

Pacific Island families' perceptions of the parental role in the learning process – in a high school setting

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March 2014

A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

Abstract

The New Zealand Ministry of Education has acknowledged the need for schools to work collaboratively with Pacific Island families so that parents can support their children to achieve positive academic outcomes. This study explored Pacific Island families' perceptions of the parental role in the learning process within the context of a New Zealand high school where Pacific Island students were a minority. This study aimed to discover how Pacific Island parents and students perceived the communication process, both within the family and between home and school, so as to make informed recommendations to strengthen the role of Pacific parents in the learning of their children attending secondary school.

A phenomenological qualitative design was employed, using focus groups and interviews. Participants were a group of seven Pacific Island parents and a group of 12 senior Pacific Island students. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was used as a framework to analyse the data. Core values and beliefs which influenced the interaction between parents and their children, and how parents interacted with teachers, were identified. The study found that the parents believed in the importance of education as a means of achieving economic security and urged their children to work hard. They valued relationships with teachers so that they could work with them to support their children. Both parents and students shared values around the collectivist nature of acting interdependently and this may have contributed to the passive approach adopted by students in class and with their parents.

A number of findings were drawn. Even though Pacific Island parents demonstrated their understanding of the school system through their selection of a high decile, academic school, they did not necessarily relate to the individualised communication within the school. Furthermore, since students often separated school from home life, many tended to avoid conversations about their learning with parents. Parents, therefore, often felt disconnected from the school and frustrated that they could not be more effective at supporting their children's academic progress, despite a desire to be more involved. Students did not always respond positively to parental

encouragement to work hard. Instead, fearing that they might not meet parental expectations, some tended to adopt a low profile and passive approach to learning in class.

Recommendations focus on the need for schools to develop inclusive strategies which encourage dialogue between teachers, parents, and students so that a shared understanding of the students' learning needs and targets can be achieved.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the help I have received from many people, enabling me to carry out this research project – from its early inception through to the final stages of its completion.

Firstly, I appreciate the warm response which I received from the research participants and cultural advisors who kindly gave up their time to support me. They were willing to help me even if it did not benefit them personally and they helped me to believe my work was worthwhile. I would also like to thank the school management for allowing me to undertake this project and for accommodating me with some teaching hours so that I could balance study with income.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family, friends, and colleagues for listening to me when I needed it and encouraging me to keep going when the work was difficult. I would like to thank Doug, my husband, for his patience, practical support, and listening ear. I also appreciate how my friends shared the research journey with me, always showing an interest and knowing what I needed to hear to take me to the next stage. In particular, I benefitted from the constructive and helpful advice of my friend, Jacqui Campbell, who understood the research process and guided me through the different stages. I would also like to thank my new friend, Laura Van Peer, who helped with the final stages of proofreading.

I am especially grateful and appreciative of the support from my supervisors, Dr Carolyn Tait and Dr Margaret Gleeson. They nurtured me through the research process with kind and constructive criticism, sharing my enthusiasm for my subject and inspiring me. I would like to thank them, in particular, for the painstaking and time-consuming reading of my final drafts. I always enjoyed and valued our meetings.

Finally, I would like to thank all the staff at the university with whom I had contact. They helped to ensure that my experience as a novice researcher was a positive one.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1 A brief overview and rationale for the study

This qualitative study explored Pacific Island families' perceptions of the parental role in the learning process in a high decile secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand with a small but growing minority of Pacific Island students. The purpose was to develop an understanding of how both Pacific Island parents and students at this school perceived parental involvement. The idea stemmed from my personal belief that parental involvement can positively support student academic outcomes. I wished to examine the communication issues in home-school relationships – between minority culture Pacific Island families and the dominant-culture school system; I believed that a better understanding could improve the communication process between home and school. I gathered rich data from a small purposive sample to gain an in-depth insight into participant perceptions.

The rationale arose from my own experience as a teacher. I have always been willing to engage with parents as a means of supporting student progress and achievement but had come to realise that some parents, who were unfamiliar with the school system, did not always respond in the way that I expected. Not only would this research benefit my reflective practice but I also hoped it would benefit other teachers and leaders in similar schools, and that they might develop more effective strategies for home-school communication with Pacific Island families. The research findings could contribute to the body of research literature on Pacific Island parental involvement in that researchers and educators might apply it to similar contexts, such as schools with families from a high socio-economic community and where there are low numbers of Pacific Island students.

1.2 Context for the study

1.2.1 A national perspective.

The need to improve educational outcomes for Pasifika students is reflected in the claim that the Pasifika population has “the highest proportion of people with no

qualifications” (Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010) and that its student population is predicted to rise from a current one in ten to one in five by 2051 (Ferguson et al., 2008). The Education Review Office (2012a) states that Pacific Island students are the “learners most at risk of not achieving in New Zealand schools” (ERO, 2012a, p.1). Many start school with lower literacy and numeracy skills than their counterparts and so a trend of low achievement continues throughout school (Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010. p. 11). A statistical review of 2012 NCEA (National Certificate in Educational Attainment) results at secondary level reveals that Pacific Island students consistently fall behind other ethnicities, from level 1 in Year 11 through to level 3 in Year 13 (NZQA, 2013) and a lower number are enrolled in tertiary education than any other ethnic group (Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010. p. 11).

The Ministry of Education’s drive to boost the academic outcomes for Pacific Island students is evident in a range of publications and research literature. A particularly important document, the *Pacific Education Plan 2013-2017*, was launched by the Ministry in November 2012 in conjunction with the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, with the aim of increasing student participation, engagement, and achievement. It contains advice for educators from early childhood through to tertiary level, with goals, targets, and action plans at each stage. It is noticeable that the Ministry of Education has distanced itself from a deficit model of Pasifika underachievement, avoiding connotations of blame. Rather, the focus of responsibility falls on educators to work more collaboratively with the Pasifika community, to improve their knowledge of these learners’ needs and their engagement with Pacific Island cultural identities in order to bring about “vibrant, dynamic, successful Pasifika learners” (Ministry of Education, 2012a, p.3).

In particular, the Ministry emphasises the importance of engaging families so that they can be involved in and supportive of their children’s learning at school (Ministry of Education, 2012a). Whilst the Education Review Office (ERO) has noted that schools which had raised academic standards of Pacific Island students also had established links with family and community members (ERO, 2012a, p. 5), Chu, Glasgow, Rimoni,

Hodis, and Meyer (2013) comment on the lack of empirical research to support this connection. They note, in particular, that there is almost no research to show effective initiatives for home-school liaison. This has been recognised by the Ministry which has highlighted the engagement of Pasifika families as a research priority specifically at secondary level (Ministry of Education. 2012b, p. 9).

1.2.2 A local perspective.

Although the national picture for Pacific Island students indicates the need to focus on improving educational outcomes, the specific context for my study was a school where academic results have overall been more positive than those reflected in national statistics (NZQA, 2013; NZQA, n.d.). Interestingly, 2012 figures show the percentage of Pacific Island students achieving levels 1 and 2 at this secondary school exceeded the national percentages for Pacific Island students. However, the percentage figures at Level 3 and for university entrance fell below the national results (see Table 1, p. 5). Nevertheless, this research setting was unique in that the school is located in a higher socio-economic area than other schools which have participated in studies involving Pacific Island students. This school has an increasing percentage of Pacific Island families, many of whom have elected to send their children here in preference to other more local and lower decile schools.

1.3 The research aim

This research was unusual because of its setting in a high decile school*. In order to gain a full understanding of how families perceived parents might support their children's studies, it took into consideration both the students' perspectives as well as the parents'. In this way, a comparison could be made and, if any misunderstandings existed, these would be highlighted in the findings. A decision to focus the study on senior rather than junior students seemed sensible as they would have a wider experience of the school system and perhaps be more mature and articulate in their explanations.

*A high decile school indicates that students were largely drawn from a high socio-economic community (Ministry of Education, Te Kete Ipurangi, n.d.a).

The research aim, therefore, was to explore the perceptions which Pacific Island parents and students had of the parental role in the learning process.

Table 1:

A comparison of NZ European and Pasifika student attainment for NCEA and University Entrance 2012

A comparison between national statistics and the college in which this study was conducted.

Year Levels	NZ European national achievement	NZ European college achievement	Pasifika national achievement	Pasifika college achievement
Percentage of participating Year 11 students attaining NCEA level 1	86%	86%	63%	67%
Percentage of participating Year 12 students attaining NCEA level 2	89%	96%	69%	87%
Percentage of participating Year 13 students attaining NCEA level 3	81%	80%	60%	50%
Percentage of participating Year 13 students attaining university entrance	74%	68%	43%	37%

National statistics retrieved from:

<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Publications/stats-reports/ncea-annualreport-2012.pdf>

College statistics retrieved from:

<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/Studying-in-NZ/Secondary-school-and-NCEA/stats-reports/2012/Qualification-Statistics-School-Ethnicity-2012-21032013.csv>

1.4 The research questions

The overarching research question “How do Pacific Island parents and students perceive the parental role in the learning process?” was broken down into two main sub-questions. These were:

- How do Pacific parents and students perceive the parents’ communication role when parents and students interact at home about the students’ academic progress?
- How do Pacific parents and students perceive the parents’ communication role when parents and teachers interact at school about the students’ academic progress?

The reason for the sub-questions was to discover what, if any, discrepancies or gaps in the communication process existed regarding the participants’ perceptions of the parental role, in both home and school contexts.

1.5 Definitions and key concepts

These definitions and key concepts are used throughout the thesis.

1.5.1 High School.

This research took place in a New Zealand high school which catered for students from the age of thirteen to eighteen. The description “high school” has been used interchangeably with “secondary school” and “college”.

1.5.2 Parent.

For the purposes of this study, the term “parent” has been used to describe the family member or care giver with the responsibility for a parental role.

1.5.3 Parental involvement.

Research literature which investigates parental involvement has adopted various terms to describe the link between home and school (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008; Catsambis, 2001; DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Epstein, 2001; ERO,

2008a,b,c,d ; Jeynes, 2003; Vazquez-Nuttall, Li, & Kaplan, 2006). This has ranged from “parental involvement” to “parental engagement” to “home-school relationships”. My study will generally use the term parental involvement although, as in other research, I will draw on other terms interchangeably.

1.5.4 Pasifika.

The term “Pasifika” is used commonly in research literature and by the Ministry of Education to describe the population of people who have been born in, or culturally identify themselves with, a Pacific Islands country such as Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Tokelau, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu (Ferguson, Gorinski, Wendt Samu, & Mara, 2008, p. 5). Whilst Pasifika people do not form one homogenous group as such, there is nevertheless sufficient commonality for the Ministry to consider Pasifika members of the New Zealand population as a distinct group deserving special attention (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010).

In my study, the terms Pasifika and Pacific Island are used interchangeably. Whilst these umbrella terms describe individuals from different countries with different cultural backgrounds, there is merit in grouping these people together for theoretical and practical reasons in order to support academic research and educational policy.

1.5.5 Culture.

A significant idea in this research literature is the interplay between Pacific Island people from a minority culture and teachers in a school system belonging to the dominant culture of New Zealand. Again, whilst I recognise the need to be careful of making generalised assumptions about individuals, culture has been a useful term in this research to describe the shared values and beliefs, both conscious and unconscious, to which a group of people adhere (Gore, Wilburn, Treadway, & Plaut, 2011).

1.5.6 Engagement and motivation.

Studies on parental involvement have revealed the impact which parents can have on their child's engagement and motivation in academic learning (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008; Catsambis, 2001; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Jeynes, 2012). There is an overlap in meaning, however, between engagement and motivation with researchers applying different emphases to these terms. It may be helpful to consider the following differentiation: engagement is an immersion in a learning activity which absorbs the attention of the learner; motivation is a more focussed and committed approach to studies, work output, and achievement (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012). In Chapter Two, I discuss positive parental guidance, which supports both engagement and motivation.

1.6 Overview

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter Two reviews relevant literature and establishes a framework for this investigation. Chapter Three outlines the methodology used and Chapter Four describes the findings. In Chapter Five, these findings are discussed. Chapter Six sums up the discussion, and concludes with some key recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore how Pacific Island families view the parental role in the learning process in the context of a high decile secondary school where Pacific Island students constitute twelve per cent of the student population. A number of key ideas and assumptions underpin this research topic and require a close examination through a review of literature.

The review is divided into three main sections:

The first section reviews literature on the topic of parental involvement, exploring why this may be beneficial at secondary school level and how it can support academic achievement and engagement.

In the second section, this review looks at the parental involvement of minority culture families internationally, considering what barriers prevent successful involvement. Specific consideration is given to research on the parental involvement of Pacific Island families in New Zealand and this section closes with a discussion relating to the empowerment for minority families.

The final section concludes with a review of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model which acts as an effective framework for an understanding of home-school relationships with minority families.

The main purpose of this chapter is to review literature on parental involvement in order to determine if, and in what ways, parents can contribute positively to student academic achievement. Specific consideration is given to research on minority cultures, focussing on Pacific Island families at secondary level in a New Zealand context.

2.2 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a term used by researchers to describe an umbrella of experiences related to home-school connections (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Research literature, both from within New Zealand and internationally, confirms that parental involvement is advantageous for children's learning. This is the case across all years of schooling (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007, Jeynes, 2012) and regardless of students' socioeconomic or ethnic background (Catsambis, 2001, Jeynes, 2007).

This section considers the value of parental support at secondary level and its impact upon student achievement and engagement.

2.2.1 The involvement of parents at secondary level.

The involvement of parents in their children's learning at school tends to decline during the secondary years (ERO, 2008a; Jackson & Davis, 2000). There may be a number of reasons for this which include lack of time, lack of proficiency in English, or discomfort with the academic level of course work (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Sometime parents feel their children should become more independent and they make a deliberate decision to retract from direct involvement in their child's learning (Hill & Tyson, 2009); consequently their children often tend to take on more of a "mediating role" between home and school as they grow older (Deforges & Abouchar, 2003, p. 4).

However, the secondary years of schooling are a particularly demanding time for young people as they work towards national, academic qualifications, make decisions about subject choices, and consider future careers. This is also a time when adolescents undergo many changes in physical, psychological, and intellectual development (Deplanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007). Quite specifically in New Zealand, McNaughton (2011) claims that at least twenty percent of young people suffer long-term behavioural and emotional effects from the challenges they face during adolescence. For this reason, parental support during these years is vital

(Vazquez-Nuttall, Li, & Kaplan, 2008). Families can provide “social, cultural and emotional support” to assist their child’s development (Deplanty et al., 2007, p. 361). They are often in a position to notice the first signs of their child’s disengagement with learning and may know how best to solve it (ERO, 2008a). McNaughton (2011) argues that parents of Maori and Pasifika students can offer valuable support to their children as they transfer from primary to secondary school, helping them adjust to the school’s value system which may be incongruent with those of their own culture. Finally, parents are a valuable support in helping their children to consider educational pathways as they progress through the senior years of secondary schooling (ERO, 2008a).

In summary, the research literature affirms that the adolescent years of schooling can be a demanding time for young people and that the involvement of parents with their children’s learning during the secondary years can make a positive contribution to their development during this period.

2.2.2. Types of parental involvement and how it can support student achievement.

There are numerous ways in which parents can be involved in their children’s education (Harris & Goodall, 2007, 2008). For example, Epstein has devised a framework summing up a range of parent activities to guide schools so that they can be better informed on how best to develop home-school relationships. These include, for example, parents’ voluntary assistance at school, their communication with teachers, and support with learning in the home (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Harris and Goodall (2007) conclude, from their qualitative study of over 20 schools in the United Kingdom, that parents can make the most positive difference to academic outcomes for their children by what they do in the home. They refer to this as parental engagement. Deforges and Abouchaar (2003), whose literature review draws on international findings, and Bull, Brooking, and Campbell, (2008), whose review draws on both international and New Zealand case studies, concur that effective parental engagement is most likely to occur when it takes place in the home.

Researchers have also sought to clarify what precisely it is that parents do when they engage in their child's learning in the home so that it supports academic achievement. Hill and Tyson (2009), for example, conducted a meta-analysis of 50 studies to clarify what type of parental involvement was most effective with adolescents in an American middle-school setting and concluded that parental assistance with homework was not necessarily associated with achievement. One possible reason was that parents' involvement in homework tasks might not necessarily be complementary with adolescents' need to develop autonomous, independent thinking. On the other hand, however, they did conclude that parents' *academic socialisation* was beneficial. This was a term the authors used to encompass parents' communication when they set expectations, foster aspirations, and help their children to develop learning strategies and plan for the future. They concluded that this type of support was beneficial since it helped students develop independence and make semi-autonomous decisions.

An American longitudinal study, conducted by Catsambis (2001), drew similar conclusions. The author also set out to investigate specifically what role parents could play in support of their children's learning with a focus on the secondary years. She conducted a multivariate analysis of data gained from a major national study, basing her findings on the interviews of over 13,000 parents and their children who were surveyed in 1988 and 1992. She concluded that parental expectation and encouragement, particularly in the last year of their schooling, were important factors which helped students to prepare for further educational opportunities and to strive for academic success. She believed that the supervision by parents of homework tasks could help students up to their 8th grade (years 13 – 14) but, beyond that, parental input was better suited to acknowledging adolescents' inclinations towards autonomy and independence. Catsambis' conclusion was that effective parental engagement amounted to well-informed parents guiding and advising their children during these the critical years of secondary schooling.

Whilst there is interest among researchers as to how parental engagement can support student achievement, some note that there are limited findings on measurable outcomes which demonstrate its exact impact (Bull et al. 2008; Desforges

& Abouchaar, 2003). This is not, as Harris and Goodall (2007) point out, because of its ineffectiveness as a tool to support students' learning but perhaps more likely due to the difficulty in measuring the actual value of parental contributions in comparison with other factors which could be influencing student achievement. However, Jeynes (2007) set out to establish what evidence did exist by conducting a meta-analysis of research literature on the relationship between parental involvement and students' academic success, based on 52 quantitative studies. He concluded that there was a positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. This applied both to voluntary parental help as well as specific school-led programmes designed to engage parents. He further noted that the most effective forms of parental involvement were *parental styling* (most frequently described in studies as the ability to provide a combination of loving support and adequate discipline) and the setting of high expectations for academic achievement.

To summarise, research evidence validates parental involvement as a positive influence on student academic achievement (Jeynes, 2007). Parents can help their children in their senior years of schooling by encouraging and advising on aspects such as learning strategies, academic goals and career choice (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Students benefit when parents are well informed (Catsambis, 2001), set high expectations (Jeynes, 2007) and adopt a parenting style that nurtures their child's need to develop independence (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

2.2.3 Effects of parental expectation and aspiration on student achievement and engagement.

A key aspect of parental involvement, therefore, is the actual attitude adopted by the parents which affects the direction of the students' learning. Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) point to the large body of research which explores the role parental expectation can play on student outcomes, much of it acknowledging, as Jeynes (2007) indicated, that there is a positive correlation between the two. One way that parents can positively affect their children's outcomes is by setting high expectations which influence the children who, in turn, set high expectations for themselves (Rutchick,

Smyth, Lopoo, & Dusek, 2009). When parents set high expectations for their children, they receive higher grades and stay in school longer (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Parents may be influenced by their own experiences of education, perhaps wanting their child to exceed what they, themselves, had achieved (Rutchick et al., 2009).

In the case of minority culture families, parental expectation can help children to make successful educational gains, offsetting any issues with cultural mismatches between home and school (Okagaki, 2001). For example, the children of Asian American parents aim for high grades because it brings honour to the family (Chen & Uttal, 1988, cited in Okagaki, 2001, p. 13). Even if parents do not have the skills to directly support the learning of their children, minority students are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their learning when they perceive that their parents place a high value on education (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992, cited in Okagaki, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 1993, cited in Okagaki, 2001). However, an awareness of their child's performance at school is advisable in order to set targets which can realistically be achieved (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) make the distinction between parental expectations (which is what parents think their children should achieve) and parental aspirations (which is what they would like their children to aim for, both academically and career-wise). Parental aspiration reflects the value that parents place on education, and research literature generally confirms there is a positive relationship between the high value parents place on education and their children's academic attainment (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2008). For example, the longitudinal, multi-ethnic study of Fan, Williams, and Wolters (2012), with data gained from over 12,000 students, drew a positive correlation between parental aspirations for their children to pursue postsecondary education and their children's confidence, work completion, and engagement in class.

Conversely, parental attitudes can have a negative impact on student achievement and engagement. The study of Fan et al. (2012) also noted that parent-school communication, which centred on children's lack of progress or behavioural issues, often had a negative impact on students' motivation. They surmised that parents'

punitive conversations probably led to their children's decreased confidence and disengagement in their learning. Likewise the study of Rutchick et al. (2009) showed how parental expectations could be problematic. They conducted a longitudinal study of 884 children and their caregivers over a five-year period and noted that parental expectations were influenced by the children's behavioural problems. They concluded that parents tended to have a lower academic expectation of their child when behavioural issues were raised by the school and this perception influenced the child, in turn, to also have low expectations.

These studies reinforce the link between parental attitude and students' academic performance, and act as a reminder for schools to consider how they engage parents in home-school communication so that parental contributions are beneficial and not counterproductive. This is an important consideration for my study where an exploration of perceptions on the parental role in Pacific Island families might reveal how parental attitudes affect student engagement with their learning. Consequently, this may provide direction on how the school can best direct home-school communication so that parents' contributions have a positive influence.

2.2.4 Effects of parental involvement on student motivation.

Parents, therefore, are able to motivate their children to engage in academic learning through the kinds of expectations and aspirations they set for them. Students' motivational beliefs are an important factor in determining their engagement with learning, leading to academic achievement (Fan et al., 2012). Whilst different theories abound on the nature of motivation, a social-cognitive view is that engagement in learning is affected by self-belief (in one's ability), individual cognition (one's ability to think and to negotiate academic tasks), and social contexts (such as school, home and cultural background), (Anderman & Dawson, 2011). Motivational theories can contribute to an understanding of how parental attitudes can positively influence students' engagement in class.

Self-efficacy is viewed as a significant component of motivation (Bandura, 1994, 1997; Fan et al., 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Students who lack self-efficacy doubt their

own abilities, whereas students who feel efficacious have a level of self-belief that enables them to participate in class, work hard and persist through difficulties (Schunk et al., 2002). Individuals with high self-efficacy visualise success and maintain a positive outlook if they encounter setbacks; they are resilient and able to self-regulate their moods; and they do not shy away from tasks which are challenging. In short, self-efficacy stems from a belief that one can influence others and achieve desirable outcomes (Bandura, 1994, 1997).

