

**Negotiating pathways: rethinking collaborative
partnerships to improve the educational outcomes of
Pacific Islander young people in Melbourne's Western
region.**

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Abstract

For many Pacific Islander (PI) people, the decision to migrate to a well-developed country is often associated with hopes for increased access to education, health and employment opportunities. Despite almost forty years of continuous migration, PI learners in Australia continue to achieve low educational outcomes, poor transitions to higher education and unsustainable employment. This study aimed to investigate patterns of engagement, achievement and transition of PI learners at the secondary school level, working with fourteen PI learners from Melbourne's western metropolitan region. Using a case study methodology, the study investigated the impact of learners' 'lived in' experiences on their educational trajectories. This methodology fitted well with the study's aim to collect in-depth and rich data and utilise a narrative writing approach. Data was analysed using constant comparison methods and cross-case analysis to extract common themes which were then compared with relevant literature and the empirical data to identify common patterns of school engagement, achievement and post-school pathways of PI.

The post-compulsory stage of schooling proved a problematic phase for some PI learners with inappropriate choice of pathways, inadequate in-home and at-school support and personal distractions cited as responsible factors, supporting current literature and research that PI commonly achieve low educational outcomes at the secondary school level. However, this study also identified some positives in learner transitions to higher education, facilitated mostly through attendance at non-school learning institutions and settings. Girls enjoyed stronger transitions to higher education while boys generally selected TAFE or direct employment pathways. PI successes in education were dependent on individual, home and school factors, which combined and interweaved to affect the schooling trajectories of participants in different ways. Learners with high aspirations, a positive self-concept and sufficient in-home and at-school support had more positive educational experiences. Parental income level, educational background and confidence to navigate school

systems and structures greatly affected a family's capability to provide support. A supportive school culture that recognises the unique needs of PI learners and commits to addressing their academic and social needs was deemed critical.

This study contributes to a growing body of knowledge about effective strategies to engage with PI to improve their educational outcomes and has implications for policies on school-wide support that can assist PI learners and families to confidently engage with educational systems, structures and institutions within their communities.

Student Declaration

I, Irene Kmudu Paulsen, declare that the PhD thesis entitled '*Negotiating pathways: rethinking collaborative partnerships to improve the educational outcomes of Pacific Islander young people in Melbourne's Western region*' is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work'.

Signature:

Date:

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Anu and Fako, both teachers who instilled in me a love for learning.

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List of Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACOLA	Australian Council of Learned Academics
ACSSO	Australian Council of State Schools Organizations
ADA	Australian Data Access
AAAPS	Australian Association for the Advancement of Pacific Studies
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
APTC	Australian Pacific Technical College
CSP	Commonwealth Supported Place
CYP	Commonwealth Youth Program
CALD	Cultural and Linguistic diverse
CAE	Centre for adult education
CDYI	Commonwealth Development Youth Index
CVPIC	Council of Victorian Pacific Island Communities
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood
DEET	Department of Education, Employment and Training
DEST	Department of Schooling and Education
ECCQ	Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland
ESL	English as a Second Language
HE	Higher Education
HECS	Higher Education Commonwealth Support
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
LOTE	Language other than English
LSAY	Longitudinal Survey on Australian Youth
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education in Research
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
SAC	School Assessed Coursework
SEDA	Sport Education Development Australia
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SCV	Special Category Visa
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VE	Vocational Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VU	Victoria University
VUHREC	Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee

Prologue

Sela's dilemma

Sela's interview appointment was scheduled for 12 noon that day. Sela had chosen to bring her mother Atesi with her to the interview and had decided to meet at the local university campus instead of meeting at home, unlike other participants' who had expressed a preference to meet at home. Initially, it had been difficult organising a suitable appointment with the family so I was a little nervous at the prospect of finally meeting Sela and Atesi. The meeting started off well with Sela's mother being interviewed first. Although claiming to have 'poor English', she was clear in her responses while sharing her high expectations for her daughter and saying,

"I am very proud of my daughter and I expect good results from school... in two years I expect her to be attending university...not pregnant or loitering the streets" (Atesi, personal interview, June, 2012)

All this while, Sela had been listening attentively and did not once interrupt her mother. When it was her turn, she was shy at first but then settled down and responded to the interview questions clearly. She said she was doing well in her subjects, had many friends and was enjoying school. Her family was supportive of her future goals and expected that attending school would help her achieve her dream of becoming a qualified nurse. Sela presented as a confident and well-spoken young woman who was focussed and capable of achieving her future educational goals as well as her mother's expectations of her.

At our second interview six months later, Sela seemed a totally different person. She was uneasy and nervous and it did not take long for her to share her news, *"I am so scared...I may be withdrawn from school for not meeting the attendance requirement for VCE. And now my parents have asked me to leave school and find a job to assist with the family's financial stresses"* she announced. What a turnaround, I thought!! Six months earlier, Sela had been so focussed on her goal to complete Year 12 with an Australian Tertiary Admission

Rank (ATAR) score high enough to study a nursing degree at university. She had been confident in her ability to achieve this goal and also had the full support of her family. Now she was faced with a real possibility of leaving school and her friends, and not completing VCE or going to university. To make matters worse, she would not be able to meet her parents' high expectations of her.

What had changed in the last six months for Sela and her family to make such a drastic decision about Sela's education and future? What could Sela do now? Were her original goals no longer important? What other urgent issues and priorities had pushed her goals to the background? Surely as a young person, Sela's main priorities were quite simple and straightforward – that is, to attend school, complete the Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE) successfully and then enrol at University and secure a good job and a successful career. What went so wrong for Sela in the last six months? What events or incidents lead students like Sela to change their focus and perspectives about schooling in a short space of time? How will these changes affect Sela's future educational journey and her career goals?

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research background and situational context and outlines the significance and scope of the study. It introduces the research problem, rationale and focus and explains the research approaches used in the investigation. The final section consists of a summary of each chapter of the thesis.

1.1 Research context: Pacific Islanders in Australia

The close proximity of the Pacific Islands to Australia has meant there has been ongoing and continuous movement between Australia and the neighbouring Pacific Island countries since early days of white settlement. Beginning in around 1847, when indentured labourers from predominantly Melanesian countries of Vanuatu and Solomon Islands were brought to work in sugarcane farms and factories in New South Wales and Queensland (Mercer & Moore, 1978), to the passing of the Immigration Restriction Act and the Pacific Island Labourers Act in 1901, Australian Government authorities have implemented a restrictive policy towards Asian and PI migration to Australia (NSW Migration Heritage Centre, 2010). With the passing of the Pacific Islands Labourers' Act of 1901, many indentured labourers were deported back to the Islands. Whilst about 7000 returned home, others stayed back due to inter-marriage and family relationships with the native Indigenous population. The descendants of these earlier migrants currently comprise an important element of the South Sea Islander population of about 40,000 that still live in Australia today (Mercer & Moore, 1978). Many of them continue to work in the agricultural sector and while formally regarded as Australian citizens, still suffer many socio-cultural and economic disadvantages within society (Macpherson, 2001; Moore, 2008).

After World War Two when the Australian migration policies were relaxed to allow freer passage from the neighbouring regions of Asia and the Pacific, more PI were able to migrate with some level of ease to Australia through family migration and guest worker schemes. With the abandonment of the 'White Australia' policy in 1972 and the adoption of the Trans-Tasman Agreement one

year later (1973) and the passing of the Racial Discrimination Act in 1975 (Slee, 2011), a more permissive attitude towards migration led more PI, mostly Polynesians to migrate from New Zealand to Australia. Many of these early migrants had left their Pacific country of origin to work in the post-war growth areas of manufacturing and agriculture in New Zealand before deciding to move to Australia (Macpherson, Bedford & Spoonley, 2000).

The period between the 1970s and 1990s, therefore marked an important period in the history of Pacific Islander (PI)¹ migration to Australia. It was significant because through signing the Trans-Tasman Agreement with New Zealand in 1973, Australia facilitated an opportunity for greater mobility between the two countries, resulting in a large number of New Zealand based PI, mostly Polynesians of Samoan and Cook Islander backgrounds, migrating to Australia. This was the first time that a sizable group of PI had been able to migrate to Australia of their own volition. In those years, many of these early migrants came in search of employment and for better education and lifestyle opportunities in a new country (Macpherson et al. 2000). Since then, there has been a continuous movement of people of PI background who have continued to migrate to Australia through New Zealand.

In the last twenty years also, another group of migrants have arrived in Australia, having come directly from the island countries with notable arrivals from Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Tonga. The growth in the number of these recent arrivals has stemmed from a shift of emphasis towards skilled migration by the Australian Government, thus opening up opportunities for PI to migrate based on prior educational qualifications and employment experience. But the

¹ The term 'Pacific Islander' (PI for short) refers to the diverse communities of people who come from the many islands scattered across the Pacific ocean who identify as ethnically and culturally Polynesian (from American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Hawaii, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Tokelau), Melanesian (from, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu) or Micronesian (from Banaba, Guam, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Truk Islands, Yap Islands).

small base of skilled workers in the Pacific countries has kept the numbers of PI migrants entering Australia on this type of visa relatively low. When combined with those migrating on the basis of family migration, mostly through the New Zealand pathway, PI migrants make up only about 4% of the total number of migrants to Australia in each year (Woolford, 2009).

Apart from high unemployment (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands), other factors such as political conflict and ethnic turmoil (as in the cases of Fiji and Solomon Islands), climate change pressures (Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru) and land shortages (Nauru, Niue, Tokelau) have provided motivations for outward migration by PI. Past and current bilateral and multi-lateral linkages between Australia and the Pacific Islands in trade, economics, education and politics have continued to strengthen, culminating in the establishment of notable programs such as the refugee asylum centres (Manus Island in Papua New Guinea and Nauru), the Pacific Seasonal Workers scheme (Hay & Howes, 2012; Opeskin, 2010), the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and the Australian Pacific Technical College (APTC). These multi-lateral and bilateral aid programs to various countries continue to strengthen Australia's position as an important influential and powerful player within the Pacific region. At the same time, the formal and informal relationships between ordinary people and communities that live in Australia and their families in the Pacific countries continue to be robust and are likely to lead to increased numbers of PI migrants over the coming years (Ang, Tambiah & Mar, 2015).

This is not a large population in comparative terms. Despite the steady growth of PI numbers in the last forty odd years and the close proximity of the islands to Australia (see Fig.1.1 below), PI in Australia account for less than 1% of the total population with 166,272 people recorded as having Pacific Island ancestry at the Australian 2011 census (Pryke, 2014). Polynesians now make up the majority of the PI population in Australia, due in part to the strength of the New Zealand pathway provided by the 1973 Trans-Tasman Agreement but also from increased recent growth of arrivals from Tonga (Brown & Ahlburg, 1999; Woolford, 2009) whilst Fijian migrants, which include Indo-Fijians have been

responsible for the steady increase in migrants from that country in recent years.

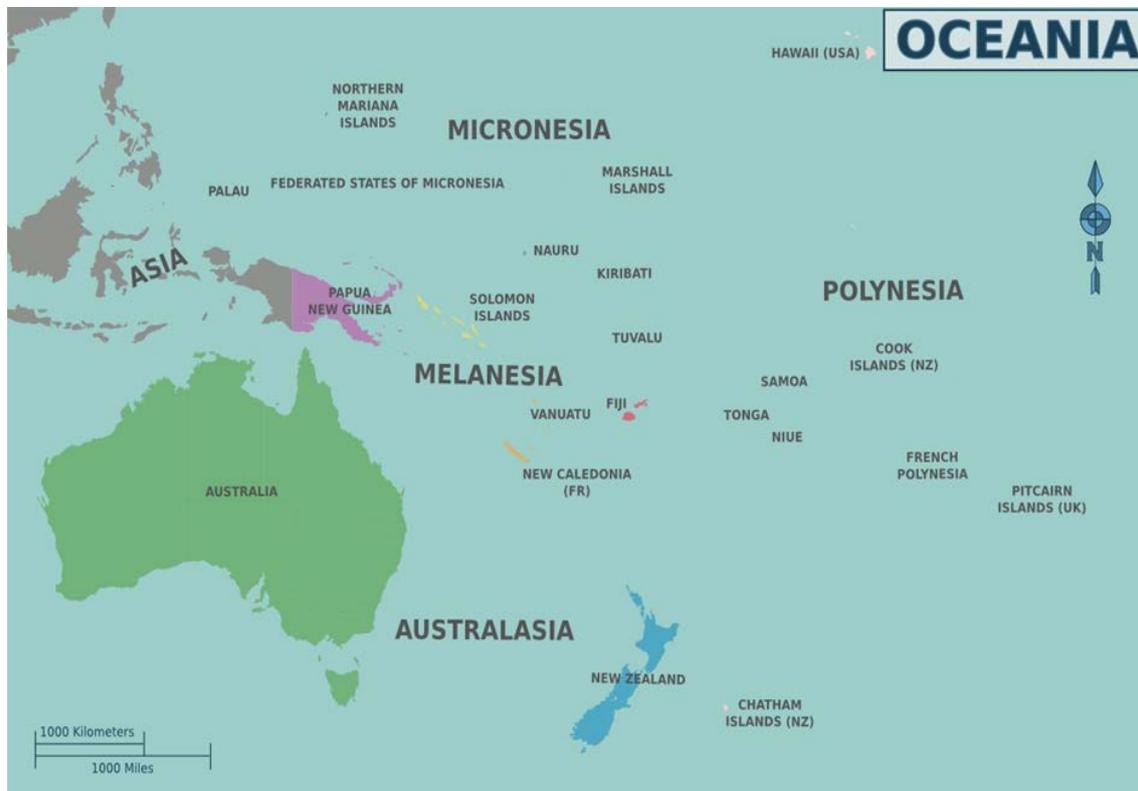


Figure 1-1 Map of Australia and the Pacific Island countries

(Source - <https://www.google maps>)

The Pacific region is often divided into three distinct regions comprising Polynesia (consisting Cook Islands, American Samoa French Polynesia, Niue, Hawaii, Rapanui, Western Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu), Melanesia (comprising Bougainville, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) and Micronesia (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Guam and the US Trust Territories). This categorisation of the Islands into geographical groups has served some purpose in the past and continues to be used to this day. Within these regions, there are multiple diversities in terms of ethnicity, language, physical appearance and socio-cultural mores. The small size of the population overall, and the inherent diversities within it have led demographers and academics to observe that “Pacific islanders as a single entity or in their

separate homeland communities are (still) mostly invisible in the social atlas” (Rose, Moore & Quanchi 2009, p.109). Despite the obscurity and the inherent diversities, PI nevertheless also share many cross-cultural traits and community traditions which characterise their unique origins as Indigenous people from Oceania. Some of the shared traditions include the high emphasis placed on family relationships, the close connections to church and communities, the interest in sports and the arts and the strong connections to tradition and culture (Anae, 1998; Gegeo, 1998; Thaman, 2007). Many PI living in Australia also maintain close relationships with their families and communities in the Islands and hold on tenaciously to the social and cultural norms and customs which identify them collectively as having an ‘Islander’ ethnic heritage and cultural background. Many PI also speak a language other than English at home and share an immigrant background.

In Australia, the small size of the PI population at national, state and city levels has meant that the PI community is relatively invisible within the broader societal context (Rose et al., 2009). Attempts by community elders and members to create a public presence within the wider Australian community and social landscape have had limited success. Some organisations have had to collaborate on a Pacific regional basis to maintain public and advocacy profiles. Pan-Pacific organisations such as the Council of Victorian PI Communities (CVPIC), the Pacific Arts Council and the PI Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ), for example, have experienced some success in advocating on issues affecting PI as a collective migrant community. At the national level, the Australian Association for Pacific Studies (AAPS) and OCIES (Oceania Comparative and International Education Society) have helped somewhat to promote Pacific presence amongst educationists, researchers and community advocacy groups but the overall small size of the PI population has continued to affect the levels of service access, opportunity and provision targeted at this group making it a vulnerable and disengaged cohort within the broader Australian social context (George & Rodriguez, 2009; Vasta, 2004).

As 'choice migrants' (people who move to another country of their own accord) to Australia, many recently-arrived PI have limited access to government supported settlement frameworks, when compared with other migrants who have fled their countries in significantly worse circumstances (Pacific Island Communities in Victoria Report, 2012; Woolford, 2009). This situation has resulted in some Pacific families, especially those who had step-migrated from New Zealand in the 1970s to experience a variety of social and economic challenges ranging from high unemployment and low employment security, financial stress, poor physical and social wellbeing, and limited access to essential services (Victorian Pacific Island Communities Report, 2012). The demise of the manufacturing and mining industries in the 1990s also led many early PI migrants whose skills were limited to these sectors to consequently experience job loss accompanied with its indirect effects of social isolation, marginalisation and a loss of identity and self-worth (Vasta, 2004). Unsurprisingly, PI have consistently been referred to as an equity group in Australia with multiple disadvantages including low socio-economic status with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and low levels of economic, social and community participation (George & Rodriguez, 2009; Vasta, 2004). Given their migration background and history as typically 'choice migrants' to Australia, however, the community expectation is that PI have had sufficient time and opportunity to improve and increase their social and economic participation in the Australian educational and labour market scenes. The reality of the situation, however, is that PI migrants in Australia still face many social and economic challenges despite the expectation that many PI first-generation migrants in Australia follow similar settlement patterns as in New Zealand where they are likely to receive most help from extended family and churches (Woolford, 2009).

Both the empirical and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that the educational outcomes for PI migrants have generally been poor in Australia (Cuthill & Scull, 2011; Kearney, 2012; Rose et al., 2009). Data drawn from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) confirm these findings, evidencing that the educational outcomes of PI learners continue to be low with limited numbers of

PI completing post-compulsory secondary schooling or enrolling at university or TAFE institutions over the years.

Similarly the transitions to employment have largely been negative for PI learners. If we consider the significance and impact of educational achievement on employability and job market success, it becomes increasingly clear that many PI young people are missing out on the opportunities to become engaged and productive members of their communities in their adopted home. Therefore, there is an urgent need to review the educational experiences of PI to determine their specific opportunities and challenges in schooling and the employment types available to this cohort within their communities. This is the basic focus of this study, which is premised on the notion that educational engagement and success is imperative for improving the economic and social outcomes of PI learners in a new environment like Australia.

1.2 Research problem: context and scope

Education plays an important contributing factor in the decision of many migrants to leave their homelands and move to another country. This is true for PI also, who associate outward migration with dreams and hopes for improved opportunities to education, health, employment and better standards of living in a new country (Buddelmeyer & Marks, 2010; Appleyard & Stahl, 1995; Woolford, 2009). Hau'ofa (1998) and Crocombe (2001) attribute education, particularly improvements in the educational opportunities for children as a key reason for Pacific families to migrate to more developed countries such as Australia. Whilst it is generally accepted that Pacific parents have a high regard for education (Crocombe, 2001; Furneaux, 1973; Hau'ofa, 1998; Siope, 2010), many studies have found home and community factors to have a detrimental effect on the schooling achievement and performance outcomes of PI learners. Despite almost four decades of continuous and steady migration to Australia, PI learners have continued to experience poor school transitions into higher levels of education and consequent limited access to sustainable career-specific employment (Chenoweth, 2014; Kearney & Fletcher, 2011; Singh, 2001).

Considering that education is a major factor in the decision to migrate to a developed country like Australia, many PI parents place a high value on education. But many young people have not delivered on the hopes and dreams of their families, and continue to withdraw early from post-compulsory levels of schooling and higher and further education (Chenoweth, 2014; Kearney & Fletcher, 2011; Rose et al., 2009). Ironically, many PI learners' report having aspirations to achieve good educational outcomes, find a decent job and be self-reliant but have been generally unsuccessful in fulfilling these aspirations nor succeeded in meeting their parent's high expectations from education (Coxon et al., 2006; Siope, 2010). Effectively, this signals possible serious barriers affecting the educational achievement of PI learners and it is this study's aim to identify the possible gaps that may be holding PI back from pursuing and fulfilling their educational goals.

An additional question for this study concerns the PI community members' expectations and perceptions of education and whether these have changed or shifted since arrival in Australia. Additionally, this study seeks to explain how PI families and communities have dealt with the demands of a new social, cultural and educational environment and examine whether socio-cultural factors contribute towards the lowering or heightening of the educational aspirations, outcomes and pathways of PI. Factors such as learner' levels of preparedness for schooling and the opportunities and risks present within PI homes and at school settings are considered to understand the ways that learners utilize their resources, skills and confidence to negotiate their individual transitions at secondary and post-compulsory secondary school destinations.

This study acknowledges that PI are not homogenous and there are indeed multiple forms of diversity between the various PI diasporic communities in Australia. The terms Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian in themselves confirm the broad and distinct ethnic, cultural and linguistic characteristics of PI. There are also many PI who self-identify as Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian or as 'Islander' depending on where such categorisations may be relevant and applicable. In spite of these obvious and discrete differences, this

study identifies PI as a collective ethnic migrant group and in this regard, argues that considering PI as a distinct collective group provides greater attention to the needs of this small-sized community which remains socially and economically invisible within Australian broader society (George & Rodriguez, 2009). Additionally, studying PI as a collective group allows the investigation to be extended to a more representative PI participant profile that includes Melanesians and Micronesians. Much of the literature that exists about PI in the Pacific Rim countries, some of which has been highlighted above, tends to focus on the Polynesian group due to their larger numbers and greater visibility within the community. This study is distinctively different in that it investigates the educational experiences of PI as a collective group that is located in a particular region of Melbourne and is premised on the grounds that PI share more commonalities than differences in terms of their historical past, migration experiences and social and cultural customs and perspectives, which consequently affect their patterns of settlement and engagement in their communities within their adopted country.

1.3 Research question

In keeping with the research focus - *Negotiating pathways: rethinking collaborative partnerships to improve the educational outcomes of PI young people in Melbourne's Western region* - this study is an investigation into the home and school factors that affect PI learners' patterns of school participation and engagement and the impact of these experiences on their subsequent transitions within and beyond secondary schooling. An important objective of the study is to present a sense of the 'lived' experiences of learners and their families and to monitor and examine these experiences in the light of ongoing decisions and actions about learning within their home and school contexts. In this study, the learner is viewed as an individual who interacts with various players and experiences within the spheres of family, school and community to negotiate and traverse their pathways from the secondary school setting and onto post-school destinations. Such personal information about the participants required ongoing and close interactions with each individual and the collective

group to capture stories as they experienced first-hand the multiple and complex realities of their personal, home and school circumstances.

The main research question is:

How can PI learners' in Melbourne's western region prepare more effectively for successful participation and engagement at the secondary school setting that can lead them towards smoother transitions and positive pathways in further education, training and employment?

The sub-questions asked to further address and respond to the main question are:

- ***1.a What are the common pathways of PI learners after leaving secondary school?***
- ***1.b How do these pathways reflect the goals and objectives of PI learners, their families and communities in terms of the opportunities and benefits of education and schooling provided in Australia?***
- ***1.c What are the factors that determine young people's patterns of educational participation and engagement of PI at secondary school? Are these factors socially or culturally induced?***
- ***1.d How has the school system, the immediate community and broader society responded to the needs and interests of PI learners in Melbourne?***
- ***1.e What supportive frameworks and partnerships can be set up at community, state and national levels to help PI learners to engage more effectively in education and contribute towards social and economic development in Australia society?***

1.4 Research approach

This study is concerned with investigating the ways that PI learners perceive and interpret their particular social circumstances as they prepare for successful participation and engagement with education in order to achieve long-term

social, economic and wellbeing goals. It looks at the schooling experiences and trajectories of a small group of PI and expounds on these experiences as case stories from which to gain insights into PI general patterns and trends of school engagement, participation and transition into post-secondary education, training and employment. In particular, this study focusses on the influences of family and community on the choices that young people make in education and employment. The emphasis on an individual's engagement with their social circumstance is closely associated with the constructivist and interpretive perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). These perspectives are intellectually consistent with a constructivist epistemological stance that rests on the belief that individuals construct their own realities of particular experiences within a particular social framework (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

A variety of theoretical frameworks are employed in the thesis to guide the interrogation and analysis of research data and findings. Bourdieu's cultural capital theory is relevant to this discussion when viewed as a mechanism for perpetuating social inequality (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). According to Bourdieu, knowledge is a form of capital that is derived from education or family means and once accumulated can be used to facilitate social mobility. On the other hand, Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth is relevant in explaining the various forms of cultural wealth that minority groups such as PI can bring to the school setting. Yosso's theory is useful for advancing a strengths-based approach that utilises family and community resources in strengthening schooling participation and community inclusion. Additionally, Broffebrenner's human ecological theory and Park's concept of the marginal man are used to explain the nature of relationships that PI have with other ethnic and cultural groups within their community.

Also relevant to this study are Pacific Island epistemological and ontological theoretical frameworks that speak to and underpin the socio-cultural '*lived in*' experiences of PI (Hauofa, 1998; Samu, 2007; Thaman, 2007). These works present as overlays in the global discourse regarding disadvantaged cohorts and their access to various forms of capital (Bok, 2010; Digiorgio, 2009; Youdell, 2012) in

new and unfamiliar settings, and the potential effects on school engagement, achievement, and career transitions of learners.

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to data collection and thematic analysis. Consistent with a case study approach, data was collected through document analysis, semi-structured interviews, an online blog and direct personal observations over a three year period (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Using both the documentary evidence from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) and other relevant literature and the empirical data collected, this study reviews patterns of PI learner achievement, transition and pathways from the secondary school to post-secondary, higher education and employment destinations. Information from these documentary sources provided the initial learnings about PI patterns of school transitions which were instrumental in providing the empirical basis and rationale for this study.

A combination of narrative analysis and constant comparative methods (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994) were used to analyze the data, in particular data associated with the case study comparisons. Theoretical sampling, a common approach used in grounded theory research was also used in the latter stages of analysis wherein the researcher interviewed existing and new participants to corroborate new and emergent findings in the data. A narrative approach (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Mishler, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993) was used to track and document participants' experiences of home and school life. This strategy was useful for monitoring the changes in the participants' perceptions, attitudes and actions towards schooling and career goals and for gathering first-hand information and rich insights into factors that influenced shifts in participants' learning and career choices. These insights provided a clearer understanding of the pathways selected by PI at various key points of the post compulsory schooling level and highlighted the facilitative and inhibitive factors that drove learner decisions and actions. Thematic analysis was predominantly used to

define and identify the common patterns and trends in the educational participation and consequent pathways of the whole participant group.

1.5 Research location

The study is located in three local government areas in the Western metropolitan region of Melbourne - Brimbank, Hobsons Bay and Maribyrnong, where the research participants live and study. Several of the most socially and economically disadvantaged suburbs in Melbourne are located in this region, with many groups well-known for having low levels of educational attainment, persistent patterns of unemployment and under-employment, insecure housing and low income levels (Growing Melbourne's West, 2004). The region is also a popular settlement area for migrants and refugees and well-known for its diverse communities with unique combinations of ethnicity, culture, religion and experiences. The local Government area of Brimbank, which is home to eleven of the fourteen participants, is well known for its industrial and manufacturing base, access to cheaper land and housing and strong multi-cultural identity. Educationally, the region is well-served by many schools catering to primary and secondary levels of education as well as a tertiary institution. As a local university, Victoria University² has a specific mandate to work with institutions and communities in Melbourne's western region to address educational inequality through improved community engagement. In keeping with this mandate, this study aimed to contribute to facilitating greater collaborations with local communities in the area, especially the PI local diasporic community, to understand its specific needs and challenges in education and to respond appropriately. Figure 1.2 provides a geographical view of the research location with the red rectangles showing the approximate location of the three LGA's.

² In its vision statement, it is noted that 'Victoria University will be excellent, engaged and accessible and internationally recognised for its leadership in :

- empowering a diverse community of students to grow their capabilities and transform their lives;
- engaging with industry and community to make the world a better place, through the creation, sharing and use of new knowledge' (Victoria University, 2015).

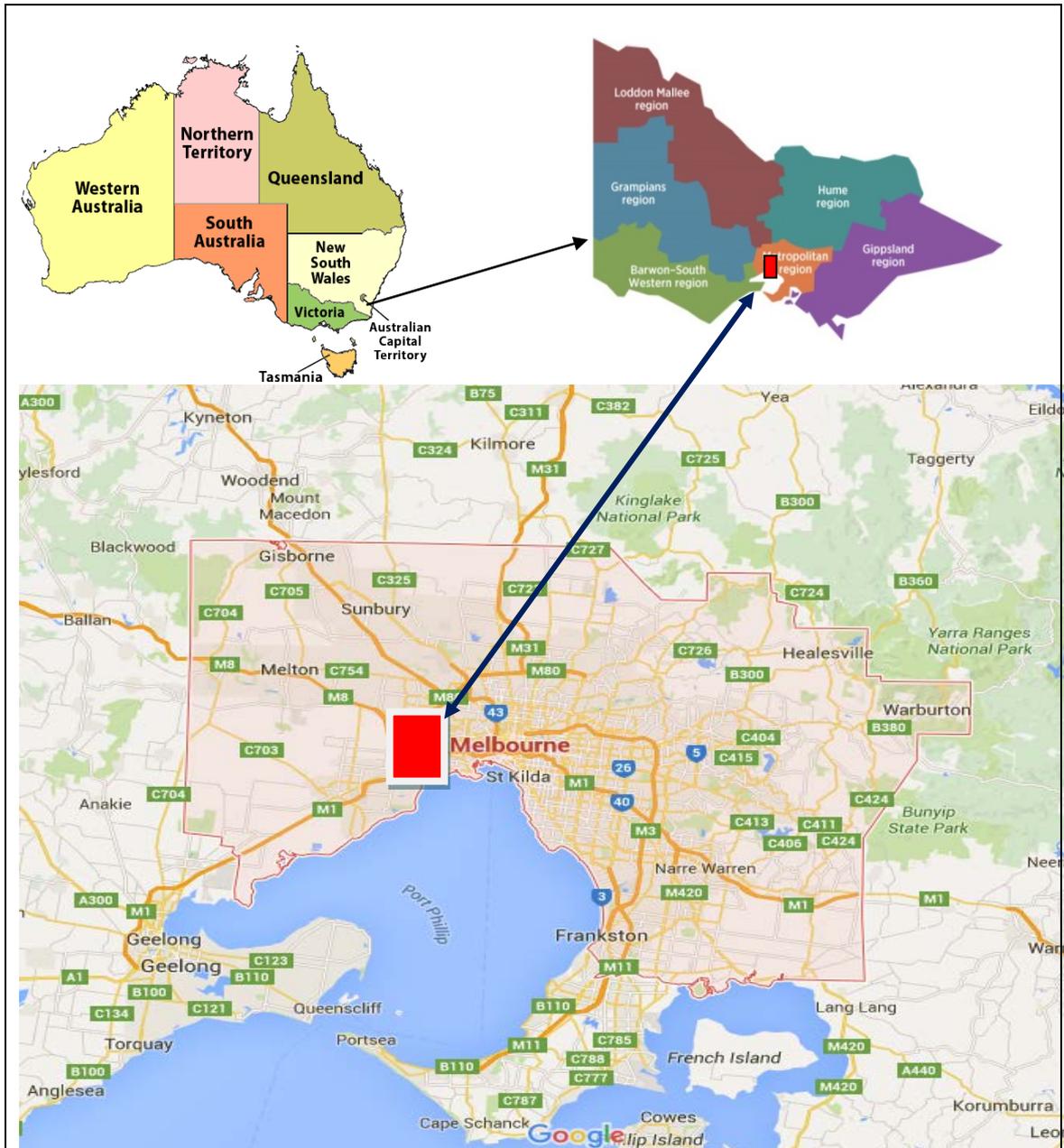


Figure 1-2 Location of research area in Melbourne's western region
 (Source - <https://www.google.com/maps>)

Locating the study in Melbourne makes a specific contribution to better understanding PI communities in Australia. Very little research has been done previously on PI learners in this region of Australia compared to Sydney (New South Wales) and Brisbane (Queensland), both of which have significantly larger populations of PI. It is acknowledged that the educational experiences of PI learners in these inter-state settings may be different to those involved in this

study, which specifically set out to tell the stories and schooling trajectories of a small group of PI learners in Melbourne's western region over a three-year period. In Melbourne specifically, due to the smaller and more disparate pockets of PI communities spread throughout the city, this method of data collection was deemed to be most suitable in responding to a particular set of learner needs, opportunities and challenges.

1.5.1 Post compulsory schooling

The secondary school is a space where young people are most likely to start making conscious decisions about their future (Connell, 1993) and therefore is the appropriate setting to base this investigation. All the study participants were attending Years 8 to 12 at secondary school when they first joined the study. The significance of this period in the context of Victorian government schools is that this is a time when learners embark on the process of preparing and selecting their post-school pathways. Although this process conventionally begins around the end of Year 10, most learners continue to make changes right through to the senior levels of Years 11 and 12. Young people's agency is also increased at senior levels of schooling as they reach adolescence and begin to make their own choices over important matters that affect them, in the areas of friendships and relationships, recreational activities, study choices, self-presentation (for example fashion and lifestyle choices) and future directions.

During this time, learners have the important task of deciding whether they stay on at school and follow the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or Vocational Education and Training (VET) or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), pathway or exit from school altogether. Those who enrol in VCE studies at the post-compulsory school level (Years 11 and 12), for example, know that their choices at this level prepare them for selection into a university course at the end of schooling while those who undertake VCAL and VET pathways expect to head towards TAFE courses, apprenticeships or take up direct employment.

1.6 Researcher position

The impetus for this study has been driven by the researcher's personal experiences of schooling and teaching with a particular interest in the area of educational access, equity and social inclusion. As a PI parent and migrant living and working in the western suburbs of Melbourne, I have observed and experienced first-hand some of the challenges faced by PI migrant learners and their families in adjusting to the demands of a new education system. Like many PI parents, an important factor in my decision to migrate to Australia was to gain greater access to opportunities in education and health that would improve my family's standard of living, supporting claims that education is a key factor in the decision of PI to migrate to another country (Crocombe, 2001; Futisua 1973). This study reflects my own experiences of schooling in the Islands where access to education, especially post secondary level of education is extremely difficult and limited. In the Islands, while access is limited, there is no shortage of learners who want to engage in education and reap the benefits of secondary and post-secondary schooling. Many can only dream of getting the opportunity to achieve such unattainable goals and for them, a realistic way to achieve this dream is through migration to a developed country like Australia where opportunities are said to be plentiful. It is this dream and motivation of PI learners, both in the Islands and elsewhere, that has inspired this research journey particularly to find out whether the high hopes of PI migrants to achieve educational access and success in a new country are realistic and achievable and whether, through the experience of living in Melbourne's western region, PI learners and their families continue to have confidence in the education system to achieve their educational goals. This is one of the key questions that the study addresses - how PI migrant families and learners have responded to the shifting perceptions of education and to seek explanations for the ways they have managed their educational experiences as well as responded to the demands of a new educational system.

Having a PI background provided some advantages in collecting data from and with research participants with whom I share a similar cultural background.

Generally speaking, the research families were willing to give access to their homes for the conduct of interviews and were always gracious hosts. As a researcher, my familiarity with Pacific cultural protocols of story-telling or 'talanoa'³ was particularly effective for initial building of trust and gaining the confidence of family members to share their stories (Thaman, 2008; Vaioleti, 2006). My position as a parent and an older female were positive factors in developing trust and confidence as most interactions with families were with participants' mothers. On the few occasions that fathers were the main informants, the mother or the study participant was usually close by, which allowed the conversations to take place in a respectful space. This important gesture shows respect to Pacific cultures which forbid the close and physical encounters between adults of the opposite sex, especially where there is no apparent prior association. The observance of this custom also gave young people a sense of trust in the researcher which led to a willingness to engage freely and comfortably in the interviews and conversations. The main challenge for the researcher throughout the research process was in maintaining confidentiality of the views and perceptions of research participants, knowing that within a small community, some participants were likely to know or interact with each other through the various associations and networks in existence within the local PI diaspora.

1.7 Research outcomes

This study is unique in its extended longitudinal approach to case study development wherein the researcher has engaged closely and directly with PI young people and their families, over a period of three years to observe, document and reflect on their educational experiences and post-school

³ Talanoa refers to a process of information sharing and exchange of ideas or thinking in a formal or informal manner, often in a verbal format, in which participants interact in a respectful, reciprocal and flexible manner with each other. It is used in various forms throughout the Pacific region but literally involves the exchange and sharing of information between two or more parties in respectful ways.

transitions. Over this period, the participants were able to tell their stories and express hopes, dreams and fears as they experienced first-hand their schooling experiences and post-school transitions. Meeting with the participants and their families in their homes provided unique and useful insights into the learners' 'lived' experiences - their day to day interactions with family members, the support structures available and sustained at home and the levels of support that could be accessed from within the home and the local PI diaspora. Working with various PI individuals, groups and networks in their natural and familiar settings allowed the researcher to document the shifts and turns in the participants' personal, home and school lives. The participants themselves also learned from being part of the research by being self-reflective about their schooling goals and their individual and collective identities as PI migrants living and learning in Melbourne's western region.

One of the important outcomes of this study has been the attempt made to gather concrete evidence regarding the schooling outcomes of young PI. While there has been much anecdotal evidence pointing to the consistent low educational outcomes of migrant PI learners, this study has been able to systematically interrogate some of these assumptions, through reference to the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) database to provide an evidence base of the educational and employment trajectories of PI learners over a period of time. This was an important initial step in providing the rationale for the research but also for comparison purposes with the empirical data emerging from this study.

1.8 Contribution to knowledge

This study aims to contribute towards knowledge in the following five ways;

1.8.1 Add to the literature and body of knowledge and theories about PI migrants in education

This thesis seeks to respond to and also expand upon current literature and research pertaining to the educational participation, achievement and pathways

of PI migrants in Melbourne's western region in particular and in Australia in general. Its contribution to knowledge lies in its systematic interrogation of the validity of current literature and research on PI learner migrants' experiences of secondary schooling. It seeks to provide qualitative understandings and explanations for the apparent low levels of engagement, achievement and outcomes of PI in education. The qualitative empirical evidence arising from this study is compared alongside the LSAY data and existing literature to provide some contextual explanations for the ongoing challenges faced by PI learners in improving their levels of school engagement, achievement and post-school pathways. These explanations allow the study to offer evidenced and informed insights on ways to improve the overall educational experiences of PI learners.

An additional contribution to knowledge lies in defining the home-school connection concept and in determining and explaining its meaning, implications and purpose for PI parents. This knowledge will improve families' understanding of their specific roles and responsibilities towards supporting their children at school in an unfamiliar setting and allow stakeholders to plan and develop effective and appropriate strategies to support PI learners as well as seek relevant advice about aspects and stages of schooling as and where needed.

1.8.2 Contribute to policy regarding education for migrants

Federal government, State agencies and Local Government Councils responsible for developing policy on social inclusion and the acculturation of minority groups in Australia can learn from this study's findings to guide and improve policy and reforms about schooling, community cohesion and social inclusion. Although located in a small region of Melbourne, this thesis has potential for broader relevance and application towards the growing academic discourse on improving the educational experiences and outcomes of migrant learners from diverse and diasporic communities who consistently encounter challenges to their educational participation and outcomes.

