (informally) about whatsoever arises is to be respected as this is the moment and space *vā* is fostered including rapport, trust and openness. It is also the researcher's gateway and passage into participant territory.

iii. Treatment of findings

In completing the study, and to ensure accountability and transparency to those directly involved especially during the data gathering stage, a hard copy of the complete thesis will be made available for participants and public access at specific locations. Foremost, is the USP Laucala Campus library that hosted, sponsored and financed this research work and scholarship. The USP library repository will also deposit an electronic copy of the final dissertation for public reference. A hard copy will also be made available at the USP Tonga Campus as well as the TIOE library for those interested within the wider Tongan community. Finally, an electronic copy will be sent directly and strictly from the researcher to participants who may request a personal copy. Electronic copies will however be securely protected to ensure there are no unlawful copying or editing of any of its sections.

4.12 Data analysis

The process of data analysis is meticulously carried out in the following chapter alongside the results and discussions, it basically pertains to the process of breaking down data into themes and components to obtain similar, different or contrasting views and information from the gathered data. It is the "*process of resolving data into its constituent components, to reveal its characteristic elements and structure*"

(Dey, 2003. p. 31). Data in particular, refers to qualitative data that is usually in "*textual form before analysis. These texts can either be elicited texts...or can be produced by transcribing interview or focus group data, or creating 'field' notes while conducting participant-observation or observing objects or social situations*" (Gale et al, 2013. p. 2). The process is also a systematic search for meaning and a:

> Way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding. It always involves what Wolcott calls "mind work"...Researchers always engage their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data (Hatch, 2002. p. 148).

4.12.1 The framework method

The step by step guide in the Framework Method framed the process of data analysis in this study (Gale et al, 2013). The Framework Method is to analyse qualitative data specifically for health research teams. It is "*useful where multiple researchers are working on a project, particularly in multi-disciplinary research teams were not all members have experience of qualitative data analysis, and for managing large data sets where obtaining a holistic, descriptive overview of the entire data set is desirable*" (p. 1). Its relevance to this study encapsulates the essence of bricolage and its multi-perspective focus. Although the study did not comprise a large data set nor multiple researchers, it channelled information from multiple sources. It was important to note, "*the framework method cannot accommodate highly heterogeneous data, i.e. data must cover similar topics or key issues so that it is possible to categorize it*" (ibid, p. 1).

Since individual interviewees in the study were not of very different views or experiences in relation to each research question, the data was easily compared and contrasted. The Framework Method is not to be confused with the study's 'Conceptual Framework', 'Theoretical Framework' or 'Methodological Framework' rather it represents the data analysis approach used in the study. It was developed by researchers, Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer (Gale et al, 2013). Its main defining feature is the "*matrix output: rows (cases), columns (codes) and 'cells' of summarised data, providing a structure into which the researcher can systematically reduce the data, in order to analyse it by case and by code*" (ibid, p. 3). The

Framework Method is mostly used to thematically analyse semi-structured interview transcripts and often adapted for other types of textual data, including official documents, meeting minutes, diaries and observation field notes (ibid). Table 4.3 tabulates the stages in the Framework Method followed by a detailed description of each and how they were administered in the study.

Table 4.3 Stages in the Framework Model

Stage	Description
Transcription	A good quality audio recording and, ideally, a verbatim (word for word) transcription of the interview.
Familiarisation with the interview	Becoming familiar with the whole interview using the audio recording and/or transcript and any contextual or reflective notes that were recorded by the interviewer is a vital stage in interpretation.
Coding	The researcher carefully reads the transcript line by line, applying a paraphrase or label (a 'code') that describes what they have interpreted in the passage as important.
Developing a working analytical framework	Codes can be grouped together into categories (using a tree diagram if helpful), which are then clearly defined.
Applying the analytical framework	Indexing subsequent transcripts using the existing categories and codes. Each code is usually assigned a number or abbreviation for easy identification (and so the full names of the codes do not have to be written out each time) and written directly onto the transcripts.
Charting data into the framework matrix	A spread sheet is used to generate a matrix and the data are 'charted' into the matrix. Charting involves summarizing the data by category from each transcript.
Interpreting the data	Characteristics of and differences between the data are identified, generating typologies, interrogating theoretical concepts (either prior concepts or ones emerging from the data) or mapping connections between categories to explore relationships and/or causality.

(Adapted from Gale et al, 2013. pp. 4-5)

Stage 1: Transcription

The qualitative data gathered through the tools of *talanoa* and *tālanga* were recorded using a good-quality and mini portable audio device, which also served as a camera to capture ethnographic images. The recordings were then electronically recorded ideally in verbatim (word for word) on a Microsoft word document where each participant's contribution was filed separately for clarity and ease of access. Every interview was repeatedly played until each account was clear and meaningful. The transcription process required the aid of a research assistant and/or skilled transcriber. He/she must also be available, computer literate, agreeable and fluent in both spoken and written Tongan and English languages. The assistant's affiliation with the study was approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee. The *talanoa* and *tālanga* were carried out in the Tongan language with minor code switching to English for clarification and at times, to indicate areas in need of

cultural and contextual mean making. The assistant was also required to be relatively and spatially close to the researcher for accessibility purposes and to be equally genuine in maintaining and upholding the ethical standards outlined in the study. The assistant however, proved to work with extreme integrity and confidentiality.

It was not necessary to record or include the conventions of dialogue transcriptions, as they were not relevant. In essence, these conventions not only included "*pauses or two people talking simultaneously*" (Gale et al, 2013. p. 4), but of laughter and talking of 'voidness' which was not of relevance to the study but was nonetheless useful in building rapport and *vā*. For formatting purposes, transcripts had "*large margins and adequate line spacing for later coding and making notes*" (ibid, p. 4). A translator, was not necessary, as the researcher is equally fluent in both the Tongan and English oral and written languages. Hence, translation of the vernacular scripts was entirely the researcher's task. It furthermore, enabled consistency of thought for the subsequent chapter. However, for formal written purposes and to ensure language use was culturally appropriate and grammatically correct, a cultural advisor was employed to overlook and scrutinise the information and consent forms for participants as well as the translated transcriptions. This aided the hierarchal language use in Tonga where certain spoken and written directives vary for the king, his nobles and the majority of commoners. Language use must be culturally and categorically fitting and appropriate for all participants who were conveniently and purposefully selected within the commoner class. This eased the process and helped maintain a consistent yet formal generic approach throughout the study. In retrospect, "*the process of transcription is a good opportunity to become immersed in the data and is to be strongly encouraged for new researchers*" (Gale et al, 2013. p. 4).

Stage 2: Familiarisation with the interview

Being familiar with the entire interview via the audio recordings and/or transcripts as well as any reflective or on-site field notes is fundamental to the interpretation stage (Gale et al, 2013). For reliability purposes also, the transcripts were double-checked by the researcher for accuracy and sent back to participants for member checking before the analysis proceeded. Member checking required researcher to return to the field and meet with participants to seek their opinions of the "*themes, arguments, or assertions developed from the codes are accurately describing their statements*"

(Janesick, 2000). This helped with descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1992) similarly helpful for "*participants to read the definition and explanation of the themes generated from the data in order to assess the accuracy*" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007. p. 565). In this case, transcriptions were sent back through email correspondence to participants even though they refused at first and said the task was unnecessary. Not one sent back a reply leaving the researcher to assume the analysis should continue yet with strict personal discipline as not to misinterpret or misrepresent the data entrusted by participants.

Stage 3: Coding

Coding is described as a "*descriptive or conceptual label that is assigned to excerpts of raw data*" (Gale et al, 2013. p. 2). Surpassing the stage of familiarisation, the researcher was then to carefully read the transcribed print line by line and "*paraphrase or label codes that describes what they have interpreted in the passage as important*" (ibid. p. 4). Obtaining a holistic impression of the verbatim transcriptions can also "*alert the researcher to consider that which may ordinarily remain invisible because it is not clearly expressed or does not 'fit' with the rest of the account*" (ibid, p. 4). Challenging the developing analysis in this way helped to "*reconcile and explain anomalies in the data can make the analysis stronger*" (ibid, p. 4). Within this initial stage, ideas were also openly coded for almost any perspective that was relevant such as:

> Particular behaviours, incidents or structures), values (e.g. those that inform certain statements, such as a belief in evidence-based medicine or in patient choice), emotions (e.g. sorrow, frustration, love) and more impressionistic/methodological elements (e.g. interviewee found something difficult to explain, interviewee became emotional, interviewer felt uncomfortable) (ibid, p. 4).

Using the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), coding could also be done digitally, which was useful to keep track of new or emerging automatically generated codes. In the early stages of coding, the pen and paper approach was preferred while the CAQDAS was not considered until Stage 5 – *Applying the analytical framework*. Qualitative data coding was privileged in the study considering it was of a purely qualitative approach throughout.

Stage 4: Developing a working analytical framework

Following the coding process, the assigned labels were compared to determine a set of codes that applied to all ensuing transcripts. The categories and codes were then grouped into clusters within parallel and interrelated ideas or concepts and were more often than not arranged in a tree diagram structure. In the next chapter *Data Analysis* – a tree diagram was depicted to show how closely and explicitly-linked the categories are to the raw data. These newly developed categories were a way to start the process of data abstraction (Gale et al, 2013). At this stage, probable iterations emerged so "*it is always worth having an 'other' code under each category to avoid ignoring data that does not fit; the analytical framework is never 'final' until the last transcript has been coded*" (p. 4). The authors also cautioned that the analytical framework can never be final until the last transcript is coded (ibid).

Stage 5: Applying the analytical framework

To apply the working analytical framework involved indexing ensued transcripts by using or assigning to them existing categories and codes "*each code is usually assigned a number or abbreviation for easy identification and so the full names of the codes do not have to be written out each time) and written directly onto the transcripts*" (Gale et al, 2013. p. 5). Even though the CAQDAS was assumed to speed up the process and to ensure data in later stages were easily retrievable, the software was not available and there were difficulties with its purchase. Participants were on the other hand, referred to in a self-developed code by the researcher (table 4.4). The twenty parents were coded [F] for female coupled by a number [1-14] and [M] for male also with an assigned number [1-6]. The ten teachers on the other hand, represented the ten different ECE centers and were coded as teacher [T1] for teacher number one and so forth until all ten (10) teachers were allocated a letter and number code. No gender descriptor was needed for teachers, as they were all female. In fact, this was not a deliberate decision but a coincidence as sampling was based on the location of a select research site that included ECE centers with a predominant female teacher population. Participants were however, subsequently coded until all thirty (30) members were allocated a number and gender code. This enabled an easy and systematic method to help identify specific and consistent contribution throughout the data analysis stage. It also helped ensure participant confidentiality as

actual names were removed to protect and respect participant discretion. As such, actual names were replaced with [Xxx].

Table 4.4 Talanoa and tālanga participant coding

TALANOA (Female)	CODE	TALANOA (Male)	CODE	TĀLANGA (Teachers)		CODE
Xxx	F1	Xxx	M1	1.	Xxx	T1
Xxx	F2	Xxx	M2	2.	Xxx	T2
Xxx	F3	Xxx	M3	3.	Xxx	T3
Xxx	F4	Xxx	M4	4.	Xxx	T4
Xxx	F5	Xxx	M5	5.	Xxx	T5
Xxx	F6	Xxx	M6	6.	Xxx	T6
Xxx	F7			7.	Xxx	T7
Xxx	F8			8.	Xxx	T8
Xxx	F9			9.	Xxx	T9
Xxx	F10			10.	Xxx	T10
Xxx	F11					
Xxx	F12					
Xxx	F13					
Xxx	F14					

Stage 6: Charting data into the framework matrix

This stage involved entering of the condensed data into the framework method matrix within a spread sheet that contained several cells which summarised the data. This is practical as some qualitative data are voluminous "*good charting requires an ability to strike a balance between reducing the data and retaining the original meanings and 'feel' of the interviewees' words on the other*" (Gale et al, 2013. p. 5). Data was inserted to the spread sheet according to codes (columns) and cases (rows). The matrix contained themes "*articulated and developed by interrogating data categories through comparison between and within cases*" (ibid, p. 5).

Stage 7: Interpreting the data

Within this time consuming stage of research, the "*characteristics of and differences between the data are identified, perhaps generating typologies, interrogating theoretical concepts (either prior concepts or ones emerging from the data) or mapping connections between categories to explore relationships and/or causality*" (Gale et al, 2013. p. 5). Since the data gathered was voluminous and rich, the generated findings went beyond description. It mirrored "*the emergence of a phenomena, predicting how an organisation or other social actor is likely to instigate or respond to a situation, or identifying areas that are not functioning well within an organisation or system*" (ibid, p. 5). The use of onsite and reflective field

notes as one of the data gathering tools was also useful at this stage as it helped "*note down impressions, ideas and early interpretations of the data*" (ibid, p. 5).

Chapter summary

Stringing together the methodological considerations embedded the study within a constructionist and indigenous paradigm to fit the purpose of acquiring ethnographic knowledge and perceptions about the phenomena of Play. It harnessed a purely qualitative approach delving deeper into a contextual and cultural meaning of the phenomena of play and learning for the early years in Tonga. The Kakala Research Framework and the tools of *talanoa* and *tālanga* were central to facilitate and strengthen the study's claims of validity and reliability and to ensure the entire research process was ethically and culturally grounded. It further adhered to the USP Human Ethics Procedure to make sure research bearings and every researcher-participant affiliation was appropriately observed. It further recognised the Pacific and Tongan ethical research requirements embedding the study within a cultural frame to ensure proper protocols were followed through. The study also utilised the Framework Method as a data analysis guide to ensure a systematic and inclusive approach was adhered to.

CHAPTER FIVE | RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Mamahi'i me'a' (Commitment)

TUI & LUVA – *Tui* is used to refer to that analysis stage of the research process…we are looking for patterns in the data, as we look for similarities, variations, and new emerging patterns in the data… *Luva* refers to the reporting and dissemination stage, signaling a process of returning the gift of knowledge to the people who had given the knowledge ~ (Johansson-Fua, 2014. pp. 53-54).

5.1 Introduction

Chapter five merges the findings and discussion phases of the study. It synthesises the results attained from the process of data collection guided by the seven (7) stages in the Framework Method approach (figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Stages in the Framework Method of Analysis[28]
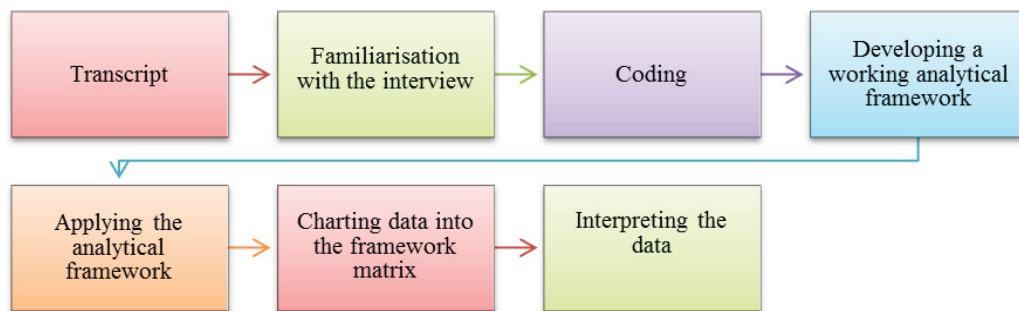
(Adapted from Gale et al, 2013)

This enabled an explicit breakdown of the lengthened *talanoa* and *tālanga* data based on the obtained participant responses to the first four guiding research questions also used to divide the four (4) main parts of the chapter:

1. How do Tongan adults conceptualise children's play?
2. To what extent is play a learning and development tool?
3. In what forms of indoor and outdoor play activities do children engage?
4. How do adults engage and support play?

The discussion weaves the multifaceted findings and merges them alongside the observation and reflective notes. It measures them against the research questions and literature review and ends with a comprehensive analysis account of the newly introduced National ECE Curriculum document currently trialed in local ECE centers since 2015. Important to note however, is the interplay of *talanoa* and *tālanga* to generate initial and sometimes a later changed response to the sequential questions and sub-questions. This occurred as participants were allowed through

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[28] See Chapter 4

talanoa and *tālanga* protocols to think deeper, reflect and add on to previous discussions increasing rigour to the acquired research data. In a nutshell, the analysed perceptions and practices paves a way for the final chapters of the study and more importantly, to answer the last research question indicating a way forward for *ako* and *va'inga* in Tonga – *What implication will the findings suggest for early learning, ECE curriculum development, ECE policy and planning, ECE teacher training and pedagogical practice, adult education, proactive stakeholder involvement?*

5.1.1 Recap on sampling

Research participants or respondents included parents and ECE teachers given their potential and capacity to generate perceptions, ideas and practices of *ako* and *va'inga* for young children. Participants were referred to in a self-developed code by the researcher enabling an easier and systematic method to identify distinct participant contributions throughout the discussions. It also aided to discretely maintain participant identity and confidentiality. This was useful when discussing the procedure of *talanoa*, *tālanga* and document analysis.

5.1.2 Analysis structure

The analysis captured similar and different responses from participants and highlighted verbatim statements that were descriptive and elaborative to help guide subsequent discussions. Selection was based on the quality and comprehensiveness of shared reactions particularly comments made beyond generalised responses. In turn, they birthed new ideas and ways of thinking of the reality of *ako* and *va'inga* in Tonga. Conversations channeled multiple emotions ranging from agreeable, eager, remorseful and annoyed feelings. The use of the [] symbols represent the discretion of actual names and sometimes proper nouns and pronouns openly referenced by participants. It also brackets participant coding at the end of direct quotes like, [**M1**]. Therefore, the symbol is not to be confused with its use to represent discretion of naming. Also, direct quotes were taken from the original Tongan transcripts but are otherwise substituted with its explicit English translation. This was necessary for clarity of reading and secondly, to ensure consistency within this chapter and the entire dissertation write up.

PART ONE: PERSPECTIVES ON PLAY

5.2 How do Tongan adults conceptualise children's play?

To obtain an authentic definition and attitude of *va'inga* from a Tongan standpoint required insight into the multiple ways it is defined as an activity of children through its many characteristics. Participant responses branched out in a series of multiple, overlapping and interconnected reactions particularly of the characteristics of *va'inga*. They are grouped clockwise in figure 5.2 according to the most to least response. They include: *va'inga* as a source of enjoyment and emotional release; natural physical activity/work of children; a form of child socialisation; free time and spontaneous activity; work/activity set out by the teacher; indication of self-actualisation, behaviour and prediction of future interests; and finally, skills development and ways of learning. While both sets of participants touched on all the apects, skills development and ways of learning was mainly shared by teachers given their core task to impart learning in learning contexts.

Figure 5.2 Adult perceptions of va'inga

In core, the views accumulate to the wider socio-cultural and pedagogical discourse of learning through play. The significance of the research question correlates to the assertion play is always context dependent, and because contexts vary, so will its definitions and conceptions (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Also, play in itself is a simple yet multifaceted word to define signaling this cultural inquiry. After all, "*no one*

definition of play can encompass all the views, perceptions, experiences and expectations that are connected with it" (Kernan, 2007. p. 5).

5.2.1 Source of enjoyment and emotional release

The most elaborated response from participants was, *va'inga* is a source of enjoyment and emotional release where children use it either to satisfy or give pleasure to their natural desires to *va'inga*. As such, children *va'inga* for the sake of *va'inga* in addition to being fun, enjoyable, spontaneous, voluntary, meaningful, symbolic, pleasurable and episodic (Fromberg, 2002; Hewes, 2006; Hirsh-Pasek et al, 2008). According to the findings, there are two levels of enjoyment. The first level comes from children's personal or collective need to satisfy and show amusement through play – "*It is the type of activity that children enjoy. My youngest child is four. When I stayed with her yesterday, she said, "Daddy, let's play." I know she just wanted something to make her laugh so that she gets happy*" [M5]. Another response was, "*Play are little activities or work that enable an exchange of feelings that lead up to a certain stage where the child reaches happiness*" [M1]. An extended part of this level of enjoyment is tied to the different forms of play children engage in. One participant said, "*Boys like playing karate* (boisterous play)" [M5]. Countless other examples focused on girls play and other gender and aged-based forms of *va'inga*. This is in line with Carvalho (2013) and Hewes (2006) advice for adults to respond to children's interpretations of diversity in their play.

One particular participant argued, "*But there are different levels of enjoyment…*" [M4]. Being able to freely show various emotions and feelings therefore became the second level of enjoyment. No further elaborations or levels were shared or established. One most shared response was, *māfana 'o e feohi'* (warmth of engagement/interaction) – "*Play at the end is happiness for children weaving feelings of warmth*" [F2]. In addition, "*there needs to be an outpouring bond of happiness and to reach that feeling in play, there needs to be enjoyment*" [F11]. Moreover, "*After that (enjoyment of play), is the need to bond with children but foremost is the enjoyment they get from play coupled with love and compassion*" [M4]. Another response was, "*It is the type of activity that children like that captures their attention, their emotions…their interests, what they like…what's in their hearts…it builds relationships amongst them*" [F6]. Play allows children to understand things about the world and people (Leaupepe, 2011). If happiness and

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enjoyment is not the outcome of *va'inga*, then it is not considered a pleasurable activity – "*There are different ways, socialising or works in which the end product is happiness. I'll say that after that work there is sadness, fighting and crying, I won't consider that as play. If enjoyment is the result, I will call that play*" [F11].[29]

5.2.2   Natural physical activity and work

Perceiving *va'inga* as a natural activity in terms of children's domestic and household work, movement and growth was the second most elaborated response especially by the majority of teachers. It pointed to every single task, activity, work and movement children make. It is supported as the broadest definition of play (Fleer, 2002). It focuses more on the physical actions of children mostly in the outdoors. The idea was shared by some participants coupled with a variety of examples. One teacher said, "*Va'inga is any work or movement of children. In their play, children show the embodiment of growth…in their thinking, their feelings, their surroundings, what they observe, who they are*" [T8]. Another teacher added:

> Mothers can recognise and track their children's movements in their play. Children explore their surroundings through play and embody their interests. They learn speaking skills through play…through sounds…and you can see their speech develop as you observe because they pronounce new words, new sounds [T7].

Physically, play also involves a great deal of bodily activity and movement such as running, climbing, chasing, and play fighting (Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). It coincides with the *Surplus Energy Theory* where children naturally play to release or eliminate excess energy or in other words, to blow off steam (Docket & Fleer, 1999; Fleer, 2009; Mitchell & Mason, 1948; Santer et al, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Unfortunately, outdoor play is decreasing as children are more engaged in digital play and commercialised indoor toys. This further indicates how a lack in outdoor play challenges health, well-being, self-esteem and confidence development (Garrick, 2004; Hewes, 2006; Santer et al, 2007; Smith, 2013). The unseen spectrum of *va'inga* particularly in free play and physical play also calls for heightened adult and communal awareness given developmental traits are unnoticeable and elusive and are therefore, underestimated to hold little to zero learning attributes.

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[29] More of this in terms of socio-cultural attitudes towards *va'inga* is discussed later on.

Physical play also implies work in terms of the household chores children are expected to perform as part of their daily contribution to societal and family living. One father said, "*Play is works children do to form play such as picking up rubbish and so forth. It is the best way children learn as they grow*" [M5]. A mother shared, "*A form of work we give children to get them engaged and to occupy their time in the sorts of activities that will develop their thinking skills, movement. They need to be more occupied and do things with purpose that helps them on a daily basis and something that is useful. Something we use to help build themselves as they grow*" [F4]. More on household chores as work and play is discussed later on. The notion is disputed in Socrates' philosophy that play is the best method of instruction and should be freely and not randomly practiced and not seen as work (Livescu, 2013). It is however in line with Montessori who encouraged children to "*actually serve meals, for example, and to clear up around the house themselves, rather than to play at mealtimes in a play house*" (Smith & Gosso, 2010. p. 23).

A contrasting view was expressed by one participant who said that although children are naturally active and that *va'inga* is a natural part of their physicality, if a child is unable to *va'inga*, they must have some sort of disability or dysfunction that inhibits physical performance – "*Play shows growth in kids…their understanding, intellect growth. A child who does not play, there is something wrong*" [F3]. Although the scope of the study refrained from the extensive coverage of disability in play[30], in terms of autism for example, play is often a challenge for some children in the risk of being excluded by peers (Wolfberg, Bottema-Beutel & DeWitt, 2012). It is important to note that adults need to understand the complexities of play and learning in regard to these special yet, marginalised children. Buchanan, & Johnson (2009) argue that play is just as necessary to the quality of daily life of young children with or without disabilities. This calls for a more open minded consciousness in terms of ensuring the availability of play for all children.

5.2.3 A form of socialisation

Va'inga is also a form of socialisation. Foremost, it enables children to interact with people or things in their immediate environments through social play. For example,

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[30] In scope, the study purposefully omitted disability in play as a means of delimiting the extensive coverage of play.

in language use and shared thinking, "*play to children, is the time they interact or socialise. When they execute body language, when they share. It is a time they are able to work alone or in groups. A time when children expand or grow thinking skills*" [T4]. Vygotsky's *Social Development Theory* supports child's socio-cultural environment is a critical aspect of cognitive development (Blake & Pope, 2008). Social play usually features as socio-dramatic play where children pretend play with peers to "*take on social roles and invent increasingly complex narrative scripts, which they enact with friends in small groups*" (Hewes, 2006. p. 3). A few participants emphasised this as *fakamuna* where *muna* means *noa* or void. In essence, to play in *muna* is where children play for no reason. The *va'inga* is seen to be of no purpose and requires no authenticity but an imitation of adult roles, family life and parenting. This mirrors pretend play where "*children's pretence may involve imitating adult behaviours rather than transforming them imaginatively*" (Fleer, 1999. p. 74). It couples the findings that the highly imaginative play encouraged in Western pre-schools may be viewed as unusual and inappropriate in some societies especially where adults are more concerned that children rehearse real-life roles in their pretend play (James, 1998; Fleer, 1999). In the *Meta-Communicative Theory*, children participate in make-believe play in which some incidents are imitations of reality and not reality itself (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). In play, children learn to simultaneously function on two levels: "(1) *make-believe purposes of objects and actions and* (2) *authenticity of life (e.g., actual identities of players and actual purpose of objects and actions*" (ibid, p. 141).

Va'inga also points to the amount of time where adults socialise with children in their *va'inga* to exchange and transmit positive feelings, to raise self-esteem, to impart cultural and moral values and to create close bonds. One mother said;

> Play is when children interactively socialise with one another or when we (adults) allocate our time with our children to socialise with them in talking (*talanoa*) or to build/expand their thinking skills. Because I believe, most of the time we give them that big black box to dwell in but to me, play is the warmth of engagement/interaction [F2].

A number of participants shared how cultural and moral values, good behaviour and expectations were imparted as part of the socialisations of *va'inga*. This is also an aspect shared in other cultures and is said to date back to hunter-gatherer societies and ancient Greeks (Gray, 2009; McLean, Haurd & Rogers, 2011). A further view is

that *va'inga* enables a mutual exchanged bond between child and parent(s). The exchange leads to the buildup of positive feelings towards oneself. One father explained, "*Play is work or activity in which there is an exchange between parent and child. For an instance, when I socialise with my son, I try to wisely select the words I use in order to gain my son's attention. And at the end of that interchange, my son feels happy or to build his self-esteem and he feels he belongs to a situation or to his home*" [M1]. The sentiment is supported in children's emotional play (Leaupepe, 2011). Through pretend and fantasy play, adults are able to help foster competence to cope with challenges and to develop positive self-esteem, which in turn influences personality growth (ibid).

It indicates children's occupation and engagement levels and whether refrained behaviours require psychological attention. According to one mother, "*It is a way children interact with each other and how they express their social life. If a child does not play, he/she must have an interaction problem. It is something that keeps them busy too*" [F3]. V*a'inga* can function as a diagnostic analysis of child behaviour. Some teachers said that children who tend to lack physical and social play behaviours are seen as a concern and require special attention or teacher-peer intervention. Of the possible reasons for this attitude, an interesting one found in a study of Kenyan children confirmed that the level of dietary intake can determine child behaviour "*Play takes energy, so the nutritional state of a child, for example, seems to be a factor in regulating his or her level of play*" (Siviy, 2010. pp. 299-300). During the *tālanga*, teachers said that understanding children's family backgrounds helped in understanding the root cause of certain behaviours and enabled the development of appropriate intervention strategies.

5.2.4 Free time & spontaneity

Va'inga was identified as free time and spontaneous leisure where children merely play for no reason whatsoever. It points to play as enjoyment, a natural reaction as part of childhood and children's free time to engage in activities of their choice, interest and *fakamuna*. One teacher highlighted this as something children do when they are not doing anything else such as chores around the house so forth – "*It is children's free time and they will va'inga and run around and so forth because they have nothing else to do or any task to perform but to va'inga*" [T5]. A mother also

shared, "*The idea and concept of play is spontaneous. It's just free because you can just see a child play in his own way*" [F2]. This is in line with Sheridan et al (2010) "*the type and duration of the play in which they engage is entirely determined by them and activities can be taken up and stopped at will. To the child, playing is an end in itself and to an observer there may not seem to be any obvious goal or conclusion*" (p. 4). Surprisingly, *va'inga* is also seen as a relaxation or recreation time for parents to engage in other activities besides attending to their children. In other words, free play gives them the space and liberty to digress from child-minding and to occupy themselves with other matters while their children engage in *va'inga*. The respondents who suggested this also added the practice is like a form of babysitting – she termed it *"Ko ha me'a fakato'otama"* [F8]. The literature does not include this aspect as a definition of *va'inga* but it is one of the underlying factors and adult behaviours that hinders or limits the ability or willingness of parents to engage in child *va'inga*.

5.2.5 Work/activity set out by the teacher

The idea of guided or structured play is common where *va'inga* is seen as work or activity set out by teachers in ECE centers and sometimes parents at home. As such, similar ideas emerged from the data dividing *va'inga* as 'work' into purposeful or purposeless play. Purposeful play mostly pertained to the *va'inga* activities adults supposed held educational value such as games and activities that involve reading, spelling, colour identification and counting. One teacher explained, "*Play are activities or work set out by the teacher coupled with resources to enable the child to use them in order to play so that the purpose of that lesson is achieved or the lesson planned out by the teacher is achieved*" [T4]. Another teacher shared the various guided play activities children engage in at school:

> Play is the work and movement of children…the activities teachers design and create for them in the classroom….in what they observe, in their jumping around eh? Play consists of activities for amusement like playing games eh? Like toys, play is the interaction of children with toys and like sand play…in the interactions children have with sand, in learning to building and create things from sand…that is the outcome of their play [T2].

However, to successfully plan guided and structured play activities, teachers need to entirely understand the meaning of child *va'inga* and its role in development. Teachers must also learn to equally value free play and guided play. After all, guided

play is a nexus between free play and formal instruction (Golbeck, 2001; Lilliard et al, 2013; Weisberg et al, 2013a). Only a few teachers shared this sentiment.

> Play is the freedom of action and movement of children while the teacher facilitates and adds enjoyment and encourages innovation to their play. I highly support free play…because in children's play, there is indoor play and outdoor play because play is the freedom of action and children need to be given that freedom. Second to that are the play activities guided by the teacher [T9].

Purposeless play on the other hand, carries no learning value or development significance and is merely seen as boisterous or meaningless and is often referred to as, *vainga maumau taimi – noa'ia* (like nothing or aimless/purposeless). One teacher said, "*Play is not boisterous or running around. Play is work that teachers set out and plan with added resources for the child to use so that he is able to achieve the lesson purpose or outcomes*" [T4]. According to Rao & Li (2009), the same attitude is evident in China "*teachers allocated comparatively little time for indoor free play and paid seldom attention to children when they were engaged in free play*" (p. 101). This confirms the sort of detrimental adult attitude and behaviour that hinders children's ability to *va'inga* inhibiting and disrupting learning development. Attitudes such as these is why the study hopes to advocate and push *va'inga* into a recognised position and to raise awareness of the significance and importance of all the different forms of play contributive to children's development regardless of the many drawbacks. Adults must be able to negotiate noise level and distraction if they are genuinely concerned with children's development. Measures should be in place to minimise certain distractions but to the extent where children's *va'inga* is not restricted or inhibited. Morton & Lee (1996) provide a snippet of the attitude of adults to play, or in this case, an outsider perspective which nonetheless, confirmed similar reactions from participants "*They were a loud, sometimes irritating presence, but they were an even-cheerful bunch*" (p. 1)[31].

5.2.6 Indication of self-actualisation, behaviour and future interests

Va'inga also helps identify and determine children's individual and unique behaviours, particularly the manner in which they intentionally and unintentionally express themselves. One teacher said, "*Play is how children express their opinions, what's on their minds*" [T1]. Play is hailed to support and stimulate self-regulation and self-realisation (Berk & Meyers, 2013; Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong, 2013;

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[31] More of these challenges and the debate on guided and free play are discussed later on.

Hendricks, 2015). One mother said, "*You can tell the nature of a child when they play…whether they are calm or boisterous like [] (her son) (laughs)*" [F7]. In children's definition of play, Hewes (2006) affirms, "*children have their own definitions of play and their own deeply serious and purposeful goals…children define play based on the absence of adults and the presence of peers or friends*" (p. 2). Albeit the good and positive behaviours reflective of moral Tongan values expected in the *'ulungaanga faka-Tonga* (Tongan way), some childish behaviours are negative, obstructive and harmful. Otherwise, some behaviours indicate children's ability to master certain critical skills which are nonetheless, necessary to determine specific interests. One father explained, "*That is how children express or reveal their real being…who he is really inside…someone can just sit down and the rest of the kids will play well and someone will be cheating…*" [M2]. He continued, "*someone will play rough…a soft kid will never make someone cry…you can tell the reality of the real self if you play with someone that's how you can identify someone…their interest*" [M2].

The same parent also supposed that a child who purposefully cheats and becomes abusive to others should be a target for adult intervention to resolve any alarming and concerning behaviours before they become irrepressible. This is most useful in the classroom where children's learning styles are identified through *va'inga* interests to aid pre-primary literacy and numeracy level grouping. According to one teacher, "*va'inga is the embodiment of a child's learning style*" [T1]. Another study found significant relationships between "*children's field independent or field-dependent thinking styles and play preferences; play preferences and academic performance; thinking styles and academic performance; and thinking styles and cultural setting*" (Holmes, Liden & Shin, 2013. p. 219). That study confirmed children who prefer "*unstructured play activities tended to achieve academic success; and that cultural values were correlated to thinking style*" (ibid, p. 219).

Some parents are able to identify and predict children's current interests through *va'inga* also how these interests form an exemplar of the intelligences and skills mastered and pursued for future professions, occupations, specialties and hobbies. Hendricks (2011) called this the "*pathway that offers distinctive opportunities for experiencing life and for discovering self-locations*" (p. 225). In reflection, some of

the sharing centered on how *va'inga* interests interplayed in their personal lives, their siblings or of their older children. A range of examples were shared as the *talanoa* and *tālanga* developed and a few are selected here. One father shared, "*My younger brother is an engineer now. Back then when we were younger, if there were any broken things, he would take it apart and try to fix it. If there was a toy, he'll sit there and try to put it together. He has grown up with that passion…take apart an automobile*" [M5]. The brother is currently an engineer. A mother shared:

> I recall my two older children. One likes rugby and anything that involves rugby. The other doesn't like it, he likes indoor and pretend play. When we go to the shop, he begs to buy him toys even my biology textbooks. He would turn the pages and look. Even my laptop he will ask to watch things on it. He will sit there, '*Ooh, look at the dinosaur*!' The other one, no, he likes playing outside. But it's good to know eh? [F13].

5.2.7 Skills development and ways of learning

Although *va'inga* as a learning and development tool was the least initial response from parents, a probing sub-question ignited a natural reaction and a chain reaction where teachers identified the extensive and various ways different forms of *va'inga* are in fact, a learning supplement. This view and attitude became one of the major indications of the level of parental awareness and consciousness let alone their flexible and willing attitude to embrace *va'inga* for its learning attributes and effortless adult support. Teachers on the other hand, were more enthusiastic of the play-learning aspect of *va'inga.* However, their foremost reliance and value of structured and guided play over free and spontaneous play proved problematic for the study purpose. It verified Tonga's position in the heated debate between guided and free play which for decades has plagued the universal discourse of play and play pedagogy (Chein et al, 2010; Fisher et al, 2013; Weisberg et al, 2013a; Wood, 2009). As previously mentioned, teachers either tend to neglect or do not fully understand the developmental benefits and learning attributes tied to free play[32].

The new Tonga National Early Childhood Curriculum (2015) highlights that learning occurs through children's active vigorousness to *va'inga* harnessing holistic growth through physical, social, emotional and intellectual developments through the variety of *va'inga* activities and opportunities offered in each center. On participant shared that *va'inga* is a way children acquire and develop new skills that are transferable. It

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[32] In chapter three figure 3.1c, Santer et al (2007) provided a series of the different kinds of learning in free play activities.

is a way of learning the world and things around them and it is their life and childhood purpose – "*Play is a way of acquiring another skill that is learning. It is the method of passing one skill from one person to another*" [M3]. One teacher said, "*Play for children is their life…like their lifeblood*" [T4]. A mother shared another view, "*Children learn about the real world through play. It is hard to expect children to follow certain rules but through play there is a possibility to learn*" [F11]. This relates to Elkind (2008) who says that through play, "*children create new learning experiences, and these self-created experiences enable them to acquire social, emotional, and intellectual skills they could not acquire in any other way*" (p. 1).

In terms of enhanced development and learning, participants advised that children often excel in activities they enjoy or take an interest in. Therefore, maximum provisions of an assortment of *va'inga* activities must be made available to facilitate and encourage diverse interests – "*A child may not learn anything from sand play because some children may not like that sort of play, maybe they will enjoy water play better* [T10]. Some parents associate and value learning with the basic skills of literacy and numeracy particularly, reading and counting through the interaction of things in children's immediate and extended environments[33]. Teachers on the other hand, felt that *va'inga* is where children learn on their own while the teacher operates as a facilitator to enable a free flow of learning.

> Play is like a bridge to learning where a child learns in his own time. The only adult task is to facilitate. If children don't play, they won't know or learn anything. If they are not happy, it's meaningless. Play is working to learn but us teachers; we need to be strategic and have many ways to stimulate children so that at the end of the play activity, there is outcome, meaning children learn something or something new [T3].

A number of teachers agrued that through *va'inga*, children express vigour in shaping their entire being. Their view is that it was therefore, necessary that ECE teachers refrain from prohibiting or obstructing *va'inga* to avoid damaging children's inner ability and desire to learn and furthermore, develop vital skills. This coincides with physical play and free play although as mentioned earlier, some teachers are yet to comprehend this significance.

> Play is the expression of *tō'onga longo mo'ui* (vigour), where children become active to mold their holistic being. And as teachers, we need to understand that children will not learn until they learn through play! And we need to design and plan play activities that are stimulating, active and fun because if we fail to do so, they won't want to play and thus, they won't learn [T3].

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[33] Examples are discussed in detail in later sections.

Another teacher in her advocacy made sure her fellow teachers were on board with the 'learning through play' notion. She said:

> And some outcomes of their play are unseen. I always tell other teachers, '*Don't ever think there is no outcome in any form of play children engage in….even if doesn't show, because sometimes it's not that child's interest. But that child learns indirectly, whether it's physical, emotional or intellectual…there is always some form of development in that play*.' It now dawns on me that play is the way children develop holistically. Whether it's jumping, sometimes we say, "Stop jumping!" not knowing, that is how the child learns to stretch his muscles…helping his body grow [T8].

This further confirms the predominant Tongan style of concrete thinking, where the elusive facets of play are unseen and therefore, not valued as a worthwhile contribution to child learning and development. It is ultimately, a testimony to the study's epistemological stance. Māhina (2008) verifies this as, "*the act-of-relating, in this context, the 'ata, images, which are themselves self-manifesting in the direction of, and freely presented to, the knower as genuine knowledge*" (p. 81). Of those born, nurtured and reared in Tonga, Wood-Ellem (2007) assumed the traditional Tongan way of thinking is mostly circular or spiral equivalent to linear and logical thinking embedded in scientific methods that underpin Western education systems.