According to Bandura, there are four major components which positively influence self-efficacy in individuals. Firstly and most significantly, they may experience mastery of a task which instils confidence in their own ability. Secondly, they may also see something modelled successfully by others and this raises their own level of belief that they can do it too. Thirdly, they may make more effort when others guide and encourage them. Finally, they are influenced by physiological factors, such as strength or stamina (Anderman et al., 2011; Bandura, 2000). One aspect of developing self-efficacy, therefore, stems from relationships with others; parents play a critical role in modelling, nurturing, and encouraging a young person's self-belief and ability to take on challenges (Fan et al., 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Although parental influence may decline as children grow older, parents are influential in motivating them through the latter years of schooling by helping them to set academic goals and select activities and groups in which to participate (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Parents, therefore, can play an effective role in helping their children to develop self-efficacy.

A different theoretical framework is the concept of self-determination (Deci, Vallerand, Peletier, & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory examines what factors motivate individuals and makes an important distinction between motivational behaviour that is intrinsic and self-regulated as opposed to motivational behaviour that is subject to external influences. People may act out of intrinsic motivation because they have a natural inclination, interest, or mastery of an activity. This level of motivation, of course, is not always evident in classroom situations. Ryan and Deci (2000) sought to establish what social and environmental features hindered or supported individuals in developing intrinsic motivation. They argued that three key

psychological needs had to be in place: the need to feel competent; the need to be able to self-regulate or act autonomously; and the need to have positive relationships with others. Learners, who have successfully had these needs met, are self-determined and confident learners, able to balance the demands of their academic learning, prioritising and engaging in tasks without friction or tension (Deci et al., 1991).

Learners who remain motivated by external factors may carry out learning activities solely to avoid punishment or to earn a reward. Even if they perform a task through feelings such as guilt, motivation is still subject to external influences since they are acting from perceived pressure from others and not from personal volition. It is when learners begin to appreciate the importance of the task as being valuable in itself (even if only to appreciate that others value it) that they start to internalise motivational behaviour and can self-regulate their learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The relationship with others is evidently instrumental in this process and this theory has certain implications for parental involvement. A parenting style which employs external rewards and punishments undermines intrinsic motivation, since the child remains influenced by external factors and is less inclined to undertake activities for personal satisfaction. Furthermore, parenting which is overly controlling denies children the chance to make their own choices. Rather, it is “autonomy-supportive” parents who can support intrinsic motivation (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005, p. 602). Finally, parents who lean towards negative feedback to their children also undermine motivation, since this runs counter to the psychological need for positive affirmations in order to feel competent (Fan et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Although this is a selected view of motivational theories, it is sufficient to highlight the benefit of positive relationships between students and their parents, and identifies how parents can influence their children’s engagement with academic learning.

2.2.5 Summing up.

To summarise this section, there is a wide body of literature which argues that parental involvement can be an effective means of supporting student engagement and achievement (Bull, Brooking & Campbell, 2008; Catsambis, 2001; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Jeynes, 2012). A number of researchers

argue in favour of parental contribution in the home where parents can effectively engage in their children's learning (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008; Deforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007). Parenting style appears to be particularly important for adolescents. Parents can positively impact on their child's learning when they set high expectations and aspirations (Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012; Jeynes, 2007; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2008), combined with appropriate guidance and encouragement which supports their adolescent child's need for independence (Catsambis, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Theories on motivation further strengthen our understanding of the supportive role which parents can play. Through their modelling, nurturing, and encouragement, parents can positively contribute to a child's development of self-efficacy (Anderman et al., 2011; Bandura, 2000; Fan et al., 2012; Schunk & Parajes, 2002). By nurturing a positive relationship with their child, parents can support their child's need to feel confident and to act autonomously which assists that child to become a self-determined learner (Deci et al., 1991, Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The implication for schools is that they may need to consider how they share information with parents, so that parent-student interaction in the home is conducive to the development of successful academic outcomes for the child.

2.3 Parental involvement of minority culture families

There is extensive research on how different family characteristics affect the nature of parental involvement. One key area relates to ethnic minority families. This section describes international research investigating views on minority families' attitudes to parental involvement, and then discusses potential barriers to forging home-school links with these families. This section finishes by contextualising the research in New Zealand, investigating potential barriers to the engagement of Pacific Island families, and outlining some strategies and initiatives which have successfully supported home-school connections.

2.3.1 Minority families' attitudes and potential barriers to engagement.

Findings from a number of studies confirm that, in general, minority parents place a high value on education (Smrek & Cohen-Vogel, 2001) and tend to set high educational aspirations and expectations for their children in the hope it will lead to a better life (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). In what they termed as an "extensive" review of literature on the characteristics of aspiration, Gutman & Akerman (2008, p. vi), referred to findings from research in the United States and Britain that minority parents hold higher educational aspirations for their children than do parents from the dominant culture. For example, researchers Fuligni, Tseng and Lam (1999) noted in their study of adolescents in a multi-ethnic school in San Francisco that the adolescents of immigrant families aspired to gain higher grades, spent more time studying, and put more effort into homework than did their counterparts whose parents were native-born Americans. The aim was to understand what factors motivated minority culture students to achieve academically and one conclusion was that adolescents frequently understood the sacrifices their parents had made to forge a better life for the family. Therefore, they endeavoured to perform well at school as part of their obligation to assist and support their parents. Fuligni, Tseng and Lam added, however, that obligations in the home could detract from focus on their studies and the students who performed well academically tended to have a "moderate" sense of duty which allowed them to take time from family responsibilities to study at home (p. 207).

High aspirations held by minority parents do not necessarily translate into effective parental involvement that is conducive to high academic achievement. Some minority culture families emphasise the importance of hard work as a way of achieving goals and believe that, as long as the child works hard, educational achievement can be attained (Okagaki, 2001). For example, the research of Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, Hsu, Kitamura, and Hatano (1990) indicated how American Asian mothers placed a higher degree of emphasis on their children's ability to work hard and be motivated as a means of achieving academic success than did their American counterparts who placed more emphasis on cognitive ability as an indicator of their child's future

academic attainment. Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) argue that parents, who rely on the notion of student effort as a major tool for achieving academic success, do not have a reliable mechanism to gauge their children's future performance. This is because effort is subject to an individual's personal volition and is not necessarily a constant factor (Weiner, 2005, p. 76). Parents, who focus on effort as a means of gauging future performance, may not necessarily understand their child's ability or have the academic experience to set appropriate goals that can realistically be achieved (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Sometimes, minority parents may feel that they are not able to help their children despite a strong desire for their children to succeed academically. They may refrain from engaging in their children's learning due to a lack of self-efficacy. Teachers may incorrectly conclude that limited parental involvement in school denotes a lack of interest (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001) or that parents are being difficult (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). However, limited English proficiency, lack of experience with the education system and financial constraints may be some issues which cause these parents to restrict their involvement in school activities (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Lack of time may be a further barrier for parents' engagement where families have to consider public transport for parent meetings or have unsociable shift hours at work (Turner, 2000). Such difficult working arrangements are likely to be associated with low income families (LaRocque et al., 2011) into which category minority families may fall.

Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001), for example, conducted research on parental perceptions in an elementary school in California where the majority of parents were on low incomes and were also members of a minority culture. They argued that schools often reflect the skills required of "white collar workers" which means that parents like their participants can feel excluded and their involvement is limited by a sense of alienation (p. 75). Likewise, they argued that schools tend to have institutionalised codes of behaviour and act as providers of knowledge so that the power dynamics reflect the school's top-down control. Such dynamics can further cause alienation with the parents who feel they do not have a voice. There is a general

tendency for schools to be dominated by white, middle-class teachers and this adds to the potential for tension when teachers interact with parents from different cultural backgrounds (Laroque et al., 2011). It is not surprising, therefore, that low income, minority parents are the least likely to engage with school. Desimone (1999) and Laroque et al. (2011) argue that schools need to take proactive measures to involve such parents who are not confident about negotiating the school system to support their children.

To sum up, international research highlights a number of potential barriers that prevent minority parents from engaging effectively with schools to support their child's learning, despite the fact that many have high expectations for their child to do well academically. There is potential for misunderstanding between teachers and parents where parents feel excluded and their contribution as a valuable resource may be overlooked by teachers (Laroque et al., 2011).

2.3.2 The New Zealand context – the engagement of Pacific Island families.

The Pasifika Education Plan 2013 – 2017, which sets out how the Ministry of Education intends to raise the engagement and achievement of Pacific Island students, envisages a holistic approach where parents, families, and students work together to bring about success. Thus the notion that parents are a valuable resource for supporting their child's learning is implicit within the document. However, research literature suggests that there may be some misunderstandings and a disconnection between teachers and Pasifika parents despite evidence that parents place a high value on the importance of education.

Many Pacific Island families have migrated to New Zealand for a better life and, similar to international findings, families perceive education as an important tool for gaining economic prosperity (Siope, 2011). Furthermore, research findings confirm that Pacific Island parents have high expectations (ERO, 2008c) and are keen to be involved in their children's learning (Amituanai-Toloo, McNaughton, Lai, & Arini, 2009; Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, Tufulasi Taleni, & O'Regan, 2008). Parents have reported that they like regular contact from school, being informed when their children's achievements are

positive, and being given early notice when there may be problems. They want to work alongside teachers to support academic achievement (ERO, 2008c).

However, findings have indicated that parents do not necessarily feel comfortable about home-school communication and have found working alongside teachers difficult to achieve. Some parents have expressed uncertainty about what their role should look like (Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, Tufulasi Taleni, & O'Regan, 2008); others have felt they needed a better understanding of academic involvement and wanted guidance on how best to motivate their children (Fletcher et al., 2008). Parents' lack of attendance and engagement in school meetings has also been an issue. Some parents have reported that they were too busy to commit to meetings because they worked long hours, frequently undertaking shift work on low wages. In addition, they have felt uncomfortable about coming into the school environment (Fletcher et al., 2008). Fletcher et al. (2008) consider parents' reluctance to come into school may be because they fear they might not understand the teachers and would not want to ask questions in case it seemed disrespectful. This is something which Tuafuti (2010) explored in an examination of cultural views on silence. Whilst silence can be seen from a Westernised perspective to imply a lack of understanding or engagement, the Pasifika culture of silence can show that someone is demonstrating empathy. Even if parents do attend parent evenings, it does not necessarily lead to a conversation with mutual understanding.

These findings, similar to international findings on minority parents, illustrate that Pacific Island parents can sometimes feel alienated and misunderstood when interacting with school, despite a strong interest in their child's education and despite wanting to be included by the teachers (ERO, 2008c).

2.3.3. Pacific Island collaborative home-school relationships in action.

The findings from New Zealand Pasifika research, in line with recommendations from the Pasifika Education Plan 2013 – 2017, indicate that Pacific Island parents desire to be included and valued by teachers (ERO, 2008c). These thoughts complement

recognised good practice for building successful home-school partnerships in that they should be collaborative, reciprocal, and mutually respectful in nature (Bull et al., 2008). The building of positive relationships is only part of the success: partnerships are more successful when interaction between home and school is purposeful and goal oriented (Bull et al., 2008). The 2012 ERO (Education Review Office) report, *Improving Educational Outcomes for Pacific Learners*, recommends that schools turn to the Ministry of Education's Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) for help with goal setting. The PEP 2013 – 2017 has specified goals which encourage Pacific parents to be more knowledgeable and demanding in their involvement of education services. One way of achieving this, for example, is to ensure information is provided to Pacific learners and their families about qualifications on offer to help with decisions related to further education, training, and employment opportunities. ERO reported, however, that some schools had not necessarily heeded the advice of the PEP nor had enough knowledge to put systems in place for appropriately engaging families (ERO, 2012a).

Nevertheless, advice is clear that schools need to reach out to engage families from minority communities since these families may not automatically feel comfortable in the school environment nor understand how they should be supporting their children (Lewis, Kim, & Ashby Bey, 2011). Schools can consider a variety of strategies which take into account the specific context of the school, considering how existing processes for home-school communication can be adapted to suit the needs of the minority families (Bull et al., 2008). Strategies include: making personal phone calls home; showing flexibility over times and locations of meetings; conveying information in minority languages; using outreach workers or mentors to establish links with families; and involving students to help feed progress back to parents (Turner, 2000). The involvement of students as a tool for engaging parents may be a significant strategy since parents are more likely to become involved with their adolescent child's learning, when their children invite the communication (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005).

Some New Zealand schools have adopted a variety of these strategies for engaging with families. Some have improved communication between parents and school through newsletters, report evenings, and more informal occasions. Others have co-

opted Pacific Island members on to the Board of Trustees as a way of developing links and mutual understanding. Yet others have made specific links with church leaders and involved them in school activities and learning programmes (ERO, 2012a). Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu, and Finau (2002) commended, for example, the initiative of a school where Tokelauan parents and teachers met on the school site for a series of Sunday seminars. A range of programmes has been shared on the Ministry of Education's website TKI (Te Kete Ipurangi) and, although they tend to focus on primary school programmes, these exemplify how schools have found ways to encourage parents to be part of the learning process. An example is the Parent Centre at Sylvia Parks where Pacific parents can call in to learn about their child's progress (Ministry of Education, Te Kete Ipurangi. n.d.). ERO (2012a) affirms that the schools which successfully developed links are those where collaboration has been prioritised and where the aim has been to help learners and their families be more proactive about tracking academic progress (ERO, 2012a).

A significant New Zealand programme which ran a number of initiatives (such as homework clubs, parent meetings, and parental access to school facilities) was the Pacific Islands School Community Parent Liaison Project (PISCPL). The PISCPL case study set out to evaluate aspects of the project in which a Pasifika community liaison co-ordinator worked in a cluster of four schools to increase family and community engagement in learning and promote learning outcomes for Pasifika students (Gorinski, 2005, p. 5). Findings indicated a number of positive benefits. Parents reported increased confidence and a sense of empowerment in their relationship to the school. Teachers reported improved relationships with parents and that students were more engaged in class.

However, the report also concluded that erratic and spasmodic funding has a negative impact on the sustainability for such programmes, and that successful home-school relationships result from the endeavours and commitment of individuals (such as a liaison officer) who set up, maintain, and strengthen the links between home, community, and school. Mutch and Collins (2012), in an evaluation of ERO's findings on home-school relationships, have drawn a similar conclusion in that these

relationships work best when schools demonstrate a strong vision and commitment to providing staff and resources for supporting relationships with parents.

As indicated here, there are a number of documented examples showing good practice in developing collaborative relationships with Pacific Island families in New Zealand schools. Key factors for success include the commitment from school personnel to work in partnership with families (Gorinski, 2005; Mutch & Collins, 2012), a willingness to develop genuine two-way communication, and a focus on goal-driven strategies (Bull et al., 2008; ERO, 2008c).

2.3.4 Issues surrounding the engagement of minority families – from a theoretical perspective.

Cummins (2001) expressed concern that intervention programmes to engage minority families may not necessarily encourage inclusiveness. The differences between the dominant culture of the school and the culture of the minority families can be considered under the umbrella term individualism/collectivism (Bochner, 1994). This term acknowledges that people who adhere to Western individualised values place importance on themselves as separate individuals who pursue personal goals; those who adhere to collectivist values are more responsive to the social context and the needs of others (Hofstede, 1983). According to Hofstede, different nationalities can be placed on a continuum between individualism at one end and collectivism at the other (Hofstede, 1983). He warns against ethnocentric management practices in organisations which fail to consider the different way people think according to their cultural heritage. School pedagogy and policies, albeit well intentioned, naturally reflect the language and culture of the dominant society although they may appear to be neutral. Minority students and their families can feel marginalised and disempowered by a school system which reflects the importance of the dominant culture through its policies and practices, even when they are intended to benefit minority families (Cummins, 1997).

Gjerde (2004) adds further substance to this viewpoint with his claim that the actual labelling of cultural groups has a negative impact on minority cultures. The reason he gives is that culture is not an objective reality but something that is constantly being remoulded by individuals as they create meaning through social interaction, drawing on their subjective experiences. Individuals, therefore, can re-interpret a particular culture in which they have been categorised. Gjerde gives the example of minority children who interact with each other and the adult world, thus adapting traditional cultural practices to the environment in which they find themselves. The problem of categorising individuals as belonging to a particular cultural group is that their individuality is overlooked through the label they are given. Gjerde (2004) argues that, regardless of good intentions, the discourse of the dominant culture maintains a position of power over minority cultures (p. 139).

The idea that cultural identities cannot always be clearly defined and are continually evolving is also something that has been considered by Leander, Phillips, and Taylor (2010). Leander et al. (2010) observe how schools are exposed to ever-changing cultural and social practices due to the migration of families, influences from the local community and the increasingly global social media. They argue that the school is no longer a self-contained space with its own value system embedded in the dominant discourse. Instead it is a place in which a range of cultural values and different social practices exist. Leander et al. (2010) warn educators not to exclude the experiences of learners and their families through a narrow perception of a dominant value system which does not recognise the cultural and social diversity existing within the school boundaries.

One way to examine the disconnection between the culture of the school and minority families is by considering “contested spaces and voices” (McMurphy-Pilkington, Bartholomew, & Greenwood, 2009). This New Zealand study investigated the mismatch between the culture of the home and school when exploring the perceptions of Maori parents’ involvement in their children’s achievement in Mathematics. They found it useful to consider the notion of space in order to contrast the different value systems of the parents and the school (Johnston, 2003, cited in

McMurchy-Pilkington et al., 2009). The notion of space, in this context, accepts the idea that individuals are likely to feel comfortable in a place which acknowledges their cultural beliefs, values, and practices. The challenge for teachers is to consider how to achieve such a place for minority culture parents on the school site, so that the values and practices of the parents are respected and are not overridden by values and practices of the school system (Johnston, 2010; McMurchy-Pilkington et al., 2009).

This section has illustrated how educational theorists and practitioners seek to address the complexities surrounding inequality in social interaction and seek solutions which empower minority families. They are aware that policy and strategies need to find a context that allows parents to participate where their voices can be heard; it is a context that takes into consideration the individual cultural values, practices and experiences of the parents (Berryman, Walker, Rewiti, O'Brien, & Weis, 2000). In this way the Ministry of Education's vision of "equal partnerships that respect and draw on the expertise of both parties" can be achieved (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 2).

2.4 A theoretical framework to explore contextual influences – Bronfenbrenner's ecological model

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model is a framework to consider how contexts can promote or deter the inclusiveness of minority families through the way in which these contexts interrelate. Bronfenbrenner developed his ecological model in the 1970s in reaction to work undertaken by psychologists which focussed on child development in isolation from the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). He continued to refine his model into the 1990s and argued that it served as a useful framework to support research on human development since it recognised the complex interplay of social and historical contexts which influence an individual's perception of the world (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012). He believed that it would,

"lead to further progress in discovering the processes and conditions that shape the course of human development" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 41).

Bronfenbrenner stated that human development takes place through an individual's reciprocal interaction with others in particular settings. If this particular interaction

occurs regularly, he named it a “proximal process” and he claimed that an individual’s development is influenced by the quality of the proximal process and by the environmental conditions in which it takes place. His argument followed that environmental conditions have the potential to enhance the quality of the proximal process and, vice versa, proximal processes have the potential to offset negative aspects from a contextual situation (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The use of his framework, he argued, can aid the researcher to understand specific detail about interaction which influences human development and this can then be used to help inform decisions around policy or particular programmes (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 41).

Bronfenbrenner envisaged an entire system of overlapping environments which support human development. The “microsystem” is the term Bronfenbrenner gave to the way individuals operate in specific settings, such as at school, home, or church. It is in these immediate environments that day-to-day interaction occurs and where proximal processes take place. Bronfenbrenner’s model acknowledges that these contextualised interactions have other contexts influencing them other than just the immediate setting in which they take place. For example, the “mesosystem” is the term he used to explain how different settings interrelate with one another, such as interaction which relates to a school setting but which actually take place in the home. He also referred to the “exosystem” to describe the wider contexts which impact upon individuals but indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986, 1994). An example of this, in relation to research on parents’ educational involvement, is educational policy and the curriculum which influence the direction of the student’s learning (Seginer, 2006, p. 32).

Bronfenbrenner also used the term “macrosystem” to refer to the overarching system of beliefs and values which are embedded in a culture or sub-culture. Bronfenbrenner (1994, p. 41) described this as a ‘societal blueprint’ which overrides and influences all other contexts and is a particularly significant component to discuss in terms of research with minority culture families (Vazquez-Nuttall, Li, & Kaplan, 2006). A final term Bronfenbrenner uses is the “chronosystem” to describe the impact of the passage of time on the development of individuals. This may include changes within the individual; for example, during the different stages of a child’s education as they

transition through their school years. However, Bronfenbrenner also acknowledges the effect of historical events which occur within families (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1994); for example, the effects of migration to a new country.

Bronfenbrenner's model considers a complexity of different contexts which interrelate and influence how individuals think and act. Individuals adapt and evolve according to their perception of these environmental factors, which directly or indirectly impact upon them (Hook, 2009). An advantage of using this model, therefore, is that it can help determine how educational programmes can best adapt environmental conditions to suit the needs of the individual (Berryman et al., 2000). For this reason, this model has been adopted by some educational theorists in their exploration of home-school relationships in order to gauge what environmental factors contribute to effective parental involvement.

Vazquez-Nuttall, Li, and Kaplan (2006) elected to use this framework to analyse home-school partnerships with culturally-diverse families in order to gauge what obstacles impeded teachers from an American urban school engaging with parents of a Hmong student from a rural setting. The researchers observed meetings between the teacher, principal and a Hmong family (from South East Asia) in an urban American school. Misunderstandings in the conversation resulted not just from language issues but from the gap between the agricultural background of the family and the way the school staff operated within American mainstream culture. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was used to show how, at the macrosystem level, the Hmong family had switched from a collective, agricultural way of life to an individualistic society. This affected the family's ability to understand expectations from the school, for example - not knowing how to respond to a letter sent home.

Another instance is the research of Stewart (2007) who also used Bronfenbrenner's framework to investigate factors which contributed to African American students' high school achievement. The model helped to locate individual, family, and school level variables which influenced student achievement. Stewart has recommended this model to schools so they can develop effective policy to engage minority learners through an examination of the different contextual influences which impact upon

them. She concluded that the microsystem and mesosystem contexts were most influential. Although student effort is individually-driven, external factors modify how students approach their studies. Since, according to Bronfenbrenner, individuals develop through interaction in different contexts, it is the quality of these interactions which can support academic progress. Stewart (2007) found in her research that important factors in the development of student engagement came from positive relationships with teachers and peers, along with academic-related discussions with parents in the home.