1.8.3 Contribute to improved understanding about PI engagement in education

On a practical level, the study aims to articulate distinct social and cultural factors that affect schooling success, wellbeing and agency for PI learners and their families, in particular on promoting and building effective relationships at school and for increasing understanding and communication between the home and school settings, both of which have significant influences on learner aspirations and well-being and to improve support to PI learners. This information can help schools, tertiary institutions and training organizations who have vested interest in successfully integrating migrant learners and minority groups into the education system may also benefit from this study's findings. At the school level, the research will inform pedagogical practice, curriculum offerings, career advice and student welfare and ESL support. At universities, it will assist in teacher training programs especially in the training of pre-service teachers and youth workers who work in schools with learners of multiple diversities and in access programs that target and support vulnerable groups like PI to aspire to and prepare effectively for tertiary level education.

1.8.4 Improve collaboration and networking with the PI diaspora community

An additional practical implication from the research findings will be to contribute towards the development of more and effective collaborative programs for strengthening partnerships with the local PI diasporic community in Melbourne's western region to understand its specific needs and challenges in education whilst simultaneously contributing to the delivery of Victoria University's strategic commitments on equity and social inclusion.

Based on the new empirical knowledge about the PI cultural community in Melbourne arising from this study, better promotion and advocacy of the needs of the PI diasporic community can be made for this small-sized community which is at risk of becoming overlooked in national, state and community level policy planning. By giving 'a voice' to this mostly 'invisible' segment of the Australian community (Rose, et al.2009), it is hoped that PI can better advocate for the specific needs and challenges of the growing community who will require

targeted and focussed attention to its social, educational and health needs. Many of the services or programs that are currently targeted towards PI are small, ad hoc and of minimal significance or impact to its growing population. With greater visibility and promotion of the groups' needs at broader community and society levels, programs and services can be better targeted to this community group where PI feel confident in promoting and self-advocating for their needs to become active members of Australian society.

1.8.5. Implications for research in local and global contexts

The findings from this study will have implications on further research into the educational engagement and achievement of PI in local and global contexts. Specifically, these findings contribute towards identifying gaps in the literature on improving school-wide approaches and support systems that cater to the needs and strengths of PI learners in migrant settings in Australia and overseas. Learnings from this study can contribute to future research on school engagement and pathways of Pacific and other ethnic learners, migrant families and diasporic communities that face difficulties in learning and engaging in unfamiliar educational settings and contexts.

1.9 Limitations of the study

The topic of educational engagement and pathways is a broad one which cannot be discussed in all its perspectives and angles in a single thesis. This study has sought to investigate only certain aspects of educational participation and engagement that are specific to the context, situation and experiences of a small cohort of PI learners located in a region of Melbourne. As such, it aims to provide insights into a focused aspect of educational engagement and participation of PI at the compulsory and post-compulsory levels of secondary education in a particular setting and time frame.

A continuing argument regarding PI migrants in Australia concerns the Maori people of New Zealand and whether they should be included in a study of PI. Although the Maori people share close cultural ties and ethnic origins with the

Polynesians from the Pacific islands, this research will limit the term 'Polynesian' to refer to PI whose migration journeys originated from the Polynesian islands (Cook Islands, Hawaii, French Polynesia, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Tokelau) of the Pacific, whether they step-migrated through New Zealand or came directly to Australia from the islands. Similarly, the term PI, as used in this study, does not include the Indo-Fijian population, who although might self-identify as PI in terms of their originating country of migration, have a different culture and have dissimilar experiences of education compared to those with an ethnic and cultural PI ancestry.

This thesis does not attempt to explain individual schooling achievements of learners. Rather it looks at how young people engage with their teachers and peers, at the academic and social level at school in a general context and as such, provides information of a general nature about the PI cohort at school rather than focussing on specific information about individual learners and individual schools.

Finally, this study does not explore in depth concepts of racism although it recognises that racism plays a part in the way that people from minority groups engage with dominant societal institutions, values and mores. It recognises the impacts of unequal or unbalanced relationships and engagements between dominant and minority cultures. In some parts of the discussion in this study, there are aspects of the data that speak to the concept of race (for example, in referring to group identities or body image) but although acknowledged as important, the issue of race is not intended to be a central focus of this paper. Where it adds to the focus of this paper, it is mentioned.

1.10 Thesis structure

This thesis report consists of nine (9) chapters, as described below:

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter provides an overview of the research background and situational context and outlines the significance and scope of the study. The research problem and rationale are presented with explanations into the choice and justifications for use of the various research approaches.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 provides a review of the Australian and international literature relating to the educational participation, engagement and achievement of PI migrants. It looks specifically at the socio-cultural, physical and structural factors that affect access and success of PI at secondary school and post-secondary school levels, including their pathways into post-school destinations of further education, training and employment.

Chapter 3: Framing the study: theoretical and methodological frameworks

This chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological frameworks that underpin and inform the research focus, approaches and processes. Located within a predominantly phenomenological theoretical background, this study uses a qualitative case study approach to investigate patterns of school engagement and pathways of PI young people who live and learn in Melbourne's western region. The chapter also outlines the main theoretical frameworks that inform the study's data collection and data analysis approaches. These theoretical frameworks guide the thematic analysis and theorisation that follows in the two discussion chapters (Chapter 7 and 8).

Chapter 4: Participants' and schooling

This chapter outlines the methods of data collection used to gather information for the study and introduces the fourteen research participants, with information about their home situation, family background and composition, school and extra-curricular interests, their friendships and relationships. It outlines some important events in the lives of the participants over the data collection period to highlight their changing motivations, relationships and trajectories over the

period. A brief discussion on the participant's sense of identity and belonging, schooling goals and fears and concerns concludes the chapter.

Chapter 5: Family perspectives of schooling

This chapter explores the perspectives of the research participants' parents and families about schooling, in particular their expectations and experiences of their children's schooling and educational pathways. It explores the parents' understanding of their own roles in their children's schooling journey from participation and patterns of involvement at school through to their subsequent post school pathways.

Chapter 6: The role of schools

A central focus of this chapter is to investigate how schools view their roles in terms of providing general or specific forms of support to PI learners at school, looking specifically at staff perspectives of PI as learners and members of the school community. PI patterns of engagement, achievement and transition at school, the specific challenges that PI encounter in achieving their educational and personal goals at school and the common pathway patterns of PI at the post-compulsory secondary school level are discussed. The chapter also examines the perceptions of school staff about the participation, engagement and pathways of PI learners at school and outlines the forms and levels of support that PI learners and their families typically require and access from schools.

Chapter 7: Negotiating waves; finding 'place and fit' between home and school

This is the first of two discussion chapters and examines the lived experiences of the research participants within the context of their personal relationships and direct interactions with family and community members, peers and significant others to understand the effects of these experiences on their schooling experiences, transitions and pathways. The young people's successes and risks in schooling, achievement and pathways are discussed on the basis of

three factors: the young people's perception of identity and belonging, their motivations for schooling and the nature and quality of their relationships with family members, peers and significant others within the immediate surroundings of home and school. This chapter pays particular attention to the role of family in supporting a young person's schooling experiences within the home, and the effects of these factors on their engagement at school.

Chapter 8: Crossing tides; navigating the external environment

This chapter explores the ways that PI families and individuals negotiate their everyday 'lived experiences' (VanManen,1974) within the wider worlds of community and society to assess how these wider social spheres and spaces interweave and influence the life, school and work experiences of PI learners in Melbourne's western region. It examines the historical, political, economic and socio-cultural factors that impact on PI settlement and adaptation to their 'adopted' setting and reviews the impact of these influences on PI learners' school participation and engagement and their subsequent outcomes and pathways. The chapter examines issues of structural and systemic inequality in relation to PI access to services and the opportunities and challenges affecting their school outcomes.

Chapter 9: Findings, conclusion and way forward

This final chapter presents the main findings, a concluding statement and some recommendations for further research into the educational experiences of PI migrant learners in Melbourne's west and more broadly in Australia. The chapter begins with an epilogue called '*Sela's alternative*' which sums up Sela's journey at the end of the research period, followed by a brief researcher self-reflection on learnings derived from the research experience.

Chapter 2 Literature review

This chapter provides a review of Australian and international literature that is relevant to, and informs the conceptual themes that are explored in the study. It begins with a broad overview of the historical, socio-cultural and contextual factors relevant to understanding the PI migrant experience and the effects of this historical journey on their settlement and integration patterns and educational engagement in their adopted country. This overview identifies three themes as having a significant effect on the settlement and adjustment experiences of PI in Australia and all three have implications on the degree to which young PI participate and engage in education. Identified as migration history, cultural values and influences and external environmental factors, these themes provide the contextual basis that informs and shapes the discussion on the '*lived experiences*' of the PI migrant learner.

The second section expands on these broad themes further, focussing on their influences on patterns of settlement and integration of PI into their immediate and broader environments. These sections serve to foreground the scope and focus of the third section which specifically examines the existing Australian and international literature on the PI migrant learner's educational experience in an unfamiliar school setting and the factors impacting their educational achievements and pathways. This section provides a rationale for the entire study and also positions the research question and purpose within the context of relevant literature. By initially addressing the broad historical, socio-cultural and environmental concepts, the reader is alerted to the general and unique characteristics and sensitivities affecting PI migrants' social, cultural and economic engagement within their local diaspora and in turn, the consequences of these community engagement patterns on schooling engagement. This aligns well with the central focus of the study which seeks assessment and understanding of PI successes and challenges in secondary and post-compulsory levels of schooling.

2.1 Contextual overview

There are three layers of influence that affect to some degree the trajectories of PI whose journeys have been facilitated by choice through the New Zealand pathway as well as through direct migration from the Islands and settled in the western region of Melbourne. These layers of influence are: migration history, cultural values and external environmental factors, which together or individually potentially affect a person's or family's pattern of settlement and integration within a new country and influences their relationships and interactions with systems, structures and processes within their broader environment.

2.1.1 Migration history

The nature and pattern of historical migration of PI to Australia has a profound effect on the sense of place, identity and belonging that connects them to their new place of residence. Whilst more recent migrations by PI have been facilitated by choice under family and skilled-based pathways, the historical experiences of earlier migrations such as that of the indentured labourers continue to remind PI of the difficult physical and emotional circumstances that confronted some PI migrants in early years. This historical past holds negative memories for some PI, especially Melanesians, whose people made up the bulk of the indentured labour force of the late 1800s. For some PI, the experiences of early PI settlers send a message that PI are not fully welcome in Australia and that any changes to immigration policy can have wide-ranging implications on their settlement in their adopted country.

An important characteristic of PI migration in the 1970s to the 1990s was that Polynesians dominated the numbers of PI arriving in Australia (Brown & Connell, 2004; Macpherson et al., 2000; Pryke, 2014). Many Polynesians were able to take advantage of their country's political relationships⁴ with the

⁴ PI countries that have association as territories or dependencies of developed countries include American Samoa, Guam and Northern Marianas (United States), Christmas Island, Cocos/Spirling Island and Norfolk Island (Australia) (Australia), Cook Islands, Niue, Tuvalu,

developed countries in the Pacific rim, namely Australia, New Zealand and United States of America to facilitate outward migration using family connections or labour-hire schemes. These were the most common pathways for early settlers of Polynesian descent (from Niue, Samoa, Tokelau and Tuvalu) who also step-migrated through New Zealand (Pryke, 2014). To a lesser degree and due to the smaller populations, the Micronesians (Guam, Marshall Islands, Palau and Federated Trust Territories) and the Polynesians (American Samoa and Hawaii) also moved freely to and from the United States due to their political ties to that country. The 1990s and early 2000s marked a period of 'increasing permeability of borders' for Polynesians who were well ahead of their Oceanic counterparts in terms of their openness to migration (Macpherson et al. 2000), a point not lost on Gough (2009) who described Samoan migrants as 'part of a group of transnational communities...experiencing migration as a process of empowerment' (Gough, 2009, p.30). On the other hand, the Melanesians and some Micronesians (Firth, 2008) who had historical and political ties with Britain (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu), France (Vanuatu, New Caledonia) and Australia (Papua New Guinea, Nauru), had less opportunities to move flexibly between the various countries. In the last three decades, however, more people from the Melanesian countries have taken up migration to Australia, prompted by in-country push factors such as ethnic conflicts and high unemployment rather than from 'pull factors' from Australia in the form of government initiatives that encourage Pacific migration. In 2010, the Australian Government introduced the Pacific seasonal workers scheme which allows workers from selected countries of the Pacific to work in Australian farms for a restricted period. This new scheme and other policies before it that targeted PI have improved somewhat in terms of the working

Tokelau (New Zealand), French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna (France) and Pitcairn Island (UK).

conditions and benefits but they remain much the same in terms of design and purpose in that they serve the needs and interests of the receiving country first and foremost (McLellan & Ware, 2011; Hays & Howes, 2012). More recently and in line with Government policy to prioritise skilled migration, more PI have migrated to Australia, under their own terms and in search of employment opportunities. This has resulted in a steady rate of migration from the Pacific over the period from 2006 to 2011 (Pryke, 2014) with migrant numbers likely to increase, due to the New Zealand pathway and also as more people migrate directly from the Islands to join family in Australia.

2.1.2 Rationale for migration

Many researchers have attributed the heightening interest of PI to migrate to the developed Pacific Rim countries of Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America to social and economic factors (Hau'ofa, 1994; Shankman, 1993; Appleyard & Stahl, 1995). According to Gordon (1996) and Lockwood (2004), the inability of Island countries to maintain and sustain the political, economic and educational systems introduced by previous colonial and neo-colonial administrations led many Island countries to suffer 'poverty, debt and economic malaise' (Gordon, 1996 cited in Lockwood, 2004, p.3) in the post-independence era of the mid-1970s. Rapid population growth, poor labour market opportunities combined with a western-based education system which could not be supported or sustained by small local Island economies contributed to the motivation for many PI to migrate overseas to the Pacific rim countries of Australia, New Zealand and United States of America (Crocombe & Crocombe, 1994; Spoonley, Bedford & Macpherson, 2003). While agreeing that education and access to labour markets were important key drivers for PI emigration, Brown and Connell (2003) also added obligation to family and the prestige associated with living and working overseas as important motivations for PI to migrate.

Aside from the economic and social benefits, some Pacific researchers (Anae, 1998; Hau'ofa, 1994; Taufa, 2003) have highlighted the cultural benefits that can be accrued from migration. Hau'ofa (1994) and Taufa (2003) claim that the

economic importance tied to migration is actually couched within the cultural concepts of obligation and reciprocity which are important cultural traits for PI who traditionally value a strong sense of 'giving back' or 'outward service' towards care-givers (Kabutaulaka, 1998; Sanga, 2011; Woods, 2013). Other Pacific historians (Firth, 2008; Lee, 2007; Shankman, 1993) agree that PI do not make the decision to migrate to another country lightly and only do so after close consultation with extended families and communities, including those who remain in the Islands. There is therefore an acknowledgement by the different parties that there are potential mutual and collective benefits to be accrued as a result of one family member or a family migrating to a more developed country (Crocombe, 2001).

The fact that migration does not just benefit the migrating family or individual but the collective good of the entire family or community (Bertram & Watters, 1985; Shankman, 1993; Small, 1997) is an important observation that is once again tied to the concepts of obligation and reciprocity. This supports the view (Anae, 1998; Hau'ofa, 1994; Small, 1997), that many Polynesians (and other PI) view migration in terms of complex social, cultural and political factors where "culture has to do with not only the notions of beliefs, attitudes, customs and social relations but with the political economy" (Anae, 1998, p.198). For some PI, migration facilitates employment that helps them to meet some of their cultural obligations at home and across the local diaspora. A popular and most obvious example of cultural obligation and collective reciprocity is the payment of remittances to relatives and communities in the Islands (Ahburg & Brown, 1998; Lee & Kumasharo, 2005; Woolford, 2009).

For many of the PI earlier settlers and even amongst recent settlers, family migration remains the main method used for acquiring temporary and permanent entry to Australia. An understanding of the important role of family in migration is crucial to making sense of the cultural obligations and benefits that are prioritised by PI and which affect their day to day lives. In all the steps of the migration process, from making the decision to migrate through to visa application and acquisition and then assistance with settlement in the new

country, the family plays a central role (Woolford, 2009). Unsurprisingly, many PI migrants feel a strong connection and sense of obligation to their families both in the local diaspora and back in the Islands and for many PI, the primary aim, as in any undertaking, is to contribute to family well-being (Hau'ofa, 1994; Fairbairn–Dunlop, 2003). When translated to an education context, this goal has important implications on young people's perceptions of their own role and engagement in education. Some PI learners may view cultural obligation as a motivation for doing well at school, getting a good job and being successful in order to assist the family and the community. On the other hand, some young people may subjugate their own individual success at school for the sake of contributing more meaningfully to the collective good of the family. Such a situation may contribute negatively to the motivation to engage positively at school as a PI learner might look to employment as a more suitable option for assisting with family needs.

The role of family members in facilitating the process of migration and settlement has implications on a migrant's level of connectedness to families back home and those in the local diaspora. In a study of Tongans in Australia, Lee (2004) concluded that the strong economic, social, political and emotional ties with relatives at home were very important for maintaining a sense of migrant identity and an acknowledgement to eventually return home at some future point to settle, retire and reconnect with extended family and cultural community. Many PI, especially first generation migrants, still entertain the possibility of returning home after a period of time in the country of migration (Firth, 2008; Pryke, Francis & Ben-Moshe, 2012; Woolford, 2009). For this reason, PI migrants maintain close connections with families at home through remittances, regular visits to the Islands or by inviting relatives to visit them in Australia. These connections to home and the remaining families, however, have weakened as more family members migrate themselves and bring older family relatives with them (Gough, 2009). In recent years, the longing to return to the islands has also waned as more family members move to Australia and due to associated risks of losing health or tax benefits when returning home (Woodward, 2009).

At the local level, the family's role in assisting migration for members continues to the settlement and acculturation phases in the new country. Often there are already clusters of communities with similar language, nationality and ethnic background in the local diaspora that can assist new families. These communities may be linked through kinship, church or other socio-cultural associations but they all contribute to ensure new arrivals can settle with ease. The proximity and closeness of these relationships within the clustered communities are crucial to maintaining cultural traditions and upholding customs and values that link people to their island identity (Lee, 2004; Pyke et al., 2012). This 'transnational corporation of kin' (Bertram & Watters, 1985) allows large groups of families and communities to access opportunities across a range of economic environments (Bertram & Watters, 1985 cited in Gough, 2009) and to assist both local and transnational communities. By using family ties and kinship links, PI are able to participate in a culture of migration (Gough, 2009 p.6) that utilize PI cultural concepts of '*community togetherness*' and '*mutual reciprocity and obligation*' to work in their favour. This sense of collective benefit and function encapsulates the integrity of the Polynesian (and other PI) migrant identity and is the reason that Pacific diasporic communities are able to survive in their new settings (Appleyard & Stahl, 1995). Further, Firth (2008) states that the collective identity and cultural traditions that PI ascribe to actually constitute the '*competitive advantage*' that PI cling to in a globalized world. Gough (2009) in specific reference to Samoans, agrees stating that "cultural practices based on traditions have provided the basis for their engagement, enabling the comparative advantage that Samoans need in order to ensure a sustainable future in the contemporary world" (Gough, 2009, p.45). This realization has implications for this study which specifically investigates ways in which PI families and communities have managed their migration journeys and the associated responses to community and sc demands for PI educational success.

From a PI's standpoint, which is informed by the incessant need to uphold family obligation and reciprocity and contribute to the '*collective good*'

(Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003), migration is advantageous for economic, social and cultural reasons. Education as both a process and an outcome of the engagement with these factors, therefore, is an effective motivation and indicator of the level of success that individuals and families can achieve through the migration process. Successful schooling and the achievement of positive pathways to further training and career-related employment are seen as valuable and worthwhile investments that can bring both personal and collective benefits to the individual, his/her family and the community at large. When viewed through social, cultural and economic lens, migration can clearly be seen as a worthwhile undertaking which, although difficult and arduous, can provide access to various forms of capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), including educational benefits which might not be otherwise accessible in the Island countries.

2.1.3 Cultural values and influences

The importance of family

The family is a very important part of the identity of young PI. Their lives are shaped and affected by family values, beliefs and culture to which they are strongly bonded from birth. Young people see themselves, their goals, hopes and fears as part and parcel of family-wide achievements and challenges. As identified by Macpherson et al. (2000), one of the primary objectives in life for a PI young person is to assist and serve family needs first and foremost before personal interest. Many PI young people find these obligations to be reasonable and regard them as part of their contribution to the collective good and wealth of the family (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003). This special connection to family continues throughout a young person's life and increases or weakens through the various stages of their physical and mental development. In a schooling context, this close connection with family can have both positive and negative repercussions on learner goals and motivations and school engagement and pathways.

Outside of the family or home environment, young people see themselves as an extension of their nuclear and extended family. As such they are protective of

matters relating to the family and may not trust themselves to speak or act on behalf of the family. Simultaneously, individual successes are celebrated with pride by the entire family while negative behaviour is seen to reflect badly on the whole family. Significantly, the relationships that young people have with their families help shape and influence young people's perceptions, choices and actions affecting their everyday lives, including the decisions made about schooling experiences (Thaman, 2008; Jonson-Fua, 2014). An understanding of the central role that family plays in the life of a young person is very important as it relates to the question of family support to learners, which is a key question for this thesis.

Cultural identity

Most PI identify closely with their country of birth or the country of birth of their parents. Their sense of identity and belonging is most closely associated with their specific Island nationality first, ethnic ancestry second and their regional background as 'PI' or 'Islander' third. These multiple identities hold important implications for young people's sense of self and identity within the various spaces and contexts that they find themselves. Lee (2007) and Woodward (2009) claim that persons who live in transnational communities identify closely with their culture and normally use culture as a point of reference for determining their level of engagement with others and for understanding their place and position in relation to others in the community. As Woodward (2009) notes, the larger mix of ethnic and cultural groups in Australia compared to New Zealand, makes it more difficult for PI to assert their language and culture, making them less visible members of the community. For some PI young people, their identity consists of multiple and different layers, depending on their migration journey and their sense of belonging and connectedness with their island community. Needless to say, the day to day interactions and relationships within the local diaspora community greatly influence the ways that young people respond to schooling and other aspects of their lives.

Language and culture are two aspects of learner identity that present as special challenges to educators (Mills, 2008) and are often identified as barriers to

positive educational achievement and outcomes of migrant learners who also have a non-English speaking background (NESB). These characteristics, which are inherent to learners and determined by their origins, histories and ecological adaptations often cause problems for those trying to navigate a school setting that uses mono-linguistic forms of communication, instruction and assessment . Many learners and families with NESB, including PI are likely to find themselves linguistically ill-equipped to communicate effectively with school personnel. For both learners and parents, limited English proficiency and minimal experience with the dominant educational system affect their levels of confidence and competence in interacting and communicating with school personnel (Sileo & Prater, 1998).

For many migrants, including PI, having a working knowledge of one's own language is essential for participating in cultural celebrations and rituals. In many PI communities also, oral communication was the norm until the arrival of missionaries in the 1880's (Ochs, 1982). In many PI societies, the ability to communicate in one's language is central to maintaining identity, position and place within the community and shows membership of a collective group. Maintaining language is also important for transferring Indigenous knowledge about cultural customs, land rights and family genealogies and inheritances, all of which are central to the PI concept of identity (Hau'ofa, 1994; Sileo & Prater, 1998). The fact that these forms of knowledge are unwritten and passed on using mostly oral forms of communication make it even more important for PI young people to be able to speak their own language. Within cultural and language groups, there can also exist information or knowledge that is restricted to family and community members but 'closed off' to outsiders (Smith, 2012) who may not understand or give proper respect to such 'privileged' information.

Maintaining a safe and harmonious environment

In PI culture, there is great importance placed on maintaining a social environment that supports inter-personal harmony and positive relationships with others (Samu, 2007; Thaman, 2008). Indigenous Pacific researchers (Thaman, 2008) refer to this virtual or liminal space as 'vaa' or 'faa' (Polynesian)

or 'mana' (Melanesian) (Gegeo, 2001) in which family and community members interact directly or indirectly through aspects of time and space. Within this liminal space, there are overt and covert rules that govern relationships, behaviour and actions, all designed to maintain social harmony amongst members, including ancestors. In the home or community setting, the value of this space is played out in the interactions and engagements that PI have with other adults or peers. Because PI value the concept of group well-being and social harmony, they normally thrive in situations that emphasise collective approach where work and function is shared to meet group needs and outcomes (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003) that create and maintain the concept of social harmony. In the main, PI see themselves firstly as part of a larger group (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003) and as an individual, second where the bigger collective is responsible for making decisions about obligations and responsibilities observed and performed within the group (Vasta, 2007).

An understanding of this cultural trait is particularly important in this study which is aimed at understanding the ways that PI engage and participate with groups and institutions that are external to their diasporic community. The achievement of a harmonious social setting requires that certain cultural mores and customs are put in place for community members to observe and follow. Some of these mores affect the nature and quality of relationships that PI young people have with adults in their community (Kabutaulaka, 1998; Ochs, 1982). These customs include respecting parents, obeying and listening to elders and speaking in turn and when asked. Such relationships may be regarded as too formal or authoritarian by outsiders but to PI individuals and families, the purpose is always to keep young people safe and conform to group rules that uphold the concept of 'vaa' or 'faa' (Thaman, 2008).

Young people's understandings and experiences of these cultural relationships can affect the relationships that they form outside of the home environment. In a school setting, the strict relationships and communication protocols practised at home such as listening to elders and passively obeying instructions have been known to present problems for PI learners at school (Nakhid, 2003; Sileo &

Prater, 1998). Such cultural expectations and responsibilities which are practised on a daily basis at home may cause PI learners to struggle in an environment like school, where learners are expected to be assertive and critical in class and work on individual tasks. Some teachers have described PI as generally “*un-interested, un-assertive and lacking drive*” (personal communication with teacher, School A) in academic work with poor results in individualised and competitive assessment tasks. Such assessments show a lack of appreciation of the importance of ‘social harmony’ in defining communication and behaviour modes of PI learners which is encouraged at home. Many PI learners see these traits as contradictory to the collective and participatory work ethic that is encouraged at home. According to Sileo & Prater (1998), the cultural gap that exists between teachers and learners can lead to many misunderstandings about PI learners such as the knowledge that PI are generally modest about their understanding, knowledge and achievements and have a tendency to indicate less than what they know and only volunteer and demonstrate knowledge when asked (Sileo & Prater, 1998).

Gender plays an important role in Pacific culture in terms of the responsibilities and entitlements that are afforded to each individual by the wider collective group. While some Pacific countries follow a patriarchal lineage system, some are also matrilineal, meaning that certain traditional roles such as speaking and land rights are passed down through the eldest female child (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003; Otunuku & Brown, 2007). Many Pacific countries, however, remain dominantly patriarchal, with structural and systemic policies and infrastructures in place that favour boys’ participation and engagement at school. An example of this imbalance is seen in the provision of more male dormitories at boarding schools and the existence of more male-oriented employment.

Other literature (Exley & Singh, 2000; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003) pertaining to gender differences amongst PI migrants in terms of school success paint a different picture. Amongst PI migrants in New Zealand (Anae et al., 2002; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003) girls were found to experience higher levels of participation in post compulsory education. Girls’ success has been attributed to

their tendency to be more home-based, with better relationships with parents and teachers. Conversely, the low achievement of migrant PI boys has been attributed to more social freedom, less in-home responsibilities and their propensity to engage in negative or violent behavior. This finding, however, is at odds with traditional notions of gender in most Pacific communities where boys are more likely to stay for longer periods at school with generally more positive educational and employment outcomes (Crocombe, 2001). Interestingly, parental attitudes towards girls' education were also seen to change with the migrant experience with parents placing higher expectations for their daughters from schooling. As with other family and cultural influences, the issue of gender is important to this study which seeks to understand how social and cultural factors affect young people's engagement with schooling and their broader community.

2.1.3 Navigating the external environment

The next paragraphs focus on the ways that PI communities engage with their external environment and the impacts of these connections, interactions and relationships on the overall social, economic and cultural participation and engagement within the community and society. Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) human ecological theory provides a useful framework for understanding people and group connections, relationships and contributions within a given environmental setting. Bronfenbrenner's original human ecological theory consisted of five environmental spheres (the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) which a child would encounter during its lifetime (Figure 2.1). In Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, the individual child is placed at the innermost core with the nature of the relationships being direct and frequent. These important interactions are typical of home-school, school-community and community-home connections which are known to strongly influence a child's life. Whilst a child may not have direct function in the outer spheres of Bronfenbrenner's model, the events within these external spheres can still affect his or her wellbeing in positive or negative ways (Berk, 2000). Such events which may occur outside the immediate realm of the

home, school or community include a parent's employment type or schedule or cultural obligations which affect a child's immediate development and wellbeing.

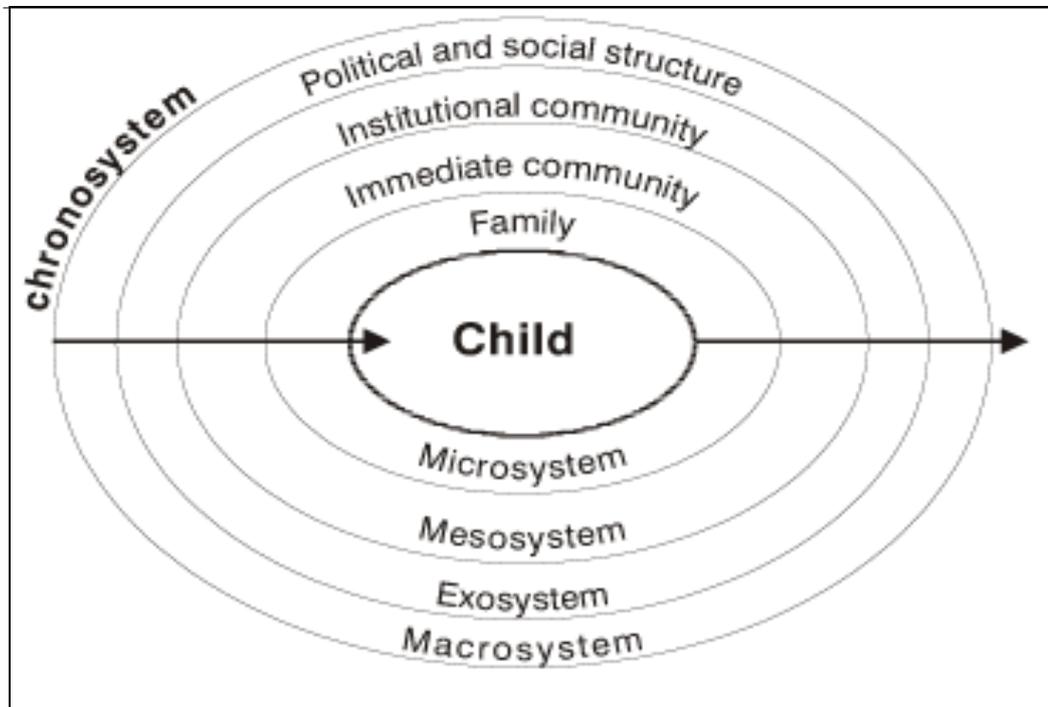


Figure 2-1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development
(sourced from Halpern & Figueiras, 2004)

The importance of this theory to understanding the PI learner lies in its contextualisation of the complexities of home, school and community interactions and their impacts on the lives of individuals, families and communities. On a broader level, Bronfenbrenner's ecological concept can also be applied to state or national policies and the ways they can act against the values or cultural mores of a community group. Consequently, the systems or structures within each of the spheres may affect individual or group competence and confidence to integrate with other groups and institutions in the external environment which in turn affects their social inclusion and community cohesion. Bronfenbrenner's suggestion that social structures engender in people a sense of inadequacy that makes them feel vulnerable and susceptible to external forces is especially relevant to the themes explored in this study, especially the contention that a 'deficit model' applies when individuals and

families have to consider themselves as failures in order to qualify for government support or intervention.

2.1.4 Community cohesion and inclusion

The importance of community togetherness and cohesion to PI individuals and communities is important for social inclusion and community cohesion. But whilst there are strong connections within the community that provide sufficient social relationships and wellbeing to PI young people, there are equal concerns about the inability of PI communities to bridge with members, groups and institutions in their wider community (Skrbis, Karinshah & Chiment, 2012; Vasta, 2004). Although the strong bonds (Hau'fa, 1983; Samu, 2007) within and between families and community members (exosystem) create high levels of social capital within the PI group, this inward cohesion within the community may result in further isolation from the broader external environment or using Bronfenbrenner's terms, the eso-system and macro-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). The effect of this weak bridging with the external structures and services is that the PI community increases its own invisibility by removing itself from the gaze and attention of broader society and from the information, attention and support that it needs to thrive in an unfamiliar environment.

Goldberg (2013), in keeping with the concept of the '*marginal man*' (Park, 1929, 1950) argues that certain groups face marginality or superficial acceptance by remaining in the fringes of society and not being able to fully integrate. Park (1950) used the concept of '*the marginal man*' to describe individuals or groups who do not fully integrate into a dominant culture. This state of marginality can be brought about by the actions and behaviour of the group itself or it can be facilitated by the external systems and processes within which the groups operate. According to Park (1950), where the systems are unprepared or unable to respond to the needs of a group, there is more likelihood of that culture resisting the importance to adapt or conform to dominant mores. This social and cultural isolation also increases if there is an absence of pressure or expectation to integrate by a community like the PI who may be reluctant or unable to advocate for their needs and interests.

Park's (1950) concept of the marginal man raises important questions regarding PI preparedness and willingness to engage with the systems and structures of the host society. The question to be asked is whether the marginality is self-induced to preserve culture and identity and if so, whether the PI community is unwittingly facilitating its own marginalisation and isolation by maintaining a deliberate physical and symbolic distance at the cost of restricting its own successful integration to broader societal institutions such as the schooling system, employment sector and the immediate community?

This work suggests that there may be misunderstandings, misinterpretations and contradictions in the understanding of stakeholders such as families, schools, local communities and the broader society in terms of their own roles towards schooling and pathways. An important issue for exploration in this research is whether there are factors that reinforce the physical and emotional isolation and cultural distance of PI migrants from the broader society and if these gaps lessen the opportunity to improve knowledge and awareness about PI by the broader society and vice versa. This is a pertinent question that this thesis seeks to address as it investigates strategies for effective collaborations between the PI community and structures and systems in the broader society.

2.2 PI in the broader community

Australia is known globally as a multicultural nation, with a diverse population from many different countries, cultures, languages and religions. According to the 2006 census, 22% of Australia's population were born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Census of Population and Housing 2007*). Through its 2011 Australian Multicultural policy, the Australian Government has made a bold and serious commitment to supporting multiculturalism whereby it recognises the breadth and diversity of Australian society and supports a culturally diverse and socially cohesive nation that is based on four guiding principles: celebrating and valuing diversity, maintaining social cohesion, communicating the benefits of Australia's diversity and responding to intolerance and discrimination (Face the Facts, 2012; Kalantzis & Hope, 1988).

The social inclusion and community cohesion agendas of the 2011 Multicultural policy and other Government level policies like it are aimed at embracing and celebrating the multiple diversities of the various ethnic, cultural, social and religious groups that live in Australia. Whilst these policies acknowledge, support and embrace the existence of many different cultural groups, there are some challenges that certain pockets of the migrant population face in the process of settlement and acculturation to their new place of residence. These same policies may also have neutral or negative implications and some groups may find them unsuitable or irrelevant to their needs or situation. For many PI, especially those whose migration trajectories included extended periods of bridging visas and permanent residency status, these exclusions or restrictions come in the form of limited access to social and health services, limited access to stable employment, and low civic participation (George & Rodriguez, 2009; Vasta, 2004). These exclusions and isolations can be experienced at various spaces including at school, at work and even in public spaces by different groups at different times.

Despite being officially regarded as part of Australia's multicultural society, PI do not all have similar access to the benefits of this membership due largely to their migration history and status and the small-sized population. Most PI migrate to Australia as 'choice' migrants and depending on the nature of their visa or citizenship status, many do not normally qualify for a structured supportive framework that assists with their settlement, adjustment and acculturation needs. Many families migrate to Australia on family-sponsored visas and while family members in Australia may facilitate and assist with this migration process, these newly-arrived families are expected to find employment and be economically self-sufficient soon after arrival in Australia. This arrangement worked well in the early 1980s when many PI migrants coming from New Zealand were able to quickly find work in manufacturing industries to fund their own settlement. However, with the downturn of manufacturing in the 1990s, newer waves of migrants have been unable to find work as easily as their earlier contemporaries. Those who lost their jobs in

those early years have also been left unemployed for long periods, without skills or experience to secure other types of employment (Vasta, 2004).

Today, many of these earlier (and older) migrants are either still unemployed or employed casually or part-time in semi-skilled and unskilled work in the manufacturing, logistics and agricultural sectors (Ash, 2013; Vasta, 2004). More than half of the families involved in this study had their parents arrive in Australia under family-sponsored visas and whilst these early migrants had been able to quickly find employment, most of this work was either part-time or unskilled. The advantage that these families had, however, was that they had arrived before 2001, an important year for New Zealand migrants to Australia in terms of visa status and access to Commonwealth benefits for welfare, settlement and tertiary education costs.

In terms of post-school transitions, the children of these earlier migrants can access Commonwealth supported assistance for their university or TAFE studies. Changes to Australian immigration policy wherein Australia and New Zealand entered into a new bilateral agreement on social security benefits, resulted in the creation of two types of visa holders for New Zealand migrants (Chenoweth, 2014). The first visa type referred to as protected 'special category visas' (SCVs) was granted to migrants who had arrived prior to 2001 while a second visa type called unprotected SCVs was granted to those arriving on or after 2001. The significant difference between these two visa types was that the second group were classed as temporary residents and not eligible for full social security benefits until they obtain a permanent visa and meet the two-year residence waiting period. Under this new agreement, the unprotected SVC holders are ineligible to receive HECS (Higher Education course supplements) help or Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) assistance or to defer tertiary education costs or apply for loans to cover these expenses.

In the last fifteen years, New Zealanders arriving after 2001 have been subjected to more stringent migration rules that align more closely to criteria applicable to other international migrants. The government's emphasis on skilled migration, however, has meant that those arriving in the last fifteen years

are more likely to possess the educational qualifications and employment experiences that enable them to secure stable and permanent employment, be more self-sustaining and adapt more easily into broader Australian society. These families tend to be more self-sufficient economically and parents are able to provide the physical and academic support to their children for their schooling (Lee, 2007; Rose et al., 2009). While the children in these families are able to access primary and secondary level education in government schools, the situation changes when they start tertiary level study. Unlike their earlier counterparts, these families face stricter rules in terms of gaining Australian citizenship and even greater restrictions to accessing Commonwealth assistance for tertiary education programs. As non-citizens, these learners are required to meet the cost of tuition fees themselves and to also pay these costs upfront before enrolling in a university or TAFE course (Chenoweth, 2014).

PI access to welfare services are not only restricted to tertiary education costs but also to health and social security benefits. The differences in the migration histories of PI to Australia invariably account for differences in the levels of service and support which families can draw from. With different pockets of PI groups requiring different services or resources, it is hardly surprising that Commonwealth or community support to this group has remained reasonably unstructured, confusing and sometimes irrelevant to this cultural group.

