UNIT STANDARDS FOR DEVELOPING BILITERACY IN YOUNG CHILDREN ATTENDING PACIFIC ISLAND LANGUAGE NESTS

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The paper presents a case study of how unit standards for biliteracy were developed for the Diploma of A`oga Amata, taking into account the recent *Samoan Language Curriculum Statement*. Three questions are addressed in the case study:

- What performance standards were relevant and representative of the competencies needed to develop biliteracy during early childhood?
- What sources of information were used to establish the unit standards and their levels?
- How were the unit standards validated?

Introduction

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is promoting the specification of competencies associated with various professional qualifications so that training providers are able to achieve consistency in the delivery and assessment of programmes. The competencies are expressed as 'unit standards', a generalised statement of outcomes. Each unit standard has a number of performance indicators that provide the criteria on which assessments are made. The unit standards are registered with NZQA. Training providers can then apply to have their courses formally accredited as contributing to the award of a nationally recognised qualification.

As part of the effort to control the quality of training programmes for early childhood educators, the Pacific Island Early Childhood Council (PIECCA) has been asked by the NZQA to define standards of professional competence for the special requirements for teaching in Pacific Island language nests. Such standards need to take into account various types of evidence relating to the emergence of early bilingualism and the conditions that foster it.

The importance of developing unit standards for Pacific Island language nests can be seen in the number of people graduating from training courses. This has more than doubled since 1991 and is now running at just under 200 a year. At present there are four training providers in the field: the A`oga Amata Training Institute, Wellington; the Pacific Island Early Childhood Council (PIECCA); the New Zealand Childcare Association; and the Colleges of Education, each servicing certificate and diploma qualifications through different course structures.

Unit standard architecture

The proposed structures for unit standards applying to professional qualifications in the field of Education lists 'Pacific Island Early Childhood Education' as a setting within the sub-field 'Early Childhood Education and Care'. The domains or key result areas for awarding qualifications in Early Childhood Education and Care are identified as early child development, partnership with parents and family/whanau, human resources management, professional practice and development, and early childhood service management (see Table 1).

Field	Education
Sub-field	Early Childhood Education and Care
Setting/Service	Pacific Island Early Childhood Education
Domains	Early child development Partnership with parents and family/whanau Human resources management Professional practice and development Early childhood service management
Unit standard titles	To date, sixty-nine unit standard titles have been proposed, but only one refers specifically to Pacific Island Early Childhood Education, (i.e. 'to demonstrate knowledge of Pacific Island cultures').

Table 1: Structure of the proposed unit standards for Early Childhood Education and Care

The task of this paper is to examine the basis on which unit standard titles would be proposed for a biliteracy component of 'Professional Practice and Development', and to suggest what the purpose statements of those titles might be. In the unit standard architecture, purpose statements represent the breakdown of unit standards into more specific competencies.

Methodology

The *Samoan Language Curriculum Statement* was used as the basis for identifying the competencies associated with developing biliteracy in young children attending Samoan language nests. The relevant section of the *Samoan Language Curriculum Statement* is reproduced below.

Written Language: Reading and Writing	
Strands *Children should have the opportunity to*:	**Achievement Objectives** *Children might*:
Experiment with reading and writing	Use literacy materials in make-believe and role-play situations
Participate in literacy events	Attend to print and develop stories from pictures Produce written messages in pretend-writing Make choices about stories and books Make choices about writing materials and the layout of their pretend-writing
Initiate interaction during literacy experiences	Ask about a character's behaviour Ask for things to be written down Ask for the meaning to be clarified Initiate talk that extends the story Use a story or a writing experience as a topic of conversation Express opinions about what has been read or written
Acquire knowledge of reading and writing processes	Recognise and respond to print in the environment Differentiate pictures from print, letters from numerals, and letters from words Start developing a sight vocabulary Show a developing ability to write words (for example, their names)

Figure 1: The written language component of the *Samoan Language Curriculum Statement* (Early Childhood level), p19.

The four strands for written language require early childhood teachers to structure opportunities for children to:

- Experiment with reading and writing
- Participate in literacy events in Samoan and English
- Initiate interaction in Samoan during literacy experiences
- Acquire knowledge of reading and writing processes.

These strands became the basis of the proposed unit standard titles. The purpose statements were drawn from an analysis of the achievement objectives. Three informants representing different academic backgrounds in bilingualism answered the question, "What knowledge and abilities would teachers require in order for children to meet the stated achievement objectives in an age-appropriate manner?" The responses from the informants were collated and presented as purpose statements for the proposed unit standards. These are shown in the next section.

Proposed Unit Standards

The following charts summarise the proposed unit standards for professional practice in developing biliteracy in Pacific Island early childhood education services.