In summary, researchers have adopted Bronfenbrenner's model as an approach to investigating parental involvement with minority families since it can help to isolate a range of environmental factors which influence individuals' perceptions which, in turn, influence the quality of interaction. An appreciation of these environmental factors, therefore, can help direct schools to consider best practice for promoting equitable and collaborative interaction in home-school relationships.

2.5 Conclusion

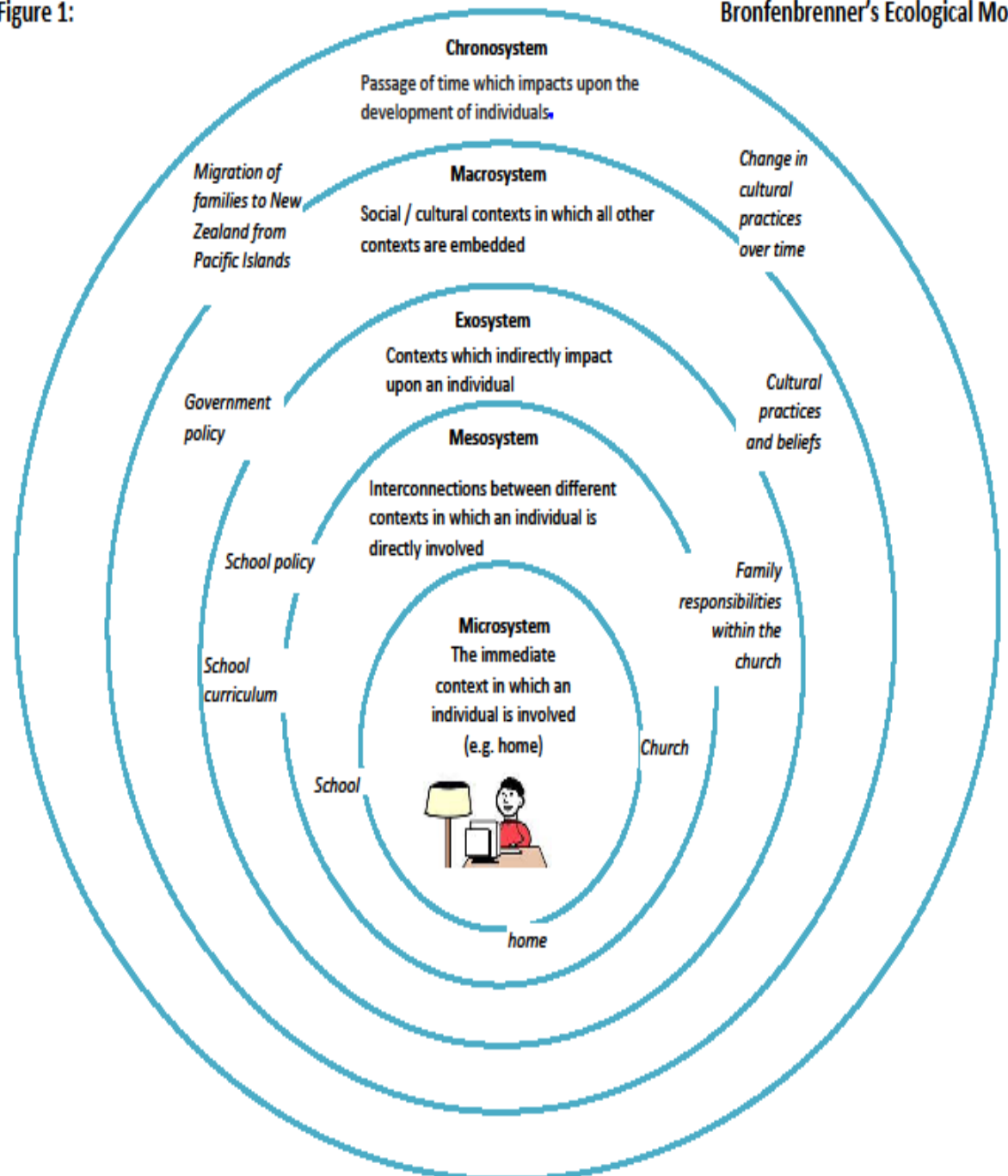
This chapter has highlighted the importance for schools to involve parents in collaborative, reciprocal relationships in order to support students' academic progress (Bull et al., 2008; Cummins, 2001; Ministry of Education, 2011). It has established the benefit for students in terms of engagement and motivation when well-informed parents provide positive guidance and encouragement (Anderman et al., 2011; Bandura, 2009; Catsambis, 2001; Fan et al., 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schunk & Parajes, 2002). Although research in New Zealand indicates a desire from Pacific Island parents to be more involved in their children's education (Amituanai-Toloa, McNaughton, Lai, & Arini, 2009; ERO, 2008c; Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, Tufulasi Taleni, & O'Regan, 2008;), parents have reported that they are not always comfortable at relating to the school system (Fletcher et al., 2008). Parents may feel marginalised in an education system which reflects the importance of the dominant culture over their own (Cummins, 1997).

Bronfenbrenner's model is a useful framework for establishing what contextual influences affect interaction between teachers, parents, and students and it could act

as a guide for establishing good practice in building positive home-school relationships with Pacific Island families. I have, therefore, chosen to adopt this model as a framework for analysis of my data in order to gain an understanding of the participants' perceptions of the parental role in the learning process. (See Fig 1 p.39.)

Figure 1:

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This investigation has used a qualitative phenomenological approach in order to examine the perceptions which Pacific Island parents and students have of the parental role in the learning process. The investigation addressed two key questions:

- How do Pacific parents and students perceive the parents' communication role when parents and students interact at home about the students' academic progress?
- How do Pacific parents and students perceive the parents' communication role when parents and teachers interact at school about the students' academic progress?

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section starts with an explanation of the methodology, showing why it was the most appropriate route to take in order to elicit meaningful data. Then an explanation of my position as a researcher follows and this leads onto the need to be culturally responsive in the design and execution of the study. The second section describes the actual process used for data gathering, highlighting issues which arose when putting this methodology design into practice, and examining how these issues, themselves, helped to contribute to the findings.

3.2 Part One – Explanation of methodology from a theoretical and personal perspective

3.2.1 A qualitative phenomenological approach.

In order to understand the perceptions of the Pacific Island students and their parents, a qualitative approach was essential. Qualitative researchers focus on the natural world, and assume that an understanding of human experience can be gained by exploring the contexts in which individuals interact. Recording complex and contextualised social interactions helps them to approach an understanding of the

meanings that the participants attribute to these interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 2; Richards, 2005). Researchers use interpretative skills to understand the data and results emerge through an iterative and reflective process (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). This study employed the qualitative techniques of interviews and focus groups in order to gain some insight into what the participants might be meaning.

Specifically, a phenomenological approach was adopted in this study. Essentially, this is where the researcher attempts to understand how the participant makes sense of the world. It is done by relating (as a fellow human being) to the experiences which the participant describes; and then by analysing and interpreting what has been said (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2004). The researcher moves beyond the description of the actual experiences in order to discover the meanings behind them. It requires a thorough approach so that the researcher can gain insight into a world where participants may not necessarily express what they are really thinking (Smith & Osborn, 2004), or may not be consciously aware of the thought processes which underlie their experiences (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2004). The researcher searches initially for significant statements and meanings given by the participants before progressing to look for emergent themes (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) and, although the data deals with the subjective world of thoughts and feelings, Giorgi and Giorgi (2004) argue that it requires an objective and rational method for collating, organising, and analysing the findings.

Husserl (as cited in Heap & Roth, 1973) was recognised as the founder of the phenomenology movement and coined the term “intersubjectivity” to explain how this process of data gathering can work. He argued that our understanding of the world is moulded by our subjective view of it. We gain knowledge of our surroundings through our subjective experiences of them and our subjective experiences are displayed through the way we behave. We can understand what someone else is thinking because we employ the same mechanisms of comprehending the world as them. We know how we behave when we are thinking something so, by observing someone else’s behaviour, we can gauge what they must be thinking too (Zahavi, 2001). However, to do this, we must “bracket away” or suspend our own assumptions and

beliefs in order to break down or “reduce” our observations of the other until we arrive at the very essence of what the other is thinking (Heap & Roth, 1973; Husserl, 1927; Sadala & Adorno, 2002).

This concept of obtaining rational findings based on the subjective world of individuals has come under much discussion in the world of research and philosophy. As Coelho and Figueiredo (2003) ask: how far is it possible for us to perceive what others feel? It is particularly complicated given that we may unconsciously transmit thoughts and feelings which we did not know we had; or have thoughts and feelings whose origin we are unaware of. This, of course, applies not only to the participants, but to the researcher as well. However, in phenomenology the similarity between the way researchers and participants think is at the core of this research methodology.

An important skill for a phenomenological researcher is the ability to empathise – to experience the feelings, thoughts, and beliefs of the participant in a like manner (Zahavi, 2001). Finlay (2005) has refined a research practice called “reflexive embodied empathy” which she believes takes the principle of empathy to a heightened level so that it closely knits the thoughts of the participant with that of the investigator. She describes a three-layered approach which the researcher can use, alternating between the different layers in a fluid and subtle manner. On one level, one should put aside personal views and assumptions about the world in order to empathise with and learn the world view of the participant. At another level, one makes an imaginative transposition, temporarily taking on the other’s emotions and feelings, to try and relive those same experiences as if they were your own. By reporting back these perceptions of what the participant may be thinking and feeling, it is possible to clarify to a degree if these perceptions are accurate. Finally, the third layer suggests such a thorough immersion in the data that, for a brief period, it is not possible to separate the thoughts of “I”, the investigator, from those of the “other”, the one being investigated.

Finlay (2005) credits the third layer of her approach to the philosopher, Merleau-Ponty, who believed in the idea that it is through our body that we experience the

world; and as we use our bodily faculties to make sense of something else or someone else (e.g. touch someone's arm), we are also subject to the same process from someone else (e.g. someone can touch our arm). It means that we are simultaneously a subject who perceives others and an object for others to perceive (Baldwin, 2004; Finlay, 2005; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). An extension of this argument is that, just as we are capable of perceiving others, we can use the same process reflectively and see ourselves as others might do. If we can make judgements about how others might perceive us, we are equally able to look at others and make judgements about how they might perceive themselves (Zahavi, 2001). Hence, the perceiving of others as they perceive us becomes an intertwined process in which we engage to make sense of the world. Acknowledging this philosophical viewpoint reminds us that, just as the researcher is interpreting the world of the participants, the participants are also reflecting on the world of the researcher. Just as I, a researcher with a European perspective, interpret the world of Pacific Island participants, they too are interpreting my world and responding to me according to their perception of it.

Phenomenology, when viewed from a hermeneutic perspective, accepts that researchers bring personal bias into their work (Wilcke, 2002). It acknowledges that researcher and participant come together to produce data which has evolved from a collaborative process of constructing meaning. Researchers need to be aware of their own role in the data-making process; they need to engage in reflexivity where they consider any prejudices and beliefs which might colour their findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). As Richards (2005, p. 42) puts it, "You yourself are part of what you are studying" and as the research journey unfolds, it is not only an understanding of the participants which evolves but a process of self-understanding too (Findlay, 2005).

In summary, data gathering for this study was undertaken from a phenomenological perspective. The aim was to uncover the thoughts, both conscious and unconscious, of participants, and produce rich and insightful data. The data gathering process is also a personal journey of discovery and, therefore, it is necessary to state my position as a researcher since it is integral to the overall process. It is particularly important to

do so as a cross-cultural researcher and I need to address any potential tensions which may arise out of this situation.

3.2.2 My position as researcher.

I arrived in New Zealand five years ago with a considerable history in both secondary teaching and adult education behind me. I embarked upon an academic path in New Zealand for a number of reasons, but largely because, despite my years of teaching experience, I felt something of an outsider in the education system which I had joined. I had to learn a new school system and a new curriculum; I had to adjust to nuances in the language and social situations. (For example, if I bring a plate, does that mean I have to put something on it?) I thought that if I engaged in academic study, I could better understand and become a part of the new world into which I had entered.

I soon learnt that there was a minority culture from the Pacific Islands whose young people, along with the Maori population, were deemed to be underachievers in the school system. I learnt that this was causing government concern, particularly since the Pacific Island population is rising in New Zealand. My interest evolved into a desire to develop my knowledge further. On one level, this was a culture (or group of Pacific Island cultures) to which a number of my students belonged and I did not know much about them. This was something I needed to remedy. However, on a deeper level, I sensed a connection; I also understood what it was like to be part of the education system in which I could not fully engage since unfamiliarity left me feeling disadvantaged and less confident than I might otherwise have been. It led me to wonder how well the dominant culture of the school, where I was teaching, was meeting the needs of its minority culture Pacific Island students so that they could be confident and engaged learners.

In addition, my years of working in adult education in the United Kingdom have encouraged me to think beyond the immediate life of the students at school. I have worked in the field of adult literacy and seen, first hand, how intelligent individuals can fall through the school system and come away from their years spent in education with minimal academic success, discovering that opportunities in the workplace and

elsewhere are denied them as a result. My experiences have left me not only with the awareness that the education system can fail some people and but also with a personal ambition to address unfairness if I am able to do so. Moreover, my experiences of working with adults showed me the cyclical nature of educational success within families. If parents are in the situation where they are unable to support or encourage their children with their schooling, there is a danger that the children, themselves, lose out academically. I concluded that any research I undertook needed a holistic approach which involved the family since home support, I believe, plays a critical role in student academic success.

What began as an academic and interesting exercise has evolved into a piece of work with much greater significance. In all meetings with my participants I have been humbled by the respect which I have been afforded. Through the conduct of focus groups and interviews, I came to realise that I was capturing the voices of a group of people who had very strong views but who also felt that their voices went unheard within the school system. Parent meetings frequently ran beyond the expected duration as parents placed their trust in me, opening up and asking for answers to fix what they perceived were problems. It has confirmed the appropriateness of my methodology since I have, indeed, captured the voices of my participants. However, it has also positioned me as a researcher with an advocacy role to represent their voices as they would wish to be represented.

Initially, it may seem that, with only five years' experience of living in New Zealand, I am limited in my understanding of the complexities surrounding the education of Pacific Island peoples in this country. The danger is that, in the course of my investigation, I may have been insensitive to cultural issues or may have overlooked potentially important data through ignorance. However, I believe an advantage for me is that I have been able to exercise reflexivity with an open mind that has not been filled with presumptions and beliefs derived from the experience of growing up in New Zealand or from belonging to a Pacific Island culture myself. Viewed from this perspective, my European culture can be seen an advantage since it enables me to be accepting of culturally different values without pre-conceived ideas.

3.2.3 A culturally-responsive approach.

Nevertheless, regardless of the opportunity afforded by my background to be open-minded, a researcher who engages in Pacific Island research must still be mindful about engaging in “Western” methods for collecting and analysing the data. It can potentially limit the value of the investigation since the findings might reflect the researcher’s interpretation, established through the lens of the dominant culture, rather than the participants’ perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This danger is evident in the collaborative process of data gathering between the researcher and participant, and one in which the researcher needs to be aware of her own slant on the findings (Richards, 2005). McFall-McCaffery (2010) states clearly, in her advice on how to conduct Pasifika research, that it must follow a design model which reflects the perspectives of Pacific peoples. Anae (2010) goes further by strongly criticising the ability of existing research to make a difference because it has failed to consider the “cultural complexities” of the Pasifika population in New Zealand (Anae, 2010).

It appears that researchers have marginalised the effectiveness of their research by treating the Pasifika population as a homogeneous group. Instead, researchers should consider, not just the particular Pacific country or countries with which an individual identifies, but a range of other cultural factors which influence how this person thinks and operates. Cultural diversity is reflected, for example, through age, sex, and social-economic factors; it is reflected through status as a migrant or as someone New Zealand born, through religion and the church, and through cross-cultural relationships (Anae, 2010; Coxon et al., 2002). Research, which specifically considers the diversity of Pasifika culture, demonstrates more ably an understanding of participants’ perspectives and viewpoints.

One way to achieve this understanding is through the incorporation of the philosophical and methodological approach *Teu le va*, which is a Samoan system for negotiating and understanding social relationships (Airini, Anae, Mila-Schaaf, Coxon, Mara, & Sanga, 2010; Anae, 2010). The fundamental principle of this is that the “*va*” or space between people should be valued and nurtured so that social relationships

unfold in a respectful and meaningful way. It recognises that people are spiritual beings and every endeavour should be made in interaction to ensure a positive outcome which values each participant's contribution. When following Teu le va, it reminds individuals to follow appropriate etiquette and protocol so that a harmonious space in the relationship is achieved. This approach highlights the Samoan concept of "self" and helps to illustrate the view that the "self" exists in relation to others and not as an isolated being.

Similarly, Talanoa is another Pacific approach which researchers can adopt to help them be more aware of the participants' perspectives (Vaiotei, 2006). Talanoa is Tongan in origin but, Vaiotei argues, it is suitable for Pacific research in general. It supports the same concept as Teu le va in that meaningful conversations with participants can only be gained through the development of respectful relationships. Talanoa means literally "talking about nothing in particular" (Vaiotei, 2006, p. 23) and shows that meaningful, collaborative relationships stem from the oral tradition of face-to-face conversation where participants share their experiences and ideas in a free-flowing manner. At the start the researcher explains the purpose of the meeting and allows talk to follow. The meeting can finish when conversation starts to repeat itself, indicating there is no new territory to uncover.

What is particularly useful for a non-Pasifika researcher is the guidance on how to achieve meaningful talk and Vaiotei recommends protocol (such as dress code and the appropriateness of food) to help strengthen the relationship between the researcher and the participants in order to achieve trust and a reciprocal conversation. Trust is reinforced in the way the researcher is accountable to the participants for data obtained and, in return for time given by the participants, factors consultation and feedback of results into the research process. It is, in fact, the strength of the relationship that provides valuable data. From a Western methodological approach, the subjectivity of the researcher may appear to jeopardise the validity of the research but from a Pasifika perspective, Vaiotei argues, it enhances the trustworthiness of the data; a level of accountability is achieved in conversation between the participants and

researcher as they check each other's understanding and interpretation of what has been said.

Vaioleti (2006) and Otsuka (2005) both give a warning to the researcher using a Talanoa approach. Should participants sense the researcher has misunderstood them, they may deliberately feed incorrect information to bring the conversation to a halt or give affirmation without further thought. The researcher needs to operate in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner, seeking to understand the diverse backgrounds of her participants, so that reliable data can be achieved through face-to-face meetings.

It is not just at the data-gathering stage but also in the analysis that a culturally responsive approach should be adopted. The use of the Ethnic Inter-Face Model attributed to Samu, 1998 and 2006, is proffered as an effective way to guide the researcher through the process (Airini et al., 2010; Anae, 2010; Coxon et al., 2002). This model encourages the researcher to be aware of the cultural make-up of the participants and note how this affects their interaction with the institution in which the study is contextualised. For example, in a school setting, aspects like the curriculum, assessment procedures, and school systems are all factors which learners have to negotiate. This interplay between the learner and the contextual situation is a dynamic relationship and should be reflected in how the researcher collects and interprets data. The Cube Model (Sasao & Sue, 1993, cited in Anae, 2010, p. 10) goes further in that it recommends the researcher see a dynamic, three-dimensional relationship between the research questions, the methodology employed, and the complex cultural factors such as those highlighted in the Ethnic Inter-Face Model. The recognition of a connectedness between these three areas should influence both the design and the findings of the study. The benefit of triangulating the study in this way is that it avoids researchers making generalised assumptions about the participants and helps clarify participants' perceptions.

In the light of recommendations for a holistic approach which takes into account the social and cultural context of the participant, the use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological

model is a useful tool to guide analysis. This model is compatible with a phenomenological outlook, since it recognises that insight can be gained into individuals' thought processes through their interaction with others as they adapt to the environmental context (Hook, 2009). As discussed in Chapter Two, the individual operates within a multi-layered structure (as illustrated in Figure 1), showing the complexity of the social and cultural contexts which act upon us and influence the way we behave both consciously and unconsciously (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The decision to incorporate this model into the methodology, therefore, was made so it could help guide emerging themes and help locate communication issues when individuals from a minority culture operate within the dominant culture system.

3.3 Part Two – Explanation of methodology from a practical perspective

3.3.1 Context.

The setting for this study is the high school where I have been teaching since my arrival in New Zealand. It is a decile 9 school on the outskirts of a New Zealand city and has a school population of over 1400 students covering a range of ethnicities. In the 2012 Education Review Office (ERO) report, the ethnic composition was stated as 57% NZ European/Pakeha, 16% Maori, 14% Asian, 12% Pacific Island, and 1% other ethnic groups. Currently, the majority of Pacific Island students at the school are Samoan (approximately 44% of the total Pacific Island population) and the remaining students are Tongan, Tokelauan, Niuean, Cook Island Māori, and Fijian. The college has started to consider its approach to Pasifika students and has, for example, held a careers evening for the students and their families. A focus group of teachers is currently working on an inquiry into Pasifika engagement and achievement. There is currently one Pasifika teacher aide at the school and no Pasifika teachers. The Pasifika teacher aide runs the school Polynesian club which prepares to perform in the regional Polyfest event where elements of Pacific culture are celebrated through performances.

Of note is teachers' belief that Pasifika families send their children here because it does not have a Pasifika-majority population and does have higher academic credentials than adjacent schools. This belief is consistent with information from the

2012 ERO report which stated that both Maori and Pasifika students performed better in 2011 at levels 1, 2, and 3 compared to national figures in NCEA performance for these cohorts of students (ERO, 2012b, p. 5). Furthermore, the 2006 ERO report stated the Pasifika student population at the school was 5% of the overall population whilst the 2009 ERO report stated the figure was 10%. Given that the population rose to 12% (ERO, 2012b), it does suggest that an increasing number of Pacific Island families are choosing to send their children to the school and a likely factor could indeed be its academic reputation.

3.3.2 Recruitment plan for participants and cultural advisors.

The recruitment plan for participants and for cultural advisors for this study was ultimately successful although it was a challenging process that required adaption on my part. I learnt that prospective participants and advisors were busy people who responded more positively to personal phone calls than they did to written correspondence. This recruitment process gave me an indication of some of the barriers that might prevent some families from attending school meetings.

To allow for a detailed analysis of transcripts it was important to select a small and manageable number of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2004). The plan was to recruit approximately six Pacific Island parents (or caregivers) whose senior-aged children attended the college, and also approximately six Pacific Island senior students. The decision to base this study around senior students was twofold: firstly, these students were likely to have more experience of the school system with an increased awareness of NCEA; and secondly, one could anticipate a degree of maturity and reflection in the articulation of their ideas. Although a perfect match would be to see all the parents of all the student participants, a degree of flexibility was required since, practically, it was not possible to recruit all family members. It was also desirable to include a variety of Pacific backgrounds and a mixture of parents who were either born in New Zealand or who were migrants to the country to reflect the variety of cultural backgrounds of families within the school.