2.2.1 Small population size and invisibility

The small size of the PI population, especially in Melbourne compared to the higher numbers of PI elsewhere (such as Brisbane and in Western Sydney), also accounts for the ways that PI needs and concerns are addressed at the broader community level (George & Rodriguez, 2009; Vasta, 2004). Amongst other criteria, population size is often an important benchmark used for determining types and levels of service provided to community groups. Being a small community group, PI whether collectively or within their specific country communities often do not qualify for certain types of assistance and are easily overlooked in terms of national, state or local government service provision (Vasta, 2004). The small population size and the cultural and social differences

between the different ethnic or country groupings mean that many programs or services aimed at and for PI tend to be 'niche' or 'one off' in nature and difficult for organisations to maintain or sustain (personal conversation with a staff member, Hobsons Bay Local Government, May 2015). The small size of the population also lessens the chances of implementing '*recognitive justice*⁵ which advocates for social groups to be able to identify, develop and participate in decision making that affect them (Gale & Densmore, 2002).

At the national level, there has been little attention paid to the growth of numbers of people arriving in Australia from the Pacific Islands or the needs of this growing community group that is already resident in Australia. Historically, successive Australian governments and aid agencies have focussed more attention on issues that centre on the Pacific region, such as good governance, trade relations, climate change, asylum seekers, ethnic conflicts and unemployment that are occurring at the country or regional levels within the Pacific, without placing much attention to the needs of the growing resident PI population in Australia.

Many PI regard Australia as an attractive destination, seeing it as a land of opportunity for improving education, employment and general wellbeing. Despite the stringent rules on migration which now mostly favour those with appropriate education qualifications, employment experiences and family connections, those who do get accepted to migrate are considered fortunate by their families at home who expect them and their children to utilise the opportunities and achieve educational and material success (Woolford, 2009). Such perceptions can put pressure on migrating families to do well, even though some do not always have a clear understanding about the settlement and adjustment challenges in Australia. Others also do not realise that many PI in Australia still engage mostly in unskilled or semi-skilled employment (Brown

⁵ The act of giving people the opportunity to make decisions and choices about things that affect their lives and their situations (Gale & Densmore, 2002)

& Ahlburg, 1998) while at the school front, many PI learners tend to be clustered into low level subjects and experience generally poor transitions at the post compulsory schooling level.

2.3 Education – a valuable commodity

Education has long been regarded as a valuable enabler for individual and collective development and advancement in the modern world. The movement towards globalisation in today's world makes education an even more important asset for individuals looking to improve knowledge, skills and technical abilities to successfully navigate the complex requirements of a modern world whilst also improving their sense of wellbeing in a competitive education and labour market environment (Bourn, 2008). According to the United Nations Education and Science and Community organisation (UNESCO) "*education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights...promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits*" (UNESCO, 2006). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 26 further states that everyone has the right to education and that education should be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. Additionally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child, which Australia is a party to, also supports the view that education is the right of every child (United Nations, 2006).

Despite these global declarations and intentions, there are many children around the world that are still not able to access either basic or intermediate levels of education. In 2010, there were about sixty one million (60.7) primary school-aged children who were 'out of school', with girls accounting for less than half of those 'in school'. The Commonwealth Youth Index identifies the top ten countries in the world with the highest percentage of out-of-school children as being from the African continent (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2014) and on a world scale, the five most common barriers to education are a lack of funding for education, lack of trained teachers, poor infrastructure, low level teaching and learning resources and gender bias. Most of these barriers are also present in the education systems of many Pacific countries, a region comprising many

developing nations that are struggling to fulfil educational benchmarks outlined in the World Millennium goals (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2014).

In Australia, the introduction of mass schooling in the mid-nineteenth century allowed many to view public education as a basic right and a vehicle that will bring the rewards and opportunities to experience more fulfilling and satisfying lives (Mills, 2008). As such, Australia enjoys a relatively good position in the international educational rankings (Commonwealth Youth Index and the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development). Yet there are ongoing systemic experiences of educational disadvantage that are still being felt by specific cohorts including Indigenous students, migrants, refugees, learners with disabilities, rural-based young people and those from lower socio-economic status (Ainley et al, 2000; Helme, Teese, Dulfer, Robinson & Jones, 2009; Mills, 2008; Rizvi & Lingard, 2004).

In Australia, formal schooling is an accepted part of a child's life and attendance at the primary and secondary (early and middle years) levels of schooling is compulsory. The final two years of secondary schooling (Years 11 and 12) are considered post-compulsory levels wherein young people undertake a range of academic or vocational pathways, including exercising the option to leave the formal schooling system if they so wish. Many families and schools encourage their children to complete these two final years of secondary level of education to broaden the number of pathways available to them after formal schooling. As noted by Kearney and Fletcher (2011), the secondary school is "*a site where aspirations are either developed or diminished and where students achieve the skills and attributes that will enable them to experience success at higher levels of education*" (ibid, 2011, p.149). As such, the school is an important institution where both children and young people conventionally attend between the ages of five (5) and sixteen (16) at least. As formal institutions, schools have important functions which include providing the necessary knowledge and skills to prepare learners for further and higher education and for facilitating successful transitions to employment and long-term social and economic wellbeing. Additionally, schools also have a wider social mandate to prepare

young people for successful integration into their communities and societies as well as participate usefully in a global context (Giddens, 1999).

2.3.1 Education for disadvantaged cohorts

In Australia, many national and state level reforms have been introduced and implemented specifically to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged or marginalized groups. Successive governments have enacted educational reforms that are basically aimed at one goal: to improve educational access and success of all people, with special interventions put in place for those who are disadvantaged or marginalised (Bradley et al. 2008; Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians⁶, 2008). In Victoria, the realization that “young people have the best chance of a successful transition if they have achieved a sequence of milestones from the ages of 15 to 24” (Victorian Department of Education & Training, 2010, p.1) underpins the importance of the total schooling experience. The Victorian Government’s strategy to lift Year 12 completions to 90% and improve educational achievement across the entire 15 to 24 years cohort (Stronger Futures for all Young Australians, 2010) evidences the need and the commitment to build capacity and social inclusion for all Victorians, including people and groups from low socio-economic status (SES), non-English speaking background (NESB), cultural and linguistic diverse learners (CALD), Indigenous and refugee, and recently arrived migrants.

Despite these policies and reforms being generally applicable to most migrants and minority groups in Australia, many researchers have been careful to point out that disadvantaged groups are not homogeneous and that separate studies must be done on specific groups and communities to learn more about their

⁶ The Melbourne Declaration has two goals which are of relevance to this study :

Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence

Goal 2: All young Australians become: – successful learners – confident and creative individuals – active and informed citizens (DEECD, 2008).

specific and unique experiences, expectations and achievement levels in education (Ainley, Frigo, Marks, McCormack, McMillan, Meiers & Zammit, 2000; Helme et al., 2009; Gale, 2007; Teese & Polesel, 2003). This call is important, given that certain blanket policies and reforms are not always relevant or appropriate across all groups in a given population. A case in point is the 'model minority'⁷ concept used in the United States to collectively categorise Asian and PI engagement in education and employment sectors, which heavily masked the true extent of PI learner's low levels of educational achievement (Suarez-Orozco & Nicolas, 2001) with negative impacts on the allocation and distribution of services to this cohort.

Despite best efforts, not all past and current policies on education by successive governments have benefitted all groups of learners, especially those from disadvantaged and marginalised groups. While the educational reforms of the 1980's and 1990's were focussed on raising the numbers of young people completing 12 years of secondary school education (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1982; Department of Education, Employment and Training, 1989; Finn, 1991), a shift towards a privatisation of education in the late 1990s and early 2000s caused a redirection of focus onto individual choice in relation to education and labour markets, resulting in growing pressure on young people and their families to provide the resources themselves to meet their educational goals (Marginson, 1999; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Consistent with a neo-liberal frame of reference, the expectation was that individuals and families needed to be encouraged to use their own skills and resources to meet their educational and employment goals.

In the seminal book called '*Making the Difference*' Connell et al. (1982) strongly suggested that class and gender relations within and between the family and

⁷ A term used to refer to Asian and PI groups in the United States in regards to their participation in education and other social services but which masks the fact that several pockets of population within this group are highly disadvantaged.

the school were responsible for the inequalities experienced by learners at school. This work supported the view that many of the disadvantages experienced at school were cost related and as such, only the children of rich and powerful parents could optimally benefit from schooling (Connell et al., 1982; McLachlan, Gilfillan & Gordon, 2013). Other researchers (Allard & Santoro, 2006; Ladwig & Gore, 1998) supported this view, identifying the educational system as biased towards the needs and interests of students from middle class backgrounds (Allard & Santoro, 2006; Ladwig & Gore, 1998). Allard and Santoro (2006) went further to question the ability of middle class background teachers to respond effectively to the learning needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The important role of schools in facilitating and perpetuating the inequalities in the educational achievement and outcomes of learners from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds is well documented in the literature (Bourdieu, 1998; Connell et al. 1982; Dorling & Southall, 2001; Mills, 2008; Thaman, 2012). Bourdieu's (1998) social theory, for example, viewed schools as having a sorting role that separates learners depending on the forms of capital at their disposal. According to Bourdieu, a person's economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital allows them to negotiate their access to benefits in different social class levels (Bourdieu, 1998). Using Bourdieu's analogy, schools can be said to have a significant contribution towards facilitating or limiting one's upward movement in the social structure, depending on their social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital. As such schools have a reproducing role, whereby they reproduce the norms, values and structures of the wider society and in so doing, encourage structural and systemic inequalities amongst its more vulnerable cohorts (Arnott, 2002; Slee, 2011).

2.3.2 PI engagement with education

In the next section, the literature and empirical data regarding PI participation in education are examined, focussing on the findings from the Longitudinal survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) data and major influences and barriers affecting PI

school participation and engagement using a historical, cultural and environmental perspective.

2.3.3 What is the evidence that there are poor outcomes for PI?

The Longitudinal survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) provides a comprehensive dataset and empirical evidence on the patterns of educational achievement and pathways of learners in Australia. This database is undoubtedly one of the first reference points for those looking for patterns and trends in data on aspirations, school completions and transitions of school learners. Since its inception in 1995, the LSAY has surveyed six cohorts of young people through to 2009, with a total of about 14,000 young people participating in each cohort. After an initial survey, participants are followed up annually over the next ten year period, making for a systematic data collection process that effectively monitors the transitions and pathways of young people over a ten year survey period.

Although the information derived from LSAY could significantly add to the evidence base for the current study, there were limitations to the kinds of information that could be sourced from this resource. Firstly, PI made up a tiny percentage (about 0.7%) of the total LSAY sample in each cohort year. Despite earlier understanding from researchers looking at the Australian Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) data on which the LSAY sample is based that there were about 150 to 200 PI young people in each wave of LSAY, these figures were found to be over-estimates as they included other groups not typically regarded as having PI ancestry, such as Indian-speaking Fijians or Hong Kong born students, included as part of PI in the 1998 LSAY cohort. These groups had to be separated out from the ethnic Islander group using language background indicators to minimise a skewing of the results and findings from the data.

The small size of the PI cohort, combined with an exceptionally high attrition rate also affected the extent to which the pathways of PI learners could be effectively monitored within LSAY. Significantly, the higher performers were

more likely to stay in the study – affirming the danger of reading the longitudinal data literally with a likely bias towards higher performers who are likely to stay at school and remain connected to the survey over a longer period. Hence, it was unsurprising to find that the pathways into higher education for those students who stayed on at school were not very different from the overall population according to these data. On the other hand, those who were less likely to be high-achieving were seen to drop off and their transitions harder to trace and monitor within LSAY. This high attrition rate raises big question marks about subsequent transitions of PI learners after LSAY and is one of the reasons that other research approaches, such as this current study are important in understanding the general pathways and transitions of PI. Nevertheless, the LSAY database is still effective in providing initial baseline data on rate of attrition, young people's attitude towards education, their performances in literacy and numeracy tests and their general patterns of school achievement, which are all relevant to this study.

By looking at just the 1995 LSAY cohort, we can see some general patterns in the data that help us make sense of PI achievement and transitions. This cohort comprised total of 13,613 participants of whom 122 were identified as PI due to the country of birth of father, mother or student. A significant noticeable pattern in the data is the high attrition rate among PI students when compared to the whole group.

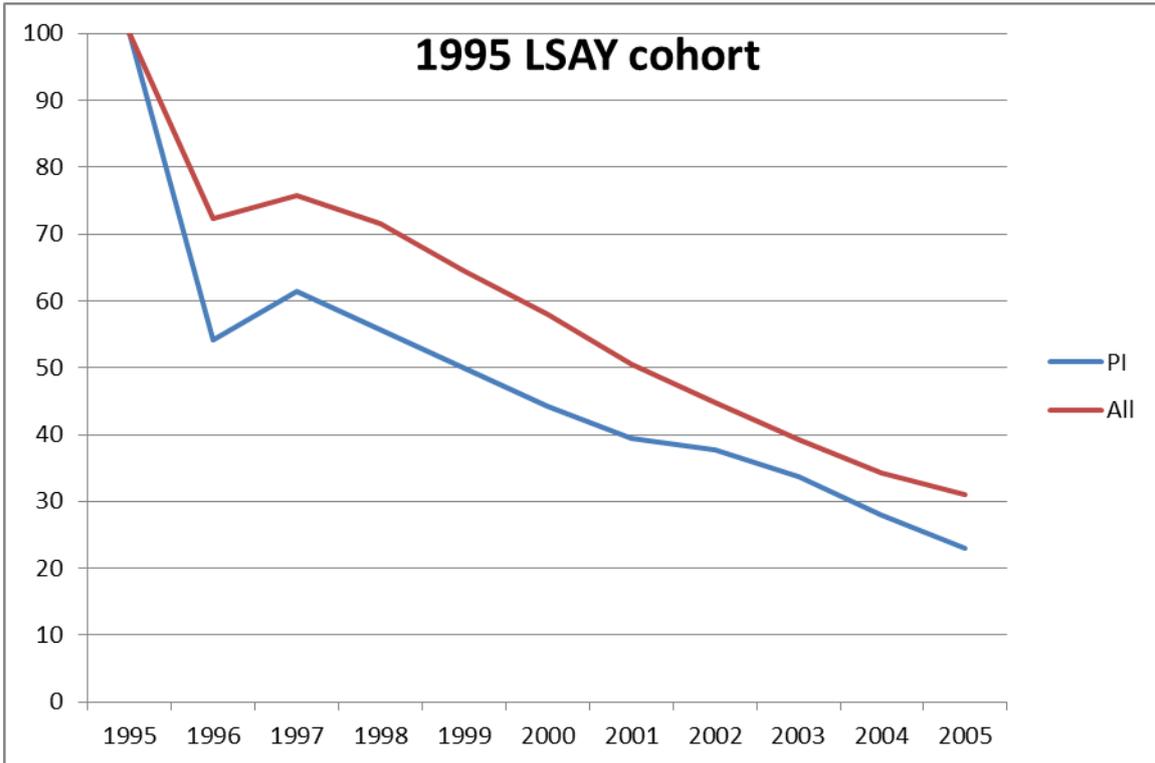


Figure 2-2 Attrition rates of PI compared to whole cohort over 10 years

Within LSAY also, the Year 9 reading and numeracy test scores are said to be predictive of future pathways (Lamb & Rice, 2008). When looking at the PI scores for both these areas, we find that PI students are assessed as not performing well in either the reading or numeracy tests, tending to cluster disproportionately in the lower achievement quartiles. Figure 1.4 illustrates the concentration of PI in the lowest mathematics achievement quartile. The striking result is the consistent high proportion of low achievement for both male and female PI students. Female students particularly demonstrate poor performance.

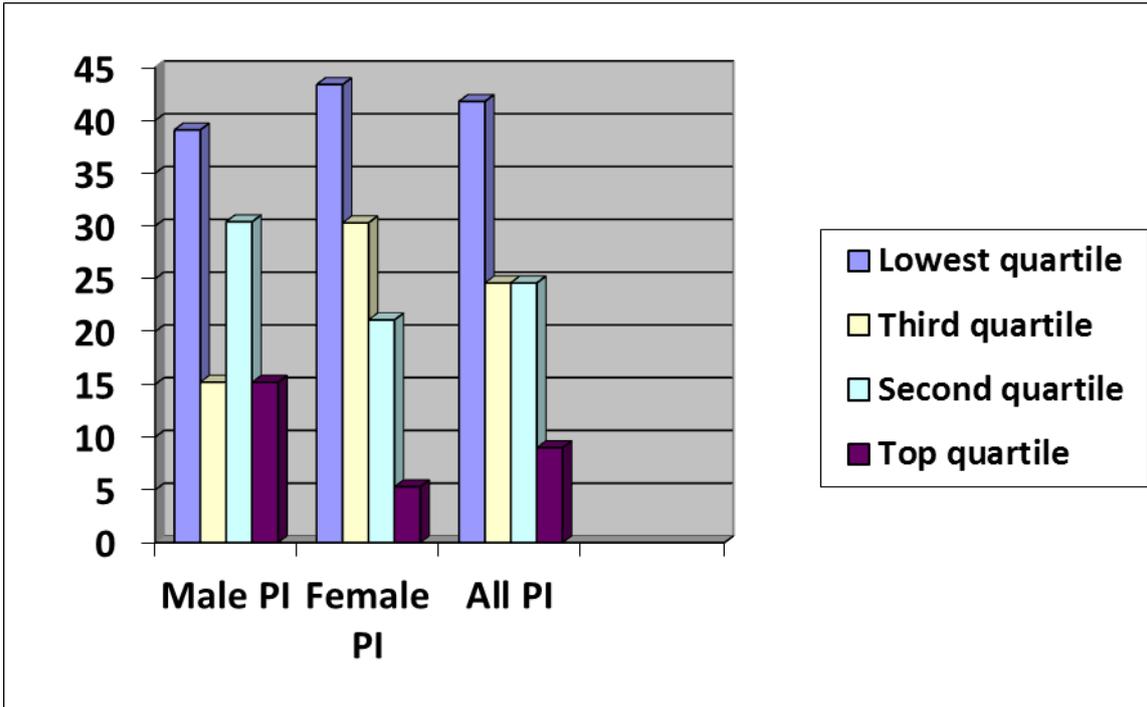


Figure 2-3 Numeracy quartiles for PI comparing males and females

PI girls reported more positive achievement in the reading tests as shown in Figure 1.5. For PI boys, however, there is high concentration in the third and lowest quartiles in the reading scores. In fact, boys' performance in reading closely shadows that of girls' performance in mathematics. This highlights a gendered pattern of performance and achievement in these two important aspects of schooling where girls appear to be struggling in the area of mathematics and boys in higher reading assessment tasks.

In the 1998 LSAY data, a similar pattern of low achievement is observed in the mean numeracy test scores of PI Year 9 students when compared with students from other regions.

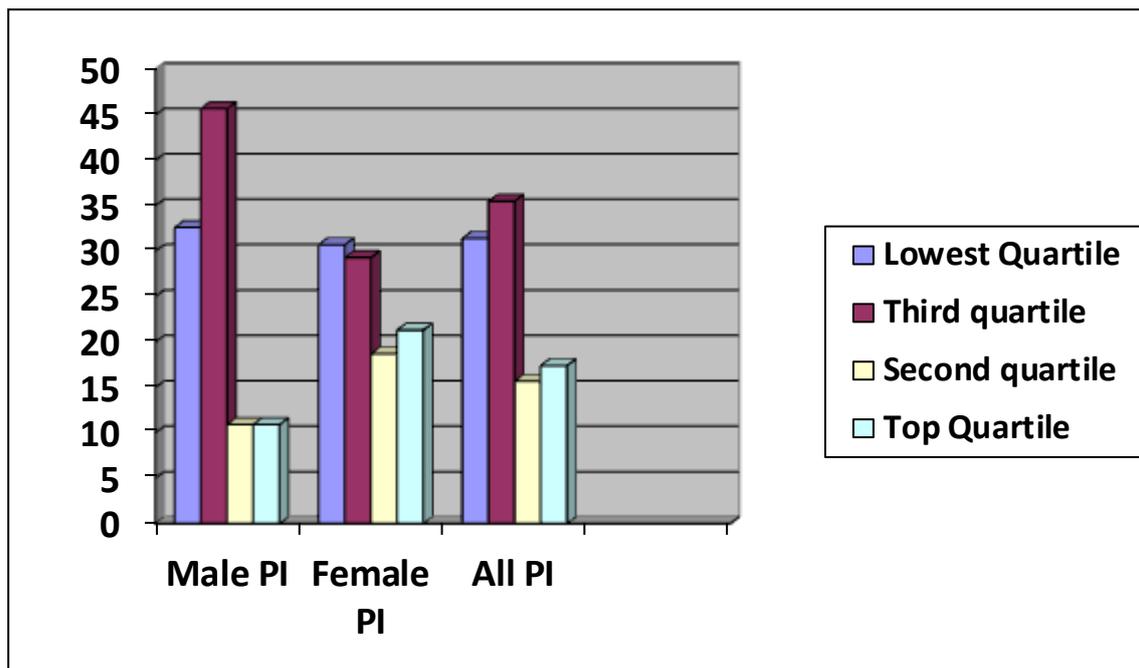


Figure 2-4 Reading achievement quartiles comparing PI males and females

Table 2-1 Mean numeracy test scores by mother's country of birth (1998 cohort)

(Sourced from Ainley et al. 2000)

Country of birth of mother	Mean test score
Australia	12.4
Other English speaking country	12.5
Southern Europe	11.3
Other Europe	12.9
Asia	13.2
Middle East and North Africa	10.5
Other Africa	13.0
Central and South America	11.1
Pacific	10.2

In addition to their actual performance, reflected in their reading and mathematics scores at Year 9, students' own perceptions of their abilities at school are also regarded as important predictors of future performance, achievement and pathways. In order to get a sense of the distinctive educational trajectories of those with PI ancestry, it has been necessary to separate them out, not only by nationality, but also by language spoken at home and cultural background. Three clear groups emerge within the cohort - those who identified as Indian speaking PI from Fiji, PI who spoke English at home and PI who spoke another language (most likely a PI local language) at home. Figure 1.6 below illustrates the differences between the three groups, with the Indo-Fijian group clearly showing themselves to be the most positive in terms of their perceptions of their schooling ability and also most confident in terms of their academic performances. The 'other language at home' group who were purported to be speakers of a PI island language mostly showed themselves to have 'average' or 'better than average' levels of perception about their abilities, and nearly one in five described themselves as achieving 'very well'. The PI group who spoke English at home were likely to describe their performance as 'average' or 'better than average'; a bare handful saw their performances as 'very strong'.

The clustering of the two non-Indian speaking groups at the 'average' or just 'better than average' (rather than 'very well') levels in terms of their perceived performance level is interesting given the cultural tendency for PI to avoid appearing too confident (Furieux, 1973; Vakalahi, 2009) but also to not want to be seen as doing badly at school.

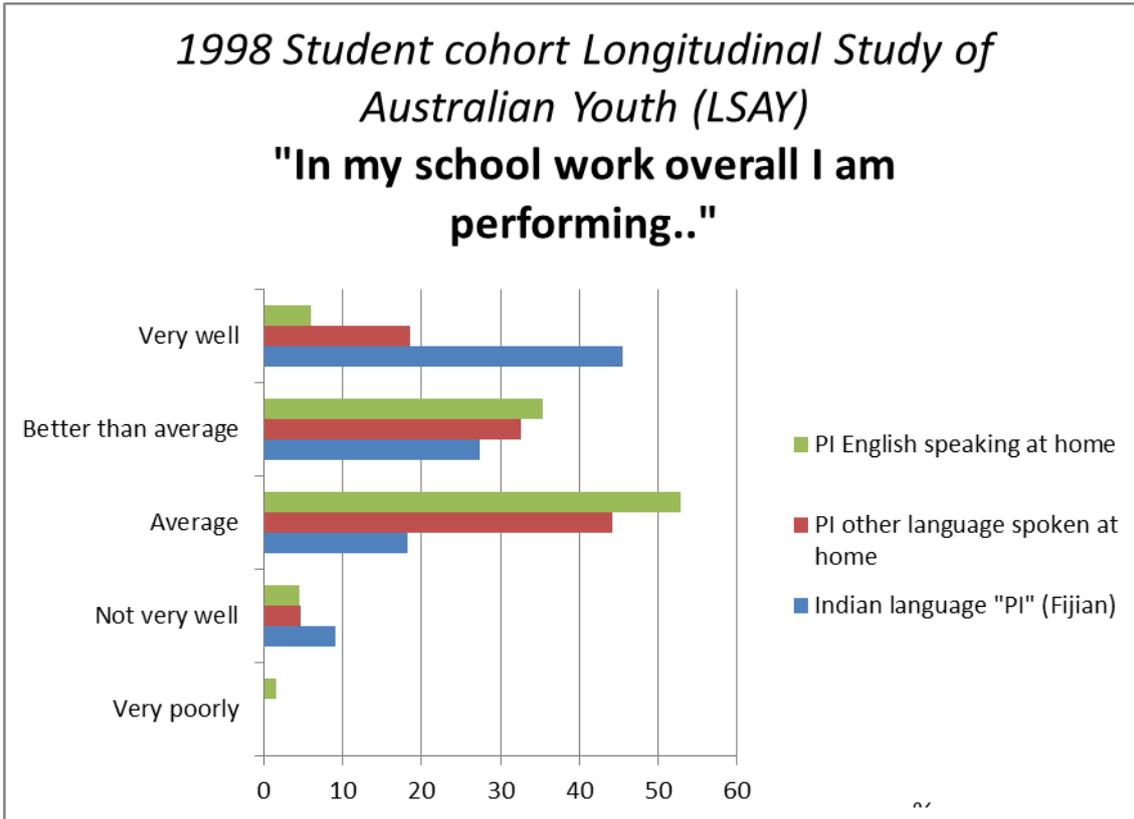


Figure 2-5 : Perceptions of ability across three PI groups

Findings from the LSAY data clearly evidence a high attrition rate by PI at the middle and senior secondary school level, with PI consistently performing at the lowest level in terms of numeracy assessments in the early years of their LSAY involvement (Ainley et al. 2002). The last twenty years of LSAY also demonstrate that young people of Pacific ancestry have low level perceptions of their schooling abilities when compared with their non-Pacific speaking counterparts.

The LSAY results support the findings of many research studies both in Australia (Chenoweth, 2014; Kearney & Donaghy, 2008; Rose et al.2009) and internationally (Anae et al., 2002; Coxon et al. 2006; Fairbairn-Dunlop & Makisi; 2003; Nakhid, 2003; Pasikale et al.1998; Thaman, 2008) which suggest that PI learners generally have low-level aspirations and consistently achieve less than average successes at school and consequent poor employment transitions, resulting in many young PI being engaged primarily in temporary, casual and non-career related types of work. The clear and consistent message from the

literature and the empirical data is that PI learners are not benefitting fully from the educational and employment opportunities that a developed country like Australia should be able to offer them and their families. The ongoing and long term consequence of this pattern of educational engagement is that many of these young people are unlikely to confidently and comfortably manage their transitions into adulthood.

Much of the existing literature on PI's engagement with schooling and education has focussed primarily on the barriers experienced by learners in accessing and participating in education (Furneaux, 1973; Anae et al., 2002; Coxon et al. 2006; Rose et al. 2009) while others have highlighted the low levels of success in academic achievement and post-school pathways (Kearney & Donaghy, 2008; Cuthill, 2010). While some of the challenging factors are specific to PI, other influencing factors can also be applied to other cohorts. Some of these factors can be said to be systemic or structural in nature but still have specific impacts on PI levels of engagement with education and the overall successes that they are able to derive from it. Each of these influencing factors, as highlighted from the literature is discussed in detail under three sections; personal based factors, home-based factors and community-based factors.

Personal based factors refer to issues of learner engagement which are influenced by an individual's sense of self-concept and include their sense of identity, personal agency and resilience. At school, a learner's self-concept affects their level of motivation, aspirations and resilience. Home-based factors relate to issues of physical in-home support, parental educational background and level of school involvement as well as cultural influences that have an impact on schooling. Both Australian and international literature point to a strong association between family and cultural influences on education (Anae et al., 2002; Bishop, 2004; Dickie, 2000; Tsolidis, 2008), particularly the barriers to educational participation of working class and low socio-economic status families and communities (Connell, 2003; Lareau, 2003; Prior & Mellor, 2002). Three aspects of family influence that are discussed here include in-home support to learners, parental involvement with school and the impacts of culture

on schooling engagement. The third influencing factor relates to community integration and adaptation of PI in the broader environmental context. The inclusion of the broader societal context is based on the belief that wider societal systems and structures play a major role in the ways that individuals and groups interpret their sense of identity, place and position in a community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Such interpretations, in turn influence learners' ability to participate, engage and integrate into community and societal structures and systems. Garbarino's (1990) adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model is most useful in the discussions about ways that a young person interacts with their environment by highlighting the interconnection between the three most important influences on a child's life - the family, school and the community.

One of the most documented barriers known to affect PI learner's success in education is low motivation and aspiration to transition to higher levels of education. Rose et al. (2009) noted that in Brisbane, out of a class with over sixty percent of Pacific Island students, 'very few were interested in participating in any form of tertiary education' (Rose et al. 2009, p.26) and many of the students in the group felt they did not have adequate literacy skills for university level study as English was their second or even third language. Low literacy skills, cognitive difficulties (Beaver & Tuck, 1998) and a low self-concept were presented as common reasons for the low aspirations of young PI. A low self-concept, combined with limited confidence in their English language ability and a lack of university-experienced role models within the family were given as reasons for the reluctance amongst these learners to view higher education as a possible pathway option.

Concern about low aspirations amongst PI learners have resulted in certain higher education (HE) providers in Australia reaching out to PI communities in their local community areas to improve aspirations to complete post compulsory levels of schooling and subsequently increase enrolment of PI learners in higher education (Kearney & Donaghy, 2008; Scull & Cuthill, 2008). These initiatives were encouraged by the widening access and social inclusion agenda (Bradley et al., 2008) which led to the establishment and implementation of the 'engaged

outreach' strategy purposely to engage with local PI communities. The introduction of programs such as the *Pasifika Australia* (Australian National University), *Polyvision* (Queensland University), *UniReach* (Griffith University) and *Pacific Islands Language and Literacy Alliance* (University of Western Sydney) provided the initial observational evidence that there were complex challenges faced by PI learners in the quest to complete post-compulsory stages of secondary schooling and enter higher education (HE) or vocational education (VE) through TAFE (Technical and Further Education). Targeting these programs at both the young people and the wider community of PI also evidenced the importance of including the community as a necessary strategy for achieving the program goals (Ortner, 1994).

A counter argument to these perceptions, however, was put forward by other researchers working with PI learners (McLaughlin & Hickling-Hudson, 2005; Nakhid, 2003; Nuthall, 2005; Siope, 2011) who found that young PI had high aspirations and expectations of themselves which also led them to value school highly as a pathway to achieving future social and economic success. This view was also shared by the parents of the participants in this study. Nakhid (2003) and Siope (2010) further claimed that the low aspiration argument was one of the biggest myths about PI learners to have come from previous studies.

Schuller's claim that 'the single most important factor in effective learning is student motivation' (Schuller, 2001.p.68) is widely supported in the literature (Bandura, 1989; Appadurai, 2004; Buckroth & Parkin, 2010). According to Buckroth and Parkin (2010), a person's identity helps them to interpret their concept of agency and the way they see themselves as actors and subjects (ibid, 2010). Sapin (2013) defines identity as an individual's self-concept which includes their sense of self-esteem, self-image, self-knowledge and self-confidence (Sapin, 2013). A person's identity and personal agency inform the extent to which they can make decisions, trust their own judgement and follow through with tasks. For many young people, their sense of agency affects their transitions into adulthood and their various stages and forms of independence (Evans, 2002; Morrow, 2008). When applied to a schooling context, an

engagement with learning, identity and personal agency are closely related to the concepts of motivation, aspiration and self-worth. A child's positive learning experiences, therefore, are closely connected to their having high expectations for themselves, as well as a positive sense of self-efficacy. A consistent experience of personal success also contributes to improved self-efficacy.

Apart from these intrinsic motivations, a person may also derive aspiration and motivation from extrinsic sources such as high parental expectations for schooling (Connell, 2003), adequate learner support from primary providers and positive encouragement from family, school and community role models. Considine & Zapalla (2002) specifically attribute successful schooling experience to young people having clear goals for their post-school pathways while Connell (2003) and Teese (2006) emphasise the importance of high parental expectations from schooling. A US study by Suarez-Orozco & Nicolas, 2001, also found that academic self-efficacy, strong English language proficiency and a supportive home-school environment presented as important protective factors for migrant learners.

Connell (1990) also pointed to the importance of facilitating strong connections between classroom structure and behavioral student engagement as a way to motivate and engage learners. According to Connell (1990), teachers who expressed clear expectations and provided consistent responses to their students were more likely to improve their student's overall behavioral and cognitive engagement at school. Wentzel & Wigfield (2007) noted that effective teacher-student and student-student relationships have significant impacts on the motivation of learners to do well by developing a strong sense of school belonging (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Numerous literature and research studies support the important role of teachers and school staff in nurturing and facilitating student motivation to succeed in their learning (Fredricks, 2014; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Peer relationships were also found to have a reciprocal impact on learners whereby peer acceptance or rejection influenced students' behavioral

engagement in terms of participation, conduct and work involvement and emotional engagement, interest and satisfaction in school (Fredricks et al, 2004). Scull and Cuthill (2010) and Kearney and Donaghy (2008) in working with PI students in Queensland found that negative peer pressure and a lack of tertiary-educated Pacific island role models in schools and in the community were responsible for the low levels of aspiration and motivation amongst PI learners in high school. In schools where there were many PI, boys in particular were found to 'act out' and sometimes misbehaved as a way of getting attention from peers and teachers. These studies affirm the importance of role modeling in improving aspirations and motivation among PI learners but also continue the stereotypical views that PI are generally not adequately motivated to succeed in schooling.

2.4 Student Engagement

Student engagement is a term that has been used widely in the education literature to refer to many different contexts and issues. According to the OECD, engagement at school is generally determined by two factors: a learner's sense of belonging to the school and their level of participation in school activities, both inside and outside of the classroom (OECD, 2003). Fullerton (2002) refers to engagement as 'an important outcome of schooling' (Fullerton, 2002, p.v) and draws on Finn's (1989) taxonomy of engagement, to define engagement as 'the examination of students' levels of participation in the schools' extra-curricular activities offered by their schools' (Fullerton, 2002, p.v). Finn (1989) and Fullerton (2002) further assert that a students' participation in extra-curricular activities is linked to a range of positive educational outcomes including a close identification with school, a sense of belonging and self-worth and the development of learner resilience. These definitions of engagement are relevant to this study, considering its dominant focus on students' general behaviour and sense of belonging to school rather than on their academic performance.

Connell's (1990) definition of student engagement sits in direct opposition to school disaffection where the two sit at two ends of a continuum. A student with

a high level of behavioral engagement, according to Connell, was more likely to be actively involved in their learning whilst students at the other end of the continuum were likely to be disengaged, passive, bored, and put in less effort to school work. The disaffected students also tended to give up easily and were more likely to display negative emotions such as anger, blame or denial (Skinner & Belmont (1993). On the other hand, Newman, Wehlage & Lambrou,1992) define student engagement as having two components: a behavioural component which includes positive conduct, effort and participation at school and an emotional component which is associated with a sense of interest, identification and belonging and a positive attitude towards schooling (Marks, Fleming, Long & MacMillan, 2000). Given that much of the available literature (Appleton, Christenson & Furlong, 2006; Finn, 1989; Fullerton, 2002; Wang & Holcombe, 2010) consistently supports a strong association between positive student engagement and high academic achievement, it is imperative that schools place a high priority on positive school engagement for their learners.

2.4.1 Home and school connection

The home front has been a particular focus when researchers explore the many physical, socio-economic and cultural issues affecting the low levels of academic achievement of PI. Physical factors such as insufficient provision of in-home space, structure and time for school work, low support for homework, (Anae et al. 2002; Mafi, 2005; Rose at al. 2009) and frequent parental absences from home have been reported as typical physical barriers for many Pacific families (Anae et al. 2002).

Significantly, cultural distance (Exley & Singh, 2000; Thaman, 2008), has been identified as a major barrier to the successful engagement of PI young people at school. Cultural distance is a term that has been used to refer to the gaps that exist between the '*lived experiences*' (Nuthall, 2005; VanManen, 1982) of learners and the social and cultural requirements and expectations of the schooling environment. Many PI Indigenous researchers (Gegeo, 2001; Hau'ofa, 1994; Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Reid, 2015; Samu, 2007; Sanga, 2011;

Sekulla, 2006; Thaman, 2008) highlight the many differences between western and Pacific methodologies to learning and teaching and emphasize the importance of recognising PI cultural knowledge forms in order to understand their approaches to socialisation, engagement and relationships at school, especially in terms of communication style, student-teacher relationships and student perceptions of belonging and personal agency (Nabobo-Baba, 2008; Smith, 2012; Thaman, 2008).

Language is an obvious cultural barrier for many Pacific learners, most of whom speak a language other than English at home and for whom maintaining oral fluency in their national language is an integral part of maintaining personal and cultural identity (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2009; Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Nabobo-Baba 2013; Thaman, 2008). Unsurprisingly, low English language competence and confidence were reported as major challenges for PI learners, alongside low academic effort and parental inexperience with education (Anae et al. 2002; Beaver & Tuck, 1998; Furneaux, 1973 Rose, et al., 2009). These demands were compounded by the need to use English confidently concurring with the view that amongst PI parents, limited fluency in English often presented as a barrier to effective communication with their child's school (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Makisi; 2003; Onikama et al., 1998).

Other cultural obligations and demands cited in the literature (Ochs,1982; Gershon, 2007; Onikama, Hammon & Koki, 1998; Pakoa (n.d); Fairbairn-Dunlop & Makisi, 2003) as being partly responsible for poor engagement and achievement of PI learner's at school were the constrained relationships and communication between parents and their children and gendered notions and allocation of roles and responsibilities.

According to Singh (2001), the cultural gap between learners and teachers in schools also extends to incorrect perceptions about learner ability and behavior where a teacher's low expectations of a learner helps reinforce the learner's own aspirations to succeed, which may result in a positive or negative experience of schooling (ibid, 2001). It is argued that past school performances and achievements of PI learners may give rise to certain expectations about PI

learners and the group's engagement patterns and behavioral demeanors which might affect the perceptions and relationships that are established in school settings. From a school perspective, a major barrier for PI lies in a family's inability to adapt and adjust to the demands of a new and unfamiliar school system which lead to limited and unstructured in-home support, poor communication with teachers and unrealistic expectations from schooling. Poor learner outcomes were also attributed to the numerous obligations and responsibilities of learners, especially females at home and the potential conflicts with school responsibilities (Nakhid, 2003; Onikama et al, 1998; Sileo & Prater, 1998).

The importance of the home-school connection and the emphasis on developing positive relationships with peers and teachers and other supportive adults to provide safe contexts for learning and improving learner motivation and achievement levels is well documented in the literature (Bernstein, 1999; Otero, 2011). Interestingly, however, a study in Hawaii by Onikama et al. (1998) found many Pacific parents 'place a distinct separation between school and themselves in the education of their children' where they regarded school as a "foreign entity with which they had no or little responsibility and where teachers were seen as the experts and specialists in the education of their children" (ibid 1998; p.68). A later study by Fairburn–Dunlop and Makisi (2003) in New Zealand concurs with Onikama et al. (1998) stating many (Pacific) parents expected teachers and schools to provide ethical as well as academic training for their children (1998). These findings suggest little congruence between family and school environments and also imply serious misunderstandings about the nature and levels of involvement expected from families and the school system.