Unit Standard Title	**Facilitate literacy play in Samoan and English**
Purpose statement	People credited with this unit standard are able to: 1. Organise literacy play using a variety of play settings 2. Interact with children during literacy play 3. Notice and record the emergence of literacy behaviour by individual children 4. Design play situations that enable assessments to be made 5. Demonstrate knowledge drawn from research into literacy play in bilingual situations. For example: Types and functions of literacy play Types and functions of interaction strategies during literacy play Stages in the development of early literacy. 6. Answer questions that parents ask about literacy play. For example: How should language switching be handled during literacy play? What should be the balance between literacy play using Samoan and English as the language of interaction?

Unit Standard Title	**Facilitate participation in literacy events in Samoan and English**
Purpose statement	People credited with this unit standard are able to: 1. Read picture books and story books co-operatively with young children 2. Design activities that centre on the events in the story 3. Observe and assess the participation of children in the literacy event 4. Make enlarged books 5. Promote literacy knowledge through the conduct of the book experience 6. Demonstrate knowledge drawn from research into emergent literacy. For example: Strategies for engaging children in book experiences Developmental stages in literacy participation Criteria for selecting picture books and story books.

Unit Standard Title	**Enable children to initiate literacy experiences**
Purpose statement	People credited with this unit standard are able to: 1. Organise the environment in such a way that literacy experiences are being initiated by children 2. Use interaction strategies that sustain children's initiatives 3. Observe and assess initiating moves made by children 4. Demonstrate skills in making books and displaying literacy materials 5. Demonstrate knowledge drawn from research on the autonomous literacy behaviour of children. For example: The initiation moves that children make, response strategies, and conditions that promote autonomous literacy behaviour.

Unit Standard Title	**Assist children to acquire literacy knowledge**
Purpose statement	People credited with this unit standard are able to: 1. Demonstrate appropriate literacy behaviour across the curriculum of an early childhood centre 2. Accompany literacy behaviour with relevant talk 3. Elicit literacy knowledge from children during book experiences 4. Notice and record significant milestone in literacy knowledge 5. Demonstrate knowledge drawn from research into the acquisition of literacy knowledge in early childhood. For example: Development stages in the acquistion of literacy knowledge Age appropriate literacy activities Conditions that promote acquisition of literacy knowledge.

Validation

In order to validate the unit standards, the proposed list was incorporated into a larger inventory drawn from the draft matrix for 'Early Childhood Care and Education' (Tangaroa, 1996). Each unit standard was accompanied by a five point scale ranging from "of no importance" to "very important". Wording that marked the unit standard as applying particularly to Samoan language nests was removed. A copy of the inventory appears in the Appendix.

Fourteen people associated with the delivery of early childhood training programmes to Pacific Island students rated each of the unit standards in the inventory. The instruction

asked the expert panel to say how important each proposed unit standard would be for newly qualified early childhood educators working in a Samoan language nest.

Results

The unit standards proposed for developing biliteracy were judged to be of almost equal importance to those proposed for general professional practice and development (see Table 2).

Proposed Unit Standards	**General Professional Practice**	**Developing Biliteracy**	**Overall**
Mean rating of importance	4.84	4.88	4.86

Table 2: Mean ratings for two sets of unit standards

The sample of respondents included seven College of Education tutors and seven supervisors of Samoan language nests. Both professional groups judged highly the importance of the proposed unit standards for developing biliteracy vis a vis the unit standards for general professional practice and development (see Table 3).

Proposed Unit Standards	**General Professional Practice**	**Developing Biliteracy**	**Overall**
College of Education tutors	4.94	4.96	4.95
A`oga Amata supervisors	4.74	4.79	4.77
Total	4.84	4.88	4.86

Table 3: Mean rating by tutors and supervisors for two sets of unit standards

A ranking of the proposed unit standards was obtained from the sum of the ratings for each title (see Table 4).

Unit Standards	**Rank**	**(Total Ratings)**
Assist children to acquire literacy knowledge	1=	(69)
Facilitate participation in literacy events	1=	(69)
Enable children to initiate literacy experiences	3	(68)
Facilitate literacy play	4	(67)

Table 4: The relative importance of the proposed unit standards for biliteracy

The sum of the rankings for each unit standard title (as indicated by the number in brackets) was in each case close to the ceiling value (70), indicating little difference in perceived importance.

Discussion

The purpose of the validation was to ensure that only important unit standards associated with biliteracy be proposed for the 'Professional Practice and Development' domain. A reasonable criterion for including a proposed unit standard would be the midpoint between moderately important and important (the next higher scale value). For the rating scale used in the present study, the value of the criterion is 3.5. The value obtained from the expert responders was 4.8, well above the criterion value set for inclusion.