In summary, *va'inga* is predominantly a physical and social activity children engage in to experience enjoyment and social interaction. It is the embodiment of *fakamuna*, where children play in *muna* (void) not so much as fantasy play, but to imitate adult roles and family/parental life as in make-believe play. It also highlights various behaviours and interests to determine current learning styles and future career paths and is surprisingly regarded as child-minding. In terms of being purposeful and valuable for learning and development, *va'inga* is mainly adult-led in the form of guided or structured play. Unfortunately, free play prevails as an undermined activity of *maumau taimi,* boisterous and purposeless play. *Va'inga* needs to be recognised and pushed into a privileged position in terms of the equivalent if not, wide range of learning and development traits it correspondingly offers.

5.3   Behaviour towards play: Is va'inga a waste of time?

It was important to find out more of the adult behaviour and attitude towards *va'inga* to understand how exactly it is valued as a natural activity of children. This helped forge a socio-cultural scenario of the Tongan opinion, ideas and attitudes of *va'inga* to determine the state of play and the direction of it as a learning element for young children in Tonga. This was possible when discussing with participants the concept

of *va'inga* as a waste of time (*maumau taimi*). At this stage, participant reactions spiraled into a chain of changed responses – a result of the nature, flexibility and openness of *talanoa* and *tālanga*. From their initial, yet simple responses, participant thinking, reflection and sharing transformed to deeper insights of their views and attitudes towards *va'inga*. This line of inquiry further explored the claims of an earlier study that Tongan and Samoan parents often view *va'inga* as a waste of time (Leaupepe, 2010). Participant responses varied between supporting and contradicting the claim with the exceptions of a few restrictions reflective of the socio-cultural barriers that often hinder children from expressing *va'inga* in its entirety. More of these challenges are discussed in a later section: *What are the challenges to play?*

On the issue of play as waste of time, a father shared: "[it] *depends on our adult perceptions and attitudes of it which are usually meaningless excuses* (laughs)" [M1]. Another father also argued the notion reflects adult idleness, "*Play is only a waste of time if we (parents) are lazy or disapprove of child play…but if it's something that they enjoy, then no, it's not a waste of time*" [M2]. Hence, a lack of adult knowledge and awareness were leading factors in this assumption. In the case of Hawaii, Holmes (2011) affirmed that adults acknowledged the importance of child play and development particularly the benefits connected to culture such as the forms of play that foster social skills such as cooperation, sharing, and group play. On the other hand, "*they strongly discouraged types of play that might harm or injure children*" (p. 356). One common mind-set in the study was the assertive emphasis on the value of domestic household chores and formalised learning over *va'inga*. A number of participants considered *va'inga* as obstructive to familial, communal and cultural structures in terms of noise level, boisterousness, potential damage to household items, safety precautions, extravagant spending and in particular, an agitated violation of the Sabbath law. The following are elaborated examples of some of the restrictions adults have towards play. Many participants agreed it is normal for children to *va'inga* at all times yet they must be taught boundaries and restrictions which is almost always dependent on certain contexts. Some viewed *va'inga* as disruptive to certain environments other than the home environment where children are excessively free to *va'inga*. One parent said that certain levels and forms of *va'inga* should be controlled:

I don't think it's a waste of time but there are times it should be restricted especially when children are in different environments that are usually not their home environment…where they are free. That environment is a different environment, with different expectations so children should know what is appropriate to do. They often go into that environment with the freedom they have at home so it is then that playing becomes a problem. They are often restricted to play as they more likely will break plates and the sort [F6].

A similar account is shared by another mother. She said, "*Children are usually stopped from playing if they disturb familial functions at home. Another thing is during prayer time. My uncles and aunties sometime come over so the children are asked to play outside. They should not be stopped due to any inconvenient adult reasons such as taking a nap, reading a book, watching a movie*" [F10]. Other reasons for restricting *va'inga* was for children to engage in what they call 'serious' activities such as homework, when visitors are over or when family prayer meetings. In some cases, if people are over or if parents are annoyed, children are removed to play in another room, a bedroom or to the outdoors. One father mentioned, "*They are not completely restricted but removed elsewhere such as the room. Like when people are over to my house they will climb on me…for this, they are told to go outside and play*" [M5]. Children are also expected to avoid so-called purposeless *va'inga* although a few parents often allowed some forms of non-boisterous play like solitary play and certain types of social play.

One mother said while *va'inga* is something good, better even, it should not be overexerted because children should not only just *va'inga*, there are other things they must do or engage in [F6]. One most common reason is for children to help out with domestic household chores. One mother said, "*It is only a waste of time if play becomes too excessive in that children play all day without contributing to any daily chores like picking up rubbish*" [F8]. Another mother added, "*Play is like something better. It is good but when carried too far, it becomes a problem. There is a time for parental counseling, family time, there is time to visit people…things like that eh*" [F6]. One mother tied the restriction to a deeper sense of cultural sensitivity, "*It is part of our culture to stop children from playing to perform chores, to help older people and to reduce noise level due to the close and constricted form of Tongan living…but that doesn't mean play is a waste of time because play is when children enjoy themselves and do things children like to do…*" [F1]. Some participants argued children otherwise perform chores while they *va'inga*. One mother recalled;

> What children see and observe always has an influence on their play. I remember our father ensured work emanated through play…that is how we did chores. He would say, '*Run, and let's see who can collect the most toume* (coconut sheaths)'…and so we ran. The reward was who gets to lie closest to him during evening *fananga* (story telling) and '*olunga he kaliloa*'[34] [F6].

According to Carvalho (2013), this behaviour is almost similar to the rural societies, in low-income families and in isolated communities such as African-Brazilian 'quilombos' and South-American Indian groups where "*children (particularly girls) are often required to help adults in varied chores, which leaves less free time to play – although they often insert play activities into their tasks*" (p. 3). At the same time, parents especially, cautioned some forms of *va'inga* as the cause for damaging household items particularly when children are expected to perform certain chores. One father shared:

> There are some forms of play that cause damage. My eldest daughter is required to be able to wash our dishes, do things around the house. And if someone goes over to play with her, dishes will fall and shatter so I stop them. Therefore, there are certain works (household chores) that cannot be done through play and some works that where we need to restrict play in case things might break [M5].

Safety was another common reason children's *va'inga* is sometimes restricted. Since most homes are not child-safe, Tongan children every so often tend to play with sharp or unsafe objects found around the home environment. Even though it may be used to demonstrate or mimic something they watched in a movie, it is possible to cause self-harm or inflict harm on others and therefore are restricted. Carvalho (2013) said the fear of occurring accidents is a major reason parents limit or impede some *va'inga* activities. One father shared, "*Sometimes we stop them from playing for safety reasons. They often like to play with sticks, to demonstrate something as in cartoons. And sometimes they climb on chairs and pretend to conduct a choir and although it is fun, we need to be mindful in case the chair turns and the fall*" [M1]. A mother also shared, "*There are some instances where my children are unusually boisterous. One child would imitate a sword fight from the movies* (makes sword swish noise). *All of a sudden, one child shows up with an actual blade and makes swish noises with it* (demonstrates and laughs). *Children actually think it is a good thing*" [F6]. Another mother shared a similar view:

> Some play activities are destructive. Like [] and []…their play involves kicking and my daughter cries because my son jumps on her back…that's why I sometimes spank him.

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[34] Resting one's head on the *kaliloa*, usually the arms of a parent or grandparent. It is mainly used as a place and space for *fananga* (oral story telling) and imparting of moral and cultural values.

> And the [] at home stops them (children) from playing outside because they pull out her taro [] and *pele* leaves so [] does not like them playing outside. It's that kind of ignorance that should be stopped [F7].

Nonetheless, some parents felt that children's curiosity often led them to a persistent yearning for these restricted items and constrained places. One mother remarked, "*They (children) are really inquisitive. I see that in their play, when they know they have been restricted from something, they insist on playing with that thing. They are often work tools and broken things…*" [F6]. One teacher said from a parent's view, *va'inga* is often seen as a waste of money rather than a waste of time. Parents need to stay abreast with the fact toys are a worthwhile investment in children's learning and is thus, a productive purchase for enjoyment. She said:

> Sometimes parents think play is a waste of time in terms of expenses that they will have to buy toys and that children are better off doing tasks they think are worthwhile like household chores. They do not understand play is not only about toys and domestic chores, it's about enabling children to just freely play with whatever they have available and in how ever manner they prefer also on their own time [T9].

To keep the Sabbath day holy in the predominant Christian and Biblical Tongan manner, meant to refrain from any forms of entertainment, sporting activity, business and trade, school and basically the ordinary everyday life activity. No literature of this emphasis could be traced assuming this an important socio-cultural contribution towards the wider discourse of play. One mother shared an example of her children's boisterous *va'inga* during Sunday church services.

> It is children's nature to play. I notice in my children, they behave differently when we go out to meet people. When we go to church, we must stay outside (of the church building) because my children cannot…and I see that is my weakness as a parent. Other children sit still during church. My children (pause and sighs)…they do not understand the concept of sitting still during church (laughs). Maybe in cases like that, play seems a little inappropriate maybe. However, they are very young but compared to other Tongan children… My [] year old, my [] year old and my [] year old are all uncontrollable like my two [] year olds [F6].

Contrarily, a few participants conversely disagreed with the notion and argued play an important and inevitable part of childhood. It shows normality in children and reassures they are functioning at normal capacity. One mother's opinion of it was, "*No…play is good…it is one of the most important parts of our childhood. If a child never plays…they grow up and it seems like they feel lost or lonely…they are not normal. But if a child does not want to play or do anything at all, there must be a problem….there is something wrong somewhere*" [F3]. Some teachers also expressed their disagreement saying *va'inga* is an inevitable part of childhood and natural

activity children must engage in as part of human development. However, a few agreed *va'inga* otherwise needs to be purposeful and if children fail to achieve the aims of the particular activities adults set out, then *va'inga* is purposeless as empahsised in Hendricks (2009). One teacher's expression was:

> No, I don't think it is a waste of time… you can only call it a '*waste of time*' if children are aimlessly playing and if not…then play is okay. If there is no purpose to children's play, then it should be stopped and told to do something more constructive. But the truth is, we just say it, but we can't stop it. I think this assumption is an overstatement [T5].

In contrast to the study by Leaupepe (2010) and the study's assumptions, some adult views particularly of parents, equally dispute *va'inga* as *maumau taimi*. This surfaced when participants were given the opportunity and sufficient time to elaborate and *talanoa* of the reasons behind their beliefs and attitudes. As such, *va'inga* only seems *maumau taimi* depending on how it affects familial and social living in terms of some of the boisterous and loud noise it often generates as well as the unfinished domestic tasks children neglect when they are preoccupied or immersed in *va'inga*. Therefore, the Tongan attitude and behaviour of *va'inga* primarily point towards socio-cultural factors that either impede or support it for its natural role to stimulate pleasure and enjoyment and its impacts on communal structures. However, the substantial critique of *va'inga* being disruptive and obstructive to core communal and societal living retains its position as an insignificant and purposeless activity. It also perpetuates the notion of play as trivia within early pedagogy and learning and cautions the dire consequences of play deprivation, "*particularly during the period between birth and seven years, has been linked to impaired brain development, lack of social skills, depression and aggression*" (Hughes, 2003 cited in Kernan, 2007. p. 60).

PART TWO: PLAY PEDAGOGY

5.4 To what extent is play a learning and development tool?

This question was divided into three follow-up questions discussing with participants their conceptions of learning and development and its link to *va'inga* and the role of *va'inga* in child learning and development. It was also necessary to bring about a conceptual understanding of the key concepts to stimulate independent adult thinking and dialogue. In other words, having these follow up or sub-questions allowed participants to add on to previous responses because they are given the time,

openness, flexibility and opportunity to do so through *talanoa* and *tālanga* protocols. It overall adds to the richness and rigour of the research data.

5.4.1   What is learning?

Learning mostly translated to the word *ako* although some participants added *ako* also means 'school', 'education' and 'practice' (in both verb and noun forms). A few attribute this to the limited nature of Tongan vocabulary. One father stated, "*Our word ako means learning different things…maybe we have limited Tongan vocabulary to define and differentiate it…but learning is ako, learning something new…new skills, new experiences*" [M5]. According to Thaman (2003), "*To study is ako, a term that is also used for education, which I define as an introduction to worthwhile learning*" (p. 2). For a majority of the participants, *ako* is also seen as a process of learning, a new skill, experience, knowledge, acquisition of something new. One father said, "*Learning is when we adopt a new kind of way of living like speaking skills. A way of life that is added to your current state…adopt or nurture. It's not something that you had before, but something added*" [M4]. In the theory of *ako* as education, Māhina (2008) argued it is both intellectual and critical involving dialectical transformations of reasoning from *vale* to *'ilo* to *poto*, "*a circular movement of the human mind from ignorance to knowledge to skill*" (p. 84).

The majority of teachers added learning is a way of doing things (*fai/fakahoko/ngāue*). One teacher in particular said, "*Ako is something a child does in order to know what is being taught to him at home or at school…if he doesn't do anything to support the knowledge imparted to him, it cannot be called ako*" [T6]. This is in line with Johansson-Fua (2004) who clarifies that *ako* is "*all kinds of learning throughout one's life as such reflecting a life-long approach to learning*" (p. 1). Another teacher added the different types of learning and learners – auditory, visual and kinesthetic and the need for teachers to take that into account when making decisions or assessments on children's development and progress. One mother shared, "*There are different kinds of learning and there are different kinds of learners. Some children learn through observation, some are auditory learners and some need to touch and feel and join in to learn*" [F11]. Similarly, Gilakjani (2011) affirms, "*teachers need to teach as many of these preferences as possible. Teachers can incorporate these learning styles in their curriculum activities so that students are able to succeed in their classes*" (p. 104).

5.4.2   What is development?

A majority of participants said development translates to *fakalakalaka* – the transition from one stage to another or the improvement and growth of something. Again, it was seen as a word with very limited alternatives. One father's definition was, "*It is a series of progressions from one stage to another. We have limited Tongan vocabularies but there should be a focus for it. We also have a Development Bank*[35] *meaning going up or improving…which is different from growth…growth of plants, growth of the human body*" [M5]. Chazan (2002) suggests that play is equivalent to growth development and is synonymous with life as playfulness equates to creativity, action, change and transformation. In terms of curriculum terminology, the Tonga National ECE Curriculum (2015) translates development as *tupulaki*, a term used interchangeably with *fakatupulaki* or *fakatupulekina*.

5.4.3   What is the role of play in learning and development?

Most participants, particularly parents, were able to connect and correlate the ties between play, learning and development. One mutual view is that learning through play (*ako fou he va'inga'*) begins when babies start noticing things in their surroundings. As they grow, children's play become more complex because they are able to do and achieve more things and at the same time, *va'inga* in so many other different ways (Scarlett, 2005). One mother shared:

> *Ako* means knowing more of or more knowledge. For example, when children play, they will only understand minor things. But as they grow, they are able to play with things appropriate for their age. They start to notice and touch things because before they were introduced to play, they usually just sat there, lie there and look/observe. So when they start touching things, they start adding new knowledge and that knowledge keeps on building up. But children play according to age. They start by playing with soft toys because they are not yet able to play with solid objects [F10].

Likewise, the word development transposed to *tupulaki, tupulekina* or *fakatupulekina* as proposed by many teachers and the Tonga National ECE Curriculum (2015). It shifted to the improvement and growth of learning. As the *talanoa* developed, one father in particular, changed his opinion from *fakalakalaka* to *tupulaki 'o e 'ilo* (growth of learning). He said, "*It is the improvement of learning, the acquisition of knowledge. It is a series of progressions from one stage to another – moving from a certain stage to another or going upwards. To develop is the expansion of something*

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[35] Used to emphasise 'development' – by means of improving, increasing, progressing instead of growing in an upward direction.

– *mentally, physically, emotionally*" [M5]. The changed opinion emerged when discussions shifted to the focus on the role of play in learning. Development was no longer treated as a general term but specific to its position in play and learning. From participant responses, figure 5.3 comprise a collection of the various development traits evident in *va'inga*. These multiple yet all-encompassed traits mirror holistic development and growth (Broadhead, 2006; Ginsburg, 2007; Hewes, 2006).

Figure 5.3 Learning developments of va'inga

Intrapersonal, solitary and all inclusive development	Interpersonal and social development	Cognitive, intellectual and speech development
Physical, bodily and well-being development	Emotional and empathetic development	Character and behaviour development
Spiritual and Biblical development	Creative, performance and artistic development	Cultural knowledge and practice development

It is important to note, the learning attributes of *va'inga* interrelate and overlap within the different and diverse forms of *va'inga*. In other words, similar learning attributes may be found in multiple forms of *va'inga*. As most teachers and a few parents mentioned, these development traits involve children's *intrapersonal, interpersonal, cognitive, physical, emotional, character, creative, spiritual* and *cultural knowledge* progressions[36]. It also aids to avoid repetition. The section follows a selection of *va'inga* scenarios in the home and school environments.

i.   Intrapersonal, solitary and all-inclusive development
Personal, self and skillful play
Teachers especially, raised the importance of *va'inga* in developing the individual and whole child or *tupulaki fakafo'ituitui, fakatoukatea'* – mind, body and soul. While they talked of cognitive (mind), physical (body) and soul (emotional and spiritual) development in their separate forms, *va'inga* foremost, makes an impact on the child-self. The idea couples *tupulaki fakatoukatea'* or all-inclusive development (holistic development) where *va'inga* enables the whole child to achieve what is called, *tā ki liku, tā ki fanga'* [F6, M5, M6], culminating skills in every aspect of life

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[36] Note the discussion part of this section is further detailed in the next chapter due to its contribution to new knowledge and the formation of a new taxonomy and model of early learning play and development for Tonga.

to ensure the child is well prepared beyond the classroom. In retrospect, it is the ability to know and be able to do things of *falehanga* (domestic household roles), *tōkanga* (farming) and *ngātai* (fishing) – the necessary skills reflective of a successful communal Tongan life. One teacher supported, "*Play develops the whole child – his mind, body and soul…what he thinks, how he grows and how he feels. Behind that is how he relates to others, to his family, his society, his culture and country*" [T5]. The *Preparation Theory, Instinct/practice Theory* or *Biological Theor*y (Cohen, 2007) supports that play is an instinctive way in which children prepare themselves for adult life (Docket & Fleer, 1999; Piaget, 1962; Santer et al, 2007). As children engage in a lot of solitary, pretend and skillful play, they are also preparing themselves for the various social and cultural obligations expected of them while they are children and as they mature.

A teacher added, "*When children are still babies, they play by themselves in their touch and feel of the things in their surroundings. They recognise and imitate what they see and hear*" [T6] (Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong, 2011; Gray, 2011a; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). She continued, "*That is the first form of learning. When they grow older, they use play to do works at home, but to some children it is not work, it is play*" [T6]. A father shared, "*That's how we know a child is prepared to do multiple things in a society like tasks of falehanga and tōkanga. When children work and play, they are being prepared to help the family and their own families. If a child cannot do all these things, then what is the purpose of his life? And what is the purpose of his play?*" [M6].

One teacher shared an example of a child's' fantasy and pretend play and how it develops imagination and creative thinking skills (Kernan, 2007). She said, "*One child used a box and pretended it was a ship. I think he has been on one to 'Eua before. He would say, 'Look teacher, this is the MV 'Onemato, I'm boarding now…I will bring some oranges.' He learns happiness, sharing…while teachers identify what children like to play with, what their interests are*" [T7]. Another teacher said some parents are supportive of this form of play and it shows in their children who in turn have an impact on other children at the center. She said:

> Some children are really supported at home and they bring those experiences to school and share with others. Their parents take them to places that stimulate thinking, observations and diversify their play experiences. They share this with

others who also experience these places. When children share these things, it develops the imagination of some other children too. It helps take the imagination to places it has never been to before [T9].

In summary, *intrapersonal, solitary and all-inclusive development* is therefore, harnessed through a child's ability to use a range of play forms to build and nourish the child-self. First and foremost, to satisfy individual and personal desires to play and secondly, to rehearse and continuously reenact his/her household and domestic chores. Adults who understand this basic need will in turn, help children reach these goals so they become well versed and familiar with such activities in preparation for future communal obligations. It also makes chores fun and enjoyable – a strategy highly useful for teachers in the classroom.

ii.   Interpersonal and social development
Relationship, social and confidence play

In social development or *tupulaki faka-sōsiale', fakafeohi' mo e feveitokai'aki'*, most parents shared their views of social play in the form of dramatic play (solitary pretense) and socio-dramatic (pretense with peers) (Hewes, 2006). This also includes fantasy, pretend, symbolic, make-believe/imaginary, role-play and solitary play (ibid). In addition, some forms of object/constructive play, games with rules play, rough and tumble play, exploratory/sensory play and manipulative play were also seen to contribute in enhancing social development in children. Through these forms of play, children learn a variety of skills. Predominant in the findings are the skills of pretense (*fakamuna*) (Fiorelli & Russ, 2011; Gargano, 2010; Gopnik & Walker, 2013; Hart & Tannock, 2013; Rosen, 2012; Russ & Wallace, 2013; West, 2010). Children also begin to master socialisation, interpersonal (*fakafeohi*), relationship (*vā*) and competence (*taukei*) skills (Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong, 2011; Cohen, 2011; Gray, 2011a; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013. Repetitive social *va'inga* is a common form of social *va'inga* interaction children like to engage in in order to master confidence and competency. An explicit example was shared by one mother:

> If a child continuously or repeatedly does something, they master and learn it. [] (child) went to impress her father's family; they had dancing rehearsal for a family reunion. So, at home on Saturday, she came in, stood there with her legs together, knees bent to a *taulalo*, and her hands cupped together. This is what she observed. This morning, she did the same thing and she said, '*[] can we practise tau'olunga? (dancing)*.' It is something that she is interested in. But they are happy [] eh? And they are eager and they want to do it again and again. That's their level of achievement [F2].

A teacher also shared:

In talking about children's play to build confidence, it is very important. In their repetitive play, they are able to practise skills through continuously doing the same thing to reach the desired outcome. We can observe children playing at home and there are different forms of play. There are children who prefer to play on their own, solitary play and they are comfortable in their own space using their own language. Some children prefer social play and to play with others…play together without talking sometimes. Some children are really cooperative and there is a sense of *fetāfeaki* (mutual bonding). Another unusual form of play is when a child attempts to come in and join in others' play. At first, he just stands there but at the same time, he has observed everything from the language used and how that particular play activity is done until he is able to join in. when children continuously to do something, they gain confidence in it. Their concentration span is very short [T4].

Young babies from as early as birth to two years show indications of things they recognise in their surroundings when they *va'inga* on their own or with others such as adults or older children (Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). A mother shared an incident with her niece, "*Yesterday, my brother's seven month baby learned how to clap. The baby just usually lies there and claps or the children would make her clap. They are now teaching her to wave her hands*" [F11]. During this young stage of familiarity and recognition, it is important that children get to know you as a parent. It is therefore, vital parents engage in social *va'inga* to create an acquaintance of trust and bonding. This relationship by some participants is said to enable learning recognition. One father shared, "*I noticed it is different when my grandson plays with me and my children. He knows them better because with me, it's mainly, 'Pē*' (Peek-a-boo). *If you don't play with them, they won't get to know you and it creates a distance. Kids learn to know you through play*" [M4].

As babies get older, their recognition expands and they are able to make more observational connections in the way they socialise with their surroundings (Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Gray, 2011a; Fein, 1981; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). A mother talked of how her children made connections between pictures and sounds in a household picture book, "*My kids had a little animal picture book and one of the things they first learned was the sounds animals make even though they could not pronounce whether it was a horse, a cow, a goat but when you say, 'Make a cow sound'…they would make it or I made the sound and they would point to the picture*" [F11]. Social interaction on the other hand, has become a norm in children's *va'inga* that some participants feel solitary play is an atypical practice. It is also however, believed to be the reason some Tongan children lack independent thought. One mother described, "*It's not in the Tongan nature to individualise. Children already grow up in an extended form of living (nofo 'a kāinga) with*

collective households and are familiar with socialised livelihoods" [F6]. She continued, "*The new trend to individualise and the move to an environment of personalisation is like culture shock. Like children that are brought over from abroad, they are used to individualism and therefore, are very independent*" [F6]. On the other hand, because socialised behaviour is perceived more innovative than solitary behaviour, children who show a lack in social skills are considered incompetent and unimaginative. Of this view, one mother shared:

> There are ten grandchildren in our home and nine of them socialise while one is isolated. When there are family meetings, she only comes like, once and if she is asked to do something, she just stands there and doesn't know what to do. The other children get straight to it and construct…see that's creative eh? The little girl waits, '*Mommy, what do I do with this?*' She cannot learn on her own so she is not creative [F13].

In social development, participants disclosed pretend play or *fakamuna* a major *va'inga* activity children engage in. A father shared that his children learned *fetokoni'aki* (cooperation) from prior experiences, observations of trips to the beach and watching television on water safety, "*An example of their play is like a pretend scenario. My daughter would say something like, 'Oh, let's go to the beach! Come! Come! You might drown! There's a shark! It's a big fish!' And my son will use a cushion and pretends to rescue her* (laughs)" [M1]. Pretend play is a way children imitate things they observe in their natural surroundings. One mother shared:

> We recently bought a mixing bowl for the conference preparations and [] would observe how cake is mixed. One day, we couldn't find the bowl, we asked around. It was taken to the backyard *sima* (water tank) where she put soil and water in it and stirred with a stick to make a cake. We looked for the bowl and her father later found it beside the *sima*…the dirt had dried up (laughs). She did this from mere observation. Play is pretense…that's using their (children) imagination from observing [F2].

Also in pretend play, children learn relational skills and good behaviour[37]. One mother said, "*When we get up in the morning, I give them (children) toys while I get ready for work. My kids play from Monday to Sunday. In pretend play, they learn social skills, 'May I? Please?' all of the sudden they would fight (laughs)…so I practise disciplining them that way too*" [F5].

In brief, *interpersonal and social development* is evident in children's *fakamuna*, socialisation, interpersonal, relationships and repetitive competency play. Babies recognise and observe things in their surroundings contributing to social and cultural immersion. As they get older, *fakamuna* helps them imitate adult roles as well as the

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[37] More of this is discussed later on.

impact of their natural surroundings including multimedia particularly, movies. Imparting good behaviour besides cultural and moral values is also infused through social play to strengthen the parent-child bond and relationship.

iii.   Cognitive, intellectual and speech development
Intelligence, perceptive, language play

A majority of the responses relate to the cognitive development or *tupulaki faka-'atamai, fakapoto* aspect of *va'inga*. Several parents shared a good deal of incidences in the way their children play at home. One important trait is the ability to think positively. One teacher shared, "*Positive thinking and behaviour is also something children learn and develop through play. Train them to be positive and think good things on his own and in others*" [T3] (Berk & Meyers, 2013; Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong, 2011; Hendricks, 2016). She continued, "*Children will fight and argue because it is in their nature, but we can teach them to negotiate and share toys, speak politely to others, ask if they need something, say please, excuse me…*" [T3]. Another intelligent skill children master in their *va'inga* is meticulous decision making. Children are stimulated to think deeper during their play especially when they are engaged in games that require careful thinking (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Han, Moore, Vukelich & Buell, 2010). One father gave an example of this while reflecting on childhood memories of *langatoi* (hide and seek). He said, "*You need to think of the most hard-to-find place to hide. It made me think deeper of a secure place. I remember this especially during moonlit nights* (smiles). *The other children couldn't find me at all* (laughs). *But that's an example of how you learn through play eh?*" [M4]. In terms of reading, one mother shared how children improve letter recognition, pronunciation and formation through adult intervention and engagement:

> [] cannot pronounce the letter /f/ so I always use phonics with her and then she is able to pronounce it correctly. If I am around, she will shape her mouth accordingly…at least she's trying and she would always look at me for approval that she is pronouncing the letters correctly. With letters, they learn them form some TV series ABC and when they are expected to pronounce random letters, [] who is three is able to do it but not [] who is four. Why? Because most of the time [] stays at home with [] and plays, plays with blocks. And sometimes like the letter /u/, [] has trouble identifying it and she will have to recite the whole alphabet from a/ onwards until she gets to /u/ then she will say it out. [] on the other hand, is able to identify it and will say '*Alela*' for umbrella because she is able to connect /u/ to umbrella. For /o/ she exclaims, '*Octopus!*' Play is developmental. They progress from identifying alphabets in order to identifying them randomly. But to me, you have to be there, and adult must be present to assist. Knowledge is within them, we just need to help unlock it and their thinking too develops if we are there [F2].

Teachers especially, shared on the development of speech (Batt, 2010; Galeano, 2011; Roskos & Christie, 2013; Shields, 2015; Weisberg et al, Zosh, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2013b) coupled with refined teacher intervention to cater for mute-like children and children who are verbally shy. The interventions helped raise confidence and foster trust. One teacher shared, "*Some children are very shy. So, I encourage them to talk and say things. We have a morning circle where they are randomly selected to stand up and introduce themselves, talk about what they like. It really helps some children with their shyness and it gives them confidence too*" [T2]. Another teacher said:

> One boy we thought was just mute so what I did was talk and play with him all the time. Because I don't teach, I always set him aside like a special project. He improved through constant interaction and just talking to him but he only started with single syllable words. He was slow to develop speaking skills but didn't progress because his parents just left him like that. He would be put in a room to play on his own. He's totally normal and capable, just unattended to. During school break, he went to the US, when he returned his parents brought him to school and he said while pointing at me, '*Misi koe*' [I missed you] (smiled) [T8].

Children also learn speech and print recognition in their *va'inga* with adult or older children. One father mentioned, "*My youngest picks up new words and speaking skills through playing with others. She is almost four years old and she can almost say a whole paragraph. She talks fast through socialising with others*" [M5]. A mother said that even though some pictures and printed books may seem advanced for younger children, consistent repetition helps faster recognition of words and print and overall, improves speech development. She said, "*My three year old son read aloud, 'I am climbing, I am eating, I am walking, and I am playing rugby.' It was all imitation and recollection of reading with his grandmother. The pictures helped him connect his memory of the story to the actual story line*" [F11].

Number recognition and manipulation is also a common learning feature in children's *va'inga* (Sarama & Clements, 2009; Susina, 2010). The most mentioned was the use of *pele* (deck of cards) to help stimulate children's mathematics skills in addition and subtraction. *Pele* also helped colour identification and arrangement. One mother mentioned, "*Card games are common, it helped with addition…suipi…talamu (spades)…playing talamu helped arrangement of colours*" [F6]. In addition to that, children often learn and enjoy playing cards through adult involvement or when they observe and sometimes part take in adult card games. One mother said, "*My eight year old son likes playing suipi* (card game). *His*

grandparents like it also and so he plays with them. When I said, 'Stop playing cards, come do your homework.' He replies, 'No mummy, look, my addition is improving' [F11]. One mother shared how her father values *va'inga* especially using *pele* and chess and how he plays with her children:

> My father does this to my kids and my sister's kids…when playing cards and chess, he says, '*You people think children's play is meaningless and purposeless. You know when they play cards; they are learning…differentiating shapes, colours, additions. They even play with cylinders, it expands their thinking.*' And when he plays with the kids, they play chess. Sometimes he would tease my eldest son when he loses to my sister's younger son especially when he makes a wrong move. My father says, '*Do you see how [] is more focused? This is part of learning…to ensure if he is focused or not.*' [F10].

However, numbers and colours are not the only things children learn from *pele*. Most parents express amusement at the manipulation of tricksters through *pele*. Even though it is often seen as bad behaviour, it is after all a new skill. Some parents agreed it helps enhance critical thinking. One father said, "*In pele, you can also learn trickery (laughs)…it's a new skill. Sometimes during card games, you can tell kids that are good at tricks, they are already smart at cheating (laughs)*" [M3]. One mother talked of her experiences as well as the trickster skill she and her husband unintentionally passed on to their son. It cautions parental roles because children copy and imitate many of the things adults do. She said, "*My son sometimes plays suipi with my husband and I and we would often trick each other. When he plays with his grandparents, he uses those tricks on them. I heard them once say, 'You're cheating aye?'* (laughs). *We also need to be careful because children often copy and imitate what we do…good or bad*" [F11]. Imitation is also a stimulus for extended learning and practice. One father shared this view in one of his reflections on childhood *va'inga* while playing a game of *pani* (a ball game using empty cans), "*One boy, instead of counting 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 he would count, 'taha, two, tolu, four, nima, six…'* (laughs). *So I would try to learn it too…Tongan, English, Tongan eh* (laughs)" [M4]. Another common mathematical stimulus was playing marbles. Marbles enabled addition and subtraction skills as well as the skill of exchange in terms of trading marbles and changing money. Identifying this skill also aids to determine future career paths[38]. One father's story was:

> When my son plays marbles, people would mention how I grew up as a boy in our village and was known for being the most proficient marble player…at a young age (laughs). One time, there was only one retail shop in our village so parents and children would come and buy marbles from me. At one stage, I would go to school in the

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[38] Mentioned in the previous section, *Indication of self-actualisation, behaviour and future interests*.

morning and sell out all the marbles then in the afternoon I would play and win them all back and sell them again. Therefore, I used to provide bus fare for my two older siblings. I would also collect the chiseled marbles and make them new again. That was a unique skill because through marbles, I learnt how to change money [M3].

Children otherwise, learn mathematics skills on their own from playing with things in their natural or immediate environments (Sarama & Clements, 2009; Susina, 2010). One mother provided the following example, "*My four year old son would eat crackers, hold it up and say, 'Mum, three sides, a triangle.*'" [F11]. According to Pongia (2009), *hiko* (juggling) enabled children to cognitively develop mathematical skills through counting the objects and the many times they were tossed in the air. Through physical play, children developed hand-eye coordination through the meticulous throw of arms and eye movements ensuring the accurate synchronisation of cycled objects. As mentioned, adults were also able to identify a child's interest and intelligence through *va'inga*. Some participants said *va'inga* equally enabled them to identify a child's weakness and therefore, use appropriate interventions to help children overcome it, but most often, that is not the case, and children are left to remain that way as they get older. One mother told her story:

I can tell [] (name of child) is very verbal because her speech is very good, but her math's is weak. I told her, '*Go and get me four pegs*.' She said, '*Where from?*' I waited for her so that I could hang some washing. She asked again, '*How many pegs []?*' I repeated, '*Four pegs*.' Again, she said, '*You are so annoying [].*' She later brought the pegs and I noticed there were five. It seemed she couldn't be bothered to count four pegs so I think she just brought a bunch. I said, '*[], these are five pegs*.' She said, '*No, four!*' She was already switched off. Therefore, I guess I should have asked her to come back and count 1, 2, 3, 4 because either she was lazy to count or she may not actually know how much four is. We have to be there because when I just left it at that, she might just take situations like that for granted. We should not leave it at that (regret expression) and think, '*Ah, that's okay…no*' [F2].

Children's sense of direction is another skill adults observed as part of their random *va'inga* activities. One mother said, "*When my oldest son was younger, he had a good sense of direction. He would notice certain places…'That's the road to []'s home…to church…to the market…that's the Unga Road…' Maybe it's because he has frequently been to these locations and is familiar with them*" [F11]. In construction play, children not only master connection, matching and coordination skills, it could also substitute discipline or time-outs. A teacher shared how she used construction play as work to substitute detention, "*I use construction play and get children to use sandpaper and rub it on some chopped shaped-wood pieces to make our wooden building blocks set. They learn smoothness and at the same time, know its punishment because they must put extra effort into it. They think its fun and enjoy*

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it" [T8]. Two other teachers pondered how this activity also helps strengthen thinking skills (Bergen, 2009) as children try to smoothen the blocks. It also fosters direct involvement and engagement and caters for real life experiences and kinesthetic learning in the interaction and manipulation of *va'inga* equipment and materials (Clark, 2013; Moller, 2015; Ness & Farenga, 2016; Power, 2012; Power, 2011; Russ & Wallace, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). A teacher said, "*I work and play with children when they are on the detention list and we pick up rubbish. When they're done, I say, 'Okay thank you, why did you pick up rubbish?' Getting them to own up and speak about their mischief's help reflect on ill behaviours*" [T5].

In review, *cognitive, intellectual and speech development* is manifested in a range of *va'inga* activities harnessing aspects of positive thinking, good behaviour, meticulous decision making to stimulate deep thinking, the development of speech through raising confidence and encouraging children to share and verbalise their thoughts and feelings. This couples speech and print recognition in the variety of printed material available in the home and school. Number recognition too is channeled through common and available *va'inga* activities as *pele*, *hiko* and the random things in a child's surroundings as the shape and colour of certain foods. Although trickster skills filter in games such as *pele* and *mapu*, they are in a way, imperative to motivate critical thinking. This brought to light how imitation provides a stimulus for extended learning and practice cautioning adults to be vigilant in their role modeling tasks. A child's strong sense of direction is also evident in these forms of *va'inga* in addition to the skills of construction, matching and coordination.

iv.   **Physical, bodily and well-being development**
Health, well-being, bodily kinesthetic, energetic play
Participants observed physical development or *tupulaki faka-sino, mo'ui lelei* in activities that involve physical/loco-motor play, exercise play, functional play, object play, construction play, exploratory play, sensory play, manipulative play, rough and tumble play and games with rules play (Harris & Jalloul, 2013; LaFreniere, 2011; Løndal, 2011; Perry & Branum, 2009; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). In terms of fine-motor skills (Gordon, 2014; Pells, 2016), one teacher shared how scribbling helps the development of small muscles preparing children for advanced writing, "*Some children like to draw and scribble eh? It helps strengthen their small muscles to prepare them for future writing in primary school*" [T7]. A few adults

also said that active physical and gross-motor play especially of the outdoors is an indication of children's optimistic health and wellbeing (Gordon, 2014; Hyndman, Benson & Telford, 2016; LaFreniere, 2011; Løndal, 2011; Pells, 2016; Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009). Inactivity otherwise, should be a sign of concern for parents regarding the normality of their children. Some mothers said they could tell the level of their children's health and wellbeing when they play. If they are active, they are well, but if they show opposite signs, they may be sick or should be given special attention. One mother said when children lack outdoor physical play activities, they tend to gain weight and linger indoors on electronic and digital games [F10]. Going outdoors to physically play with the things in their natural environments and surroundings helps alleviate weight and health problems (Pells, 2016). The same mother shared:

> My youngest son would gain weight during school break because he just stay indoors and play games (digital). He would only eat and play games from morning till evening. When the games are switched off, he goes out to play…to the neighbours. All of the sudden I see him climbing the neighbour's breadfruit tree and guava tree, will play touch with the older children. Next minute, he is playing at the farthest house to the mangrove swamps where he is often called the '*town officer*' (laughs)…and he doesn't seem overweight. And I notice, it is very different when he plays indoors compared to when he plays in the outdoors [F10].

In summary, *physical, bodily and well-being development* aids to develop fine motor and gross motor skills beneficial to enhance physical, bodily, well-being and mental health. In contrast, these forms of play are often considered boisterous and purposeless and hold no learning contribution. It is enlisted as somewhat, an unseen facet of play and learning when instead, the skills development children receive during physical play *is* the actual learning. Its contribution to early learning development therefore, should not be substandard to play forms that embody premature formalised learning traits such as cognitive play. Physical play also allows parents and teachers to identify the level of well-being, health and normality in children to issue any alarming concerns such as obesity, lack of exercise and inactivity, mental disabilities particularly, of undetected and unattended cases.

v. **Emotional and empathetic development**

Intra-empathy, inter-empathy and competitive play

A few adults in particular mentioned that children also learn to show and express emotions in their *va'inga* (Clark, 2013; Hendricks, 2016; Kris, 2015; Power, 2011; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). From the responses, emotional development or *tupulaki faka-ongo', feongo'i'aki* stems from children's ability to show and express inner and

outer empathy to oneself and to others (Bergen & Davis, 2011). One mother shared, "*You can tell how a child socialises in the manner he plays…whether they are happy or not…they show emotions because some forms of play are competitive and some children cry when they lose because they only want to win*" [F10]. Showing emotions also indicates the socialisation level of children and how they handle certain situations. One mother advised parents to be aware of that aspect in children's *va'inga*. A teacher shared one classroom incident where children are taught to show empathy towards others:

> Once a child came to school, his grandfather suddenly passed away. He is usually jubilant but this day was different. As soon as his mother left, he broke down and cried. He was very close with his grandfather and was deeply affected. I brought him close (cried) and told the rest of the children what had happened and we prayed. Some other children prayed for him too (cried). They also showed sympathy for him (cried). It is good to know everything that happens to our children and the little things we can do to help them grow or overcome feelings. Even the little boy (cries) said a prayer and asked the Lord to help him. He felt better after that. And that's play, Poliana…children learn sympathy and empathy to oneself and one another through play interactions [T3].