At the community level, the main barriers as viewed by researchers include a lack of role models within the PI community, negative peer pressure and excessive focus and time spent on community-specific activities such as church, sports and other cultural events (Gershon, 2007; McDonald, 2013; Ochs, 1982). Many young people in the Logan study (Rose et al., 2009) felt

physically and emotionally removed from the higher education setting due to the view that universities were out of their intellectual or economic reach. This socially constructed negative view, when combined with an absence of role models with university experience within the local PI diaspora, contributed further towards lowering PI learner aspirations to attend university. In contrast, TAFE was seen as a more viable destination due to its vocational and practical emphasis, cheaper cost and its alignment with Pacific cultural forms of knowledge transfer which favour experiential approaches to learning.

2.4.2 Family Involvement

There is substantial literature that supports the benefits of parental involvement in the educational achievement of learners (Anfara, Mertens & Caskey, 2007; Ferlazzo, 2011; Kearney, Fletcher & Dobrejov-major, 2011; Otero, 2011) and the success of schools (Henderson & Raimondo, 2001). Positive parental involvement in schooling is said to be necessary both for improving student aspirations and attitudes towards schooling and for achieving high educational performance. Other research (Epstein, 1994; Finn, 1998) further claim that positive parental involvement is more influential on learning than family, social or cultural background or parental occupation or income level (Snodgrass, 1991; Daniel, 2011). Others have focussed on distinguishing between various levels of parental involvement (Epstein, 1994; Ferlazzo, 2011). A recent study from the United States (Wang, 2015) identified five key ingredients of parental involvement as follows:

- a) frequency of communication between parents and teachers,
- b) quality of communication between teachers and parents,
- c) extent to which parents encouraged their children to figure out their own solutions to homework,
- d) structure established at home in terms of schedules and guidelines for study and

e) extent to which parents discussed with their children the importance of education in future success.

In another US study, the Ewing Kaufman Foundation (2005) categorised parents according to the nature of their roles towards their children's schools wherein the parental roles ranged from slight involvement to enhanced engagement. In the first group were parents who were 'help seekers', while 'school helpers' comprised the second group that assisted at school events and services and the third group 'potential transformers' referred to those with the potential to shape and influence school decisions and operations.

In 2004, the Australian Government demonstrated its commitment to the importance of parental involvement in children's education by establishing the Family-Schools Partnerships framework (DEST, 2005). The impetus for parental involvement in children's schooling was based on both a philosophical and pragmatic stance (Daniel, 2011). From a philosophical standpoint, parental involvement practice in children's education made good democratic, consumer and economic sense (Soliman, 1994) while the pragmatic advocacy was based on linking parental involvement to academic benefits as well as social and emotional development of young people.

The literature also identifies some barriers to successful parental involvement in schooling (Kalantzis & Cope, 1988; McInerney, 2002; Cavahlo, 2001). For example, Daniel (2011) identified three types of challenges to parental involvement which he referred to as physical constraints (lack of time, transport and cost), cultural pressures (where there is a diversity of needs, expectations and experiences) and school-based factors (hierarchical structures, perception of roles and responsibilities). Of particular interest to this study are the "barriers that prevent the involvement of families from minority, marginalised or disadvantaged groups on the basis of class, ethnicity, gender, aboriginality and culture" (Daniel, 2005, p.152). Daniel (2011) asserts that working class parents (and those from disadvantaged or marginalised groups) may not always have access to the cultural, social and economic forms of capital that enable them to maximise their involvement and engagement at school compared to middle

class parents who are more likely to take up the opportunities for active involvement in their children's schooling (Mills & Gale, 2004). This supports Bourdieu's (1977) social theory that suggests that individuals and groups are differently placed to negotiate their place, influence and agency in a particular setting given their unequal access to appropriate social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital. Parents' limited levels of access to these forms of capital, according to Mills and Gale (2004) may lead schools to incorrectly view working class or disadvantaged parents as being uninterested in or uncaring about their children's schooling (Mills & Gale, 2004).

Cavahlo's assertion that the parent-school partnership model is heavily based on middle-class conceptions that may facilitate further inequalities for working class parents (Cavahlo, 2001) is supported by McKeand (2003) and Daniel (2011). McKeand (2003) further claims that the disparities in the ability of marginalised and disadvantaged groups to take up opportunities for parental involvement can create a situation of 'double disadvantage' where benefits from the additional involvement opportunities are limited to already advantaged families (Daniel, 2011). McInerney (2002) concurs arguing that parental perceptions of their school involvement are socially and culturally informed and heavily linked to parents' sense of efficacy (confidence and competence) and their role concept (Swick, 1988; Vincent, 2001). These views agree with Soliman's (1995) position 'that differences in culture may explain how separate or connected the school families feel and what action they can take on behalf of their children', (Soliman, 1995, p.162). Further, Soliman asserts that the involvement of working class families might not be obviously clear or visible to schools which support the view (Tan, 2001) that disadvantaged parents may get involved in their children's schooling through informal and social actions rather than through formal channels of involvement that the schools recognise and encourage (Jervis, 2006). For example, schools may blame poor parents for not attending school meetings but be quite accepting of the reasons provided by well-to-do parents not attending similar meetings (Jervis, 2006; Hale & Stessman, 2007).

2.5 Cost of education

The relationship between social class and poor systemic socio-economic circumstances on education is well documented (Connell, 1982; James, Baldwin, Coates, Kraus & McInnis, 2004; McLachlan et al. 2013). High cost and long-term poverty are well-known for their contributions towards the secondary negative effects on learning such as low learner support, conflicted motivations and poor achievement at school (Helme et al., 2009; Marks, McMillan & Ainley, 2004; Teese, 1978). Amongst PI learners, the effect of cost on the participation of PI learners in post-compulsory education is aptly reflected in Anae's observation of PI learners in New Zealand:

"... for many Pacific parents, the centrality of the financial, social and cultural provision of resources for their children coupled with the lack of ability, skills, time or energy to assist their children with schoolwork is intensified if and as their children progress from secondary schools into tertiary sectors" (Anae et al., 2002, p.129).

This statement presents a fairly accurate summary of the specific and general barriers that confront many PI learners and their families in the pursuit for successful education and schooling. For some learners, long-term insecure, casual and low-paid employment that brings low-level family income may give rise to motivations to leave school early to find work and contribute to family income. Although many families may not support their children resorting to such an option, young people may feel obliged nevertheless to contribute towards family welfare (Rose et al, 2009). Young males were said to be especially vulnerable and likely to make the decision to leave school early and contribute meaningfully and financially towards the family's situation. This is especially true for PI families whose visas are facilitated by family migration and who are unable to secure jobs soon after arrival.

Long term poverty particularly affects PIsettlers who step-migrated through New Zealand and who faced job cuts in the manufacturing industry in the 1980s and

1990s, forcing them to take on casual, shift or temporary work (Ash, 2014). The children of these families may be able to access Commonwealth assistance in the form of loans for fees (FEE-Help) for university and TAFE tuition but the substantial financial hardship experienced by their families may have affected their capacity, motivation and confidence to study at university. On the other hand, immediate affordability of higher education fees is the main challenge for more recent migrants who do not have Australian citizenship and thus cannot access government assistance to meet the tuition and English language support costs for their children at university or at TAFE (Technical and Further Education). Whilst they may have the confidence and ability to aim for university studies, the high cost of tuition and non-access to loans prevent families from meeting tuition costs at post-compulsory levels of education (Anae et al. 2002) where the high up-front costs are known to seriously disadvantage PI in participating in education that could lead to long-term positive post-school pathways and career-destined training and sustainable employment (Chenoweth, 2014; Rose et al., 2009). This set of barriers is likely to result in a situation of inter-generational disadvantage where PI are unable to rise out of financial disadvantage and poverty supporting Kearney (2012) that in Australia there is a *“rapidly growing Pacific Island cohort whose higher education and employment opportunities are limited by their ineligibility for HECS-HELP. Most will be unable to fulfil their aspirations to proceed with study and career development while they aim to build a meaningful life as Australian citizens. The cycle of disadvantage is cemented. In this lucky country, they are the unlucky ones”* (Kearney, 2012. p.130).

On the other hand, other research has attributed the financial difficulties of PI to cultural or religious obligations (Connell & Brown, 2004). The importance of the church in PI life is acknowledged by Crocombe (2001) who states *“there are few places where such deeply rooted ‘folk churches’ bind the communities so closely and effectively as in the Pacific Islands”* (Crocombe, 2001, p. 223). Some of the financial considerations that have been known to affect family finances include church fundraising, community and cultural contributions, sports membership fees or even remittance payments to families in the Islands.

Many PI also maintain close relationships with their inter-city, inter-state and trans-national families and communities and make regular trips to island homes to attend important family social and cultural events such as weddings, funerals and traditional events. Alternatively, they may bring family members to visit in Australia. All these cultural obligations and interactions are very important to Pacific families and are often highly prioritized in family budgets.

2.6 Questions emerging from the analysis and literature

On review and analysis of the literature on PI migrants and school participation, both the Australian and international literature point to multi-faceted reasons for the consistently low levels of educational participation and achievement by PI migrant learners. Some reasons given for these poor educational outcomes include low literacy, unfamiliarity with the education system, high cost and lack of adequate support at home. There has been an assumption that such factors are constant across different contexts. This realisation led the researcher to wonder if similar schooling performance and achievement patterns and educational barriers also applied to PI migrants living and studying in Melbourne's western region and if so, how have these challenges manifested and what, if any solutions have been applied to improve the situation. On a broad scale, the research aimed to identify school and home factors that impacted PI learner's school engagement, achievement outcomes and post-school pathways and to address the challenges and propose useful responses. From the literature analysis, the continuing low levels of school engagement of PI migrants are dependent on and shaped by the differing contexts within which the learners live and interact.

In summary, the literature analysis points the following propositions about PI and schooling:

- PI migrants value schooling and PI learners have aspirations that are tied to educational achievement and outcomes

- PI have strong connections to their cultures which includes their history, language, community and church affiliation
- PI school engagement and achievement is impacted by a variety of personal, family and community factors that are further impacted by external environmental factors
- PI learners and families are affected by cultural and social disconnects between Pacific methodologies and forms of learning and western models of learning that are used and encouraged in Australian schools
- PI enjoy high social capital within the networks of family and local diaspora and transnational communities
- PI weak connections to their external environment affects opportunities to advocate more effectively on behalf of community needs and interests and can lead to further isolation and disconnection from broader society.

2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter outlined the current literature on the historical, cultural and environmental factors that affect PI's social, cultural and economic engagement with their immediate community and the wider environment. This overview was aimed at contextualizing the spaces and places that young PI encounter in their day to day lives, especially in learning and thinking about the future. This contextual background and the literature review have uncovered important revelations about the participation and engagement of PI in education. There are clear gaps between family expectation, learner aspirations and motivations and actual achievement outcomes of Pacific learners at school. The high value placed on education by parents and families continues to be poorly matched in the numbers of enrolments of PI at the post-compulsory and tertiary education levels supporting the sentiments of Scull & Cuthill (2008), Rose et al (2009) and Kearney et al (2011) that there are structural, systemic and cultural barriers. This study aims to address these concerns by contributing further to the literature and the body of knowledge related to the improvement of PI education

and post-school pathways and to suggest realistic strategies that will improve PI students' engagement at school and their contribution to the wider community.

Chapter 3 Framing the study: theoretical and methodological frameworks

This chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological frameworks that underpin and inform the research focus, approaches and processes. Located within a predominantly phenomenological theoretical background, this study uses a qualitative case study approach to investigate patterns of school engagement of PI young people who live and learn in Melbourne's western region. This chapter outlines the theoretical underpinnings that guide data collection, presentation and the analysis. It also outlines the methodological perspectives that influenced data collection tools and the justifications for their use and describes the various steps taken to ensure that the research process and practices have been conducted within appropriate ethical codes and standards.

3.1 Theoretical framework

Researchers often inform us that our worldview and perceptions of social reality are determined by our ontological and epistemological orientations (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Usher & Edwards, 1997). These two philosophical stances have a profound effect on the way social realities and knowledge are perceived and constructed and are useful in locating and situating a study within its appropriate theoretical and methodological frameworks and in explaining how the study contributes to new forms of knowledge. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) refer to the ontological theoretical orientation as 'a way of looking at the world: assumptions people have about what is important and what makes the world work' (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.25). Conversely, epistemology is concerned with explaining and understanding certain phenomena or occurrence. A qualitative epistemological perspective views knowledge as consisting of multiple realities, where meanings and understandings are subjective and constructed on the basis of interpretation and created through interactions between individual consciousness and meaning. A qualitative epistemological perspective views knowledge as being socially constructed (Burns, 2000; Crotty, 1998; Denzin &

Lincoln, 1994), therefore accepting differences in the understandings created and formed about similar phenomena, events or situations.

Since the 1960s, social science research has evolved into four dominant perspectives about how social reality is observed, measured and understood (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Neuman, 2006). The first is the positivistic perspective which views truth and knowledge as being fixed and sees social reality as being objective and external to the individual. This perspective naturally favours scientific methods of inquiry, typical in quantitative studies. The second is the interpretive perspective which emphasizes meaningful social action and a respect for socially constructed meanings and a belief that different perspectives are all integral to understanding social phenomena (Neuman, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The third perspective - critical social action (Habermas, 1972) advocates for change and empowerment for certain marginalised groups in society. A fourth perspective – radical structuralism advocates for transformation through revolutionary social action (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), which constitutes an extreme view at one end of the spectrum, and mostly refer to drastic ideological or practical changes within organisations.

This study clearly falls within the interpretive perspective because it subscribes to the view that knowledge consists of multiple realities and accepts that interpretations of understandings and meanings are socially constructed and can lead to different yet correct possibilities and alternatives. This perspective is most appropriate to this study which seeks to understand phenomena and experiences of participants within their social setting whilst being respectful of the importance and meaning of the experiences to the participants and cohorts concerned. To a lesser extent, the critical social action and radical structuralism perspectives are relevant to this study which examines aspects of equity and disadvantage of a cultural community which has consistently experienced inequitable outcomes in formal education and looks to identify ways to bring about positive change.

3.1.1 Theoretical frameworks for analysis

The study is grounded in the disciplinary areas of sociology, culture and education. Due to its multi-disciplinary nature, it utilises a range of theoretical frameworks to guide the development and analysis of its thesis. Consistent with its socio-cultural focus, the study uses Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) construct of capital as one of its analytic frames. This theoretical stance states that certain groups in society are enabled or limited in their opportunities and abilities to achieve various goals or outcomes due to inherent structural inequalities that exist in the systems within which they operate. Bourdieu posits that an individual's social place and position (*habitus*) within a given society (or field) is determined by their access to various forms of capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and a person's level of access to social, economic, cultural or symbolic capital affects their ongoing position, experience and activity within that system or setting. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is a mechanism that perpetuates social inequality and limits opportunities for groups to rise above and beyond their social and economic circumstances.

Also relevant to this thesis are theoretical discourses that challenge hegemonic practices in educational access and success (Helme, Teese, Dulfer, Robinson & Jones, 2009; Gramsci (1971), Giroux, (1983) Henry, Knight, Lingard & Taylor, 2006; Marks, Cresswell & Ainley, 2006) and the promotion of inclusive and equitable practices in schools (Mills & Gale, 2004; Teese & Polesel, 2003). Like Bourdieu, these authors share the view that the educational systems are structured to favour certain groups within the population whilst discriminating against other sections, especially those with differing forms of cultural, social and economic capital. These views support the critical social action (Habermas, 1972; Yosso, 2005) and radical structuralism paradigms outlined by Burrell and Morgan (1979).

In keeping with its socio-cultural focus, this study consults with Pacific epistemologies and indigenous knowledge frameworks (Nabobo, 2012; Hauofa, 1998; Smith, 2012; Thaman, 2008) to frame and formulate propositions and explanations regarding school participation, engagement and achievement that is

relevant to PI migrant learners. Thaman (2003) acknowledges the importance of understanding traditional and Indigenous knowledge forms and their impact on culturally diverse learners while stating that “*little attention has been focused on the impact on people’s minds, particularly on their ways of knowing, their views of who and what they are, and what they consider worthwhile to teach and to learn*” (Thaman, 2003, p.1). An understanding of Pacific forms of knowledge and their influences on PI cultural traditions and viewpoints helps to explain some of the attitudes, decisions and actions of PI learners and their families to schooling, its purpose and value and their roles and responsibilities. These forms of knowledge are characterised and evidenced through shared values and traditions that typically characterise Pacific peoples which include a strong belief in a higher power, an acknowledgment of community history, memory and cultural traditions that embody notions of identity, language and kinship ties, the importance of family, respect for the common collective good and the maintainance of social group harmony through mutual obligation and reciprocity observance and practice.

For many PI, these knowledge forms are learned outside of the formal schooling sector wherein PI participate in ‘*continuous and circular spheres of experiences*’ (Thaman, 1993, p.256) where physical, cultural and spiritual sensitivities combine with past, present and future occurrences to merge into a whole ‘*integrated nature of traditional knowledge and learning*’ (1993). This integrated experience is seen as a central circular space in which learning occurs and transmits, reflecting shared knowledge, skills, beliefs and values. On the other hand, schools are seen as places that transmit foreign knowledge, which is organised in separate and distinct disciplines (Smith, 2012) and where success is measured through individual effort, and formal and inflexible formats such as tests and examinations that facilitate promotion to higher levels of education and employment which can help members meet kinship and community obligations.

Because PI view the learning and acquisition of knowledge in informal, experiential, integrated and holistic ways, they often struggle when adapting to

western forms of learning which emphasise individual effort and achievement, competition and formal testing and assessment. These forms of learning and interaction contradict with Polynesian concepts of 'faa' (Tongan) or 'vaa' (Samoan) - the shared space of time and being which is underpinned by values of respect and the maintenance of harmonious relationships that minimize conflicts amongst individuals and groups (Thaman, 2008). These metaphorical and liminal spaces between and among individuals and collective groups exist to ensure group harmony that is underlined by complex and often unwritten codes of conduct and behaviour from individuals and the collective group, aimed at maintaining positive *'interpersonal and inter-group relationships and responsibilities'* (Thaman, 2008, p.471). PI Melanesians also uphold this concept of individual and collective social wellbeing and all-round goodwill in the concept of '*mana*' - the 'essence of a good life' (Gegeo, 1998) where members aspire to live a humanitarian life as well as engage in culturally appropriate activities (Gegeo, 1998).

Language is an important marker of cultural identity for Pacific peoples who have maintained proficiency and fluency in their languages through mostly oral transmission. For some PI, the maintenance and use of language is necessary for upkeeping cultural traditions and knowledges whilst also protecting the importance of 'vaa' where normally direct personal attention or communication is preferred, in opposition to indirect, written, impersonal communication and interaction. In communication and language use, avoiding confrontation that might 'harm' personal space and group harmony is very important. Such avoidance often leads to what some Westerners regard as imprecision and/or indirectness in Pacific people's use of language (Thaman, 2008). The notion of shared space and collective identity also extends to accomplishments and failures of members and groups. The de-emphasising of individuality continues to exist amongst PI to present day where "*much emphasis is placed on a relational theory of personhood and the importance of vaa in defining and giving meaning to people's behaviour*" (Thaman, 2008, p.468). Other Pacific researchers (Hivding, 2003; Samu, 2007) have also emphasised the importance

of teaching appropriate behaviour, values and cultural knowledge about the many webs of relationships needed for PI to live worthwhile lives which are not provided for in Australian schools.

There are clear differences in the world views of Pacific and Western epistemologies which can alienate PI learners from the school system. The sense of alienation and isolation increases in spaces where Pacific knowledge forms differ greatly in focus and practice from western forms of learning and knowledge acquisition like the Australian school system which is predominantly based on Anglo-European epistemologies (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Hivding, 2003; Thaman, 2008).

This study also draws from aspiration theory (Appudurai, 2004; Bandura, 1989), school engagement theory (Appleton et al., 2006; Finn, 1989; Fullarton, 2002) and the home–school partnership concept (Epstein, 1994; Otero, 2011) to guide the discussion on learner engagement and achievement at school. Of specific interest to the home–school partnership concept is the notion of *'engaged outreach'* (Cuthill, 2010; Cuthill & Scull, 2011; Kearney, 2012) which advocates for active collaboration between particular communities and educational institutions to develop models of practice that address specific needs, strengths and challenges of particular target groups. The concepts of *'engaged outreach'* and *'community cultural wealth'* (Yosso, 2005) are particularly relevant frames for analysis given the importance of family and community involvement in decisions and actions concerning schooling amongst PI learners. Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth provides a useful analytic tool for assessing differences in the perceptions of different forms of capital.

Additionally this study draws from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) human ecological theory and Park's concept of the marginal man (Park, 1950) to explain the nature of relationships that PI are able to develop with other social and cultural groups within the community. These theories help to explore how the concepts of social inclusion and community cohesion are experienced by PI within their own communities and with and between individuals and groups within the wider society and thus are relevant in the discussion concerning community

integration and settlement, social inclusion of PI in the broader social context and the cultural gaps between different types of population groups.

3.2 Methodological framework

This study utilises a phenomenological and ethnographic approach to data collection, analysis and theory development through the use of case study and narrative approaches to investigate PI levels of school engagement, achievement and pathways. Phenomenology is a branch of the qualitative research tradition and is referred to by Burns (1990) as *“the host of personal meanings that are derived from the context of direct experiencing (where) perceptions and interpretations of reality are linked with these meanings”* (Burns, 1990. p.3). A phenomenological approach is suitable for this study as its purpose and research process align well with the data collection and analysis procedures selected for use in the study.

In this investigation, the majority of data was collected using first-hand and direct interactions with participants who were themselves experiencing changes and shifts in their experiences and perceptions over the course of the study. Consistent with a phenomenological approach, the informants' ideas, motivations and interests were gathered and then analysed and interpreted to make better sense of their specific circumstances. Phenomenologists believe *“there are multiple ways of interpreting experiences available to each of us through interacting with others and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitute reality”* (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003 p.24). A phenomenological approach fits well with a qualitative methodological framework in that both rely on human perceptions as data and accept that these perceptions are subjective. This is an important feature of both phenomenology and qualitative research where data used and the research outcomes produced are not presented *“as transcendent truth but as a particular rendering of interpretation of reality grounded in the empirical world”* (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003.p.24). A phenomenological perspective is also relevant to this research as it emphasises the importance of historical and socio-cultural contexts of the informants' lives and seeks to provide *‘thick description’* (Green, 1978) about their history and culture. Spradley's (1980)

definition of culture as “*the acquired knowledge people use to interpret, experience and generate behaviour*” (Spradley,1980, p.6) is relevant in a phenomenological approach that allows the researcher to examine the topic of study whilst being attentive to and mindful of the participants’ historical and socio-cultural contexts.

Located within a qualitative methodological framework, this study employs a research process that seeks to understand people’s experiences, actions and behaviour in order to make careful and accurate interpretations about what these things mean to them. Inherent in qualitative research is the search for meanings and explanations of actions and behaviours through communication and interaction with those who are directly involved in such real life experiences. Patton (1985) sums up qualitative research as an effort “*to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and interactions therein*” (Patton, 1985 in Merriam, 1988, p.16-17) where the understanding is facilitated through an interaction and appreciation of the nature and uniqueness of that setting and the participants within it as they go about their day to day roles and activities. Qualitative research resonates with a phenomenological approach because it aims to gather insights, discovery and interpretation about a phenomenon, situation or action and relies on the interpretation of thoughts, beliefs and behaviour to make sense of these occurrences. Qualitative research relies on words, documents and experiences as the main forms of data (Usher et al. 1997).

Similar to other forms of phenomenological inquiry, qualitative research methodology uses a constructivist approach whereby the researcher’s knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. Like Ralton (1990), Denzin and Lincoln (2007), Bogdan and Biklen (2003) agree that qualitative research uses holistic and inductive reasoning in its data analysis and uses ‘*thick description*’ derived from naturalistic settings to allow others to engage with the findings with familiarity. It is from this rich and detailed data that qualitative researchers are able to employ induction strategies to build

concepts, theoretical categories and propositions from the relationships and patterns found in the data (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

One of the main criticisms of qualitative research, however, is that the research processes used may be subjective, putting the study and research findings at risk of unreliability, limited validation and low level generalizability to other settings. Added to this is the potential risk of researcher bias especially when the researcher has primary responsibility for choosing the research question, framing the research design, selecting data and data collection methods, analysis and interpretation methods (Merriam, 1983). The problem of researcher bias is a criticism of qualitative research that must be dealt with to maintain integrity of the research process. For this study, the researcher has been careful to apply a variety of research approaches to limit bias and enhance reliability and increase validity of the research process and outcomes. These approaches are outlined in the section called '*ethical conduct*', which come later in this chapter.

3.3 Case study research inquiry

Guided by a phenomenological theoretical orientation, this research uses a case study inquiry approach to collect, analyse and interpret data. As with other qualitative inquiry approaches, the case study method allows the researcher to seek understanding of meanings in the ideas, words and actions of those closest to the phenomenon being studied. The design and purpose of data collection is framed with the intention to facilitate a fuller and better understanding of the phenomenon, content or culture being explored (Cooper, 1989; Wolcott, 1992). The aim is to gather information that is holistic, descriptive and explanatory to the situation and context whilst being attentive to the ways that specific groups confront issues and problems (Shaw, 1978), while also focussing on changes that occur over time and through historical periods (Burns, 1990). Merriam (1988) asserts that a qualitative case study is suited to educational research which deals with critical problems of practice that can extend the knowledge base of key stakeholders such as learners, parents and school-based personnel.

A case study approach lends itself to inductive, heuristic and interpretive approaches to data analysis. Consistent with Yin (2003), Stake (1996) and Merriam (1988), case study research promotes inductive reasoning whereby the majority of the ideas, concepts and abstractions about the phenomenon under study emerge and evolve from an examination of the data. Case study research is considered heuristic in that both the description and analysis of data results in deeper understanding of the topic being studied. A case study research also lends itself to data analysis that is essentially interpretive as much of the theorising and reporting of research outcomes is based on the researcher's interpretation of meanings that have been gleaned from the ideas, words and actions of the research informants. In the process of searching for meanings, the researcher is a key player in the interpretive process because he/she shapes, influences and co-constructs the research data, analysis and findings.

A case study approach requires the researcher to make accurate and valid interpretations on the basis of observations and data collected from the cases under study. The researcher looks at ways that the cases explain their own circumstances and the ways they negotiate the social systems and structures within which they operate. Following Yin (2003), the case study method is seen as relevant for investigating research that respond to explanatory questions (ie 'why and 'how' research questions) where the focus is on "*a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context*" (Yin, 2003, p.1) over which the investigator has little control over the events and where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003).

3.3.1 Rationale for using a case study approach

Yin (2003) differentiates between case study research and other types of empirical research in terms of the data collection and analysis strategies. He postulates that in case study research, the general theoretical concepts, an initial literature review, a clear definition of the units of study and the recruitment methods must be determined prior to designing the study and data collection. Yin further posits that case study inquiry encapsulates the following three features:

- *“copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points,*
- *relies on multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result*
- *benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis”*

(Yin, 2003, pp.13 -14)

Consistent with Cressy (1953) that the multiplicity of issues affecting a young person’s life is bound to give rise to certain relationships or outcomes that are specific to the individual or the group, this study utilises an embedded case format (Scholz & Tietje, 2012; Yin, 2003) to differentiate between the two layers of cases; the first layer comprising individual learners and the second layer consisting the collective group of participants to highlight the multiplicity and complexity of issues existing at individual and collective levels, and thus adding to a richer and fuller understanding of the whole case.

Another advantage of an embedded case design is its ability to enhance triangulation of data while providing insights that come from the shared understandings of all research participants. Drawing from the embedded case model, case histories (Burns, 2000) or vignettes were utilised to capture personal information about each participant as they experienced schooling alongside the influences of ‘significant others’ - their families, school personnel and their peers. Following Merriam (1988), semi-structured interviews were deemed the best method to collect first hand information from research participants which included family members and school staff from the participants’ schools as secondary participants, recognising their importance as stakeholders that interacted with the primary participants on a daily basis. The secondary participants were interviewed once or twice during the data collection period and their information used to fill gaps in the data and to triangulate the information received from the various informant groups.

Other data collection tools were used including document review (Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS),

school level data) and personal observations at formal and informal events and cultural meetings and activities. The choice of these data collection methods was deliberate, concurring with Yin (2003) that using a variety of data collection tools is necessary for maintaining research rigour and accurate analytic triangulation of findings.

A specific aim of this study was to find out student perceptions of schooling and how these shape future transitions beyond schooling. In line with this aim, the research question sought to solicit comprehensive and unique data that could be interpreted through a process of inductive reasoning, theoretical sampling and holistic analysis (Burns, 1990). The in-depth and regular interviews with the participants provided the researcher with first-hand accounts of the participants' experiences, behaviours and attitudes towards schooling and to compare and match these against parents and teacher accounts to gain an in-depth understanding of each individual and the collective group.

According to Stake, case studies can have general relevance, if they are framed in ways that are relatable to those who have had similar experiences (Stake, 1996). Stake further claims that these naturalistic generalisations can be both intuitive and empirical and develop as a product of a person's 'vicarious experiences' (Patton 1985; Merriam, 1988) derived "*from the tacit knowledge about how things are, why they are, how people feel about them, and how these things are likely to be later or in other places with which this person is familiar*" (Stake, 2000, p. 22). In order that such relationships can be made, Stake argues that case study researchers must capture the cases' uniqueness and respect its boundaries with a purpose to understand how the people operating within it view their world (Stake, 1996).

Lincoln and Guba (1994) and Gomm & Hammersley (2000) propose that case study research provides a working hypothesis that can be used to understand other cases. For them, transferability between cases is a function of the similarity or fit between cases. In this research, the similarity or fit function referred to by Lincoln and Guba (1994) relates to the commonalities in the participants' demographic aspects such as their ethnic background, domicile,

migrant status, and years at school. Despite these commonalities between participants, this study concurs with Schofield (2002) that generalizability may not necessarily be a useful or obtainable goal for most qualitative research. However, that does not mean that case study researchers cannot propose general conclusions from their research findings. Studies conducted in a setting or with a particular cohort may still be used to draw conclusions for other groups, locations and situations and generalizability can be maintained when thick descriptions of the site in which the study took place allows readers to recognise the differences and similarities that facilitate the necessary fit between different cases or settings. In case study research, the use of rich and '*thick description*' (Green, 1978), '*clear and detailed descriptions*' (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982) and '*vicarious experiences*' (Patton, 1980) provide the potential for comparability, translatability and applicability to other cases to be made.

As with the issue of generalizability, theory development in case study research is a contested issue. Some critics of case study theory argue that the typically small size of cases used leads to results and findings that do not lend themselves sufficiently to theory development. Others ask whether theory development is indeed a function of case study research and whether authenticity and authority of doing case studies can be maintained through representing the case '*in its own terms*' (Gomm & Hammersley, 2000). In response, Skocpol (1986) asserts that theory development in case study research can be achieved through the process of cross-case analysis, where the study consists of multiple cases within the main case. Accordingly, this research employs a cross-case analysis approach to distinguish similarities and differences in individual learner's schooling experiences to illuminate unique factors from within the home, school or individual level that potentially affect school engagement and education and employment pathways.

Yin (2003) contends that a goal of case study research is to expand and generalise theories through a process of '*analytic generalisation*' (Yin, 2003. p.10). Along with Skocpol (1986) and Raglin (1987), Yin supports the use of comparative methods such as inductive reasoning, pattern matching and

replication logic to arrive at theoretical generalisations. Furthermore, Yin expounds that the rich and extensive data collection effort used in case studies using a variety of methods, including document analysis, personal observations, interviews and focus groups all help to facilitate theory testing in case study research.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Approvals from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) and the Victorian Government Department of Education and Curriculum Development (DEECD) were sought and granted prior to data collection. The VUHREC also subsequently granted a further period of twelve months (to September 2014) for follow-up interviews with the study participants who joined the research six months into the data collection period. A total period of three years (September 2011 to September 2014) was granted for data collection, with the majority of interviews taking place between February 2012 and September 2014 to coincide with annual school term holidays.

Four main issues dictated the ethical procedures for conducting this research. The first issue related to confidentiality of data as the small size of the PI community in Melbourne's western region meant that study participants could be known to each other or others known to them within the community. To minimise the risk of exposure and maintain anonymity of participants' identity and information, the researcher did not recruit participants with whom she had a personal formal or informal connection. Instead there was a deliberate decision to recruit from PI networks, families and communities with whom the researcher had only a distant, impersonal or temporary connection. As a result, there were no participants from the Solomon Islands (the researcher's home country) selected as core informants in the study. There was also a deliberate move to exclude participation of the immediate family members of the community contact persons who had assisted with the identification of participants at the recruitment stage of the study.

Secondly, to maintain confidentiality, the participants' real names and identities have been de-identified in the case database and in this final report. Other oral records or written reports or publications arising from this study have ensured the protection of participants' identities. In accordance with VU policy, all data, material and artefacts used in both the data collection and reporting stages have been stored in secure filing cabinets or password protected computer files that are accessible only to the researcher and the research team. All files and records related to participant data and information have also been kept on file and will remain accessible to relevant authorities for a period of 5 years after the thesis has been submitted to the university.

The third ethical consideration concerned the core informant group, whom at the start of data collection, were aged between 13 to 17 years of age. All of them required formal consent from their parents or guardians to participate in the study. Most of the parents were willing to provide formal consent and eager to be involved in the research as secondary participants alongside their children. The involvement of parents, whilst considered very important also posed some dilemmas for the research, specifically in terms of potential social language barriers. One of the main barriers observed by the parents was whether the interviews would be held at a university setting by an unfamiliar person. These anxieties were averted when it was found that if required, an interpreter known to the family would attend the first interview at the family home or other place chosen by them and that the researcher, herself also a PI, would be conducting the interviews. For the data collection phase, it was obvious that the researcher's PI background was effective in building up the trustworthy and collaborative context needed to visit homes, conduct interviews with family members and observe family activities at close range.

Using a longitudinal case study methodology option posed a fourth ethical risk in that the research entailed a strong focus on each participant's emerging narrative at the time in their lives where they were experiencing significant pressures and stress. There was a chance that the individual's attitude to the study could change over time, or that they may become concerned about how

their story would be represented. These risks, however, were mitigated by stressing to informants the voluntary nature of their participation and their ability to withdraw at any stage of the research.

Where possible, the researcher offered opportunities to participants to listen to audio-recorded information or read drafts to check accuracy and completeness of the data and information used in the analysis and reporting. Most of the time, the interview participants' expressed satisfaction and comfort in the information provided and did not ask to review it. Follow-up interviews with the informants and members of the Pacific community were also conducted as a way to fill gaps of information and corroborate missing or incomplete information. In these interactions as with the interactions with parents and families, the researcher placed emphasis on the importance of the 'student educational experience', which allowed participants to recognize the value of the research to themselves, their families and the wider PI community and in this way offered information and suggestions willingly.

3.5 Participant selection and recruitment

The first step to recruitment of participants to the study involved the use of a short online survey. Its purpose was to introduce the research topic to the young person and allow the young person to determine in advance if they could participate in the research. A link to the online survey was sent to a selected group of community members through email, with an invitation to pass the survey on to potential participants. The community contacts were encouraged to distribute hard copies of the surveys if it was an easier option for the young people than completing online. The survey was designed to allow the young person the freedom to consider participation in the research without pressure of advance commitment to the research or being coerced by others to participate. This strategy essentially allowed a young person to withdraw from the research process if they wished without undue pressure from others and thus strengthened the consent process.

Fourteen young people were ultimately identified as the key research informants and primary participants. The secondary participants comprised the family members of the fourteen informants, together with members of staff from the primary participants' schools. Prior to final recruitment of participants, the researcher held meetings and informal discussions with many community elders and young people within the local Pacific diaspora as well as non-Pacific stakeholder groups in Local Government agencies, schools and universities and youth organisations in Melbourne's western suburbs to draw ideas and perceptions about PI communities and young people. Many practitioners, professionals and community members welcomed the idea of working closely with PI to acquire greater insights about their views about education and community participation. Many individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions whom had prior experiences with PI in different community settings were willing to share honest and sometimes contradictory understandings about the school, home and '*lived experiences*' of PI.

Consistent with the research purpose to track the attitudes, motivations and interests of participants over a period of time to observe static, recurrent or progressive changes in the goals, attitudes and behaviors towards schooling amongst PI learners and families, the longitudinal approach to data collection proved to be most effective in documenting the PI 'lived in' experience and culture. Ethnographic strategies such as direct observing, listening to conversations, participating in activities and maintaining a research journal were all used to supplement and complement the data derived from the interviews (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Merriam, 1988; Wolcott, 1992). In their own ways, each of these tools helped to fill gaps in the data.

3.6 Strategies for collecting data

Merriam (1988) posits that "*qualitative research usually utilizes a variety of techniques for gathering data, the most common being conducting interviews, field observation and documentary analysis*" (Merriam, 1998. p.134) and that 'all three means of data collection are frequently used in an interactive and holistic way to get intensive holistic description and analysis in order to understand the

case in its totality' (Merriam, 1988. p.135). Wolcott (1992) refers to this entire process as 'systematically watching, asking and reviewing' in order to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena being investigated.

A narrative approach to data collection

In concert with case study research, the study used a narrative approach (Burns, 2000; Gomm & Hammersley, 2000) to data collection that brings out the rich and '*thick description*' (Green, 1978) of each case within its bounds and contexts (Schofield, 2002). Storytelling and sharing of stories has important social functions, one of which is to make sense of one's continuous experiences and dialogic interactions within their familiar surroundings (Atkinson et al., 2006; Squire, 2008). Through stories, people can explain into tangible and meaningful formats their ideas, feelings and experiences (Charmaz, 2006). According to Squire (2008), young people are enabled to make better sense of their experiences and seek out explanations and resolutions to their own realities by telling their own stories. Moreover a narrative form of delivery provides the content with legitimacy in an adolescent world that allows young people to put context and order around their life experiences (Squire, 2008).

Following Burns (1990), a narrative approach to report writing was chosen to document 'life histories' (Burns, 1990) of the research participants as they experienced their schooling journeys. According to Riessman (2008), a narrative analysis is developed whereby sequence, context and consequences can be easily identified (Riessman, 2008). A narrative approach also fits well with the PI cultural norm of story-telling to reveal and re-live 'lived experiences'. Having an oral culture, PI have traditionally used story-telling as a dominant form of communication and interaction, hence the use and acceptance of the 'talanoa' method of storytelling, referred to in Chapter 1 as an appropriate tool for formal or informal communication (Vaioliti, 2006; Thaman 2008). Thus, the fourteen units within the case study are initially described in detail separately, with the aim to foreground its own distinct and unique features.

Consistent with Stake (1996), case study works best when it uses a writing style that is informal and uses verbatim quotations, illustrations and even allusion and metaphor to bring out 'vicarious experience' which gives the reader "*understanding, extension of experience and increase in conviction in that which is known*" (Stake, 2000. p. 21). A narrative approach is suitable in this research given the importance placed on differences in each learner's circumstance, perception, motivation, opportunities and challenges and the varying effects on a young person's options, choices and decisions about schooling or their career goals.

