

NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

TE HUNGA RANGAHAU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

Pasifika Group Award 2008

The New Zealand Association for Research in Education's Biannual Pasifika Group Award was initiated by the Māori Caucus of the NZARE Council. Therefore, the Pasifika Caucus acknowledges the Maori Caucus of the NZARE Council for their support of Niuean, Cook Islands Māori and Tokelau; Fijian, Samoan, Tongan, Tuvaluan, Kiribati and Solomon Islands researchers in Education.

Importantly, the Award recognizes the collective approach to research and validates collective knowledge and wisdom. Niuean, Cook Islands Māori and Tokelau people; Fijian, Samoan, Tongan, Tuvaluan, Kiribati and Solomon Islands peoples thrive through living collectively in the homelands and to a lesser extent in Aotearoa New Zealand. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of research led by Pasifika researchers on lives lived collectively. In 2008, the awfully small number of nominations received by the Pasifika Caucus for the Award is evidence of the scarcity.

This year the NZARE Pasifika Group Award honours the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, the Pasifika Early Childhood Centre of Innovation at Richmond Road School, Auckland. The A'oga Fa'a Samoa was selected by the Ministry of Education as one of the six national Centres of Innovation (COIs). Set up in 1990, the A'oga Fa'a Samoa was the first licensed and chartered Pacific Island Early Childhood Centre. The special characteristics of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa are the Samoan immersion programme and "community of learners" collaborative approach to teaching and learning.

The research was led by Dr. Valerie N. Podmore, Victoria University of Wellington in association with Jan Taouma (Centre Manager), Ene Tapusoa (teacher) and Tanya Wendt-Samu (the facilitator/parent representative) and who comprise the A'oga Fa'a Samoa Research Focus Group. The study is the culmination of innovative ideas on Pasifika education practiced in the A'oga over nearly 25 years. The research investigated the relationship between learning and language continuity from the point of entry through to beginning compulsory schooling. The strengths of the three year research are the promotion of Samoan language, culture and identity, as well as, building the capacity of the Centre's teachers.

The investigation advances the understanding of the education of Samoan children in Aotearoa. Furthermore, ideas can be drawn from the study to inform emerging Samoan researchers about how to engage, challenge and rethink the value of new knowledge and the benefits to complex living by specific and diverse communities in New Zealand society. The critical question remains: How does knowledge from research studies change for the better the educational, political, economic and the socio-cultural situation for Niuean, Cook Islands Māori, Tokelau peoples; Fijian, Samoan, Tongan, Tuvaluan, Kiribati and Solomons peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand?