This brings perspective to the view play is work and all the activities and movements of children (Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). It also sheds light on Freud's *Cathartic Theory* where children harmlessly express disorganised or painful emotions through play (Docket & Fleer, 1999; Mallick & McCandless, 1966). In light of this, play allows children to rid themselves of negative emotions such as traumatic events or personal conflicts they may experience at school or at home (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). In retrospect, play further helps children achieve greater emotional stability (ibid). As such, teachers and parents need to stay abreast with Freud's *Play Therapy* which allows children to naturally express themselves and act out feelings such as tension, fear and insecurities. Meanwhile, adults should attempt to understand children's level of thinking to draw out these feelings (Axline, 1974).

In core, *emotional and empathetic development* allows children to shred hurtful emotions and harness feelings emotions in their play and interactions with adults and peers while at the same time, sympathise and encourage others who go through similarly situations. Negative or hurtful emotions are often brushed away and children are habitually told to get over themselves and their feelings. This should not be the case and adults need to understand how to combat and cure such circumstances, such as, resort to Freud's *Play Therapy* so that children are supported and thus able to regulate their emotions. Meanwhile, adults should furthermore, be

armed with more culturally appropriate intervention and mediation strategies to help children overcome, if not, manifest their emotions.

vi.   Character and behaviour development

Behaviour and values play

Children also learn to master various ways to manage their behaviour through values play and their interactions with other children and adults (Bergen & Davis, 2011; Hendricks, 2016; Leaupepe, 2011a). This was termed, *tupulaki faka'ulungaanga, fakamōlale*. One teacher said, "*Through pretend play, children learn to take home good manners like saying, 'fakamolemole, mālō, tulou…' (Please, thank you, excuse me and so on). Some children are not taught these things at home*" [T7]. She continued, "*Some parents come to the center and thank us surprised in what their children learnt in school. But that's the essence and purpose of our existence – to teach children the right ways, the values they require for a good and respectable life*" [T7]. Another teacher shared, "*One working father was surprised when his son didn't eat dinner at home for a few days. His response was, 'Because I have no father at home for dinner…a family has a mother and a father.' The father felt guilty and made sure he was at home for dinner*" [T8]. The teacher said they did not teach him that but he indirectly perceived it when they discussed and role-played the concept of a unified family. The little boy took it to heart when his father was not always present for dinner.

In some cases, a number of children would not sleep until they had family prayer at home and read their memory verses. Teachers unanimously agreed these things build good character and embed Christian values at a young age. Another teacher said changes in children's behaviour are recognised and remedied through *va'inga*. She said, "*It's very important to be aware of the changes in children's behaviour because if we don't pick up the signs how children react differently on certain days or how they're facial expressions change, we may be blocking their possibility to learn that day and it may lead to more severe side effects*" [T8]. She continued:

> We must give them the opportunity to talk to us, and we must be willing to understand them and really listen. If a child comes in the morning crying, I always pull them aside and get to the root of the problem. Whether it was from home or whether it was fear of coming to school because of a certain teacher or even myself. This helps mend the damage before it becomes a bigger negative impact on his development. And with our teachers, we must ensure everybody goes through a counseling programme so that we are able to understand and attend to the diverse emotional needs of our children [T8].

Character and behaviour development gives children the opportunity to enact and practise good, moral and just behaviours. It is an opportunity for adults to ingrain the appropriate characters and behaviours of a decent Tongan citizen embedding strong cultural and Christian values, qualities and attributes. It helps detect misdemeanours common in children's play lives to correct and remedy such instances lest they get out of hand and become uncontrollable especially as children get older.

vii.   Spiritual and Biblical development

Biblical, religious play

From *character and behaviour development*, being a predominant Christian country, adults saw the crucial need for children's play to help harness spiritual and biblical development in children or *tupulaki faka-laumālie', fakalotu, faka'ilo folofola* (Geula, 2004; Lin, 2014; The Tonga National ECE Curriculum, 2015). One teacher said, "*Children learn to pray and say grace as part of their daily activities and play. Sometimes they don't say grace at home before they have their meals, but we teach them these skills. It builds respect and moral Christian behaviour*" [T8]. Most teachers said Sunday school and White Sunday are major ways children learn spiritual development through role-plays, singing and so forth (Prescott & Johansson-Fua, 2016). It couples what most children learn at home. One teacher argued, "*Children may learn spiritual and biblical development at Sunday school but they also learn it at preschool even through play. I always have bible stories with children and teach them moral lessons to help inner spiritual growth and to know the Christian ways of being*" [T3]. She tells how a father was surprised when his son said, "*Daddy, is your heart made of iron? You need to know the Lord.*" [T3]. This particular teacher also shared a song she sings with her children in to teach concepts such as atonement and repentance. She sang, "'*Fakamolemole 'eku fakahela', fakamolemole 'eku talangata'a', 'e 'i ai pe 'aho te u si'i 'aonga ai…*' (cries) [I'm sorry for being a burden, I'm sorry for being disobedient but I will be useful one day']" [T3]. The father in her earlier account rushed over to hug his child emotional and impressed at his spiritual growth and development.

In essence, *spiritual and biblical development* provides children the opportunity to embrace Christianity through embodying it in their play. Sunday school, White Sunday and preschool programmes all contribute in indoctrinating strong Christian beliefs and values in children cultivating a strong Christ-like life and outlook. While

it is equally important children are given this opportunity at home, sometimes it is not the case making these alternate avenues a safe haven to ensure spiritual and biblical development are attained through other mediums.

viii. Creative, performance and artistic development
Innovative, performance and artistic play

Teacher's mostly mentioned that children develop creative skills through *va'inga* in what they call *tupulaki faka-tufunga mea'a, faka'ilo fo'ou* (Clark, 2013; Moller, 2015; Ness & Farenga, 2016; Power, 2012; Power, 2011; Russ & Wallace, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Taufe'ulungaki, 2002). It includes the ability to construct and create things from imagination, stimulation (Moller, 2015; Robinson, 2015) and imitation and couples the skill of performance particularly singing and dancing – evident also in social, cultural and heritage play. Creative skills are the way children construct things in their natural and home environments which in the past involved a range of cultural artifacts but today couples commercialised toys, blocks, Legos, puzzles and some forms of digital play such as mind craft (Garcia, 2013; Hewes, 2006; Ness & Farenga, 2016; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Sand play is a common example several adults shared. One mother said, "*Playing in the sand…making the sand wet and making little sand men. Playing cards, that's one way I notice in my children. Their addition also improves through playing cards*" [F10]. Of commercialised toys, building blocks, Legos, puzzles and board games such as snakes and ladders were a common form of *va'inga* adults shared. One mother said younger children prefer building blocks and puzzle play, "*They construct little houses, learn different shapes, four sided or a triangles. Puzzles are usually very difficult at first but as they get used to it, they are able to put the pieces together. Like snakes and ladders, they learn the pictures first then the rules of the game before they are able to play*" [F10]. Garcia (2011) ensured jigsaw puzzle play aids better understanding of children's leisure activities and to distinguish "*serious from casual leisure, explore the relationship of work to play, assess the importance of rules, investigate the relationship between product and process in play, and identify some of the intrinsic rewards that motivate play*" (p. 308).

A father shared how young children learn patience and persistence through building blocks. This skill couples behavioural development. He said, "*I like to observe when my children play blocks. My son's goal is to put one block on top of a block. There*

are spheres, triangular pyramids. Blocks would fall, but when he finally manages to balance a block on top of another, he gets overjoyed. He learns persistence eh" [M1]. A teacher talks of performance play, "*Sometimes I observe girls play pretend dancing, especially tau'olunga (traditional female solo dance). This helps me identify certain skills and interests to further train and encourage them. Also to provide appropriate va'inga activities, opportunities and environments*" [T1].

Creative, performance and artistic development involve children's ability to use creative imaginations to construct and create things. Nowadays, such creations are evident in blocks, puzzles and digital games leading also to cognitive, construction and physical play particularly of fine motor skills. In the past, children utilised these skills to make cultural artifacts such as mats, *tapa* and baskets. As mentioned in the next section, ECE centers in Tonga are taking the lead to revive and restore customary practices so that children today learn, uphold and prolong these significant aspects of indigenous knowledge and traditions.

ix.   Cultural knowledge and practice development
Cultural and heritage play

From the cultural aspects of *creative, performance and artistic development*, comes a deeper emphasis on cultural knowledge and practice development through *tupulaki 'ilo anga/faka-fonua'* (The Tonga National ECE Curriculum, 2015). This helps cultivate and maintain the indigenous knowledge and practice of basic cultural Tongan ways of being, knowing and doing (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2013). Such is achieved through *va'inga* activities such as language use, values and behaviour, traditional wear, food preparation, performance and music (The Tonga National ECE Curriculum, 2015). One teacher shared, "*We have a cultural day every Wednesday where children come to school in traditional attire and bring a traditional meal for lunch. We emphasise on using the Tongan language and to perform cultural dances, songs and make kahoa (necklaces) out of shells and beads and seeds. The whole day is of a cultural focus*" [T5]. The activity was mutually shared by most teachers also they were most impressed with the MET initiative of an annual ECE cultural week. One teacher shared, "*Once a year the ministry arranges a Cultural Day and visits our centers where we display our indoor and outdoor areas, our programmes and our annual achievements*" [T1]. She continued, "*In preparation, we become more aware and take significance in the importance of our culture, language, food and our*

heritage. Children especially enjoy it because we dress up imitating older people's faiva (dance) and role-play mythological stories, solo dances… (laughs)" [T1]. One mother shared how her granddaughter insisted she join a family reunion *tau'olunga* (solo dance) [F2]. The experience was culturally enriching harnessing skills of *taulalo* (bent knees), *fola haka* (hand movements) and *mālie* (*bravo* factor/warmth).

In summary, while the sharing on *cultural knowledge and practice development* mostly emerged at ECE centers, it is also a common household occurrence and should be emphasised so young children engage and absorb the unique cultural practices they will pride in as they get older. Sadly, these things are sometimes neglected and appear insignificant to people who assume children will automatically know and become proficient in these things or are conditioned to know them as part of being Tongan. The visual ethnographies however, portray a strong sense of cultural and multicultural development in ECE schools.

PART TREE: REFLECTIONS ON PLAY

5.5   In what forms of indoor and outdoor play activities do children engage?[39]

It was important to ask this question to understand the reality behind the practice and ethnography of *va'inga* in Tonga. The indoor and outdoor *va'inga* activities in the home and school environments range from the different forms of play children engage in or are made available to them in each context. They are: *personal, skillful, character and behaviour play; pretense, relationship and confidence play; intelligence, perceptive play; health, well-being, bodily kinesthetic, energetic play; inter-empathy and intra-empathy play; behaviour and values play; innovative, performance and artistic play; biblical, religious play; and cultural and heritage play*. While most parental sharings were of commercialised and digital play, teachers made the effort to regain and practise many of the lost and fading traditional *va'inga* games as part of their advocacy in promoting and safeguarding culture.

5.5.1 How is children's play different to adult play?

While Tongan children today engage in a diverse number of play activities, a lot of these *va'inga* forms are either the same or are completely different or modified in certain ways to the *va'inga* experiences of adults when they were children. Albeit

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[39] To avoid repetition, a table indicating a comprehensive account of the different *va'inga* forms and age categories of children are displayed and discussed in the following chapter (Chapter Six).

minor similarities, a number of participants shared that some traditional forms of *va'inga* are no longer practised. Through the array of adult responses, an age pattern emerged. The 25-39 aged adults showed more similar *va'inga* activities to children rather than adults aged 40 and above. Some children showed similarities to the 40 and above aged participants in more traditional *va'inga* forms such as *moa, tolo pato, hiko, kaka 'akau* and cultural singing and dancing. With younger parents, *va'inga* similarities pertained more to educational games, digital play, solitary play and construction play. The necessity of this differentiation was considered when selecting the study participants – to generate a wider range of varying and multiple responses to represent parents of varied age groups. Table 5.1 illustrates this comparison.

Table 5.1 Differences and similarities in adult and children's va'inga[40]

	Similar *va'inga* activities	Different *va'inga* activities
Adults aged 40 and above	*Pani, making 'umu, lanitā, moa, tolo pato, hiko, tāfue mokofute, kaka niu, 'akau, mango, breadfruit trees, heke la'i 'akau, mokofute,* slide with coconut leaves, mutton boxes, buoyant poly bins, made up pushers with cans and sticks, singing, dancing, cards, *fūfū*	*Fananga, uani-tusi-tusi-sipai, lafo*
Adults aged 25-39	*Pani, making 'umu, lanitā, moa, tolo pato, hiko, tāfue mokofute, kaka niu, 'akau, mango, breadfruit trees, heke la'i 'akau, mokofute,* slide with coconut leaves, mutton boxes, buoyant poly bins, made up pushers with cans and sticks, singing, dancing, cards, *fūfū,*	Story books, stories, hide and seek, ball games, tag, skipping with ropes, juggling with balls, counters (ice block sticks), swings in a playground, backyard set of swings, juggling with balls, clapping games
Children Aged 0-8	*Moa, tolo pato, hiko, kaka 'akau,* cards, *fūfū,* singing and dancing	Bedtime stories, baking, climbing ladders, park equipment, parallel bars, small trees, counters (variety as that used in western homes), slide boards, surfboards, push carts, play strollers, toy cars, trucks, netball

The observation merely indicated the younger aged parents are presumably the meeting point for early and new forms of *va'inga* that exists and are still practised in current Tongan households. It does not however, suggest these *va'inga* forms are the study's sole focus. Participants agreed that traditional *va'inga* games such as *kasivaki*, *heulupe, lafo* and so forth need to be preserve and safeguarded (Pongia, 2014). In retrospect, and as discussed, a wide repertoire of learning prospects surfaced altogether as all forms of *va'inga* both old and new comprised some sort of different if not the same learning element. An extensive part of these differences

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[40] To avoid repetition and space usage, these terminologies are not mentioned in the glossary section (Appendix A) and should be drawn from this diagram alone.

point to the inevitable influence of globalisation and social or societal change. As such, these forms of *va'inga* have either been modified or completely transformed as the increase in commercialised toys and digital play have escalated making its way into the norm of society. These changes are created by three main things, (i) work and time at work of adults; (ii) the transformation of play activities by technology and commercialisation; and (iii) the changed meaning of play, childhood and families (Cross, 2008). It was expressed by one teacher as, "*That is the consequence of modernisation and globalisation. Play has changed from our time like fananga (oral folktales/myths/legends)...they are not often told nowadays. Today, parents are reading bedtime stories... children are skipping with ropes and not with vine lashes*" [T6]. Table 5.2 shows some of the early traditional forms of *va'inga* activities and games children have been engaged in for as long as history remembers. Most of these forms are in fact, still practised today while some are slightly modified.

Table 5.2 Early forms of child va'inga activities in Tonga[41]

Early va'inga form	Description
Fananga	Moral folklore and mythical legends accompanied by *talatupu'a* (riddles)
Hiko	A form of juggling using Tahitian chestnuts, candlenuts etc.
Kaka niu/'akau	Climbing coconut, mango, breadfruit trees
Lafo	Traditional form of shuffleboard using mats
Langatoi	A form of hide and seek
Lanitā	An early tag, run and throw game
Moa	A form of juggling, tossing of stones/rocks, a form of counting (counters)
Pani	An early game similar to baseball/softball yet with tin cans
Ta'o 'umu	Making '*umu*/*lovo*/earth oven was a common *va'inga* /game
Tāfue mokofute	Skipping with vines and twines
Teke	Pushers (on wheels) with cans, sticks
Tolo moa/pato	An early throwing and tag game
Uani-tusi-tusi-sipai	An early form of hide and seek

From the data, of the *va'inga* activities that are unchanged and still practised today especially in rural villages and outer islands; one most common pastime is *pele* (card games) in games such as *suipi, talamu* (spades) and *laasi kaati.* Some other games have become a social event for children and families such as *pani* (a ball game with empty cans), *tolo pato/tolo moa* (form of ball throwing and tag game), *moa* (for of jackstones) and *fūfū* (Hiding hand object game). One father said they are organised and communal, "*Tongan games are mostly in groups...they start off by breaking into two teams*" [M5]. Another father said traditional games are mainly games with rules play and must follow certain instructions. Since instructions are not written, some

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[41] To avoid repetition and space usage, these terminologies are not mentioned in the glossary section (Appendix A) and should be drawn from this diagram alone.

players often argue over directives. One father said, "*Most of our play forms have certain unwritten rules. Sometimes, we stop playing and break into arguments. The game heu and pani have rules…there is a clash in the manner players understand the rules. There is a form of cricket that also has its own rule…*" [M4]. A few respondents also mentioned some of the early forms of *va'inga* that are no longer practised by children which include some adult-based games as the original *lafo* (form of shuffleboard) and *kasivaki* (water game) (Pongia, 2014). A mother shared:

> I grew up in an environment of play. In our home, there were seven children. Each had children. My brother has seven children, [] has seven children, [] has four children and I have four children. We all lived in one house with our parents. We played all the time, *lanitā* (ball game), played outdoors, played indoors, *tolo pato* (ball game). Sometimes adults will say, '*Don't play with the pillows!*' We threw them around until there was cotton everywhere (laughs). And that was engagement, it will never be forgotten. As we grew older, I got lazy but my mother continues to care for my children [F2].

In other cases, some *va'inga* forms are extinct and no longer practise even though they prevail in people's cultural memory – another pressing reason to safeguard its practice. On mother said, she predicts some existing games are dying out due to prohibitive adult behaviour. She said, "*Like moa (a form of jackstones)…when I grew up, it was often restricted and thus became a lost play activity…the same as hiko (juggling)*" [F11]. Table 5.3 shows some of the early *va'inga* indoor and outdoor activities and games adults engaged in. It also shows how these activities have been altered throughout the years although some early forms are still practised today. Most participants shared their children mainly engage in the altered forms as part of their *va'inga* intervals both at home and at school.

Table 5.3 Early and altered forms of va'inga[42]

Va'inga /games	Early description	Altered description
Fakapaheke (Sliding boards)	Coconut leaves, mutton boxes, buoyant poly bins/pieces of wood, plywood etc.	Slide boards, surfboards etc.
Fananga (Story telling)	Oral folklores, stories and mythical legends	Story books, written fananga
Talatupu'a (Riddles)	Traditional riddles	Written riddles, western riddles
Heke (Swinging)	Swing from trees, swing with a mokofute (vine) lash	Swings in a playground, backyard set of swings
Hiko (Juggling)	Juggling with citrus fruits, candlenuts, Tahitian chestnuts etc.	Juggling with balls
Kakakaka (Climbing)	On coconut, mango, breadfruit trees...	Parallel bars, small trees etc.
Lafo (Shuffleboard)	Lafo - Using long mats and coconut shells, Tongan oil	Modern shuffleboard equipment
Langatoi (Hide and seek)	Langatoi/uani tusi-tusi-sipai – more of a hide and tag game	Modern hide and seek
Lau (Counters)	Counting with stones, sticks, coconut shells etc.	Counting with counters, ice-block sticks, bottle caps etc.
Tāfue (Skipping)	Skipping with vine lashes (mokofute)	Skipping with ropes
Teke (Pushers on wheels)	Made up pushers – with cans, sticks…	Push carts, play strollers, toy cars, trucks etc.
Va'inga pulu (Ball games)	Tolo moa/pato, pani, lanitā (form of tagging/throwing)	Netball, volleyball, football, soccer etc.

The following accounts further display a number of participant views and reasons for these differences coupled with some examples of the different *va'inga* experiences between adults and children. A common reason may be the changed living structures of most families which in turn, influence the play activities and behaviour of children particularly the shift from outdoor play to increased indoor play. One mother explained, "*The changes in living structure nowadays has influenced the different ways and nature of children play. I remember back then we mostly lived as nofo 'a kāinga (extended form of living)…we would live with our extended families and there was a variety of play activities…especially outside play*" [F6]. She continued, "*Things have changed…family living comprise of the immediate family only and play has become more indoors*" [F6].

Kalliala (2006) argues that some changes are a result of the changing culture of child play, a result of the continuous changes in societal structures. This indirectly affects adults and moreover, children. Some of the changes also involve migration and settling patterns. One mother shared a comprehensive account of her childhood

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[42] To avoid repetition and space usage, these terminologies are not mentioned in the glossary section (Appendix A) and should be drawn from this diagram alone.

va'inga experiences in a foreign country and the latter transition to Tonga. She indicates how socio-cultural circumstances not only alter the nature and practice of *va'inga* but of the unpleasant attitude some people show towards it.

> My sister and I grew up in a foreign country and we played from Monday to Sunday (laughs). I liked to play outdoors and my friends were boys. We climbed breadfruit trees, all sorts of things…roasted food in cans my father grew vegetables in…uprooted his carrots on Sunday and cooked them pretending we were cooking. My sister [] liked girl play with dolls. When I came back to Tonga, it was like, shock. No playing on Sunday. But [] and [] did not stop us from playing even though we didn't have any play time with our parents. But it was like this, '*Go and play in the room.*' Even on Sundays. When our cousins came to visit it was new to me because girls (in Tonga) didn't climb trees because I climbed trees because I had been used to climbing trees since I was three, four years (laughs). There were girls but I didn't like playing with them. My cousins sometimes said, '*Stop climbing things, its bad*' (frowned expression). My sister played with dolls while I'm outside playing with sticks, shooting guns (laughs) and using empty cans to cook carrots, uproot my father's pineapples and he would scold us (laughs)….make believe we are parents while my sister played with dolls and pillows and our small clothes…we learnt all the different vocabularies [F5].

Another common reason for this difference is the increased use of various *va'inga* resources and equipment especially commercialised toys and digital games. One father shared, "*There are many modern day games now…board games, games with rules where children learn addition. In playing marbles, they can count scores, addition and subtraction*" [M5]. He continued, "*I remember we were always prohibited from climbing trees but nowadays, children go to the park there are equipment for climbing while you assist them*" [M5]. A mother added toys and games are becoming more educational and therefore, appealing. She reflected on her experiences of pretend play and the available resources involved, "*Nowadays, play games are more educational not like before we played in the sand, built sand castles. And pretend play eh? Construct a make-believe store fill it with pretend corned beef and goods where we would exchange money*" [F7]. She continued, "*Like playing pretend with dolls, you learn how to be a mother, looking after a baby to make sure it is warm and fed* (laughs)" [F7].

In summary, of the variety of indoor and outdoor play and play experiences, some home areas today are more modernised reflecting Western forms of *va'inga* and a dynamic change in living structures. Meanwhile, preschool centers in their aim to uphold and safeguard cultural practices are making efforts to rehearse and display traditional forms of *va'inga* so it is prolonged while its knowledge sustained. Like the array of play forms within the literature, the indoor and outdoor play activities in

Tonga equally encompass a range of learning and development attributes coupling the skills of cultural, spiritual and values development[43].

PART FOUR: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

5.6   How do adults engage and support play?

In light of the previous discussions, it was imperative to inquire how and how often adults engage in *va'inga* to understand the nature of the adult-child relationship within the play domain. It also determined the extent *va'inga* is being valued as a worthwhile activity and to identify the challenges that inhibit adult involvement. This helped disclose the socio-cultural barriers that impede adult support and suggest ways to appropriately address these issues so that social living, culture and *va'inga* are not disrupted. The section ends with an investigation into how adults may further support and ensure proactive engagement in *va'inga* activities[44].

5.6.1   How often do adults engage in play?

The frequency level of adult engagement in *va'inga* amounted to three main levels. They are displayed from most to least in figure 5.4 – *scheduled time and date, spontaneous engagement* and *zero engagement*.

Figure 5.4 Levels of adult engagement in va'inga

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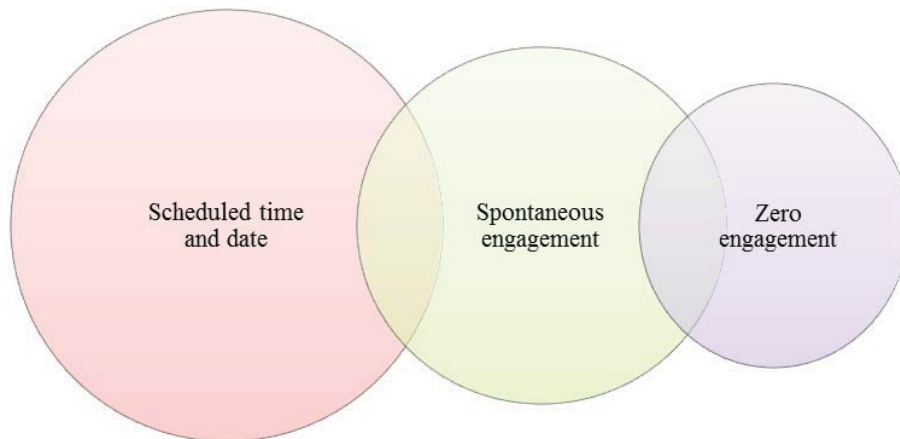
[43] Detailed accounts of these play forms are discussed in the next chapter
[44] Note that a few responses are closely associated to some of the discussions in previous questions. Also, note the bulk of the discussion ideas are summarised at the end of every section to allow a free flow of *talanoa*.

i.   Scheduled time and date

While the majority of teachers engaged in children's *va'inga* at their centers, parents admitted to not spending sufficient or enough time at all (Gray, 2011b; Witherspoon & Manning, 2012). A few teachers admitted likewise. One mother shared, "*Children learn differently in their involvement in activities with toys and when they bond with you or their teacher or friends*" [F11]. The average adult time spent in *va'inga* ranged from scheduled date and time as well as availability. Meaning, when adults are available to play or when they schedule a specific time and date to engage in play. One teacher shared, "*At our center, there is free time for play especially when children have recess and lunch…then there is guided play and that's when I engage most in their play*" [T5]. Some working parents schedule specific days mostly on weekends and public holidays. One father's response was:

> For me when I'm working, I hardly involve in my children's play but during holiday's and weekends I join in. If not the holidays then mostly on Saturdays. Last Saturday we went to the park and played there for at least two hours, three hours maybe. I agree that play is a way children learn and that most of the things they pick up are through their play experiences. In the way I raise my children, I encourage them to play. Every opportunity I get like on holidays from work, Saturdays, we would go to the park or to the beach…they would swim and play there. I usually take them to play with my sister and brother's children…there are more kids for them to play with [M5].

For some parents it was during a specific part of the day most times in the evening when children returned from school and sometimes in the morning before they left for school. One mother in particular said she preferred to engage in *va'inga* in the morning before work, "*Every time I wake up in the morning, I must play and socialise with them. Sometimes when I get home from work, if we played in the morning I would say, 'We'll continue after school.' Sometimes I get home and I'm tired…they would knock on the door and accuse me, 'You told us so! You promised!' But it's mainly in the evening when they are around eh…*" [F2]. A father's example of *va'inga* in the evening meant before bedtime when he would gather his children on his spread-out arms. This common practice and traditional *va'inga* form is called *'olunga he kaliloa'* or resting one's head on the *kaliloa* usually the arms of a parent or grandparent. It is used as a place and space for *fananga* (oral story telling) and imparting of moral, cultural and biblical values.

Albeit valuable, some adults caution that *'olunga he kaliloa'* is becoming a lost practice and mostly only reside in their childhood if not, cultural memories, "*I mostly

play with my children in the evening. When we lay down, they would argue who is closest to me. My youngest is mostly closest to me while others would cry…but that's how children are eh…" [M5]. One mother shared a memory in terms of imparting values through *akonaki* (moral advice). While, she and her siblings were physically in sync with each other on their father's bosom, they carefully listened to his words of wisdom, instruction and guidance. She said, "*We used to ride horses and read certain things like traditional nursery rhymes, things you still remember today. That is 'olunga he kaliloa' and we would compete to lay by his (father) side. Through that form of play, we learned certain values*" [F6]. She continued, "*Like the older child must sacrifice so the younger child is closest to our father*" [F6]. One father proclaimed the intimacy is why "*the children and father bond is very strong and also why the father is mostly always, deeply favoured*" [M5]. The mother earlier on however, continued to share her reflective memories of her late father whom she believed was very instrumental in her childhood *va'inga*. The things she learned from him left a permanent influence on her. She said:

> A lot of times we think of our late father (pause)…and I think of what made our bond with him so close. I now remember that it was in fact, our play times with him. I don't remember playing with my mother…she would smack me till I cried (laughs). I remember with our father, we used to play little games and he used to tell us *fananga* (folklores). Later on we would learn multiplication and so forth. But it is very important…that's the relationship that develops through play and it is long lasting [F6].

Moreover, some adults schedule *va'inga* engagement around a specific period measured by hours or certain intervals in a week. A few examples are taken from different participants even teachers who reflected on their *va'inga* time at home. One teacher said, "*My grandchild and I, approximately one hour or half an hour a day because my husband mainly stays and plays with []…from running around to holding blankets, hiding beneath clothes. But for me, just half an hour to an hour*." [T4]. One mother shared, "*I only va'inga with my kids twice a week because I am busy. When I was not engaged in studies, I used to stop them from playing but when I went back to studying, I understood but my response is, twice a week but they (children) prefer to va'inga with their father…*" [F2]. Another mother said, "*Once a week, I join when they play ping pong and snooker. I see their joy and excitement when my husband and I join in. They also find it humorous because we can't play as well as they do. The youngest usually gets his father to play horse while he rides his back (laughs)*" [F10]. One father talked of his routine with his children and how he

has made time for them to *va'inga* in the evening. Prior to that, he was not very instrumental until his son showed utter excitement of his involvement altogether changing his outlook on *va'inga* and the pressing need for adult inclusion:

> I rarely played with my children but one day I felt guilty after a soccer game with [] he said, '*Dad, You're the best dad in the world!*' Just because of the time I played with him (cries). Ever since then, my heart is heav. Now, we allocate a specific time. After work, I change and cook our dinner. From six to seven, that's our play time and my kids know, its '*drop everything and play*'. [] keeps track of time so at eight, it's '*drop everything and pray*' (smiles)…and we keep to that routine…[M1].

ii.   Spontaneous engagement

The next form of *va'inga* engagement between adults and children is the spontaneity of the interchange, which is bound by no time restraints or schedules (Weisberg et al, 2013b). *Va'inga* happens instinctively, often sparked by a child's random request to *va'inga* or just a normal occurrence in a child-parent or child-teacher's daily interaction. The incidence nonetheless, helps trigger speech development like one father's experience, "*One day, my youngest son crept up under my legs so I squeezed and wiggled him around. He laughed hysterically. I noticed its different when he plays on his own and when he plays with me. When he comes to me, he sometimes says, 'Pā, pā, tā, tā.' That's when he tries to communicate and talk with me eh*" [M1]. A mother's shared experience was of the same nature, yet her son learned a domestic task through imitational observation, "*Sometimes when I make soup, [] would come and see how I mix the flour with water. He would ask what it's for and if he can help stir the flour; so I give him a separate bowl so he can freely do it himself*" [F10]. She continued, "*It's all from observing how the flour and water are mixed to make soup…so he learns from observation and demonstration*" [F10]. A few teachers too experience this every day in their classrooms as a normal day to day *va'inga* routine and exchange between teacher and children. One teacher said, "*They (children) would always come over and ask me to play with them, tie up their hair, fix their shoes and so on. I realise they just want our attention and engagement in what they are doing and not just leaving them to play on their own*" [T6]. She continued, "*When teachers are involved, it makes children happier, especially as they look forward to coming to the center everyday*" [T6].

iii.   Zero engagement

Lastly, few mothers expressed negative or zero engagement in their children's home *va'inga*. Most reasons are due to a lack of interest and willingness to *va'inga* but do not imply they are unsupportive of it. Their standing is rather of physical disengagement given home *va'inga* is too physical, roudy, boisterous and rough and tumble. They also believe social play, dialoguing and forms of play that do not display physicality are not viewed as *va'inga* but are a more purposeful activity. As such, one mother stated her *va'inga* experiences at home are, "*Hala 'atā* (zero chance)" [F8]. Another mother said, "*On a scale of 1 to 10* (laughs)…*but my husband* (pause)…*especially as a working mother or father. [] (husband) plays all the time. Even when they are in bed, they still play, when they eat, they still play…on Saturdays*" [F6]. This view was shared by a few other mothers who also said their spouses mostly played with their children or that children preferred to *va'inga* amongst themselves. Low energy level was another common excuse and the status of a working mother trying to juggle multiple things during the day, averting the prospect of any sort of *va'inga* engagement. As the *talanoa* developed, these mothers began to realise how *va'inga* is an important part of their children's lives so a majority professed they will make a better effort to engage in *va'inga*. One mother shared her mutual view knowing the engagement required is surprisingly effortless, "*I never engage in their (children's) play, but after this talanoa, it is important to educate parents so they are aware because va'inga seems very practical*" [F7].

5.6.2   How do adults engage in play?

The two leading yet reversible ways adults engage in child *va'inga* correspond to two main levels – actual involvement and observational presence. Figure 5.5 shows the change amongst the levels of engagement in which the majority of participants interchanged between the two while a few used an either and or approach.

Figure 5.5 Ways of adult engagement in va'inga
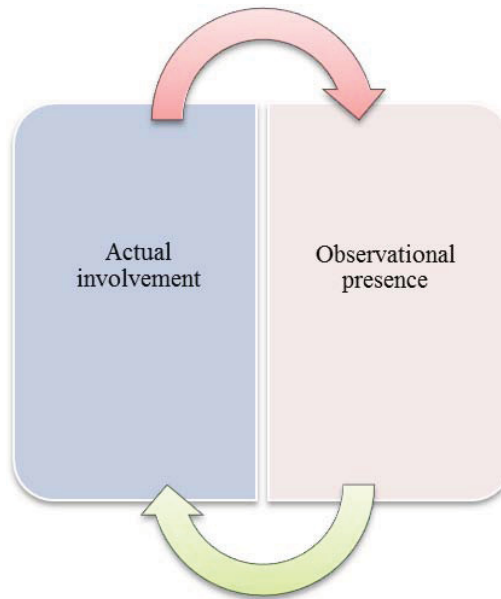
i.   Actual involvement

The first level of engagement is actual involvement, especially in play forms such as social, physical and construction play. Teachers in particular, engage in this form of *va'inga* as part of their daily classroom interactions. A few selected examples are provided, "*No matter what, as a preschool teacher, a major part of your responsibility is to engage and involve in play…whether its running around, playing in the playground or in the pretend play corner*" [T1]. She continued, "*Children play all the time at school so you are also made to play. A teacher that does not play should not be a preschool teacher* (laughs)" [T1]. A lot of parents too shared various incidences of *va'inga* engagement. One mother talks of *va'inga* while a baby is still in the womb. Cultural beliefs or superstitions even, led to the belief that what a mother does while pregnant becomes the child's interest and habit as well. She said, "*I always recall when I was pregnant, the old women would say, 'Read a lot of books so the baby will grow up to like reading.' Play starts from the womb where you play with your unborn baby or when your husband pretend plays to your baby; you talk to him/her so play starts while they are still inside*" [F11]. The majority of sharings consisted of *va'inga* games that stimulate speaking and mathematical skills. A few were selected to represent this aspect:

> I play with my kids one third (1/3) of the day…a lot…sometimes we sit down and I design a game for us to play…like I use my eyes to wink at them and that's how I can tell which one is more smart…that's how I try to develop their mind…I tell them sometimes to imitate…and you can tell this one is fast to imitate…sometimes the

younger one cannot do it…but they are figuring out how to do it…they try their best to follow…(referring to his wife)…she is lazy…she never plays with them (laughs) [M2].

So…often indoors…and when at beaches…at least I go out with them…but inside, I can be part of them when they dance, '*Nanna stand up*' okay we all dance… they will sing songs, testify…it's like a game to them…but to me, I don't stop them because it's one way of them learning how to do it…they've got praying, testifying…it teaches them…memory verses…after that they stand up and do actions, choruses, songs…and I kept joining in Sometimes I join in to make them more interested…and if they see me joining in they say, '*Oh this is good!*' and they will continue [F3].

My sister's two children stay with my father and they were able to pick up speaking really fast like my son [] who also stayed with my father. The other grandkids are quite slow because they were raised by their parents. So, you can tell the kids raised by the grandparents, they are very talkative. Sometimes my uncle comes over and he observes how [] and [] talk fast [F10].

ii.   Observational presence

The other level was through observational presence where adults not only physically engage in the *va'inga* activity, but are otherwise, present as an observer or supervisor. Sometimes, this contributes to the lack of motivation to *va'inga* while other reasons are preoccupation with other obligations. One mother's response was, "*I don't usually play with my children but I always make sure they are supervised because I am a stay-at-home mother and I do the housework. I let my children play and mess the house but I have to makes sure I watch them in case they get hurt*" [F9]. Because *va'inga* is seen as an activity and work of children, some adults especially teachers, assumed children naturally need the free time to *va'inga* on their own as part of their daily activities and that adult engagement was not necessary or important. One teacher's shared, "*Some teachers often leave children to play on their own or with others while they just observe and sometimes fail to observe and do other things. Play then, is like an activity only for children*" [T5]. This coincides with children's definition of play such as having fun, being outdoors, being with friends, choosing freely, not working, pretending, fantasy, drama, playing games, friendships, the opportunity for play choices, running, building (Cohen, 2007; Garrick, 2004; Santer et al, 2007; Sutton-Smith, 1997; White, 2012). Free play is 'children's free time to play', some teachers said *va'inga* is when children went outside to play or to play corners while she prepares for the next work activity. She said, "*Children would play when we had free play time and they would use all the outdoor and indoor play areas to play while I prepared for the next activity. They just play by themselves or with other children in any form they prefer but with the supervision of an assistant teacher*" [T6]. One mother said, "*I thought children need that time to play and use*

their energy (laughs)...*and that we didn't need to be involved. But I know that now so I will make sure I can join in when I am available*" [F9].

In summary, adult engagement in play confirms the reality of parent-children relationships in Tonga. While most parents and teachers spend the majority of their time in direct contact with children, the interaction and communication between them appears limited. *Va'inga* should be mobilised as a safe and fun space to link or act as a meeting point to ensure the prospect of *feohi* (interaction) – or as some adults mentioned, *māfana 'o e feohi'*. A study of Northern Trinidad by Roopnarine & Davidson (2015) focused on the impact of parent-child play as parents constitute the early core of children's economic and social lives. Although mothers and other family members contributed more to child play in their study, the opposite is happening in Tonga like it varingly happens in different parts of the world. This indicates that although the ECE teacher population are female, within the home environment, the father-children interaction is more formidable. Fathers are also more mindful of the need to *va'inga*, the support required in *va'inga* and the heart of *feohi*. Most mothers refuse and decline *va'inga* engagement and often limit and restrict certain boisterous and physical play activities. It thus calls for a more robust approach of advocacy to encourage both parents of the benefits of adult involvement and to empower fathers to continue supporting *va'inga* in their homes. In terms of the ECE teacher ratio, the findings point towards the possibility of encouraging male ECE teachers which may just be the way forward for play in Tonga.

5.6.3 What are the challenges to play?

There are numerous challenges that hinder adult *va'inga* engagement and support as well as certain challenges to *va'inga* itself. Adult failure to engage or support *va'inga* stems from a number of conscious and subconscious reasons[45]. However, most responses overlap so some examples will feature in multiple sections. The literature[46] range on the challenges to play mostly centered on general international aspects regarding the space, time and limitations to play, the complexities of the play

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[45] Note, a few of these reasons have been mentioned in the previous section and in the section on play perceptions, attitudes and behaviours.