An important element of narratives, according to Chase (2005) is "*the temporality of experience and the sense of self that connects past experiences with the present and the future*" (Chase, 2005. p.22). By tracking the individuals' transitions and pathways at various points of their educational development and maturity, this study recognises that the experiences of the young people are subject to change and that some ideas shared or choices or actions made are temporary or spontaneous. Nevertheless, the robust nature of the data shared at different points of time allow the participants to construct and share a sense of self that is significant to them at that particular stage of schooling. Using both the individual case histories and the collective group themes as apparatus for comparison and analysis, this study helped to illuminate the main factors that impact on the school engagement, achievement and pathways of PI learners as they transition from secondary school to post-school destinations.

Semi-structured Interviews

Consistent with a qualitative approach to research (Merriam 1988; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982 Wolcott, 1992), this study used semi structured interviews as the main method for collecting data. Four semi-structured interviews were held in six-month intervals with each primary participant over the three-year data collection period to acquire perspectives about schooling experiences and in-home support fro schooling. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to ask pre-determined questions and explore individual's areas of interest within a framework of comparability. The regular face to face

interviews with the participants provided the researcher with the opportunity and time to observe and document shifts in their school and career goals, interests and concerns as they moved from middle to senior secondary schooling and then from senior schooling to TAFE and/or University and employment.

The interviews with participants' families were aimed at documenting changes or occurrences within the home that influenced student attitudes towards school participation, study goals or pathway options. The goal was to interview as many family members of participants as possible twice over the data collection period. The interviews with teachers aimed at getting an overall sense of the PI student experience of school and gaining a general understanding of the patterns of participation, achievement and pathways of PI as a group at the school. It was clearly explained that no information about individual students would be sought from school staff and the identity of the learners participating in the research would be protected. Information gathered from the parents and school staff were primarily designed to provide the check and balance in the information and gain accurate insights of participant's experiences as well as aid the triangulation of data and verification of sensitive information.

Personal observations

The extended period of time dedicated to the data collection period was deliberate and provided a means for acquiring an outsiders' perspective of the multiple events and activities occurring within participants' homes as well as accessing general information about PI school participation and pathways from those close to the participants but not formally involved in the research. Having a core group of community members to discuss and test ideas with allowed for a systematic evaluation of responses to check for correctness and truthfulness and to monitor and track events and changes in the lives of the participants during the important years at school (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). Additionally, the researcher maintained extensive field notes in a research journal to record interesting or common observations questions and interpretations of the conversations and interactions with the primary and secondary participants in their homes and school settings.

Documentary evidence

The documentary evidence phase was planned to include both primary and secondary sources of information in print, electronic or digital format from Federal, State and Local Government public websites. The LSAY data was one of the primary datasets used to learn about the past experiences of PI learners across Australia and to compare data about PI learners to whole cohorts in each wave. Five waves of the LSAY data (1995, 1998, 2003, 2006 and 2009) were provided by the Australian Data Archives (ADA) and approved for use by the researcher. The LSAY database proved valuable in establishing some baseline information about the demographics, attitudes and student performance of PI at the initial collection level but was not as effective in monitoring their overall patterns of achievement and pathways.

Some inconsistencies were detected in the ways that PI were categorized or defined. Where the earlier versions of LSAY used country of birth as an identifying marker, more recent waves categorized PI according to broader ethnic groups. While this was useful as a way of aggregating students into sizable groups, it also took away the separation between individual countries and blurred the differences in ethnicities between countries. Added to this difficulty was the lack of distinction between certain groups that identified as PI in the data. For example, the Fijian-born cohort did not distinguish between Indo-Fijians and Fiji PI. As the former group are ethnically and culturally distinct from those with a Fijian ancestry and are more inclined to have higher aspirations and motivations for schooling, this grouping failed to reflect these distinctions. Additionally, some PI self-identified as New Zealanders in the LSAY data and were accordingly lost to analysis. In an instance of mis-categorization in another wave of LSAY data, Hongkong was included in the data for PI, making for some real distortion in the patterns of PI outcomes and pathways. The considerable variability across the fields in the different cohorts sometimes made coding inconsistent especially in the definitions of PI which led to a situation where the LSAY data was not entirely helpful for the purpose of this study. However, the data still proved its worth at the initial stages of data

collection where participants' reading and mathematical mean scores and attitudes to schooling were recorded and where general patterns in certificate completion and qualifications could be mapped at the end.

Other relevant data sources including from national, state and school-level records were used to support the literature review, analysis and findings sections of the report. National databases such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), My School website were consulted as well as reports from the Department of Education and Early Childhood development (DEECD), Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), and the Centre for Multi-Cultural Youth (CMY). In addition, written and pictorial data from educational institutions (including Universities, schools and other registered training providers), government, corporate and community agencies and organisations with an interest in the Pacific Islands were also reviewed as useful secondary documentary sources. Where applicable, media, online and written data were used to support the interview responses and direct observations.

Online Blog

In addition to the interviews, an online blog discussion forum was set up in the early stages of the study primarily to extend the ideas arising from the interviews. The blog was managed by the researcher and all informants had individual log-in details to access the site whilst keeping their identities private and only known to the researcher. The intention was to create a learning community amongst the participants to share views about their schooling experiences and improve learner communication and contact with each other and with the researcher. A blog discussion topic was posted every two months during the first two years of data collection and the topics were carefully selected to explore important issues arising from the interviews. A total of 8 blog questions were posted and participants were asked to make at least one response to each blog topic. These contributions were checked and recorded

by the researcher and non-respondents asked to physically write posts at the next interview session.

Phone calls and emails

Due to the lengthy data collection period (3 years) and the transient nature of some PI young people and families, it was necessary to maintain regular telephone and email contact with the research participants between formal study contacts. These strategies were put in place to maintain participant interest and momentum in the research but were also important avenues for reminding participants about upcoming interviews and blog postings and for keeping abreast of important occurrences and changes in the lives of students and their families.

Informal engagement with PI and non-PI communities

In addition to the interviews with parents, many other community elders and young people from various Pacific Island communities residing in Melbourne's western region were informally consulted through conversations and telephone interactions to acquire a general perspective on schooling patterns, in-home supports for schooling, educational outcomes and civic participation of PI learners in the local area and in Australia generally. Informal conversations with elders and youth from the Pacific communities of Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Kiribati, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tuvalu, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu provided useful information and insights into their personal and general experiences of the education system which were further verified through the follow-up interviews with research participants. These sessions were more focussed and theme-specific at the later stages of the data collection whereas at the beginning, the information sought was more issue-focussed and broad-based. The majority of people consulted were generally willing to volunteer and contribute information about their own experiences or the experiences of others they worked with in the community thereby assisting with validation of emerging themes.

3.7 Data analysis

This study predominantly used a thematic approach to data analysis, recognizing its merits for working with a small-sized group of participants (Stake, 1996; Yin, 2003) and its potential to gather rich and thick data from participants (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). A case study approach to data analysis provided the capability to capture the voices and experiences of informants and to collect in-depth information about their unique home circumstances and schooling trajectories. Consistent with a case study approach, the data analysis process undertaken was primarily interpretive, requiring the researcher to continuously interrogate both the existing literature and the empirical data to search for meanings and common understandings (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1996). Through the writing of analytic memos and individual case histories (see Chapter 4 for participant case summaries) developed from examination of the interview data and personal observations, interesting and unique features about participants and their circumstances were documented and then cross-matched with relevant literature and emerging themes across and between the collective group (Merriam, 1988; Burns, 2000).

This study used an embedded case study approach in terms of its data analysis and interpretation and theory development (Yin, 2003; Scholz & Tietje, 2012). At the first level of analysis, individual learner case histories were examined to account for unique and common features applicable to all fourteen cases. These features were then compared and contrasted for general themes related to aspirations and attitudes towards schooling, levels of in-home support and general in-school engagement and achievement of individual learners. A second stage of in-depth analysis then followed of eight participants, selected on the basis of their progress and completion of senior secondary school and the unique aspects of their experiences to determine common pathway patterns. Finally, the emergent themes from these two levels of comparison and analysis were combined to form a collective perspective of the whole case. Through this systematic process of cross-case comparison and multi-layer analysis, the key themes pertaining to PI experiences of secondary schooling

were identified and reviewed alongside relevant literature to formulate and theorise general propositions and conclusions about the nature, forms and patterns of PI school engagement and post-school pathways.

The elaborated case histories of six participants are presented in detail in chapters 5 and 6 to illustrate specific opportunities and challenges that characterised these learners' experiences of schooling over the three year data collection period. These informants were selected on the basis of their distinctive features as informed by their stories about their schooling experiences, personal hopes and their career goals. These stories were then cross-matched with data extracted from the family and teacher interviews to assist in authenticating information as well as acquiring a fuller and richer perspective of the situation and to be able to respond to the research question.

At the initial stages of data analysis, the data from the participant interviews were transcribed and coded electronically on excel spread sheets. At this stage, the coding process involved examining the data closely to search for common, unique or interesting information from the existing literature, documentary evidence and the interview data. The emerging codes were then 'chunked' into broader categories on excel spreadsheet before being transferred to A3 paper and flipcharts for further comparison, expansion or elimination. This initial inductive reasoning approach whereby data was consistently compared and contrasted with emerging patterns and categories from the literature and the empirical data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994 Skocpol, 1981) proved useful in starting the data analysis process for the study as these categories were re-developed and refined throughout the study to form the basis of the thematic analysis, especially at the later stages when the interview and blog data were transcribed, categorised and coded directly in NVivo software (Morse & Richards, 2002). Again, a systematic cross matching of the information assisted in strengthening the interpretations of the data.

In the latter part of the data analysis process, the study utilised the grounded theory principle of theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1995; Charmaz, 2006) to advance theory development. This process allowed for additional data

to be acquired for assessing the emerging propositions. In analyzing the data, a conscious effort was made to recognise each young person's unique experiences and journeys whilst also being cognizant of the collective themes emerging from the whole group. The case histories provided a reflexive lens on the student experience of schooling and encouraged participants to relive past events and recall important incidents and relate these to current and future experiences. This reflexive process, supported through interviews, allowed the participants to think about their options and opportunities in a different light and enhanced their self-reflection and agency. Table 3.1 outlines the analytic approaches used at different stages of the study to support its thematic and theoretical development.

Table 3-1 : Data Analysis approaches and rationale for use

Analytic approach	Method used	Rationale for use	Examples
Case Study	Initial literature review and documentary evidence Case histories Embedded case model Analytic memos	According to Yin (2003), case study inquiry benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. Provides a snapshot of the lived experience of the participants and thus 'clear and detailed descriptions' (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982) Enhances the triangulation of data (Yin, 2003) Allows the analysis to start in line with data collection (Yin, 2003)	PI parents and learners value education and view successful schooling as a pathway to improved wellbeing but current literature and research point to ongoing low educational achievement and pathway outcomes for PI/ Detailed descriptions of participants in chapter 4 outlining family, school and personal experiences. Matching of specific and general information regarding participants' personal, family and school experiences to identify common and unique patterns in the data. Consistently describing, analysing and theorising findings so as not to lose sight of important themes over a long period of data collection.
Inductive Reasoning	Constant Comparison	Provides a systematic tool for comparing patterns and themes in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1994)	Use Nvivo nodes to ascertain common and recurring factors impacting on learner's school participation and achievement and their subsequent post-school pathways.
Grounded theory	Theoretical sampling	Focused search for information and data relevant for supporting study findings (Charmaz, 2006).	Conducted follow-up meetings with PI community diaspora at end of data collection phase to cross-match and test emerging findings and themes from the study

3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter provided the theoretical and methodological frameworks that underpin the research approaches used in the study. It outlined the participant selection and data collection strategies selected and the justifications for their use and application in the research process. The ethical guidelines adopted throughout the research to maintain credibility, validity and authenticity of the study's process and outcomes were also outlined. In the next chapter, a detailed examination of the data collection methods as used in the field is provided followed by a brief introduction to the research participants.

Chapter 4 Data collection: methods and participants

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical and methodological basis for the study and introduced the data collection procedures that support a qualitative case study and phenomenological inquiry. This chapter begins with a recap of the initial study question and sub-questions. It then outlines the data collection methods used and introduces the research participants, with information about their home situation, family background and composition, school and extra-curricular interests, their friendships and relationships. Some important incidents and activities that occurred over the three year data collection period are highlighted as a means to explain changing motivations, concerns or views of schooling. A brief discussion on the young people's sense of identity and belonging, goals and fears and concerns wraps up the chapter.

4.1 Research question and sub-questions.

Main Question:

1. How can young PI learners' in Melbourne's western region prepare more effectively for successful participation and engagement at the secondary school setting that can lead them towards smoother transitions and positive pathways in further education, training and employment?

This chapter addresses in particular the following two sub-questions:

1c) What are the factors that determine young people's patterns of educational participation and engagement of PI at secondary school? Are these factors socially or culturally induced?

1d) How has the school system, the immediate community and broader society responded to the needs and interests of PI learners in Melbourne?

4.2 Methods of Data collection

The choice of data collection methods and the types of information sought from research participants were driven by the literature review, research questions, aims and purpose. Three main data collection tools were used; semi-structured interviews, archival and current documents and participant observations (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2003). These methods were supplemented by other tools including an online blog, a researcher’s journal, theoretical memos and case histories of participants. Table 4.1 shows the main tools used to collect data to specifically address the research questions.

Table 4-1 Data collection methods, rationale and relevance to key questions

Question	Method	Rationale	Data Collected
Q1 1a,1b,1c, 1d	Semi-structured Interviews (refer to Appendices 1,2,3)	Acquire first-hand perspectives about schooling from a range of individuals and groups.	78 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants, parents and school staff over 3 years from February 2012 to September 2014. Documented case histories of 14 participants capturing participants’ voices and perspectives about schooling experiences.
Q1 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d	Archival and current documents	Acquire background literature and research evidence on key issues	Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Hobson’s Bay Local Government Area Data Myschool Data website Written and web-based literature and audio and video material on PI migrants

Q1 1c, 1d,1e	Direct and personal observations	Gain perspective on events, activities, occurring within the case.	Direct observations of participants, their families and community groups over 4 years (Feb 2011 to Sept 2014) Researcher journal, field notes and personal memos Presentations at 2 conferences to hear about new research in the area and to discuss emerging findings with a broader academic audience Attendance at community events, cultural activities over 5 year period
Q1 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d,1e	Online blog (see appendix 4)	Develop a learning community	Written responses to blog posts conducted online from April 2012 to June 2013
Q1 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d,1e	Case histories	Provide in-depth reflections on student experiences and trajectories	Semi-structured Interviews with students, parents and teachers Informal conversations with PI community members Personal observations
Q1 1a,1b,1c, 1d,1e	Analytic memos	Researcher reflections on emergent themes.	Information from interviews, direct and personal observations, written literature review from February 2012 to September 2014

The information sought from the participants was primarily focused on their perceptions and experiences of schooling; their goals and aspirations, their concerns, joys and feelings of social wellbeing and inclusion; classroom participation and achievement, extracurricular activities, home support and relationships and school and post-school pathways and transitions. The

questions for the families and community members were designed to collect information about their perceptions of the purpose of schooling and their educational goals and expectations for their children and the kinds and levels of socio-cultural and academic supports that they provided at home and from within their local community. School personnel were recruited to provide a general perspective of the perceived attitudes of PI towards learning, their general interests and performances at school and also their pathway patterns and transitions. The interviews with school personnel were helpful in generating a picture of staff and peer attitudes towards PI learners.

4.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

A total of 78 interviews were conducted during the three-year period from February 2012 to September 2014. The semi-structured interviews took place mostly in participants' homes, with other family members present to provide as natural and familiar setting as possible. Some participants chose to have their second and third interviews held at public places like fast food restaurants close to their school or home. The first interviews were designed as introductory sessions where both the parents and the learner were informed about the purpose of the research and the nature of their participation and asked to sign consent forms. Subsequent interviews were focussed more on school experiences and the support from school and home, school engagement and pathways and general wellbeing.

Prior to the interviews being held, a basic outline of the questions to be covered in the interview was provided to informants. Opportunities were also provided at the end of the interviews to listen to the recorded data to check information. However, these were not requested although the informants asked many questions about the research as it progressed and they became more familiar with its aims and procedures. The questions for the learner participants centered on their transitions at significant milestones of schooling such as work placement, post-compulsory schooling options between the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), experiences of sitting school-based and state-based examinations, their

aspirations for university or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) study and preferred career pathways. Appendices 1, 2 and 3 provide a list of guiding questions used for interviewing the three groups of informants.

The table below outlines the nature and number of interviews conducted.

Table 4-2 Number of interviews conducted and their purpose

Participant Type	No. of participants	No. of Interviews	Purpose of Interviews
Young People	14	47	2 to 4 interviews per participant over 3 years to document changes in personal goals and interests, engagement and achievement and pathway patterns and for monitor schooling progress and significant occurrences at home.
Parents	18	23	One to two interviews per family unit held at the start and the end of the data collection period to document shifts in family attitudes towards schooling and monitor changes in home strategies to support participant's schooling.
School Personnel	12	8	Six individual interviews and two group interviews held with twelve members of staff from five of seven secondary schools to gain general information about engagement, participation, achievement and pathways that characterize the PI cohort at the school.
Total	44	78	

Ten learner participants were interviewed four times while the other four were interviewed either once or twice. The interviews were conducted personally with the young person alone except for the first interview when the participants presented together with their parents to ensure that both parties received consistent information about the study. Meeting the young people alongside their parents at the first meeting was useful to establish initial trust and ongoing confidence in the research process. By the second and third interviews, most participants were able to relate more comfortably and freely with the researcher,

so subsequent interviews were held individually with the young person, either at home, at church or school or in public venues such as fast food restaurants, with permission from parents.

A plan to interview family members as a group or unit and gather diverse viewpoints from different members was dismissed when it was found that some families lived in single parent households. At other times, certain family members were absent from the home at the time of the interviews. In most of the dual parent homes, the parent with more educational experience took the lead role in the interviews. A total of twenty three (23) semi-structured interviews were conducted and audio recorded with family members with interviews lasting between 45 to 60 minutes. The findings and themes arising from the family interviews are discussed in length in Chapter 5.

The information from teacher interviews was general but comprehensive with insightful ideas about PI school engagement experiences at the respective schools. Topics such as general attendance and behavior, classroom participation, homework completion and school pathways of PI as a cohort at the school were discussed. The interview sessions with teachers were organized through the respective School Principal who nominated a staff member's participation. Twelve teachers from five secondary schools in the Western suburbs of Melbourne participated in the study and engaged in 8 interview sessions (six individual and two group sessions), all of which lasted between 45 to 80 minutes. As with other interviews, these sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. The perceptions of school staff regarding PI cohorts' engagement, achievement and pathways at school are dealt with in depth in Chapter 6.

In addition to the interviews with participants, family members and school staff, there were a series of in-depth, confidential individual interviews held with selected individuals in the PI local diaspora purposely to check and verify emerging themes from the interviews that had a direct relevance to the research questions. The semi-structured interview approach had the advantage of

allowing the researcher to expand on emerging and relevant issues as the research process evolved.

4.2.2 Direct observations

Further data was collected using direct personal observation methods. Many observations were collected on an informal, ad hoc but selective basis, with information collected and recorded from a wide range of sources, involving participant interactions with family and community members in natural settings. Field notes were recorded of relevant PI events such as community meetings and cultural celebrations to gather observable insights into general patterns of PI family and community life within the local context. The long period given to data collection allowed the researcher to work with many professional and community stakeholders and to observe a variety of programs and events.

4.2.3 Documentary evidence

The LSAY database proved a most useful data source at the initial stages of data collection to acquire information about the numeracy and literacy achievement levels of PI learners and their perceptions and attitudes towards schooling. Due to high attrition of PI from schooling within the early survey years (Year 9 to 12) and inconsistent coding of the PI group of learners in some waves, the patterns of certificate completion and qualifications of PI participants in the LSAY cohorts were less clear or conclusive but nevertheless the database was still useful for comparative purposes with the empirical data.

Aside from the LSAY data, many other relevant data sources including Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and state and school-level records were used to support the literature review, analysis and findings sections of the report. Where applicable, media, online and written data were also used to address the overall research question and sub questions.

4.2.4 Online blog

The online blog was envisaged as an important data source that would encourage participants to communicate and share views about schooling with

the aim of building a learning community. The first blog question was posted after the first set of interviews to ensure that participants were briefed on the purpose and use of the blog. Each participant was provided with personal log-in details and assured of anonymity within the blog forum. Out of all the data collection methods used, the blog was the most problematic with slow or limited responses. Most responses were brief and directed to original blog questions than to the group discussion. Although the tool was not as effective in developing a learning community amongst participants, the responses provided additional information to support or question the data gathered from the interviews. In this context, the blog responses aided the development of individual case histories of participants. A list of the blog questions is provided in Appendix 4.

4.2.5 Sustained contact: phone calls, text messages and emails

Throughout the three-year data collection period, the researcher maintained regular phone call, text message and email contact with the participants. These communication strategies were put in place to sustain contact and communicate with participants regarding upcoming interviews and blog postings and assisted in monitoring important occurrences and changes in the lives of learners and their families and to maintain interest and momentum in the research.

4.3 The participants

The nature of the PI population in Australia has driven the research approach. From the early stages, it was clear that the research would involve a small number of participants and that a case study methodological approach would appropriately address the factors informing the experiences of this small and diverse cultural group in education. As pointed out in the introductory chapter of this thesis, PI make up just under 1% of the Australian population with 166, 272 having Pacific island ancestry (Pryke, 2014). Such small numbers brought with it some challenges; getting a balanced sample that would be representative of the three regional ethnic groups of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia and recruiting a balanced number of young people that would represent the proportion of PI within the broader community.

4.3.1 Participant selection and recruitment

The selection criteria used for recruitment was as follows:

- the participant self-identified as having a PI ethnic background
- the participant had at least one parent born in a Pacific Island country
- the participant spoke English less than half of the time at home
- the participant was attending a high school located in Melbourne's western suburbs
- the participant was in Year 8, 9, 10, 11 or 12 in 2012 and attending school on a full time basis
- the participant had internet access at home
- the parents/family units of the participant had to agree to participate in the study.

The participants were recruited using a combination of purposive sampling and snowballing techniques (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003), and in the initial stages included informal communication with PI community members through word of mouth through known personal networks about the purpose of the research. Through these community contacts, other stakeholders such as teachers, youth workers and church elders who interacted frequently and closely with PI young people were identified and contacted.

Following the initial consultations, an online survey was developed on survey monkey and sent to potential participants to further assess their suitability. Hard copy surveys were distributed at church and community events. Out of a total of thirty-five (35) hard copy surveys that were handed out, twenty-five (25) completed surveys were returned, including one online response. The hard copy responses were either sent by post to the researcher or hand-delivered through the community contact person. Of the 26 young people that completed surveys, seven (7) declined the invitation to participate. The reasons given for non-participation varied. Six of these said that the engagement time of three

years was too long. Another two were not comfortable participating alongside their teachers or parents in the research. One participant declined as he had to return to his home country. Inviting potential participants to respond individually to the survey proved to be a good strategy for those who wished to opt out of participation without undue pressure from the community contact person or a parent. Three young people used this strategy to eliminate themselves from the pool of participants. In two of these cases, the parents of the young people had expressed a strong interest for their child to be involved in the research, without knowing that these young people had already declined the invitation to participate. With this knowledge, the researcher was able to inform the parents that the young person would be put in a pool of 'reserve' informants and invited to participate at a later stage of the research process.

On the basis of the completed surveys, an initial pool of nineteen participants agreed to take part in the study. All were of Polynesian and Melanesian background. From this group, the researcher initially selected 8 participants, all of whom were undertaking Years 10, 11 and 12 at secondary school and kept the rest in the participant pool in case of withdrawals. Interview appointments were made with the eight families as soon as the parents provided consent for their children's participation and gave approval to participate themselves. Six months later, another six participants were recruited from the pool. This second group consisted of younger students in Years 8 and 9. It was decided to include the second group to maintain a good number of participants in the study in the event of future withdrawals. In the end, a total of fourteen (14) participants were recruited between February and October 2012 and all of them and their parents remained active in the research for the entire data collection period (February 2012 to September 2014) and participated in all the interviews.

Given the study's initial focus on online engagement, a criterion for participation was that the young people needed to be able to access a computer and internet connection at home. There were initial concerns that using this criterion might exclude potential participants thereby attracting a biased sample of young people. However, this criterion proved to be redundant as all respondents had

computer and internet access at home. However, as the experience with the online blog suggest, having access to this equipment at home did not mean that the participants preferred to use digital methods of communication. The poor response to the online survey and the online blog suggested that these learners were more responsive to face to face and relationship–focused approaches of communication in their participation with this research.

4. 3. 2 Participant information

Data collection for the study commenced in September 2012 with fourteen participants (five boys and nine girls) aged between 13 to 17 years, all of whom required parental consent to participate. Six of the fourteen participants lived in single-parent homes while the other eight lived with both parents at home. In the six single-parent homes, four mothers were the main breadwinners whilst in the dual-parent households, only one mother was the main breadwinner. Out of the fourteen participants, two were siblings and another two were cousins, with each pair living in the same household. In all the twelve households, there was at least one income-earner employed in either a professional, vocational or unskilled occupation. Of the eighteen parents involved in this study, eleven had full-time or part-time jobs that were related to their qualifications while two had full-time jobs that were unrelated to their training. Five parents were non-certified and involved in shift or casual labouring work. Of these five, one was a single parent while the other four had partners at home who were sick, unemployed or employed in another unskilled or casual job. Three of these five parents were the sole wage earner at home, with their employment subject to variations and instabilities. Four of the five families had been in Australia for longer than fifteen years, with the main income earner being much older with less educational experience compared to those parents who had arrived more recently and employed in career-specific jobs.

Table 4.3 provides a demographic summary of the participants' information with a pseudonym assigned to each participant for ease of reference.

Table 4-3 Participants' demographic details

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Arrival Year	Age	Year Level	School Type
Ama	Female	Melanesian	2005	17	12	State Co-ed
Visi	Female	Melanesian	1998	16	11	State Co-ed
Sela	Female	Polynesian	1999	16	11	State Co-ed
Jela	Male	Polynesian	N/a	17	12	State Co-ed
Timo	Male	Polynesian	2010	17	12	State Co-ed
Neli	Female	Polynesian	2000	15	10	State Co-ed
Lisi	Male	Polynesian	2002	15	10	State Co-ed
Via	Female	Polynesian	1998	15	10	State Co-ed
Esi	Female	Polynesian	1995	14	9	Catholic single sex
Lali	Female	Polynesian	2003	14	8	Catholic single sex
Elli	Female	Polynesian	2000	15	9	Catholic single sex
Edi	Male	Polynesian	Birth	14	9	State Co-ed
Sei	Female	Polynesian	2004	14	9	State Co-ed
Sio	Male	Polynesian	2004	13	8	State Co-ed

In terms of school support, some participants were able to access some level of school support at home due to their parents having had positive educational experiences themselves, a steady employment background and a strong financial base. Others were able to access school support from parents, or siblings or other relatives who had themselves experienced success at high school or tertiary level. Other participants relied on school friends or their own resources, especially if parents were either unavailable or unable to assist. The higher levels of schooling were seen to be the most problematic areas for home support as parents found themselves struggling to provide the levels and forms of support required due in part to inexperience or unfamiliarity with the expectations and requirements of the senior levels of schooling

The secondary schools attended differed in terms of the responsible education authority, and the curriculum offerings and the size of the PI cohort. Five of the schools were Government-owned and co-educational whilst one was a Catholic all-girls' school and another, a Catholic co-educational school. Six schools offered both a VCE and VCAL curriculum and also Vocational and Education Training (VET) subject offerings while one school (School A) only offered VCE and VET. Five schools had a sizable PI cohort while two schools (Schools F and G) had less than 10 enrolments of PI learners.

Despite sharing similar characteristics, such as their PI ethnicity, migrant background and location of school and home, the participant profile reflected a diverse cohort, with many differences between participants in terms of school goals, subject preferences, friendship choices, learning motivations, orientations and preferences and career pathway goals.

4.4 Participant summaries

This section introduces the fourteen participants, detailing their migration journeys, family situation, interactions and connections with their Island community and experiences of schooling. Each participant is identified using a combination of symbols that represent their gender, age and year level at school when they were first interviewed. For example Ama (Participant 1) is

coded as F17Yr12, meaning she is female, 17 years old and was attending Year 12 at her first interview. The various strengths and challenges that characterize each participants' personal situation and the ways that the young person has responded to the opportunities and challenges encountered in trying to achieve their personal goals and schooling expectations are highlighted. Owing to the small size of the PI population in the local area, some of the participants were known to each other ; participants 13 and 14 - Sie and Sio are siblings while participants 4 and 5 (Jela and Timo) are cousins. Three of the girls - Esi, Lali, Elli (Participants 9, 10, 11) - attended the same school and four participants belong to the same church (Esi, Lali, Elli and Edi). As can be seen from these demographics, throughout the period of data collection, some of the participants had opportunity to interact with one another on an ongoing or regular basis at one or more settings, whether at home, school, church or at cultural events. This confirms the small size of the population and also the importance of these common settings in the lives of young PI.

Participant 1 : Ama (F17Yr12)

Ama self-identifies as Papua New Guinean first and PI second and is proud of her identity and cultural background as a Melanesian young woman. When she started with this study, she was seventeen (17) years old and attending Year 12 at school. Ama had spent the first ten years of her life in her home country of Papua New Guinea (PNG) prior to moving to Melbourne in 2005. She enrolled in Year 6 a year later at a local primary school and remained there until she began secondary school in 2007 and where she stayed until the completion of Year 12 VCE in 2012. Ama had received some subject prizes (English, Science) in Years 8, 9 and 10 and even won the 'Principal's prize' in Year 9. Ama and her family were most proud of the English prize that Ama had received as it provided strong evidence to them that she was able to compete with peers in a language that was not her first language. Ama's prizes were clearly displayed in the living room of their home. Ama's mother explained that in PNG, Ama had studied English at a private church school where the staff consisted mostly of American missionaries who taught the curriculum in English. She attributed Ama's success in speaking and writing English and her positive

adjustment to the schooling system in Melbourne to her past teachers at her previous school in Port Moresby.

Ama spoke a native PNG dialect at home to communicate with her family but also spoke English fluently. She lived with her mother (a registered nurse) and younger brother and sister in a two bedroom flat close to her school where the family had lived since Ama's mother arrived in Melbourne in 2005. Her mother had chosen to live in this particular western Melbourne suburb because of its easy access to local schools and her place of work – a well-regarded hospital in the city. Ama's father lived in the Islands where he worked as a police officer but regularly visited his family in Melbourne.

Ama's goal was to study medicine and work in the medical field like her mother. In her middle years of schooling, Ama's performance at school had been positive as demonstrated by the prizes she won in important subjects. At the commencement of this study, Ama was doing well in VCE (Victoria Certificate of Education), and was confident of passing all her subjects. She felt that appropriate information about subject choices had been provided and believed that she was properly enrolled in the subjects that would enable her to apply for a course in medicine. She liked her teachers and had a core group of friends at school who were all highly motivated and wanted to do well in their VCE exams.

When Ama sat for her Year 12 mid-year exams that same year, she reported afterwards that she was unhappy with her results but felt that sitting the exams had given her the experience needed to better prepare for the final VCE exams at the end of the year. However, after sitting her final VCE exams and getting the results, Ama found that she had not achieved the results needed to study medicine or to attend her choice of university. Instead, she accepted an alternative offer to study a general science degree at the local university campus.

The following year, prior to enrolment at university, Ama found that as a non-citizen of Australia, she was required to pay upfront a tuition fee of AUD \$18,000 for the first year of enrolment. This was a cost that her family had not budgeted for and could not afford. Fortunately, Ama was advised by the university enrolment officer to still enroll in her course but ensure that she pass all her subjects and acquire Australian citizenship that year.

This advice allowed Ama to start her university course as planned and to stay engaged in education. She applied for and was granted citizenship that year so her tuition costs were able to be recovered by the university. This was a turning point for Ama and her parents as they realized that all the hard work that had gone into preparing Ama for university could have been wasted had she not received appropriate advice about her options. Ama's family was grateful for the assistance which affirmed for them that some educational institutions, such as the university that Ama had enrolled in, have the potential to assist students like Ama to continue their education through recognizing the unique circumstances of students like Ama. This incident demonstrates the need for more timely and relevant advice about the opportunities and costs of education at higher levels for parents and learners with immigrant backgrounds early in the pathway planning stages. Moreover this incident evidenced gaps in the understanding of migrant parents about cost and access to higher educational opportunities in Australia.

There were other important changes to Ama's schooling and home life, apart from beginning university studies and acquiring Australian citizenship. Her father and maternal grandmother visited the family twice and once respectively and her younger brother was accepted to study at another Melbourne university. Meanwhile, Ama's younger sister started primary school at the same school that Ama had attended nine years earlier. Ama's story is revisited in Chapter 5.

Participant 2 : Visi (F16Yr11)

Visi self-identifies as Papua New Guinean first and PI second. Her family moved to Australia from PNG in 1998 when Visi was just a toddler. They first settled in Sydney where her father took up a job as an accountant. The family acquired permanent residency whilst in Sydney and a few years later, they moved to Cairns where Visi's father had found another job. Visi's parents separated soon after the family arrived in Cairns so Visi's mother decided to move to Melbourne in 2006 with her two young daughters Visi and Sima. She settled in the western suburbs of Melbourne because her cousin, who was then studying at the local university on a Papua New Guinea (P.N.G) Government scholarship, also lived there. With the encouragement of her cousin, Visi's mother enrolled in a Diploma in Early Childhood course at the same university and graduated in 2011. Following her graduation, she started working as a teacher's aide at a nearby early childhood center. Visi's father lived interstate but maintained close contact with the family and also provided financial support. He himself had graduated with an Accounting degree from a university in PNG and held a professional job in another Australian state.

At the start of the research period, Visi was sixteen years old and attending Year 11 at school. Visi and her sister had both attended the local primary school which their mother had selected because of its proximity to their home and because there were other children from Papua New Guinea who attended there. After completing Year 6, Visi moved to the nearby secondary college where she remained until the end of Year 11. Visi had many friends at school and generally liked most of her subjects but she also had a passion for sports, especially volleyball. Her teachers had informed her that if she continued to do well at school, she would be eligible to apply for a scholarship to play volleyball in America at the end of Year 12. This was an exciting proposition for Visi and her family. In Year 10 and 11, Visi played competition volleyball for a local club and often travelled with school friends two days a week to train and compete in club competitions. Whilst she was thrilled to be attending a school where she could *'learn as well as play volleyball'*, Visi found it difficult to combine her volleyball training with studying and completing assignments. As a result, she

did not pass her midyear Year 11 English SAC test, an outcome which held significant repercussions on her schooling options. After meeting with school authorities after the mid-year exams, Visi's mother decided to transfer her to an alternative education setting to do Year 12 VCAL studies in 2013. After completing Year 12 VCAL at the alternative school setting, Visi enrolled in a Certificate 4 in General Science at the TAFE sector of the university where her uncle worked. Visi reported that she had become more focused on her studies due to the 'flexible and less structured learning environment and the helpful teachers' in both these settings. Over the research period, Visi had studied at three different institutions and although this was not the pathway that she had expected when she was first interviewed in February 2012, she seemed happy enough with her decision to leave secondary school although still intent on pursuing a career in sports.

On the home front, Visi's family moved to another suburb that same year and her father also visited the family. Her paternal grandfather also died during this time which required Visi's mother and sister to travel to Papua New Guinea to attend the funeral, leaving Visi to stay with relatives during their three weeks absence. In Visi's case, she was lucky to be supported by her uncle, who had since graduated from university and taken up a job at a Melbourne university. It was clear that the family drew a lot of material and emotional support from this family member. Later that same year, Visi also travelled to PNG for a holiday and her father visited the family a second time to farewell his daughters before moving overseas to take up another new job.

Participant 3 : Sela (F16Yr11)

We first met Sela in the prologue to this thesis. Sela self-identifies as Samoan first and PI second. Her Polynesian heritage is important to her. She is the youngest in a family of four and is the only one still left at home with her elderly parents. At the beginning of the research period, Sela was in Year 11 at a nearby school where she was doing well in her subjects and had many friends. Sela had attended the local primary school prior to moving to the nearby

secondary college. Sela's mother had completed Year 12 in Samoa and had started a nursing course there which she had been unable to complete. Sela's parents moved to Australia from New Zealand in 1999 when Sela was still a baby. Her father worked as a laborer when they first arrived from New Zealand but now stays at home due to illness. Her mother works night shifts for Australian Post and was the sole income-earner during the course of the data collection period. Both of Sela's parents held chiefly titles back in the islands which meant that they often had to provide traditional advice and financial assistance to relatives and community members both in Melbourne and in Samoa.

Sela's personal goal was to complete Year 12 VCE and study nursing at university. However, Sela encountered some personal difficulties in pursuing this goal. At the end of Year 11, she received a warning about poor attendance at school; if her attendance did not improve, she would have to be withdrawn. At about the same time, her mother urged her to find a part-time job to help ease financial stresses at home. Although Sela managed to stay on at school into the following year, her attendance record did not improve and she was asked to withdraw midway through Year 12 VCE. The school helped enroll her into a Certificate 4 in Health Science course at the local dual-sector university (TAFE sector) soon after. Sela was disappointed to be leaving school but hopeful that the course would get her back on track to pursue her goal of becoming a nurse. Initially, she kept the information about being withdrawn from school from her parents. By the time they finally found out, Sela was already into her second year at the local university doing a Diploma level course in nursing. She hoped to continue and complete a degree in nursing in the following year at the same institution.

During the research period, Sela experienced some significant events at home and at school. After being withdrawn from school in the final year of VCE, she moved immediately to a new educational institution, losing her school friends and having to adjust to a new and very different educational setting. At home,

her father's illness and her mother's absence from home in the evenings posed emotional and financial stresses which had contributed to Sela's poor attendance at school. Despite these challenges, Sela had some good experiences. She participated in community and cultural activities and joined a youth media program as well as, travelled overseas with her church group to attend a youth rally. Although Sela experienced some challenging times during this period, she was able to draw emotional and social support from her cousin and best friend who at the time was doing a nursing degree at the same institution. Sela's story is revisited in the epilogue in Chapter 9.

Participant 4 : Jela (M17Yr12)

Jela, is a 17 year old young man who was born in Australia to a Tuvaluan father and an Australian mother. Since his parent's separation, Jela moved often between his parents' homes. At the time of this research, Jela was living with his father in rented accommodation close to the school where he attended. Jela's father was the sole income earner at home. He worked night shifts and was often busy and tired during the day. Because of the nature of his job, Jela's father did not often engage with his son's school and conceded that he did not spend much time speaking with either his son or the teachers about schooling as there were other urgent matters to attend to. For purposes of this research, he was often difficult to contact and could only be interviewed by telephone. Luckily, his cousin (Jela's aunt) who lived in the same neighborhood and organized youth community events maintained regular and consistent contact with Jela and was able to provide emotional support to him as needed. She was also responsible for connecting the researcher to Jela and his cousin Timo and often provided background information about their home situation during the research period.