Also since the quality of the data depended upon the ability to make successful connections with Pacific Island participants (Otsuka, 2005; Vaioleti, 2006), I made a decision to incorporate a cultural advisor role. This decision stemmed, firstly, from an awareness of the difficulty in requesting participation by letter since this would appear distant and formal. Someone known to the community (such as the local pastor) could approach families on my behalf and assist with the introductions and help establish links. Using a link from the community avoided making a direct request and potentially putting pressure on students and their families to accept because, as a teacher, I was seen to be in a position of authority.

Secondly, there was potential for problematic interaction with participants due to misunderstandings. Knowledge of the concept of Teu le Va was a reminder that respectful relationships was a priority (Airini et al., 2010; Anae, 2010), as was knowledge of Talanoa so that trust and reciprocity could be achieved through free-flowing conversation (Otsuka, 2005; Vaioleti, 2006). The recruitment of cultural advisors would help in advising on protocol when communicating with participants and also on sharing an understanding of Pasifika-related issues so that (without directly sharing data with them) a better understanding in the analysis of findings could be reached.

In summary, the plan for recruitment was to employ a snowball technique (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), where the recruitment of participants would be initiated through the establishment of cultural advisors and follow-up could happen once initial contact had been established. Once contact had been made with an individual, it was possible that this person could recommend another and this would continue until such time there were sufficient numbers of participants.

3.3.3 Data Collection Plan.

There were two major benefits to using focus groups as a source of data collection: firstly, a more relaxed and natural discussion can take place than might be found in a one-to-one interview; and secondly, individuals often find it easier to voice their opinion when they have been listening to others' (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In

order to establish familiarity with the background of the participants, the participants would complete a questionnaire when they attended the focus groups. The plan was to then conduct follow-up interviews with approximately three parents and three students who, ideally, would be children of the parents already interviewed. It would then be possible to explore similarities and differences in perceptions of the learning process between parent and child from the same family. This was a realistic number of interviews for the time frame.

Semi-structured questions were planned for both the focus groups and interviews in order to allow a flexible approach for following up on areas of interest (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Also it was important to allow enough free flow of conversation as recommended in Talanoa since this could lead to more insightful, critical discussion (Vaioleti, 2006). Furthermore, the conversation needed to nurture relationships, allowing time for individuals to feel comfortable and know that their opinion was valued. From a Talanoa perspective, it was helpful to nurture collaborative discussion, allowing participants to share their experiences and knowledge, as this was an important ingredient in achieving cross-cultural research (Otsuma, 2005).

3.3.4 The recruitment and data collection process.

Qualitative research requires a degree of flexibility so that the research design can be adapted according to circumstances (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Richards, 2005). This proved to be the case in the actual recruitment of participants where it was necessary to employ sensitivity when making contact and to amend procedures as appropriate. One issue in establishing cultural advisors occurred in explaining who I was and why I needed support with recruitment. My method seemed unusual to some Pacific Island individuals. For example, a member of the local Pasifika business community said he thought it was odd not to directly request participation and saw no issue over power dynamics. However, an administrative employee for one of the local churches embraced the idea and initiated contact with three families, two of which suggested family members for the research. Interestingly, the third family declined.

A further issue impacted upon the smooth recruitment process of participants. Parents and members from the community proved very hard to get hold of. Emails were not responded to, telephone calls were not returned, and return slips from information letters were generally not sent back, despite the supply of a stamped-addressed-envelope. For this reason, a teacher colleague, who was working very successfully with Pacific Island students, helped by making initial contact with some of them. This worked well and enabled the recruitment of a further family. Also, I was able to speak to three individual students with whom I had had previous contact as a teacher. I was very careful not to give the impression of coercion and all were delighted to be included with the mother of one of these students also joining the parent focus group. It showed that the students responded well to personal connection and this is what prompted their participation.

The lack of communication from families throughout the recruitment procedure meant that I was uncertain about the final numbers for both the parent and the student focus groups. Two student focus groups were held in the end. On both occasions, I directly invited six students and requested they bring a friend. Only three students turned up for the first group and twelve for the second. A factor, which may explain the increase in numbers, is that students had now heard about the research and were interested in finding out more. Likewise, the attendance pattern for the parents was also unpredictable. Having rung around all the parents for the focus group, the positive response to attend was overwhelming and it appeared there would be about twenty participants. In the end, five turned up and it was a most successful evening. Again, it was clear that personal connection ensured attendance. Three students, whom I had already interviewed, prompted their parents to make sure they attended. One of these parents brought her neighbour. Another parent, whose recruitment was the result of snowballing from other participants and who had confirmed attendance with a reply slip, did not actually attend. However, he was still willing to participate and I was able to interview him on a subsequent occasion.

Likewise a degree of flexibility was required in the interview process which followed the focus groups. Since the parents were so enthusiastic and supportive of the

research topic, it was appropriate to adopt an inclusive approach to follow-up interviews. However, some were busy and I conducted follow-up interviews with the parents who were able to give me some extra time. Similarly, flexibility was required with the student interviews. In total, four students were interviewed: two of these students had parent participants and the other two had expressed a strong desire to be involved in the research although their parents had not come forward to participate. I also planned to see a further two students since I had interviewed their parents but these students did not attend interviews (one being very busy with other commitments and the other failing to turn up). However, both had previously committed to focus groups and expressed ideas in this context so it was still possible to match their perception with that of their parents.

A flexible approach was required in the conduct of all the focus groups and interviews as it was hard to keep to prepared questions. The parents, in particular, wanted to share their stories and discuss ideas which were significant and important to them. Students spoke more readily when they could talk about their experiences of the classroom before relaxing enough to talk about conversations with their parents. The principles of Talanoa helped direct the conversation and this approach enabled me to gather rich data.

The recruitment and data collection process prompted tentative findings. As a result of the conversation with a potential cultural advisor, I considered how my view of power dynamics possibly differed from that of Pacific Island people and thought this required further investigation. Another factor was the problematic nature of communication which, I soon learnt, was not due to lack of interest. Participants welcomed my research and gave a lot of time talking to me both on the phone and in person. However, their passivity in responding to contact was something else which required further exploration and it was clear that both parents and students juggled a lot of commitments in their daily lives which affected not only their availability but also their willingness to communicate.

Finally, and significantly, the response I received through making personal connections with participants endorsed what I had learnt from Teu Le Va and Talanoa, showing that it was indeed through the successful establishment of relationships that meaningful data was going to be generated. So, although it proved very hard to make arrangements with participants, personal contact was appreciated and participants responded with warmth and openness in face-to-face discussions.

3.3.5 Participants.

Table 2 presents an overview of the parent participants. (See p.61). A quick examination shows that, as hoped, a mixture of New Zealand born and New Zealand migrants was achieved, as was a variety of Pacific cultures with an even distribution of mothers and fathers. An added advantage was that a mixture in educational backgrounds was also achieved since three of the parents had professional qualifications whilst the remaining three did not have formal qualifications.

Table 3 presents an overview of the student participants. (See p.62). The large number results from the surprise attendance of twelve students at the second focus group. One other student did attend this group but declined to complete any paperwork and was reluctant to contribute. A balance of male and female students was achieved with a mixture of cultural identities. An initial inspection shows how busy their lives were. For example, eleven of the fifteen participants had three or more siblings and four of them stated that their households also had members of the extended family living at home. (This does not include the two students who lived with grandparents rather than parents). It was also evident that church life played an important part in their lives and most students enjoyed a range of co-curricular activities (with only one student showing no interest in any activities). The busy lives of the students meant that they were often unavailable at lunchtime or after school and this accounted, to some extent, why it was so hard to organise meetings with them.

Only one of the students (who attended the second focus group) was a migrant to New Zealand; the remainder were New Zealand born. This can probably be linked to the participants' report that Pacific Island languages were diminishing amongst the

families. Only five of the fifteen students claimed to speak a Pacific language at home although a further five did claim to have some knowledge of the language of their culture. Five students said they could only speak English. A similar observation could be made amongst the parent participants: three out of the four New Zealand born parents only spoke English. This issue of familiarity with Pacific languages was explored by the parents in the focus group.

3.3.6 Cultural Advisors.

The Cook Island Maori teacher aide assisted with protocol for meetings. Focus groups opened and closed with prayers and refreshments were provided. I was grateful to know that I had been advised appropriately so that communication with participants was conducted in a culturally sensitive manner.

A teaching colleague within the school also provided assistance. Although not Pasifika herself, her work with this cohort of students meant that she could assist with recruitment and contacts in the community. Likewise, the deputy principal of the school became a cultural advisor and was able to share ideas since Pacific students were part of his portfolio of responsibility.

Finally, I was very grateful to a student who linked me not only with her Fijian pastor but also to a Samoan member of her church who works for the Ministry of Education. Discussions with these individuals helped develop my understanding of Pacific Island migrants in New Zealand and their conversations supported the direction of analysis of data.

Table 2: Profile of Parent Participants

Relation to senior child at college	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Mother	Father
Cultural identity	Tokelaun	Samoaan	Tongan	Tongan	Samoaan and Cook Island Maori	Tokelaun / Tuvaluan	Tuvaluan
Languages spoken	English (only a little Tokelaun)	English	Tongan (at home) and English	Tongan (at home) and English	English	English is the main language but can also some speak Tokelaun and Cook	English and Tuvalu
New Zealand born / economic migrant	New Zealand born	New Zealand born	New Zealand migrant	New Zealand migrant	New Zealand born	New Zealand born	New Zealand migrant
Educational background	No formal qualifications	No formal qualifications	Various university courses in New Zealand	Degree from New Zealand university	No formal qualifications	Attended the same college which her son now attends	New Zealand university education
Occupation	Stay-at-home mother	Technician	Administration, now at home caring for family	Accountant Church pastor	Part-time administrator	Registered nurse	General practitioner
No of children	5	5	4	4	4	1	3
Senior child participated in research	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participated in focus group	Yes	No	Yes (with husband below)	Yes (with wife above)	Yes	Yes	No
Interviewed	Yes, with husband	Yes, with wife	Yes	No	No	No – moved to Australia soon after focus group	Yes

Table 3: Profile of Student Participants

Coding	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sex	M	F	M	M	M	F
Year group	12	13	13	12	12	13 repeating
Age	16	17	17	15	17	18
Cultural identity	Tokelaun Samoaan	Tongan	Cook Island Maori Samoaan	Cook Island Maori Tokelaun	Tuvaluan Samoan Tokelaun Irish	Fijian
Languages spoken	English	English Tongan at home	English	English (some Cook Island Maori and Tokelaun)	Tuvalu, English, Samoan	English
New Zealand born	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Household occupants	Parents, 5 children, and grandparents	Parents, aunt, cousin, 3 children	Parents and 4 children	Parents (mother now in Australia)	Parents, 3 children and 2 cousins	Parents and one daughter
Siblings	Eldest of 5	Youngest of 4	Eldest of 4	Only child	Eldest of 3	Second eldest of 3
Interviewed	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Participated in a focus group	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parental participation	Mother attended focus group	Mother and father attended focus group	Mother attended focus group	Mother attended focus group	Father interviewed	No
Church and other co-curricular activities	Church every week, Fitness group, Rugby	Church every Sunday, Church youth group, Girls brigade, School choir, Netball, School Polynesian club	Church three times a week, Youth group, Church band	Church every Sunday, Church youth group, Volleyball, School Polynesian club	Church every Sunday, Church youth group	Church 4 times a week, Church youth groups

Coding	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Sex	F	M	F	F	M	M	F	F
Year Group	12	12	13	13	13	13	13	12
Age	16	16	17	17	17	16	17	16
Cultural identity	Tongan	Samoaan	Samoaan	Samoaan	Samoaan	Samoaan	Samoaan / Tokelaun	Multi-cultural
Languages Spoken	English (some Tongan)	English, Samoaan	English (some-times Samoaan)	English	Samoaan, English	English (sometimes Samoaan)	English (a little Tokelaun / Samoaan)	English
New Zealand born	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Household occupant	Parents and 4 children	Parents and 6 children	Parents and one daughter	Parents and 4 children	Grandparents, aunt, and 5 children	Parents, 4 children, aunt, and uncle	Parents and 2 children	Grandfather, mother, and daughter
Siblings	Second eldest of 4	Third eldest of 6	Only child	Second youngest of 7	Eldest of 6	Second eldest of 4	Second youngest of 4	No siblings
Interviewed	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Participated in a focus_group	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parental participation	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Church and other co-curricular activities	Church every Sunday, choir, School Polygroup	Church every week, School choir, School barbershop quartet	Church every Sunday, Youth group, P I sports group, Gospel choir, Rugby, School Polynesian Club	Church every Saturday	Church two times a week, Church youth group, Basketball, Barbershop, School church group	Church every Sunday, Youth group, Rugby, Gospel choir, Church leadership group	Church – irregular attendance, Church youth group, School Polynesian group	None

Coding	15
Sex	M
Year Group	13
Age	17
Cultural Identity	Samoaan
Languages Spoken	Samoaan
New Zealand born	Born in American
Household occupant	Mother and son
Siblings	No siblings
Interviewed	No
Participated in a focus group	Yes
Parental participation	No
Church and other co-curricular activities	Church once or twice a week, Church youth group, Rugby 1 st XV, Volleyball, School Poly Club

3.3.7 The analysis of data.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a useful tool for understanding how individuals are making sense of their personal and social world but the detailed exploration of transcripts via this method can take a long time (Smith & Osborn, 2004), particularly when analysis includes time to listen to recordings in order to interpret intonation, pauses, and body gestures which are not directly recorded in the transcripts (Rapley, 2007). However, it is through this immersion in the material that themes and patterns emerge to form the basis of findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This was achieved through a number of key steps which were mainly chronological but overlapped as I engaged with the data, revisiting and re-appraising earlier observations and decisions.

Analysis of data began by noting initial descriptions and interpretations of participants' thoughts before making more detailed observations and decisions about emerging themes. The aim was to be as open minded as possible. Only after an initial immersion in some of the data, was it possible to establish four main categories – communication, hope and aspiration, church and family, and personality traits – into which the emerging themes could be slotted. In this way, the categories grew from the data and were part of an inductive, reflective process.

The category of *communication* was formed to reflect parents' views. They wanted to improve conversations with their children and with the school about learning, and they specifically hoped this research would find solutions to obstacles which they perceived

blocked this three-way process. An example of a theme placed in this category was one called *trust and honesty* as these were specific words which parents used to express what they considered important in their conversations about learning.

A further category was called *hope and aspiration*; these were words used to sum up a collection of ideas relating to the parents' desire to secure financial stability for their children through education. This covered a variety of themes, often using parents' vocabulary again. For example, the theme *struggle and hardship* was placed into this category as it reflected the language parents used in their endeavour to forge a better life for their children.

A third category was called *church and family* and reflected the commitment participants gave to both these areas. This category subdivided into a theme relating to church and one relating to family but these themes interconnected in the way that church was perceived as an extension of the family. Both themes showed the importance of a group identity for my participants.

For the final category, a generic term *personality traits* included a range of themes either relating to how participants felt about themselves or what they considered were important personal attributes. For example, the theme *shame and disappointment* emerged due to the regularity with which these words were used to describe emotions participants felt; and the theme *respect* emerged due to the emphasis participants gave to this as a core value to guide behaviour and attitudes.

With broad categories in place, it was possible to work through all the data, continuing to discover emerging themes and gather relevant quotes as evidence. On completion, there was a sizeable number of quotes to support each key theme. However, a further heading *other* was used to collect quotes and ideas about anything that was interesting but not compatible with existing themes. This prompted a search for any deviant cases which might suggest incorrect assumptions had been made and this process helped to confirm the validity of findings.

3.3.8 Ensuring trustworthiness.

An issue for qualitative researchers is how to show rigour in the construction of findings which are not grounded in scientific, objective investigations (Cho & Trent, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Shenton, 2004). According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), the trustworthiness of qualitative data is founded on two premises: firstly, that plausibility is drawn from the recognition that reality is comprised of multiple world views that are time and context bound; and, secondly, that the researcher is an integrated aspect of the research itself, and evidence emerges through negotiation and reciprocity between researcher and participants. Trustworthiness in research is established, therefore, when the researcher employs a holistic approach by examining multiple factors and finding patterns within a given context. In addition, value judgments made by the researcher in design, implementation, and evaluation of the research project also contribute to the process of establishing a level of certainty in the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). These premises underlie a set of constructs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986) which offer techniques and procedures to help secure a level of “transactional validity” (Cho & Trent, 2006), and which have been widely accepted by subsequent researchers involved in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Shenton, 2004).

One key criterion, which Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1986) have proposed for establishing trustworthiness, is the notion of credibility (equivalent to the concept of internal validity in quantitative research) where the investigator feels confident that findings are compatible with reality and can be said to be believable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986; Shenton, 2004). A recommended procedure for achieving this is triangulation. In the case of my research, I thoroughly explored the data to find common patterns and, when ideas re-occurred from different participants, started to formulate my findings. By gathering multiple viewpoints, I was able to verify these against each other and, thereby, achieve corroboration through this agreement of multiple sources (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Shenton, 2004). As already mentioned, part of my exploration of data was to screen for deviant cases, noting any negative instances which would counteract an emerging pattern. The use of negative case analysis was a

further strategy to support triangulation and help achieve credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Since the researcher is integral to the data gathering process, the manner in which research is conducted is also important in establishing credibility. To this end, I ensured that I conducted member checking, where I regularly fed back an understanding of the participants' contributions to confirm or amend my interpretations of what was said and to gain further insight from participant responses (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Shenton, 2004). A further strategy I engaged in was peer scrutiny which helped me to consider alternative views and act with reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Shenton, 2004). Whilst discussion in general with cultural advisors was helpful, a more specific discussion of data with my supervisors was useful to support the construction of ideas. I also delivered feedback to school-teacher colleagues and this was useful in checking if I had made any assumptions that needed challenging.

A further aspect of establishing credibility was through the way I described my data. I endeavoured to relate as much detail as possible so that others reading it could ascertain if my overall findings were compatible with the rich description that I had supplied (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Shenton, 2004). Finally, an important reason for conducting the literature review was to ensure that findings were built upon the systematic review of previous relevant and recent studies so that conclusions drawn from this research were compatible with other, similar work in the field (Shenton, 2004).

3.3.9 Ethics.

This project was approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee and complied with correct ethical procedures throughout. However, ethical practices cannot be viewed in isolation from trustworthiness since both are closely tied together (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The potential trustworthiness of a study lies not just with procedural matters but with the ethical commitment which the researcher makes to show consideration and respect for participants in the gathering

of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A potential problem with ethics procedures is that researchers may reduce these to a paperwork exercise (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Instead, the researcher should maintain an ethically reflexive approach where sensitivity to participants is shown, not just in the initial engagement in research, but in ethical practices throughout the entire process (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

I have endeavoured to show ethical reflexivity in all aspects of my research, particularly through sensitivity to participants' cultural identities, using, for example, the principles of Talanoa to engage appropriately with participants in meetings (Vaioloti, 2006).

3.3.10 Limitations.

A limitation of this study, like other qualitative studies, is its sample size which is too small to generalise to a wide population. What it does do is to specifically give insight on how some Pacific Island families relate to home-school relationships at one particular secondary school. However, it is worth noting the comment of a parent, who said at the end of the focus group, "Though there is (are) five of us... (we) are representing the Pacific parents for our children here in ...". This suggests that the parents themselves felt that they were expressing ideas shared by other Pasifika parents. Also other educators will be able to draw conclusions from the rich data in this research and may apply these to different contexts such as other high decile schools across New Zealand.

This study has been reliant on the nature of the relationship between researcher and participant and misleading data could have resulted, for example, as a consequence of a participant speaking compliantly rather than honestly. The relationship between researcher and participants may have been complicated further because the researcher is Palagi (of European descent) and this may have been a deterrent to some participants to speak openly. However, there did not appear to be a lack of honesty or reluctance to engage in any of the meetings which took place.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the parental perception of the learning process amongst parents and their children. Qualitative phenomenological methodology was employed to elicit findings from semi-structured interviews and focus groups with both student and parent participants. This chapter describes the findings derived from data generated in these meetings and is divided into two main areas. Firstly, the findings from a parental perspective are discussed before moving on to findings from a student perspective. In each case, I begin with a description of values and beliefs which support individuals' perspectives and then look at how these affect communication within families and with teachers in relation to the students' learning. I conclude with a brief summary of key points which emerge from the findings.

Participants' own words are used where possible. Students are abbreviated to S (numbering 1 to 15 to represent the students who participated) and the abbreviation P is used for parents (numbering 1 to 7 to represent each parent).

4.2 Parental Perspective: Values and Beliefs

The data revealed that a number of core values and beliefs underpinned the way parents and students felt about their learning conversations. The parents expressed strong beliefs about education and this directed their conversations with their children. Also parents' core values about the family and church influenced their thinking and decision-making in relation to learning conversations. Therefore, this chapter starts with a description of these parental values and beliefs before moving on to communication issues.

4.2.1 A good education.

Parents believed strongly that the economic benefits from migrating to New Zealand would enable families to provide a better future for their children. The idea that New Zealand was “a land of opportunity” * became apparent in the focus group when parents introduced themselves; once the first parent had chosen to talk about his arrival in New Zealand, it prompted others to tell similar stories about how their families had arrived. For example, a parent (P 1) explained how her parents arrived in New Zealand from Tokelau in the 1960’s for a “better life” and another said something very similar, explaining how her parents and grandparents, also from Tokelau, came to:

work somewhere they could make a living and I guess be successful, which is why we are here today. (P 6)

The belief that migration could lead to a more prosperous way of life was closely linked to a commitment to education. Families thought that good academic qualifications led to a well-paid job. A parent showed this connection when she explained that her parents brought her and her siblings to New Zealand:

to give us an opportunity to get a good education and – get a good job.(P 1)

She has passed this message onto her children telling them that:

If you don’t have an education, you’ll suffer basically.....You can’t get by. (P 1)

When some parents talked about their own educational experiences, they showed that they placed a high value on education. This was true of those who were well qualified and those who were not.

One parent illustrated the commitment to gaining qualifications as a route to professional work when he began introducing himself. He was keen to explain why it was so important to gain a qualification so he could escape poorly paid, unqualified work which he had had to do when he first arrived in New Zealand:

*a phrase coined by a cultural advisor when she was explaining the background of the economic migration from Pacific Islands to New Zealand.