[46] Adams & Fleer, 2016; Anning, 1997; Bennet & Kell, 1989; Carvalho, 2013; Cohen & MacKeith, 1991; Garvey, 1991; Hayes, 2006; Hutt, 1989; Kernan, 2007; Pramling Samuelsson, 2004; Siviy, 2010, Smith, 2013; Sutton-Smith, 1997; Wood & Attfield, 2005.

definition, insignificance of the play status, the play and work divide and life-long play and learning. It coupled the rights of children to play, child labour, exploitation practices, war and neighbourhood violence, the limited resources available to children living in poverty, disabilities, gender disparity (Ginsburg, 2007; Wolfberg, Bottema-Beutel & DeWitt, 2012). In terms of the place of play in the ECE curriculum, Wood & Attfield (2005) say it is problematic given the continuous debate on the purpose, role and value of play as a worthwhile learning tool. This section offers an exclusive socio-cultural perspective of the circumstances in Tonga in terms of adult engagement in play. In order of most to least responses, figure 5.6 illustrates an array of these challenges followed by a detailed account of each.

Figure 5.6 Challenges to va'inga engagement and support

Uninformed/ unaware	Family structures, communal disruption, expectations, pressure and cultural restrictions	Boisterousness and safety precautions	Exhaustion, irritability, idleness & laziness
Preoccupation and multiple obligations	Purposeful vs. purposeless va'inga	Lack of communication, commitment and strategy	Social play vs. solitary play
	Digital play vs. physical play	Health factors	Lack of stakeholder involvement and intervention

i.   Uninformed/unaware

While most adults, prior to the *talanoa* and *tālanga* or during the course of each became aware of the benefits of *va'inga*, a few were surprised as the dialogue unfolded. Some confessed they often restricted and stopped children from playing due to sheer ignorance (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Sometimes this unfamiliar knowledge stemmed from their own personal upbringings. One mother shared:

> I remember I didn't really grow up in an environment where parents encouraged talking…'*What did you do today?*'…etc. I notice in my two children, they ask a lot questions and when they ask more than five questions, I get angry. But I know that the environment (school) they are in encourages them to talk, to question…but us, '*Keep quiet, stop blabbing…close your mouth when you eat*' (laughs). I think of it because I am one of the slow ones to respond to a question given to me, I will respond differently then think about it later (laughs). I see that in questioning children, it happens with *pālangi* children eh? As soon as they are asked a question, they answer it straight away.

I remember in my case, I mostly hesitated and always gave the wrong answer. I would think of the question again and the right answer later (laughs) [F6].

Another mother said the claim and attitude is reflective of the belief that *va'inga* holds no learning or development qualities but is otherwise a free activity of children (Wood & Attfield, 2005). She said, "*Children learn through a lot of things and a lot of those things are unseen but some parents don't know that and they say, 'What kind of play is that, to play from morning till evening?'* [F10]. She continued, "*Some parents think learning is infused through homework but when children are left to just play, they complain it is a waste of time*" [F10].

ii. Family structures, communal disruption, expectations, pressure and cultural restrictions

The *nofo 'a kāinga* structure of living in Tonga sometimes not only disrupts the *va'inga* activity of some children, but hinders the opportunity for engaged adult *va'inga*. One mother said she thought play was something to take lightly as she spends very little time with her children, let alone play with them. She shared, "*I always dream to live on my own with my husband and our children because we still live with his parents. Because every time I must come and make food for my parents in law. That's what I see hinders the most (playing with her children)*". She also talked of her husband's busy work schedule while she also works and attends to household obligations. Parents agreed that these factors contribute to their engagement in *va'inga*. One father said he understands the importance of playing with children but sometimes it is problematic. He said, "*I will always play with my eldest son while my daughter feels left out. I need to maneuver or use a different approach where I am able to confidently play with my daughter or change the activities so that she is able to join in*" [M1].

A lot of parents mentioned that because children are expected to perform certain household chores at home or around the community, *va'inga* is sometimes delayed or even restricted. One mother said, "*When va'inga is noisy, we stop children because it bothers our close settlement structures. Children are expected to perform domestic tasks but when they play and do not perform these chores, we often stop them or get angered*" [F9]. On the pressures on teachers by the community especially parents that children should be exposed to more formalised instruction than *va'inga*, often leads to negligence in *va'inga* based activities. It also affects the teacher's

willingness to use it as an activity of children or medium of learning (Hayes, 2004; Kernan, 2007; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Sadly, some of these parents are teachers themselves or well-educated people. This further reduces the status of ECE teachers as worthwhile contributors to early learning. One teacher said, "*The Tongan ECE teacher is still being looked down on and the prospect of learning through play has put on extra pressure because a lot of parents don't value play*" [T9]. She continues, "*Even some well-educated parents are stubborn and arrogant. They're the ones with concerns, always asking why their children are not able to read or write yet. This is why some teachers are afraid to use play pedagogy more often and they don't value play even though it's in the curriculum*" [T9].

Another teacher said parents put pressure on ECE teachers of their opinions that children should be able to write their names and to write and draw letters. Teachers therefore, are pressured to include and emphasise on such skills in their daily programmes and plans and in turn, neglect play (Bennett & Kell, 1989; Nicholson, Bauer & Woolley, 2016). Meanwhile, teachers in pre-primary school usually blame ECE teachers for taking over their roles because children should not be expected to write until pre-primary years. She continued, "*Other teachers and parents don't support preschool because of this reason. Some children are bored with formalised learning once they get to pre-primary school because it was enforced on them in preschool when they should instead be playing and learning from their play*" [T7]. One other teacher supported, "*Yes that's true. One parent said, 'Why does my child not know how to write any letters?' Another said, 'Why don't children write on paper or books?' I thought, 'Man, what kind of mentality is this? No wonder teachers are reluctant to be innovative and use play in the classroom*'" [T8].

A major part of communal observance is the adherence of critical cultural practices that restrict children from certain forms of *va'inga* that include boisterous play, games with rules play and some construction and object play. The strict Sabbath observance in Tonga was the most shared by participants especially parents. One mother shared how her children's grandparents got upset if they played on Sunday. She said, "*Once, my son took out a pack of cards to play with. They said, 'We have told you this is Sunday and playing is prohibited!*'" [F11]. She continued, "*At church, they (children) would push and pinch each other so when we got home, they would get a smack because they know there is strict seriousness and restrictions in*

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certain places and at certain times" [F11]. Although the Sunday law is quite harsh, some parents still allow yet limit their children to engage in mild forms of social play within the proximities of their homes or bedrooms. This aids to avoid disturbing neighbouring homes or the wider community.

Gender restrictions on the *va'inga* opportunities of girls (Carvalho, 2013; Hewes, 2006) is another contentious issue. One mother shared her childhood experiences and the restrictions on some boisterous forms of *va'inga*, "*When I came back to Tonga, it was like, shock. No playing on Sunday. But [] and [] did not stop us from playing and even though we didn't have any play time with our parents, they didn't stop us. But it was like this, 'Go and play in the room'...even on Sundays eh*" [F5]. In terms of gender disparity, one mother reflected on her experiences, "*When our cousins came to visit, it was new to me because girls didn't climb trees...I climbed trees because I had been used to climbing trees abroad since I was three, four years old* (laughs)*...and my playmates were boys*" [F5]. She continued, "*There were girls but I didn't like playing with them. My cousins sometimes said, 'Stop climbing things, its bad!'* (frowned expression)" [F5]. One mother reflected confirming the cultural constraints that limit the *va'inga* opportunities of girls as opposed to boys. She said:

> One of the things I remember of my dad is that he gave me a big smack once. I grew up close to the rugby field at []. I got a smack because one day I didn't get home until it was dark. I was allowed to go out and play but I had to come back before sunset to take a bath. But this time, I don't know and maybe someone at home was lazy to call me so I got a big smack because as a girl I wasn't expected to stay out that late. Another case is after school at [] one day, my friends and I went into town to watch a passenger's ferry. When we went back home, all the other kids lived in town so I was the only one who walked all the way to []. On my way, no more vehicles were seen on the road it was about six to seven in the evening. When I got home, I got a smack and was told I would never again go out to play and come back this late. But that's discipline and you learn also that even though its play, but as a girl, I needed to come home early [F11].

This mirrors the advice by Pongia (2009) in his view of *langatoi* (hide and seek) as befitting for boys rather than girls given its predominant preference as a night or moonlight activity. Although his reasons were for safety and security purposes, the concern for play safety should not be a matter of gender as male children are also prone to the same if not, different risks and danger. It also reflects the challenges neighbouring PICs share as in the case of Samoa where one of the culturally conflicting aspects of play and learning relate to gender relationships and the segregation of play between boys and girls (Paleai & Amituanai-Toloa, 2015).

The cultural belief that the father's body is sacred or restricted means children are to refrain from any forms of physical contact unless in the case of *'olunga he kaliloaʹ*. This inhibits *va'inga* engagement especially when a lot of physical, roudy and rough and tumble *va'inga* require the vigorous physical interaction. One mother said, "*But children cannot play with their fathers because we remember that is what our mothers always told us, 'Don't eat his left over food; Don't touch his hair/head; Don't come close to him…'*" [F6]. One father said he knows the importance to physically engage with his son in soccer and rugby so he allows the interaction [M2].

iii.   Boisterousness and safety precautions

Following this, boisterousness and safety precautions precede communal disruption as some children's *va'inga* are often stopped due to the loudness it occasionally creates which further disrupts some forms of communal structures (Ginsburg, 2007; Nwokah, Hsu & Gulker, 2013). *Va'inga* was not seen as something destructive, but is often restricted depending on particular contexts. One father said, "*Sometimes we stop children from playing because they're too loud and we might bother the neighbours*" [M1]. A mother said, "*Children have the freedom to play but are restricted to at certain times depending on the environment and situation*" [F6]. One father shared how children often behave differently in different contexts other than the home. They seem to be more boisterous and sometimes uncontrollable away from home; a behaviour shared by several other parents. He said he noticed while temporarily living abroad, the doors were mostly locked and his children played indoors till evening and spent most of their time with their mother. The problem was when they went out into society. He said, "*They (children) don't care if there are people around, like at church. We told them playing during church is bad but they still play. So, why not remove children elsewhere?*" [M1]. He continued, "*When the sermon was delivered, [] didn't care if anyone was standing at the pulpit. She walked up, went inside, looked up at the pastor…doesn't care at all* (laughs)" [M1]. He cautions there are certain skills to teach children like going out to public places and meeting people although what actually happens in reality is totally the opposite.

A lot of adults also restricted or prohibited *va'inga* if children were playing rough and with items that may harm themselves or others (Garvey, 1990; Sandseter & Sando, 2016). Some examples were taken to demonstrate this view. One mother said, "*Like wrestling…my eldest often imitates some moves on my youngest. I always get*

frustrated and stop them but my father says, 'Let them be.' But we should really monitor some play activities" [F10]. Another mother said, "*One child would imitate a sword fight from the movies* (makes a sword swish noise). *All of a sudden, one child shows up with an actual blade and makes swish noises with it* (demonstrates). *Children actually think it is a good thing*" [F6]. A lot of the boisterous *va'inga* activities adults shared coupled children using sharp objects or unsafe household items in their *va'inga* mainly to imitate something they saw on TV, in a movie or of things in their natural surroundings (Sandseter & Sando, 2016). This is often stopped to prevent any hazardous incidents especially of children harming themselves or others. One father shared his experience, "*Sometimes we stop them for safety reasons. They often like to play with sticks, to demonstrate something as in cartoons. And sometimes they climb on chairs and pretend to conduct a choir and although it is fun but we need to be mindful in case the chair turns and he falls*" [M1]. Another father shared, "*I remember getting scolded for playing. That was the mentality and state of mind of parents back then before we had this understanding. They would say, 'Stop climbing, you might fall!'*" [M5].

iv.   Exhaustion, irritability, idleness and laziness

One other major factor was the high level of exhaustion a lot of adults endured especially mothers. It mostly led to the lack of vigour and desire to engage in *va'inga* as well as an increased irritability to tolerate the playful nature of children. One mother said, "*Every so often we adults say, 'Go away, stop being inappropriate or I will slap you!' That is when you hinder their (children's) ability to cognitively develop* [F2]. Another mother shared, "*Tiredness often makes us irritable to children's play even if they are just making a simple joke, we become annoyed. That's when you often think play is purposeless*" [F11]. She continued, "*The truth is, we lack patience and the ability to be spontaneous and use a variety of methods to enable small forms of play. Sometimes you get angry and you say things like, 'Don't talk to me, can't you see I'm trying to do something?' But that is not right eh…*" [F11]. Some participants shared that sometimes tiredness often gets in the way of engaging in child play knowing there is a lot of cleaning up to do afterwards. It also allows an irritable tendency to ignore *va'inga* requests from children. One father said, "*My wife and I understand the benefits of play but exhaustion hinders our behaviour. In less than twenty minutes, there are toys everywhere, the house is*

wrecked, blankets, pillows, blocks are scattered everywhere…but little do we know that is when they learn things eh? (smiles)" [M1].

In addition, several teachers attribute the negligence of some teachers and parents to engage in *va'inga* to idleness and absolute laziness. A lot of parents, especially mothers confessed to this behaviour even when they are well aware of the benefits of adult engagement. One teacher said, "*Laziness, that's why some teachers don't want to play because they can't be bothered but they know very well the importance of play in preschool years*" [T9]. She continued, "*But then they get frustrated with children…no other strategy. Some teachers also use inappropriate language…*" [T9]. A mother also said, "*I guess the main reason is laziness and the mentality of 'couldn't be bothered' to play because that is just an activity and work of children for themselves on their own time. Especially for us working mothers, you get back from work, so tired so play is not something you want to do when you are tired*" [F8].

v. Preoccupation and multiple obligations

Sometimes the fault lies even when working parents are within the home premises but bring extra work from the work place further occupying their time while at the same time, making little to no time for neither their children nor their *va'inga* needs. One father shared how he and his wife have allocated a time to involve in their children's play. He said, "*Most of the time you get home from work and usually you take home extra work and you get preoccupied in that then later you realise there was absolutely no time for your children (regret expression)*" [M1]. He continued, "*So, we have structured a time to play, to do our housework and cooking and to put our children down to bed*" [M1]. Some teachers confessed to playing with children at school but lacked *va'inga* activity at home with their own children. The multiple obligations some working parents have often hinder their ability to engage in home *va'inga*. One teacher shared, "*I know some people in our village think, 'this lady is a workaholic' because I spend most of my time at school, preparing lessons and activities for the next day. I also like to mentor young teachers and encourage them of their responsibilities as ECE teachers*" [T9]. She continued, "*But with my children, I know I leave them out…I hardly have time for them or play with them (paused regret look)*" [T9]. Working parents mostly attribute their hectic schedules not only to their day jobs but to the multiple obligations they also adhere to which mostly involves church functions as choir practice, additional work hours and

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extended family obligations. One mother shared this in terms of the short time she and her husband both have with their children because of the multiple obligations they shoulder:

> Most of the time I am involved in church functions and I must go to choir practice. So what I do, I send my children to my cousins, '*Okay, you guys can go home*.' My husband often gets angry on Sundays because after church our children do not come home with us. I told him, '*Because the children know there is no home here because we are not together most times. They are the father and mother to them because they are always there for them.*' And you really feel the gap when you do not have time for your children to play and appreciate them because sometimes when we are tired, sometimes we hit them even say things a that are not uplifting…'*You are a stupid girl…You are such and such…You are like such and such.*' But I am thankful for recognising our culture and our bond through this *talanoa* [F11].

vi.   Purposeful vs. purposeless va'inga

A lot of teachers shared and agreed the debate of 'play is a waste of time' is really a question of purposeful play versus purposeless play. Teacher engagement and attitude towards *va'inga* depend if the activity is not boisterous or rowdy, a mismatch in teachers' understanding of early learning play theory and practice (Toganivalu, 2008). According to Hendricks (2009), it mirrors orderly and disorderly play in how adults categorise play according to cultural, social, and psychological sources of order. Some participants believed if the *va'inga* activity is purposeless, it should be stopped and converted to an activity that is more purposeful and so-called, educational. One other teacher shared, "*If that task is meaningless, then love forbid, stop it! It is a waste of time…*" [T3]. A few parents also had this reasoning and would not tolerate any forms of boisterous play declaring it was a waste of time. One particular mother said, "*When my children play rough and loud, I call it aimless or purposeless play because they just create noise and chaos when they fight and then one of them cries* (laughs)" [F9]. She continued, "*But when they are engaged in meaningful play like building blocks and board games, that's learning eh? Even video games sometimes I don't like…my boys will sit on those games and make so much noise*" [F9]. Regardless of these attitudes, boisterous play in the form of strenuous physical activity sustains muscles for strength, supports healthy growth and coordination and helps improve academic performance (Gordon, 2014; Hyndman, Benson & Telford, 2016; LaFreniere, 2011; Løndal, 2011; Pells, 2016; Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009).

vii. Lack of communication, commitment and strategy

A lot of teachers agreed the negligence of parents to verbally communicate and dialogue with their children at home not only hinders their speech development, but restricts *va'inga* interests. In some cases, children are left with a babysitter or a grandmother who does not converse with children. One teacher said although speaking skills are important, it stems from interactions between parents and children at home. She shared an example, "*One mother told me her only child doesn't speak at home, she just watches movies. I asked her if she and her husband talk or dialogue with their daughter, she said no. See? That is the problem and when children like that come to school, it is extra work for the teacher, but I make them talk and I dialogue with them a lot, ask them questions…*" [T9]. Several teachers point the finger at themselves because they fail to dialogue with children. They said they are of a very quiet character which should not be the case if your profession is teaching.

One teacher said some teachers do not dialogue with children as often as they should or ask questions to stimulate thinking and speech. She also said overcrowded classrooms is another problem, "*Teachers don't talk that much with children or ask them questions. There are also too many children in one class, that is why there should be more classrooms, more teachers so that one teacher can easily come through one by one and cater for a desirable amount of children to ensure they learn properly*" [T2]. Another teacher said teachers themselves are not talkative and therefore, reflect that behaviour in their teaching and interaction with children. It is a normal Tongan behaviour to be quiet and shy but something should be done in the way teachers are prepared at the training college. In Western countries, the teacher makes time to talk and converse with children. This is not seen as the case in Tonga. There is either no time or no desire for *talanoa*. She said, "*Sunday school is maybe the only way children really get to talk, converse and perform in White Sunday lessons and Biblical recitals. That's important to develop spiritual and Biblical knowledge skills and practice eh?*" [T9]. She concluded, "*Bottom line, everyone comes into the teaching profession with their own personal traits and that is what either impedes or facilitates learning*" [T9].

Some teachers said a lack of commitment to *va'inga* nor the willingness or ability to use strategic interventions through *va'inga* for different situations is a major hindrance in the classroom (Toganivalu, 2008). One teacher said, "*And with*

teachers, they already know what to do, the guidelines, curriculum, everything is there. They choose not to on their own accord which mostly is lack of commitment and idleness" [T9]. One teacher's example of the situation was of free play. She said that although she values and supports free play and the need to monitor and observe children's play, some teachers view it as *va'inga noa'ia* (purposeless play) and a time when children have free time to play on their own (Gilakjani, 2011). She otherwise encourages them to observe children's play to identify interests and problematic play but, they refuse. She continued, "*In my USP courses, I see trainees that are appealing in their practice and I wish I could hire them* (laughs)…*not to be biased or selective with the teachers I already have but I prefer to work with people who are committed and are passionate about their calling as ECE teachers*" [T8]. She sometimes jokingly would say to her teachers, "*Maybe it's good for you to find another profession because your heart is not here with ECE* (laughs)" [T8].

viii.   Social play vs. solitary play

Following this, the disparity between social and solitary play is equally beneficial but it becomes a problem when older children refuse to socialise given they lack interpersonal and social skills or are not given the opportunity to do so. This was a concern from some teachers who said such situations call for special attention and intervention. One teacher shared her experience of some children becoming excessively unsociable lacking social skills if pretend and solitary play are carried too far. Children refrain from a lot of things like communication skills especially talking. She said, "*One boy is an only child and his parents said he spends his day in one room watching movies of dinosaurs and playing with dinosaur toys. He does not speak but makes dinosaur noises. He does not want to go outside to any other way*" [T3]. She continued, "*I told his parents to change that routine and speak more often to him. I actually talk a lot to him at school too and he is improving. Now, he can talk, talk to others and go out to play or play in other corners of the classroom*" [T3].

ix.   Digital play vs. physical play

A number of teachers were concerned at the increased level of immobility of some children at school and at home. It raised the concern of heightened digital play hindering children's physical activity and well-being (Kernan, 2007). One teacher said, "*Children need to be active and move around all the time because that is their nature. If they are watching TV or doing a task sitting down on the mat or on tables,*

they should be only kept there for a minimal time only" [T3]. Another teacher said, "*Like electronic and computer games, while there are some learning benefits in some games, children lack physical skills because they are too engaged in digital play. They don't go outside anymore to run around. I see that in their faces when they come to school…they look weary*" [T6]. Another teacher said a mother shared how her son gained weight and does nothing at home but remains indoors and plays video games (Graham, 2010; Kernan, 2007). She said it reflected at school because he is uninterested in any other forms of play because there are no video games and he also refused to go outside and play. She advised the mother for a change in lifestyle and routine for her child for it is unhealthy for him to be like that. She could start by minimising his time on video games and to make him play outside more often or do some housework in exchange to play. She said, "*I also encouraged and urged him to go out and play. I also initiated ball games for him. He is improving at school and his mother said at home as well. She is happy that she and her son have time to do other things together*" [T9]. She continued, "*Both the school and home need to equally intervene to ensure children engage in the most appropriate ways to play to make sure they have an equal chance to develop in all aspects of growth*" [T9].

x.   **Health factors**

To maintain children's health may be a reason for children to *va'inga* but it can also be a concern and cause of some health issues. According to Veitch et al (2010), low levels of physical activity lead to increased obesity and chronic diseases in children. On another note, several participants in the study pointed out the extreme humid weather Tonga experiences almost year round can be detrimental to some children struggling with hay fever and asthma. Some active *va'inga* activities cause children to heavily perspire leading to cough outbreaks and more often, difficulty in breathing. One mother shared why she sometimes has to stop her children from playing, "*My children play all the time and they are so active even when the weather is so hot and humid. I take my son to the hospital almost every week because he comes home from school wet from perspiration and if I don't immediately change him, he has to go on the nebulizer or be given ventolin*" [F1]. She continued, "*My other children cough a lot from the humid weather because every day they play until they get hot and tired*" [F1]. One mother shared that while some forms of *va'inga* are fun and useful such as helping out with household chores, they can be the cause for

attracting the flu or further health complications. She said, "*My son comes home every day with a dirty uniform. At school, he waters their garden and plays with water at the same time. I often get upset because he usually gets sick that way and I don't want him to catch pneumonia or anything serious*" [F11].

xi.   Lack of stakeholder involvement and intervention

The *va'inga* interaction between teachers and children are also affected by factors beyond the school level branching further into the broader systems level (Kernan, 2007). One teacher said there is a lack in how things are being dealt with at the systems level and the ministry needs to step up and intervene, have more televised and on-air programmes for ECE or get teachers from each center to promote their practices of play so people nation-wide are informed and are aware. She continued, "*Because that's what gets information to family homes, to the islands eh? The TPA used to have broadcasting programmes but they don't run now. Even though some parents don't listen to the radio or watch television, bring them into the center and talk with them*" [T9]. The suggestion itself also posed another major problem as one teacher shared how the ministry would often host workshops where a teacher representative from each center would attend. Most times, these teachers do not report back on the workshop for further in-house staff development and in-service trainings. She continued, "*They just keep it to themselves or either do not know what the workshop was about. That is a problem when trying to get teachers in Tonga to think alike in their knowledge and practice of ECE*" [T5].

In summary, challenges to *va'inga* engagement mostly depend on the various socio-cultural perceptions and behaviours adults have towards it as a natural activity of children. Boisterous play is a leading factor given its audacity and rough-tumble nature especially in tight knitted settlements. Another is the Sabbath where some play forms are said to cause *maumau Sāpate* (inappropriate activities of the Sabbath). Gender disparity and the expected poised nature of female children restrict them from some forms of physical and boisterous play in which otherwise, they too may enjoy let alone its contribution to physical development. The overemphasis on the father's body being sacred restricts children from physically bonding in play with him unless in the case of *'olunga he kaliloa'*. There needs to be forms of cultural negotiation to allow a free flow of *va'inga* to ensure children receive the ultimate development, support and engagement they need to thrive in the most extensive

assortment of *va'inga* activities. Lack of adult knowledge and awareness couple other reasons to deeply understand the low level of adult engagement in child *va'inga* in Tonga. These cultural-specific scenarios however, further contribute to the wider discourse of play and the challenges imposed on play inhibiting its ability to perform its role in children's early learning and development.

5.6.4 How will you proactively engage and support play?

As the preceding *talanoa* and *tālanga* unfolded, adults became more and more aware of the imperative necessity of *va'inga* in children's lives and learning. Thinking and reasoning shifted for most participants as they began to see and share *va'inga* from a new perspective[47]. This section also bridges the previous section on the challenges of adult engagement in *va'inga*. In the literature of play support[48], certain themes emerged which involved the facilitation of play, understanding play, valuing home play, creating play environments and opportunities, play involvement and encouragement and expanding play repertoires. The findings also encompass a series of these aspects and further contribute to the wider socio-cultural discourse of play and learning. In methodical order, figure 5.7 points out the different ways adults engage and support *va'inga* in the home and school environments. It sanctions a heightened awareness of *va'inga* for the development benefits of young children[49].

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[47] The question itself stimulated a changed reaction in participants who were initially reluctant to the idea of play as a catalyst for learning.

[48] Adams & Fleer, 2016; Christie & Roskos, 2013; Gilakjani, 2011 Hewes, 2006; Kalliala, 2005; Kris; 2015; Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015; Schwartz; 2014; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013.

[49] Note, a comprehensive literature account was not available for all these particular aspects. However, a few indigenous and international perspectives were obtainable.

Figure 5.7 Ways to support va'inga

Understand and enable va'inga	Make time, practice involvement and schedule va'inga intervals	Provide and create opportunities and environments for va'inga	Provide resources and design stimulating va'inga activities
Encourage, support & assist va'inga plus take children to va'inga playgrounds	Relocate children to available va'inga spaces, negotiate va'inga spaces and look for va'inga alternatives	Make observations and identify va'inga interests	Create lasting bonds and initiate dialogue through va'inga
Bridge socio-cultural barriers and lift va'inga restrictions	Reinforce early forms of va'inga	Set boundaries to va'inga intervals and use discipline through va'inga	Ensure va'inga safety and model good va'inga behaviour
	Share/raise awareness of va'inga and develop reflective practice on va'inga	School and system's level support of va'inga	

i.   Understand and enable va'inga

First and foremost, before adults venture to support and engage in *va'inga*, they must understand *va'inga* in its entirety especially how it contributes to the learning development of young children (Adams & Fleer, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002). This helps bridge the gap that *va'inga* is substandard to formalised learning. One teacher said, "*Ignorance is the main reason for the lack of play knowledge in some teachers. They don't understand children must play…as if they didn't play when they were younger eh? (laughs)*" [T7]. She continued, "*They need to be informed and to know its importance for children's growth and development*" [T7]. One mother added, "*We know our Tongan parents, if they know something is good for learning, they will go the extra mile to achieve it for their children…why not inform them of play? It is also a very easy task and cheap too*" [F1]. One simple and effortless way some adults suggested, was to enable (*fakangofua*) and allow children to *va'inga* for the sake of *va'inga* and nothing else. One mother said, "*I believe we should allow children to just play…that's really good. That is an abundance of learning*" [F6]. One father said giving children the freedom to *va'inga* is a learning tool in itself, "*I never have a problem when my children play…I never stop them…I just let them play because that's the time they are free to be like kids*" [M2]. He continued, "*If we let them play freely in what they like, they will learn a lot more for themselves just like when we help them…but sometimes I can see they learn from their self or from*

their sisters and brothers" [M2]. One mother said, "*Through play, children's learning intensifies and they are able to learn both good and bad*" [F6].

ii.   Make time, practise involvement and schedule va'inga intervals

Even though adults assured to make the effort to understand and appreciate *va'inga*, they also need to ensure they actually make the time to engage in *va'inga* due to its long term benefits in children's learning (Lynch, 2015; Nicholson, Bauer & Woolley, 2016, 1989; Weisberg et al, 2013b). One mother said, "*I've learnt a lot, we need to spend time with our kids, even though its play but they are learning eh?*" [F11]. One father said, "*We should ensure we make the time and that time is used wisely because sometimes when children need us, we are exhausted and tired. We should make a better effort*" [M4]. A mother also shared:

> Play is not recognised as something important. We understand its significance but it is not yet put into a position where time is dedicated so that you can engage in play. Sometimes you think, '*That's okay because there are a lot of guys at home to play with the kids*.' But no, there should be a focus and effort on play and the time to engage in play. I must be willing to dedicate my time so that I can engage in the process because I believe in the importance of play as a process and I will ensure to dialogue with my children. I won't let them just play…they can play on their own but I must ensure I am part of their play especially through *talanoa*…question them of their play [F6].

According to most teachers and some adults, to involve in *va'inga* is one thing, but in order to truly understand its essence and link to learning development, adults needed to practise becoming actively involved (Tonganivalu, 2008). In other words, the parent or teacher must self-teach and self-train themselves how to get involved in *va'inga*. One father said, "*It's not just to involve yourself in va'inga then you think that is involvement…no, you must first ako/teach/train yourself how to va'inga and how to be involved with your children so that you can fully understand the benefits of va'inga for their learning*" [M6]. One way to ensure engagement in *va'inga* is to actually schedule specific times and intervals for it to occur. A lot of working parents suggested this as something they are already doing or will make an effort to do. One father suggested, "*Prepare a timetable to ensure there is an allocated time to play with your children*" [M3]. One mother reflected on this suggestion with remorse asserting she will make the effort to schedule her busy day schedule so that *va'inga* engagement becomes one of her daily priorities. She said, "*Even though my husband is sometimes not here, he is the one who frequently plays with our children. I prefer to play with my brother's kids, but with my kids, I usually get angry and I spend my time at work. But like this talanoa, I need to reschedule my time so that I make time*"

[F11]. She also talks of the irreplaceable lost time parents need to understand in the bond *va'inga* engagement creates, "*I often tell my husband, this is the time we need to spend with our children because when they grow older, go to high school, look at our eldest son, he is in [], (and mostly spends his time there at [])...when get married, that's the end*" [F11]. She continued, "*We will try to get them back, but no. You will come from drinking kava and overtime from work and no one is here...it's an empty house, and there are no children in it*" [F11].

iii.   Provide and create opportunities and environments for va'inga

Providing opportunities for *va'inga* coupled enabling and providing resources and environments that allow children the freedom to choose the forms of *va'inga* they prefer to engage in (Kalliala, 2005). It allows sharing of family chores and routines by making them more fun and playful. It further permits free play without adult inclusion or intervention. For adults to understand this necessity is by all means, another way of supporting *va'inga*. One teacher said, "*Parents and teachers should understand that children's free play is also important because it is just their time to explore and learn on their own the things in their surroundings and environment. But some people especially teachers don't understand that*" [T9]. One father said, "*Children learn on their own even when you play with them but at times, they are used to playing alone. They learn on their own and it depends on the child*" [M1].

Creating environments for *va'inga* especially in the home area is something most parents do not really consider in terms of spatial availability within the home proximities. Children are often expected to *va'inga* outdoors in available open spaces, in nearby homes and sometimes in village rugby fields. Some parents otherwise, take their children to the park or the beach. With this awareness however, parents realised the importance to create home environments that enable children to *va'inga* within the comforts of their home so they do not always rely on going out to *va'inga* (Bourke & Sargisson, 2014; Christie & Roskos, 2013; Hewes, 2006; Jarrett, French-Lee, Bulunuz & Bulunuz, 2010; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Wilson, 2011). Indoor play is also a major aspect of consideration. One mother said, "*Their toys do not fit in our room so we must put them in the living room or the outside porch. However, we live with their grandparents and they do not like it when there are toys lying around so sometimes we need to restrict and limit our children's play time*" [F11]. She continued, "*But in the morning I would always find him (one of*

her sons) in his corner, playing with his trains" [F11]. One father mentioned, "*My girls like to play pretend indoors so I will use the spare room to make them a play room. Only my youngest daughter likes to play outside a lot but her mother always stops her in case she gets hurt because my building supplies are there. I will put them away so she can use that space*" [M6].

iv.   Provide resources and design stimulating va'inga activities

Most adults, especially parents, shared one of the best ways to support *va'inga* is to ensure resources are provided for children to enable enjoyment and the prospect of learning (Christie & Roskos, 2013; Hewes, 2006). Sometimes it is best to know what children like and provide these particular *va'inga* resources. One father said, "*I noticed, my children like playing in the sand so I set apart an area for some sand and sand play*" [M5]. Some parents suggested commecialised toys (Garcia, 2013; Hewes, 2006; Ness & Farenga, 2016; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013) as their demand are on the increase in a lot of stores. One mother said and suggested, "*We should provide resources for play. Like the Snakes and Ladders game. However, I haven't had time to go out to buy one, so I just drew one on a piece of paper and there are dices at home so he can play, count and learn from. Just provide these things for them to draw on*" [F13]. Another mother suggested, "*Just provide play resources and materials like charts from the bookshop. When they constantly observe something, you get surprised when you ask, 'Where is your head? Where are your shoulders, where are your legs?' and they point*" [F10]. She continued, "*At the same time, they become familiar with it and know a lot of things like the ABCs. Sometimes, the first letter-picture example they give is usually what they observe in the charts*" [F10].

Other parents recommended the use of available or natural resources around the home area in which children may utilise in their *va'inga* because play does not always require toys. However, it is also important to maintain children's toys for future use to minimise expenses. One mother shared, "*My mother in-law was amazed at how I kept all the toys from my eldest to my youngest child. I will only throw away a broken toy knowing it may harm my child*" [F5]. She continued, "*I kept every toy, even toys with wheels…and even if one wheel went missing (laughs). But I was watchful and told the babysitter to discard any broken toys*" [F5]. Another mother shared, "*It's cheap to use available resources at home like boxes and paper*

or natural resources like wood, sticks, leaves. Children do not only have fun when we can sometimes afford to buy them toys from the shop…some parents cannot afford it so it's good to be wise and use what we can" [F14].

Most teachers and some parents shared it was important as part of adult engagement not only to provide *va'inga* resources for children but also to design, organise and plan fun games and activities that help stimulate learning (Fisher et al, 2013; Hirsh-Pasek et al, 2009; Wood, 2008). For teachers, it is a main part of their guided play activities that run on a day-to-day basis at their centers. One teacher shared, "*There is indoor through play and outdoor through play and both of them are important especially free time when children need to spend time playing on their own*" [T9]. She continued, "*I am a big supporter of free play but I also believe it is important to structure play activities that help a child learn as well as making available resources and activities during free play so that children are engaged in their own learning*" [T9]. A few parents also suggested *va'inga* games be organised at home where parents either engage or where children *va'inga* on their own. Sometimes games are organised by parents have a special meaning to children. One father mentioned, "*Sometimes I bring stones and like multiply, addition, I use the stones…I tell her, 'You count 3 and if you want to add another 3 and you put them together'…and she gets it…just using games…but it will help her to understand*" [M2]. He continued, "*On the exams, she teaches herself and draws stones on the paper…and that is a way for kids to learn. Just to design play things for them and help them play…and learn as well eh?*" [M2]. Organised games as another father mentioned, ensures children are given the opportunity and freedom to *va'inga* in a safe way and environment. He said, "*The way I see play, it should be organised and children be given the freedom to play. At the same time, we need to supervise play for safety reasons so children do not hurt themselves*" [M5].

v. **Encourage & assist va'inga plus take children to va'inga playgrounds**

Parents and teachers alike shared a great deal on how they could assist children learn through *va'inga* by means of engaging in their *va'inga* as peers and as facilitators of learning (Hewes, 2006). An example is shared by one father, "*It is crucial to encourage and assist children when they va'inga to fully encompass the beneficial outcomes of learning through play*" [M2]. Another father said, "*Play brings out*

things we can help or assist in. [] said, 'CEDAW!' I asked, 'Can you spell it?' She said, 'No.' So I told her to bring me paper and I wrote out the abbreviation like this…/C/ stands for this, /E/ stands for this, /D/ stands for this…" [M1].

Teachers foremost said understanding both solitary and social play, was an important part of supporting *va'inga* because they are both equally beneficial to child learning and development. One teacher said younger children are naturally more solitary and should not be confused with anti-social behaviour, "*Just because a child plays on their own does not mean they are anti-social. Younger children prefer to play alone and should be allowed to do so and not ascertained as having relational problems*" [T1]. It is supported, some children desire to play alone between ages 2-3 and as they get older (3 or 4 years), they start to move out and play in groups of three or more participants (Fein, 198; Smith, 2013; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). On the other hand, some parents appreciate solitary play and instead of actually engaging or taking part in children's *va'inga*, otherwise praise and commend them boosting self-esteem and confidence. One father said, "*They should be left to play on their own because it builds their self-esteem, but when you encourage their play, there is a feeling that connects us to the child…and the child feels it too. One day my son said, 'Man, yes dad! I can do it!' I replied, 'Yes [], you can do it!*" [M1].

With some older children, social play is sometimes difficult because they are seen as anti-social or are very shy to join in other children's *va'inga*. Most teachers shared that it is important as adults to recognise these signs and help a child socialise in a way the child feels comfortable with and not by force or shame. One teacher said, "*Some children are shy…very emotional and does not want to join the other children. Sometimes the child may be a new student but then they become familiar and are okay…but some are just naturally shy, reserved eh?*" [T1]. She continued, "*That's when it is important for us as teachers to recognise these things and step in…introduce them to others, ask other children to invite that child to play. Find him a friend.*" [T1]. One mother described how some isolated children behave:

> When children associate with each other, they are more adaptable because they are familiar. Not like an environment where a child is isolated and silent and grows up on his/her own. You feel sorry when they go out and associate with people. You can see how they try to refrain from other kids. You can tell kids that are allowed to play, they are active and boisterous like the rest. But a child who is isolated will just sit there so you introduce him/her to the other children so that they play together [F10].

Frequently taking children to *va'inga* playgrounds is also a good way to support and engage in *va'inga*. Some parents shared outings with their children to the park enables them to learn coordination skills and to strengthen physical and health development. One father said, "*The park in town has a long log* (demonstrates with his hands) *where my youngest one enjoys walking on, practicing her balance*" [M5]. Another father shared, "*When I take my children to the park, they develop their physical self eh…they run around and they climb and catch the ball or swing and exercise their physical body eh…that is one way they learn…also to keep the body fit and healthy*" [M6]. He continued, "*When I used to teach sports in high school, we had to train students of body coordination…just like our children*" [M6].

vi. Relocate children to available va'inga spaces, negotiate va'inga spaces and look for va'inga alternatives

Of the numerous times children's *va'inga* interferes or disrupts social living, some parents suggested when visitors are over or when adults need privacy or quietness, children can be removed or relocated to other areas of the home or to the outdoors where they are able to freely go about their *va'inga*. One mother said when visitors are over, her children are taught to sit still. She also shared, "*I get upset some mornings when I wake up to iron their clothes for school and they are playing beside their sleeping grandparents. I always say, 'Always be respectful. You are strictly not allowed to play where your grandparents sleep'. My kids wake, eat, breathe and sleep play* (laughs)" [F11]. Often at church where children are expected to sit still, there should be a separate venue and programme such as Sunday school where they engage in age-specific activities like Biblical lessons appropriate to their level. At the same time, children are flexible to engage in active and functional programmes which does not disturb adults at church. One mother said, "*Because there is no Sunday school, children will be noisy in church. They need to exercise their energy because they cannot sit still for a long time and our church services are very long* (laughs)" [F14]. This coincides with the *Surplus Energy Theory* where play is seen as a way of releasing or eliminating excess energy (Docket & Fleer, 1999; Fleer, 2009; Mitchell & Mason, 1948; Santer et al, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 1995).