The mean ratings were based on two respondent categories, each with seven members. A larger number of responders for each category would be needed to ensure that the mean values obtained were accurate estimates of the population means (the means for all possible members of the categories in question). Moreover, the respondent groups would need to include teacher educators associated with the various training institutions providing qualifications for workers in A`oga Amata, as well as supervisors of A`oga Amata from all the different regions. In order to increase the diversity of people responding to the inventory, an additional category of responders could be included in the survey, sampling Pacific Island co-ordinators from the Early Childhood Development Unit and other people associated with the administration of early childhood education.

The unit standard titles for developing biliteracy represent only part of the important competencies needed to deliver the language curriculum for a Samoan language nest. A similar job analysis needs to be undertaken for the development of oral language, visual language and cultural learning.

Summary

Using the *Samoan Language Curriculum Statement,* a job analysis was conducted to define the unit standard titles and purpose statements for the written language component of the curriculum for Pacific Island early childhood centres. The proposed titles were:

- Facilitate literacy play in Samoan and English
- Facilitate participation in literacy events in Samoan and English
- Enable children to initiate literacy experiences
- Assist children to acquire literacy knowledge.

The proposed titles were assessed for importance by asking a sample of College of Education tutors and A`oga Amata supervisors to rate each title using a five point scale. The titles were embedded among the titles already proposed for the domain of 'Professional Practice and Development'.

The results of the validation exercise revealed a very high level of agreement in terms of the perceived importance of the proposed unit standards for developing biliteracy. In addition, the results appeared to be stable across a diversity of early childhood educators.

Bibliography

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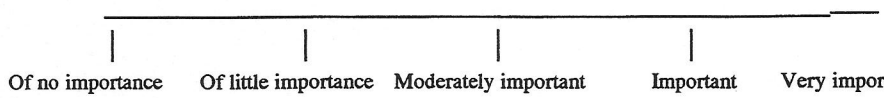
Appendix: Inventory of Unit Standards for Professional Practice and Development

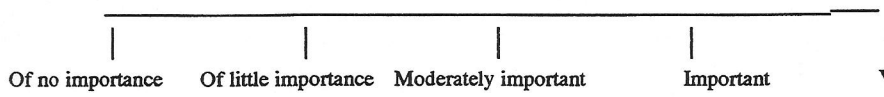
Professional Practice and Development

How important is it for newly qualified early childhood educators working in a Samoan language nest, to know or be able to do each of the following in order to perform their job well? Circle your response on the scale below each statement.

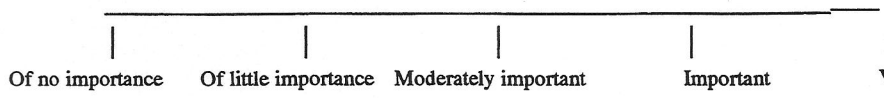
Demonstrate knowledge of the development of early childhood in Aotearoa



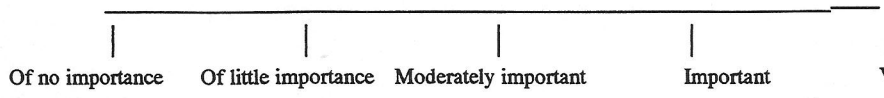
Enable children to initiate literacy experiences



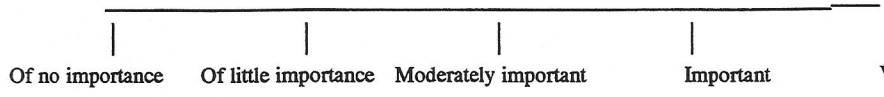
Facilitate participation in literacy events



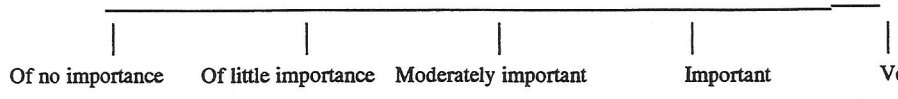
Establish and review professional development



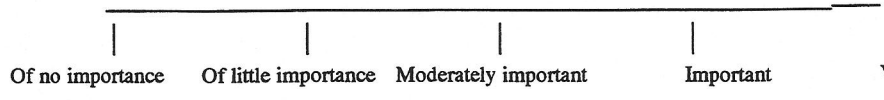
Develop professional support networks



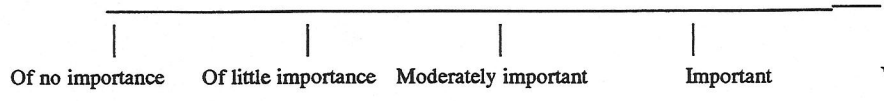
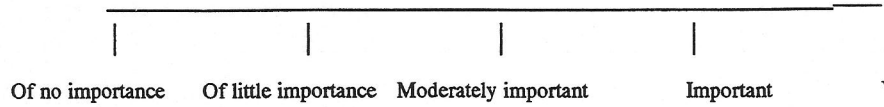
Facilitate literacy play



Review own professional practice



Develop support network with Maori



Assist children to acquire literacy knowledge