At the start of the research period, Jela was attending Year 12 at the local school. He had a younger sister who attended the same school but she lived with her mother in another part of Melbourne. When asked what had been a highlight for him at school, Jela said that getting to Year 12 was a highlight and

to have reached that far without doing much homework was quite an achievement for him. Jela admitted that he only went to school to meet with his friends and to play rugby. He did not like his teachers as he felt they picked on him. When he was in Year 9, Jela had been suspended from school for aggressive behavior towards another student and had been reprimanded by his father at home. Jela was clear about not wanting to go to university as he did not enjoy schooling or doing homework and was in fact looking forward to being employed and earning money.

Two weeks before the Year 12 VCE exams, Jela was withdrawn from the school, an action that he had been expecting for some time. In fact, he wished that the school had released him earlier so that he could find employment and help out his dad at home. In light of his imminent withdrawal from school, Jela had informed the researcher that he wished to withdraw from the study as he would be leaving school. However, the researcher suggested that he continued his involvement in the study as his experiences would be beneficial to the study. He agreed to stay in touch. Soon after leaving school, Jela took up casual and part-time jobs in cleaning and logistics. In the second year of the research, Jela was doing security work at a night club, a job he enjoyed despite claiming 'it did not pay much' (Jela, personal communication, October, 2014) and therefore he was considering a move overseas to work in his uncle's security firm.

The researcher met with Jela twice at his local church where he was an active youth team leader and attended every Sunday, serving as an usher. He said that the church was an important factor in his life which provided a space and outlet where he could be himself and play an important role. He was also an active member of his community's youth group and a role model to others in the group. Jela presented as a pleasant young man who just did not like school and could not wait to get out and experience the world. Despite the difficult conditions and low support towards education at home, Jela had some social and emotional supports in place which included his church, his community youth group and his aunt, all of whom allowed him to maintain his personal

wellbeing and remain in touch with the study. His phone number remained the same over the study period and he still always picked up his mobile phone when called even though he often sounded busy working his various jobs. Jela's story is revisited in Chapter 5.

Participant 5: Timo (M17Yr12)

Timo is Jela's cousin who was also attending Year 12 at the nearby school at the beginning of the research period. He was Tuvaluan and his whole family lived in New Zealand but he had been sent to live with his uncle in Melbourne in order to attend secondary school. Timo did not disclose the reasons for his move to Melbourne to attend secondary schooling but his aunt suggested that it may be due to the fact that many parents thought secondary schooling in Australia was of a higher standard than in New Zealand. In the course of the study, the researcher was surprised to find there were other young PI, like Timo who were studying in secondary schools in Melbourne while their parents continued to live in New Zealand.

Unlike his cousin Jela (Participant 4), Timo enjoyed school and said that he liked Mathematics, especially when interacting with the teacher who made class fun and engaging. His goal was to become a paramedic nurse after leaving school and said that the person who most influenced his education was his mother who was a Primary school teacher in New Zealand. Timo did not often speak much but his comments were usually direct. When asked what he liked about school, he responded "*school is school... it is something you have to do*". One of the things he liked about his school was the inter-school sport competitions, especially the rugby games. But he also had high hopes of completing his schooling and continuing with further studies to secure a good job that could help his family.

Timo completed VCE Year 12 in 2012 and started working casual jobs in cleaning and logistics with his cousin Jela. In the second year of the research, Timo worked as a security officer at a night club but he still hoped to continue

his education. Timo's original plan to study paramedics was put on hold so he could concentrate on meeting other priorities, such as working to support himself while in Australia and to fulfill his goal of bringing his family to live in Australia. Even if he had wanted to continue his tertiary studies in Australia, Timo and his family would have found it impossible to meet the high university tuition costs due to his New Zealand citizenship status, making him ineligible for Government assistance towards tuition fee costs. For now, Timo was content with staying in Melbourne where it was easier for him to find a job to support himself and to assist with his family's goals to move to Australia.

Outside of school, Timo spent most of his time at the local 'gym' or playing rugby or just hanging out with his cousins or his girlfriend. He did not attend church but he did participate in the community youth meetings at his aunt's house. This link to his community, alongside his security job and a steady girlfriend provided the emotional and social supports that Timo needed to maintain his self-worth and wellbeing, especially living away from his immediate family. After the first interview, Timo was often difficult to contact; his phone was often disconnected and he never responded to text messages or blog posts. However, the researcher was able to meet with him informally at the regular community youth meetings at his aunt's house.

Participant 6 : Neli (M15Yr10)

Neli is Niuean-Samoan and was fifteen years old and in Year 10 when she started as a research participant. She lived with her mother and paternal grandmother in a western Melbourne suburb where they had settled since moving from New Zealand in 2000. Neli's mother had studied art at university and was an active community worker who ran arts and media workshops for the PI community in Melbourne. Neli was an active participant in these workshops and was able to meet and interact with many PI in these settings, thus improving her social network. Neli's interest in school was also in the arts and her personal goal was to do well at school, complete Year 12 VCE with an ATAR score of at least 70 and go to university.

From the start, Neli seemed a very confident young woman who knew exactly what she wanted from school and in life. Her mother appeared to have a very strong influence on Neli in terms of her school and personal goals. She chose arts as a personal career goal; the same area that her mother had studied at university. At school, she had won some prizes for arts and media and assumed an important leadership role. Neli was also strong minded and had previously had a confrontation with a teacher about culture which had resulted in her mother coming to the school to sort the issue out. Having a strong role model at home through her mother provided the foundations on which Neli could develop her interpersonal and communication skills. Her strong network of friends at school also supported Neli in her leadership role and at home, both her family and church provided the emotional and social support structures that Neli could depend on to pursue her life goals.

There were many changes in Neli's home and school life over the research period. In one year, she spent her Christmas holidays in Christchurch, New Zealand visiting her grandparents and other relatives. One of the most important events for Neli in her final year (2014) at school was that she assumed an important leadership position – she became a co-school captain. This was quite an achievement by any standards but especially for a young PI female in a school with very limited numbers of PI. But this was also a role that Neli seemed quite prepared for, reflecting on her inter-personal and communication skills displayed at the first interview. She reported that taking on a leadership role was a challenge but that she accepted it with the hope and confidence that it would sharpen her leadership skills. She later admitted that her focus on this role had caused her to be less vigilant about her academic studies, resulting in an ATAR score lower than she had hoped for, but she did not regret anything. Neli said that being a school co-captain had made her review her personal goals and she was now thinking more strongly about pursuing a career in the community development field. Neli was accepted to do a double degree in Business and Community development and in 2015 started

her degree course at university. Neli also expressed interest in doing work experience at a refugee center and to volunteer with her church doing ministry work in schools. Regular contact was maintained with Neli and her mother throughout the data collection period but not her school (School F) who declined to respond to the invitation to participate in the study and therefore did not participate in the interviews.

Participant 7 : Lisi (M16Yr10)

Lisi self-identifies as a Samoan first and PI second and is proud of his Polynesian heritage. He is the eldest in a family of four with one brother and two sisters. Lisi was attending Year 10 at a secondary school that was some distance away from his home when he joined the study in 2012. Two years later, he was still at the same school and studying Year 12 VCAL. His two younger sisters also attended the same school. Lisi's family had migrated to Melbourne in 2002 from New Zealand where they had lived for 10 years after their original move from Samoa when both parents were still young. Shortly after moving to Melbourne Lisi's mother undertook a Diploma in Business Administration course at the local university and now works as an accountant.

Lisi's mother explained that they had chosen Lisi's current school ahead of other schools because of family history, "*basically my other nephews went there*" and its close proximity to their residence when Lisi started secondary education. His mother also added that the school was known to have a 'good curriculum' and that teachers held high expectations of their students and were supportive of them. She also trusted them to do the right thing by the students. When the family moved to another suburb in western Melbourne a few years later, Lisi remained at the school as he had grown used to the teachers and his friends at the school. His mother said that the school had lived up to its good reputation so far and that she was satisfied with the support and resources provided to her son.

From Year 10, Lisi knew that he wanted to go to TAFE to get a trade qualification in plumbing or carpentry. He had also considered becoming a policeman. Lisi was engaged at school saying that he enjoyed all his subjects except Science and that he found his teachers friendly and the school a safe and comfortable place. He had many friends and one of his highlights in Year 10 was performing as a drummer in the school music concert. In Year 11, Lisi did VCE but he switched to VCAL in Year 12 and was expecting to do an apprenticeship at TAFE in 2015. Lisi's goal of becoming a tradesperson aligned with that of his parents who were more than happy to let him choose his own career. They also believed that he could become successful in the trades industry, saying that at home he showed interest in practical tasks. The school was also supportive of this pathway for Lisi and with such support forthcoming from both his family and the school. Lisi seemed engaged in his learning and content with the choices made. For him, there were no real barriers or challenges to his goal of becoming a tradesperson.

The most important change that occurred during the research period was Lisi's completion of a school organized work placement with a cabinet making business. This experience helped him decide that carpentry was not the trade area that he wanted to study at TAFE. He was leaning more towards plumbing as a future career. At home, Lisi's family adopted a 14 year old girl from Samoa who joined him and his sister at School B; he reported that he was helping her to learn English. Throughout the research period, Lisi worked two weekend shifts at the local McDonalds which he enjoyed as he could meet his friends there. He described this as more an opportunity to develop work skills rather than to make money.

Participant 8 : Via (F16Yr10)

Via identifies as Samoan first and Polynesian second and is proud of her heritage. She lived with her grandmother and cousin in a house just opposite her parent's home. She is a middle child in a family of eleven siblings ranging from 5 year old twin boys to a 28 year old sister. All of the siblings live in the parental home. Via had lived with her grandmother from a young age and was

very close to her and a similar-aged cousin who lived with them. At the start of the research period, Via was sixteen years of age and attending a secondary school that was some distance away from home. Via's parents were originally from Samoa but then moved to New Zealand before migrating to Australia in 1998 when Via was less than one year old.

Via's father works at a fruit and vegetable grocery shop while his wife stays at home. The father had been educated at a prestigious boy's secondary college and had later trained as a plumber at a Technical Institute in his home country. Although he had plumbing qualifications acquired from overseas, Via's father said he found it difficult to get a plumbing job in Melbourne due to a vision impairment and so he took on whatever job he could to support his large family.. Via's father said he chose his daughter's school due to the positive experiences of his older children at the school.

When asked about her experiences of schooling, Via said:

“Everything at school has been a highlight especially joining my older sister and cousins at the school. I feel supported and teachers are good – they make us feel that it is important to ask them for help if we do not know how to do the homework... however I don't like Science and the only lowlight at school is when failing a test” (Via, Interview 1, September, 2012).

In Year 10, Via had a fair idea of her future career - she wanted to be a teacher. One of her teachers had told her that she would make a good teacher so she thought about it and mentioned it to her friends who agreed with the teacher. At that point Via began to think seriously of becoming an English teacher including exploring ways to work towards her goal. Via chose the VCE pathway in Year 10 and although she was the only PI student in her year level doing VCE, she knew this was the right thing for her. She was also aware of the status this entailed, saying that many people in her school believed that students who were recommended to follow a VCE pathway were smart and likely to transition to university study. Via also explained that many of her PI friends were doing

VCAL and that she had a great mix of friends, including those that did VCE with her and from whom she sometimes received homework assistance. At times, she asked her older cousins for help with school work but most of the time, Via did homework by herself at a nearby library. Via was comfortable approaching her teachers for help when needed. She reported that she did not have any major challenges apart from a dislike of Science and hated getting a low mark on a test. She was well connected to her teachers, friends and family, especially her grandmother, with whom she lived and who played an important role in encouraging her to do well at school and ensuring that she did her homework.

During the research period, there were some important occurrences at Via's home. Her brother got married in Samoa and two elderly family members died in Samoa and in New Zealand so her parents and grandmother travelled overseas to attend the funerals. Her cousin and best friend who also lived with her grandmother, had a new baby which meant Via had new responsibilities, including sharing in the care of her new-born niece. Her entire family also joined a new church.

Participant 9 : Esi (F14 Yr9)

Esi is Tongan and at the start of the research period was studying Year 9 at school. Esi was confident, bright and well supported at home with many friends at school. She was amongst three students featured in the school's Year 7 promotion advertisement. When asked about the advertisement, Esi said that she was asked to take part and was proud of it. Her family's proximity to the school meant she could walk there every day. She enjoyed going to school, studying her subjects and interacting with her friends. Her favorite subjects were English, Legal Studies and Art and her goal was to study Law after completing VCE studies. Esi spent much of her spare time at home but was looking forward to engaging in more activities outside the home when she reached Year 10.

Esi's family had moved from New Zealand in 1995 and settled in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Her father is a Pastor at the local church where a lot of family and community members attended. Her mother was studying towards a

Diploma in Early Childhood while also running an after-school care facility at home with her eldest daughter. Esi is the youngest in a family of four - two brothers and one sister. She had a lot of extended family in Melbourne and was very involved in her community due to her father's position at the church. Their house was a hub of community activity; they often had many visitors, including children, and her mother was always busy in the kitchen. Her older brother had studied music and now played for the church band while her other brother played professional rugby.

At the beginning of the second year of the research, Esi shared that she was thinking of dropping Maths as a VCE subject because she found it difficult. When they found out, her parents bought a \$5000 computer software program called 'computer mathemagics' to assist in improving her mathematics skills. This was a purchase that they had heavily invested in and which they kept reminding Esi about. When asked why they had decided to buy this expensive product, Esi's mother confirmed that they believed passing VCE Mathematics would provide their daughter with more options of a career choice. However, by the end of Year 11, Esi had dropped the Maths subject and no longer wanted to study Law saying that she probably would not make the grades for it. Instead she was leaning towards an arts degree because she had more strength in these subjects. Esi understood also that by dropping the Maths subject, she was limiting the choice of courses that she could apply for at university but she was adamant to drop VCE Maths. During the course of the research, Esi's family welcomed a baby niece and her brother went to Europe to play rugby. Her father also visited the US and Tonga for work purposes. In the third year of the research, the members of the church where Esi's father was the pastor celebrated 20 years of the church's existence in Australia and showed a video of the highlights, particularly the increased membership in the congregation.

Participant 10 : Lali (F14Yr8)

Lali is Tongan and was attending Year 8 at the local secondary school in 2012. She lives with her parents and is the eldest in a family of five. At our first

interview, Lali had just acquired a new sibling. Lali found her schooling enjoyable and got on well with her friends who were mostly of Asian background. She found Mathematics difficult and also said she found it hard to follow teachers when they spoke too fast. Her mother said that Lali had a hearing problem which possibly caused challenges in following and understanding her teachers. Lali also said that she had been bullied at primary school but said she had got over this and was now happy at school. Her personal goal was to become an architect or school teacher and her father was active in assisting her in working out her schooling and personal goals. Lali was also a member of the church band and had considered pursuing a music career.

At the first interview, a community member had assisted the parents in translating their responses to the interview questions but after a few minutes, both became more confident and communicated directly in English, with the help of the interpreter. Lali's father worked a casual job in a factory close to home while her mother stayed at home but took on casual jobs as needed. Lali's mother was frank about the fact that the family was struggling and that jobs were hard. She said that both she and her husband had not done well at school. Because of this, they wanted Lali to do well to help the family.

“Look at us... we find it so hard... we want her to be not like us but to do better and help herself and us”, (Lali's mother, Interview, October, 2012).

Lali was aware of the pressures on her family and in turn wanted to do well at school to help improve the situation. A year into the research, Lali found a part-time job at the local McDonalds fast food restaurant and worked there on weekends which enabled her to assist her family. Lali's two cousins from New Zealand also came to live with the family and worked in the same factory as her father. When visiting for an interview with Lali or her parents, I often found the house to be full and bustling with activity and both the adults and the children occupied with various household chores. During the research period, Lali and her family travelled together to New Zealand to attend a funeral.

Participant 11 : Elli (F15Yr9)

Elli is Tongan and lives with her parents and two younger siblings. The family arrived in Australia in 2000 and settled in the western suburbs. Her mother is a registered nurse at a state government hospital and her father works full time as a tradesperson although he had graduated with an Advanced Diploma in Theology. He also volunteers at the church and encourages his children to attend there while being very supportive of their education. Elli's father was very proud of Elli and her achievements at school and often contrasted her performance with her older brother who was not doing well and had been involved in some challenging incidents. He remarked that the difference between Elli and her brother was that she was very open and communicated well with her parents while the brother was more reserved and did not share his experiences at school with his parents.

Elli was attending Year 9 at the nearby secondary school (School G) at the start of the research period. She was very confident and well-spoken and well aware of her strengths and capabilities. She liked her teachers, had many friends at school and her favorite subjects were Media Studies, Drama and Art. Her personal goal was to work in the media and arts sector. She had taken part in some drama performances at school and really enjoyed these experiences. At her school, there had been only four PI, one of whom was Elli's older brother. Her parents said that the majority of students there were of Asian background and felt that sometimes the PI students went '*under the radar*' somewhat at the school.

In the second year of the research, Elli moved to another school (School D) closer to her home to start Year 11 VCE because she wanted to study Legal Studies which was not offered at her old school. This was a school where two of her cousins also attended and was closer to her home than her old school. Elli had started the year well at the new school but by the third interview in mid-2014, was concerned about her progress saying the attendance requirement at

the new school was very strict and she had already received a warning letter about it. By the end of the same year, Elli reported that she was now back on track at school, had passed her Year 11 exams and was looking forward to Year 12 VCE. She also shared that she found the teachers at her new school to be helpful, saying that their positive attitude and interest in her studies had contributed to her quick adjustment to her new setting.

During the research period, Elli's family welcomed a new baby niece and the whole family travelled to Tonga for holidays.

Participant 12 : Edi (M15Yr9)

Edi is Tongan and for the first two years of the research, lived in a western Melbourne suburb with his parents and three siblings. His mother worked as a night shift bank teller and his father was a tradesperson. Edi was attending Year 9 at the junior campus of his school in the first year of the research in 2012. He then moved to the senior campus in 2014 to do Year 11 VCE. His older brother had attended the same school which was a 10 minute walk from home. Edi enjoyed his subjects and said he had good friends at school. His best subject was music and he had been awarded a prize at junior college for music. Edi also played the guitar with his church band and often had to practise on Friday evenings. He also played rugby at school.

At home, Edi spent most of his free time watching his two younger brothers or helping his mum with house chores. Edi was very shy at the first interview but always responded promptly to requests for interviews. His parents were young and both had jobs which kept them busy. They often allowed Edi to attend interviews by himself as they could not be home at these times. Edi had good communication skills and his confidence improved as the research process progressed. I wondered how much of Edi's time was spent on his homework as his mother relied on him heavily to watch his younger brothers and do house chores. When meeting with staff from Edi's school in the second year of the research, concerns were expressed about Edi being at risk of failing certain subjects. Attempts by the school to contact his parents had been unsuccessful

and one of his teachers felt that Edi was spending too much time on home and church commitments which were preventing him from achieving the grades of which he was capable. His parents, on the other hand, said they did not think Edi was having any problems and reported that they did try to call the school sometimes to check on their son's progress.

By the third year of the research period, Edi's parents had moved the family to another suburb in Melbourne and had arranged for Edi to attend Year 12 VCE at a different school. Edi was excited to be moving to a new school and said that he had already met some of the teachers and found them to be friendly and helpful. At our final interview, Edi expressed his interest in becoming a music engineer so he could pursue his love of music but also have a degree and a professional career. At home, Edi enjoyed a close relationship with his family. He also had relatives living in the same neighborhood who he visited from time to time. The whole family had important roles at their church where they attended on Sundays and on other days of the week. Both Edi and his older brother were in the church band and youth group and their membership in these groups required them to be at church at least three to four days a week.

Participant 13 : Sei (F15Yr9)

Sei and her brother Sio are Samoan and were the last to join the research cohort. Sei was in Year 9 at the nearby school when she started as a research participant. She enjoyed school and had many friends from multi-cultural backgrounds. At the time of the interviews, Sei was doing well in her subjects, especially in English and Humanities which were her favorite. She also got on well with her teachers. Sei's mother described her as "*a good student who is hard working and well-motivated but who needs to improve her study skills*" (Interview 1, October, 2012). Sei was receiving extra maths tuition at the time of our first interview. Her goal was to study veterinary science as she loved caring for animals. Her mother supported Sei's goal saying that Sei had helped to birth a puppy at home by herself which led her parents to believe that she was genuinely interested in animal care.

Sei was the eldest in a family of five siblings. The youngest member of the family was born two years into the research period. Sei's mother is a social worker who works in a Government Department while her father is a motor mechanic. The family moved to Melbourne from New Zealand in 2004 and settled in the western suburbs. During the research period, the family moved house once and this was prompted by a need to be closer to the schools that the children attended. Sei's mother was a member of the Parent-Teacher Association at the primary school where all her four older children had attended. Both she and her husband took an active part in the school's affairs and had good relationships with the teachers at the primary school and the secondary college. Both said that they found the parent – teacher meetings very useful and on the basis of feedback from these meetings, they had arranged for extra tuition through Kip McGrath to assist Sei and her brother Sio in English and Mathematics. Both parents were also very supportive of their children's education and were prepared to give all the academic support needed to ensure the children did not miss out on any opportunities to succeed at school.

During the second year of the research, the family resumed an active role at their local Samoan church after some years of non-attendance. Sei's father conducted the youth group sessions at the church and encouraged his children to attend in the various activities such as choir, youth group and youth camps. Sei's mother confided that they had decided to move back to the church to keep their adolescent children focused on family life and schooling. Both parents hoped that by keeping their children occupied with activities at church, they would have less time to spend on other activities that might lead them astray from family and school responsibilities.

During the research period, Sei's whole family visited extended family members in Samoa and New Zealand once respectively for different reasons.

Participant 14 : Sio (M14 Yr8)

Sio is the younger brother of Sei and was attending Year 8 at the same neighboring school as his sister. He is the youngest participant in the research cohort. He said that he enjoyed Social Science and that he liked most of his teachers. His mother said that his popularity at school was costing him his grades and said that he nearly failed all his subjects in the first term so his parents arranged for him to receive extra tuition on Maths and English. Sio noticed some differences between the tutors at school and the ones that came to teach him at home, saying that the after-school tutors explained things much more clearly and that the one-on-one sessions helped him to understand his school work better.

Sio said that he had been selected to do Adventure Leadership camp at school but that he declined because he was not interested which was a surprise to his sister and parents who saw it as a great opportunity and honor to be selected. Sio, however was undeterred by their encouragements and stuck to his decision. He was interested in Humanities subjects and his personal goal was to become an electronic games designer. His parents did not take him seriously saying that this was an excuse to let him play computer games. By the end of the research study, Sio also said that he had considered doing VCAL and going on to TAFE to do engineering. He said his interest in TAFE was piqued by the fact that tradespeople seemed to enjoy their jobs and also collected good pay from it.

Sio was a talkative child and quite popular with peers at school. He said there were many PI at his school, adding that they all mixed well with each other as well as with other ethnic groups. He also suggested that other ethnic groups were sometimes intimidated by the PI at school. Sio's mother reported that he was often invited to visit Australian friends' homes and said that this was possibly due to his openness and confidence.

Sio and his family were active members of their local church where they attended every Sunday with their whole family. His father ran the Sunday school sessions and at church, Sio and his siblings were able to attend Samoan

language classes, learn public speaking and also interact with other community members.

4.5. Factors that impact on learner trajectories

The next section outlines some of the common factors impacting on the daily lives of these learners within the context of their homes and schools which consequently also affect their school participation, achievement and pathways.

4.5.1 Family situation and composition

All the participants lived with parents or guardians largely in rented accommodation located in the western suburbs of Melbourne. They all lived in close proximity to their schools where they attended with other siblings and accompanied their siblings to and from school. The schools chosen were often ones where there was some prior connection either through older siblings having attended there or due to their close proximity to home. Most participants had strong connections to their families and in some cases, extended family members such as cousins, aunts, uncles and grandmothers played important roles within their households. These extended family members often played crucial roles in the lives of the young people, including providing physical or emotional support towards schooling.

All fourteen participants were active followers of Christianity and had close connections to church with some participants attending with parents or individually with other family members. Most of the churches they belonged to were located in the same neighborhoods as where the participants lived or went to school (Refer to Figure 1.2). For some of the young people, church attendance not only included Sunday worship but also band practice, leadership and youth programs and church cleaning on two or three days of the week. These were responsibilities that the participants accepted as part of their home tasks and normal routine.

Twelve of the participants were Polynesian, whose families had migrated to Australia using the New Zealand migration pathway whilst the two Melanesian

participants and their families had migrated directly from the Islands under the skilled migration visa category. The differences in visa status determined the levels of assistance that the families could receive from the Government. Those families who had migrated from New Zealand prior to and up to 2001 had less stringent restrictions placed on their visa status, allowing them to access some educational, health and welfare assistance benefits. For those families who came after February 2001, there were stricter restrictions and individuals and families were required to serve a specific waiting period before applying for permanent residency and then citizenship. Understanding the historical differences between migrant groups is important because access to social services, welfare assistance and tertiary education support depends on visa status, which for many New Zealand migrants is determined by the date of arrival in Australia. Six participants in this study were affected by this visa requirement which had implications on their ability to afford tertiary level education.

In all the households, at least one parent was employed. A noticeable difference was that parents who had arrived in the earlier waves of migration tended to be older with lower level qualifications whilst parents who arrived within the last ten years were younger and more likely to have professional qualifications. In employment terms, the earlier migrants were likely to work casual, shift or laboring jobs while the more recent arrivals were engaged in career-specific employment or upgraded their education and qualifications to secure vocational or professional employment. The socio-economic situation within a home greatly affected the levels of support, supervision and assistance that the participants could access at home. The families of three participants (Jela, Sela and Lali) in the study were severely hampered in their efforts to support their learner at school due to insecure employment, low income and ongoing financial constraints at home.

In households where parents had secure employment and higher incomes, the participants were able to access more support for resources and also get help

for schoolwork. Since coming to Australia, four mothers had taken up further study to help their children and also improve their income situation. Generally, where and when possible, all study parents tried their best to provide time and support for their children's learning but in some homes, these efforts were hampered by educational inexperience, lack of time or poverty. On their part, the young people were appreciative of their parents support and accepted that parental support was sufficiently adequate, describing the help from parents to be more than enough and asking *'how else can they help?'* The participants were mostly grateful to their parents for the opportunity to attend school, be provided with material and physical resources and for a few, to receive assistance with homework.

The 'ownership' of academic success also varied between participants. Some were able to exercise personal agency in terms of their school work. Some participants did not regard homework assistance and monitoring as being the responsibility of parents; if they needed assistance, these participants sought help from school friends. Some reported a significant level of autonomy in the decisions they made about their schooling. Although they reported that parents wanted them to do well at school, some participants were aware that their schooling experience constituted an investment by parents, and benefits were anticipated. Sela (F16Yr11) illustrated this point clearly stating *"My parents think that they spend money on me so they expect me to pay them back"* (Sela, Interview 2, Dec, 2012).

When seen as a family investment for the common good and benefit, schooling also brought pressure to learners to do well at school. Some of this pressure manifested in positive ways where the young people enjoyed their schooling, engaged positively in the learning and achieved the good results which their parents expected from them. On the other hand, if things did not turn out well or if the children failed to engage actively and positively at school, their family strategies were found to be compromised and the learner outcomes poor. With this group of PI learners, the pressure of parental expectations was an

important indicator of whether young people remained resilient or gave up and tried something else.

4.5.2 Identity and belonging

When asked how they would describe themselves, most participants emphasized a specific identity tied to nationality such as 'I am Samoan' rather than 'I am Polynesian' or 'Islander'. These participants preferred being identified firstly with their country of birth or the country of birth of their parents to being identified as Polynesian (cultural heritage) or PI (regional association). The close association with country of birth is possibly due to the fact that members speak the same language and celebrate the same national and community events relevant to their country. In some cases, PI self-identified themselves into smaller sub-groups such as Polynesian, Melanesian or Micronesian or as '*Australian Tongans*' (Lee, 2007) or '*wantoks*' consisting of PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu members who speak Pacific creole (PNG tokpisin, Solomon Islands pijin and Vanuatu bislama).

While these participants associated easily with other PI and peers from culturally diverse groups when at school, they were less likely to interact with them outside of the school setting, preferring instead to interact more frequently with those with whom they shared similar country of birth, language, cultural background and church affiliation. These preferences also determined the spaces such as churches, community halls and sports fields where they frequently attended, participated and celebrated important social and cultural events. Similar-aged relatives and cousins also interacted very closely with each other with many opportunities to hang out and interact at family gatherings, church, sports venues, shopping malls and at each other's homes.

4.5.3 Goals and aspirations

All the study participants had career goals which were more or less related to educational success. These goals mostly aligned with their parents' expectations which confirmed that in most cases, both parties were listening to each other's wishes. Sometimes the participants' goals were influenced by teachers, school

peers or based on personal interests. Those participants who experienced success at school through winning prizes, receiving positive teacher and peer feedback and receiving good grades were clearly more well-connected to their school than others showing the importance of validation and acknowledgement from school personell. Generally, there was less pressure on learners, if their parents and teachers also agreed with the chosen goals. There were a few participants who tended to formulate goals on the basis of feedback received from teachers or school friends. For example, Via (F15Yr10) chose her personal goal of becoming a teacher as a result of feedback received from teachers and school peers. This was a relatively easy choice for her as her parents had allowed her to decide her own career. For Sela (F16Yr11), it was a more difficult decision because although her parents shared her goal of becoming a nurse, they also wanted her to get a part-time job to assist at home and also expected her to complete secondary schooling at Year 12, go to university and get a well-paid job that would help her experience an easier life than they themselves had experienced.

Some parents were aware of the school requirements and strategies for selecting future careers and pathways and directed their children towards the appropriate subjects. For example Lisi's (M15Yr10) parents supported his choice of a VCAL pathway and steered him towards subjects that would prepare him for this goal. On the other hand, Ama (F17Yr12) who wanted to pursue studies in medicine risked being dropped from the VCE Chemistry class by her school and had to get her mother's assistance to re-instate her into the class. As indicated in Ama's example, there were some tensions experienced when the advice or suggestions provided by the teachers were inconsistent with the child's career plans or subject choices.

Sometimes the expectations placed on young people were too high or unrealistic for some learners and at other times, the strategies and investments put in by parents were significant but extremely poorly directed to support their children's success at school. This is well illustrated in the case of Esi (F14Yr9)

whose parents expected her to do well at school and even bought her an expensive computer program to assist her Maths skills only to find out that she had dropped VCE Maths in Year 11. Also in Visi's case (F16Yr11), the expectation of attaining a sports scholarship after VCE was compromised by the intensity of her focus on volleyball training which distracted her from the academic VCE subjects which she needed to pass to be eligible for such a scholarship. In the case of Jela, he was kept at school for longer than he wished to stay although the school knew he was disengaged and uninterested in school work.

Some participants were seen to change and adjust their goals as they experienced enjoyment and hardship in their subjects. Whereas Ama (F17yr12) stuck to her goal of studying medicine throughout the study period, there were others who changed goals from interview to interview over the data collection period. These changes were often directly or indirectly related to individual progress or performance in tests and exams, a preference for certain subjects or teachers or even feedback received from significant others such as family members, friends and teachers or other school staff. In the majority of cases, the goals and aspirations of these participants were focused on being successful at school so as to secure pathways that would enable them to pursue further studies or job prospects that would enable them to help themselves and their families. The goal of providing for the family was a commonly expressed goal for many participants, although in some cases, it was not always clear how they planned on achieving this important goal and role.

4.5.4 Fears and concerns

The participants in this study did not openly discuss their fears or concerns but some did allude to concerns about discrimination. Two participants expressed a fear of being 'jumped' at train stations or shopping malls for their Islander ethnicity, an assertion confirmed by a study (Grossman & Sharples, 2010) on safety in Brimbank, one of the Local Government (LG) area's in which this study is located. Another participant was concerned about the treatment of PI at

school saying that there was little understanding or recognition of their specific learning needs. Another participant was concerned about how PI are treated in the workforce and whether being PI would influence her success in getting employment. Apart from these issues, the participants mostly showed a positive sense of self and wellbeing, evidencing that the social capital derived from within the family and community networks contributed to making them quite resilient and happy.

A more subtle concern for the participants, however, related to family wellbeing and the ability to respond appropriately to family needs and priorities or 'a sense of common good' (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2007). The participants in this study were acutely conscious of the implications of their choices and options on the wellbeing of their families. They all had a strong desire to do more for their families and to be able to provide for their needs. They were unanimous in their view that parents were already doing a great deal for them and they felt indebted to their parents for their ongoing support and care to the extent of giving up personal goals and plans, where needed, to be more accommodative of family needs and wishes.

The cost of education, especially higher education and the financial implications on family was also a concern for some learners especially for those in families with no access to Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) funding. The ability to afford tertiary level education costs for these learners and families was simply out of the question as evidenced in the case of Ama (F17Yr12) who almost discontinued her university studies. This was shown to be a predicament likely to affect an additional five study participants, whose visa status restricted their access to Government CSP support. Some participants were very aware of the economic stresses on family welfare and were open to adjusting and amending their educational goals and plans to ease the stresses. Two study participants sought full time employment after finishing school to assist with family needs. Another participant found a part-time job to meet her own and family costs. At school, some participants masked or cushioned their family's financial situation by opting for less expensive options such as refusing to attend non-compulsory

school events or not registering with a sports club to avoid unnecessary costs to their families. In these instances, the young people did not always make the best choices for themselves but rather put the needs of family above their own as a way to contribute towards the 'bigger and collective good' (Fairbairn-Dunlop 2003; Samu, 2007).

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter provided an outline of the data collection methods used in the study and introduced the study participants. The final section summarised the main factors impacting on participants' educational choices and pathways and illustrated the diverse and complex nature of personal, home and school situations on individual schooling trajectories. In the next chapter, the role of family and community in preparing and, supporting the schooling experiences of PI, is explored, using the case stories of three participants to highlight issues and challenges as seen through the eyes of the family and the PI community.

Chapter 5 Family perceptions of schooling

The previous chapter outlined the methods of data collection and introduced the study participants with details about their family situation, personal goals and interests, while outlining some significant happenings in their lives over the data collection period. Parents and families were seen to play an important and emphatic role in the daily lives of participants, including having a huge impact on the types of relationships they developed, their perceptions of schooling and life in general. This chapter explores further the perspectives of parents and families about schooling, in particular their expectations from, and experiences of education and their understanding of their role in their children's schooling experiences and outcomes at the secondary school level and beyond. The case stories of Ama, Jela and Sela are used to further illustrate and illuminate the opportunities, challenges and strategies encountered by PI families in facilitating positive schooling experiences and outcomes for their learner.

This chapter specifically responds to the following sub-questions;

- ***1b) How do the pathways of PI learners reflect the goals and objectives of learners, their families and communities in terms of the opportunities and benefits of education and schooling provided in Australia?***
- ***1c) What factors determine the young PI's patterns of educational participation and engagement of PI at secondary school? Are these factors socially or culturally induced?***

In particular, this chapter examines PI parental and community values towards education, possible changes in their perceptions and expectations from schooling and the ways that they have responded to the requirements of Australian secondary schooling.

5.1 Family members

A condition for a young participant to participate in the study was that their parent(s) or family unit had to agree to be involved in the study through

participation in two semi-structured interviews to be held at the beginning and end of the data collection period. Including the families in the study was welcomed by the majority of parents who were more than willing to be involved if and when their child had already agreed to participate. Some parents had been made aware of the purpose of the study through speaking with the community members who had distributed initial paper surveys to potential participants and understood the research purpose. The involvement of parents in the study proved extremely beneficial for acquiring information about family and community perceptions of schooling and for understanding the range and types of home support available and accessible to learners within the home. Additionally, parental involvement helped to maintain interest and ongoing participation of the participants in the study. In most cases, parents were eager for their children to participate, seeing the process as positive and beneficial to their children's long-term schooling experience.

A total of twenty three (23) interviews, each audio-recorded and lasting between 40 to 60 minutes were held with nineteen (19) family members, including seventeen (17) parents and two guardians. The majority of these interviews were personally conducted in the participant's homes or at church or the local fast food restaurant. Two phone interviews were conducted with one parent and one guardian. The phone interviews were held separately with the parent of Jela (M17Yr12) and a guardian of Jela and Timo (M17Yr12). The parents of siblings, Sei (F14Yr9) and Sio (M13Yr8) attended both interviews together. In eight families, the same family member was interviewed twice due to it being either a single parent family or due to absence of the second parent in the household during the first or second interview session. For five families (that of Ama, Visi, Leli, Esi, Sei and Sio) both parents were present at either the first or second or both interviews and hence there is available information on each of these parents.

5.2 Family situation

All the families involved in this study had originated from a Pacific island country and migrated to Australia through New Zealand or directly from the Islands between 1990 and 2004. Apart from two families who had migrated directly from Papua New Guinea, the rest of the families arrived in Australia from New Zealand between the 1990s to early 2000s, a period when there was freer movement of people between the two countries (Bedford, Ho & Hugo, 2003; Birrell & Rapson, 1990; Centre for Multi-Cultural Youth, 2014). The application of stricter migration rules on New Zealand citizens as from June 2001, resulted in a slight decrease in the number of migrants coming to Australia but this did not deter three families involved in this study who arrived in 2002 (parents of Lisi), 2003 (parents of Leli) and 2004 (parents of Sei and Sio) respectively. Compared to the earlier migrants from New Zealand who were able to acquire Australian citizenship prior to the change in migration laws in 2001, these three families, by virtue of their arrival date were temporary migrants in Australia at the time of the study. Until and unless they acquire permanent residence and become eligible to apply for Australian citizenship if that is their choice, the children of these families are not eligible to receive Government assistance for higher education tuition fees and medicare. These restrictions to benefits also apply to all other migrants coming to Australia on permanent resident or bridging visas. These similar restrictions applied to Ama (F17Yr12) and her family who had arrived in 2005 directly from the Papua New Guinea but not to Visi (F16Yr11) and her family who had also migrated from the same country but had acquired Australian citizenship soon after arrival in Australia due to her father's education and employment background.

All the family members interviewed in the study spoke a language other than English at home and used this language most of the time to communicate with their children. All the families lived in the western region of Melbourne, and all of them had chosen the area due to other relatives already residing or working in the area. Another important reason for choosing this area was that it provided warehousing and factory jobs and gave easy access to public transport and cheaper housing. Twelve families lived within walking distance of schools,

allowing their children to walk to and from school while two families lived in a neighbouring suburb but kept their children at the same school where they had started their secondary education. In all the families, there was at least one member that was employed. The employment status of the parents ranged from professional to unskilled work and their educational backgrounds were also different. Two factors determined the ease with which families and parents were able to secure employment in Australia. The first determining factor was their educational qualifications and the second was their visa status upon arrival in Australia. This study found that some educational qualifications acquired overseas were not always recognised and PI migrants had to study further to improve their qualifications and employment options. Some PI took up jobs that were unrelated to their training or qualification. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the education levels and employment status of the parents that were involved in the study.