One of the ways adults and children are able to maintain a balance in *va'inga* is through negotiable terms. One example is the play and work divide. While parents mostly instruct children of what household tasks they are to perform in order to

va'inga, some children present their own terms. One father said the skill of negotiation is a necessary learning attribute, "*When children negotiate, they are learning how to state their mind…learning to win through manipulation*" [M5]. One father's reflection of his negotiable *va'inga* experiences was much of a win, win situation in that *va'inga* was not actually negotiable but more compulsory. In the end, *va'inga* was permissible and as a lot of adults shared, a pleasant strategy, "*I remember growing up, play was used as a cooperation strategy, 'Do this and you can go out and play, and if you don't do this, you won't be allowed to play'* (laughs)" [M1]. Some parents shared the flexible arrangements they have with their children especially in terms of *va'inga* and work. One father said, "*Two of my kids usually pick up rubbish. I persuade them with electronic games. 'You can play games if you thoroughly pick up the rubbish.' However, I limit their game play to only two hours, if not they will play endlessly* (laughs)" [M4].

A mother also shared, "*What [] does is persuade [] especially if it's a holiday. They say they will clean up the room if we go to the beach and it's funny because they use play to negotiate; 'I'll do this, if you give me this; give me this, and I'll do that'* (laughs) [F6]. On other occasions, negotiating *va'inga* reinforces good behavior as shared by a lot of parents. One father said, "*My children like cartoons but they can only watch movies on weekends. I often say, 'When you are well behaved, we will go out to buy a new movie.' Being good and well behaved in order to go to the park is something good for them too*" [M5]. He continued, "*As a weekend or holiday approaches, they look forward to the park. I use it as a weapon to ensure they are well-behaved* (laughs)…*Or, 'We will not go to the park if you misbehave too much'*" (laughs) [M5]. Kawash (2011) disclosed, children initiate their own forms of play and contests and negotiate these terms.

In response to adult preoccupation, one way to combat the absence of engagement and to meet the diverse *va'inga* needs of children, additional *va'inga* counterparts seems a suitable alternative. One father said his older children otherwise play with his younger children and grandson while he attends to other obligations, "*We live with our grandson and I have younger and older children. To make up for the time I don't play with my grandson, I let him play with my younger children. They build bonds as they play and they learn feongo'i'aki (empathy) for each other*" [M4]. He continued, "*Meanwhile, I do our house work like going to the bush and so forth. But

the truth is, to me, parents spend little time playing with their children mostly because they are busy" [M4]. Another father said "*When I'm busy, I just take them to my sister's house so they play with her kids. She takes them to the park and there are play equipments at their house, a trampoline and so forth. That's how I make up for their play needs*" [M5].

vii.   Make observations and identify va'inga interests

One way to support *va'inga* is to make observations of children's actual activities in order to completely understand their nature and the manner in which they *va'inga.* In turn, this helps identify how learning development actually interplays. One father said, "*When I see them play, it is so rewarding and fun. You also observe the type of language they use in their play*" [M1]. Teachers especially use this as a formal part of their teaching practice and assessment for learning. One teacher in particular mentioned, "*Part of our classroom practice is to make observations of children's activities even their play. Every child has a portfolio of learning and we can track their performance and understand the nature of children's play and learning through these records*" [T9].

Being able to identify children's *va'inga* interests helps foster learning needs. This amounted to the variety of *va'inga*, games and resources made available. Some participants added it nevertheless, prevents parents from limiting their provision and support of the things their children are only interested in but to explore new things to vary their learning repertoires and to expand *va'inga* and learning experiences. One mother's perspective was, "*With us parents, we need to know the level/situation our children are at to understand the importance of their play*" [F10]. One teacher said, "*I get children to introduce themselves and talk of what they want to be in the future. I use this to observe their play so that I can encourage their intelligences and to identify and encourage alternative talents*" [T5]. She continued, "*You can tell some children are being forced by parents towards a particular ambition* (laughs)…*but they should be encouraged according to how they behave and the interests they like in their play*" [T5].

viii. Create lasting bonds and initiate dialogue through va'inga

Va'inga is a good way to create lasting bonds with other children and adults through the *māfana* (warmth) of interaction (Holmes, 2012; Mori et al, 2009). It foremost, allows children to imitate good and righteous behaviour and the language used by adults. For this, some adults shared, although *va'inga* is very important it calls for much caution. One father said, "*The more we play with them, they learn and imitate certain languages we use and sometimes, they become closer to us*" [M1]. This bond as most parents and teachers shared, is the love and trust that gives children the reassurance, confidence and openness to mutualise the bond. The relationship nonetheless, is long lasting and instilled in children as they mature and grow older further nurturing good and responsible adults for the future. The same father said:

> [] is in class 4, he cannot leave until he gives me a hug (cries) and when he sleeps at night. It's a feeling that we ingrain in a child so that when he gets older, it will never leave him. That's the importance of play. I recall little puppies and kittens. The more we stroke them, the more they become close to us. That's the same thing with our children. When they grow older, they wouldn't care if we didn't bring them close to us when they were younger [M1].

These bonds also raise confidence and eliminate shyness especially when children go to school. One mother said, "*I believe if children are confident to play at home, they will feel comfortable to play around other people and they will be able to associate easily. Sometimes our children fail because they are shy to push themselves to do things that help them succeed*" [F10].

The lack of verbal expression was a concern for several parents and teachers. It is believed dialogue and higher order questioning raises cognitive skills and critical thinking (Lillard et al, 2013; Meckely, 2002; Perry & Branum, 2009; Weisberg et al, 2013b). *Va'inga* therefore, should involve a lot of adult-child dialogue (*talanoa*) to encourage children to speak and talk to raise confidence at school and at home. One teacher shared, "*It is true that our Tongan children do not express themselves a lot and it all goes back to our restrictive upbringing. But it is something parents need to understand because children need to develop communication skills that are vital for their future*" [T2]. One mother also said, "*Some forms of play help improve children's language skills in their speech. My eldest son used to stay with my father when he was younger. During the day, they spent most of their time talking and conversing*" [F10]. She continued, "*At the age of one year and a few months, he could articulate sentences…but it's from being around my father because he would*

always talk and dialogue with my son. He is different from [] (other son) who mostly stayed with us (parents) and we didn't really talk to him like that" [F10].

ix. Bridge socio-cultural barriers and lift va'inga restrictions

A changed state of mind or mindset was another mutual response participants believed was foremost important before any other form of *va'inga* engagement. One mother said that most of the time the baby sitters or her mother would put her children for naps to make their work around the house easier, "*but there needs to be a change in mindsets to the importance of play because cleaning the house can always be done after that. So every day now I will tell them to let the kids play especially when I am not at home*" [F6]. Another mother felt remorseful not knowing the importance of *va'inga* engagement especially as one of her children has passed on. She vows to fill that gap by ensuring she plays and spends time with her grandchildren. She said, "*I'm trying to fill the gap in parenting my children because I failed in my reliance on my parents and I don't want to leave it at that. I think to myself, 'I will go home and play with [] and []'*" [F2]. She continued, "*In gaining this insight, I proclaim, children are a gift from God, they are the offspring of the womb. I feel love towards []* (child that has passed on), *I can't bear to see []'s children grow up like that* (cries)" [F2]. Breaking barriers on the other hand, point to a violation of cultural taboos and efforts to amend aspects of the Tongan culture that are more detrimental than helpful to children's development. One father aptly stated:

> The more you play with your children; it helps break the cultural barrier that hinders play. I remember my eldest son came to stay with my parents in Tongatapu while I worked in Ha'apai. My father called and said my son is very talkative. I told him, '*If you won't answer his questions, send him back*'. I noticed that is how we were raised. When we sat at the dinner table, only our parents talked; no one else was to talk. But if we spend more time with our children we could push to break that barrier. I think there was a research on Tongan students in New Zealand…it stated; one of the problems for Tongan students is their restrictive form of living. They are expected to respect elders, have no voice or saying…when allowed to speak, then speak. Therefore, we lack critical thinking skills…but I believe that respect, culture can be improved [M3].

Following this, is to ensure not only socio-cultural restrictions to *va'inga* are bridged but that any form of restriction should be lifted and negotiated so children have ample time to *va'inga* while they are young enough to harness the development they need for future growth. One father said, "*There are certain pretend plays children engage in before they sleep. To me, play should not be restricted to any time not even on the availability of adults to play. Whatever opportunity you have with your children, you should play and if not, don't stop them. That's good eh?*" [M1]. A

mother raised the issue of adult ignorance that often leads to *va'inga* restrictions, "*We are the ones hindering play because we are the one's always stopping children from their play. Sometimes we say, 'Go and do something else more productive'. That is why va'inga is always restricted, because of our ignorance*" [F14].

x. Reclaim early forms of va'inga

Both teachers and parents alike expressed the importance to regain the old forms of cultural *va'inga* activities that are no longer practiced as well as to reinforce the activities that are soon becoming a lost practice. The significance also features in the learning elements prevalent in these forms of *va'inga*. One mother said, "*Like jackstones (moa)…I grew up when we were restricted to play moa and it is becoming a lost form of traditional va'inga…also hiko (juggling)*" [F11]. She continued, "*Maybe we should practise them and teach our children because like moa, children can learn addition and subtraction, counting*" [F11]. One father said, "*Like heulupe, this game is not really played anymore. Tolo moa and tolo pato are hardly practised too…like lanitā eh? However, it's good to see them again and to have families encourage them because they teach us a lot*" [M4]. He continued, "*Also to get children physically active because now, they mostly stay indoors and watch movies and play video games all day*" [M4].

xi. Set boundaries to va'inga intervals and use discipline through va'inga

One of the few responses received was to set boundaries and time limits to *va'inga* intervals. This helps children learn and understand the importance of rules and instructions. Some teachers believe this is one way of avoiding unnecessary noise level and the accused, aimless and purposeless *va'inga*. One teacher said, "*But even play needs rules and certain restrictions especially noise level because that is why some adults are irritated with va'inga*" [T6]. She continued, "*It also helps show children how to follow instructions and the importance of those instructions. This helps them learn self-control and obedience*" [T6]. One mother in particular said in her household, children are informed of their limits and how to *va'inga* in certain activities that are worthwhile for learning. Her idea of *ako and va'inga* does not include shouting, screaming and running around. She said, "*I support play and children should play but only purposeful play and not boisterous play like running*

around, shouting and screaming. I provide my children with a lot of colouring books and colours also building blocks, Legos…" [F12].

Engaging in *va'inga* allows adults to identify misbehavior and to use appropriate measures of order and discipline. One father said, "*Sometimes my wife would say, 'Gosh, we will have to take all those toys back and clean this up'. I told her, 'What about this, Who brought the blankets and pillows?' One of my kids said, 'Me.' 'Okay, you go take them back where you got them from'*" [M1]. He continued, "'*Who scattered the box of blocks?' Another would say, 'Me.'… 'Okay, go and get the box and put all the blocks back into it.' After all, the mother's only task is to sweep…no one gets tired. But our exhaustion is always a hindrance to children's play*" [M1]. Being involved in children's *va'inga* allows adults to identify mischief such as the incompetency to play fair with others, cheating, harmful play, swearing, lying, not sharing and bullying. One father said, "*In observing and identifying play, we can teach children good behaviour and moral values such as politeness, fairness and honesty. It is also a way play and learning is be enhanced*" [M2].

A mother too shared, "*Like my in-law's children. My kids will approach me and say, 'I want some ice-cream.' I would say, 'I don't have money to buy those things and it's not good for your teeth'. They copy what my in-law's children do* [F11]. She continued, "*They say, 'I want a toy gun because [] has a gun.' I always tried to stop them because it's not right for them to think everything they want will be handed to them*" [F11]. A similar response also coupled equality and fairness. One mother said, "*When we discipline our children in our everyday relationships with them, they will remember these things in their play. However, we need to be fair in our discipline so that all children equally receive the same instruction and treatment so they don't feel we have favours or are lying to them*" [F3]. Another mother said even though she has engaged and supported *va'inga* since her children were younger, there are quite a few of them so they usually play amongst themselves. She also used *va'inga* as an alternative for discipline, "*Play was a way of disciplining my kids because I mostly worked. The only time I played a lot with them was when they were babies. When they wake up, it was only me and during the day it was the babysitter*" [F5]. She continued, "*When they started to walk, there was distance in the way I played with them…not that I didn't want to, but I was just too busy and there were many of them like a mata'i helu (comb-like)* (laughs). *But play was always in my routine*" [F5].

xii.   Ensure va'inga safety and model good va'inga behaviour

Participants also mentioned that in order to foster learning development through *va'inga*, children must be discouraged from any forms of unnecessary or dangerous *va'inga* and to ensure utmost safety (Holmes, 2012). One mother said forms of precaution teach children to value safety and security, "*Sometimes children play rough and dangerously with toys or sticks or they throw rocks. We should teach them to stop playing with these kind of things and also make sure there is nothing sharp or dangerous around their play*" [F3]. She continued, "*When we do that, children will know the dangers of the sharp and dangerous things they should not play with*" [F3]. To engage in *va'inga*, adults need to ensure they model good deeds as children often imitate adult behaviour and language use. One father shared, "*Because I am a father, I really witness the joy and happiness in my children when I play with them because they feel free to express themselves and they are close to me and can share anything in life to me*" [M2]. He continued, "*I can also see they learn from me too. Sometimes like the way I talk, the language I use. So, we should join their play and be good role models when we play with them*" [M2]. Another father's said:

> Sometimes [] would scream and shout and we noticed that when she gets angry, she screams and shouts. Her mother usually gets angry at her but I told her, '*No, she is copying it from you, that's why she shouts like that because you always raise your voice…we shouldn't shout* (laughs)…' But you see, that's why it is important we engage in our children's play and at the same time, are mindful because they copy things from us. It is a waste of time if we tell them they are wrong. The patriarch says, '*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*' (Proverbs 22:6). It is important for children to learn on their own and it is equally important they learn from us, from people older and more mature [M1].

A common example as some parents mentioned, was pulling tricksters in games of *pele* especially *suipi* and *talamu*. Although it may seem humorous, it sometimes sends the wrong message that trickery and cheating are acceptable ways of behaving. This was shared earlier by one mother, "*And like our discussion, play must go hand in hand with learning. And it is important to be very careful like the trickster we taught our son in playing a card game of suipi* (laughs). *If we persist to let him do it, he may develop a bad habit of cheating*" [F11].

xiii.   Share/raise awareness of va'inga & develop reflective practice on va'inga

The majority of teachers and a handful of parents agreed it was important to foster and encourage *va'inga* at school and at home by sharing and extending the knowledge of *va'inga* and the learning that arises from *va'inga* to others –

neighbours, families, friends, colleagues and the nation in general. The aim is that they too are able to adopt the awareness of *va'inga* and think and act likewise. One teacher proudly attested it to be her duty and obligation to impart and share that knowledge so that a chain reaction of understanding and awareness is promoted. She said, "*I believe it is important to share this knowledge so that others too are made aware of these benefits so they can do likewise. Sharing knowledge and practice is like a reverted blessing for my children and the learning they encounter as young learners*" [T5]. Teachers especially shared the importance of reflective practice in daily *va'inga* interactions and encounters with children in their centers. This allows a teacher to evaluate and re-evaluate teaching practice and how they are able to monitor, engage and facilitate indoor and outdoor play as well as free and guided play. One teacher shared, "*When you join in and observe children's play activities, it allows you to reflect on your teaching practice to improve or change the things that are not working and at the same time enhance the practices that are working*" [T5].

A few parents also mentioned this aspect contemplating on their current child rearing practices, which led to a renewed form of thinking and approach. One mother shared, "*Play in the Tongan context is being there. I am a mother and a grandmother and what is happening to me is that I'm trying to find myself. I am a working mother and my husband is also a working daddy and we didn't have time. I am a lazy mother* (cries)" [F2]. She continued, "*I didn't raise my children, my parents toiled to raise them because I was busy working. I wasn't able to play with them, I thought it was okay. But I was able to provide, give them things to play with like TVs, videos. I thought that was the best way* (cries)" [F2]. Now, this mother has grandchildren and vows not to make the same mistake with them. Conversely, one father critically contemplated on the notion of '*ako* and *va'inga*' and the need for adult engagement querying his own personal upbringing and that of his children. He said:

> I am sometimes still confused; it's almost like a reflection to compare the two different views of how I raise my children. In my upbringing, I grew up in a family of seven and our bonding, I don't know if anyone can separate us (cries). But when our father told us something, he only said it once. And I see that it isn't like it is now how I play with my children because we did not play with our father back then. But I'm using that as a mirror to see how it turns out. I often think, '*Man, maybe it's better off if I don't engage in play* (laughs).' But maybe it all goes back to culture and discipline, because when your mother says '*Do this*' that's what you do. When your father says '*Do that*' that's what you do. There are also times when I would play with [] and I would say, '*Do this*.' He says, '*No, you do it, you're the one who's supposed to do it!...No, it's you!*' (laughs). And sometimes in the midst of people I say, '*[], come*' and he says, '*No!*' (laughs) [M1].

The same father also provided the following account, which concludes this section and the entire notion of adult engagement and support for *va'inga* as well as the predominant Christian and biblical underpinnings prevalent in Tonga. He said, "*Like the saying, after this talanoa, I am reminded of Jesus' command to the law expert in relation to His parable of the Good Samaritan, 'Go, and do likewise.' Now that we know what should be done, therefore, we should do the same* (smiles)" [M1].

xiv.   Levels of va'inga advocacy

The final form of engagement and support for *va'inga* was through multiple suggestions of *va'inga* advocacy from teachers and teacher heads of ways to improve *va'inga* support, involvement, practice and performance at the school and system's level. Advocacy first of all, needs to start from the school level where teachers looked at themselves and reflected on their perceptions, attitudes and behaviours toward *va'inga* and what it really means for their profession as early learning educators. This branched into the support chain teachers have amongst themselves, their practice, their teaching and learning philosophy and their commitment to *va'inga* as a unit. It further branches to the systems level where a restructure of ECE centers in collaboration with pre-primary school became a prospective. Lastly, it ventures out into the wider stakeholder body in terms of teacher education, curriculum development, donor support and higher decision making and involvement. In terms of participant perceptions, figure 5.8 illustrates a relationship diagram of the advocacy levels of *va'inga* support.

Figure 5.8 Levels of va'inga advocacy
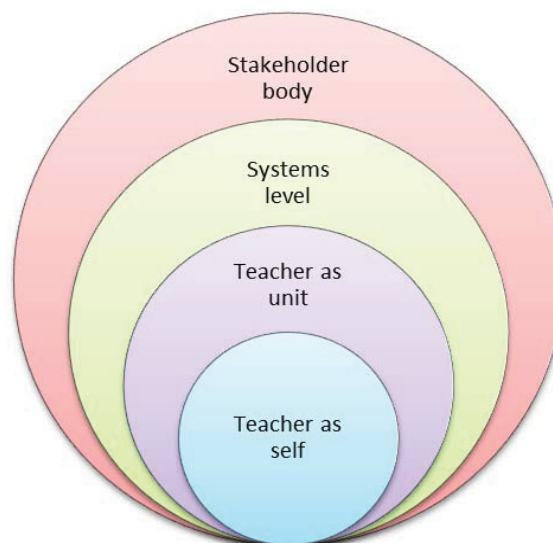
Throughout this section, Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological System's Theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), is used as a parallel approach to the levels of *va'inga* advocacy (figure 5.1h). Bronfenbrenner focussed on the child and how different levels of the ecological system contributes to nurturing their perceptions of the world. The immediate and extended environments also feature as a catapult for where certain elements surrounding the child either directly or indirectly gear how *ako, va'inga* and *tupulaki* are engineered. The levels of advocacy portray similar stages of support for ECE teachers and furthermore, parents and stakeholders.

a.   Teacher as self

The first level of advocacy looks within the teacher as self and the inner, intrapersonal stance as an ECE teacher and direct counterpart and promoter of *va'inga*. The teacher as self foremost featured in her passionate love and genuine commitment for her teaching profession coupled with meticulous and consistent teacher planning. One teacher said that they (teachers) need to feel a "*deep, true and pure love for children who are the future of our existence as a cultural group and people*" [T6]. Teachers need to know they are in the right place and profession and it is where their hearts are. As one teacher said, "*As soon as children or a child enters the premises of your preschool center, you automatically become his mother, his guardian; you are in charge and in control but you are also responsible for their safety, well-being, learning and development*" [T3].

Teachers also need to work through integrity and compassionate love as teaching is not a calling to be taken lightly. One teacher declared, "*Our hearts need to be in the right place and to be full of goodness because God is full of goodness and we should be aware He is watching because if we go astray, it will show*" [T3]. She continued, "*We need to conduct our teacher roles with integrity and abide in truthfulness at all times. Money and material donations should not be a priority if you intend to be an ECE teacher of love…we are not poor here in Tonga but we must do our best*" [T3]. She continued, "*When your heart no longer beats and has no blood flow, then you can say your mission for ECE is complete*" [T3]. This initiated a chain reaction of similar responses centering on *loto'i 'ofa* (compassionate love from the heart) – a prerequisite attribute every ECE *faiako ma'a Tonga* should encompass. Hence, the

idea and notion framed a new form of being, knowing and doing which was later used to develop a new model of play, learning and development[50].

Teachers also need to understand the child first as an individual then as a learner. One teacher said, "*I noticed when we capture children's attention and their hearts, they respond easily to us making our task more pleasant and effortless. That's why it is good to create close bonds with them from the start and to maintain it every day*" [T8]. She continued, "*Knowing children helps us intervene and confront parents in some of the ways their children can improve and how their parenting, if I must say, can improve. To do that, we must really take charge of our roles and responsibilities*" [T8]. Another teacher supported this bringing to the forefront of *tālanga* the changed moral behaviour of many children as compared to the past. This heightens the teacher role and dedication to a higher level of devotion. She said:

> Yes, I agree, and this couples a Christ-like attitude and life. The ECE teacher's life has been my main purpose of existence for almost 20 years now because I am dedicated to it and I am passionate about it. But I am saddened of the way not only teachers behave, but the low moral and ethical behaviours a lot of children bring into the classroom. This differs from the past where children were respectful, polite and had good manners. I always say, '*To'utangata ongo ngata'a mo'oni*' [This is a very stubborn generation] because values are no longer important in a lot of Tongan homes. And if children don't have values and moral teachings at home and have none at school, then what is our purpose as teachers? We need to love these children like they are our own, a deep love from the heart so we can reach out and help them grow to be good people because now, parents and teachers only want educated children and they give them too much '*tau'atāina kovi*' [destructive freedom]…but where are their manners? [T9].

Another teacher agreed saying parents are too lenient in character building with their children in that they do not understand it is doing more harm than good. She said, "*That's why it is important we fill in those gaps at school and at the same time, raise the awareness with parents*" [T7]. A few teachers blame the lack of teacher performance and dedication as a reflection of poor lesson and daily planning. One teacher said, "*I think first and foremost, teachers should plan play activities and every other activity they do in the classroom and to follow up on that. Some teachers tell children to bring things and when children come to school with those things, they forget to carry out the activity* (annoyed look)" [T2]. She continued, "*They also need to assess and monitor children's development in all aspects so they are aware of what can be improved, what they can work more on*" [T2]. Another teacher

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[50] See Chapter Six (6).

supported this claim adding that meticulous planning confirms the commitment and innovation level of teachers. She said:

> With planning, yes, that is a problem because some teachers lack the consistency of weekly and daily planning. I can tell this sometimes when I alter or change a teacher's programme and they do not respond. But sometimes a teacher would intervene and say, '*Sorry, I have already planned to do this*.' Those are little strategies we can use to ensure planning. I sometimes spontaneously ask them on the spot to hand in their plan books and catch those who fail to plan. It is then you confront and help them grow through mentoring to find passion in what they do because there are plenty of people waiting for their teaching post if they do not perform to standards. Sometimes I would ask, '*Who will stay behind after school to do any extra planning and work?*' I will then stay behind with that person for support and encouragement. I am persistent in pushing them to do well because they are the future of our work as ECE teachers and we want to see productive and passionate teachers rise to the challenge [T9].

b.   Teacher as unit – mentor and monitor

Teacher as a unit level of advocacy can be achieved through teacher mentorship and collaboration as well as consistent monitoring and appraisal of teacher performance. This also aids to evaluate the ongoing necessity of current teachers. To mentor and collaborate with teachers especially the younger ones, one teacher advised, "*And with the problems we have with our teachers, embrace them. Bring them close and train, mould and monitor them because the real world is different from the classroom they were trained in even though they had a lot of practical experience. Be there and guide them…show love all the time*" [T3]. To maintain harmony and peace amongst themselves, the key was love, patience and tolerance. One teacher said, "*We need patience both with our children and with our teachers because if we are overly stern and harsh, there will be no connection because it is only natural to abruptly respond to austere situations*" [T8].

One teacher correspondingly suggested and encouraged spontaneity. She said, "*We have different play corners and a teacher is assigned to observe and monitor a different play corner every day of the week. The same goes to outdoor play activities because we have a wide range of areas for children to play in*" [T9]. She further said, "*This helps teachers especially the younger ones familiarise with different play and learning needs to increase their teaching and learning repertoires*" [T9]. Another teacher said, "*In my experience in working with teachers, I don't have any issues with them whatsoever. They know what is expected of them…they have a lot of energy to do their work and they plan meticulously*" [T8]. She then goes on to say, "*That's part of the reason why I am taking ECE courses at USP, so that I am more*

qualified to do my job and feel suitable to lead retired teachers who for years have certified certificates or diplomas in teaching; also new teachers who completed the ECE training programme at TIOE" [T8].

In terms of monitoring and appraising teachers, a standard strategy was agreed to. Teachers recommended it should be taken to an extreme level of screening if quality and dedicated teachers are a pressing priority for ECE. One teacher suggested, "*We use annual appraisals in our school system where we monitor teachers according to a certain criteria. Sometimes I would say, 'I am not satisfied with your performance, not that I have anything personal against you, but that you need to improve on certain things*'" [T8]. She continued, "*I told them I always observed their performance and conduct such as failing to know the exact parents of teachers in your class and instead, ask them who they are picking up* (annoyed look)" [T8]. Teachers should also be encouraged to take on further education and training to broaden their horizons of *va'inga* and the ECE teacher practice altogether. One teacher said, "*I am part of the ECE programme at USP. It broadens my knowledge, practice and experience. I push my teachers to do likewise so I need to make sure they enroll as part of our center policy and also get financial support from our system. There is an available bachelor's programme at TIOE as well*" [T8]. The same could be said of the need for teacher-parent collaboration and understanding. One teacher said, "*Learning is mutual because children teach us a lot especially children brought up in good homes with good parents. They work well, neatly, are good mannered and extend that goodness to others who mimic and copy them*" [T9].

c.   **Systems level**

Of the systems level, one common collaboration effort was a unity of ECE teachers across the nation in terms of teaching philosophy. One recent initiative is the nation's first National ECE Curriculum (Tonga National Early Childhood Curriculum, 2015) currently trialed in ECE centers since 2015. Teachers also suggested a bridging system of schooling for preschool to pre-primary school is an appealing option given it successfully functions in a few schools. One teacher said, "*At our school system, and as the principal, I am in charge and oversee our preschool programme all the way to pre-primary years (class 1-3). I am able to monitor children's progress and their play development beyond preschool to pre-primary years*" [T8]. Another teacher supported this and was agreeable by the

majority of others. She said, "*Schools like ours are otherwise under the same principal, but is self-governed so our principal mainly only monitors the primary school section*" [T9]. She continued that after kindergarten, parents are free to take their children elsewhere because they are not encouraged to stay, "*I see no point too because we cannot monitor children's' performance and progress anyway. It is out of our control and authority. But, maybe we should propose to have the system like the [] system eh? That way at least we can monitor until the child reaches 8 or 9 eh?*" [T9]. Another teacher saw the need essential especially for private centers who are completely detached from any school or church system. She said, "*While they have the freedom to do their own programmes, they too cannot monitor students' progress in pre-primary school years. Maybe it's good Tonga moves to that structure because the curriculum is nationalised, and we are all following it*" [T5].

d.   Stakeholder involvement

Adult education and awareness was the most common form of wider stakeholder involvement and advocacy. Teachers shared that people who need the most knowledge and understanding of the benefits of *va'inga* are foremost parents who currently work closely with ECE centers. Next are the wider communities who also play a big role in raising children at the home and community level (Prescott & Johansson-Fua, 2016). The last level is the MET and other involved stakeholders who form the umbrella body of ECE in Tonga. From the study, the mediums of adult education and awareness ranged from teacher parent pre-arranged and spontaneous collaboration, workshops, media programmes, PTAs, newsletter distributions and the aid of extensive visual graphics.

Some teachers agreed the first point of contact with parents was at the very beginning of the school year. One teacher said, "*We ensure parents are informed at the very beginning of the year of our center's philosophy. Now, we will use the new curriculum but will still encourage free play because that is what our center values the most*" [T9]. Another teacher said, "*Teachers and parents should have a mutual understanding of the expectations of the center and the importance of play for the development needs of their children at the very beginning of the year*" [T7]. She continued, "*With this understanding, parents will be more supportive and won't criticise our practice and programmes. They will provide things for play like pieces*

of wood, scrap paper, one-sided paper. I usually ask parents to donate and they are always willing to" [T7]. The need, as mentioned, stems from a dire lack of knowledge and awareness. An enraged teacher shared, "*One mother drove past in her car and noticed her son playing outside the center and she was upset and confronted me. I didn't really respond to her then, but I was shocked at the mentality of some parents towards play*" [T8]. She continued, "*So, I will say, 'The next time you come around and see your children playing, you must understand it is part of their learning and daily routine. The era of pushing literacy too early at the ECE level has come to an end*' (laughs)…'*You are hindering your children's learning with that attitude*'" [T8]. The same teacher continued to share what she is currently doing to combat the problem:

> I asked our school system and president if they could arrange a PTA meeting and not inform parents of the purpose as I just wanted to explain the importance of play for a mutual understanding. I presented a PowerPoint on the importance of play and their children at play highlighting the learning areas children accomplish through play. Now, some parents are supportive and pride in how they allow children to play more often at home. At school, I welcome parents in the morning and bid them goodbye in the evening and brief them of our day so they are kept in the loop in how their children progressed throughout the day. That is my way of doing things now. Always interact and report to parents what the center does to achieve play and help children learn. Now, parents positively respond and become more appreciative of what we do [T8].

Teachers also agreed and added the need for prearranged programmes like workshops during PTA meetings. One teacher said, "*There should also be parent-teacher workshops at the school level and have people in the MET conduct workshops so parents are informed what to expect, how ECE programmes function, why play is important and so on*" [T9]. She continued, "*Because sometimes, parents don't value the ECE teacher, they rather prefer to take the advice of a school officer from the ministry*" [T9]. The collaboration with parents is also significant because it allows more vigorous teacher-parent collaboration in support of the child where teachers need to take into account the advice and feedback of parents. One teacher mentioned, "*It is also good to get constructive feedback from parents to help evaluate our work for improvement because sometimes we do not see some things they see eh? It is important we keep and maintain that balance and mutual relationship*". [T3]. She continued, "*Sometimes parents walk to the center and back in the scorching sun* (cries)…*because they want their children to learn* (cries). *We need to remember that we are not the only ones who care for our children's learning*" [T3]. She urged to establish and maintain that balance with young teachers

too, "*They should be allowed to make mistakes because it helps them grow and learn of the responsibilities of their profession*" [T3]. As a backup and follow-up plan, some teachers suggested home visitations is a good way to collaborate with working parents or parents that do not attend the workshops or PTA meetings. The *kava* circle was another suggested prospect. One teacher agreed, "*With fathers that support play, I will ask them to raise the awareness in communal kava circles. It is an effective space to talanoa of learning and education because they are instrumental in pushing wider communal support and financial assistance*" [T6].

Ongoing media programmes, distribution of newsletters and the use of visual aids were additional advocacy options. One teacher suggested, "*In our monthly newsletters, we should include something like, 'this week is colour play week and children learned this and that with colours'. When parents see things like that, it adds credibility to our practice and parents feel more confident with our techniques*" [T2]. Another teacher said, "*Using posters and visuals are a good way to promote play and learning. Having more radio and television broadcasting progammes to promote play should recommence because they are not really airing anymore*" [T1]. She continued, "*Instead of convincing parents, use these essentials. The visuals speak volumes as well as media programmes and the MET workshops. The key is communication*" [T1].

In terms of wider stakeholder involvement and in addition to the request for the MET to host professional development workshops, teachers and children alike, enjoyed the MET initiative for an annual Cultural Day for ECE. Teachers further suggest it runs on a more consistent and regular basis. One teacher said, "*I saw a change in parental views during these programmes and they became more understanding and open to ECE*" [T8]. She also realised after the first cultural day how much teachers and children enjoyed it and how it made a difference in their awareness of the Tongan culture, it also allowed them to value cultural diversity by observing certain aspects of other cultures especially their traditional dress, food, basic greetings and so forth. In preparing this occasion, teachers reflected how children enjoyed learning Tongan songs, music, dance, traditional wear and food preparation. Although it is a normal daily exercise, culture day heightens the preparation and expectations so centers go the extra mile. One teacher shared an incident, "*The education officer that day was mostly impressed with the formal*

language children used to address the guests. That is how children develop speech eh?…through playing, make-believing and rehearsing in front of the class" [T8]. Most teachers concluded from the experience that in return, children were deeply immersed in the richness of the Tongan culture – an important aspect in the new National ECE Curriculum and a major significance in this study. One teacher suggested the MET and other involved stakeholders should push for consistency in these cultural programmes to ensure children are deeply rooted and grounded in culture at a young age. Teachers however, resonated with the Tongan saying - *'Oku 'ikai tunu hake pe 'unga' pea kula leva* figurative of the idea, 'it takes a while for a roasted coconut crab to redden'. It culminates the notion behind 'development' – it is a gradual but sure process if the environment for it to flourish is favourable.

In summary, Tongan parents are known for their extensive support and drive for better child education and opportunities in Tonga and abroad. In addition, teachers alike form the chain of support of *va'inga* for children's holistic learning and development. As the *tālanoa* and *tālanga* progressed, parents and teachers slowly embraced *va'inga* for what it genuinely entails – a natural activity of children and a significant attribute to early learning. Fostering this attitude through *fevahevahe'aki* (mutual sharing) enabled a chain reaction of ideas and ways to support its engagement in the home and school environments further contributing to the socio-cultural discourse of play support for ECE. The different levels of advocacy helped ensure an inclusive effort and approach to support *va'inga* within separate and joint student, teacher, curriculum and wider stakeholder bodies. Like the diagram of the levels of *va'inga* advocacy[51] and *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory*[52] (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), the certain systems are specifically imperative to ensure both the child and teacher are catered for not only in their practice but in their stance as key figures within the ECE continuum.

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[51] See Figure 5.1h
[52] See Figure 3.1g

PART FIVE: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

5.7 Tonga National Early Childhood Curriculum – Lālanga Moʻui Silapa Fakafonua Maʻae Ngaahi Ako Tokamuʻa ʻi Tongaʹ

'*Our children, our future, our responsibility*' is the cliché underlying the particular document under analysis – the newly introduced Tonga National ECE Curriculum – *Lālanga Moʻui Silapa Fakafonua Maʻae Ngaahi Ako Tokamuʻa ʻi Tongaʹ* by the MET. Apart from examining the motivation, intent and purpose of the document in general, the analysis looked into the extent and scope of *vaʼinga* to ascertain how it is represented as a key learning and development tool and not just an activity of free play. According to Bowen (2009), the usefulness of this task "*Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge*" (p. 27).

5.7.1 Motivation, intent and purpose

The document is an outcome of a regional requisite in 2013 through the PRC4ECCE and FEdMM encouraging member countries to develop national quality frameworks, to nationalise a standard ECE curriculum (Rich-Orloff & Camaitoga, 2016);

> It provides a user-friendly guide and thought-provoking questions, to provide a starting point for countries to develop a national quality framework on ECCE that reflects the unique and cultural priorities for the individual country, incorporating regional and international benchmarks in developmentally appropriate quality services (p. 189).

Currently under trial since 2015, the Tonga National ECE Curriculum incorporates a culturally inclusive approach to early learning for the nation's growing ECE population. Prior to its implementation, local centers had operated on their own through private, church or community based settings adopting various ideas, practices and programmes from abroad. To some extent, the curriculum synonymously emphasises a play-based approach to learning yet, internal and external factors impede its administration. Teacher participants in the study shared and admitted to personal and collegial fault in terms of curriculum implementation and their value of free play. This attitude ultimately led to the persistent yet long-standing mismatch between theory and practice that has plagued the ECE teachers' level of professionalism. The attitude was personally observed during the course of participant observation confirming previous observations during assessment visitations to local ECE centers. Hence, the rationale for this study partially centers

on this information to unearth the core of the problem and to suggest further mediums in which to alleviate its continuation.

5.7.2 Content structure

The new curriculum document is guided by the *Lalanga 'o e Ta'ovala Tu'oua Tonga Framework* emblematic of the process of weaving one of the most finest traditional wrap around waist mats worn by Tongans for various cultural and formal functions. The intricate and complex process to acquire and make the *ta'ovala tu'oua* represents the delicacy of the document framework and its exclusive purpose for young Tongan learners. Its vision is to:

 i. Enable children to grow and develop *poto hono loto* (knowledgeable within one's heart);
 ii. Ensure children are proud of who they truly are as a Tongan in conduct, language use, to honour their Tongan heritage, beliefs, values and ways of life in becoming Tongan; and
 iii. To grow up as highly capable and healthy students and members of society; and to know and respect themselves, other people and their environments.

Figure 5.9 illustrates a detailed visual of the framework and *fe'unu* (strands) of the *ta'ovala tu'oua*. One of the main strands – **fe'unu fakama'ufatu'** consists of (i) *ko e Tonga kita* (knowing and being Tongan); (ii) *ko e Kalisitiane kita* (being a Christian); and (iii) *ko e tokotaha mo'ui ako* (committed learner). The second strand, **fe'unu 'o e fakafekau'aki'** further entails sub-*fe'unu* strands (i) *fakafekau'aki ke 'ilo'i kita* (knowing oneself) through immediate families and communities, cultural heritage and holistic grounding; (ii) *tauhi vaha'a'* - nurturing relationships, respectfulness, collaboration and mutual helpfulness; and (iii) *fakafekau'aki mo e 'ātakai ako'* - quality learning environments, empowerment and inclusiveness.

Figure 5.9 Lalanga Mo'ui 'a e Fānauʹ
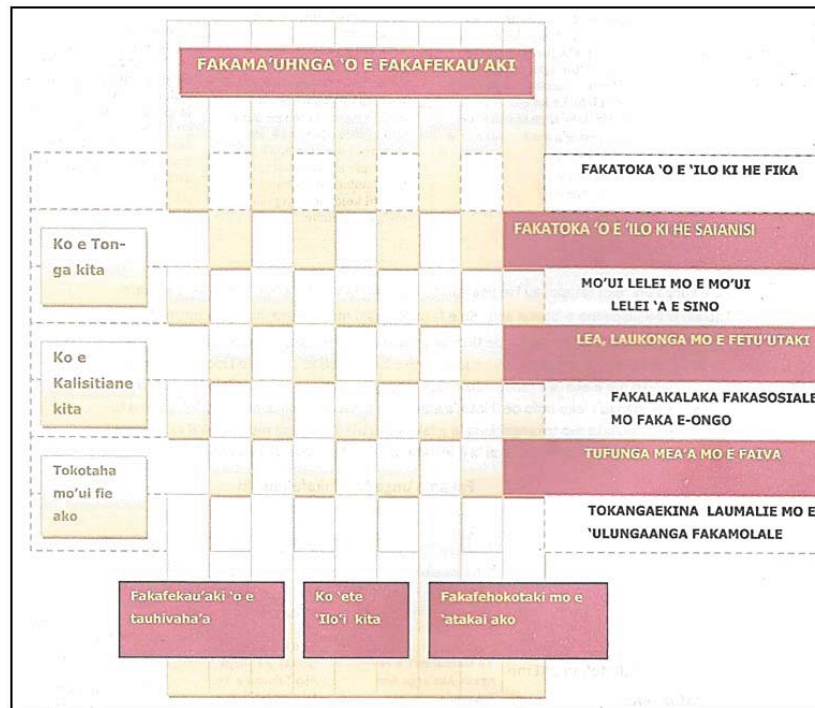
(Tonga National ECE Curriculum Document – *Lalanga Mo'ui Silapa Fakafonua ma'ae ngaahi Ako Tokamu'aʹ*, 2015. p. 14)

In terms of *va'inga* and its rigorous emphasis in this study, the main discipline areas within the new curriculum document value a partial play-based approach to supplement its otherwise, formalised foundation. In theory, the Piagetian approach significantly influences Developmentally Appropriate Practice for ECE and the perspective "*children learn 'naturally' through play, with the teacher facilitating opportunities for play in the environment*" (Moore, Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie & Boyd, 2014. p. 9). As such, while the new model allocates *va'inga* to an apt extent, the study anticipates teachers embrace the benefits to its entirety and stakeholders likewise to help push *va'inga* into a privileged position in early learning. Table 5.4 details the specific play areas within the document. In fact, the areas largely coincide with the range of indoor and outdoor play activities children currently engage in especially at school. The learning component section highlights the learning strands within the document indicating each developmental aspect in the range of indoor and outdoor play areas. The guide is simple and easy to follow, hence, user-friendly.