Especially in winter time, you know, I didn't like cleaning, especially the toilets. Some of the factories – very strong you know in winter time. Sometime I stood in the middle of the factory doing my cleaning, like day dreaming, questioning myself. Am I going to do this job for the rest of my life? (P 4)

Although a qualified teacher, he had to take menial work in New Zealand due to his limited English. However, he studied at a further education college and then university, striving through language difficulties till he became a graduate and gained a professional job.

Even the parents, who were not formally qualified themselves, felt that education was very important for their children. A parent (P1) explained how sorry she was that she did not gain any formal qualifications from school and spoke with regret that she had “slipped through the cracks”. Her commitment to her children’s education arose from the fact she did not want them to make the same mistakes as she did and so she and her husband:

are always encouraging them to do their best. (P 1)

Five of the six parents expressed an interest in their children going to university and this may indicate why they had chosen to send their children to a college with better NCEA results than others in the area:

I just want to take my kids to a school that's academic. (P 7)

In summary, parents were committed to education and strongly believed that academic success would help their children gain professional, well-paid jobs; they hoped their children would achieve financial security which was the purpose of migrating to New Zealand.

4.2.2 Economic success for the children.

The parents collectively represented the view that Pacific Island families aspired to integrate into New Zealand society. This was shown by the way they wished their children to gain qualifications so they could become part of the professional work force. It was also evident in the choice made by some families to speak English at

home. Two of the parents said that their parents had elected to speak English in favour of their own cultural language when they came to New Zealand.

English was their second language but (they are) still both fluent in their language today but chose to raise my siblings and I in English,....., they didn't teach us their languages. And you know we've always asked why they didn't teach us but they felt that because we are in New Zealand society, that it was better for us to learn English.
(P 5)

It was possible to detect some regret in this participant's voice over her parents' decision to deny her the opportunity to speak their mother tongue but another parent responded by saying that many Pacific families made this choice when they arrived in the 1970s. Families were willing to sacrifice aspects of their own culture in order to become assimilated into a new one.

It was not just language where families made sacrifices as part of the process of becoming part of New Zealand society. Parents also made difficult financial decisions. One parent described her early days of coming to live in New Zealand without the support of the extended family and the fact this necessitated the extra expense of bringing her mother over to assist with childcare. She said:

It was a hard life trying to survive and we had to wait for nine month for a relative to come and look after our children. (P 3)

She explained how she had to go back to work because they could not support the family on one income:

We struggled when we were ...(pause) I shouldn't say I was forced to go back to employment and not staying at home with the kids. So I started in '97, you know the kids were still young. (P 3)

Her voice and choice of wording suggested regret that she had to leave her children in order to work and this dilemma of mothers choosing between work and family was also evident in those who were New Zealand born. One parent explained how she felt she needed to spend more time with her children and gave up work but this decision was not an easy one to make financially:

It's hard you know, having one income but yes, you do, you get by. (P 5)

This idea was also evident in the comments of another stay-at-home parent. She said she and her husband were willing to send their children to private tuition if it helped academically and were prepared to make sacrifices in other ways to find the money.

Me and my husband do what we can, like most Pacific families they probably won't be able to afford it but because they know the need is there, they do it. It's quite hard. (P 1)

To sum up, parents showed a willingness to make decisions which might involve hardship if it would benefit their children's future:

The key drive is to ensure economic success really for the children. (P 7)

4.2.3 A belief in hard work – “You've got to be a hundred per cent.”

Since families aspired for “economic success”, they realised that a strong work ethic was important. This belief was apparent when the parent (P4) opened the meeting with a description of how he studied hard to gain qualifications. His commitment to hard work was also evident when he described that he was currently employed full time and also a church minister at weekends. Another parent arrived in New Zealand to complete his education in the sixth form and continued through to tertiary education, qualifying as a doctor. Since his parents were not educated themselves, he said he learnt to be self-reliant and focussed if he was going to achieve. He was clear about what he thought:

I am a believer in you have to do your work. (P 7)

He expressed concern that students are not making the same work commitment as he did when he studied. They needed to:

achieve to the best of their ability rather than not achieving to the best of their ability, but it's hard work they have to do. (P7)

This was echoed by another father:

You've got to be a hundred per cent. You can't be half-hearted in things you do or you get half-hearted results. (P2)

Whilst parents believed in hard work, some were worried that their children did not work hard enough:

I know my son is bright and he's got his head screwed on but I also know he can be lazy. (P5)

Another parent commented that her son was:

a really, clever bright kid. It's just he really needs to apply himself – and he's just so slack. (P 1)

A parent, who considered that her daughter was a hard worker, understood a bigger picture of the work ethic of Pacific Island students and of NCEA. She has gained her knowledge through supporting her husband's ministry work and through her own voluntary work with organisations like Laulotaha (which mentors Pacific Island students in order to support academic achievement). She, too, showed concern that many students have not adopted a strong work ethic:

*Some of our students, they are capable but they are not really into it. They'll just go for 102, you know. *(P 3)*

In summary, the parents collectively demonstrated a belief in hard work but were concerned that some of the younger generation had not bought into it and were underachieving as a result.

4.2.4 A commitment to the family and church.

Parents emphasised supporting one another, for example, through the extended family. Of the fifteen student participants, six reported that members of the extended family (such as grandparents or cousins) were living with them. A parent (P3) provided detail on the level of support she provided. She mentioned that her niece, a year 10 student, lived with them and that she tried hard to monitor her niece's homework, aiming to instil the same work ethic that her own children had. She also explained that she looked after her nephew's children in the day time so he and his wife could go to work.

**102 classes are generally less academically rigorous than 101 classes.*

Finally she mentioned that her son's friend had been living with them because he needed somewhere to go while he studied at university, showing that her willingness to support moved beyond members of the immediate family.

A further way that families give and receive support is through church. Parent (P3) explained the significance of church as a means of providing support since family members had been left behind on the islands and members of the congregation could, therefore, fill this gap:

Your church is your extended family. It's more like family. (P 3)

She saw the benefit in belonging to a church because it meant that, as you showed concern for other people's children, they – in turn – did the same for your children:

At church, they count our children as theirs. They're always asking after them. It really means a lot to us. (P 3)

Another parent also wanted to stress the importance of church. She felt it had been valuable in nurturing her son and providing language lessons to help connect him with his island culture. Whilst parents reported different ways in which their churches delivered services to their congregation, they shared an appreciation for the support it offered. A parent summed up her feelings this way:

Church should be seen as a haven. (P 6)

Parents did, however, allude to some tension in the way church impacted upon their lives. For example, in discussion about church life with P 2, she realised that some Pacific parents prioritised church over school events because they believe:

Church is more important. (P 3)

A parent suggested that churches might not always understand school issues and so would not be aware of the impact they had on children's education. He said he has learnt (as an organiser for his Tuvaluan culture) to be mindful of the school calendar and avoid clashes but church leaders may not realise this.

Another parent acknowledged there was gap between what the children learnt in church and what they learnt at school. Ideally, they should be able to transfer the values they learn in church as “spiritual” people and use them in a school setting but students, he thought, might not be able to make the connections. He further commented that:

lot of Pacific Island churches are spoken in their languages so that's another barrier that kids are confused maybe and then they go to school and are trying to fit what they learnt on Sunday to what they're doing Monday to Friday. (P 2)

A consequence of the commitment that Pacific people give to church and to the extended family means that they lead very busy lives and have very busy households.

They (Pacific Island families) have a lot of visitors that come and go and also there might be some family that comes and stays and so there is overcrowding. (P 7)

It seemed that this busyness accounted for the difficulty I had in organising meetings since parents found it hard to commit to a time. For example, two fathers, who work full time, also help to run sport teams.

In summary, the parents showed how they operated collectively in order to gain and give support to others but there was some evidence that there could be friction with different commitments impacting on their time.

4.3 Parental perspective: communication

The theme of respect emerged from the findings and was particularly significant to the way parents felt about communication between them and teachers and between their children and teachers. It is useful to discuss the idea of respect before looking at the parental perception of how they liaise with teachers and the parental perception of learning conversations with their children.

4.3.1 The dilemma of respectful relationships.

The idea of respectful relationships is very important to parents. It was something I had read about in preparation for meeting them and I endeavoured to use a protocol

which would show respect. This was noticed and appreciated as a parent (P4) thanked me at the end of the meeting for being so courteous.

Tonight I would like to thank you, Maggie. When we started off tonight you asked us to say a prayer because you come from England and you haven't been in New Zealand that long to be familiar but that's part of the communication – to get to know the people you are with. It's part of respect. I think it's the attitude teachers should have with their students. (P 4)

I had apparently met the standard required for respect because I had acknowledged aspects of their culture such as prayer and shown that I was genuinely interested in them and cared enough to listen to their opinions.

However, another parent showed a different aspect to the word respect with regard to student behaviour at school:

I think the kids need to learn that they've got to have respect for people in authority like the teacher.... They need to respect them and listen. ...because he is too much chatting with his friends and not listening to what the teacher said.(P 2)

In this context the word respect can be interpreted to mean listening in a manner that does not disrupt or show rudeness to someone in authority. A problem with teaching students that questioning is disrespectful is that this is not always beneficial to their learning as another parent pointed out:

From our culture we need to allow kids not to be shy to talk especially when it comes to school because it is the only way of hearing your concerns because if you don't voice your concerns, it will be left. (P 4)

These parents' comments indicate that Pacific people value relationships that are nurturing and respectful to their culture. Part of this respect is to teach younger people to listen and not question which, as a parent indicated, could be counterproductive to the learning process.

However, just as parents have taught their children to respect authority, they also do not like to question. A parent expressed this opinion but noted that attitudes were

changing since another parent at the meeting, who was New Zealand born, was more assertive and critical in her appraisal of the school system.

*For us who migrated from the islands sometimes we are too polite and we don't hardly ask questions when we come and sometimes we don't really understand the feedback.
(P 4)*

The wife of this parent commented on the reticence within her family. Her daughter did not pursue an opportunity offered by the careers department and her husband has not pursued the idea of applying for a scholarship for their daughter to go to university.

One problem, therefore, in respectful relationships is that it can prevent individuals from speaking out or taking initiative in some situations.

4.3.2 A desire for open, honest feedback from teachers.

Parents expressed a strong desire for reciprocity in communication between home and school. It was reiterated by different parents and this was probably the main reason that they attended the focus group. A parent, who was concerned that her son was slipping behind academically, really appreciated the teacher who kept her informed about his progress. Her ideal was:

For us to support the school, to support our kids, to do better – that communication could be more regular and more open. (P 6)

She felt that if teachers could inform parents early on, before students slipped too far behind, then parents could play their part to help before it was too late. The other parents agreed with her and one parent (who was interviewed separately and therefore not part of this conversation) came to a similar conclusion:

(We) would rather hear it now (feedback from teachers), rather than hearing after the exams or when it is so close to the exams because there will be no time. (P 7)

A parent (P1) said she appreciated the teacher who communicated with her because she received “honest feedback” and expressed disappointment that another teacher

had not let her know that her son had fallen behind with his studies. This was something another parent echoed:

Honest feedback, not something that is just token. (P 5)

So whilst the parents expressed a desire to support their child's learning, they expressed disappointment that they were not better informed or more closely involved. The parents wanted the school to realise that students would benefit if home and school worked together more closely:

Just work as a team to help with achievements. (P 7)

It should be a working partnership thing where parents can offer support where they can. (P1)

One parent offered a constructive solution which moved beyond individual parents supporting individual children to thinking how Pacific parents could collectively contribute to greater achievement for their children:

It's not about the school taking all the full responsibility or ownership for it but getting the support from parents because that is where the drive will come from, the parents who have had kids are able to feed back what has worked or what hasn't, what could be improved and could move forward with each milestone.(P 4)

In summary, these parents were very keen to support their children's learning and believed that a partnership between home and school could bring about better academic results.

4.3.3 Barriers to parent-teacher communication.

One problem was a lack of knowledge of the NCEA qualification system and parents regretted that they were not better informed. They felt it was something that the school could remedy so parents could be more confident at participating in academic discussions.

Helping parents to understand that, simplify the information that comes through to us. NCEA I am still trying to get my head around it. (P 1)

Another issue was the parents' passive approach to school communication. For example, in the preparation for establishing a focus group, parents did not respond to reply slips, return phone calls, and many did not turn up to the focus group even though they had indicated they would attend. Parent 2 suggested that:

Those who are New Zealand born, the day they receive the invitation they put it down in the diary and remember to come, but for us (migrants) even though we put it down if there is no reminder quite a lot of us parents forget things. (P 2)

In fact, the lack of communication over setting up the focus group applied to New Zealand born parents just as much as migrants. However, the significance of this statement was that it indicated that parents do not always respond to written communication.

Attendance at parent evenings can also be problematic and this parent gave her opinion of what other Pacific parents may also be thinking:

There's no point. They won't understand or it clashes with family/church activities. (P 3)

Her comment suggests that parents are likely to opt for activities where they are supported by their familiar networks rather than act in a proactive way that takes them into unfamiliar territory.

To sum up, there are some significant barriers which prevent communication between Pacific Island parents and teachers. Parents reported a lack of knowledge of NCEA and often displayed passive behaviour with school-related communication procedures and situations.

4.3.4 A desire to encourage learning.

Parents are keen for their children to do well and have found their own ways in which to encourage them to work hard, trying to find the right amount of pressure to be effective:

We applied lots of pressure at home. And at the end of the year, he was really stressed. Even though when he got his results he was really pleased. But he felt we were too strict. And so in the sixth form here, we decided to just...back off, a bit. (P 5)

Whilst parents want to encourage their children as best as they can, they have found conversations difficult since they lack understanding of the NCEA system. This was the same for the educated parents as well as those without formal qualifications:

I still don't understand markings from the school, I am used to marks like 80% and if my kids come with 70% I will know to keep pushing. (P 7)

For those parents who were not qualified, the conversations could be uncomfortable:

My kids know when I don't know something. They say "oh you don't know this, you don't know that" and then sometimes I can't help my kids so there is that as well and that's a bit hard. (P 1)

The consequence of parents' lack of knowledge is that they felt that they could not be more constructive in their conversations:

I need to educate myself in how the system and everything works so I can actually put something positive to him and not sound negative all the time with the way I talk. (P 1)

The parents rely, therefore, on their own children to let them know how they were getting on and explain their progress in terms of NCEA. They realise that this is potentially problematic as their children can select what they tell them:

You trust them that they are telling you the truth. (P 5)

To summarise, there was a potential for tension and frustration in some parent-child conversations where parents obviously wanted to support their children with their learning but felt restricted by lack of knowledge. For this reason, parents felt it was very important to have good links with teachers so that they could better understand their child's learning.

4.4 Student perspective – values and beliefs

The findings showed that students were influenced by their parental beliefs and this, in part, affected how they communicated with both their parents and their teachers. However, the findings also reflected their view that they were young adults with their own decision making and this also had an impact on how they communicated.

4.4.1 An interest in a university education.

Students showed they understood education was important to their parents and that they were expected to do well. For example, this student gave a positive response to what he hoped to achieve in Year 12:

My parents want me to get excellence. ...I'm aiming for excellence but I hope to come out with a merit at least.... (S 1)

This student's tentative response suggests he is influenced by his parents' expectations that he should do well rather than due to a prediction based on results so far. (This student did not pass Level 1 at the end of Year 11.)

He explained that he knew his parents would like him to go to university because it is something they were not able to do themselves:

They are not really that well educated and, I mean, my dad got a good job but he said he could have done better if he did his work and stuff properly and went to uni. (S 1)

Another student summed it up as:

They don't want you to do what they did at school. They want better for you. (S 3)

Students generally expressed an intention to go to university, although they were not always clear about the details of their intended study. There was a mixture of responses. A Year 14 student (S 6) did know what course she was aiming for and had had to return for an extra year in order to gain sufficient credits. A Year 12 girl (S 7) expressed enthusiasm to go to university but had not decided her direction as yet; however, she was inspired by her mother's academic pathway and was considering the same subjects as her. She was also inspired to do well after witnessing her cousins

drop out of school and seeing that they had very little opportunity for the future without qualifications.

Other positive comments about university were expressed as:

Yeah, I wanna go to uni as well to...(pause) help me go further in life. (S 15)

Yeah, with mum and dad, we're always talking about uni. (S 3)

Later the previous participant added that university would:

give me a head start in life. (S 3)

These comments indicate a positive attitude to higher education but they also suggest that clear career pathways are not in place. The fact that mum and dad are mentioned in the same sentence about university suggests it is them who are initiating the university conversations.

Parental influence is shown again by student 1 whose agreement to attend university is added on afterwards, as an afterthought:

I have to make sure I go to uni. My parents really want me to go to uni. So I kinda have to – but I want to as well. (S 1)

He revealed that his real interest was in physical fitness but knew that his father dismissed this as an unsuitable career. He understood his parents' message that a university education was important for the future and could reiterate the parental aspiration about the need for financial security for the family:

If you wanna good job you have to do well in school, you need a good education to make money, to provide for your family and all that stuff and I thought ah – yes so... (S 1)

These conversations with students revealed that they were influenced by their parents' desire that they should attend university. They suggest that students may not be forming decisions based on realistic targets and may not be taking the initiative in deciding their future career paths. Instead they are relying on parents whose knowledge, by their own admission, is limited.

4.4.2 Engagement in learning.

Students varied in terms of commitment to learning, responding to parental encouragement to work hard in different ways. A student, whose parents confirmed she was conscientious, was aware that her parents had struggled as migrants and that she had the opportunity to do better than them:

He thinks that like we were born in New Zealand we have all the opportunities, like no reason why we shouldn't be achieving so it's always like we have to beat him 'cos he came from nothing. (S 2)

However, other students, despite knowing the reasons why their parents want them to work hard, admitted that they were inclined to laziness:

It's just it's like laziness and it's like I don't like doing homework. (S 3)

This student, along with two others, acknowledged the importance of parents putting pressure on them to work. Although they did not like it, they realised that they needed it if they were going to achieve:

Yeah, it's good. (S 3)

The external pressure from parents, therefore, was an important motivation tool which some of these students relied on in order to keep up with work.

They also reported that they worked harder when they enjoyed the subjects which were interactive and did not involve too much talking from the teacher.

I know that they don't just like sitting there listening to the teacher talking, and writing it down and stuff. The teacher could also do activities, or some kind of classwork or something. (S 3)

They (Pacific Island students) are thinking 'if I only I could be back outside'....I have noticed with practical learning they seem to be much more engaged. (S 1)

Student 3 pointed out the aversion that many Pacific Island students have to classroom-based learning, explaining how their lack of motivation stems from lack of enjoyment:

I mean all Pacific Islanders are good at sport or something to do with sport only because they enjoy it but they don't...(pause) but when it comes to school work or learning they are like lazy I guess 'cos they don't have the attitude, the mindset. If they don't enjoy it, they won't try. (S 3)

The noticeable exception in students' attitude to work came from the year 14 student who had specifically returned to get a set number of credits for university. Now with a clear target in mind, she understands how absences from school set her back last year.

So this year I have been able to engage in the class and go to lessons, asking questions and emailing teachers if I don't know something. It's been the biggest success for me. (S 1)

This student has now developed a level of maturity about her learning and established a clear pathway. She differs from the other students in that she did not express reliance on enjoyable lessons or the need for parental pressure to motivate her.

4.4.3 Relating to others.

Like the parents, students relate to others in a group setting. They enjoy participating in group activities such as sport and music and some students reported that they felt more comfortable in group situations in their learning. One student explained it this way:

I think Pacific Islanders, they struggle on their own. So when they go home and study, if they don't know what to do they'll just leave it and just won't do it. (S 3)

A solution for him would be situations where students:

can discuss and talk about the different ideas.(S 3)

This is something another student agreed with:

A group is where they (Pacific Island students) can relate to, you know, because it's a smaller context than a classroom, which can be intimidating for them but a little group is more intimate. (S 6)

Students showed that they were aware of others and could be influenced by others' opinions. This came across clearly when they talked about their passive attitude to learning in class. They reported that they did not speak up because they were worried what other students might think of them. They were particularly worried how the New Zealand European students might perceive them and they did not want to appear stupid.

They're ashamed. They don't want other people to think, you know. They worry what other people think of them. (S 3)

They don't want to look bad in front of people. (S 6)

Pacific students, therefore, do not always perceive themselves as confident learners. They do not like to stand out from their peers in case they make mistakes:

They don't want to speak 'cos other students will mock them and they're too afraid to prove them wrong.(S 15)

An exception was student 6 who believed that the guidance from her pastor had helped develop her confidence:

I know my identity and for me when I go into school I am not defined by what people say I am.... I don't have to be defined by the expectation of others.(S 6)

She clearly recognised that there is an issue for Pacific students who fear making mistakes because they worry what others may think but she, herself, felt that she had become stronger and more confident through the values taught her at church. The church is, actually, another part of students' lives where they are used to operating in a group setting. Their experiences of church life varied but there was general agreement that this was an accepted part of their life. They did not appear to question whether or not they should attend. In response to the question if she liked going to church, students said:

Yeah, 'cos I grew up going to church. (S 7)

Oh, we enjoy it... It's just that we were raised, brought up to go to church. (S 3)

One consequence of church life for students is the time commitment.

*We always go to church every Sunday and like sometimes in the day during the week.
(S 7)*

The parent of one student mentioned how they go to church twice on a Sunday, once to a service in English and once in their own language. She expressed disappointment that her daughter was involved in other activities on the Saturday which meant she had to do homework on the Sunday and could therefore only attend one of the services.

In summary, the students are familiar to operating in group settings like the church. The church plays a big part in their lives and is an indication that students are used to conforming to parents' values. Students are more comfortable in group settings and are uncomfortable speaking up or asking questions as an individual where they think they are being judged.

4.4.4. Church-self, school-self, and home-self.

Students have busy lives. The commitment to church is obviously one factor. They are also expected to support with household duties.

Me and my sister, we clean the house. I babysit. Yeah, like, I do everything in the house. I help out the family, cook dinner, and yeah, we have church youth practices after church or after school but, like, at 6 o'clock and we just practise and practise and then go home and do some more chores. (S 7)

Students therefore juggle different activities; apart from their home and church commitments, they also enjoy sport and music activities. A student shared the difficulty he had in making decisions about his time in Year 11 when he focussed on rugby to the detriment of his school work (resulting in disappointing NCEA Level 1 results). Although he mentioned that this year he goes to the gym every night and does not get home till 6pm, he says he has improved:

I try my best. I try and do my work – or homework. (S 1)

Students felt that they were generally in charge of managing their own time and gave the impression in the focus group that they were successful with their decision making:

For me, I sort of value my independence... 'cos next year I have to do that anyway why I don't really want to tell them (parents) anything. (S 5)

One student felt she had worked out how to manage her time, explaining how she would speak to teachers or organisers for her various activities if she could not attend anything, and how she worked better for internal assessments than externals where she could pace herself and perform without so much pressure. She spoke with confidence about managing her time:

Sometimes if I don't go to Youth (church group), I just stay at home and do my homework or go to the library. (S 7)

Whilst students affirmed they had the ability to time manage, it is difficult to assess how successful they really were at it. It was certainly hard to organise times with them for participant focus groups and interviews; numbers for the focus groups were unpredictable as students, who promised to come, did not and other students turned up by surprise.