Table 5-1 Educational level and employment status of parents

Educational Level	Male	Female	Total	Occupational Status	Male	Female	Total
Degree	2	3	5	Professional (degree of higher)	2	3	5
Diploma	1	4	5	Vocational (Technical or Diploma qualification)	1	4	5
Certificate	2	1	3	Trades (4 year trade certificate/ Sales/Office)	2	1	3
High School	1	2	3	Semi-skilled (machine operators/ hospitality/Agriculture)	1	2	3
Primary School	1	1	2	Unskilled (labouring, factory, security)	2	1	3
Not stated	1		1	Not stated			
Total	8	11	19		8	11	19

Of the thirteen family members who held post-secondary qualifications, eleven parents had full or part time jobs that were related to their qualification and experience while two had full time jobs that were unrelated to their area of training. One parent did not disclose his educational qualifications but reported that he worked a night-shift job. The six non-certified parents also had some form of employment, which was either full-time or part-time, casual or temporary and/or involved night or weekend shifts. Three parents in the semi-skilled or unskilled group were single bread winners (parents of Sela, Jela and Lali) while another single wage earner (parent of Via), who held a Certificate in plumbing from overseas worked in an unskilled category as a grocer shop assistant. The other parent in the uncertified group was the mother of Edi (M14Yr9) who worked as a security officer, and whose partner was a 'tradie' who also had not been available for interview. These six families' main incomes were derived from semi-skilled or unskilled work and in employment areas that were subject to variations and instabilities. Such vulnerabilities were intensified if and when the parent was also a single wage income earner.

Many parents in this study were aware of the importance of further training to improve employment opportunities and enhance adjustment and adaptation to the Australian way of life. Seven parents had undertaken further studies after arriving in Australia specifically to upgrade their qualifications and secure more permanent and stable employment. Apart from one mother who was still continuing with a TAFE Certificate course, the rest had completed their studies and found employment in related fields. Two parents who had arrived with Diploma qualifications pursued degree studies while four parents who already held high school leaving certificates pursued Diploma studies. Out of the three parents who arrived with certificate level qualifications, only two found jobs in their related field. Participants were able to pay for their training or study through private or church sponsorship. Others who took up their studies in more recent years were able to do so after acquiring Australian citizenship while others took advantage of the opportunities offered by the Government to offer

funding support for certain certificate level courses to New Zealand migrants in 2012 (Department of Immigration, 2012).

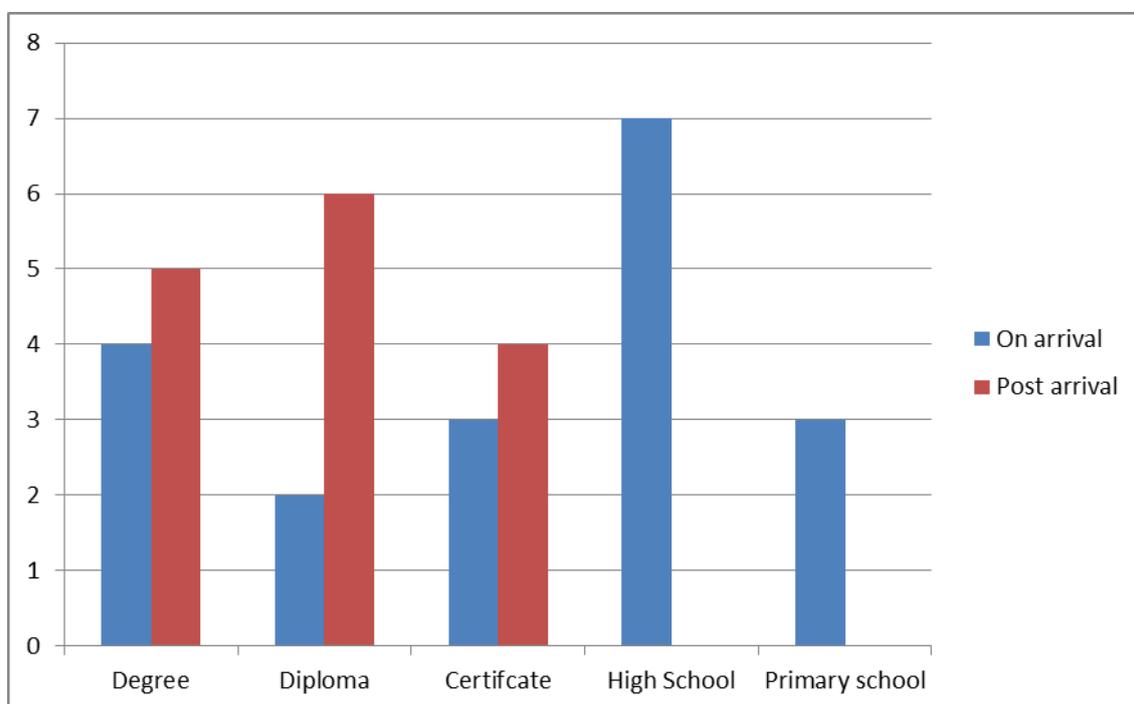


Figure 5-1 Number of parents undertaking further studies in Australia

5.3 Schooling as seen through the eyes of parents and community

Many PI migrate to Australia to seek better social and economic opportunities for themselves and their children. Education is regarded as the key means through which migrant dreams can be realistically achieved (Furneaux, 1973). How well PI learners adjust to the demands of the Australian educational system, and whether they can cope with the new responsibilities to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available are important questions for many migrant parents. Whilst many families are prepared to provide the support needed by their children to learn and engage at school, there are certain factors that can place competing demands on their ability to provide the necessary levels of support.

5.3.1 Valuing school and education

The parents in this study all placed a high value on schooling and held high expectations for their children to succeed in education. They considered their children fortunate to be attending school in Australia with better and easier access to facilities, resources and teaching quality that were considered superior to what they themselves had experienced in the Islands or in New Zealand. The common aim was for the children to achieve successful educational outcomes and '*go as high and as far as possible*' in their schooling and aim for tertiary level study, a well-paid job and a professional career. Both university and TAFE were regarded by these parents as preferred destinations for their children. Some parents in the study took steps to find the necessary time and effort to help their children plan their personal goals and future careers. A few of the parents helped keep their own migrant dreams and hopes alive by ensuring they themselves improved their own education.

Whilst all the study parents held a high regard for educational success, there was no evidence to suggest that they deliberately sought out certain types of schools to promote that success. Schools were mostly regarded as comparable and many parents believed that any school in Australia was definitely better than those at home. Given the view of school as comparable in its services across locations and school types, the most common reason for choice of school was its close location to home or to public transport. Exceptions in this study were seen in limited instances, for example, when a family moved house or there was a prior or existing connection to that school. In these instances, the children travelled by bus to their schools. One family kept their son at the old school to maintain the good relationships with teachers and peers. Another family whose child used public transport to reach school chose the school due to the positive experiences of older relatives. Three sets of parents chose Catholic system schools for their children not just because of the close proximity to their homes but because they hoped that the school would teach Christian values and enforce strict discipline, instilling good behavior in their children. Significantly, however, the overtly religious focus of most families did not serve as a trigger for faith-based education choices for these participants.

The parents in this study often spoke about school personnel, whether a principal, course coordinator, teacher or welfare or careers officer with a great deal of respect. Some of the positive memories that parents spoke about were their active involvement with their child's primary school years, the prizes their children had won or their children's performances in school organized activities such as music concerts, school plays or rugby matches. A few parents commented that secondary school was very different from primary school in terms of the opportunities for their participation. They admitted to finding the lower levels of secondary schooling to be more straightforward in terms of homework requirements, and found that seeking school assistance and communicating with teachers was easier at this level. Additionally, speaking with their children about their school interests and concerns was much easier and straightforward at the junior secondary stage than at senior secondary school level. One parent reported that her relationship with secondary school teachers was limited, saying that staff were often busy and difficult to approach.

Some parents found themselves becoming increasingly distanced from their children on a physical and emotional level as their children reached the senior levels of secondary schooling. These parents claimed that their aspirations for their children became more uncertain as the children moved to higher levels of schooling and increased their emotional and physical independence. Whilst still supportive of their children's aspirations of doing well and progressing to tertiary level, it was evident that some parents adopted a less active role in supporting their children academically when they reached the higher levels of schooling. The lowering of support at this crucial level of schooling can be attributed to parental unfamiliarity with the supports required at this stage of schooling which some parents attributed to self-inexperience with this level of education, a lack of confidence in communication skills and inability to access adequate advice or support from other sources. Very often, the parents were also constrained from providing optimal support due to work or personal reasons.

When asked about their level of familiarity and understanding of the Victorian education system, the response was mixed. The majority of parents reported they had average level 'about 50% to 60%' understanding of the system or as they saw it, 'enough information' to support their children. Some parents understood the system better after older children or relatives had gone through similar pathways and for some, their own recent experiences of higher education also assisted greatly. The importance of parental familiarity with the education system was a critical factor in regards to the level of responses to school issues. Sometimes this meant having the ability to exert pressure in the right place at the right moment, for both large scale or less significant matters. For example, Ama's mother's understanding of the subject requirements for a science-based course at university led her to successfully negotiate with her daughter's school to re-instate Ama into the Year 12 chemistry class. On the other hand, Esi's father was reluctant to approach the school to ask about his son's suspension because he was uncertain about his rights to seek an explanation from the school about his son's performance and eventual suspension.

Parents' strong feelings about their children's schooling experiences were evident in the study and families generally regarded success (or failure) of their children as a reflection of their own standing within the local PI diaspora. Via's father's anger and shame at his son's expulsion was not an isolated case. Other parents also related stories of honour or shame regarding their children's successes and failures at school which demonstrated the existence of pressure from within families and the local PI diaspora for children to do well at school and fulfil the migrant dream while also helping to lift families out of poverty. The statement below illustrates the pressure on young people to do well at school.

"Within the community, there is pressure for young people to do well at school and if your children do not go to university or TAFE, you will be mocked or looked down on", (Mother of Sela, June 2012).

The interviews with parents revealed that there were some differences in the ways that PI families perceived the goals and expectations for their children. There were two fathers in this study who often spoke about their sons' negative experiences at school although neither boy was part of the study. These experiences were important in shaping their views of school generally and also informed their views for supporting the experiences of younger children. Via's father, for example, was comfortable in sharing information about his daughter's successes at school, often highlighting Via's high engagement and good test scores at school while at the same time expressing disappointment in his son's behaviour and school results. Ellie's father also noted that his relationship with his daughter was more positive than that with his son which allowed him to find out more information from his daughter about her schooling achievements and experiences. He also said that he had never been summoned by the school to discuss his daughter's behaviour or academic progress but had been asked to come in to discuss his son's behaviour. These examples suggest there was much more expectation that daughters would behave well and perform well academically compared to sons. Thus, we find that Sela's family experienced a great deal of disappointment when she left school to go to TAFE and Lisi's parents were concerned that his sister should maintain her academic pathway to university although they were generally content with Lisi (M15Yr10) opting for a vocational pathway.

"My son (Lisi) is interested in doing Trades so he is following a VCAL pathway... that is his interest and his strength but I am encouraging my daughter to do VCE and go to university because I do not want her to be stuck in a hard job...girls need to do better" (Mother of Lisi, September 2012).

The comment by Sela below also confirms the gendered difference in attitudes to schooling.

"In my community, most girls are more serious - the boys are way more laid back. It is hard to find an islander boy who has finished Year 12 VCE, maybe VCAL yes." (Sela, Interview 4, April 2014).

Additionally the interviews revealed that while a few parents showed a willingness to learn and adapt to the education system as they or other family members experienced it, there were many instances in the study which showed there were communication gaps between parents and their children concerning educational directions and pathways. For example, Esi's father admitted that he put pressure on his eldest son to do Year 12 VCE because of the boy's lack of interest in practical and hands-on work. He later found that his son had taken up a labourer job in a delivery van and enjoyed the work, a discovery that caused him to regret pressuring his son to do VCE, when he could have done better with a VCAL qualification. In Sela's family, her parents were not aware of alternative pathways to university study and were disappointed when she left Year 12 VCE and transitioned to TAFE. In these examples, it was clear that some families tended to leave some important decisions to chance whilst others resolved to learn from past experiences for future reference. Parents were also aware of the pressures from their local diaspora and cultural community to do the 'right thing' by and for their children, although at times, it was not always clear what these schooling expectations or pressures entailed.

5.3.2 Parents' understanding of their roles

All the families in this study worked hard to provide for the basic material, physical and social needs that their children needed at home. Most parents considered the following as part of their roles: providing school uniforms, textbooks and resources, ensuring the children attend school, attending parent-teacher interviews and monitoring homework. Interestingly, several parents did not regard engaging and communicating with the school as part of their role. These parents were often too busy with other commitments to be able to find the time or motivation to communicate with the school. Others were aware of the importance of parental intervention to their children's education but were sometimes hampered by poor language skills or lack of confidence to communicate and interact with the school effectively. One parent attributed her hesitation in communicating with the school to her position as follows:

“Why would the teachers be interested in hearing what I have to say? I cannot even speak English properly and only attended up to primary education” (Parent of Lali, December 2012).

Like Lali’s mother, there were other parents who were self-conscious about their language skills and confidence to interact with school staff but who also had high levels of trust in the school system to deliver good outcomes for their children. These parents believed that the school had better resources, capability and skills to support the children than they did at home. As long as the children were attending school regularly, being happy there and bringing home satisfactory results as shown in their school reports, these parents did not see the need to intervene into a space with unfamiliar rules and requirements.

One of the main concerns about PI and schooling rests with the low levels of interaction and communication that parents and families have with their children’s schools. From the perspective of some parents in this study, this was an unnecessary concern and they saw no real need for consistent and regular communication with the school if the children were attending classes, passing tests and exams and not causing trouble. Too much communication with the school was actually viewed negatively; it could be read as having a child who was causing problems or as a signal that parents might be looking for favours from teachers. So, although school-initiated communication was seen as sometimes necessary, these parents considered their own initiated communication to be more important. These parent-initiated occasions were often related to serious incidences such as when a child was upset or felt unfairly treated about a school issue. Whether the parent intervened or not also depended on the level of confidence that the parent had in terms of communicating and negotiating the issue with school personnel. In Ama’s case (F17Yr12), her mother was sufficiently confident in her communication skills and her understanding of the school system to courageously approach the school about her daughter’s concerns. On the other hand, the parent of Via (F15Yr10) felt he could not do much about Via’s brother’s expulsion from school due to his embarrassment about his son’s behaviour and his belief that his English was

'not good enough' to negotiate a favourable outcome. This parent could also have asked another relative to approach the school on his behalf but decided against it, rationalising it as already a hopeless situation. In this example, the inability or hesitation to contact and communicate with the school led to significant consequence for the son who subsequently dropped out altogether.

This study showed some parents to respond differently to school actions, depending on whether the matter concerned a son or daughter. Whereas the two fathers whose sons had been disciplined at school were reluctant to approach the specific schools about their son's behaviour, it was obvious from the interviews that they would have responded differently had the matter concerned their daughters. But both fathers revealed in the interviews that this was simply behaviour they did not expect from their daughters. Both fathers said they had never received any complaints from the school about their daughters and said they did not expect to hear any negative reports from school about them. It was a different matter with boys with some parents almost expecting that they would most likely act out or mis-behave at school. In these instances the parents seemed to have a very good understanding of their children's strengths and weaknesses. In terms of schooling, though, it was apparent from the interviews that parents were more likely to communicate with the school for matters that concerned a daughter. This observation is consistent with the broader freedoms conventionally accorded to boys, while girls found school, home and social activities were more closely scrutinised and controlled. The exception to this was the case of Sela where her parents were kept in the dark when she was withdrawn from school but became very upset and angry about her withdrawal when they found out the truth.

On their part, some parents found themselves able to contribute meaningfully towards school activities utilizing their skills and knowledge. These involvements included fundraising for the school sports team, helping out as a sports coach and serving on the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Financial assistance was another area that schools provided which was well-received by parents. Two

sets of parents in this study were grateful to receive financial assistance for their children in the form of funds to pay for a school jersey and for assistance with year camp fees. Such financial assistance, which may be regarded as minimal for some families, was welcomed by the two families concerned which is a significant revelation considering that in PI cultures, most people like to present as proud and self-sufficient. However in these few cases, parents were able to request and receive assistance from schools. This small act of assistance from schools was highly appreciated by the receiving families, who in turn developed a positive connection to the school and consequently sent younger children to the same school whilst promoting the school to other relatives. These examples indicate the significance of financial need amongst some of the families involved in the study and indicate an area of need that could be addressed and further explored as a matter for strengthening family and school connections.

5.3.3 Providing academic support

On the whole, the majority of parents were seen to be providing the necessary support to their children to the extent possible within their means and capability. The more experienced they were in the Victorian education system, the easier it was for parents to adjust to new pressures or expectations placed on them by their children's schooling. These parents also acknowledged that their adolescent children continued to require close supervision, care and support even when they had reached their teens, and were developing into more mature and independent learners. As such, they tried not to increase home responsibilities and add stress to learners as they moved towards the higher end of secondary schooling. It became obvious during the study that the secondary school phase was daunting for some parents and that their lack of confidence meant that some students lost support at a time when they were in most need of it.

Some parents actually decreased their level of academic support as their children advanced to higher levels of secondary schooling. This withdrawal, although unintentional in most cases, coincided with periods when parents felt

unable to provide assistance to the appropriate level of academic work required. While some parents may have wanted to support their children, they did not feel confident in providing the assistance to the conceptual and academic level required by the school. In such situations, parents deferred this responsibility to their children and allowed them to make important decisions about their schooling or personal goals themselves. Sometimes, this action resulted in the participant's goals diverging from the parents' wishes as shown in Sela's (F16Yr11) case wherein she 'managed' her own pathway from Year 12 without the knowledge or approval of her parents. Sela may have done this to avoid disappointing her parents as they were likely to disagree with the pathway chosen. She was also motivated to lessen the emotional stresses at home, given her roles in caring for her ill father and assisting her overworked mother. Perhaps things could have turned out better for Sela if her parents had been aware of her schooling situation in the first place and approached the school to discuss alternative options. However, conversations with the school staff and Sela herself confirmed that her mother was often too busy due to working nightshifts and caring for a sick spouse to visit the school or take calls from the school regarding her daughter's schooling.

For some students, a decrease in supervision within the home also coincided with, and was reinforced by the growing independence of the young person and their ability to assume more responsibility for themselves. In acquiring more responsibility from parents, young people felt more relaxed and confident about exploring their interests, priorities and responsibilities, both at home and at school. But this independence did not always work in the best interest of the young person. For example in Visi's (F16Yr11) case, her mother allowed her to spend longer hours at school after classes, believing that she could complete homework there and seek help from teachers. In her view, her child's presence at the school after hours would enable her to access the assistance and resources that she needed for her school work that could not be provided at home. This was an allowance that she provided to Visi who was in Year 11 but

not to her younger daughter who she thought was still too young to be given this freedom.

However there was no evidence that the daughter received such assistance from teachers in after-school hours as Visi did not improve her school work as a result of the new-found freedom. Later that year, to the disappointment of Visi's mother, Visi failed her mid-year English exam and was ultimately transferred to an alternative education setting. While her mother expected her daughter to be studying at school after hours, Visi was spending time playing sports or hanging out with her friends. To Visi's mother, giving her daughter permission to remain on the school grounds after school was a way of providing her with flexibility and responsibility for completing work at school but this action was viewed differently by Visi. Unknown to her mother, Visi confided to the researcher that she actually preferred spending time with her mother at home rather than staying back at school after hours but she realized that her mother had to work long hours to support the family. This incident highlights a misunderstanding between Visi and her mother about ways to support Visi with her school work and her wellbeing more generally.

Many parents expressed concern that they found themselves becoming more distanced from the school as the children progressed towards higher levels of secondary schooling. On the home front, this also coincided with a time when parental supervision of school-related activities also diminished. Some parents were seen to shift some of the supervision and monitoring of homework responsibilities to their children at this time, regarding them as better informed about school than themselves. This role reversal was evident in terms of decisions regarding homework or study which parents were least confident about. The parents of Sela (F16Yr11), Jela (M17Yr12), Via (F15Yr10) and Ellie (F14Yr9) all shared the view that their children were more knowledgeable about school issues and better able to make the right decisions. This situation was reversed in Ama's (F17Yr12) family because her mother was degree qualified,

aware of Ama's rights as a learner and able to exercise '*a feel for the game*' (Mills, 2008).

In summary, the interviews with parents and family members of the study participants revealed that despite the high value placed on senior secondary schooling as a bridge to advance to tertiary level study, some parents found the secondary school phase to be quite challenging and their lack of confidence and support to navigate this stage means that students lose support at a time when they are in great need of it.

5.3.4 Communicating with the school

The parents interviewed said that having good communication with the school was important for bringing up academic and disciplinary concerns about their children and viewed parent–teacher meetings to be necessary but emphasized that they attended only if the children were failing or misbehaving. Sometimes parents sent other family members to school meetings because they could not attend themselves due to time constraints or because they felt these relatives could represent them better at school as they had better language skills. However, three sets of parents did consider these meetings to be very important and took action on the basis of teacher feedback to engage outside help, purchase resource materials and relax home responsibilities to assist their child's progress. Generally, most parents spoke of positive interactions with school personnel and had themselves either assisted with running school programs or sought financial assistance from schools.

But there were also occasions in the study when some parents felt that the school did not deal with their concerns appropriately or fairly. When faced with such disappointments, some parents felt incapacitated to act appropriately due to a feeling of 'shame' or of '*putting themselves out*' in unfamiliar situations or spaces. This cultural aspect of 'shame' or sense of vulnerability is best illustrated in the cases of two fathers whose sons had been withdrawn for behavioral breaches but did not submit complaints to the respective schools

although they were clearly upset about the schools' actions. The shame of exposing their own misunderstandings of the way the system works possibly led to their resistance to approach the school for advice or clarification. A similar response is observed from Visi's mother when she agreed with the school to withdraw her daughter and transfer her to an alternative school setting. Initially, Visi's mother had been disappointed that her daughter had failed her mid-year English examination due to not receiving extra tuition and support from the school. However, she did not inform the school about it, instead accepting that Visi be withdrawn and transferred to another setting. The fear or shame of exposing a lack of 'feel for the game' or insufficient understanding of the system may have led to this outcome for Visi. The only parent who submitted an academic-related complaint to school personnel was Ama's mother who successfully negotiated for her daughter to be re-instated in VCE Chemistry, a subject that both mother and daughter felt was an important pre-requisite for applying for a science related course at university, in line with Ama's VCE plans.

There were parent-initiated interactions with the school when and where parents deemed it important and necessary to do so. Interestingly, the reason for most school-initiated contact was for discipline and behavioural issues whilst most of the parent-initiated contacts related to attendance at social events and financial assistance as shown in Table 5.2. In some way, this reflects the attitudes of the different parties towards the appropriate reasons for making mutual contact. Where the schools were more interested in administrative issues (behaviour and parent-teacher attendance), the parents were more interested in attending social or celebratory events and seeking financial assistance but not so confident or forthcoming to discuss behavioural or academic issues.

Table 5-2 Nature of School and parent initiated communication

Reason for contact	No. of contacts made	School Initiated contact	Follow up
Parent Teacher interviews	3	<p><i>'I take these meetings very seriously and make sure I follow up at home'</i> -Parent of Sei and Sio</p> <p>'When I did not show up for PTA, the school called to ask if I had any concerns about my daughter at school'- Parent of Lali.</p> <p>'My husband normally meets with the school and he told me her Maths result is poor'-Parent of Esi</p>	Extra tutoring
Administrative	1	'To collect my son as there was a fire at the school' – Parent of Edi	Yes
Homework	1	'To check that my son had completed his homework properly' (Parent of Lisi).	Yes
Discipline	4	<p><i>My son had behaviour issues and was withdrawn</i> but I did not approach the school.</p> <p><i>My son was expelled for behavioural issues</i> and we only found out after he was sent home.</p> <p>My son's friend was involved in a fight and we were called in to discuss his involvement.</p> <p>My daughter's friend was involved in a bullying incident and my daughter stood up for her.</p>	<p>None</p> <p>None</p> <p>Warning at home</p> <p>Warning at home</p>
Social activities	4	Attend a school fundraising event, school concert or rugby match.	Attended
Total	13		
		Parent Initiated Contact	
Finance	2	<p>I needed help towards payment of Year 12 jersey</p> <p>We needed help to pay for school camp fees</p>	<p>Assisted</p> <p>Assisted</p>

Academic	2	School asked daughter to withdraw from VCE subject. My daughter failed mid-year English exam and I went to the school to discuss school options' Visi's mother.	Decision overturned Student eventually withdrawn
Complaint about teacher	1	'My daughter had an issue with a certain teacher so I went to find out' Mother of Neli.	Principal intervened with positive outcome
Total	5		

In a few instances, parents approached schools for academic related issues and felt they were within their rights to be able to seek answers on matters affecting their child. One parent (Ama's mother) successfully negotiated with the school about her concern. But there were others who were not so successful. For example, when Visi's mother approached the school to ask why her daughter was failing her subjects, she was advised to withdraw her daughter and transfer her to an alternative educational setting to complete VCAL. Both Visi (F16Yr11) and her mother agreed to this suggestion without questioning if there might be other options to keep Visi at school and provide support. Whilst others might view this action as an attempt by the school to deflect responsibility for Visi's poor performance, both Visi and her mother believed the school was acting in their best interests. In another case, Sela's parents did not approach the school to discuss her withdrawal from Year 12 VCE but were nevertheless disappointed and angry when they found out about the outcome and the alternative education pathway. For them, there was no other way for Sela to get to university except through the VCE pathway and they were embarrassed about her withdrawal from school. The difficulties experienced in communicating with Sela's parents probably led the school to believe they were not interested and that there was little point explaining Sela's options to them. On the contrary, Sela's parents were interested in their daughter's progress at school but their home circumstances (sick father, mother on night shift work and

single income) often kept them busy and focussed on more immediate and urgent issues at home.

Sometimes, a parent had enough information about the issue at hand but was hesitant to approach the school due to language difficulties or fear of causing further problems for their child or other family members at the same school. Some thought that their intervention may not provide a useful result or cause further embarrassment to the family. This feeling of uncertainty, vulnerability and hopelessness was expressed by one parent in the following way:

“My son got suspended for some behavioral issue and we were told of his suspension after he left school. I was very upset but what can I do about it? Not much because there is not much information or explanation from the school and also he has already been suspended... my daughter also goes to the same school so I have to make sure she is not affected by her brother’s actions” (Parent of Esi, September 2012).

The nature and level of parent initiated interactions with school personnel depended largely on two factors; the parents’ level of confidence in communicating in English and their familiarity and knowledge of the school system. These situations send a message that parents and significant others who help make decisions for children need better assistance and clearer information and understanding about the options available to learners at critical points of their learning especially at times of crisis, such as possible suspension or withdrawal, and when considering post school options.

5.3.5 School pathways

When asked about their awareness of key senior secondary school programs (VCE, VCAL and VET), most parents said they were aware of these pathways and understood their importance in their children’s schooling. While some parents had read and understood the information sent from school, the volume and complexity of information about subject choices at Year 10 was sometimes too confusing for other parents. Some parents (eg the parents of Visi and Lela) asked for assistance from other relatives to help them understand the material and the implications before making decisions for their children. One parent said

that she used the internet to find out further information about VCE and VCAL. At times, there were conflicts between the child's interest area and the parents' wishes. Three parents acknowledged that they had let their children make their own decisions about the Senior Certificate (VCE or VCAL or VCE (VET) pathway while nine (9) parents said they took part in making the decisions with their children.

Sometimes, the participants made their choices on the basis of their own understandings of their strengths and weaknesses in certain subjects and on the basis of teacher or peer feedback. For example, Via (F15Yr10) with little intervention or input from her parents, chose a VCE pathway on the basis of her test results, teacher and peer feedback and her desire to become a school teacher. On the other hand, Jela (M17Yr12) similarly decided to do VCE, knowing full well that he wanted to find employment as soon as he left school, and would not be pursuing academic study afterwards. The lack of consistency in parent perspectives and children's choices in regards to post-compulsory schooling choices demonstrates that at certain times, learners ended up making pathway choices without their parents' involvement, either because the parent could not assist in the selection or because they feared their parents might select options that they did not like or were not academically suited to. This gap in understanding of pathways caused Elli's (F14Yr9) parent to think his son was undertaking the academically focused VCE when he was actually following a VCAL pathway and hoping to do trades course at TAFE.

An important aspect of schooling for this group of families relates to the issue of non-school education settings and pathways. This issue is best illustrated in the story of Sela (F16Yr11) who was withdrawn from Year 12 VCE and who then started a Certificate 4 course in TAFE at the local dual sector institution. Sela's parents viewed her transfer to the TAFE Certificate course as a failure because the pathway diverged from their expectation that she complete Year 12 VCE at school and transition directly to university to study a degree in nursing. Sela's transition to TAFE rather than a university was disappointing to her parents who

had hoped she would be the first of their children to complete VCE and attend university. Even though her parents were not happy about her choice, Sela eventually followed the pathway suggested by her school and her older cousin who was also doing nursing studies, knowing that it would, in time, put her back on track to pursuing her goal of becoming a nurse. What was important to Sela was that she would still be able to make up for her parent's disappointment in another way although she had let them down by leaving school early.

"My goals are still the same. It's a bit shady now coz it is harder to get onto the nursing course now but I will get there - it is just that it will take longer to get into the course" (Sela, Interview 3, Sept, 2013).

Whilst Sela's parents were not happy with her entering a TAFE pathway, the parents of Visi (F16Yr11) were grateful for the assistance given by the school to transfer their daughter to an alternative education setting to do Year 12 VCAL. In the beginning, Visi's mother had expressed some concern that the school had not provided enough academic assistance to her daughter, causing her to fail her mid-year English exam. However when the school advised that Visi could be transferred to an alternative setting to do Year 12 VCAL, she acknowledged the benefits of this option. Both Visi and her mother later agreed that the move had been the right choice as the alternative education institution (Centre for Adult Learning) provided a flexible, less structured and hands-on approach in an adult learning setting that Visi was comfortable with.

The experiences of these two participants highlight the importance of understanding alternative pathway options of PI learners and the reasons for such changes or trajectories. In both Sela and Visi's situations, the focus of both learners was on continuing their schooling journeys even if it meant compromising on their initial goal of completing VCE and going directly to university. Both of these participants followed alternative pathways that involved further education in areas still related to their original goals. Although one of them had the support of her mother to pursue the revised pathway, the parents of the other participant did not, demonstrating a need for more support and

advice to gain a better understanding of the post-school pathways available to learners. A better explanation about pathway options and outcomes could have eased the tensions that Sela's parents felt about Sela leaving school and enrolling in an alternative educational setting. Coincidentally, the study revealed that the more experienced and educated parents had more flexible attitudes towards pathways, preferring their children to select their own pathways and expressing greater understanding, if the children were unable to achieve the educational outcomes and pathways they had originally planned. At other times, less educated parents left their children the responsibility to select their own pathways so long as these were generally aligned to the wishes of their parents. In some cases though, the participants experienced pressure to pursue careers in fields that were unrelated or irrelevant to their own interests or subject strengths.

5.4 The centrality of family

In the next section, the case histories of three participants - Ama (F17Yr12), Sela (F16Yr11) and Jela (M17yr12) - whom you met in Chapter 4 are retold to provide insights into the varied and complex lived experiences of young people as they participate and engage in the senior secondary schooling. These stories convey some of the realities that young people encounter during the critical years of secondary schooling and tell of both planned and unexpected events and shifting occurrences at home that affect learner's educational trajectories and pathways. These factors are organised under four headings: family situation and educational experience, community engagement, cost of education and learner personal agency.

5.4.1 Family situation and educational experience

The parents and families involved in this study regarded the school as an integral part of their child's life and of their own through their child. They all shared one common purpose; that their children do well at school, go on to TAFE or university if they wished, find a good job that pays well and live fulfilling lives that will take care of themselves and their families. A simple enough goal

but as seen in the stories of Ama, Sela and Jela, the pathways towards achieving these educational goals were varied and complex for each participant and their families, and were informed by their unique situations and circumstances.

Ama's parents attempted to provide as stable a home environment as possible despite the parents living separately from each other. The parents' educational background and experiences informed their understanding of the home setting required to support their children's learning and they made deliberate efforts to provide the physical, emotional and intellectual supports for Ama. A smooth transition from primary schooling right through to senior secondary schooling paved the way for a positive school to university pathway. Key elements included a stable and supportive home environment, close and safe relationships with both parents and extended family and access to good role models in educational achievement. The parents made it their priority to support Ama, using a combination of PI cultural and western practices to strengthen their daughter's educational position. They attended school meetings, read school newsletters and documents, displayed school prizes and graduation gowns prominently at home, supplied necessary school resources and encouraged the children to develop self-discipline and self-awareness through observance of culturally relevant behaviour and discipline at church.

In Sela's home, her mother was often busy in her primary bread-winner role as Sela's father was ill and could no longer work. Sela spent many hours at home caring for her father or babysitting her siblings' children. The educational experiences of both her parents created an environment in the home that was less conducive to learning. Neither parent had experienced secondary schooling in Australia and were unfamiliar with the schooling supports required by their daughter. As their older children had not completed senior secondary schooling, these parents were unaware of the higher levels of support and concentration required by Sela to succeed at this level of schooling. Due to their comparative poverty (brought about by personal challenges such as sickness and reliance

on a single shift work income), they could not provide alternative home-work support, professional tutors or the material resources that many other students accessed at this important stage of schooling. A lack of information and awareness about pathways also presented as a significant barrier for Sela's parents in understanding their daughter's eventual withdrawal from school. Having experienced most of their education in the Islands, these parents saw the pathway to higher education as a linear continuum from Year 12 VCE direct to university and were unaware of other non-school pathways. They remained unconvinced about the wisdom of Sela's decision to enrol in a TAFE course and had not visited the school to seek information about Sela's withdrawal or the nature and purpose of her next pathway. Due to their busy lives, they had not maintained a close connection with the school and did not think it appropriate at a late stage in Sela's schooling to ask the school for information and assistance to support their daughter and themselves.

Jela lived with his father and young cousin who was of the same age and who also attended Year 12 at the same school. Jela received little support for his learning at home because his father worked night shifts and was always tired during the day. There was no other adult in the household to offer assistance with homework or provide social or emotional supports to Jela and his cousin at home. Due in part to his night shift hours and limited school experience, Jela's father was unable to provide Jela and his nephew Timo with homework help. He had little time to communicate with the school and conceded that he knew very little about the happenings at school. Nevertheless he encouraged both Jela and his nephew Timo to do well at school and to ask teachers for assistance. Whether the boys made good on this encouragement is another question but Jela did admit to having little interest in school work, stating that he attended mostly to socialise with friends, play rugby and to keep his father happy. Jela had an aunt who lived close by who was able to assist him with his studies but he never sought her assistance despite frequently visiting her house to meet with other young PI there.

A supportive and stable family environment and a solid socio-economic base are important elements in building a conducive learning setting. However, these elements alone were not sufficient for successful pathways, as illustrated in Ama's situation where the cost of university tuition threatened to block her transition from school to higher education. On the other hand, in Sela and Jela's homes, the limitations involved in the actual employment type and nature of the main income earner threatened the provision of physical, material and socio-economic support, homework assistance and supervision which both students needed to support their schooling. In Sela's case, her mother's educational background (Year 12) qualified her to provide homework support but her extended work hours, needed to bring in income and meet household bills, were more urgent to the family situation. In Jela's case, the absence of a significant adult in the home in the evenings meant that there was no one available to check on his wellbeing and to supervise homework and monitor his progress at school.

The level of educational experience that a family member accumulates also presented as a critical element of the family supportive framework. In the context of this study, this experience was accumulated individually or through other family members and one's social network. The total accumulated educational experience of a family proved critical in the case of Ama whose educated mother was able to facilitate an enabling home situation by purposefully creating a learning space that served as a shrine to the value of education. Whereas Ama's parents were able to draw on their own educational experiences to strategically guide their views, actions and understandings about Ama's learning needs at school and at home, the families of Sela and Jela were unable to draw on comparable resources because of their limited experiences of education. Within these homes, the absence of family members with this type and level of educational experience placed these two young people at a disadvantage. This was exacerbated by the fact that the main income earner worked night shifts and was therefore not physically present to assist with

homework and discuss school-related matters in the evenings when both young people needed this assistance.

Educational experience is also closely linked to familiarity with the school system. Ama's parents were able to familiarise themselves with school activities and events by reading letters and correspondences from the school and interacting closely with their children. They were able to navigate the school's demands by actively seeking information about the school and by communicating with the school as and when needed. This did not happen in the case of Sela, whose parents proved unaware of their daughter's withdrawal from Year 12 VCE, or for Jela, whose father cited tiredness and having 'no time' as a reason for his poor communication with the school. Jela's father was so time-poor that he could only be interviewed by telephone, and his limited involvement in school-related matters was evident in his suggestion that questions regarding Jela and his cousin Timo's schooling should be addressed to the two young men, not him, as they were more familiar with school issues. It is apparent that in Sela and Jela's homes, their families had limited confidence about their ability to assist their children in the secondary school years as they regarded their children to be better positioned to deal with school issues than themselves. The withdrawal of these parents at this critical stage however caused problems for both young people. As we have seen in the context of her parent's decreasing involvement in her schooling, Sela made a pathway decision which has had lasting ramifications at home and has affected her attempts to build a pathway to higher education. Jela's withdrawal from school at the end of Year 12 was triggered by low achievement and poor engagement at school but limited support and financial difficulties experienced at home may have also played a role. Left to their own devices, these young people found staying on at school without support at home too hard.

In all three families, there were clear role models within the extended family and community networks. Ama's mother was a constant presence at home and could provide the modelling behaviour needed to assist her daughter. It helped

too that she was employed in the labour market area that Ama aspired to enter and through work, church and social contacts, could access relevant information pertaining to her daughter's aspirations and interests. Sela, on the other hand, was very close to an older cousin who was studying a nursing course at university. She drew encouragement and emotional support from this cousin to prepare for her own post-school journey. Jela had an aunt who was a community leader and a university graduate with whom he had regular and accessible contact. Having these role models around them was certainly beneficial for Sela and Jela. Nevertheless, their presence paled into the background when considered alongside the immediate and urgent social and financial difficulties encountered at home.

5.4.2 Socio-cultural factors

Socio-cultural patterns refer to community mores that are accepted as part of PI ways of doing things. Some common Pacific mores include: working together towards a common goal, having a strong connection to culture, respect for elders, observation of obligation and reciprocity, and an expectation for children to maintain traditional practices such as speaking the language, knowing family roots, being truthful to one's heritage and having a belief in God (Gegeo, 1998; Sanga, 2012; Thaman, 2008). Added to this is the importance of maintaining firm discipline so children can play important roles at home, at church and in the community. These were regarded as important attributes to instill in children as foundations for citizenship. At the same time, there is an expectation that children do well at school and secure themselves a good job to live a fulfilling successful life whereby they can help themselves and their families. Sometimes, these expectations aligned in culturally appropriate ways to support schooling but at other times, these socio-cultural factors actually challenged or impeded the fulfilment of schooling expectations as shown in the next paragraphs.

In Ama's home, her mother enforced strict discipline on the children and restricted the relationships they formed to selected groups such as members of

their church group. The family's attitude towards community events and relationships is encapsulated in the sentence below:

“I try to keep my children away from community events, especially if it is a setting that encourages competition, jealousy or promote unproductive behaviours such as smoking, drinking, interacting with the opposite sex “
(Ama's mother, Interview 1, Feb 2012).