Table 5.4 Play areas in ECE centers

Learning component	Indoor play and learning area	Outdoor play and learning area
Early learning mathematics (*Fika tokamu'a*)	Blocks area, building area, puzzles, early learning mathematics	Building and construction area, playing sticks for counting
Early learning science (*Saienisi tokamu'a*)	Magnetics area, dough area, study of people, animals and stars area	Sand play area, water play area, vegetables and floral area
Early learning creativity (*Tufunga mea'a*)	Weaving and necklace making, sing and dance, cooking, leadership	Painting and drawing area, building equipment, building area, flannels, water play, off-cut material play
Early learning speaking, reading and communication (*Lea, laukonga mo e fetu'utaki*)	Library full of Tongan books, charts, bible picture story books, family section filled with Tongan artefacts, indoor resources and picture books	Tongan house play, Tongan cultural artefacts play, language and social play
Early learning health and wellbeing (*Mo'ui lelei mo e tokamālie fakasino*)	Work and events regarding health and wellbeing	Outdoor play equipment, swings, tires, slides, trees, balls etc.
Early learning social and emotional development (*Fakalakalaka fakasōsiale mo faka-e-ongo*)	Family area, information and inquiries area, overall center activities section	Encourage collaborative learning, mixed and ability grouping
Early learning spirituality and behaviour (*'Ilo fakalaumālie mo faka'ulungaanga*)	Bible stories and religious ways, fruits of the spirit	Attach posters and visuals of Christian moral behaviours around the center

(Tonga National ECE Curriculum Document – *Lalanga Mo'ui Silapa Fakafonua ma'ae ngaahi Ako Tokamu'a'*, 2015. p. 65)

As prior experience and practice knowledge indicate, the fate of how well the new curriculum document interplays in ECE centers rests in teacher implementation. This couples external factors such as a teacher's inner drive as a genuine and dedicated *Faiako Ma'a Tonga*, personal teaching and learning philosophy, the quality of formal training, professional mentoring and nurturing, teacher education curriculum and stakeholder influence. Following a guide or framework is one thing, but going beyond to utilise innovative measures to ensure children are supported in their learning to their full potential takes extra effort, commitment and drive. The study anticipates a more established network between teachers, ECE centers, the MET, communities and involved stakeholders to ensure the teacher personnel is well supported in her task to empower play for children's holistic development to improve utmost potential for future learning and learning opportunities. After all, in understanding *va'inga* and children's play preferences, aids school policy makers in

their decisions of extracurricular activities and the types of play they should encourage (Holmes, Liden & Shin, 2013).

Chapter summary

The relationship of *ako* and *va'inga* from a Tongan view reflects the assumption parents are partially uninformed nor completely aware of its significance while teachers regularly neglect it as a learning tool confining it to free time. *Va'inga* continues to be an isolated, physical, free and enjoyment activity children carry out and slightly prevails as *maumau taimi*. Early and current forms of *va'inga* reflect socio-cultural contexts and the inevitable impacts of societal change and globalisation. In terms of the relational process of *ako, 'ilo* and *poto* even for the early years, learning continues to mirror the Tongan notion, to become *poto* (educated), one must *ako* (learn) and achieve *'ilo* (wisdom, knowledge). Formalised instruction continues to be valued as the prime attainment of early learning and adults likewise, yield to its ideology. Although most participant mindsets, thinking and beliefs transformed during the *talanoa* and *tālanga* and eventually embraced *va'inga* for its ability to generate learning, Tonga as a whole, is yet to fully accept it as a valuable asset. Learning in the early years must digress to a different path of *ako, va'inga* and *tupulaki*. In retrospect, play and learning are synonymous and interchangeable with each other and should be treated as a distinct and unique equation for early learning.

CHAPTER SIX | TAXONOMY AND MODEL OF PLAY

Tauhi vā (Maintain/uphold relationships) and *Uouonga taha* (Unity)

LUVA (cont') – Refers to the reporting and dissemination stage, signaling a process of returning the gift of knowledge to the people who had given the knowledge ~ (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 54).

6.1 Introduction

Chapter six continues to reciprocate *vā* between researcher and holders of knowledge in which the study was forged (*luva*). It is a contribution to the discourse of play and learning in the early years and more profound, a contextual look into the Tongan practice of *ako* and *va'inga*. As such, the study lead to the development of a taxonomy of play to indicate the different forms of *va'inga* in Tonga and how they correlate to each progressive development stage. A new model emerges to depict how play, learning and development interplay within a contextual and cultural Tongan setting. The taxonomy and model will aid ECE teachers in their practice and for parents and caretakers in child rearing, specifically, to help bridge the cultural knowledge and pedagogical gap of early play and development in Tonga and across cultures while contributing to the wider discourse of play and learning. A culturally-inclusive taxonomy and model are necessary given we need to "*understand and value the differing types of 'play' that take place across cultures, as well as the cultural meanings enacted through 'play'. If we do not, then we are at risk of utilising a deficit model for our observations of non-Western children*" (Fleer, 1996. p. 16). A range of visual ethnographies of the *va'inga* forms children practise within the setting of Tongan homes and early learning centers accompany the taxonomy and model. The pictorial images are referenced within text but otherwise presented in the appendices section (Appendix H).

6.2 Taxonomy of Play in Tonga

As a result of the different and varying indoor and outdoor play activities Tongan children engage in within the context of home and school environments, a taxonomy of play is developed to help indicate the gradual evolution of *va'inga* forms throughout the early years (ages 0-8). Its construction correlates to the findings and the typology of play by Hutt (1979) in addition to the kinds of play by Hewes (2006). In terms of age level, the three (3) categories [0-3, 3-6, 6-8] within the taxonomy closely associate and interrelate with one another. In other words, each age level progresses and advances into the next coupling additional and more complex *va'inga*

forms and development skills. Figure 6.1 illustrates the taxonomy of play, its correlated age categories and a description of *va'inga* forms and the major development attributes tied to each level.

Figure 6.1 Taxonomy of early learning play in Tonga

CORRELATED AGE CATEGORISATION

AGES 6-8

Personal, skillful, character & behaviour play; pretense, relationship & confidence play; intelligence, perceptive play; health, well-being, bodily-kinesthetic, energetic play; inter-empathy & intra-empathy play; behaviour & values play; innovative, performance & artistic play; biblical, religious play; & cultural & heritage play

Children's play forms become more complex at this stage enabling a wider stimulation of the holistic skills of development acquired through play - intrapersonal, solitary and all-inclusive, interpersonal and social, cognitive, intellectual and speech development, physical, bodily and well-being, emotional and empathetic, character and behaviour, spiritual and biblical, creative, performance and artistic, cultural knowledge and practice development.

AGES 3-6

Personal, pretense, intelligence, perceptive play; health, well-being, bodily-kinesthetic, energetic play; inter-empathy & intra-empathy play; behaviour & values play; innovative, performance & artistic play; biblical, religious play; & cultural & heritage play

Children still engage in the previous play forms further progressing to more complex forms. Social play becomes more evident coupled with play forms that stimulate skills relating to intrapersonal, interpersonal, cognitive, physical, emotional, character, spiritual and cultural knowledge & practice development.

AGES 0-3

Personal, pretense, perceptive, bodily-kinesthetic, energetic play

Children initially play in solitary exploring objects in their environments through sensory perception. They touch, feel, see, hear, smell and respond to people close to them builidng initial ties of *feohi* (interaction). As they approach year 3, some children occasionally play with others but still prefer to play alone.

KINDS OF PLAY

6.2.1 Level one: Ages 0-3

In Hutt's (1979) typology of play, ludic behaviour is associated with the emergent years. Of the *va'inga* forms in the findings, children mainly engage in personal, pretense, perceptive, bodily-kinesthetic and energetic play specifically in fine motor skills as small muscle development. Like the array of examples shared in the previous chapter, 0-3 aged children initially start to *fakatokanga* (notice/recognise) objects and people in their natural surroundings and environments. Even in the womb, an unborn child tunes in to his/her mother's voice and is often believed to take an interest in the things a mother does/likes while pregnant, in one example, a fondness for reading. On the contrary, the notion is otherwise, reckoned as superstitious. Children also start making connections denoted as *māfana 'o e feohi'*,

bonding with adults, siblings and other close people building trust and *ongo'i 'ofa'i mo malu* (feeling loved and secure). At the same time, children initially learn to imitate adults/adult roles and older children especially in speaking, body language and behaviour. In terms of specific development skills, children mostly attain intrapersonal, solitary and all-inclusive development; cognitive, intellectual and speech development; physical, bodily and well-being development and slowly emerge towards interpersonal and social development.

6.2.2 Level two: Ages 3-6

As children advance to and beyond ages three (3), their *va'inga* becomes more complicated taking on board and mostly engaging in *va'inga* forms that become a nexus to their already existing ludic play behaviours. As such, *va'inga* couples and further evolves into personal, pretense play, intelligence, perceptive play; health, well-being, bodily-kinesthetic, energetic play; inter-empathy & intra-empathy play; behaviour & values play; innovative, performance & artistic play; biblical, religious play; & cultural & heritage play. Hutt (1979) believed children engage in more games with rules play whether games of chance or games with a purpose to teach children certain skills development as cooperative and competitive skills. Hewes' (2006) description of the kinds of play children ages 0-8 engage in comprise dramatic (social pretense) play, construction play, physical play, socio-dramatic play, games with rules play and games with invented rules play. Findings indicate that children within the 3-6 age category engage in similar *va'inga* forms and further utilise a rather initial response to intrapersonal, interpersonal, cognitive, physical, emotional, character, spiritual and cultural knowledge and practice development. In comparison to Hewes (2006) and Hutt (1979), similarities can be drawn and applied as the categories within the taxonomy overlap and do not confine *va'inga* forms to specific levels or age categories.

6.2.3   Level three: Ages 6-8

As children reach ages 6-8, they are be able to engage and associate in a more complex web of *va'inga* activities. Hutt (1979) calls this the epistemic behaviour level where children are mature enough to master and acquire skills such as problem solving. In the kinds of play identified by Hewes (2006), children engage in more multiplex forms of dramatic (social pretense) play, construction play, physical play, socio-dramatic play, games with rules play and games with invented rules play. In

terms of the findings, children are mature enough to develop a wider range and more intricate skills pertaining to intrapersonal, solitary and all-inclusive, interpersonal and social, cognitive, intellectual and speech development, physical, bodily and well-being, emotional and empathetic, character and behaviour, spiritual and biblical, creative, performance and artistic, cultural knowledge and practice development. Table 6.1 categorises some of the indoor and outdoor *va'inga* activities participants were able to gather during the *talanoa* and *tālanga*. They are further alphabetically categorised into three (3) main age groups aligning with the various development attributes they represent as outlined in the subsequent section. The study saw no reason to discuss this in detail, as the table is self-descriptive. From these categories however, the taxonomy of play emerged stipulating the groupings and to feature as a play and learning resource tool for ECE classrooms.

Table 6.1 Indoor/outdoor va'inga activities and age categories[53]

INDOOR PLAY		
Ages 0-3	**Ages 3-6**	**Ages 6-8**
Totolo, tolotolo (crawling, creeping)	*Aati* (art & craft – creation)	*Fī fau, la'i 'ulu, maea* (plaiting – pandanus, doll hair, rope…)
Fakamuna (dramatic play – doll house, nursing, family play…)	*Fa'u pēteni* (forming patterns – colours, shapes, material, seeds, sticks, beads…)	*Hoka* (pool table)
Lau alifapeti' (reading the alphabet)	*Faifio, fakahoa* (mixing numbers and letters for matching)	*Kako lou'akau, lalanga* (weaving – paper or weave straps)
Lau mata'ifika, me'a lau (counting – counters – shells, bottle caps…)	*Fakahoa* (matching/flashcards – numbers, shapes, colours, alphabets, shells, beads, seeds)	*Laipeli* (library play – borrowing, librarian, reading)
Puhi pula (balloon blowing)	*Fe'auhi* (competitions)	*Lalanga va'akau* (stick threading)
Sio vitiō (videos – nursery rhymes, cartoons)	*Fokotu'utu'u, sīpinga', faka-kalakalasi, fakafa'afa'ahinga* (sorting, categorising, classifying (e.g. Shapes)	*Lau konga'* (reading corner – picture books, print books)
Va'inga nge'esi hina (plastic bottle playing – passing, kicking, filling, squirting…)	*Lea, hiva* (speaking, singing…)	*Lau maau* (poem reading, construction, rhyming)
Va'inga tou (play dough)	*Mūsika* (music – singing, instruments – rubber bands, strings, wood…)	*Ngaahi kahoa* (making necklaces – beads, flowers…)
Va'inga/langa poloka (building blocks – wooden, plastic and Lego)	*Pele* (playing cards)	*Pāsolo* (puzzle games)
	Saimone sesi (Simon says)	*Pingi pongo* (ping pong)
	Tohi,valivali, tā sioka (chalk writing/drawing)	*Tuitui nima* (sewing – needle threading)
	Tohi/valivali palakipoe	*Veimau* (chess)

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[53] To avoid repetition and in the interest of brevity, these terminologies are not mentioned in the glossary section (Appendix A) and should be drawn from this diagram alone.

	(chalkboard, colouring, drawing)	
	Tohitohi (writing – letters, numbers, 3 letter words)	
	Va'inga mata'ifika' (number games, songs, matching/pasting)	
	Va'inga mata'itohi' (letter play – tracing, colouring, painting, threading…)	
	Va'inga pāsolo (puzzles)	
	Va'inga pooti/kaati (board, card games)	
	Valivali painting (tooth brush, pandanus fruit)	
	Valivali/tā valivali (colouring - crayons, pastes, coloured pencils)	
	Veesi lauloto (bible play – memory verses, stories – guessing, questions, quizzes…)	
OUTDOOR PLAY		
Ages 0-3	**Ages 3-6**	**Ages 6-8**
Heka hoosi (actual horse/wooden/stuffed horse/water horse/rubber horse riding)	*Fakapuna lofa, vakapuna* (throwing paper planes, kite flying)	*Akapulu, 'aka'aka* (footballing, kicking…)
Heke (sliding – slippery slide, cardboard, coconut husk)	*Hapohapo* (catching balls, nuts, rocks…)	*Fu'ifu'i ngoue* (watering plants, gardens)
Kaka/kakakaka (climbing – tree, playground equipment)	*Heka pasi* (bus riding – passengers, driver, bursar)	*Fusi maea* (tug of war)
Lele, lova lele (racing, running)	*Heka/faka'uli motopaiki* (motorbike riding, push bike)	*Kilikiti* (cricket)
Lue lalo (walking to the sea picking shells, to open spaces to pick flowers and observe nature (living and non-living things)	*Hiko veve* (picking up rubbish – counting, sorting…)	*Malemale* (touch rugby)
Punopuna (jumping)	*Hopohopo* (hopping, hopscotch…)	*Mapu* (marbles)
Sēlue (see-saw)	*Kaka tu'unga* (ladder climbing)	*Ngāue fakatufunga* (building, carpentry – blocks, wood…)
Sipilingi (bouncing - trampoline, rubber balls/horses)	*Langa toi* (hide and seek)	*Pasiketipolo* (basketball)
Sitepu (steps stepping)	*Lue palanisi'* (balance walking on wood, bricks)	*Tō ngoue fo'i'akau/matala'i 'akau* (gardening – florals, fruits and vegetables)
Suingi (monkey bars, tree trunks)	*Puhi mo fakapuna pula* (balloon blowing, rocketing)	*Tolo pato/moa* (dodge ball)
Teke (pushing – trucks, prams…)	*Pusi mo e kumā* (cat and mouse – tag and chase)	
Tolo/va'inga/hapo pulu (ball playing, throwing, catching)	*Saimone sesi* (Simon says)	
Va'inga 'one'one (sandpit)	*Tāfue* (skipping, jump rope)	
Va'inga vai (water play)	*Va'inga keimi* (games with rules)	
Va'inga/lele/hū tānolo (tunnel play)	*Ve'e teka* (tyre rolling)	

6.3 Model of play, learning and development

As a result of this study, it was possible to devise a model of play from the combined ideas, perceptions, behaviours and attitudes from study participants and the literature support on the discourse of play and learning in the early years (figure 6.2). Premised on the analogy – *Ouau 'o e Taumafa Kava'*, the model is a user-friendly guide of knowledge and practice for both the early learning home and school environment. It is called, *A Love from the Heart Model of Play, Learning and Development* (*Loto'i 'Ofa Model of Va'inga, Ako and Tupulaki*). The model merges the general development traits within the wider literature of play and development with its attributes in the currently trialed National ECE Curriculum as well as the findings in the study. The model brings together the philosophy, cultural position and practice of *ako* and *va'inga* in Tonga.

Loto'i 'ofa – a deep love from the heart is the unanimous and agreed response from ECE teachers of the expected stance of a *faiako ma'a Tonga* for ECE (ECE teacher for Tonga). It conforms to empathy in what Markham (2016) considers the potential for students to open up to "*deeper learning, drive clarity of thinking, and inspire engagement with the world—in other words, provide the emotional sustenance for outstanding human performance*" (p. 1). It also culminates core Tongan values essential in the chapter theme and highly required from teachers whose role as *faiako* (teacher) is interchangeable with the role of *fa'ē* (mother). The affection is an immediate, consistent yet conventional reaction the minute a *faiako* enters an early learning premises. Tongan ECE teachers, all-female, arrived at this comparison as well as the certainty and expectation that a mother bears a natural heart of love or *'ofa fakafa'ē* for her children. As such, she is to exercise *'ofa* to carefully and lovingly mould young children to achieve maximum development goals to reach their full potential whilst under her care and nurturing. In retrospect, an ECE teacher is accountable and responsible for her children's developmental growth and learning just as much as mothers, fathers and other family members in the *nofo 'a kāinga* sphere are liable for children's well-being and care at home.

Figure 6.2 A love from the heart model of play, learning and development

TEACHERS

Intrapersonal, solitary & all-inclusive development

PARENTS

Cultural knowledge & practice development

SCHOOL   Va'inga   Va'inga   HOME

Interpersonal & social development

Tupulaki fakafo'ituitui, fakatoukatea

Tupulaki 'ilo anga fakafonua, tala tukufakaholo

Tupulaki fakasosiale, fakafeohi, feveitokai'aki

Tupulaki fakatufunga mea'a, faka'ilo fo'ou

Tupulaki fakalaumalie, fakalotu, faka'ilo folofola

Tupulaki faka'ulungaanga, fakamolale

Tupulaki fakaeongo, feongo'i'aki

Tupulaki fakasino, mo'ui lelei

Tupulaki faka'atamai, fakapoto, fakalea

Creative, performance & artistic development

Spiritual & Biblical development

Character & behaviour development

Emotional & empathetic development

Physical, bodily & well-being development

Cognitive, intellectual & speech development

6.3.1 Taumafa Kava Ceremony

The interplay between play, learning and development within the model is figurative of a cultural analogy – *Ouau 'o e Taumafa Kava'* (Taumafa Kava Ceremony), the Tongan ceremonial ritual for the acceptance and consumption of *kava* in honour of a royal death, marriage or bestowment of a noble title or royal coronation. *Kava* is a traditional Pacific beverage made from the root and stem of the piper plant, *Piper methysticum* (Hussein, 2015). It is known throughout the Pacific as "*yaqona in Fiji, ava in Samoa, awa in Hawaii, sakau in Pohnpei and kava in the Marquesas*" (Davis & Brown, 1999. p. 7). The ritual represents symbolic interactionism in which, "*human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that they have for them…the social interaction that one has with one's fellows*" (Blumer, 1986. 2). According to Taulahi (1979), the ceremony involves the "*ancient installation of kings…solemn dignified manner pledged the loyalty and ceremonial sealing of office between the king and people*" (p. 3). The induction is by tradition, coined the *fakanofo* while *fakanofonofo* (seating arrangements) position around the *'alofi* (*kava* circle) from the King at the head until the lowest *matāpule* (chief). The presiding King of Tonga is the paramount figure in this ceremony and his presence is both

central and celebrated in the occasion. When presiding in the *kava* circle, he is known as the *'olovaha*, chief of the circle, marking his highest rank bordered by two *'apa'apa* (talking chiefs). The various *nōpele* (nobles) of the realm must be seated within the *kava* circle accompanied by an attending *matāpule*. Figure 6.3 shows an actual image of the *Taumafa Kava Ceremony* held at Pangai Lahi, Nuku'alofa, Tonga displaying the scope and extent of the people involved and the cultural resources required. The Palace Office (2014) provides a clear yet concise and compressed snapshot of the four (4) main ritual proceedings of the ceremony embedding a comprehensive description of the model.

Figure 6.3 Taumafa Kava Ceremony[54]

i.   Kava preparation – Kumi ha'a´mou tokonaki

First, the *matāpule* to the right of the *'olovaha* calls out, "*Kumi ha'a´ mou tokonaki.*" A command to gather supplies for the making of *kava*. The required materials are brought forward and assembled in front of the *ngaohi kava* (*kava* mixer) or *tou'a* who is seated on the opposite end of the *kava* circle parallel to the *'olovaha*. The *ngaohi kava* is specifically selected to perform the task – usually a person of royalty or high nobility rank. On both sides of the *ngaohi kava* are two attendants called *angaikava*. In reference to the study's new model, it sees the *ngaohi kava* figurative of teachers and parents of young children in the early years purposefully tasked to nurture and

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[54] Matangi Tonga Online (2015) http://matangitonga.to/2015/06/27/taumafa-kava-royal-kava-circle

cultivate children within the home and school environments. They preside at the centerfold of the moulding process similar to the *ngaohi kava*'s task to carefully knead *kava* for proper consumption.

The *angaikava* on the other hand, represent ECE stakeholders that include the MET – teacher educators, curriculum developers, policy makers, donors as well as the PTA body and local communities. They form an extended leverage to serve ECE while their contribution to play, learning and development is equally vital to the model. The *tano'a* (*kava* bowl) represents the context for *va'inga,* usually the two settings a child is most familiar with – the *'api* (home) and *'apiako* (school) environments. The *kava*, being the highest-ranking cultural beverage, represents *va'inga*, the essence and core of this study. It summons adults to embrace, understand, practise and harness *va'inga* for its natural ability to bring enjoyment to children as well as the holistic learning and development attributes it offers in return.

ii.   Kava making process – Kuo holo, tuku atu. Tuku mālie pe kae palu

Next, the right hand *matāpule* instructs, "*Kuo holo, tuku atu*." (It is kneaded: lower the bowl which is tilted towards the *matāpule*). He continues, "*Tuku mālie pe kae palu.*" (All right, mix). He then addresses the *angaikava*, "*Tafoki kimoua*" (Turn) and they turn inwards. "*Ui ha'a´ mo vai*" (Put in your water). The helpers then call out to the people around the *ngaohi kava*, "*Vai!*" The water is fetched in a *hohoni* (full coconut shell) and emptied into the *kava* bowl. After that, the right hand *angaikava* takes more water and pours it into the *kava* bowl while the *ngaohi kava* kneads it with *kava* powder. The Palace Office (2014) describes the process;

> The mixer, with graceful flourishes of the hand, mashes the *kava* together in the bowl, spreading it out over the inner surface of the bowl, and tipping the bowl away from him, his hands on either side of the rim, exposes its interior to the president, calling, if the president be the king, '*Holo 'a e taumafa´ ni,*' (knead this drink), or '*Kuo holo kava´ ni,*' (this *kava* is kneaded) (p. 1).

The *ngaohi kava* and *angaikava* must be mindful of the exact measurement of water and *kava* necessary for consumption. After all, the fate and climax of the ceremony, rests on their ability to manipulate these two ingredients to create the perfect beverage mix. Adults likewise should be able to utilise what they can at home and at school to ensure children are well supported and supplied with maximum *va'inga* opportunities, time and resources. In adjunct to this, teachers in particular must consider the essential ingredients of children's diverse learning styles, abilities and

needs; stages of cognitive development; innate and learned intelligences, their immediate and extended environments as well as the social construction of their play. Stakeholders too must play their part to ensure support and inclusive curriculum and policy decisions are in place.

iii.   Kava distribution – Milolua

The right hand *matāpule* further instructs, *"Tokonaki 'o fakatau"* (Prepare to distribute, wring out the *kava*). The *fakatau kava* (men sitting behind the *ngaahi kava*) move forward with empty *ipu kava* for filling. This is called *fakatau* – wringing out of *kava* into serving cups for drinking. In specific, as the *fakatau kava* raise their *ipu kava* over the *fakalou fusi* (edge of the *kava* bowl); the *ngaohi kava* squeezes the beverage into it from a restored *fau* (pandanus strainer). The empty and halved *ipu kava* is the sole means of collecting, distributing and serving *kava*. In terms of the new model and contributive knowledge to the study, it represents the particularisation and significance of the variety of development forms that emerge from *va'inga*. Similarly, to acquire the most befitting *ipu kava*, the *ngaohi kava* is to use specific, custom-made yet finely furnished coconut shells reserved only for the *Taumafa Kava*.

Children last of all, are emblematic of the *'olovaha* himself – *tapu ange mo ia* (in all due respect); as well as his chiefs and nobles predestined to consume the kneaded *kava*. This royal positioning bestows on children the climax role within play and learning development just as the response and acceptance of *kava* by the king and his nobles epitomise approval of the meticulous bartending skills of the *ngaohi kava* and *angaikava*. In order for productive and all inclusive outcomes in play and learning, parents, teachers and the community must treat all children equivalent to the *fuifui lupe 'o loto palasi´* (doves of the royal palace – pertaining to the princesses and royal children). As the *ngaohi kava* vigilantly kneads and blends *kava* and water for the beverage mix, the same rigour is expected of teachers and parents in their role to nourish and harness play and learning development in young children. In other words, the usefulness of *va'inga* depends on the awareness, ability and willingness of parents and teachers to ensure children are well equipped and given maximum opportunities to holistically develop through a range of play forms and mediums. Like the role of *ngaohi kava*, best practice and perfection is imperative.

iv.   Kava is served – Kava Kuo Heka!

The final stage is where the right hand *angaikava* chants: "*Kava kuo heka*" (The *kava* is taken up) and is ready to be served. The right hand *matāpule* chants in response, "*'Ave ia ma'a...*" (Take it for... [naming the one to be served]). The first cup is offered to the *'olovaha*, head of the *kava* circle. The second cup is presented to the left hand *matāpule* while the third cup to the right hand *matāpule*. The serving of *kava* is continuously repeated until all people within the *kava* circle are served. However, each time a new person is served, the same chant is repeated over and over again. The serving process signifies the climax point of the ceremony as the ritual assumes its peak – the rightful people within the realm of *Taumafa Kava* who officially hold land and dignified titles in Tonga. In terms of the entire study, the new model aims to honour and show gratitude to those involved by imparting worthwhile, valuable and contributive knowledge declaring, "*Kava kuo heka!*" and that *kava* is ready for consumption. This follows the *fakafisikava* task of Noble Vaha'i to close the ceremonial ritual and seal its practice and completion. It looks for a *mālie* and *māfana* factor in the study propelling knowledge and practice towards a breakthrough in quality learning and education for Tonga and to re-examine the usefulness of the study purpose, approaches and research tools. It also prides in its significant socio-cultural contribution to the wider discourse of *ako* and *va'inga* in the early years.

6.3.2 Comprehensive description of the model

The model is most significant to help guide the knowledge and practice of play, learning and development in Tonga. In other words, even though the learning developments within the model are common and general concepts in the discourse of early play and learning, it otherwise bears context-specific and culturally inclusive features that reflect the uniqueness of the Tongan way of knowing, learning, being and belonging (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2013). The model merges information from the acquired research data and the empirical support within the literature review. From the data, the development forms[55] obtained ranged from – *intrapersonal,*

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[55]As mentioned in the previous chapter, the multiple development and play forms interactively correspond each other and are mentioned several times in different sections. Also note, that while this section only touches on the various forms of development and *va'inga* activities passed on by research participants and the highlights from the literature review, the prospects are extensive and could not be entirely incorporated within the scope of this study. A comprehensive account is also to be taken from participant examples in chapter five (5).

interpersonal, cognitive, physical, emotional, character, spiritual, creative and cultural knowledge development. Gray (2008) supports that play is where "*children develop their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral capacities*" (p. 1).

i.   Intrapersonal, solitary and all-inclusive development
Personal, self and skillful play

Tupulaki fakafo'ituitui, fakatoukatea' - Children's *va'inga* foremost develops the intrapersonal persona, individual or self to enable further holistic development particularly the things children are exposed to and influenced by in their natural immediate and extended environments. Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological System's Theory* clearly shows how a child's growth and development is shaped by ecological surroundings such as the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The influences of these inward-outward environments mirror Piaget's *Theory of Assimilation and Accommodation* shaping children's behaviour, perceptions and beliefs of the world especially their immediate or home environment (Blake & Pope, 2008). As one research participant pointed out, "*Play develops the whole child – his mind, body and soul…what he thinks, how he grows and how he feels. Behind that is how he relates to others, to his family, his society, his culture and country*" [T5]. Children's natural ability to pretend and make-believe in their *va'inga* is an influence of these ecological factors.

Commonly known as *fakamuna*, children sometimes reenact real life experiences or pretend an imaginary yet positive experience, which at times indicate interests, feelings and emotions. Piaget's *Construction of Knowledge Theory* also explains this. Through their own play, children have a natural ability to learn while the teacher is merely the facilitator of play opportunities and environments (Moore, Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie & Boyd, 2014). This is explained in the section on emotional development. *Fakamuna* furthermore*,* enables children to enter a make-believe world separating them from everyday experiences (Garvey, 1990; Hewes, 2006; Johnson et al, 1987; White, 2012). Solitary play aids to foretell a child's interests and intelligences so adults are able to encourage, monitor and support future goals, professional pathways and aspired dreams.

A focus on the self also incorporates *tupulaki fakatoukatea* (all-inclusive development) branching out to a child's extended capacity to be multi-skilful in

va'inga – a mimicry to futuristic tasks of *falehanga* (domestic household chores), *tōkanga* (farming) and *ngātai* (fishing). This is also known as an all-rounded aptitude pertaining to *tā ki liku, tā ki fanga*, meaning, becoming skilled in all facets of societal life. These skills are nonetheless, crucial to ensure sustainable and perpetual livelihoods in an ordinary Tongan rural and sometimes urban community are maintained. The *Pre-Exercise Theory* supports this as a way in which children rehearse and imitate adult roles (Piaget, 1962; Santer et al, 2007). It is a "*way for children to practise the skills required later in adult life*" (Docket & Fleer, 1999. p. 24). *Fakatoukatea* also pertains to academic achievement through *va'inga* enables children to thrive and build on basic numeracy and literacy skills paving a way for further formalised learning and life in general. According to Santer et a (2007), "*the benefits of play to children, families and communities – continue into later life, probably contributing to increased social responsibility and reduced antisocial behaviour, and to the ability to make a contribution through employment*" (p. xvii).

ii.   Interpersonal and social development
Relationship, social and confidence play

Tupulaki faka-sōsiale', fakafeohi', feveitokai'aki' - Children's interpersonal and social development are enhanced through their interactions with other children, toys or adults. In solitary pretense and pretense with peers, children are able to "*invent scripts and play many roles simultaneously. Toys or props, (e.g. dolls, cars, action figures) usually support this kind of play*" (Hewes, 2006. p. 3). As a result, children develop imagination and creative thinking skills most useful for creating extensive imagination images such as entire worlds as they get older (ibid). A bonus for classroom situations is when creative children share such skills and experiences with others sparking a transmission of creative thoughts. More of child creativity is discussed later. Children are also able to value the relationship of *vā* and cultivate confidence and competence to assist in future learning and assessment decisions. As Smith & Pellegrini (2013) suggest, social play helps children understand others' meanings, understand complex language constructions, develop social, narrative, novel and intricate story line skills and negotiate meanings and roles. It furthermore helps develop relational, negotiable and decision makings skills crucial to maintaining relationships and to ensure collective collaboration (ibid). Through interaction, young babies especially, are able to recognise, observe, imitate and

discover things they sense in their immediate and natural environments (microsystem). This in turn helps shape their initial responses and thoughts which is why it is critically important to include children from as young as 0 years in the study. In fact, some Tongan mothers superstitiously believe *va'inga* should start from the womb where babies eventually imitate what mothers do during their pregnancies. It comes to show the prevalence of ominous notions and the dire need of some people to cling to such signs for hopeful future predictions. In contrary, they also use these beliefs to fend off impending negative energy and misfortune.

Like Bronfenbrenner, Piaget further supports environmental influence and how it shapes individual development. His Onset-Offset curve from solitary to social play indicates his theory of the *Stages of Cognitive Development* in which children pass through a series of cognitive stages (Blake & Pope, 2008). This coincides with children's level and pace of cognitive maturity before they are able to be fully functional in what he calls the *Concrete-Operational Stage* and further into the *Formal Operational Stage*. Yet, according to socio-cultural interaction, it is Vygotksy's *Social Development Theory* that merges a child's intra and inter developments "*first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)*" (Vygotsky, 1978. p. 57). So, while Bronfenbrenner and Piaget place primary emphasis on the child as self (intrapersonal development), Vygotsky considers otherwise and prioritises social interactions even of children's *va'inga* and development. However, in terms of study participants, communal influence is the norm reflective of typical Tongan living or *nofo 'a kāinga*. The emphasis to center on the child as self has been very much neglected and is believed the reason why some Tongan children lack independent thought. They are very much conditioned and in-tuned to working and functioning as a whole that in return, often inhibits self-determination, self-regulation and often leads to the lack of self-sufficiency. Either way, the Tongan outlook on the importance of children's solitary and social play are undermined and requires immediate adult reaction to ensure children are well provided and supported in both. Hence, the findings point to a critical issue in the quality of learning given also the diverse learning styles and needs of young children.

iii. Cognitive, intellectual and speech development
Intelligence, perceptive, language play

Tupulaki faka-'atamai, fakapoto, fakalea – In cognitive or intellectual development, children explore various activities that stimulate ideas, higher order thinking, decision-making, literacy and numeracy. Lester & Russell (2008) say the brain increases flexibility during play improving potential for learning. One most evident aspect of learning is the skill of speech or *talanoa* and *pōto'i lea*, mostly harnessed through language play. Children do this through socio-dramatic, symbolic and solitary play and further assists in pre-literacy, oral and written language skills such as talking, writing, speaking and reading (Hewes, 2006; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Christie & Roskos, 2013). Letter recognition, pronunciation and formation are easily identified through children's everyday *va'inga* and as participants suggested, allows adults to identify children's strengths and weaknesses for home or school intervention to help mark school readiness. In a study of linguistics and literary play by Bongartz & Richey (2010), the use of narratives helps the production of meaning in both oral and written forms. It is important children engage in quality play to acquire well-developed memory and language skills as well as the ability to regulate behaviour – a leading quality in enhancing adaptability and adjustment to school and academic learning (Barblett, 2010).

For children who are slow to develop speech, teachers advise additional intervention strategies and remedial support. They also encourage the prospect of having vocal and talkative children constantly engage with them to raise confidence and develop a habit of *talanoa*. Vygotsky's ZPD theory fits in well with this recommendation in terms of assisting a child reach full potential whereas his own capabilities do not permit him to. In core, it "*requires adults or peers to provide assistance to students, who cannot complete the assigned task without help*" (Blake & Pope, 2008. p. 60). Howard Gardner's MI Theory explains human potential beyond the usual audio, visual and kinesthetic learning styles into what he calls "*a broad range of abilities that humans possess*" (Armstrong, 2009. p. 6). The MI theory supports the cause for intellectually strong and capable children to aid one that does not naturally acquire that particular intelligence. These learning theories are an imperative tool in the classroom to consider learning need and support. They should also be used to identify various intelligences and talents to determine ability grouping and to

strengthen teacher-student support – a strategy most useful in pre-primary and primary years.

In mathematics play, Sarama & Clements (2009) share a plethora of skills found in children's free play such as "*patterns and shapes, compare sizes, and count things*" (p. 313). *Langatoi* (hide and seek), *pele* (cards) and *mapu* (marbles) are amongst some of the most common *va'inga* activities Tongan children engage in to stimulate mathematical skills. With *mapu*, Lancy & Grove (2011) say that with its perfectly polished, round spheres, "*marbles encourage the development of small motor skills and digital finesse. Watching children play marbles, we first see the refinement of manual dexterity. And we also observe the development of social intelligence or MI in the gamesmanship of children as they play marbles*" (ibid, p. 490).

Critical thinking and decision making emerge as children deeply think of a secure and concealed place to hide. Numbers, counting, matching, colours, shapes are manipulated through *pele* and *mapu* along with a wide range of other play and learning features tabulated in the previous section. One other yet amusing cognitive learning feature is the ability to develop trickster skills such as a game of *pele suipi* where children often imitate from adults the art of *tukumuli* (cheating). Albeit devious, it nonetheless fuels critical thinking, yet with hope and embedded values, it will not become an accumulated skill for negative use. Digital play also emerged as an inevitable part of children's *va'inga* channeling a range of effective and transferable cognitive skills. According to Gee (2008), "*good commercial video games foster deep learning and problem solving and that such games in fact promote mastery as a form of play*" (p. 229). However, some adults argue it impedes outdoor play as children tend to linger on video games for elongated periods. This issue is further discussed in the next section.

iv.   Physical, bodily and well-being development
Health, well-being, bodily kinesthetic, energetic play

Tupulaki faka-sino, mo'ui lelei – To ensure children develop physical, health and bodily well-being is another popular feature within the model even though the initial idea of it being a learning tool was undermined. Alongside emotional development, the unseen and rather elusive nature of the *va'inga* attributes within these two development forms contributed to the confusion. It indicated the gap in parental

awareness of the holistic nature of play as skills development. While some teachers are familiar with the concept, meticulous deliberation through *talanoa* enabled a comprehensible view on how learning skills emerged through these forms of development. In physical development to be exact, scribbling for example helps develop the growth and movement of small muscles and is not to be seen or valued as a worthless task. In physical play, muscles are sustained for strength, endurance, physical coordination and healthy growth (Pells, 2016; Perry & Branum, 2009; Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009). Amongst many writers on physical play, Hewes (2006) provided a list some of the forms and development attributes of play including physical play[56]. Maintaining a healthy mind, body and soul reflective of holistic development was also a major feature during the *talanoa*. Sattelmair & Ratey (2009) however, affirm, "*strenuous physical activity is not only healthy for students but improves their academic performance*" (p. 365). Tongan children being very outdoors, leisure in a range of games with rules play in which they mostly *va'inga* in groups or in pairs. Hence, both physical and social developments are enhanced.