Since they think their parents do not understand their busy lives, students have decided it is up to them to manage the different worlds without consultation.

So you got your church-self, your school-self and then you've got your home-self. So it's like three different things so you wouldn't want your parents to know all about your school and stuff 'cos it's got to be different from your home. (S 15)

Students have generally adapted to an independent approach to managing their time, making their own decisions about how they should use it. These decisions may or may not be prioritising their academic learning.

4.5 Student perspective: Communication

Students' perceptions of how they talk with their parents and their teachers about learning are influenced partly by values and beliefs from their parents and partly as a reaction to how they manage their independence.

4.5.1 Choosing not to talk to parents.

Most students avoid saying much about their learning with their parents. There appeared to be unanimous agreement in the focus group that parents were to be kept at a distance:

If she asks me about school, I just say good and nothing more than that. And if I have homework or not – I just don't do it. (S 4)

They know I have homework but it doesn't really go any further than that.(S 12)

I just keep it to myself. They usually find out later...when reports and stuff come but, especially if it's a bad grade I will keep it to myself. (S 1)

One major reason that students give for not communicating with their parents is to avoid disappointing them. The fear of not doing well enough in their parents' eyes is a strong factor in stopping conversation:

I am just like so ashamed to bring it up. It's not like I can't be bothered because sometimes I can. I just choose not to....The disappointment lasts for ever. Not for ever but for ages – like I am disappointed in you for not passing. (S 11)

Of course, the opposite was true if students did something well:

If it is an achievement like top in English then I will tell my grandparents and my whole family. (S 15)

It is possible that student progress is discussed not just with the parents but amongst other members of the extended family; thus, if the student has to share poor results with several relations, it could magnify feelings of shame. A student summed up the problem of why students do not wish to discuss their learning with their family:

One of the biggest things is for students who really feel the pressure and who need to impress family members. (S 6)

Students not only avoid speaking to family because they worry about the reaction they get, but also because they realise their family does not understand what they do. Even though Student 6 was an exception because she said she was happy to have conversations with her family without judgements, she admitted that it was difficult to communicate with her parents:

I could tell them more but actually they don't have a clue about the system. (S 6)

Students were in general agreement that a lack of knowledge about NCEA was a deterrent, expressing how frustrating it was if they had to explain what they were doing.

It's a struggle for them and it's a struggle for us to explain to them something they don't even know. (S 1)

In summary, the students confirmed the parents' suspicions that they avoided talking about their school work. A fear of shame and parental lack of knowledge were the main reasons given for maintaining distance.

4.5.2 Staying “under the radar” in class.

As discussed, students tend to remain quiet in class because they wish to avoid looking stupid in front of their peers. Added to this is a perception that keeping a low profile will avoid negative feedback which they do not want their parents to hear about. For this reason, students keep:

under the radar. (S 11)

The irony of keeping quiet in class is that students do not ask for the help they need and therefore risk falling behind and disappointing their parents anyway. This irony was not lost on Student 3. He explained a cycle of miscommunication. Firstly, they may be stuck in class but will not ask the teacher for help.

The teacher gets angry because they think they're not listening in class but really they don't actually know what they're doing. So they get told off in class but they are really trying to receive help from others. (S 3)

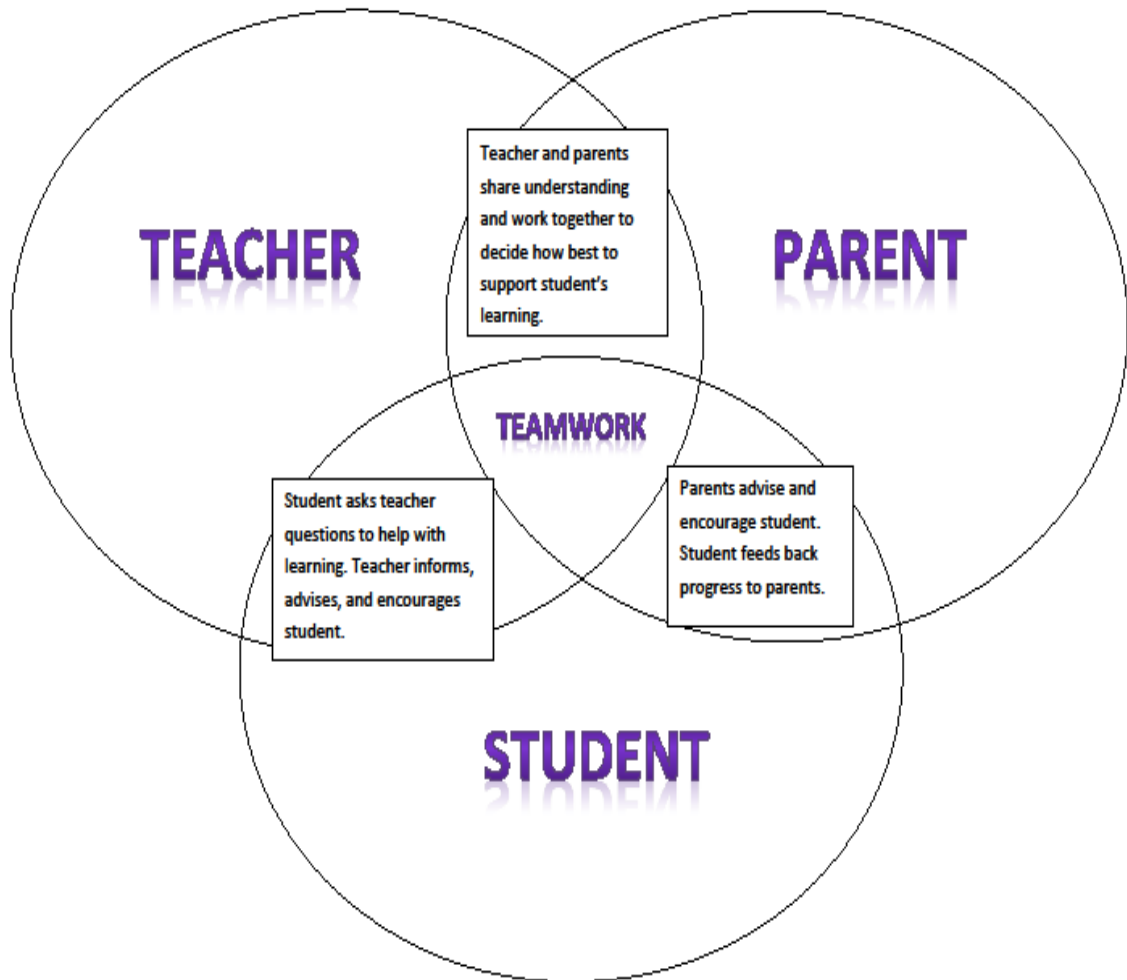
However, students fear the reaction of what will happen if this is reported home. The family might say:

“Listen to your teacher.” So they won’t tell their parents what’s happening...it’s a fear of failure. They don’t want to fail their parents. ...but without them telling their parents and without the teacher knowing, they’re going to anyway. (S 3)

4.6 Conclusion

To conclude, many Pacific Island students avoid conversations about their learning. They fear asking for help in class and they fear the consequences of their family discovering they may have underachieved. These findings illustrate the strong desire from parents to see their children succeed with their education. Parents believe they can play a supportive role, working in partnership with teachers, to help their children achieve positive educational outcomes. (See Fig 2, p.97.) However, they do not feel sufficiently empowered to participate in this way. The students understand their parents’ point of view but are generally choosing to avoid learning conversations at home (and with their teachers) and this contributes to the feelings of disempowerment which parents may have.

Figure 2: Parents' vision: working in partnership with teachers, to help their children achieve positive educational outcomes



CHAPTER 5

Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

The findings from my study have revealed that the participant parents placed a high value on education and wanted to play a supportive role in helping their child gain positive academic outcomes. However, both parent and student participants perceived that gaps in the communication process, both within families and between home and school, impacted negatively on the parental role in the learning process. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss key findings from the research, analysing participant perceptions in order to gain a better understanding of these issues.

Research literature substantiates the parents' desire to be involved in the learning process since parental involvement is positively associated with student academic achievement (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008; Catsambis, 2001; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Jeynes, 2012). Parents can support their child in the senior years of secondary schooling by setting aspirations and expectations (Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012; Jeynes, 2007; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2008) and by offering encouragement and advice (Catsambis, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009). They can play a supportive role in helping their child to develop self-efficacy (Anderman et al., 2011; Bandura, 2009; Fan et al., 2012; Schunk & Parajes, 2002) and to become a self-determined learner (Deci et al., 1991, Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Given the positive contribution that parents can make towards their child's academic outcomes, this discussion of the findings develops our understanding of how issues with communication sometimes inhibit a supportive parental role, and leads to recommendations for strengthening the communication process involving parents (see Chapter 6).

5.2 Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model as a framework

This discussion has been guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model which was outlined in Chapter Two (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986, 1984, 1999). Bronfenbrenner's model recognises the complexity of different, overlapping contexts which influence individuals' perceptions. These perceptions, in turn, affect the way individuals interact with one another. My reason for choosing Bronfenbrenner's system was that it strengthens the analysis, helping to determine what contextual factors might be influencing the perceptions of the participants, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Bronfenbrenner's model recognises the positive influence of interaction on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Human development, according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, results from an active engagement in reciprocal interaction which occurs on a regular basis, in a specific environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). (Bronfenbrenner called this environment the microsystem as illustrated in Fig 1, p.34.) Whilst the quality of interaction is influenced by participants' perceptions of other contexts beyond the immediate environment, the microsystem is where interaction takes place and leads to personal development. In my study, the home context is where parents and their children typically interact. Potentially these interactions provide an opportunity for the children to educate the parents about their academic progress and for the parents to foster academic engagement in their child. In addition, parents may meet with teachers within the microsystem of the school context and these interactions, too, have the potential for reciprocity. Parents may develop an understanding of their child's academic progress whilst teachers develop a more holistic knowledge of their student. The active engagement of parents in interactions in both school and home contexts leads to a "cross fertilization" process, strengthening the parents' ability to contribute positively in each of the settings. (Bronfenner referred to the interconnecting of contexts as the mesosystem. (See Fig 1, p.34.) The findings indicated that such reciprocal interactions, which provide opportunities for individual development, did not necessarily take place. This discussion, therefore, uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological model as a framework to help analyse what different contexts may have influenced parent and student participants'

perceptions and, consequently, affected the quality of interactions in the home and school settings.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. Firstly, I analyse the participants' perceptions of the parent-child interactions in the home context, comparing the perceptions of the parent and student participants. Secondly, I analyse the parent perceptions of parent-teacher interactions in the school context. Since my study has not included teacher participants, I am not in a position to make claims about teachers' perceptions of parent-teacher interactions. I conclude with an overall review of the discussion on the participants' perceptions of communication issues which affect the parental role in the learning process.

5.3 Parent-student interaction in the home context

Whilst parents commented that they wanted honest, open conversations at home with their children to discuss progress at school, a number of students commented that they avoided these conversations. Both parents and students recognised that these discussions could become tense and that the students were not always truthful about their progress.

The adolescent years are known as a period when tension and conflict may arise as parents set out expectations which teenagers dismiss because they believe they can make their own decisions (Steinberg, 2001). As children detach themselves from their parents, friction between parents and children is a possible outcome (Frank, Pirsch, & Wright, 1990; Steinberg, 2001). However, even though adolescent children seek independence from their parents, they still need to maintain a sense of relatedness towards them in order to develop self-esteem and confidence. Consequently, parents have to adapt their parenting style (Phinney, Kim-Jo, Osorio, & Vilhjalmsdottir, 2005), and acknowledge their children's need for autonomy in order to successfully guide them through these school years (Catsambis, 2001). It is not a surprise, therefore, that the parent and student participants expressed there were some communication issues as they adjust to this need for increasing independence.

In this section, I first discuss parent perceptions and then I discuss student perceptions. This leads to a deeper understanding of why some students elected not to engage in conversations with their parents with regard to their academic progress.

5.3.1 Parents' perspective.

Findings from this study show parents placed a high value on the importance of education, and this has been validated by other research literature. Parents said that they wanted their children to work hard and gain qualifications so they could obtain professional work. They believed that education was a tool to enable integration into New Zealand society and a way of achieving economic security for the family. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001), who undertook research in California, also reported that the Samoan participant parents in their study believed education was the route to financial security. In New Zealand, Gorinski and Fraser (2006) confirmed that Pacific Island parents, in general, placed a strong emphasis on the value of education for their children. Siope (2011), whose parents were Samoan immigrants to New Zealand, told of the sacrifice her family made so that she could enjoy the benefits of a good education. Likewise, the importance of education was reiterated in a collection of published stories from Pacific Island people who have been educated at Victoria University, Wellington (Sanga & Chu, 2009). For example, Billy Fito'o, from the Solomon Islands, explained how education opened the "doorway to job opportunities" (Sanga & Chu, 2009, p. 24). The literature indicates strongly that the aspiration to gain a good education is evident across different Pacific cultures and in different settings.

In this study, the parents' perception that education was an important route to economic prosperity significantly influenced the way they interacted with their child. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, different contextual influences affect the way an individual thinks. The parent participants reflected values that are shared by other Pacific Island people who have migrated from the islands for economic reasons. They wanted to pass these values on to their children, reminding them of why the family had decided to come to New Zealand. This was the same for the migrant parents as well as the parents who had been born in New Zealand. (These values belong to the macrosystem and chronosystem in Bronfenbrenner's model. See

Fig 1, p.34). Parents hoped that their children would understand why they set high expectations to work hard in order to gain qualifications and go to university. They wanted their children to achieve the economic security that had prompted the family to migrate from their home island one or two generations ago.

When parents place a high value on education, it can benefit the academic achievement of their children, regardless of academic ability, ethnicity, and location (Jeynes, 2005). When parents set high expectations for their children, the children receive higher grades and stay in school longer (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Minority parents can help their children to make positive educational gains through their encouragement, offsetting any incongruence between the family's home culture and the school culture (Okagaki, 2001). However, whilst research evidence suggests that minority culture students respond positively to parents who place a high value on education, this was not necessarily the case for the Pacific Island student participants.

Despite parental high expectation not all students were motivated to work hard. A number of parents expressed concern that they could not influence their children to be more successful with their academic studies. They expressed disappointment that their child did not work hard enough or had not achieved high grades, and that they could not engage in conversation to discuss academic progress. Given the high value which the parents placed upon education, they expressed frustration with this situation. Their ability to positively influence their children's academic progress was limited by the lack of reciprocal interaction in the home context.

The parents explained why they thought their conversations were problematic and their influence was limited. They did not understand the NCEA qualification system and found it hard to comprehend specific details about courses and grades. (In Bronfenbrenner's model, the NCEA system would be part of the exosystem. See Fig 1, p.34.) The parents realised that their lack of knowledge made it difficult for them to understand what their children were doing at school. Those who were not well qualified themselves found it hard to engage in conversations about academic learning at senior level. For parents to engage in conversations, they need self-belief in their

own skills and knowledge in order to feel they can make a difference (Bandura, 1997, 2000; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Parents, who have low self-efficacy in terms of their own academic ability, may lack confidence in supporting their children's learning, especially as the children progress through high school to more complex work.

However, even the participant parents who were well qualified expressed confusion about NCEA due to unfamiliarity with the examination system. They felt this contributed to misunderstandings in conversations with their children and, in fact, the student participants echoed the same concern. They said that they found it hard to talk to their parents when their parents did not understand the academic system. A parental lack of knowledge partly explains why conversations were problematic. The children were in the position to bridge the gap between school and home. They could have facilitated conversations in the home by helping their parents to gain a better understanding of their grades and progress. The parents were aware that their child often chose not to do this.

Thus, the parents perceived an important part of their role was to explain to their child that education was the route to prosperity and, therefore, encourage their child to achieve positive academic outcomes. However, they sometimes felt ineffectual because it was difficult to engage their children in conversations about their academic progress. In part, this can be explained by the parents' lack of knowledge of the school system and the child's reluctance to take on a mediating role which could have bridged the gap between home and school.

5.3.2 Students' perspective.

There may be a number of underlying causes which prevented the students from interacting with their parents to discuss their academic progress. Students explained that one reason was that they felt pressure from the family to perform well academically and this is what led them to withdraw from learning conversations at home. They talked about the "fear of failure" and expressed concerns about causing disappointment to their families which prevented them not only from engaging in conversations at home but also from interacting in the classroom. Since they did not want their parents to believe they were underperforming, they preferred not to talk to

them about their school progress. They also believed that if they kept a low profile in the classroom, they would not bring attention to themselves and therefore alert the teacher, who might notice that they were underperforming, and inform their parents.

In this section, I start by focussing on the students' perspectives on communication with parents in the context of the home. Secondly, I refer to their perceptions in the classroom and show how the classroom context affected interactions with their parents.

5.3.2.1 Parental influences

The students acknowledged their parents' lack of understanding about the grading system in NCEA and this could be one reason why some reported parental pressure. Since students often kept information about low grades from their parents, parents possibly found it hard to measure what was a realistic expectation to set their child. Not being able to set concrete targets, parents encouraged their children to work hard and achieve the best grades they possibly could. Consequently, students may have felt they were expected to perform to a high standard and achieve unrealistic grades. They, therefore, kept negative information away from their parents to avoid disappointing them and feeling they had let them down. This seemed to form a circular pattern. The more students withheld information from their parents, the less likely parents could adjust their expectations to a more realistic level. They were then likely to continue to set ambitious targets for their child who, feeling pressure to achieve high grades, continued to withhold information about progress in case it caused disappointment. Any friction and lack of communication between parents and children, therefore, may have stemmed from a parental over-reliance on effort as a grade determinant. This arose because they were unable to set expectations based on a realistic understanding of the student's academic progress (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Ironically, students expressed an appreciation for the conversations with their parents even though they did not necessarily like them. They appreciated the fact that their parents pushed them to work hard. On the one hand, they expressed a desire for independence but, on the other hand, they still showed that they depended on their

parents to motivate them to study. They recognised that an aspect of their parents' role was to motivate them to work. However, the students' ambivalent attitude about whether they wanted to engage in the conversations made it difficult for their parents to play an effective role. Furthermore, since some of the students expressed a reliance on their parents' encouragement, they may not have been intrinsically motivated and fully engaged in their own learning. If they were, they would not have said they needed their parents to push them.

Students can achieve positive education outcomes when they are engaged in learning (Caraway, Tucker, et al., 2003), exercising self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000; McInerney & McInerney, 2009, p. 209). A student who is self-efficacious can visualise success (Bandura, 1994, 1997). Parents can support this by encouraging their child to have self-belief and take on challenges (Fan et al., 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). A student who is self-determined can self-regulate the demands of academic learning (Deci et al., 1999). Parents can support this by helping their child to feel competent about their ability to manage academic tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000; McInerney & McInerney, 2009). Parents, therefore, can support their child's ability to be engaged and internally motivated with their studies.

When parents set high expectations for academic outcomes, their children may feel that they cannot attain these goals and, consequently, lack self-belief and feel they are not competent. Any negative feedback from parents may reinforce feelings of inadequacy. The students admitted that they frequently operated in lessons from a fear of failure in case they disappointed their families. Parental pressure, therefore, may have had a negative impact on children's ability to develop internal motivation because the children feared they were not competent enough. An unintended, negative consequence from parents' high aspirations for their children is that it may have undermined their child's personal confidence and, subsequently, their inclination to be self-motivated with their studies.

To summarise, parents can support their child's academic achievement by encouraging and advising them (Catsambis, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Schunk & Parajes, 2002). However, they are better able to play a supportive role when they understand the

school system and are well informed about their child's progress (Catsambis, 2001). Both parents and students were aware that there was a parental lack of knowledge which inhibited conversations about the students' progress. Students may have felt that they could not meet their parents' expectations which were sometimes unrealistic. Rather than communicate openly with their parents about their academic performance, students chose to withdraw from the conversations. This meant that parents could have unwittingly contributed to the students' fear of failure and lack of confidence in the classroom by continuing to set targets which students perceived were unrealistic.

5.3.2.2 The classroom context

A number of students commented that a fear of failure prevented them from speaking out in class. They were worried what other students might be thinking and this inhibited them from asking questions or contributing ideas. Rather, students expressed a preference for small group situations, particularly with other Pacific Island students, where they could feel more comfortable about asking questions and could gain mutual support with their learning. Their comments suggested that their perception of other students influenced the way they operated in the classroom. The students' preference for operating interdependently in groups and their self-conscious attitude to speaking out in class suggest that the collective nature of their cultural background influenced how they acted in a classroom setting. In a collectivist culture, the individual recognises the identity of the self in relation to others. A collectivist culture promotes mutual dependence and encourages participants to feel involved with other members of the group (Gore et al., 2011; Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000; Trumbull, 2003).

The students, in effect, operated within two potentially contrasting value systems: individualism and collectivism. School systems generally support the value system of the dominant culture which has a Westernised, individualised perspective that promotes independence and self-reliance (Trumbull, 2003). The New Zealand curriculum, whilst acknowledging the importance of "relating to others" as a key competency, also states that "managing self" is a vital skill. Students who successfully

self-manage know how to develop personal goals and take responsibility for their own learning. Quite specifically, students should know “when and how to act independently” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12). For some student participants, this may have seemed incongruent with their background cultural values where independent actions may not have been prioritised.

The curriculum not only encourages personal responsibility but it also expects students to develop skills in critical thinking. This can be noted, for example, through the choice of vocabulary used for setting out the core values which underpin the curriculum. For example, students should: “Express their own values” and “critically analyse values” as well as “discuss disagreements that arise from differences in values” (Ministry of Education, 2007).

For students to be able to discuss and express their own ideas, they need to be proactive and engaged in interaction. Human development is affected by the quality of regular interaction which takes place at the micro-level, in this case the classroom (Bronfenbrenner, (1977, 1994, 1999). A potentially negative side to operating interdependently is that it can suppress personal development as the needs of the group take precedence (Pettit, 1987, p. 547). Gore et al. (2011) consider this issue in the school setting. They argue that students from a collectivist culture tend to conform to each other, focusing on relationship maintenance at the cost of striving for individual success that might risk separation from the crowd (p. 6).