In terms of children's health, parents especially, are encouraged to minimise and limit elongated digital play to reduce health risks such as obesity (Veitch et al, 2010) and to encourage other forms of play to keep children socialised and mobile. Participants however, suggested more outdoor play where children are exposed to and have direct contact with nature for fresh air and sunlight and for more opportunities of physical activity. Kernan (2007) lists children's priorities in their outdoor play experiences as movement, vertical expansiveness, finding and constructing small spaces, transformation, direct contact with animals, insects and plant life, and social experiences. In other words, to increasingly enable and provide opportunities for more *va'inga*, especially outdoor play. According to Homeyer & Morrison (2008), the mental health needs of children are also important and that play therapy is "*a valuable and developmentally appropriate intervention*" (p. 210).

v.   **Emotional and empathetic development**
Intra-empathy, inter-empathy and competitive play

Tupulaki fakaeongo', feongo'i'aki – Emotions towards oneself and to others is another skill children develop through *va'inga*. According to participants, children

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[56] See table 3.1h

are able to express certain emotions during *va'inga*, which indicate self-actualisation and varied behaviours. Teachers believe this not only helps identify particular interests but also detects troubled children or children who experience traumatic experiences for intervention purposes. In self-actualisation, children are able to demonstrate intra or inner empathy for oneself such as an internal drive to complete a task. Having feelings for oneself sometimes shows in competitive play when a child competes with others for first place or when intrinsic motivation is involved besides a drive and urge to win becomes intense. However, Kris (2015) said, "*preschoolers who participate in social-emotional skills programs exhibit less aggression and anxiety and become better social problem solvers*" (p. 1). Often children go to school with built-up emotions and are left undetected by the teacher. This increases chances of depression and unhappiness and should be a serious cause for attention. One suggestion is through play-based interventions where teachers could help alleviate trauma through empathy play with other children. Listed are a few things parents and teachers are able to do in order to encourage emotional literacy in the classroom:

- Reflective listening and putting a name to emotions;
- Normalising emotions into good or bad and that everyone has feelings;
- Developing simple and memorable strategies;
- Read fictional pictures to promote empathy; and
- Practice mindfulness to improve emotional self-regulation also children gather and talk about the different emotions and how each one is normal given they are provided with moral, family and friend support (Kris, 2015).

Leaupepe (2011) adds that emotional, pretend and fantasy play help children master competence to face the world and to cope with it, which in turn develops positive self-esteem and influences the growth of personalities. In preschool centers, teachers see a link in inter-empathy as children resonate feelings with others in their speech, facial expressions and ability to show comfort. Pretend play also allows children to use toys or friends to demonstrate and show remorse and feelings to. Using play as therapy helps children "*deal with their negative feelings in a way that did not alienate them from adults*" (Elkind, 2007. p. 2).

vi.   Character and behaviour development
Behaviour and values play

Tupulaki faka'ulungaanga, fakamōlale' - Values and good ethics mould child behaviour through varying *va'inga* activities. In pretend play, children learn the basic commands of *fakamolemole/kātaki* (please, sorry), *mālo/mālō 'aupito* (thank

you/thank you very much), and so forth. This is highly supported in Hart & Tannock (2013). Children's changed behaviour patterns are also evident in their *va'inga* and should be an observant aspect for teachers to act on. Like emotional play and development, children's behaviours indicate their interests and self-actualisations. The Tonga National ECE Curriculum (2015) document values *faka'ulungaanga* (behaviour development) as part of the document's major strands of learning and development. It centers on the ability to choose right over wrong and good over bad.

In terms of interests, participants ventured in nostalgia of the actual childhood *va'inga* experiences that in effect, determined future interests and career paths. One example was of a childhood liking of marbles, winning and accumulating them from other village children. The single store in the village ran out of supply so children and parents would buy them from this particular child. The next day, he would venture out and win them back again and thus the cycle recurred. Not only did it allow the child to spontaneously explore *va'inga*, but enabled him to utilise and demonstrate mathematics-logical intelligence (Gardner, 1993; 2011). In fact, it helped him linger within the domains of that intelligence and is today, a successful accountant and accounting teacher.

Another example is of a child who leisured in construction play, taking things apart and reconstructing them. His bodily-kinaesthetic and hands-on ability and intelligence paved a way for his futuristic career in engineering. While there are innumerable reflections and examples beyond the word limits of this study, the multi prospects of *va'inga* are high and calls for an elevated focus and value of its ability to recognise future interests. This in turn, helps parents and teachers encourage and prepare *va'inga* and learning environments conducive to these needs, which will optimistically take children into self-thriving and self-efficient futures.

vii.   Spiritual and Biblical development
Biblical, religious play

Tupulaki faka-laumālie', fakalotu, faka'ilo folofola – Given the majority of Tongan families are of the Christian faith, participants stressed the importance of spiritual development particularly of the doctrines and moral teachings of the Bible. This coincides with character and behavioural development. Religious development is offered not only at home and school, but in church groups and Sunday schools. One

particular event for some churches is the annual *fakamē* or White Sunday. Through a mild form of *va'inga*, children learn simple prayers, learn to give, offer and *foaki* in small donations to the church or for school functions. They are also taught to develop a sense of belonging to the Christian church, faith and teachings, a willingness to help and assist others and a passion for scripture through daily devotions, listening to Bible stories, reciting and memorising Bible verses, singing hymnal or scriptural songs and reenacting stories from the Bible. Through these forms of *va'inga*, children are expected to develop a Christ-like behaviour of love and compassion, forgiveness and kindness.

These basic moral values couple the main core Tongan values within the Kakala Research Framework and chapter theme. The Tonga National ECE Curriculum (2015) document features *fakalakalaka fakalaumālie mo faka'ulungaanga* as a major strand in the holistic development of young children. Like the responses from participants, it concerns learning and embodying Christian-like moral teachings and conforming to ways of the Bible. Another major context/culture-specific aspect is Tonga's firm Sabbath observance, which typically discourages *va'inga* of any sort especially loud, physical and boisterous play. Although most households restrict all form of *va'inga* on this day, children are known to engage in mild forms of social and solitary play and sometimes even construction and object play. Some adults otherwise allow this form of play to cater for the inevitable urge of children to *va'inga*. This correlates with the *Surplus Energy Theory* by Spencer arguing play is an uncontrollable desire or a superfluous activity (Docket & Fleer, 2003; Fleer, 2009; Mitchell & Mason, 1948; Santer et al, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 1995).

viii.   Creative, performance and artistic development
Innovative, performance and artistic play

Tupulaki faka-tufunga mea'a', faka'ilo fo'ou' - Creative and artistic development pertain to children's ability to construct and create things using their imaginations through stimulation and imitation most likely in things within their natural environments including, commercialised toys. Building blocks, legos, sand play, card games, puzzles, board games as well as some forms of digital play accumulate to other development forms but more so to children's ability to generate creativity. One example of a significant digital game is mind craft where children indulge in creating virtual environments of their dream homes. The effort and detail involved

demonstrate imagination and innovation (Robinson, 2015). This couples the skill of performance as Tonga is well-known for her melodious people and culture. Children engage and develop this ability and talent mainly through singing and dancing in both the home and school environments. A lot of Tongan teachers are known for their ability to spontaneously break into song – a common skill in many other people as well. This behaviour is often learned by some children as the MI theory asserts; at present embrace creative, music and dance as part of one's multiple intelligences. Taufe'ulungaki (2002) argues that Pacific people are more right-brained and accentuate a lot creative, holistic, circular and people-focused thinking. Performance development is also apparent in social play as well as cultural and heritage play. ECE centers venture in annual cultural weeks where centers, nation-wide showcase cultural aspects to help promote cultural awareness and significance. The MET oraganises and visits each center encouraging the cause and motivates teachers and children of the importance to promote the Tongan language, custom, dress, food, behaviour, beliefs and values.

ix.   Cultural knowledge and practice development
Cultural and heritage play

***Tupulaki 'ilo anga/faka-fonua', tala tukufakaholo'* -** The ultimate learning of cultural knowledge and practice is embedded in children's everyday *va'inga*. In their language use, Taufe'ulungaki (2000) encourages a return to the vernacular mother tongue for children in the early years. This helps promote and safeguard language use, which was swiftly being replaced by the ideological English medium of instruction in most Tongan schools. Heritage play encourages children to learn about their Tongan culture and heritage through cultural practices of language use, food, dress, performance, art, music, dance, behaviour and all things pertaining to knowing, doing, being and becoming Tongan. *Va'inga* has been the epitome of culture from as early as hunter-gatherer societies. Gray (2009) says play was the foundation and a means of social existence in primitive societies. For children, they "*were free to play and explore, and through these activities, they acquired the skills, knowledge, and values of their culture*" (p. 476). It is also a way to value and acknowledge the diversity of cultures around the world as displayed in the National ECE Week[57].

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[57] See Appendix H

Although the changes of time also saw a change in many cultural aspects in the *anga* and *nofo faka-Tonga* (Tongan ways and ways of living), preserving and promoting it through children's *va'inga* is a step forward to ensure stability in culture and the Tongan way of life. A range of indoor and outdoor play activities[58] showcased the wide variety of cultural contributions to *va'inga* leisure and learning resources marking efforts of cultural aptness, sustainability and safeguarding. The culture-specific aspect of *va'inga* is the essence of this study. It is reflective of Vygotsky's *Cultural-Historical Theory* and its perspective on play (Fleer, 2009). It is not only a space to consciously recognise concepts but serves as a context to understand play in its specific cultural environment. Smith (2013) also asserts, cultures value and react differently to play. The study builds on this knowledge to raise awareness of both the importance for culturally inclusive approaches to early learning and the actual play practices of children to inform appropriate and cultural-sensitive pedagogies.

Chapter summary

While the majority of development forms coincide with the extensive international literature and discourse of play and learning, some aspects are context-specific to Tonga in terms of how culture, religion, socio-political, ecological and economic status influence child play and its perceived value as an activity of children and attribute to early learning and development. The taxonomy and model of play hopes to be a fundamental platform to broadly recognise play and present a potential play-based approach to learning in Tonga. Findings correlate to a wide range of play and learning theories. In particular, they resonate with the MI theory and its focus on the multiplicity of talents and intelligences both innate and learned and how it equates to the bricolage nature of play and the multi-developmental outcomes it generates. Alongside these theories feature the socio-cultural factors within the taxonomy and model of play indicating the reality of *va'inga, ako* and *tupulaki* in Tonga to serve as an inclusive guide for cultural relevance.

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[58] See Figure 5.1a

CHAPTER SEVEN | CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Mamahi'i me'a (commitment) *and foaki* (gift, contribute, offer)

MĀLIE AND MĀFANA – *Mālie* is a point where we evaluate the whole research process, asking such questions as: Was it useful? Was it worthwhile? Who was it useful for? And who benefited from the research process? *Māfana* is seen as the final evaluation process of the *Kakala* research framework, where we seek whether transformation, and application and sustainability of the transformation, has taken place ~ (Johansson-Fua, 2014. p. 55).

7.1 Introduction

This closing chapter provides an overview of the entire study re-examining and re-evaluating the significance of the research aims and objectives, the eclectic bricolage approach and the triangulation of research tools. It further summarises the research findings accumulating and bridging potential knowledge gaps within the existing literature and discourse of early play and learning. Finally, it recommends ways forward for the knowledge and practice of *ako* and *va'inga* in Tonga while the focus on contextual knowledge and culturally inclusive practices for learning culminates *māfana.* From the *Taumafa Kava Ceremony*[59], the task of *fakafisikava* closes the ceremonial ritual and seals its completion until the next royal installation.

7.2 Significance of the study

This study was designed to generate an understanding of Tongan conceptions and behaviours towards child play and its profound usefulness for early learning and development paved a Tongan epistemological frame. Inquiring into culturally inclusive pedagogies for young children became the centerfold of this study, also taking into account the researcher's passion and expertise in the domain of teacher education. Hence, the objective for a doctoral recognition around this selected topic, was inspired upon three major incentives. (i) The global discourse of the significance of both free and guided play and the advocacy for a more play-based approach in ECE has for years, become a growing universal concern and move towards quality and relevant early learning. (ii) It was deemed to be a common regional problem amongst ECE teachers in the Pacific (Puamau, 2008). There is a general failure to recognise and accept the importance of play for child development and learning and otherwise, place a premium on formalised instruction. The study argues for teachers and curriculum developers to carefully adhere theoretical underpinnings of the stages

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[59] Chapter six (6)

to children's cognitive development to ensure they are not being pushed beyond their capacities as young learners. Unfortunately, societal influences, pressures and cultural restrictions couple conventional educational pathways thrusting children into a premature frenzy of didactic learning when they should otherwise be learning through their play. (iii) In order to completely understand play, its practice and role in early learning must be observed and interpreted within its own unique cultural, political and historical context (Docket & Fleer, 2003). These reasons informed the aim behind the objective to understand the play phenomena in the context of Tonga.

7.2.1 Purposeful bricolage

Theoretically and conceptually grounding the study within an eclectic bricolage approach enabled a wider philosophical conceptualisation of the key concepts of *ako* and *va'inga* through both foreign and indigenous lenses. With its roots in complexity theory (Nelson, 2011), and the known multifaceted aspects of play, the foundations of curriculum were used as a platform to stipulate the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of play. In exploring the extensive literature on early play and learning, the bricoleur extended its disciplines to anthropology and most importantly, the development or learning development aspect of play. Utilising these multiple lenses enabled a comprehensive yet compressed investigation of play. The interdisciplinary approach gave credibility to the study in its wide repertoire of prospective ideas.

7.2.2 Triangulation of research tools

Upon reading the extensive literature on the multifaceted features of play, a qualitative approach centered on the construction of knowledge and meaning from an interpretivist paradigm was selected. It drew from ethnography to delve deeper into the phenomenon of *ako* and *va'inga* through the socio-cultural lenses of key people involved in children's early learning and nurturing. It focused on parents and ECE teachers as the study's main participants given their ability to generate most befitting information and knowledge. In a culturally inclusive and sensitive approach, the study utilised the indigenous tools of *tālanga* and *talanoa*[60] as its main research tools. Its ability to generate constructive dialogue confirmed its appropriateness for *fevahevahe'aki* (mutual sharing). The ideas and perceptions shared are indicative of a

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[60] Focus groups and semi-structured interviews

wide range of enthusiastic and open responses from participants. It further coupled participant observation, document analysis and visual ethnographies to harness a variety of avenues observing the same phenomena adding credibility, validity and ensuring triangulation in the study.

7.3 Study findings

The findings are summarised in terms of important outcomes in each research question. In fact, these selected aspects point to how adult perceptions not only allowed an in-depth inquiry of the socio-cultural practice of *ako* and *va'inga* in Tonga, but how it further contributes to the wider discourse of early play and learning, a heightened issue of debate around the world.

7.3.1 A Tongan conceptualisation of play

It is apparent that play in its trivial position for most parents and some teachers is predominantly viewed as a physical and social activity that brings enjoyment to children. Play is also children's works in terms of physical action and movement and is a means of social interaction mostly with other children. A minority of participants saw play as an indication of child behaviour and interests that may determine future career paths, learning styles and to pinpoint misbehaviour. It is a form of *faka-to'otama* (child-minding) and is seen in the home as a sole activity of children without the inclusion or interference of parents. On the whole, play is seen as a free time activity children engage in as part of growth and childhood. In ECE centers however, free play is generally subordinate to guided play considering guided or structured play more purposeful to yield productive and favourable learning outcomes (Henricks, 2009). Contrastingly, free play features as children's own time to engage in activities that are mostly purposeless and boisterous and often underestimated as *maumau taimi* (waste of time). This attitude is also prevalent in some homes coupled with a range of socio-cultural restrictions pushing play further into the insignificant and trivial category. Cautioning parents of the alarming consequences of play deprivation and its links to impaired brain development, lack of social skills, depression and aggression (Hughes, 2003) is an important consideration when inquiring the significance of play and this study.

7.3.2 Extent of play as a learning and development tool

Although the general Tongan notion and process of learning is *ako, 'ilo* and *poto* (Thaman, 1998), early learning slightly ventures into a diverse path where *ako* (learning) and *va'inga* (play) are interchangeable with each other to create *tupulaki* (development or learning development) (figure 7.1). The child is at the centerfold of the equation and the extent and quality of learning he is to receive, highly depends on the ability of teachers and parents to manipulate this equation.

Figure 7.1 Interchangeable equation for play, learning and development
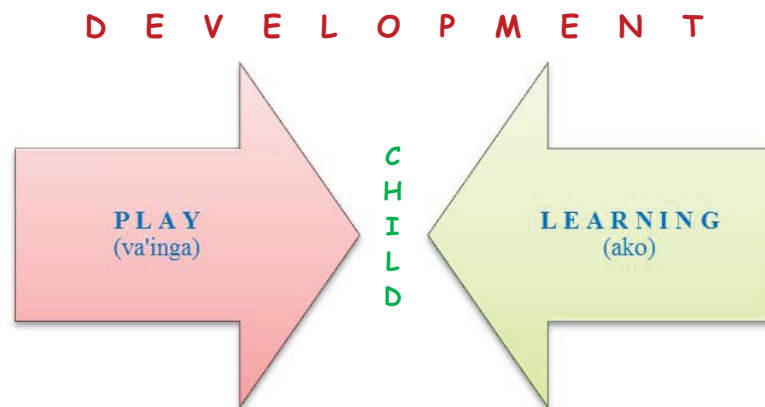
The vast play forms gathered in the findings correspond to each of its unique learning and development form and sometimes overlapped into other forms. They were evident in the broad literature of learning development although certain aspects are context-specific to Tonga indicating how culture, religion, socio-political, ecological and economic status interplay to forge a common perceptual value of child play and its attribute to early learning and development.

In discussing culturally inclusive aspects, the *Loto'i 'Ofa Model of Va'inga, Ako and Tupulaki* maps how children in Tonga holistically develop in the range of play activities and experiences they engage in on a daily basis whether in the home or at school. It offers a potential platform to widely recognise, *talanoa* and advocate for play as a comprehensive play-based approach to improve and increase learning. If so, parents and adults need to become more aware and proactive in their value and support of play. In the meantime, the unseen facets of physical and emotional play are not seen as learning or an added skill but an activity of pretense or bodily movement that hold no purposeful learning outcome. The ability of play to generate learning is still a work in progress in the mindset of some adults and ECE teachers. It

is still treated as a mere activity of children although there was evidence of transformed thinking in study participants during the course of data collection.

7.3.3 Forms of indoor and outdoor play activities

The extensive array of indoor and outdoor play activities practised in Tongan homes and early learning centers mirror many of the play activities prevalent elsewhere in the world as found in the literature; particularly of commercialised toys and the ever-increasing rise of digital play[61]. Play has shifted from the more traditional forms usually practised by children in the past although some aspects prevail or are otherwise, modified in terms of rules and number of players (Hewes, 2006). Fortunately, ECE centers have taken the initiative to promote and cultivate these forms of play in their centers with the aid of natural available resources. The new National ECE Curriculum Document also highlights the need for a heightened cultural emphasis to safeguard and pass on cultural knowledge and heritage to emerging and young generations in Tonga. From the reflective perspectives of parents, upon being more aware of the benefits of play for their children, they too realised the pressing need to not only retain traditional play forms, but to re-enact the exchanged bonds and imparting of values some of these play forms generate particularly in the case of *'olunga he kaliloa'*.

7.3.4 Adult engagement and support of play

While adults in the study emerged out of the uninformed zone and embraced play for what it deeply meant for their children's early learning and development needs, the constraints to child play remain a concerning challenge in Tonga. The restrictions primarily stem from the socio-cultural barriers and the effects of play in disrupting communal living and cultural taboos. For instance, some forms of boisterous, rough and tumble play are too loud for closely knitted settlement structures. The *nofo 'a kāinga* system some families dwell in imply children are often restricted from being loud and boisterous, to run around and to make a mess.

Gender disparity in terms of suitable play activities and time restraints for female children also meant they are often restricted to forms of play that seem masculine or boisterous, such as (bending down) playing marbles or climbing trees. The safety of female children is also an important consideration. Male children are often allowed

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[61] See Taxonomy of play

to continue with physical play for lengthier periods although the noise and audacity generated by some activities are equally scrutinised. The father's body is over-emphasised as being sacred restricting children from any form of physical contact with him unless in the case of *'olunga he kaliloa'*. This was most unfortunate given fathers are more supportive and open-minded of play. The overbearing Sunday law restriction on noise and life in general prohibits physical and boisterous play preventing many children from play. However, like other restrictions, there should be some form of cultural negotiation to allow a free flow of play to occur (Perry & Branum, 2009). This will go some way to ensure children receive the maximum development, support and engagement they need to thrive in an assortment of play activities when their minds and bodies desire to, instead of the dictation of adults.

7.4   Recommendations and implications

The next section summarises the potential impact of the study for EYL practice in Tonga and future directions in relation to play and learning.

7.4.1   Proactive stakeholder involvement

Wider ECE stakeholder involvement is imperative in order to ensure the voice of play is carried as far and as near as possible through more proactive partnerships and collaborative *talanoa* and *tālanga* with ECE teachers and parents who are at the forefront of early learning. It requires their inclusion in curriculum and policy planning decision making through their views, ideas and experience in the reality of child learning and rearing. Their views should form the basis to understand how Tongan children think and learn and how the socialisation patterns of their immediate and extended environments come into play in shaping what it takes to know, to be and become a good and productive Tongan citizen (Prescott & Johansson-Fua, 2016). It culminates in *fofola e fala′ kae ālea e kāinga′*, emblematic of 'roll out the mat for kin to deliberate and discuss important issues'. This highlights *fefalala'aki* (confidence/trust) in the ideas and perceptions of our people whose profound knowledge aid to directly inform good practices and cultural sensitive ways in how we know and do things.

7.4.2 Re-emphasise play inclusion in ECE and teacher education curriculum

The study advocates for a heightened recognition and inclusion of free play in the National ECE and teacher training curriculum so that both in-service and teacher trainees speak the same language and understanding of play. Moreover, teacher educators at the TIOE and USP Tonga Campus also need to be grounded in and familiar with the theories and concepts that surround and embed play. Upon employment resumption in Tonga, it is anticipated that the researcher's position at the TIOE would provide for opportunities to enact some of the findings of this study.

7.4.3 Policy and planning

From the literature and research findings, three main suggestions emerged that education policy makers at the decision making level may consider:

i.   Delayed EYL enrolment vs Play-based ECE

There is a suggestion that delayed kindergarten enrolment may be necessary given that current trends are developmentally inappropriate (Bassok, Latham & Rorem, 2016; Elder & Lubotsky, 2009). According to Dee & Sievertsen (2016), age six is favourable. Although most of these studies propose children stay at home and just play, a play-based approach in ECE may serve as an alternative.

ii.   Increased school breaks

Increased recess and lunch intervals is also necessary to ensure children receive maximum time to exercise social competence which is important for academic performance, but also to engage in more physical play, thus alleviating health and obesity problems (Bassok, Latham & Rorem, 2016; Huberty, Siahpush, Beighle, Fuhrmeister, Silva & Welk, 2011; Panksepp, 2008; Pellegrini, 2008). This suggestion is most useful for Tongan children and their usual high carbohydrate heavy diets. In terms of free, outdoor and undisturbed play, Perry & Branum (2009) confirm children "*practice language skills, perspective taking, representational thinking, problem solving, taking turns as they work hard to keep their games going. These skills are the predictors of academic achievement and school adjustmen*t" (p. 195).

iii.   Reduced homework tasks

Decreased homework is another aspect worth considering since it does more harm than good if tasks are not purposeful or yields low quality-learning outcomes.

Homework also damages children's attitudes toward school and may also contribute to physical health problems (Smock, 2016).

7.4.4 Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs)

The study calls for a decolonisation of local mindsets from the ideology and arbitrary perception that learning in the early years only takes place through formal instruction. It is imperative to take ownership and to heed IKSs that inform appropriate and contextualised ways of *how* learning generates within a cultural setting, "*What we might perceive to constitute Pacific studies (knowledge) therefore constitutes a type of power exercised over those who are 'studied' or 'known,' and those who produce the discourse (that is, we) have the power to enforce its validity and its scientific status and make it 'true'*" (Thaman, 2003a. p. 3). The RPEIPP, a significant space for Pacific researchers to theorise and put into practice what is truly our own ways and frames of thinking "*If education is about worthwhile learning then it is about culture, since the content of education has value underpinning it*" (Thaman, 2006. p. 51).

7.4.5 Teacher personnel

While the intended outcomes point towards extensive adult and community awareness and acceptance of play for child learning and development, the bulk of its implications present a significant challenge on the teaching personnel. Teachers' status should be seen as key and integral in achieving quality education (Thaman, 2015b). It reflects the CEARTs[62] report on the need to invest in teachers as that is, investing in learning (Thaman, 2015c). It also calls for capacity and performance evaluation, the need for effective school leadership that focuses on learning (school level), increased spending on education such as, improved/increased teacher salaries, the need for teachers to be recognised as professionals, provide mentors for new teachers, maintenance of teachers and the resourcing of schools (ibid). These were featured in the World Teacher's Day theme, 2015 – 'Empowering Teachers, Building Sustainable Societies' (*Fakaivia e kau faiako' ke langa ha sosaieti tu'uloa*). These all point towards a focus on the teacher 'self' as integral to ensure effective teaching and learning takes place. In terms of the push for play, if teachers are not supported, trained, well grounded, mentored and inspired towards the theories and practices of

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[62] Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning Teachers

play, they fail to understand, practice or embrace play in its entirety and for what it genuinely represents as an early learning tool.

7.4.6   Recurring Research Process

Finally, there is a critical need for more research on play and learning beyond this dissertation. As such, the study harnesses an added pathway to the research process – the Recurring Research Process (*fõunga fefokifoki'aki 'o e fekumi'*). It takes on the cliché *kātoanga mo hono tutuku*, figurative of the events that occur during the aftermath of a ceremony. It is hoped that an extensive quantitative and qualitative research with outreach to all the islands of Tonga might be conducted to secure more empirical data to help indicate and implicate supplementary information for an enhanced way forward for play in Tonga. It is suggested that a synthesis of each of the bricoluer aspects of play is needed to conduct a specific and comprehensive inquiry of each and ultimately to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of each play and learning element in households, schools and the wider Tongan community.

Concluding remarks

My journey into constricted closed spaces to retrieve accurate, yet sensitive information through the knowledge, thoughts, ideas, practices, life structures and cultural ways of life of my people meant complete and utter caution. Particularly, in the manner information was constructed through my own eyes as a researcher, a passionate teacher educator and mother of deep immersed Tongan embedding. I was required to equally value these three sacred spaces despite the fact, they often contradicted one another. It is my hope and sincere optimism that early learning in Tonga is transformed to ensure children have the opportunity to learn in the best way possible. It is time for a shift in thinking and an end to the demoralisation of play as a valueless and insignificant aspect in the lives of our children. Play must be recognised as a critical part of their ultimate being and means of existence as young people. We need to ensure while children are still young and have the highest potential to develop, we maximise play and its ability and capacity to generate learning and the vital skills that enable children to move into and engage in a competitive and complex world. With this, I exit in the manner I entered, with a heart of thankfulness to my Creator who has seen me through this journey, its countless struggles yet invaluable rewards – *Tu'a 'ofa atu.*

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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: Glossary of Indigenous terms & Notes on Tongan Words

Ako	To study, learning, instruction, formal education
Akonaki	Moral advice
Ako fakatupulaki, fakatupulekina	Learning development or learning as development
Ako fou he va'inga'	Learning through play
Ako laulōtaha	Holistic development
Ako tokamu'a	Early childhood center, preschool, early learning
Ala	Touch
'Alofi	*Kava* circle
Anga fakafonua	Culture, tradition, custom
Anga fakamatāpule	Respect
Anga/lotofakatōkilalo'	Humility, modesty
Angaikava	Two attendants of the *ngaohi kava*
'Apa'apa	Talking chiefs
'Api	House, household
'Apiako	School environment
'Ata	Image
'Ātakai 'o 'api' mo e komiunitī	Home and community environment
'Atamai	Brain, mind
'Ave ia ma'a...	Take it for...naming the one to be served
'Eiki	Royalty, nobility
Fa'ē	Mother
Faa'i kavei koula	Four golden pillars
Fai	Doing
Fai fatongia	Service, duty
Faiako	Teacher
Faiako ma'a Tonga	Teacher for Tonga
Fai/fakahoko/ngāue	Way of doing
Faiva	Dance
Faka'ānaua	Ruminate, ponder
Faka'apa'apa	Respect
Faka'uhinga	Give meaning or construct meaning to
Fakafe'iloaki	Approaching
Fakafeangai	Professionalism, behavioural performance/conduct, dealing
Fakafekau'aki ke 'ilo'i kita'	Knowing oneself
Fakafekau'aki mo e 'ātakai ako'	Quality learning environments, empowerment and inclusiveness
Fakafisikava	Closing ceremony
Fakafoki'/toe foaki	Return, reoffer, give back
Fakafotu	Niece/nephew (a female's brother's children)
Fakaivia e kau faiako' ke langa ha sosaieti tu'uloa	Empowering Teachers, Building Sustainable Societies
Fakakaukau	Thinking, discernment
Faka-kaungā me'a	Friendships, affiliations
Fakalakalaka	Development
Fakalakalaka fakasōsiale' mo e fakaeongo'	Early learning social and emotional development
Fakalou fusi	Edge of the *kava* bowl
Fakamahu'inga'i	A significance to/of
Fakamālō	Acknowledge
Fakamālō'ia	Thank, appreciate, express gratitude
Fakamamafa pau	The symbol ['] a long pause at the end of the word it follows
Fakamē	White Sunday
Fakamolemole 'eku fakahela', fakamolemole 'eku talangata'a', 'e 'i ai pe	I'm sorry for being a burden, I'm sorry for being disobedient but I will be useful one day

'aho te u si'i 'aonga ai…	
Fakamolemole/kataki, mālō, tulou	Please, thank you, excuse me
Fakangofua	Enable
Fakanofo	Bestowment, installation
Fakanofonofo	Hierarchy, seating arrangement
Fakapotopoto	Someone who wisely uses his/her limited resources) or the wise use of *'ilo*
Fakatātā	Demonstrate
Fakatau	Wringing out of *kava* into serving cups for drinking
Fakatoka 'o e 'ilo ki he fika'	Early years mathematics
Fakatoka 'o e 'ilo ki he Saienisi'	Early learning science
Fakatokanga	Notice/recognise
Fakatōkilalo	Humility
Faka-to'otama	Child-minding
Fakatupulaki/fakatupulekina	Development (learning development)
Fakau'a	Glottal stop
Fakava'e	Basis, foundation
Falala	Trust
Falala'anga	Trustworthiness
Falehanga	Domestic household roles
Fananga	Moral folklore and mythical legends
Fānau, kauleka, leka	Children
Fanongo	Listen
Fatongia	Service, duty
Fatongia	Duty, role
Fau	Pandanus
Fefalala'aki	Confidence/trust
Fe'ofa'aki	A love for each other, love, compassion
Feohi	Engagement, interaction
Fefalala'aki	Trust, confidence in
Feinga mālohi	Hard work/dedication
Fekumi	Research
Fengāue'aki	Interactions, working together
Feongo'i'aki	Empathy
Fetāfeaki	Mutual bonding
Fe'unu	Strands
Fe'unu fakama'ufatu'	Strands of embedding
Fe'unu 'o e fakafekau'aki'	Strands of interconnectedness
Fevahevahe'aki/fe'inasi'aki	Sharing, mutual sharing, shared involvement
Feveitokai'aki	Reciprocity, cooperation and fulfillment of mutual obligations
Foaki, vahevahe, luva	Gift, give, offer, give away
Fofola e fala' kae ālea e kāinga	Roll out the mat for kin to deliberate
Fola haka	Hand movements during a female solo dance
Fono	Village meeting
Founga	Method, technique, way, process
Founga Fefokifoki'aki 'o e Fekumi'	Recurring Research Process
Fūfū	A form of traditional hiding game using the hands
Fuifui lupe 'o loto palasi	Doves of the royal palace – pertaining to the princesses and royal children
Ha'a	Line of kings
Ha'a Tu'i Kanokupolu	Present reigning line of king in Tonga
Ha'a Tu'i Takalaua	The second line of kings in Tonga
Ha'a Tu'i Tonga	The first line of kings in Tonga
Hala 'atā	Zero chance
Hala fononga 'a mata'ikoloa	Journey of a valuable emblem
Heilala	Traditional Tongan floral
Heilala fakava'e pipitongi	Traditional Tongan floral garland made from the *heilala*

	and *pipi* florals
Heke	Swinging from twines, sliding with coconut leaves, boxes, poly bins
Hiko	A form of traditional juggling
Hohoni	A full cocnut shell
Hou'eiki	Noble
'Ilo	Knowledge, wisdom
'Ilo fakalaumālie mo faka'ulungaanga	Early learning spirituality and behaviour
'Inasi	Offering, giving, a share of something
Ipu kava	Coconut shell
Kahoa	Necklace
Kāinga	Extended kin
Kaka niu/'akau	Climbing coconut, mango, breadfruit trees
Kakala	National florals. Garland of traditional Tongan flora
Kakala 'eiki	Garland of royalty/nobility
Kasivaki	A form of traditional water play
Kātoanga mo hono tutuku	Figurative of the events that occur during the aftermath of a ceremony
Kau faiako	Teachers
Kaungā ala	Working together
Kauleka/fānau/tamaiki	Children
Kava	Traditional beverage
Kava kuo heka	The *kava* is taken up
Kinitakāteni/kinitī	Kindergarten, kindy
Ko e Kalisitiane kita	Being a Christian
Ko e tokotaha mo'ui ako	Committed learner
Ko e Tonga kita	Knowing and being Tongan
Ko ha me'a fakato'otama	Babysitting
Koloa	Treasure
Komiunitī	Community
Konisitutone 'o Tonga	Tongan constitution, constitution of Tonga
Kumi ha'a' mou tokonaki	A command to gather supplies for the making of *kava*
Kuo holo, tuku atu. Tuku mālie pe kae palu	It is kneaded: lower the bowl which is tilted towards the *matāpule*
La'aa'	Sun
Lafo	A form of traditional shuffleboard
Lalanga Mo'ui 'a e Fānau'	Weaving life for children
Langatoi	A form of hide and seek
Lanitā	An early tag, run and throw game
Lea, laukonga mo e fetu'utaki'	Early learning speaking, reading and communication
Lea mo e 'uhinga faka-tonga	Tongan terms and meanings
Leka/tama	Child
Loto 'ofa	Love from the heart
Loto'i 'Ofa Model of Va'inga, Ako and Tupulaki	A Love from the Heart Model of Play, Learning and Development
Lototō	Humility
Luva	Dedicate, give, offer
Ma'u mai	Receiver of gifts, taker
Maa'imoa	Action/doing/cause/foundation or so forth that involves the king
Māfana	Warmth, overwhelming
Māfana 'o e feohi'	Warmth of interaction
Maheni	Acquaintance, friend, associate
Mahu'inga'ia	Importance, value
Mala'e va'inga	Play fields, open fields
Mālie	Praise, exaltation, acclamation, applause, good entertainment, *bravo*
Mālo/mālō 'aupito	Thank you, thanks

Mamahi'i me'a	Commitment
Mamahi'i me'a	Commitment, sacrifice
Mata'i helu	Comb-like
Matāpule	Talking chief
Maumau Sāpate	Inappropriate activities of the Sabbath
Maumau taimi	Waste of time
Mea'ofa	Gift, present
Mehikitanga	Paternal auntie
Milolua	Distribution of *kava*
Misi koe	Miss you
Mo'oni	True, pure, real, authentic
Moa	A form of juggling, tossing of stones/rocks,/counters
Moana	Pacific Ocean, Oceania
Mo'ui lelei' mo e mo'ui lelei 'a e sino'	Early learning health and well-being
Ngaohi kava/tou'a	*Kava* mixer
Ngātai	Fishing
Ngāue	Working, work
Ngāue fakataha	Team work
Ngāue māteaki	Commitment
Noa	Void, emptiness
Nofo	To stay, dwell among
Nofo 'a kāinga	Extended form of family living, extended familial living
Nōpele	Royal noble
'Ofa	Love, compassion
'Ofa 'aufuatō	Compassionate love
'Ofa fakafa'ē	Motherly love
'Oku 'ikai tunu hake pe 'unga' pea kula leva	It takes a while for a roasted coconut crab to redden
'Olovaha	King's position within the kava circle
'Olunga he kaliloa'	Resting one's head on the *kaliloa* usually the arms of a parent or grandparent. It is mainly used as a place and space for *fananga* (oral story telling) and imparting of moral and cultural values.
Ongo'i 'ofa'i mo malu	Feeling loved and secure
'Otu Motu Anga'ofa	Friendly islands, isles
Ouau 'o e Taumafa Kava'	*Taumafa Kava* Ceremony
Pālangi	European, Caucasian
Pani	An early game similar to baseball/softball yet with tin cans
Pē	Peeka-a-boo
Pele (n)	Bele leaves
Pele (n/v)	Card game
Pelepelengesi	Delicate, fragile
Pipi	Traditional Tongan floral
Poto	Educated, knowledgeable, knowing what/how to do things
Poto hono loto	Knowledgeable within one's heart
Pōto'i lea	Skill of speech or *talanoa*
Poupou	Support
Pule'anga Fakatu'i 'o Tonga	Kingdom of Tonga
Punopuna/puna	Jumping, hopping, skipping
Siasi Uēsiliana Tau'atāina 'o Tonga	Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga
Sima	Fresh/rain water tank
Sio	Observation
Suipi	Card game
Tā	Perform or act
Tā ki liku, tā ki fanga	All-encompassing skills in every aspect/facet of life
Ta'ahine	Girl

Ta'o 'umu	Making an earth oven
Tafoki kimoua	Turn
Tāfue mokofute	Skipping with vines and twines
Taimi va'inga	Play time
Tālanga	Focus group, dialogue, conversation, conference, discourse
Talamu	Card game
Talanoa	Semi-structured interview, dialogue, conversation
Tamasi'i	Boy or child (often regardless of gender)
Tano'a	*Kava* bowl
Ta'ovala	Traditional Tongan wraparound
Tapa	Traditional bark cloth from the mulberry tree
Tapu ange mo ia	In all due respect
Tau'olunga	Highest part of the body – neck or head
Ta'ovala tu'oua	Double-layered wrap around mat
Tauhi vā/tauhi vaha'a	Maintaining/upholding, nurturing relationships, respectfulness, collaboration and mutual helpfulness
Tauhi/hokohoko	Maintain, uphold
Taukei	Competence
Taulalo	Bent knees during a female solo dance
Taumafa kava	Royal beverage ceremony
Tau'atāina kovi	Destructive freedom
Tau'olunga	Traditional Tongan solo dance
Tā-vā	Time-space
Teke	Pushers (on wheels) with cans, sticks
Teu	Preparation, planning
Tokamu'a	Foundation or underpinning
Tōkanga	Farming
Tokangaekina laumālie'/'ulungaanga fakamōlale'	Early learning spiritual guidance and moral behaviour
Tokonaki 'o fakatau	Prepare to distribute, wring out the *kava*
Tokotaha fekumi	Researcher
Tokotaha poto	Educated person, one who applies *'ilo* with positive results
Tokotoko	Walking stick
Toli	To gather, pick, collect
Tolo moa/pato	An early throwing and tag game
Tonga	South
Tongatapu	Sacred/forbidden Tonga or sacred/forbidden south
Tō'onga longo mo'ui	Vigour
To'utangata ongo ngata'a mo'oni	This is a very stubborn generation
Tufunga mea'a' mo e faiva'	Early learning creativity and cultural performance
Tukumuli	Cheating
Tuku mālie pe kae palu	All right, mix
Tu'unga	Social status
Tui	To weave, string together
Tu'i Tonga	Highest ranking chief – the King
Tupulaki/tupulekina	Development (learning development)
Tupulaki faka-'atamai, fakapoto	Cognitive, intellectual development
Tupulaki fakafo'ituitui	Intrapersonal, solitary development
Tupulaki 'ilo anga/faka-fonua', tala tukufakaholo'	Cultural knowledge and practice development
Tupulaki faka-laumālie', fakalotu, faka'ilo folofola	Spiritual and Biblical development
Tupulaki faka-ongo', feongo'i'aki	Emotional and empathetic development
Tupulaki faka-tufunga mea'a, faka'ilo fo'ou	Creative, performance and artistic development
Tupulaki faka'ulungaanga, fakamōlale.	Behaviour and values development

Tupulaki faka-sino, mo'ui lelei	Physical, bodily and well-being development
Tupulaki faka-sōsiale', fakafeohi' mo e feveitokai'aki'	Social, pretense and relationship development
Tupulaki fakatoukatea'	All-inclusive development, holistic development
Uani-tusi-tusi-sipai	An early form of hide and seek
Ui ha'a' mo vai	Put in your water
'Ulungaanga fakafonua	Culture, traditions, customs, way of life
'Ulungaanga faka-Tonga	Tongan way, behaviour, Tongan way of living
'Ulungaanga lelei	Good behaviour
Uouongataha	Unity
Vai	Water
Va'inga, fakavā, maa'imoa, munomuna, fakauloula, faka'ulungamanu, fakava'iva'inga	Play, recreation, amusement
Va'inga maumau taimi – noa'ia	Like nothing or aimless/purposeless
Vaka Pasifiki	Pacific vessel – figurative of collaboration. New name for the RPEIPP
Valevale/pēpē	Infant, baby
Vesa	Wristlet, bracelet, bangle

NOTES ON TONGAN WORDS AND SPELLING

A brief tour into the enunciation of Tongan words and spelling is also explored especially of the language features such as alphabet and vowel usage and the application of certain linguistic symbols. This helps forge an understanding of the intricacies and complexities immersed within the Tongan language specifically used in this dissertation study. They are italicised throughout the write-up except for headings and sub-headings.

Phoneme-grapheme correspondence

Tongan words exhibit a fine link between sound-letter correlations also known as phoneme-grapheme correspondence. No letter has the same sound as another like the /s/ sound in 'soft' and 'city' in the English language (Harris and Hodges, 2012). The authors explain, "*Sound–letter correspondences are the relationships between sounds (or phonemes) and letters (or graphemes). This starting point highlights the connections between the sounds in words and the letters that are used to represent those sounds*" (p. 1). There are no irregular spelling words or sounds in the Tongan language although the claim only makes sense to the speakers and users of the language. A non-Tongan speaker may not be able to connect the phoneme-grapheme correlation and otherwise argue for irregularities. Tongan educator Konai Helu Thaman expressed that Tongan spelling is phonetic; "*Before 1943, **g** represented the sound /**ng**/, and **b** and **j** were used instead of **p** and **s**. In 1943, the current King, then Crown Prince Tupouto'a and Minister for Education, reformed the Tongan alphabet, substituting **ng** for **g**, introduced **p** and **s** and eliminated **b** and **j**. Furthermore, the glottal stop ['] became the last letter in the alphabet*" (Thaman, 1998a. p. 8).

Glottal stop and hyphen ['] [-]

In the written and spoken Tongan language today, the alphabet consists of 16 letters – **a, e, f, h, i, k, l, m, n, ng, o, p, s, t, u, v** including the glottal stop or apostrophe-

like symbol known as *fakau'a* ['] and the hyphen [-]. There exists eleven (11) consonants – **f, h, k, l, m, n, ng, p, s, t, v** and the standard five (5) vowels with the distinction of their long and short forms – **a ā, e ē, i ī, o ō, u ū**. The function of the *fakau'a* is to serve as a definitive accent (Thaman, 1988) particularly to divide two (2) vowels where the latter vowel is almost always pronounced with a short emphasis. For example, the word *ha'a* (line of kings) used in the study is pronounced /huh ah/. The /ah/ syllable at the end is pronounced or sounded out in a short vowel form. Another example is the most frequent word used throughout the dissertation – *va'inga* (play). The vowel /*i*/ that follows a *fakau'a* is pronounced in short form as the emphasis in the words /igloo/ or /ink/. Usually it is pronounced /ee/ as in /s<u>ee</u>/ and /b<u>ee</u>/ unless it follows a *fakau'a*. The hyphen however, functions as the usual link between words particularly words conjoined with the prefix *faka* (a way of) such as *faka-Tonga* (Tongan way), *faka-tupulekina/faka-tupulaki* (development, growth). It differs from *<u>faka'apa'apa</u>* (respect), *<u>faka'ofo'ofa</u>* (beautiful, lovely) and so forth who are not independent of the prefix.

Fakamamafa pau ['']

Moreover, if a word is accompanied by or a sentence ends with the *fakamamafa pau* symbol ['], it is emphasised with a long pause. This usually happens in spite of the situation in either dialogue or written forms. For example, "*Ko e Ha'a Tu'i Kanokupolu' 'oku 'afio he taloni 'o Tonga*'" (The Tu'i Kanokupolu line reigns on the Tongan throne). Note the *fakamamafa pau* symbol after the words *Kanokupolu* and at the end of the sentence in the word *Tonga*. The situation or idea behind this sentence is that of a statement or declaration. Although sentences that do not end with the prolonged heavy and low *fakamamafa pau* key may also be a statement or declaration, the distinction situates in the mood or emotion of the speaker or how the writer affiliates him or herself with or in the sentence. It also indicates the sentence is of a rhetoric nature. It can be argued that it takes some effort to familiarise oneself with these distinctive yet applied phonetic symbols before one is to clearly and fully understand the role of the *fakamamafa pau*. Although the symbol usage is evident and sounded out in spoken language, it is often forgotten or neglected in written texts and other forms of inscribed communication. Failing to use or acknowledge the unique symbols of *fakau'a* and *fakamamafa pau* as well as the long and short vowel forms are often considered acts of idleness.

Alternate consonant-vowel sequence

Another important note, there are no double consonant letter words as that in /ta<u>ll</u>/, /li<u>tt</u>le/, /bi<u>gg</u>er/, /pe<u>pp</u>er/ and so forth. A consonant always follows a vowel and vice versa. For example, note the <u>underlined</u> consonants in the alternate consonant-vowel sequence in the following words – *a<u>k</u>o fa<u>k</u>a<u>t</u>u<u>p</u>u<u>l</u>a<u>k</u>i* (learning as development). For vowels, two different vowels can follow or precede each other as the /i/ and /e/ vowels in the word *kom<u>ie</u>unitī* (community). Same vowel letters and sounds do not usually go together unless for vowels in words such as /*ha'a*/ which is separated by the *fakau'a* (mentioned above) and words such as *maa'imoa*

(action/doing/cause/foundation or so forth that involves the king), *fa'ee'* (mother) and *la'aa'* (sun). Reasons are given in the last paragraph of this section.

Long and short vowels [a] [ā]

It is also important to elaborate on the emphasis the long and short vowels have for specific words and their meanings. The phonetic symbol of a dash above vowels (eg. Ā ā) signifies those vowels are to be pronounced with a double and lengthened emphasis. For example, the word *mālō* (thank you) used by Thaman (1988a), is phonetically pronounced as /maaloo/ and that its short vowel form *malo* will connote and mean a totally different thing. However, the word *malo* in itself is not a used word nor does it have a definitive meaning attached to it. Another example used in the study is the word *pēpē* (baby). Without the long vowel emphasis, the word will be *pepe* (butterfly). As such, there is a substantive difference in the meaning of words when the long and short vowels are correctly applied. Failure to do so will particularly confuse the reader as the lapse often occurs when spoken language transpires to print form. Thaman (1988a) pointed out how some word processors prevented the prospect of using the long vowel symbols – **ā, ē, ī, ō, ū** and instead, writers had to use double vowels to indicate the long vowel emphasis. For *pēpē*, the case would be /*peepee*/ such as the /*maaloo*/ example above with exceptions to words such as *maa'imoa* (anything (action/doing/cause/foundation or so forth that involves the king), *fa'ee'* (mother), *la'aa'* (sun) and so forth. There is a lengthier emphasis in the pronunciation of these words so a double vowel in written form is required accompanied most times by the *fakamamafa pau*. Contrariwise, modern day technology and computers offer and provide these symbol options making it an available, useful and practical tool to accentuate written text.

APPENDIX B: Chapter Theme – Hala Fononga 'a Mata'ikoloa′

Hala Fononga 'a Mata'ikoloa′ (Journey of a Valuable Emblem) is a metaphorical and familial narrative that involves a chain of social interactions. It is used as the chapter theme for the study where each chapter is guided by a series of core Tongan values pivotal to the narrative and to child rearing in Tonga. It features the customary Tongan figure, role and status of *mehikitanga* (paternal aunt), the instinctive impulse of *fa'ē* (mother) and the task and position of *fānau* (children). With reference to a particular *mehikitanga* and her parallel duty of *fa'ē*, the idea behind this narrative embarks and revolves around the bestowal of a treasured family emblem – an infant-sized silver *vesa* (wristlet). The recipient, a niece (*fakafotu* – brother's daughter) is gifted the *vesa* by her *mehikitanga*. The niece represents both the purpose and outcomes of the study[63]. The *mehikitanga* however, holds the highest rank in the *nofo 'a kāinga* circle in which she is usually the receiver of gifts, food and artefacts from her brother and his children.

The 'Vesa' – Symbol of reciprocated values, ideas and practices

The niece's *fa'ē* also a *mehikitanga* in her family circle, extends the *vesa* gifting (*foaki*) to a chain of her own nieces and nephews who equally become momentary recipients, owners and bearers of the *vesa*. The gifting behaviour embodies the interchangeable role of *mehikitanga* and *fa'ē* to demonstrate *'ofa 'aufuatō* (compassionate love) as well as the ability of *fānau* to become actively involved in a structure of *fevahevahe'aki, fe'inasi'aki* and *feveitokai'aki* (cooperation and fulfillment of mutual obligations) – an important Tongan moral value associated with child rearing. The gifting and recurring cycle it follows also matches the process of *luva* (giving away) in the Kakala Research Framework. To be exact, the *kakala* as an important aspect in Tongan culture is a "*collection of fragrant flowers, woven together as a garland for a special person or special occasion*" (Thaman, 2003. p. 6). The nature of the *kakala* gifting is "*often passed on from the original recipient to another person who in turn shares in the original purpose for which the kakala was given in the first place*" (ibid, p. 6).

Also significant is the symbolic representation of the *vesa* to the mutual relationship of cultural (indigenous) values and practices to foreign influences adopted (past and present) from the West. This echoes the prolonged impact of Western theories of learning and development for the early years – a point of contact that has guided Pacific and Tongan learning systems for decades. The *vesa* thus calls for a collaborative effort of learning and practice in Pacific Island Countries (PICs). The sequential line of bearers therefore, represents the complex and intricate charisma of the research process besides the multifaceted nature of the experience and journey itself. For this reason, the research process is not observed in a sequence but a cycle and ongoing chain of events. For a moment, the ensuing cycle ceases with this

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[63] Note, the chapter theme is in no way indictive of feminism or inconsiderate of gender representation, it solely aims to portray an important aspect of Tongan culture, gifting and child rearing.

particular generation and the *vesa* returns to its initial and rightful owner – the *fakafotu*. In essence, she represents the outcomes, results and end product of the research process and the assumption the study is susceptible to change and continuity. Meaning, the *fakafotu* will someday become *mehikitanga* and/or *fa'ē* and may wish to carry on the same sequence of *foaki* to a new generation of *vesa* bearers. This act will in some way determine if the moral values imparted by *mehikitanga/fa'ē* are functional. Hence, the endless cycle will continue to permeate and prolong the persona and socio-cultural virtues of *'ofa 'aufuatō* and *fevahevahe'aki/fe'inasi'aki/feveitokai'aki*.

The spherical form of the *vesa* epitomises an endless entity and the possibility for further research. It is figurative to the circular or spiral Tongan thinker affirmed by Wood-Ellem (2007) as the traditional way of thinking particularly for those born, nurtured, reared and raised in Tonga. The spiral reasoning matches the linear and logical thinking embedded in scientific methods that underpin Western education systems. Tongan thinking (*fakakaukau*) and the theory of mind (*'atamai*) reflect time-space theory (*tā-vā*) of nature, mind and society (Māhina, 2008). Thinking he believes is "*the act-of-relating, in this context, the 'ata, images, which are themselves self-manifesting in the direction of, and freely presented to, the knower as genuine knowledge*" (p. 81). The chapter theme however, aims to stage a more meaningful observation of the research process through the prospect of a new and unique socio-cultural lens.

In a nutshell, the *mehikitanga* and *fa'ē* in Tonga are expected through cultural and socialisation practices to act on and perform familial tasks and obligations according to the interchangeable roles they are birthed with into society. However, this *mehikitanga* in particular chose to modify a certain situation and embarked on a different form and interpretation of her role yet, only to the extent where her status is not compromised nor family living disrupted. In this case, the *mehikitanga* used her mother-like instincts and impulse to show *'ofa* (love and compassion) and *fevahevahe'aki* (sharing). She chose to be a presenter and giver of gifts (*foaki/vahevahe*) rather than her usual *mehikitanga* role as receiver or taker (*ma'u mai*) – a virtue and behaviour she expects generations of children within her family circle to observe and practise to help maintain and uphold relational ties and connections (*tauhi vā/vaha'a*).

APPENDIX C: Information Sheet for Talanoa

Poʻaloʻi Poliana Faʼoliu-Havea

PhD Candidate

Supervisors: Dr Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka'uta and Dr Marion Sanders

INFORMATION SHEET

AKO MO E VAʻINGA:
A Tongan Conceptualisation of Play and Learning in the Early Years

You are kindly invited along with nine (9) other participants to partake in a one-to-one *talanoa* session with the above named researcher at a time, place or venue convenient to you. The *talanoa* will focus and seek to acquire your contributive knowledge of the Tongan parental perception and attitude towards childhood play, the practice of play in your household and your understanding of the learning qualities of play for children ages 0-8 years. You are also required to provide an array of specific ethnographic images and photos of the play activities practised at home as part of your agreement to participate in the study.
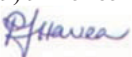
The *talanoa* session will be acoustically recorded and transcribed word for word and returned to you for member checking. The information you share will be strictly confidential and accurately represented. No data or conclusions will be manipulated. From your contribution, the outcomes of the study will expectantly determine a contextual and cultural approach to learning for children in the early years and help determine what forms of play are appropriate for learning and development at this level. Findings of the project will be made available to you by request directly by the researcher upon successful completion and approval by the above named supervisor, FALE Post-Graduate Research Committee and the USP Research Office. At this time, publication of the study may also be available to the public.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question;
- Withdraw from the study (specify timeframe);
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission for this to the researcher;
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when the project is concluded.

Researcher: Poʻaloʻi Poliana Faʼoliu-Havea

Phone: (+679) 941 5485   **Email**: polianahavea77@gmail.com
Signature: **Date**: September, 2015

(Tongan translation of Information Sheet for Talanoa)

![USP logo]

Po'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea

Tokotaha ako mo e fakatotolo

Supavaisa´: Dr Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka'uta and Dr Marion Sanders

TOHI FAKAMATALA´

AKO MO E VA'INGA: Ko hono faka'uhinga'i faka-Tonga 'o e va'inga 'a e longa'i fānau´ - Ngaahi fōunga ako moe tupulaki ma'ae longa'i fānau iiki´

'Oku fakaafe'i fiefia koe heni ke kau mai mo e ni'ihi kehe 'e toko hiva (9) ki ha talanoa tāutaha mo e tokotaha fakatotolo 'oku hā 'i 'olunga 'i ha taimi mo ha feitu'u 'e faingamālie kiate koe. Ko e talanoa´ ni 'e makatu'unga ia hono vahevahe mai ho'o 'ilo mo e a'usia fekau'aki mo e va'inga 'a ho'o longa'i fānau iiki ta'u 0-8 pehē ki he ngaahi fōunga va'inga 'oku nau fakahoko 'i 'api´. 'Oku kole atu ai pe heni ke 'omai ha tatau 'o ha ngaahi 'īmisi taa kehekehe fekau'aki mo e va'inga 'oku fakahoko ho'o longa'i fānau´ 'i 'api.

Ko e pōtalanoa´ ni 'e hiki ongo ke toki fai hano hiki lea tatau 'a ia 'e fakafoki atu kiate koe ke toki vakai hifo ki ai pe 'oku mo'oni mo totonu 'a e ngaahi hiki lea´. 'E 'ikai ngāue hala'aki ho'o fakamatala´ pe 'e tukuange ki tu'a ke toe vakai ha taha/kakai kehe ki ai. Mei he vahevahe te ke 'omai´, 'e lava ai ke ma'u ha fakafuofua lelei ki ha ngaahi faka'uhinga faka-Tonga ki he va'inga´ mo e ngaahi fōunga va'inga 'oku fakahoko 'i he 'api mo e famili Tonga'. 'E makatu'unga leva mei heni 'a hono vakai'i ha ngaahi fōunga ako mo e tupulaki fo'ou ki he va'inga´ ma'a e longa'i fānau iiki´. 'E malava ke ma'u atu ha tatau 'o e ola 'o e fakatotolo´ ni 'i ha'o fiema'u hili hono fakakakato 'o e ngaahi fiema'u ki he fakatotolo pea mo ha fakangofua mei he supavaisa 'oku hā 'i 'olunga´, kōmiti fakatotolo 'a e fānau ako ma'olunga ange 'o e va'a ako 'a e 'Univēsiti 'o e Pasifiki Saute´ pehē ki he ulu'i 'ōfisi fakatotolo 'a e 'univēsiti´. 'E toki paaki 'a e fakatotolo´ ni pea 'e faka'atā leva ki ha taha pe.

'Oku´ ke fili tau'atāina pe kapau te ke tali 'a e fakaafe´ ni. Kapau te ke fili ke ke kau mai, 'oku 'i ai 'a ho'o totonu ke ke:

- *Ta'etali ha fehu'i 'oku 'ikai te ke fie tali;*
- *Fakafoki 'a e kole fakaafe atu´ (fakapapau'i kei taimi mai);*
- *'Eke ha ngaahi fehu'i lolotonga 'a e talanoa´;*
- *Fakahā ho'o ngaahi fakakaukau´ 'i ho 'ilo pau 'e 'ikai ngāue'aki ho'o hingoa´ 'i he fakatotolo´ tukukehe kapau te ke toki loto ki ai mo 'oange ha ngofua ki he tokotaha fakatotolo´;*
- *Ma'u ha ngofua ke vakai ki he ola 'o e fakatotolo´ 'i hano toki fakakakato.*

Tokotaha fakatotolo´: Po'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea

Fika telefoni´: (+679) 941 5485   **'Īmeili´**: polianahavea77@gmail.com

Fakamo'oni nima´: *RHavea*   **'Aho´**: Sepitema, 2015

APPENDIX D: Information Sheet for Tālanga

Po'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea

PhD Candidate

Supervisors: Dr Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka'uta and Dr Marion Sanders

INFORMATION SHEET

AKO MO E VA'INGA:
A Tongan Conceptualisation of Play and Learning in the Early Years

You are kindly invited along with nine (9) other participants to partake in a focus group (*tālanga*) session with the above named researcher at the ECE center at the Tonga Institute of Education (TIOE). The *tālanga* will focus and seek to acquire your contributive knowledge of the Tongan teacher perception and attitude towards childhood play, the practice of play in your classroom and your understanding of the learning qualities proposed by play for children ages 0-8 years. The *tālanga* will be followed by an arrangement for the researcher to visit your classroom in order to participate and observe how the practice of play is carried out on a daily basis. The researcher also wishes to observe your children spontaneously play during the visitation course. You are also required to provide an array of specific ethnographic images and photos of the play activities practised in your classroom/school as part of your agreement to participate in the study.
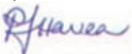
The *tālanga* session will be video recorded and any information you share will be strictly confidential and accurately represented. No data or conclusions will be manipulated. From your contribution, the outcomes of the study will expectantly determine a contextual and cultural approach to learning for children in the early years and help determine what forms of play are appropriate for learning and development at this level. Findings of the project will be made available to you by request directly by the researcher upon successful completion and approval by the above named supervisor, FALE Post-Graduate Research Committee and the USP Research Office. At this time, publication of the study may also be available to the public.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question;
- Withdraw from the study (specify timeframe);
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission for this to the researcher;
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when the project is concluded.

Researcher: Po'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea

Phone: (+679) 941 5485   **Email**: polianahavea77@gmail.com
Signature: **Date**: September, 2015

(Tongan translation of Information Sheet for Tālanga)

Poʻaloʻi Poliana Faʻoliu-Havea

Tokotaha ako mo e fakatotolo

Supavaisaˊ: Dr Cresantia Frances Koya Vakaʼuta and Dr Marion Sanders

TOHI FAKAMATALAˊ

AKO MO E VAʼINGA: Ko hono fakaʼuhingaʼi faka-Tonga ʻo e vaʼinga ʻa e longaʼi fānauˊ - Ngaahi fōunga ako moe tupulaki maʼae longaʼi fānau iikiˊ

ʻOku fakaafeʼi fiefia koe heni ke ke kau mai mo e niʼihi kehe ʻe toko hiva (9) ki ha tālanga mo e tokotaha fakatotolo mo e tokotaha fakatotolo ʻoku hā ʻi ʻolunga ʻi ha taimi mo ha feituʼu ʻe faingamālie kiate koe. Ko e talanoaˊ ni ʻe makatuʼunga ia hono vahevahe mai hoʼo ʻilo mo e aʼusia fekauʼaki mo e vaʼinga ʻa hoʼo longaʼi fānau iiki taʼu 0-8 pehē ki he ngaahi fōunga vaʼinga ʻoku nau fakahoko ʻi ʻapiˊ. ʻOku kole atu ai pe heni ke ʻomai ha tatau ʻo ha ngaahi ʻīmisi taa kehekehe fekauʼaki mo e vaʼinga ʻoku fakahoko hoʼo longaʼi fānauˊ ʻi ʻapi.

Ko e pōtalanoaˊ ni ʻe hiki ongo ke toki fai hano hiki lea tatau ʻa ia ʻe fakafoki atu kiate koe ke toki vakai hifo ki ai pe ʻoku moʼoni mo totonu ʻa e ngaahi hiki leaˊ. ʻE ʻikai ngāue halaʼaki hoʼo fakamatalaˊ pe ʻe tukuange ki tuʼa ke toe vakai ha taha/kakai kehe ki ai. Mei he vahevahe te ke ʻomaiˊ, ʻe lava ai ke maʼu ha fakafuofua lelei ki ha ngaahi fakaʼuhinga faka-Tonga ki he vaʼingaˊ mo e ngaahi fōunga vaʼinga ʻoku fakahoko ʻi he ʻapi mo e famili Tonga'. ʻE makatuʼunga leva mei heni ʻa hono vakaiʼi ha ngaahi fōunga ako mo e tupulaki foʼou ki he vaʼingaˊ maʼa e longaʼi fānau iikiˊ. ʻE malava ke maʼu atu ha tatau ʻo e ola ʻo e fakatotoloˊ ni ʻi haʼo fiemaʼu hili hono fakakakato ʻo e ngaahi fiemaʼu ki he fakatotolo pea mo ha fakangofua mei he supavaisa ʻoku hā ʻi ʻolungaˊ, kōmiti fakatotolo ʻa e fānau ako maʼolunga ange ʻo e vaʼa ako ʻa e ʻUnivēsiti ʻo e Pasifiki Sauteˊ pehē ki he uluʼi ʻōfisi fakatotolo ʻa e ʻunivēsitiˊ. ʻE toki paaki ʻa e fakatotoloˊ ni pea ʻe fakaʼatā leva ki ha taha pe.

ʻOkuˊ ke fili tauʼatāina pe kapau te ke tali ʻa e fakaafeˊ ni. Kapau te ke fili ke ke kau mai, ʻoku ʻi ai ʻa hoʼo totonu ke ke:

- *Taʼetali ha fehuʼi ʻoku ʻikai te ke fie tali;*
- *Fakafoki ʻa e kole fakaafe atuˊ (fakapapauʼi kei taimi mai);*
- *ʻEke ha ngaahi fehuʼi lolotonga ʻa e talanoaˊ;*
- *Fakahā hoʼo ngaahi fakakaukauˊ ʻi ho ʻilo pau ʻe ʻikai ngāueʼaki hoʼo hingoaˊ ʻi he fakatotoloˊ tukukehe kapau te ke toki loto ki ai mo ʻoange ha ngofua ki he tokotaha fakatotoloˊ;*
- *Maʼu ha ngofua ke vakai ki he ola ʻo e fakatotoloˊ ʻi hano toki fakakakato.*

Tokotaha fakatotoloˊ: Poʻaloʻi Poliana Faʻoliu-Havea

Fika telefoniˊ: (+679) 941 5485   **ʻĪmeiliˊ**: polianahavea77@gmail.com

Fakamoʼoni nimaˊ: *RHavea*   **ʻAhoˊ**: Sepitema, 2015

APPENDIX E: Consent Form & Agreement Form

Po'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea

PhD Candidate

Supervisors: Dr Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka'uta and Dr Marion Sanders

CONSENT & AGREEMENT FORM

AKO MO E VA'INGA:
A Tongan Conceptualisation of Play and Learning in the Early Years

I have read and understood the Information Sheet describing the above-named project. I agree to participate as a subject in the project. I consent to publication of the results of the project/the information given to me on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.

Kuoˊ 'osi lau mo lave'i a e tohi fakamatala fekau'aki mo e fakatotolo 'oku hā 'i 'olungaˊ. 'Okuˊ ou loto lelei ke u kau ki he fakatotoloˊ ni. 'Okuˊ ou fakangofua ke pulusi 'a e ngaahi fakakaukau te u tānaki ki he fakatotolo niˊ 'aki 'eku lave'i 'e malu'i faka'ēfika 'eku tokoni ˊ.

I understand that at any time I may withdraw from the project, as well as withdraw any information I have provided.

'Okuˊ ou lave'i foki 'oku malava ke u fakafisinga'i 'eku tokoniˊ mo ta'ofi hono ngāue'aki 'eku ngaahi fakamatala 'e tuku atuˊ.

I note that this project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at the University of the South Pacific.

'Okuˊ ou toe lave'i ko e fakatotoloˊ ni na'e 'osi vakai'i mo fakamafai'i 'e he Kōmiti Faka-'Ēfika ki he Fakatotoloˊ mei he 'Univēsiti 'o e Pasifiki Sauteˊ.

Name (please print)

Hingoa (kātaki 'o tohi mata'itohi)

Signature (*fakamo'oni*)

Date ('*aho*)

APPENDIX F: Confidentiality Agreement Form

APPENDIX F: Confidentiality Agreement Form

Po'alo'i Poliana Fa'oliu-Havea

PhD Candidate

Supervisors: Dr Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka'uta and Dr Marion Sanders

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

AKO MO E VA'INGA:
A Tongan Conceptualisation of Play and Learning in the Early Years

I agree to keep confidential all information concerning this project. I shall not retain or copy any information about this project.)

'Oku´ ou tali ke u malu'i 'a e ngaahi fakamatala kotoa pē fekau'aki mo e fakatotolo´ ni. Pea 'e 'ikai te u feinga ke u ma'u pe hiki tatau ha ngaahi fakamatala 'o e fakatotolo´.

Name (please print)
Hingoa' (kātaki 'o tohi mata'itohi)

Signature (*fakamo'oni*)

Date ('*aho*)

APPENDIX G: Talanoa/Tālanga Guiding and Follow-Up Questions

QUESTION 1:

How do Tongan adults conceptualise children's play?
Ko e hā 'a e sio, fakakaukau 'a e mātu'a tauhi fānau Tonga' mo e kau faiako' ako tokamu'a' 'o fekau'aki mo e va'inga 'a e longa'i fānau iiki'?

1. What is child play?
Ko e hā ho'o fakakaukau felave'i mo e 'uhinga 'o e fo'i lea ko e va'inga?

2. Is play a waste of time? Give reasons.
'Oku ke fakakaukau nai ko e va'inga' 'oku maumau taimi? 'Omai ha ngaahi 'uhinga/fakamatala ki ho'o tali'.

QUESTION 2:

To what extent is play a learning and development tool?
Ko e hā 'a e a'usia 'a e mātu'a tauhi fānau Tonga' mo e kau faiako ako tokamu'a' fekau'aki mo e mahu'inga 'o e va'inga' ki he ako mo e tupulaki 'enau longa'i fānau iiki'?

1. What is learning?
Ko e hā ho'o fakakaukau mo ho'o faka-Tonga lelei ki he fo'i lea ko e ako?

2. What is development?
Ko e hā ho'o fakakaukau mo ho'o faka-Tonga lelei ki he fo'i lea ko e <u>development</u>?

3. What is the role of play in learning and development?
Ko hā 'a e felāve'i 'a e va'inga' mo e ako' mo e fakatupulaki'?

QUESTION 3:

In what forms of indoor and outdoor play activities do children engage?
Ko e hā 'a e fa'ahinga va'inga 'oku fakahoko 'e he fānau' 'i 'api mo e ngaahi ako tokamu'a'?

1. What types of indoor and outdoor play activities do children engaged in at the home or school environment?
Ko e hā 'a e fa'ahinga va'inga fakalotofale mo e va'inga 'i he 'ātakai 'o tu'a' 'oku fakahoko ho'o fanau' 'i 'api' pe 'i he ngaahi ako tokamu'a'?

2. How is children's play different to adult play experiences?
Ko e hā 'a e faikehekehe 'a e fa'ahinga va'inga 'oku fai ho'o fānau' mo e fa'ahinga va'inga na'a' ke fai'?

QUESTION 4:

How do adults engage and support play?
Ko e hā 'a e fōunga 'oku' ke kau fakataha pe poupou ki he va'inga 'a ho'o fānau'?

1. How and how often do adults engage in play?
Ko e hā 'a e lahi 'o e taimi 'oku' ke va'inga ai pea mo ho'o fānau' 'i 'api pe ko 'apiako pea ko e hā 'a e ngaahi fōunga va'inga ko ia'?

2. What are the challenges to play?
Ko e hā 'a e ngaahi palopalema 'oku' ke fehangahangai mo ia 'oku' ne ta'ofi koe mei ho'o kau pe poupou ki he va'inga ho'o fānau'?

3. How will adults proactively engage and support play?
Mei he taimi' ni, 'e anga fēfē ho'o kau mo poupou ki he va'inga ho'o longa'i fānau'?

QUESTION 5:

What implication will the findings suggest for early learning, ECE curriculum development, policy and planning, teacher training and pedagogical practice, adult education, proactive stakeholder involvement?[64]
Ko e hā 'a e ngaahi fakakaukau mo ha ngaahi fokotu'utu'u fo'ou 'e ala ma'u mei he ola 'o e fakatotolo' ni ke tokoni ki he ako 'a e longa'i fānau iiki', silapa', palani ngāue', ako fakafaiako', ako matu'otu'a' pea mo e ngaahi fēlave'i'?

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[64] This question is determined from the responses provided by parents and teachers in questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 as well as the information obtained through the process of document analysis.

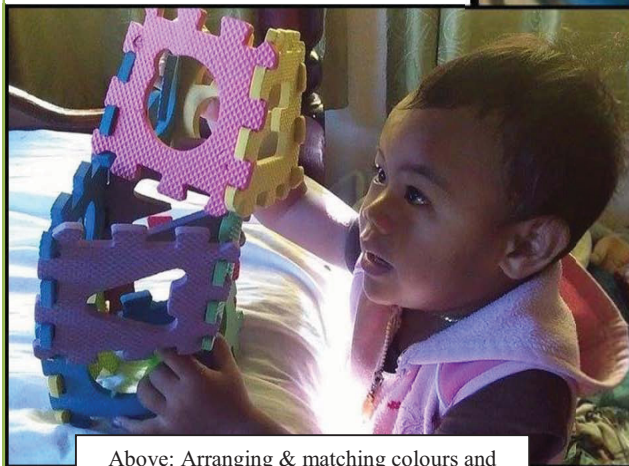**APPENDIX H: Visual Ethnographies of Va'inga**
i.   Personal, self and skillful play

Left: Counting money learning to add and subtract. Basic numeracy skills. Photograph courtesy of Pāteli Vailea Tonga, 2016

Right: Rolling dough, measuring flour. Basic numeracy & coordination skills. Photograph courtesy of Catalina Fa'oliu, Tonga, 2014

Above: Arranging & matching colours and shapes. Practising coordination. Photograph courtesy of Melissa Fa'oliu, Tonga, 2016

Right: Cutting shapes and sizes. Exercising small muscle play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Kāinga, Tonga, 2015

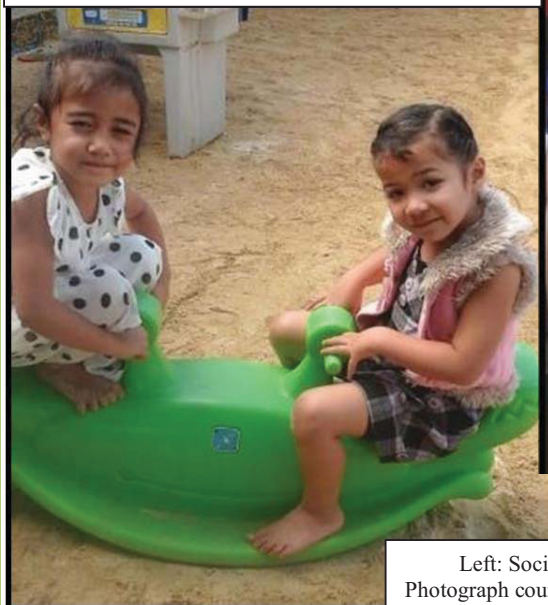## ii.   Relationship, social and confidence play

Left: Social guided play with peers and an adult. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

Above & below: Pretense with peers, solitary pretense, nurture play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Kāinga, Tonga, 2015

Above: Pretense with peers cooking and domestic play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

Left: Social, relationship & physical play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Kāinga, Tonga, 2015

iii.   Intelligence, perceptive, language play

Left: Early literacy & print play. Fine-motor skills development. Photograph courtesy of Efe Haupeakui, Tonga, 2015

Above: Early literacy & print play. Fine-motor skills development. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Kāinga, Tonga, 2015

Above: Colour coordination play. Strengthening small muscles. Photograph courtesy of 'Ilaisaane Fatukala, Tonga, 2015

Above: Early literacy, print play & speech play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

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iv.   Health, well-being, bodily kinesthetic, energetic play

Below: Physical, muscle play.
Photograph courtesy of Sione Tau
Havea, Fiji, 2014

Above & below: Physical, balancing play.
Photograph courtesy of Melissa Fa'oliu & 'Amelia
Hōlani, Tonga, 2016

Right: Physical, coordination play.
Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

v.   Intra-empathy, inter-empathy and competitive play

Below: Inter-empathy, pretense with peers play. Photograph courtesy of Tāvai Vikilani, Tonga, 2014

Above: Inter-empathy play, physical & construction play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Kāinga, Tonga, 2015

Above: Self, physical and chores play. Photograph courtesy of Melissa Fa'oliu, Tonga, 2015

Right & above: Inter-empathy, pretense with peers, social, relationship & construction play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Kāinga, Tonga, 2015

vi.   Behaviour and values play

Left: Values play, greeting guests & formal speech play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

Right: Behaviour, values & household chores play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Kāinga, Tonga, 2015

Above & below: Behaviour, culture, values & moral skills play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani & 'Alisi Piu, Tonga, 2015
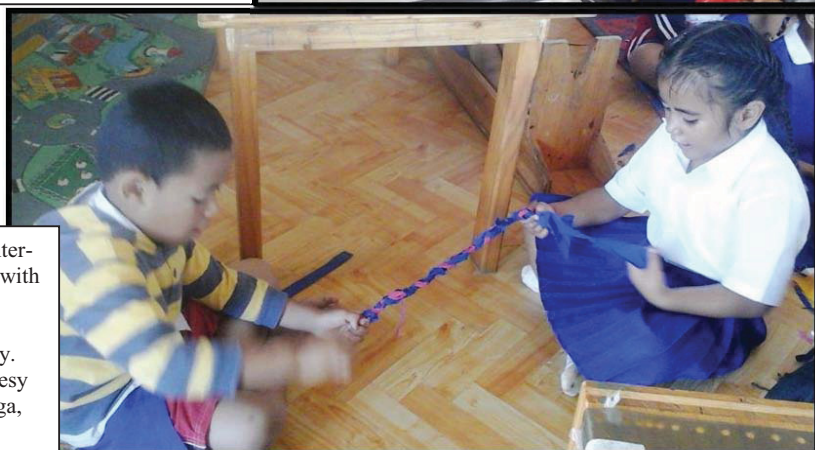
vii. Biblical, religious play

Left: Biblical, religious, social, values play. Reciting, & speech play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

Right: Biblical, religious, values play. Singing & speaking play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

Left: Biblical, religious, values, physical play. Singing, dancing & movement play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

viii.   Innovative, performance and artistic play

Above & below: Performance, social & cultural play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

Below: Innovative, social & cultural play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

ix. Cultural and heritage play

Left: Cultural, heritage, diversity, social, relationship, behaviour & values play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

Above & below: Cultural, heritage, social, relationship, behaviour & values play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

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Above: Cultural, heritage, diversity, social, relationship, behaviour & values play.
Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

Above & below: Cultural, heritage, social, relationship,
behaviour & values play. Photograph courtesy of 'Amelia
Hōlani, Tonga, 2015

APPENDIX I: Participant Listing

Adi Lātū	Mother
Alaimoana Vakapuna	Teacher educator, Tongan language advisor, TIOE, MET
'Alisi Hoponoa	Mother
'Alisi Piu	Mother/ECE teacher
'Amelia Hōlani	Computer Operator Grade III, Communications, MET
'Amelia Kāinga	Mother/ECE teacher
'Ana Haupeakui	Mother/Grandmother
'Analiva Tupou	Mother/ECE teacher
'Atu Lātū	Mother/Grandmother
Catalina Fa'oliu	Mother
Eddy Pongia	Father
Efe Haupeakui	Mother
'Ela Kaulave	Mother/Grandmother, ECE teacher/principal
'Ene'io Fekau	Mother/Grandmother, ECE teacher educator, TIOE, MET
Ikatonga Vaka'uta	Education Officer, Communications, MET
'Ilaisaane Fatukala	Mother
Kakatisi Taulava [Deceased, 2016]	Senior Inspector of Schools, Primary (ECE) MET
Laumanu Petelō	Communications Officer, Communications, MET
Lingikoni Vaka'uta	Tongan visual artist
Lita Liutai	Mother/ECE teacher
Malakai Potolaka	Secondary teacher, Tongan language/cultural advisor, MET
Mele Folau 'Ahota'e'iloa	Crafts maker
Mele Simiki Aleamotu'a	Mother/Grandmother
Mele Tonga Fīnau	Mother
Melissa Fa'oliu	Mother/driver
Milika Tu'ineau	Education Officer, EMIS, MET
Monalisa Tukuafu	Mother/ECE teacher/principal
'Olivina 'Asaeli	Mother/Grandmother, ECE teacher/principal
'Otolose Kula	Mother
'Oto'ota Tatafu	Teacher educator, TIOE, MET, Critical friend
Pāteli Vailea	Mother
Paula Fisi'ilose	Father
Paulo Manu	Father
Pēseti Vea	Teacher educator, TIOE, MET, Critical friend
Rianiwa Fisi'ilose	Mother
Sālome Naupoto	Mother
Samiuela Matakaiongo	Father
Seini Manu	Mother
Sela Lolohea	Mother
Sione Pouanga Lataimu'a	Father
Sione Samisoni	Father
Sione Tau Havea	Graphic designer/research assistant
Sisilia Tahaafe Lihau	Mother
Sister Velonika 'Anitoni	ECE teacher/principal
Soana Kitiona	Assistant Teacher Graduate, ECE Officer, MET
Tano'a Tui	Mother
Tapukitea Lolomāna'ia	Tertiary Staff/Cultural advisor, USP Tonga Campus
Tāufa Kioa	Mother/ECE teacher
Tāvai Vikilani	Senior Education Officer, EMIS, MET
Toakase Tatafu	Mother/Grandmother, ECE teacher
Vīlai 'Ilolahia	Deputy Principal, TIOE, ECE Coordinator