This might explain why some students said that they elected not to speak out in class. To speak out would make them stand out as an individual when the relationship with their peers is a higher priority. Trumbull (2003) adds that the hierarchical structure often found in collective cultures means that independent thought is discouraged among children because they are expected to listen and respect the knowledge of their teachers. The literature review of Ferguson et al. (2008) confirms this point of view with research findings that Pacific Island parents encourage their children to listen (p. 36). Likewise, this was something that the parent participants of my study acknowledged, saying that they emphasised to their children that they should listen in class. Whilst the school curriculum encourages a proactive approach to learning, students generally decided to keep a low profile in class. Their passive approach

potentially inhibited opportunities to develop critical thinking which is promoted in the New Zealand curriculum.

The students, therefore, operated in different, and sometimes opposing, value systems – between those of school and those of the home. In Bronfenbrenner’s model, the school and the home were both microsystems in which the student interacted. These microsystems were influenced by different values. Rather than make connections between these two worlds (in the mesosystem), students elected to keep them as separate as they could. Their decision was reflected in the way they avoided conversations with parents about their academic progress. This is not a new finding. Hill and Hawk (1998) reported that Pacific students kept their lives separated into different worlds, keeping a distance between them. This included keeping information about school from parents and information about home and church separate from school. Siope (2011) reported a similar story about her upbringing as a child of Samoan migrants. She chose to avoid speaking to her parents, although she recognised that keeping her parents out of her school world was unhelpful to her learning. Thus the students in my study echoed research conducted some years ago in different school contexts.

Given that some of the parents of the student participants were educated in the New Zealand school system, one might have expected students to be more adaptable or willing to bridge the gap between the two worlds. The Canadian-based research of Kwak (2003) investigated family relationships within immigrant families and showed how these families learn to live in two cultures. Second-generation children (or third, as some students in my study were) acquire their cultural heritage from the family context but also learn to adapt to the dominant culture in which they live. From a socio-cultural point of view, individuals continually negotiate meaning through social interaction, and in doing so, cultural values are also negotiated and transformed (Kwak, 2003, p. 116). One area in which cultural values are negotiated is in parent-adolescent interactions. Tension can occur as parents transmit the values and social norms within their culture whilst adolescents press for autonomy as part of their socialisation and development in the dominant culture (Kwak, 2003; Raeff et al., 2000, p. 60.). There may be less friction in parent-child interactions with adolescents from

collectivist cultures, where interdependence and strong family cohesion are emphasised, as the adolescents are less likely to embrace autonomous behaviour (Kwak, 2003, p. 132). It is possible, therefore, that some of the Pacific students elected not to talk to their parents in order to avoid the difficulty of explaining different values and creating friction within the family. Instead they preferred to separate their worlds and adapt as best as they saw fit. Even when parents had been educated in New Zealand, students often chose not to keep their parents informed if they perceived their parents did not comprehend their school world.

An issue raised by this research, therefore, was the continuing preference for students to separate their worlds. Rather than act as a conduit between home and school, so that parents were better able to support, they preferred not to build bridges. Their parents' strong emphasis on the importance of academic success may have deterred students from feeling they could engage in conversation and be truthful about their progress. Also core values which parents and their students shared around the collectivist nature of acting interdependently may have contributed to the passive approach adopted by students in class and in communication with their parents. Both parents and students agreed that conversations regarding academic progress could be beneficial but parents were not necessarily able to give appropriate advice due to a lack of familiarity with the school system and their child's reticence to communicate with them.

5.4 Parent-teacher interaction in the school context

The parent participants expressed a desire to connect with teachers so that they could work alongside them to support their child. They felt this was particularly important since they were aware that their child did not always communicate openly with them about progress at school. However, the participant parents also felt that it was sometimes difficult to engage in reciprocal dialogue with teachers. This is not a new finding since New Zealand based research also reported that Pacific Island parents were keen to be involved in supporting their child's learning but were not sure how to interact with school (Fletcher et al., 2008). However, the context for this research was different in that the participants had elected to send their child to a school where

there was a minority of Pacific students. An implication of this decision was that parents had chosen a school that had not yet developed policies on how best to interact with Pacific families in order to encourage parental involvement.

The participant parents expressed a strong belief in the importance of relationships. They liked to operate in group structures, such as at church and in the extended family, where they could network and support one another. They valued opportunities for face-to-face meetings to help build relationships. This was shown by the gratitude they showed me for meeting with them and listening to their concerns. Their concerns extended beyond their own children to discussion about the needs of Pacific Island children in general. For example, some of the participant parents, who had Year 13 children, still attended the focus meeting since they hoped their contribution might benefit families with younger children.

The parents, like their children, expressed values derived from a collectivist culture, in which the concept of the self is someone who only has meaning in relationship to others – for example, a mother or a teacher (Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, & Bush, 2005). (These values belong to the macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, as shown in Fig 1.) This concept acknowledges the importance of spirituality and that a sense of wholeness in individuals is created when they treat others with love and respect. This is a different way to perceiving the world compared to that from a Westernised, individuated perspective (Tamasese et al., 2005). This is why the concepts of *Teu le Va* (Anae, 2010) and *of Talanoa* (Vaioliti, 2006), explained in my methodology chapter, have both been adopted by researchers since they recognise the importance of valuing relationships as a way of encapsulating meaningful data in Pacific Island research.

It was important, therefore, to the participant parents to build relationships with teachers so that they could communicate with them about their children. In order to achieve this relationship, the participant parents wanted to feel included and valued by the teachers so they could contribute to discussions relating to their child's educational progress. The importance that Pacific Island parents place on relationships with teachers has already been noted in other New Zealand findings (Amituanai-Tolo

et al., 2009; ERO report, 2008c; Fletcher et al., 2008). If parent-teacher relationships are to be meaningful, the parents need to feel valued as equal partners where their voices can be heard (Bull et al., 2008; ERO, 2008c; Ministry of Education, 2011).

Likewise, the participant parents' feeling that reciprocal dialogue with teachers was hard to achieve has also been recorded. Barriers to achieving effective parent-teacher interaction have been highlighted in previous research and are compatible with the findings from my study. Parents felt conflict between supporting their children's schooling and fulfilling their work commitments (Fletcher et al., 2008), and a conflict between supporting their children's schooling and fulfilling their church commitments (Siope, 2011). In my study, it was clear that they were busy with work, family, and church commitments and this made it difficult to arrange meetings. Their busyness was compounded by a preference for spoken communication rather than written so that I needed to make phone calls rather than send letters if I wanted to organise a meeting.

The parents, like their children, demonstrated a preference for operating interdependently. Whilst people in individualistic cultures tend to prioritise personal goals and interests, people in collectivist cultures tend to give either equal or greater priority to the needs of the family and community (Gore et al., 2011, p. 3). Parents' unavailability at school events may, in part, have stemmed from prioritising group contexts as opposed to attending to individual obligations and demonstrates the collectivist culture in which they operated. Their attentiveness to group situations may also partly explain why they were too busy to reply to written communication. However, since relationship building is an importance aspect of operating within a group context, this could explain why the parents responded to personal phone calls rather than formal, written communication.

A further issue, which inhibited interaction between teachers and parents, was the respect for authority voiced by some parents. The Education Review Office, in their May 2012 report for *Improving Educational Outcomes for Pacific Learners*, realised that "respect for authority" stopped some parents from speaking with teachers and that teachers were not always sure how to go about engaging Pacific parents (ERO,

2012a). Tuafuti (2010) also expressed concerned that parents' respectful silence in teacher consultations meant that parents' voices were not heard. Although, in my study, the parents generally agreed that respect was a barrier to communication, there was recognition that those born in New Zealand were learning to speak out and ask more questions.

Despite growing confidence amongst the parents, there was general concern that their voices were not heard in teacher-parent communication. One parent participant commented how other parents avoided school meetings altogether because they did not understand them. Although they wanted to make a positive contribution to their children's educational progress, they perceived that communication with teachers was difficult. Gorinski and Fraser (2006) commented in the findings from their literature review on *Effective Engagement of Pasifika Parents and Communities in Education* that teachers may not understand the discontinuity in values, beliefs, and experiences between school and home. They may not seek out parents to consult them about their children's education but rather expect them to conform to existing school communication systems situated within the dominant mainstream culture. Their recommendation was for schools to reconsider school practices, reaching out to engage parents.

It is reasonable to speculate that this recommendation would be supported by the parent participants in this particular study who wanted the school to adopt a more inclusive approach with them. It is interesting to note that these parents did not typically represent those portrayed in other research studies, which have largely been based in low decile schools. These participant parents had elected to send their children to a high decile secondary school where their children formed a relatively small minority of the overall population. This suggests a degree of efficacy on the part of the parents with regard to the school system (since they had made a conscious decision in their choice of school). However, they still reflected similar views to the parents from other research in that they expressed feelings of disempowerment and sought greater reciprocity in communication with teachers.

5.5 Conclusion

A discussion of the findings has revealed there are a number of issues surrounding communication that prevented parents from playing a supportive role in their child's academic progress. Whilst parents and students both acknowledged the merit in parental involvement to provide encouragement and motivation, parents felt disconnected from their child's academic world and, therefore, limited in the support they could provide. Parental encouragement, based on a belief in effort rather than knowledge of the school system and their child's actual performance, may have discouraged students from being fully engaged in their studies.

Both parents and students demonstrated a preference to operate interdependently, influenced by their cultural background, and this was sometimes incongruent with the individualised nature of the school system. Students learnt to compartmentalise their worlds and, rather than acting as medium between home and school, elected to avoid conversations with parents even though they acknowledged there were benefits to them. Parents wanted more communication with teachers but there was an apparent incompatibility between the way school operated and the need for parents to build relationships in order to establish reciprocal dialogue with teachers.

These findings are compatible with other studies and confirm much that is already known. However, the parents in my study had elected to send their children to a high decile school where Pacific Island students were in the minority. Despite their efficacy to negotiate a school of their choice and their aspirations for academic success for their children, they expressed some difficulty with negotiating the school system to support their children. These findings demonstrate the relevance of parent-child interaction in the home on student academic outcomes. They illustrate the key role which students can potentially play in bridging the gap between home and school, so that parents can more ably support their child's academic progress.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model highlights the value of reciprocal dialogue in which participants are engaged and proactive. One barrier to this dialogue stemmed from the parents' lack of knowledge of the education system (the exosystem in the

ecological model, see Fig 1, p.34). However further contextual influences were the participants' cultural values (in the macrosystem in Fig 1, p.34). Both parents and students showed how cultural values, belonging to a collectivist culture, impacted on the quality of interactions that related to a school context which operated from an individualised perspective. One might anticipate that, with each successive generation, Pasifika learners and their families are further acculturated into the individualised school system, (the chronosystem in Fig 1). For example, participant parents acknowledged that parents who were New Zealand born asked more questions. However, congruence between my research and previous studies indicates that issues regarding home-school interaction continue to exist despite the passing of time. If these issues can be addressed, it may help parents to play a more supportive role in their child's academic progress.

An important issue, therefore, raised in this research is to consider the impact on students' learning when they develop mechanisms to separate their worlds. For some Pacific Island students there exists a discontinuity in the various social spaces they inhabit and one outcome of this is that it can lead to parental exclusion from the learning process. As Leander et al. (2010) point out, there is often an assumption amongst teachers and researchers that learning is bound within the limits of a physical classroom or, at least, bound by the dominant classroom discourse. They warn of perceiving learners only in relation to the classroom and of not recognising the different social contexts that may act upon the learner (p. 335). Since social processes are fluid and learners bring different perspectives then, perhaps due to geographical mobility of the family, Leander et al. (2010) argue it is time to redefine the learning spaces which take into account the changing world of the learner. An issue for the students and their parents, therefore, is the negative impact of disconnected social spaces which can marginalise minority families' cultural identity and deter the potentially beneficial contribution which parents could make to the students' learning process.

CHAPTER 6

Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with a summary of the research project, giving an overview of key conclusions drawn from the findings using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to support the analysis. Next, implications of the findings are discussed with reference to the Ministry of Education's perspective. The chapter closes with some key recommendations regarding the parental involvement of Pacific Island families with students at secondary level and suggests possible direction for further research.

6.2 A summary of the study

The aim of the research project was to explore the Pacific Island families' perceptions of the parental role in the learning process. It was conducted in a high decile secondary school where Pacific students formed a small, but growing, minority. An important idea, which underlies this research, is that parents' involvement in their children's learning can have a positive impact on academic outcomes and it is, therefore, worthwhile for schools to encourage and guide them in their support. The main research question, "How do Pacific Island parents and students perceive the parental role in the learning process?" was broken down into two parallel sub-questions:

- How do Pacific parents and students perceive the parents' communication role when parents and students interact at home about the students' academic progress?
- How do Pacific parents and students perceive the parents' communication role when parents and teachers interact at school about the students' academic progress?

The purpose of the sub-questions was to discover what, if any, gaps existed in the communication process regarding perceptions of the parental role. In doing so, it

would then be possible to make recommendations to strengthen the communication process involving parents.

The academic results of Pacific Island students at this school compared favourably with statistics for this national cohort of students. Also some of the parent participants in this study spoke positively of connections they had made with teachers with regard to conversations about their child's learning, and some students spoke favourably of the supportive and encouraging conversations they had with their parents. Nevertheless, the findings showed that issues around communication did exist and, if these could be addressed, the school would be better positioned to support Pacific students to gain positive academic outcomes.

A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed. The research used focus groups and interviews to gain insight into the participants' views. Analysis of data involved a search for emergent themes which evolved through an inductive, reflective, and thorough process. In order to conduct such a detailed analysis, the sample size was small. There were seven parent participants and twelve student participants.

The findings reflected how the parent participants were keen to support their children's learning. They hoped to be able to work with teachers so that they could understand their children's learning needs; they hoped, also, to have open, honest and informed conversations with their children so that they could support them accordingly. The findings showed that parents sometimes felt disempowered in conversations with teachers and frustrated that their children elected not to share their learning experiences with them. The students appreciated their parents' support but a number of them acknowledged there were barriers to engaging in learning conversations with them. Instead, students chose to separate the world of school from the world of home.

This research was supported by current and relevant research literature and its findings were, in many ways, compatible with the results from other research on Pacific Island students and their parents in New Zealand. However, this study took

place in a high decile school where Pacific Island students were in the minority. Even though parents showed initiative with the school system by selecting a school of their choice, they still expressed some uncertainty about communicating with teachers and understanding how they could help their child's progress. It is not a new finding that Pacific students have kept their home and school life separate (Hill & Hawk, 1998; Siope, 2011). Given that some of the students' parents were educated in New Zealand, the passing of time does not appear to have changed how some students continue to keep the world of school and home apart.

Another of this research's unique contributions to the literature in this field is that both parents and students participated so that an insightful comparison could be made of differences in perceptions; this helped to provide a deeper understanding of the communication process within families.

6.3 The employment of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model proved to be a useful tool for supporting the analysis of these findings. It helped to pinpoint core values and beliefs which influenced the direction of the interaction between parents and teachers, and between parents and their children. At the macro level, it could be seen that beliefs related to the collectivist nature of Pacific Island cultures affected the way parents engaged with school. They did not always relate to the individualised communication system of the school which did not appear validate the importance of relationship building nor understand that parents may be uncomfortable expressing their concerns to the teachers. Likewise, students' values, situated within the collectivist nature of their upbringing, brought a degree of disparity to the classroom where learning reflected values associated with individualised thinking. Some students managed these conflicts by maintaining a low profile in the classroom and separating school from home life, thereby blocking parents from conversations. In addition, at the macro level, the parents' belief in hard work compounded the students' resistance to engage in conversations as they feared they would not meet their parents' expectations: this had a potentially negative impact on their ability to be confident learners who had self-determination.

Bronfenbrenner's model was an effective framework for this study because it acknowledged how reciprocal dialogue in an immediate context supports human development. Parents can support their child's learning through their active engagement in interactions at home with their child and at school with teachers. The model helped me to look for contextual influences which affected the quality of interaction involving parents. Whilst the framework affected the data I analysed, I was careful, however, not to force data into the framework.

6.4 Limitations

Although the findings were based on a small group of parents and their students, they have been strongly supported by recent and relevant literature in the field. One major reason why the parents agreed to participate was because they were keen for their children to do well and saw the research project as useful to them. Their views may not have necessarily represented the views of other Pacific parents in the school. However, they spoke of other parents who, they believed, felt the same as them. They expressed the hope that their contribution to the research would benefit other families.

Both parents and students could have been influenced by my role as a teacher or by the fact that I am European in origin. This may have influenced them to say what they thought I wanted to hear or to avoid altogether telling me what they were really thinking. However, I believe my skill with building relationships enabled me to secure rich data from the participants who appeared open and trusting towards me.

6.5 Implications

In this section, implications are discussed under three broad areas: firstly, parent-teacher interaction; secondly, parent-student interaction; finally, the Ministry of Education perspective is taken into consideration.

6.5.1 Parent-teacher interaction.

This study confirms other research findings which show that Pacific Island parents wish to support their children's learning but are not always sure how to best to proceed. The study has highlighted that parents do not necessarily prioritise meetings with teachers at parent-teacher meetings and do not necessarily express their concerns openly to teachers when they do meet. This study supports the findings of Gorinski and Fraser (2006) that there may be dissonance between the values and beliefs of the parents and the school. The risk is that teachers, unaware of the perception of the parents, may interpret passive behaviour or non-attendance at school meetings as lack of interest in their children's academic progress. Furthermore, the disparity between values can emphasise the dominant values in the education system and leave parents feeling marginalised and ineffective at supporting their children's learning. Misunderstandings in communication and parental feelings of disempowerment can undermine parental contributions to support students' learning.

6.5.2 Parent-student interaction.

Parents often encourage their children to work hard and aim for high targets in their learning, hoping that they will gain entrance to university and secure a well-paid professional job. It was important to the parents in this study to have honest feedback from their children but a number of students preferred to separate their school world from their home world rather than engage in learning conversations with their family. There are a number of implications which can result as a consequence of a gap in communication between parents and their children.

One implication is that students may respond negatively to what they perceive as parental pressure. Rather than responding to encouragement to work harder, they maintain a low profile, avoiding attention in class in case they are underperforming. This lack of engagement can potentially lead to disappointing results. The risk, therefore, is that students feel they cannot meet the expected targets that their parents have set them which results in their retraction from learning conversations and from engagement in class.

A further point is that some students said they had come to rely on parental pressure as a motivating factor. It is likely that students who rely on such external parental pressure will be less inclined to become self-determined learners who are intrinsically motivated. Also, it is difficult for parents to set targets and direct their child's learning if they lack understanding of their child's progress.

6.5.3 Ministry of Education perspective.

Mechanisms which schools traditionally employ for home-school relationships may not be meeting the needs of Pacific Island families. These findings highlight the case for developing strategies to engage these parents since this may not only be beneficial to students' learning but also, as explicitly stated by the participant parents, it is something parents specifically wanted. The findings are compatible with the viewpoint of the Ministry of Education whose Pacific Education Plan for 2013 – 2017 states clearly that a goal is to engage Pasifika parents, families, and communities with schools in order to support their children's learning. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education is currently generating information to help schools find practical ways to achieve this. For example, the June 2013 edition of the Ministry of Education publication *Talanoaako* (Ministry of Education, 2013) focuses on initiatives to build links with parents, families, communities, and schools. The overall focus of this publication is to encourage initiatives in schools to connect with Pacific Island families in a culturally compatible way.

Likewise, as a means of encouraging schools to be proactive and adaptable in engaging Pacific Island families and communities, the Ministry of Education website Te Kete Ipurangi (tki) has a dedicated section with media clips (Ministry of Education, Te Kete Ipurangi. n.d.). These clips collectively demonstrate an underlying awareness from the Ministry that the involvement of Pacific Island parents is an important key to Pacific Island student achievement and the sharing of ideas which develop parental participation is valuable for schools with Pasifika students across New Zealand.

6.6 Recommendations

This study has established the need to encourage reciprocal dialogue at the micro/meso level between teachers, parents, and students so that a shared understanding of the students' learning needs and their targets can be achieved. There are three key recommendations to make.

Firstly, one way parents can support their child's academic progress is by setting realistic expectations and targets based on their understanding of NCEA and their child's academic performance. If teachers are able to share knowledge on these matters, parents and their children can have more confidence in engaging in meaningful conversations at home based on a mutual and realistic understanding of the student's performance.

Secondly, as Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) stress, parents need to understand feedback from teachers so that they can set realistic targets with their children. One way this can be achieved is by building positive relationships between parents and teachers so that there is the opportunity to develop mutual understanding and have informed conversations about the students' learning (Yamamoto and Holloway, 2010). For example, teachers need a better understanding of a student's home life, understanding how different responsibilities impact on time that could be dedicated to school work. Parents need a better understanding of school deadlines and awareness of practical measures they can take to help their child meet these deadlines. Importantly, when parents and teachers are engaged in positive and trusting relationships, parents can feel comfortable about asking questions so that information about NCEA and academic progress becomes demystified, and teachers can learn from parents how best to meet the needs of their students.

Thirdly, Bronfenbrenner's model is a reminder that changes in the exosystem need to be addressed if teachers and parents are to achieve effective dialogue. It is difficult for teachers to find opportunities for building relationships with parents on an individual level when they already have large demands on their time and they may also require professional development to understand how best to achieve positive connections

with parents. An important recommendation then is to encourage schools to adopt strategies which support teachers in developing an inclusive approach so they have effective opportunities to share information with Pacific Island parents. Clearly, the five-minute short slots afforded to parents at parent meetings are insufficient to build relationships which are a prerequisite for information exchange for many Pacific Island families.

It is, therefore, important to consider what strategies are effective in engaging parents. There are currently a number of practical ideas being employed in schools across New Zealand. For example, some schools organise special invitations to Pacific parents to attend social events which successfully lead into parent-teacher meetings; the collective nature of these encourage group attendance and relationship building. The recruitment process in my study illustrates how parents might be engaged. A Pacific liaison person could initiate contact with some of the parents who, in turn, could communicate with others in order to gather parents together in a group meeting. This snowball effect was evident amongst both the parent and student participants. Numbers grew as parents and students communicated with each other and learnt about my study. A Pacific liaison person might also work with students, organising them to give feedback to their parents under the direction of their teachers. Teachers could scaffold learning conversations between parents and their children, which could continue at home. A further benefit of these conversations is that it might help students to develop connections between home and school, and encourage them to communicate with their parents about their academic progress.

In summary, this study provides research which supports current practical strategies happening in schools across the country to engage Pacific Island families in a culturally-compatible way. Often these occur in low decile schools with large numbers of Pacific Island families but this study illustrates how high decile schools with an academic reputation also need to be mindful of providing effective measures for an inclusive approach to minority culture families.

6.7 Suggestions for further research

Although there are a number of practical projects in existence in schools in New Zealand to support the engagement of Pacific Island families, there is a lack of research which measures the effectiveness such home-school strategies (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008; Chu et al., 2013). Therefore, research, which measures the effectiveness of strategies employed in a school to engage these families, would be timely.

This study also acknowledges the need for a redefinition of learning spaces, moving beyond the concept of the “classroom-as-container” as the sole place where learning might be expected to take place (Leander, Phillips, Taylor, 2010). Currently, for some Pacific Island families there exists a discontinuity in the social spaces between the different worlds of home and school. To restrict learning conversations to the narrow confines of the classroom setting, with its specific language and practices, is an exclusive approach that can deny parents’ entry into their child’s learning process. Therefore, research, which investigates learning spaces outside of the specific context of the classroom where students and their parents can both enter, would be worthwhile exploring.

One possibility would be to conduct an action research project which creates a physical space for teachers, parents, and their children to enter where they can engage in dialogue for the benefit of the students’ learning. This would bridge the metaphorical space between the different worlds. It would be interesting to explore how a parental perspective can contribute to the learning process when it is afforded equity with teachers’ perspectives through the use of physical space.

6.8 Looking towards the future

This research concludes with the affirmation that the involvement of parents in their child’s learning at secondary level is to be encouraged. When Pacific Island parents have a greater understanding of their children’s academic targets and goals, they will be able to play a stronger role in supporting the learning process.

The Ministry of Education has made its clear in its Pacific Education Plan for 2013 – 2017 that it seeks to improve the engagement and achievement of Pacific Island students and has established the involvement of families in their children’s learning is a priority. The Ministry acknowledges schools that have been adaptive and creative in their links with Pacific Island families. It is to be hoped that funding to support further research and initiatives, such as suggested here, will be forthcoming.

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Appendix 1 - Information Sheet for Parents and Caregivers



Research Project:

Building bridges – unlocking perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families

Introducing me and my research

My name is Maggie Flavell and, as you perhaps know, I am a teacher at Tawa College. I come from the United Kingdom and arrived in New Zealand in January 2008 to take up a teaching position at the College. In 2009, I started a Master's Degree in Education at Victoria University and have been working on this on a part-time basis whilst continuing to teach full time. I chose to study because I wanted to better understand the education system here and, most importantly, the students.

I have now started on research for my degree and am investigating how Pacific Island parents and caregivers see their role in their child's learning. I hope that the results of my research can inform school practices so that teachers can be better informed at making connections with students and their families. I think this is important because I feel strongly that anything we can do to improve the way teachers, parents and students communicate will benefit the students' progress at school.

I would like to meet with a group of about six senior students at Tawa College and find out about how they perceive their family is involved in their learning and with a group of about six parents or caregivers, related to these students, and find out how they perceive they help their children with their learning. I will hold both meetings at Tawa College at a time that is mutually convenient. Meetings will last for approximately an hour. I have some questions to ask but the priority is to allow a relaxed conversation to take place where you feel comfortable to contribute. I will ask you to complete a brief questionnaire at this meeting. I will invite some students to be interviewed individually and also their related parents or caregivers so that we can discuss matters further.

At each meeting, I will audio record the conversation in order to turn it into a written copy of what was said. I will take notes of the conversation which I shall read back to you so you can amend them if you wish. I will also ask you to complete a short questionnaire. I will seek the help of some cultural advisors from the community to guide me with arrangements for meeting up and possibly share ideas with me on my research topic. I will not share with them any raw

data that I directly collect from you and they will sign a form to ensure that they keep all matters related to the data I collect confidential.

Taking Part

I would like to invite you to participate in my research. The information I collect from you will be treated confidentially. It will be seen by me, my university supervisors, and possibly a typist, if one is required. No real names will be used and the school will not be identified either. I will protect the identity of any individuals who agree to participate. I will not report back to the students what you tell me. I will store paper-based data in a locked file and I will password-protect information gathered on my computer. All information will be destroyed after three years. You can withdraw from the research at any stage without giving a reason up to 30th April. I will send you a summary of my findings. The findings of my research will be published in my thesis which will be lodged in the University Victoria Library and I may present these findings at conferences.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee whose role is to ensure I conduct my investigation in a way that respects the interests of individuals participating. If you do have any concerns or questions about the ethics conduct of this research, please contact Allison Kirkman (Allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz), chair of the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee. Alternatively, you may wish to contact either of my supervisors, Carolyn Tait (Carolyn.tait@vuw.ac.nz), Director, International School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, or Margaret Gleeson (Margaret.gleeson@vuw.ac.nz), Senior Lecturer, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy.

If you have any questions regarding my research, please feel free to contact me. My email address is flavelmarg1@myvuw.ac.nz. Alternatively you may wish to ring the school on 04 2328184 and leave a message for me.

I hope you will be able to support me with my proposed study and I look forward to working with you.

Kind regards

Maggie Flavell

Appendix 2 - Focus Group Consent Form for Parents / Caregivers



Building bridges – unlocking perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families

Please tick the boxes if you agree, then add your signature and date. The easiest way to return the form to me is to hand it into the school office and I can collect it from there.

- This study has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I am willing to participate in a small group discussion with other parents or caregivers.
- I understand that this meeting will take place at Tawa College and will last for approximately one hour.
- I acknowledge that the conversation will be audio recorded and notes will be taken. These will be checked back with me.
- I understand that I will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire about my cultural background and educational experiences. I can leave any answers blank if I choose.
- I understand that the findings from this research will be used in a Master of Education thesis and may be published in academic papers and presented at conferences.
- I know that Maggie will not use my real name or my child's name in reporting this focus group.
- I understand that Maggie will not report back to the students or the cultural advisors what I tell her.
- I understand that the information I provide will be used to support the findings of this research and will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my written consent.
- I understand that, even if I give consent now, I may withdraw at any stage up till 30th April and do not need to give a reason.
- I agree to participate in this research.

Signed:

Date:

Name:

Please note down your preferred means for contacting you:

Home tel no:

Work tel no:

Cell no:

Email address:

Home address:

Appendix 3 - Confidential Interview Consent Form for Parents / Caregivers



Please tick the boxes if you agree, then add your signature and date. The easiest way to return the form to me is to hand it into the school office and I can collect it from there.

- This study has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I am willing to participate in a confidential interview.
- I understand that this meeting will take place at Tawa College and will last for approximately one hour.
- I acknowledge that the conversation will be audio recorded and notes will be taken. These will be checked back with me.
- I understand that the findings from this research will be used in a Master of Education thesis and may be published in academic papers and presented at conferences.
- I know that Maggie will not use my real name or my child's name in reporting this interview.
- I understand that Maggie will not report back to the students or the cultural advisors what I tell her.
- I understand that the information I provide will be used to support the findings of this research and will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my written consent.
- I understand that, even if I give consent now, I may withdraw at any stage up till 30th April and do not need to give a reason.
- I agree to participate in this research.

Signed:

Date:

Name:

Please note down your preferred means for contacting you:

Home tel no:

Work tel no:

Cell no:

Email address:

Home address:

Appendix 4 - Information Sheet for Cultural Advisors



Research Project:

Building bridges – unlocking perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families

Introducing me and my research

My name is Maggie Flavell and, as you perhaps know, I am a teacher at Tawa College. I come from the United Kingdom and arrived in New Zealand in January 2008 to take up a teaching position at the College. In 2009, I started a Master's Degree in Education at Victoria University and have been working on this on a part-time basis whilst continuing to teach full time. I chose to study because I wanted to better understand the education system here and, most importantly, the students.

I have now started on research for my degree and am investigating how Pacific Island parents and caregivers see their role in their child's learning. I hope that the results of my research can inform school practices so that teachers can be better informed at making connections with students and their families. I think this is important because I feel strongly that anything we can do to improve the way teachers, parents and students communicate will benefit the students' progress at school.

I would like to meet with a group of about six senior students at Tawa College and find out about how they perceive their family is involved in their learning and with a group of about six parents or caregivers, related to these students, and find out how they perceive they help their children with their learning. I will hold both meetings at Tawa College and these meetings will last for approximately an hour. I have some questions to ask but the priority is to allow a relaxed conversation to take place where individuals feel comfortable to contribute. I will invite some students to be interviewed individually and also their related parents or caregivers so that we can discuss matters further.

I plan to consult with members of the Pasifika community and am seeking a small number of individuals to support me with my research. These individuals are already likely to have existing connections with Tawa College and share the commitment to develop educational achievements and opportunities for Pasifika young people.

Taking Part

I wonder if you would be able to assist me as an advisor. I am seeking help with the recruitment of Pasifika families who may be willing to participate in this

project. Perhaps you could recommend a family where a child is a senior student at Tawa College, and, if so, I would be grateful if you could make the initial contact on my behalf. (If you are willing to do this, I have an information sheet and consent form which you can hand out.)

Even if you are not able to support with the recruitment of participants, I would welcome your interest. You may have time to meet with me so that I can share my project with you in more detail. One area where I am particularly keen for further guidance is advice on protocol so that I am able to make connections and put people at ease when I meet them.

The information I collect from you and from the families will be treated confidentially. It will be seen by me, my university supervisors, and possibly a typist, if one is required. No real names will be used and the school will not be identified either. I will protect the identity of both the school and of any individuals who agree to participate. I will not share any raw data with you that I directly collect from participants and will ask you to sign a form to ensure that all matters related to the data I collect are kept confidential. I will store paper-based data in a locked file and I will password-protect information gathered on my computer. All information will be destroyed after three years. I will send you a summary of my findings. The findings of my research will be published in my thesis which will be lodged in the University Victoria Library and I may present these findings at a conference.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee whose role is to ensure I conduct my investigation in a way that respects the interests of individuals participating. If you do have any concerns or questions about the ethics conduct of this research, please contact Allison Kirkman (Allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz), chair of the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee. Alternatively, you may wish to contact either of my supervisors, Carolyn Tait (Carolyn.tait@vuw.ac.nz), Programme Director, International School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, or Margaret Gleeson (Margaret.gleeson@vuw.ac.nz), Senior Lecturer, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy.

If you have any questions regarding my research, please feel free to contact me. My email address is flavemarg1@myvuw.ac.nz. Alternatively you may wish to ring the school on 04 2328184 and leave a message for me.

I hope you will be able to support me with my proposed study and I look forward to working with you.

Kind regards

Maggie Flavell

Appendix 5 - Cultural Advisor Confidentiality Agreement



Research Project:

Building bridges – unlocking perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families

Researcher:

Maggie Flavell

If you are willing to act as a cultural advisor for this research, please could you tick the boxes if you agree, then sign and date this form.

I understand participating in this research could involve:

- contacting families who currently have a senior student at Tawa College and asking them if they are willing to participate in this research;
- advising on protocol to help Maggie show appropriate cultural sensitivity in the conduct of her data collection;
- advising on cultural interpretation of data to avoid misrepresentation of findings;
- meeting to share ideas and understanding of Pasifika educational matters in general.

I also understand that:

- information discussed with Maggie will be deemed confidential and I will ensure that it is not shared with any third party;
- Maggie will not directly share any raw data with me.

I,, will be a cultural advisor to support the research project “How do Pasifika parents and students perceive the role of parents in the learning process?”

Signature of the cultural advisor

Date

Please note down your preferred means for contacting you:

Home tel no:

Cell no:

Home address:

Work tel no:

Email address:

Appendix 6 - Information Sheet for Students



Research Project:

Building bridges – unlocking perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families

Introducing me and my research

My name is Maggie Flavell and, as you perhaps know, I am a teacher at Tawa College. I come from the United Kingdom and arrived in New Zealand in January 2008 to take up a teaching position at the College. In 2009, I started a Master's Degree in Education at Victoria University and have been working on this on a part-time basis whilst continuing to teach full time. I chose to study because I wanted to better understand the education system here and, most importantly, the students.

I have now started on research for my degree and am investigating how Pacific Island parents and caregivers see their role in their child's learning. I hope that the results of my research can inform school practices so that teachers can be better informed at making connections with students and their families. I think this is important because I feel strongly that anything we can do to improve the way teachers, parents and students communicate will benefit the students' progress at school.

I would like to meet with a group of about six senior students at Tawa College and find out about how they perceive their family is involved in their learning and with a group of about six parents or caregivers, related to these students, and find out how they perceive they help their children with their learning. I will hold both meetings at Tawa College and these meetings will last for approximately an hour. I have some questions to ask but the priority is to allow a relaxed conversation to take place where individuals feel comfortable to contribute. I will ask you to complete a brief questionnaire at this meeting. I will invite some students to be interviewed individually and also their related parents or caregivers so that we can discuss matters further.

I plan to consult with members of the Pasifika community and am seeking a small number of individuals to support me with my research. These individuals are already likely to have existing connections with Tawa College and share the commitment to develop educational achievements and opportunities for Pasifika young people. I will not share with them any raw data that I directly collect from

you and they will sign a form to ensure that they keep all matters related to the data I collect confidential.

Taking Part

I would like to invite you to participate in my research. The information I collect from you will be treated confidentially. It will be seen by me, my university supervisors, and possibly a typist, if one is required. No real names will be used and the school will not be identified either. I will protect the identity of any individuals who agree to participate; and I will not report back to the parents or caregivers what you tell me. I will store paper-based data in a locked file and I will password-protect information gathered on my computer. All information will be destroyed after three years. You can withdraw from the research at any stage without giving a reason up to 30th April. I will send you a summary of my findings. The findings of my research will be published in my thesis which will be lodged in the University Victoria Library and I may present these findings at conferences.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee whose role is to ensure I conduct my investigation in a way that respects the interests of individuals participating. If you do have any concerns or questions about the ethics conduct of this research, please contact Allison Kirkman (Allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz), chair of the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee. Alternatively, you may wish to contact either of my supervisors, Carolyn Tait (Carolyn.tait@vuw.ac.nz), Director, International School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, or Margaret Gleeson (Margaret.gleeson@vuw.ac.nz), Senior Lecturer, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy.

If you have any questions regarding my research, please feel free to contact me. My email address is flavelmarg1@vuw.ac.nz. Alternatively you may wish to ring the school on 04 2328184 and leave a message for me.

I hope you will be able to support me with my proposed study and I look forward to working with you.

Kind regards

Maggie Flavell

Appendix 7 - Focus Group Consent Form for Students



Building bridges – unlocking perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families

Please tick the boxes if you agree, then add your signature and date. The easiest way to return the form to me is to hand it into the school office and I can collect it from there.

- This study has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I am willing to participate in a small group discussion with other students.
- I understand that this meeting will take place at Tawa College and will last for approximately one hour.
- I acknowledge that the conversation will be audio recorded and notes will be taken. These will be checked back with me.
- I understand that I will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire about my cultural background and educational experiences. I can leave any answers blank if I choose.
- I understand that the findings from this research will be used in a Master of Education thesis and may be published in academic papers and presented at conferences.
- I know that Mrs Flavell will not use my real name in reporting this focus group.
- I understand that Maggie will not report back to the parents, caregivers or cultural advisors what I tell her.
- I understand that the information I provide will be used to support the findings of this research and will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my written consent.
- I understand that, even if I give consent now, I may withdraw at any stage up till 30th April and do not need to give a reason.

I agree to participate in this research.

Signed:

Date:

Name:

Form Class:

Cell no (voluntary):

Appendix 8 - Confidential Interview Consent Form for Students



Building bridges – unlocking perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families

Please tick the boxes if you agree, then add your signature and date. The easiest way to return the form to me is to hand it into the school office and I can collect it from there.

- This study has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I am willing to participate in a confidential interview.
- I understand that this meeting will take place at Tawa College and will last for approximately one hour.
- I acknowledge that the conversation will be audio recorded and notes will be taken. These will be checked back with me.
- I understand that the findings from this research will be used in a Master of Education thesis and may be published in academic papers and presented at conferences.
- I know that Mrs Flavell will not use my real name in reporting this interview.
- I understand that Maggie will not report back to the parents, caregivers or cultural advisors what I tell her.
- I understand that the information I provide will be used to support the findings of this research and will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my written consent.
- I understand that, even if I give consent now, I may withdraw at any stage up till 30th April and do not need to give a reason.
- I agree to participate in this research.

Signed:
Name
Form Class:

Date:
Cell no (voluntary)

Appendix 9 - Information Sheet for Senior Management



Research Project:

Building bridges – unlocking perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families

My research

As you are no doubt aware, I am undertaking a research project for my Master's degree which is investigating how Pacific Island parents and caregivers perceive their role in their child's learning. I hope that the research process will help strengthen the connections between the College and Pacific Island families. I also hope that the results of my research can support school practices so that teachers are better informed about making connections with students and their families. I feel strongly that anything we can do to improve the way teachers, parents and students communicate will benefit the students' progress at school.

My research plan

I would like to meet with a group of about six students and find out about how they perceive their family is involved in their learning. I would also like to meet with a group of about six parents or caregivers, related to these students, and find out how they perceive they help their children with their learning. I would also like to conduct a follow-up interview with about three students and a follow-up interview with their related parents or caregivers so that we can discuss matters that are important to individuals.

I also plan to consult with members of the Pasifika community and am seeking a small number of individuals to support me with my research. These advisors are already likely to have existing connections with College and share the commitment to develop educational achievements and opportunities for Pasifika young people. I hope they can help me select families to participate, guide me with arrangements for meeting up and possibly share ideas with me on my research topic. I will not directly share any raw data from participants with these advisors and I will ask them to sign a form to ensure that they keep all matters related to the data I collect confidential.

I intend to select senior students in preference to juniors, since they are likely to be more articulate and will have more experience of the secondary school system. In the selection of families, it would be helpful to include a range of Pacific Island ethnicities as reflected in our school's population. It may also be helpful to include family members who have been born in New Zealand (and have experienced the education system here) as well as family members who are migrants to this country (with different educational experiences).

All information that I receive will be treated confidentially and I will ensure that it is securely stored. I will protect the identity of both the school and of any individuals who agree to participate. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

I intend to hold my meetings at the school as I believe this is the most appropriate venue and anticipate carrying out my meetings during Term One, 2013. I aim to have completed my thesis prior to returning to my full-time role in Term 4 and would like to present the school with a summary report of my findings on my return.

I hope it is acceptable for me to proceed with my research at College. I would be grateful for names of any Pasifika contacts whom I could call upon in an advisory capacity as outlined above. I hope, also, I may select participants as described and hold meetings at the College here. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. I am very excited about conducting this research and I appreciate your continued support.

Regards

Maggie Flavell

Appendix 10 - Consent Form for Principal



Research Project:

Building bridges – unlocking perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families

Researcher:

Maggie Flavell

If you are able to permit me to conduct this research at College, please could you sign and date this form.

I,, give permission for Maggie Flavell to proceed with her research project investigating the perceptions of the parental role in the learning process amongst Pasifika families as outlined in her information sheet.

Signature of Principal

Date

.....

These questions were used as a guide only.

Appendix 11 - Focus Questions to Parents

Tell me about the conversations you have with your children about their learning at school.

In an ideal world, what would your role in your children's learning look like?

To bring about this ideal world, what would you like:

- your children to do
- the school to do
- families or the community to do?

Appendix 12 - Questionnaire for Parents / Caregivers

Please could you complete this questionnaire which will be treated confidentially and destroyed on completion of the research:

1. Full name
2. In which country were you born?
3. What other countries have you lived in apart from New Zealand?
4. How long have you lived in New Zealand?
5. Which Pasifika culture or cultures do you belong to?
6. Is there a particular Pacific Island or village with which you closely identify?
7. Do you belong to any other cultures? If so, what?
8. What language(s) do you speak at home? If you speak more than one language, which is the main language used at home?
9. What ages are your children?
10. Which schools do they attend?
11. In which country / countries have you been educated?
12. Up to what age did you receive formal education?
13. Which church do you belong to?
14. What is your profession / employment?

Appendix 13 - Interview Questions for Parents / Caregivers

Tell me about some recent conversations you have had with your child in regard to his / her learning at school.

- What have you spoken about?
- What have you been pleased about?
- What, if any, concerns have you had?

Which areas of your child's learning are you most pleased about? Why?

Which areas of your child's learning are you most concerned about? Why?

If you could change anything about the conversations you have at home about your child's learning, what would it be?

If you could change anything about the way the school communicates with you concerning your child's learning, what would it be?

What do you expect your child to achieve by the end of the year?

What are your dreams / hopes for your child?

These questions were used as a guide only.

Appendix 14 - Focus Questions to Students

Tell me about the conversations you have with your parents about your learning at school.

In an ideal world:

- what would you like them to know (and **not** know) about your learning?
Why?

- what kind of help or support would you like from them with regard to your learning at school? Why?

Is there anything you could do to help your parents understand more about your learning at school?

Appendix 15 – Questionnaire for Students

Please could you complete this questionnaire which will be treated confidentially and destroyed on completion of the research.

1. Full name Age
2. Date of birth In which country were you born?
3. Which Pasifika culture or cultures do you belong to?
4. Do you belong to any other cultures? If so, what?
5. What language(s) do you speak at home? If you speak more than one language, which is the main language used at home?
6. Do you have any brothers? What ages are they?
7. Do you have any sisters? What ages are they?
8. What position in the family are you? (Are you the second eldest, for example?)
9. Where do you live when attending school? (For example, T..... or P.....)
10. Have you ever attended school in another country? If so, where and for how long?
11. Who lives with you in your household? (e.g. mum, aunty etc)
12. Which church do you belong to?
13. How often do you attend church?
14. What groups do you belong to outside of school? (e.g. church youth group)
Why did you choose this group?
15. What groups do you belong to at school? Why did you choose this group?

Appendix 16 - Interview Questions to Students

Tell me about some successes you have had with your learning at school.
(Which subjects have you done particularly well in? How do you know you did well?)

What conversations have you had with your family about these successes?
(Who have you spoken with? What did you say? What was said to you?)

Did anything prevent you from having a conversation? Why?

Did anything motivate you to have a conversation? Why?

Tell me about some aspects of your learning at school that has not gone so well.
(Which subjects have not been so successful for you? How do you know?)

What conversations have you had with your family about this learning? (Who have you spoken with? What did you say? What was said to you?)

Did anything prevent you from having a conversation? Why?

Did anything motivate you to have a conversation? Why?

What do you realistically expect to achieve by the end of the year?

What would you like to do in the future?

If you could change anything about the way you communicate with your family about your learning, what would you change? Why?