Although these views may be regarded as traditional and restrictive, Ama's mother saw fit to enforce them to keep her children focussed on their schooling. To Ama's family, these were effective for minimising interactions with people who might lead the children astray or encourage them to engage in undesirable activities. Many PI parents commonly use these cultural strategies for monitoring children's behaviour allowing children to only mix within familiar settings such as churches, schools and community events. But as seen from the stories of Sela and Jesse, these strategies did not always work. In Ama's family, these restrictive rules worked because she accepted that these strategies were necessary supports put in place to assist her educational journey. Without Ama's own agreement to follow these rules, this support mechanism may not have been as effective and could have instead triggered negative behaviour.

Ama's sense of self-efficacy was evident in the way she responded to her family's high expectations of her, both in terms of her school work and her choice of relationships. Without support from her close-knit family, Ama may have been unable to draw the strength and confidence to overcome the obstacles she faced along the way. On their part, her parent's strong support and belief in their daughter's abilities played an important role in developing her confidence and raising her aspirations. Although she could not interact with other community members locally, Ama maintained close connections with her cousins in the Islands and was able to draw social capital from immediate family members and like-minded friends from school and her church.

Like Ama, both Sela and Jesse also had strong community networks through their families and church networks. Sela depended greatly on her cousin and church as constant sources of support while Jela was an active member of his church, and a constant factor in his life. It was also the one place where he could be found for this project, even if he stopped communicating through phone, email or blog post. He was also a member of his community youth group which often met at his aunt's house. All three participants saw the church as a culturally-accepted social space in which they could interact safely, comfortably and meaningfully. For the families, the church was a safe haven to keep children away from negative social influences whilst encouraging youth to engage in acceptable forums such as choir or band, youth rallies, language study and fundraising. The church presented a space for these families to meet, celebrate together and perform social and cultural events (Crocombe, 2001).

Unlike Ama, Jela and Sela did not have the constant supervision of parents at home to supervise and monitor their relationships. As we have seen, both were active with their church and attended of their own free will without their parents. Most of the young people they mixed with, therefore, were from family or church. As a boy, it was culturally acceptable for Jela to enjoy more freedom than Sela and Ama. He could interact with more people and hang out in different spaces. Jela mainly hung out with cousins of similar age, either on the rugby pitch, at the gymnasium, in shopping malls or at church. With more freedom and less pressure to be at home, boys like Jela could extend their unsupervised time to avoid doing homework or studying at home. This may well have contributed to Jela's markedly diminishing interest in school work in his later school years, a feature that he was willing to share with friends and the researcher but not with his father who remained adamant that his son do VCE. The unsupervised time afforded to boys can be seen to present potential problems for some PI boys whose interest or engagement at school may be compromised as a result.

But girls were also seen to experience challenges in managing cultural demands and school priorities. For girls like Sela, although there was more pressure to stay at home, in a more regulated context, the expectation was that much of this time would be used for helping around the home, looking after younger or older relatives and doing house chores. In these ways, the gendered nature of roles within the home both conflicted with and distracted the efforts of participants to focus time and attention on their schooling needs and educational outcomes.

5.4.3 Family income

Financial stress was a constant concern for some of the families involved in this study especially those relying on single incomes or those with insecure and temporary employment where the day-to-day concern was on sustaining livelihoods and meeting immediate and urgent needs. In Sela's family, financial stress caused her family to consider withdrawing her from school to find employment that could assist with family costs. In Jela's case, seeing his father struggle with payments was a difficult daily observation which may have influenced his decision to leave school and find work and contribute meaningfully towards the family's financial situation. Even if they had wanted, Sela and Jela's parents often did not have the time, energy or academic experience to assist their children. On the other hand, Ama's professional mother was able to find the time and energy to support Ama with homework and monitor her studies at home.

From all accounts, it would appear that Ama was destined for a successful pathway to higher education. However families such as hers faced a further financial barrier to participate in higher education. As a permanent resident in Australia, Ama did not qualify for a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) for tertiary education fees and her parents could not afford to meet this cost. They seemed to have overlooked this contingency in their otherwise strong preparations to assist Ama in reaching her schooling goals. On the other hand, both Jela and Sela were Australian citizens and eligible for a Commonwealth

Supported Place (CSP) but did not have the educational results or interest to access pathways to tertiary level education. Sela, for example, was an Australian citizen and eligible to access CSP but due to being withdrawn from VCE due to poor attendance, was following a VE pathway that would eventually take more time and costing her an increased Higher Education Commonwealth Supplement (HECS) debt.

In families where both parents were working or where the one parent had a professional job there was less anxiety about family finances and living costs. Some families consistently had to make difficult financial choices; whether to spend money improving their own education or their children's education or pay community/church contributions, send remittance payments to families in the Islands, save for a house deposit or save funds to travel home for important occasions like attending weddings or funerals. These cultural obligations were very important to all the families involved in the study who prioritized these expenditures in family budgets, when and where necessary and were often able to find money to travel or send money overseas.

Again the ability to understand and navigate the post-school system was unequally shared across the study group. While Ama's family had experienced some financial concerns, these were minimal compared to the high cost of tuition required for Ama's study at university. There were other parents who actively planned their child's pathways on the basis of their understanding of the costs involved. One parent who realized that her daughter would be ineligible to receive CSP funds if she undertook tertiary study in Australia was considering sending her daughter to a Pacific regional university where a degree would be cheaper. Another parent whose son was commencing TAFE studies said that her family was already saving to meet these costs. But there were other parents who did not share these views, stating that it was unfair that they could not access CSP assistance for their children's university or TAFE education especially since they had worked and paid taxes in Australia for many years. These families did not understand why the Government could pay for university

tuition fees for refugees but not other migrants who had not taken up citizenship. They also could not understand why primary and secondary school education was free but not courses at tertiary level.

The subject of finance, although very important, was sensitive and often avoided during the interview discussions. However, interviews with family and community members revealed that it is a major issue that can seriously impact the educational outcomes and transitions of PI learners. In Ama's case, the family was not financially prepared to meet the cost of her university fees, despite having firm and long-standing goals for Ama to attend university after Year 12. Whether they were simply unaware of the costs or knew but ignored the requirements is unclear but they were ultimately able to deal with this challenge through acting on advice provided by Ama's enrolling university. Ama's experience has since helped other families in the study to act on the option of acquiring Australian citizenship in order to further their children's education. Four other young people in this study are affected by this condition of their visa status and have started to prepare themselves for addressing this challenge.

In a few families including those of Jela and Sela, their financial stresses were not related to cost of university tuition but to the ongoing financial poverty experienced by their families. These young people were seen to be tempted or pressured to find work and help their families rather than place further financial burdens on their families for their education. As seen in these examples, the high cost of further education can actually deflate the aspirations and pathways of at least some PI young people, causing them to become disillusioned or disinterested in aspiring for higher levels of education.

5.4.4 Exercising personal agency

Personal agency refers to the ability to see oneself as having some control over the issues or matters that affect you (Sapin, 2013). The level of personal agency one has depends on the networks and relationships formed in one's social space so a home, school or church can be an important space in which to

develop and nurture one's personal agency. An important part of PI culture is the need to respect one's elders especially parents and older relatives and community members. In many PI homes, young people are expected to defer to their parents and similar behavior is expected towards teachers at school and pastors and elders at church. This cultural nurturing across settings has sometimes been criticized as a mechanism that produces quiet, non-assertive personalities amongst PI young people even though such a personality trait is regarded a positive attribute in both the home and social environments. In a western culture like Australia's, the expectation that young people need to demonstrate some control over some aspects of their lives, be independent, self-determining and responsible can conflict with PI's more collective sense of agency. In Ama's case, acquiescence with her parents' plans helped to reinforce her personal belief in the value of education and kept her resilient even when confronted with challenges to her educational pathway. Sela, on the other hand, was able to exercise personal agency when deciding to follow the TAFE pathway to achieve her dream of becoming a nurse but in doing so, went against her parents' wishes. She had been accustomed to making her own educational decisions and managed to keep the two worlds of home and school separate as a strategy to protect her parents from the disappointment of her withdrawal from school. Despite her journey being fraught with home and school stresses, Sela was eventually able to overcome these and continue the pathway that aligned with her personal goal. In Jela's case, the difficulties at home made him review his schooling position wherein he made a conscious decision that could help alleviate a difficult financial situation at home. Although his exit from school may be seen as a negative move, for Jela this was a necessary and positive action to help his family.

5. 5 Chapter summary

This chapter ascertained that the families in this study provided support to their children in different forms and levels depending on their capabilities. Some families were able to provide more support depending on their levels of educational experience, familiarity with the education system and their financial

resources. The participants were also able to support themselves through having a positive sense of agency and self-esteem and by their flexibilities in light of changing circumstances. Despite these differences, most parents in this study continued to place a high value on education and had high expectations from their children's participation in education. Additionally, their views of the importance of education had not changed and they continued to be hopeful of achieving better educational outcomes for their children generally. For this study at least, Anae's observation that "*...educational considerations such as providing space and time for homework were often relegated for other commitments such as cultural obligations, work commitments and financial limitations*" (Anae, 1998.p.129) is still relevant although some PI families have become more proactive about making the necessary changes within the home to better support their learner.

Chapter 6 The role of schools

The previous chapter looked at the ways that families perceived their roles towards schooling and the support that their children needed and received at school. The focus of this chapter is on schools as another important space in which young people engage and interact with other adults and peers and in which they develop mental and physical capacities and formulate important relationships. Most importantly, schools provide a space in which personal goals and aspirations can be developed, facilitated and transformed into reality. This chapter examines the perceptions of school staff about the engagement, achievement and pathways of PI learners at secondary school as a way to understand how the school supports and encourages PI learners and their families to achieve their educational goals. A second focus of this chapter is to investigate how schools view their own roles in providing general or specific forms of support to the PI cohort at school. The discussion is framed around three topics: staff perspectives of PI young people as learners and members of the school community, PI patterns of engagement, achievement and transition at school and specific challenges that PI encounter in achieving their educational and personal goals at school.

This chapter specifically addresses the following research sub-questions:

- ***1a) What are the common pathways of PI learners after leaving secondary school?***
- ***1b) What are the factors that determine young people's patterns of educational participation and engagement at secondary school?***
- ***1c) How has the school system, the immediate community and broader society responded to the needs and interests of PI learners in Melbourne?***

6.1 School staff participants

Twelve members of staff from five secondary schools in Melbourne's western region took part in this study as interview participants with the specific purpose

of providing a general perspective of the patterns of participation, engagement and achievement of the PI cohort at their respective schools, focusing on their in-class and out-of-class activities, overall school engagement and post-school pathways. Staff were not expected to provide information on individual students but rather asked to offer general observations and perspectives of the general PI cohort at their school and the ways they interacted with their learning, extra-curricular activities, staff and their peers. The interview questions sought to draw out school perspectives on the main challenges encountered by PI young people in terms of their learning and the impact of these challenges on the achievement of school goals and career pathways. The views and perspectives of the staff provided useful and interesting insights into the patterns and levels of school engagement that characterised PI cohorts at the school level.

All interviews were conducted and audio-recorded at the staff member's school and lasted between forty five (45) to ninety (90) minutes each. The availability of parents, school and teacher participants, it will be remembered, constituted an important condition of eligibility for participation in the study. Participating schools were accordingly selected on the basis of attendance by at least one study participant. In line with Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)⁸ regarding research in schools, ethics approval to work with the selected schools was sought and granted by the DEECD Research Unit and the Principals of seven schools (Schools A, B, C, D, E, F and G) were contacted to identify a staff member to be involved. One criterion for selection was that the staff member needed to have prior experience of working with students from multi-cultural backgrounds, preferably with PI learners. Of the seven schools invited, only five schools responded and an assortment of staff including one principal, a social worker, an equity officer, a music Lead teacher and several year level coordinators and subject teachers were selected for

⁸ The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) is the government body responsible for schooling in Australia. This Department has recently been renamed and is now called the Department of Education and Training (DET).

interview by the Schools. Four staff members from four schools took part in one or two individual interviews and in one school, two sets of group interviews were organised. The first group interview was held at the junior campus of the school (School E) where five staff comprising the Principal and four lead teachers participated. In the second group interview held at the senior campus of the same school (School E), two Year level coordinators and one school equity officer participated. Appendix 3 lists the schedule of interview questions used with members of school staff.

During the research period, there were some movements of students from and between schools. The most significant move involved eight students who had moved to post-school destinations by the close of the data collection period. Three went to university, three went to TAFE and the other two took up direct employment. The rest of the participants remained at secondary school. Out of the remaining 6, two students moved to other schools within the region over the data collection period. All seven schools that participated offered a VCE and VCAL curriculum stream in Years 11 and 12 but only five of them offered an additional VET component in these years which meant that subject offerings were limited in these schools. Out of the seven schools, only School D was a single sex school. Two schools did not respond to the invitation for a staff member to participate in the study. However, staff from the other five schools remained actively involved throughout the study and so the information gathered is based primarily on the experiences of staff from these five schools.

The Index of Community Social and Educational advantage (ICSEA) is a tool used to provide an indication of the socio-educational backgrounds of students at a particular school (Myschool Factsheet accessed from acara.edu.au on 26th October, 2015). ICSEA is benchmarked using a figure of 1000 as the average value and schools that fall under 1000 are said to be low in terms of socio-economic benchmark level. Only one of the schools (School F) had an ICSEA value of above 1000 while 6 of the 7 study schools showed a level below average of educational advantage. These figures are also closely linked with the percentage of Language other than English (LOTE) spoken at home.

Students attending schools with a higher percentage of LOTE also tended to be below average in ICSEA which suggest that these students mostly come from migrant or refugee backgrounds, a typical feature in this area of Melbourne.

Table 6.1 shows general demographic information about the seven schools and the number of participants and staff members involved from each school.

Table 6-1 Information about schools

(Sourced from Myschool Data, 2013)

	No. of participants	School Type	Sch Population	ICSEA	% of LOTE	PI at the school	No. of Interviews	Positions of staff
A	2 (0)	Government	1081	994	30 %	80	1	Teacher
B	2 (0)	Government	1120	920	81%	150	2	Teacher
C	3 (2)	Government	1130	935	83 %	70	2	Welfare officer
D	2 (3)	Catholic	728	963	65 %	100	1	Teacher
E	3 (1)	Government	910	909	54 %	250	2	Principal, Coordinators, teachers, equity officer
F	1 (0)	Government	1468	1074	17 %	4	0	None appointed
G	1 (0)	Catholic	1489	953	56 %	10	0	None appointed
Total No. of staff members								12

6.2 PI school enrolments

Being based in the western region of Melbourne which is recognised as a popular settlement area for migrants and refugees with multiple and diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds, the expectation was that the school populations would also reflect this rich diversity. Figure 6.1 below provides some information on the numbers of PI attending at the seven schools in 2012.

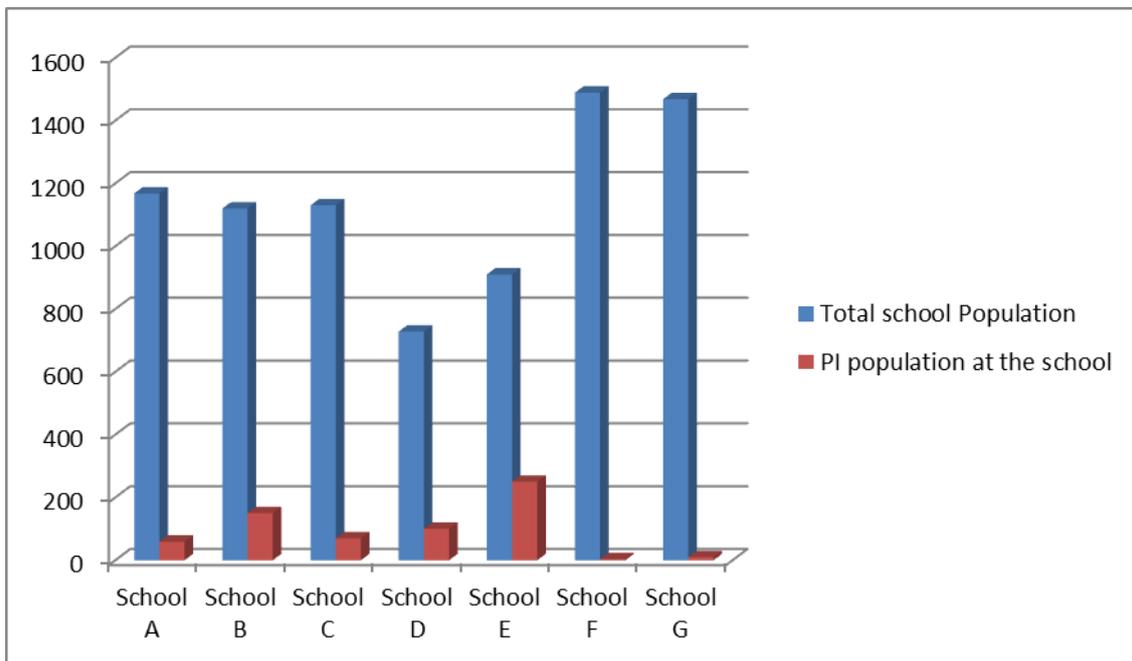


Figure 6-1 Estimated numbers of PI at the participating schools

(Source: Myschool data website).

Two schools (Schools B and C) recorded high percentages of students who spoke a LOTE (Language other than English at home) at 81% and 83% respectively. School D followed closely at 65% and Schools E and G each recorded around 55%. School A recorded a 30% LOTE while School F recorded the lowest at 17% and also an ICSEA (Index of Community Social and educational advantage) score of 1074 that was above the state average of 1000. The ICSEA scores of the other six schools were lower than the state average falling in at between 909 and 963. This implies that the school populations of six schools (Schools A, B, C, D, E and G) that were involved in

this study typically had students of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and also a lower than average socio-economic status. School F was the exception with a lower percentage of LOTE amongst the student population and a higher ICSEA score which implies that the families were mostly Australian born and first-language speakers of English and generally more affluent.

As shown in Figure 6.1 above, five of the participating schools (Schools A, B, C, D, E) each had a sizable PI student cohort compared to the other two schools (Schools F and G) which, according to the research participants from both schools, had fewer than 10 PI in each. School staff provided only estimates of the total PI numbers at their school, reporting there were difficulties in establishing accurate numbers as PI often listed New Zealand as their country of birth, as a result of families having migrated directly from that country thus masking their original ancestry. Statements such as these were common in all the schools.

“PI students constitute one of the bigger student groups with at least 10 to 20 Pacific students in each year level” (Teacher, School A).

“PI students make up the largest group with 20% to 25% of the total student population” (Teacher, School E).

However, it is most likely that these estimates of PI numbers provided by teachers included non-PI New Zealand students as was discovered when cross-checked against a list of students and their countries provided by School C. While the staff member had earlier estimated that there were about 70 PI at the school, the list produced by the school showed only 15 students who self-identified as being PI compared to 44 students who identified as being New Zealand born. The difficulties with identifying PI from New Zealand have been well-documented, causing Pryke (2014) to insist that using ancestry, rather than country of birth as a variable helps differentiate more clearly between New Zealanders and PI's who migrated through the New Zealand pathway.

In some schools, staff compared or combined the PI student numbers with the African student population at the school and made comments such as:

“The Islanders and Africans make up the biggest numbers of students here” (Teacher – School A).

“There is about 10 - 15 a year level, not a huge proportion, a similar proportion to African students’ and ‘at this school, maybe 30 % - 40 % is made up of PI and African” (Teacher, School C).

The reasons for comparing and combining these two student groups were not explicit, given the distinct cultural differences between the two groups but could be attributed to their background as NESB (Non-English speaking background), similar educational outcomes, student behaviour or appearance or the tendency for both groups to mix well with each other at school. In all the schools, the PI student population consisted mostly of students with a Samoan and Tongan ancestry except in School D, where most PI were of Tongan and Cook Islander background.

These figures show an increasing presence of PI learners in these schools. Schools B and C specifically reported increased enrolments of PI students in Year 7, most of whom entered through local feeder primary schools rather than entering at higher year levels from other school zones or overseas. Such numbers were expected to grow as more Pacific migrant families are drawn to this region for its close proximity to manufacturing businesses, multi-cultural identity and cheaper housing (Brimbank, Hobson’s Bay and Maribyrnong Council community profile reports, 2011) which also attract population groups that are of a lower socio-economic status and those seeking warehousing and factory-based employment opportunities. As more PI settle in this part of Melbourne, the expectation is that more of the newly-arrived relatives will subsequently choose to live in the area to be close to family members. Hau’ofa (2000) aptly describes this consistent clustering of PI in the statement;

“People live and interact most closely with other members of their immediate household, and with members of other households to whom they are related who live nearby” (Hau’ofa, 2000, p.133).

The tendency for families and community members to cluster together was evident in this study where families chose mostly local schools and local churches to attend.

Figure 6.2 shows a clustering of schools attended by the different families and individuals during the study period. A similar pattern was found with churches with individuals and families attending these institutions within their local area. Given the tendency for PI parents to prefer sending their children to local schools on the basis of geographical proximity and ease of access, it is likely that PI numbers in the region will grow.

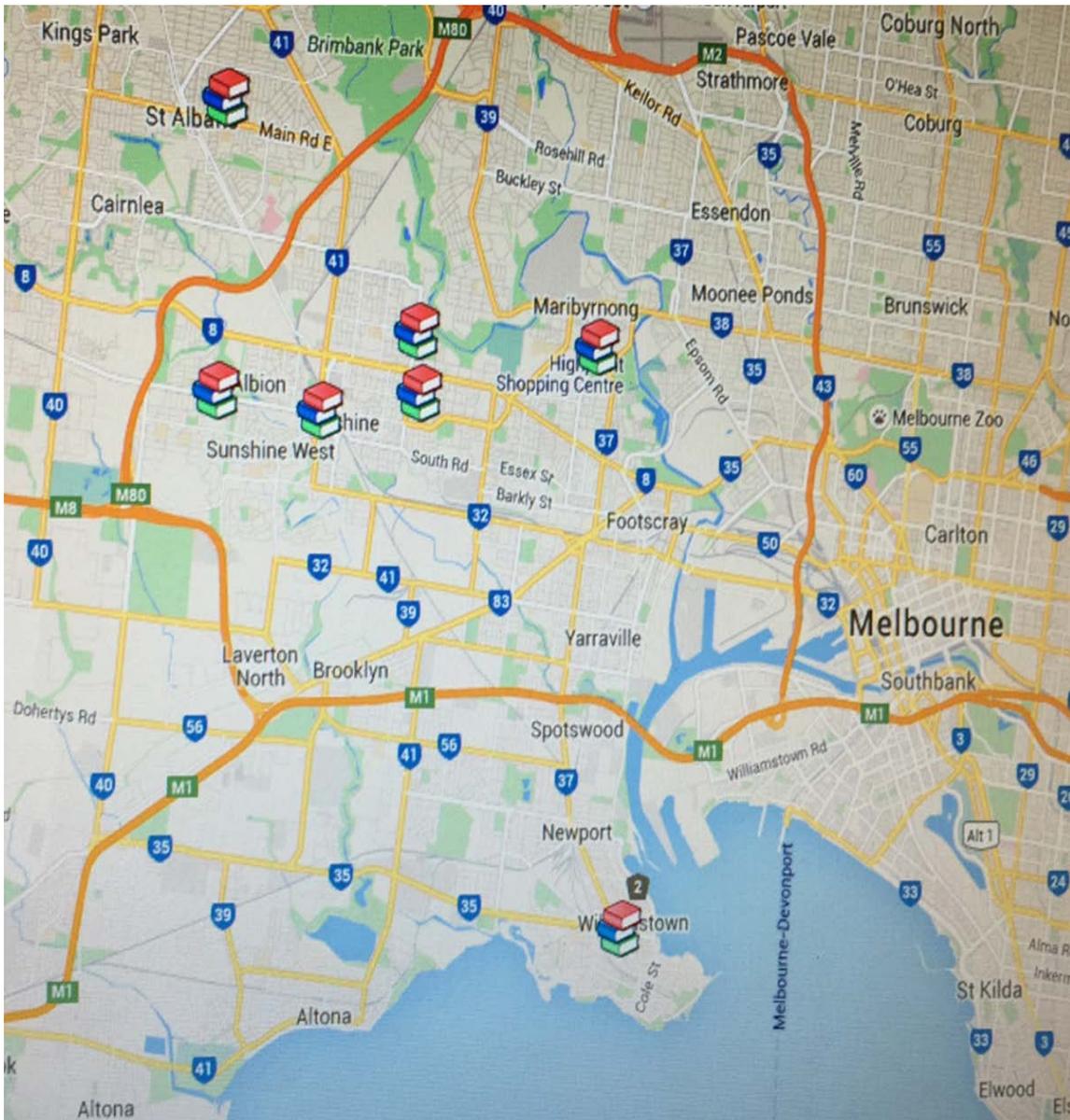


Figure 6-2: Location of Schools in the local area (Source: zeemaps.com)

6.3 Interactions with PI families and communities

All staff members involved in this study reported having had some form of interaction with PI families either on a professional or personal basis. The majority of these professional interactions occurred at school-initiated events such as parent-teacher meetings, parent-information sessions, end-of year award ceremonies or sports and music performances. Some of the interviewed staff also met with individual PI parents when they visited the schools specifically to discuss their child's academic progress or behavior. If and when

the interactions between staff and PI family members were related to student behaviour, staff reported that they found it easier to deal with mothers or female relatives who were found to be more responsive to tackling issues affecting their children. Fathers were said to become involved only when matters were serious such as students fighting or using drugs at school. One staff member reported that at her school, PI students sometimes got punished at home for breaching school rules and confirmed there had been a few students who had self-referred for support from the school when confronted with domestic violence issues at home. Although rare, she said that such instances had caused staff at the school to be cautious in their handling of matters that affected PI learners, especially in families and communities with known issues within the home.

Three of the staff members interviewed had had more personal contact with PI students and families than others. The equity officer in School E had taught many years in a Pacific country and said that he often greeted PI students 'in their own dialect' if he came across them at school. According to this staff member, relating to the students in this way created closer bonds with these students. Another staff member who was of Maori background had worked with PI learners in New Zealand and was well acquainted with Pacific cultures. In her role as year 7 Coordinator at School D, she had spent time counselling many PI girls and their parents as well as advocating for PI and Maori families to strengthen their social engagement at the school. The staff member who had the closest personal contact with PI students and their families was a subject Lead teacher. She had taught music at the school for over 20 years and had taught members of the same Pacific families through the years. She kept contact with past students through their younger siblings at the school and was often invited to social functions in which the young PI performed music at church or at youth rallies, sometimes using borrowed equipment from the school. Her husband also taught at the school and was the rugby coach. As music and rugby were popular subjects with PI, and many students continued to be involved in these subjects after school, both staff members maintained close and ongoing relationships with past and current PI students and their families.

As a result, they had a good understanding of young PI both at their school and within their communities.

“Pacific Islanders are very people-centered and want to know about you and talk about themselves. They do not respond well to formal relationships or settings. Many teachers do not know some of the PI boys beyond the brief encounter but when they get closer to them, they get pleasantly surprised at how nice some of the PI boys are” (Lead teacher for music, School B).

School staff also reported that some PI parents were actively engaged in organizing social events such as putting on cultural performances and raising funds for their children’s schools. In school A, one PI father organized a Polynesian dance group to perform at his son’s school fundraising event. At another school, where a ‘Parents and Friends Committee’ had been set up specifically to engage parents, staff reported that the PI parents were actively involved in organising the food and performing cultural activities on Cultural Day but were less engaged when it came to attending meetings or sessions that had an academic focus. School staff reported that PI parents tended to *‘lose interest and found it uncomfortable and difficult’* to engage actively in formal events. They also noted that PI parents possibly needed someone from their own cultural background to work with them to promote equal engagement in all forms of school-based activities.

6.4 General school engagement

Engagement at school is generally determined by two factors: a learner’s sense of belonging to the school and their level of participation in school activities, both in and outside of the classroom (Finn, 1998; OECD, 2003). The staff members involved in this study generally viewed PI learners to be well engaged at school and regarded the PI cohort as not any different to other migrant groups in a culturally diverse school. Some staff reported that the increased numbers of PI joining the schools in the last ten to fifteen years had contributed to higher visibility and better understanding of the PI cohort amongst school staff and students. The increased numbers of PI and the younger age at which

these students entered the schools had contributed towards an increasing acceptance of PI as part of the school's multi-cultural identity. The staff generally viewed and treated all students the same, irrespective of their ethnic background. Some staff members, through teaching or through the performance of their specialist roles at school had more frequent and different interactions with PI students than others. For example, the social welfare officer in School C mostly interacted with PI students for behavioural purposes while the music teacher in School B mostly interacted with those who chose music as a subject of study. Despite the diversity of these relationships and interactions, claims by all staff that PI students were engaged at school tended to affirm the views of the majority of learner participants who found school to be generally a fun, safe and comfortable space to learn and engage with others.

For these teachers, PI young people were said to have positive attitudes with a reputation of being polite, open and honest and mostly well-engaged in subjects such as physical education, drama, and music where a few had earned themselves high profiles at the school through involvement in these practical subjects and related extra-curricular activities. PI were described as particularly active in social events and at taking up leadership roles and organizing fundraising events for the school. PI learners were always willing to volunteer their time to help staff with out-of-class activities and staff attributed this willingness to PI being accustomed to helping out at home and at church where they practised these responsibilities. PI were also known to develop positive relationships with most teachers and able to mix well with other student groups. They were also respectful of others within the school community and of each other.

The school staff noted that PI engagement at school improved if and when the school offered subjects or extra-curricular activities that appealed to them. Hence schools which offered music or physical education and competitive rugby (which is unusual in an Australian Football League state) as subjects or extra-curricular activities attracted many PI students and their families who believed

their children could benefit from or even excel in these subjects or activities. Out of the five schools, Schools B and E had rugby teams which included many PI boys. One study participant admitted that the only thing that kept him at school was to participate in rugby competitions against other schools. In School A, one of the participants was in the school volleyball team and also played competition volleyball for a local club. Staff were openly proud of the achievements of PI in these extra-curricular areas but also expressed a need to see similar improvement and achievement in the academic and written work.

All five schools reported that there were no specialized forms of support provided for specific groups of students at school but there were clubs and extra-curricular activities organized that were open to all students and available according to the interests or talents of staff. In School B, having a sports teacher who had connections with a local rugby club helped the school set up a socialization program which interested a lot of PI boys. School E also had a rugby program which involved PI students, including girls. In School C, where there was no rugby, both PI girls and boys were part of the school volleyball team. In School A, one of the female participants (Visi) was in the school volleyball team. In School D, the PI girls took the lead in a weekly church session and in School B, the long-term connection between the music teacher and her students provided an opportunity for PI students to borrow school musical equipment for use in social events, attend music concerts and performances outside of school with parental consent. In individual schools, the personal talents and interests of certain staff helped to facilitate events and activities that particularly appealed to PI groups of students. However, these activities or programs were incidental and happenstance rather than systematic attempts initiated by schools to engage with or cater to PI learners as a cohort with specific academic and engagement needs. It brings to question the role of schools in meeting the social inclusion and equity needs of a cohort of students which by their own admission clearly require assistance to produce better schooling outcomes.

6.4.1 Dealing with school rules

Apart from attendance, school staff reported that PI students' attitudes to other aspects of school regulations were mostly positive. Students had no difficulties complying with uniform requirements or bringing in the necessary resources needed in the classroom. Lateness was described as sometimes an issue for some girls, and tended to get worse as they moved to the senior years and possibly '*tasked with more responsibilities at home*' (Teacher, School C). Teachers noted that lateness was sometimes an issue with siblings from the same family. In this study, one participant had been withdrawn from VCE Year 12 due to poor attendance and another student in Year 11 had received a warning about her sporadic attendance. A staff member from one of the schools reiterated the importance of attendance at the senior levels as follows:

"The school has a 90% attendance requirement but the state says it should be 80%. In Year 12, the attendance level is set by VCAA (who coordinates VCE) and the requirement has to be followed otherwise it affects the promotion policy. If the problem is only about attendance, we talk to parents and wellbeing staff. At the junior level, they can repeat a year level but at senior level, they cannot really repeat the level so have to be dealt with differently such as working with their parents and other agencies that deal with engagement or pathways" (Welfare worker, School C).

Interviewed staff mostly attributed student absences to family obligations such as caring for younger siblings or accompanying parents to medical or official appointments. Sometimes PI students were seen to leave school at short notice to travel overseas to attend family gatherings such as weddings or funerals. Such absences were frowned upon by teachers but regarded as non-negotiable in PI homes especially if the absence related to attendance at a family member's funeral. Sometimes learners stayed at home to care for younger siblings or older relatives if there was no other assistance available at home. In one school, one learner continually missed classes on one particular day of the week as outlined below.

"I have one student in Year 10 who stays at home on Tuesdays to support mum with various things, such as keeping Centrelink appointments. It has been difficult to explain to the family because the student wants to attend

but she cannot due to her family requests. Girls are mostly kept at home to help rather than boys. If a young person gets into trouble, they are kept home to do chores as punishment. A few students have been punished for talking to us about their problems at school and we are careful as it can lead onto other stuff” (Teacher School C).

At least half of the staff members interviewed were aware of the existence of negative perception towards PI students at their school. These teachers said that past occurrences which involved big groups of PI boys fighting with other migrant groups had led some new teachers to expect PI learners to be more difficult to deal with than others in terms of behaviour. These teachers also acknowledged that there were fewer fights nowadays and that the past violence and aggressive behaviour known to erupt between PI boys and other groups had actually dissipated over the years. They claimed that the various ethnic groups had now become much more cohesive and adaptive to the multi-cultural identity and nature of their schools.

“They are more compliant and more respectful now than they were before when they used to be more rebellious. There are fewer fights now at the school” (Teacher, School A).

Whilst there were fewer fights between PI students and other groups, one teacher made an interesting observation regarding aggressive confrontation between female teachers and PI male students. This teacher cited an incident where a PI boy had not been willing to back down to a female teacher and she attributed such behaviour to differences in cultural concepts of gender. This same teacher also volunteered that a PI boy in her class spent most of his class time talking to friends and did not pay any attention to the lesson or the teacher. In her view, this boy was not interested in school work and was just waiting for the time to leave. Interviews with teachers suggested that PI boys tended to engage in active forms of resistance such as displaying aggressive behaviour while girls were more likely to show passive forms of resistance such as being late to class, experimenting with uniform requirements and being repeatedly absent from school.

6.4.2 Fitting in with peers

In the five schools where staff participated, PI students 'blended in' and interacted well with other student groups. Some were admired by others in the school community for their performances in the school band or success in rugby or other sports. In Schools A and C, the PI boys mixed well with African boys and liked to be seen as 'machos' while the girls interacted more with Asian girls who were noisy, loud and 'not nerdy'. In School D, an all-girls school, the PI girls mixed well with other peers and engaged actively in activities that required physical activity. They saw their involvement in these activities as a way to engage actively with other groups and took the lead in encouraging others to take part. In all schools, younger PI were seen to be more inclusive, having been born or grown up in Australia and open to interacting with other student groups. In School E, staff reported the PI students had become more compliant and a positive influence on other students compared to ten years ago when PI students generally were much older and had come directly from overseas with little experience of Australian school settings.

"Today, you walk around the school and an Islander kid will smile at you and know your name and you can simply take them as they come... there is no hidden agenda. Once you get on well with an Islander person, they become a friend... forever" (Teacher, School E).

Amongst themselves, PI were seen as a cohesive group and able to get on well with each other and to form close friendships at school. The PI girls were seen to be more visible and loud with '*a reputation for taking no crap from others*' (Teacher, School E, August, 2014). Girls were also much more open to making friends with non-Islander peers at school and found the relaxed and non-stringent atmosphere at school appealing. In School E, one of the teachers brought up an interesting issue about body image, commenting that some PI girls were large which made them subject to teasing.

"Some of the girls are quite big and I worry about them... all of them are pretty but then there are others who are quite large and so I wonder about

their self-esteem and ways they can shelter themselves against body image pressures” (Teacher, School E).

This was an interesting observation, considering that none of the interviews with participants or their parents saw the issue of body image as a concern for PI girls at school or at home. The observation was made without realisation that being large in some PI cultures was considered an attractive trait. For Polynesian boys in particular, being big is an advantage and a symbol of strength and prowess in sports whilst for girls, being big is frowned upon as being unattractive and obese in western culture. These mixed messages about gender bring home to young PI, especially females additional burdens which they did not need at school especially when they themselves were not bothered by the body image issue. Whilst this concern might appear to be super-imposed onto these learners at this time, it certainly is a topic worth considering, especially if it results in creating unnecessary gaps between the perceptions of PI young women and that of the school.

Some staff were also sensitive to the fact that they did not always understand issues confronting individual young people, especially when a PI learner was reluctant to share their difficulties. They believed it was harder to engage learners when they had home or family issues to deal with which made these students less open. Although this was an issue for all students, the staff said that PI students often dealt with family issues themselves and did not want to share them in case they exposed their family affairs or got into trouble at home. This point was driven home to the researcher while attending an interview session at School E with three staff members. Halfway through the interview, a PI female student (not a participant in this study) was invited by one of the teachers to join the interview and provide her views and experiences of schooling. The group was told that this student was one of the more academically oriented of the PI learners in her VCE class. The interview started off well enough until certain questions were asked which caused the student to burst into tears.

Fila's story

It was recess time at School E. Fila had just finished a Year 11 class in Health and Human Development. Her teacher asked if she could come to a meeting to talk about her experiences of schooling – what she liked about school. Fila willingly agreed, seeing it as a privilege to be selected to speak with some teachers and a visitor from the local University. Fila was introduced as a hard working student who was doing well in her VCE subjects. She answered the general questions about her background and interests until asked why she found school hard which caused Fila to burst into tears. The questions that led to the change of mood in Fila were as follows:

Teacher: Why is school hard, Fila?

Fila: "Oh... my parents dropped out".

Teacher: Why is school hard for you?

Fila: (No response... crying)

There was silence in the room for a minute as we all stopped to comprehend what had just happened and to ask ourselves why Fila had reacted in an emotional outburst. Nobody spoke as we waited for Fila to compose herself. The teacher who had brought Fila into the interview said "Oh...Fila is quite a bright student and writes very well".

After a few minutes and with many pauses, Fila resumed answering a few more general questions but for me, that incident changed the mood in that room completely. A most noticeable change was that Fila switched from being 'the informant and in charge' to being a 'student and in a vulnerable position'. The teachers also had assumed their roles as 'knowledgeable, informed and in charge'. This incident and situation brought home the unbalanced and unequal structure, setting and dynamics in that room. I witnessed the teachers becoming embarrassed, bewildered and quite responsible for what had happened. After Fila left the room, I was asked why Fila had reacted so emotionally. I replied that there may be matters regarding her family that she did not want to share and perhaps the questions asked were sensitive. One of the teachers suggested that Fila may have felt the pressures on her from all sides and internalised these to a point where she felt vulnerable. I could only guess but said 'I think there are some things at home that students like to keep to themselves and this is one of those'.

On reflection, as a researcher, it was an awkward moment because it brought to the

fore my instincts as a parent with an Islander identity. These instincts instructed me to protect Fila but my professional role as a researcher and an academic also made me conscious of the ethical boundaries. As a PI myself, I was torn between being protective and being sorry for Fila and could not help feeling like an intruder who was party to a situation where the respondent felt persuaded to disclose information she would have preferred to keep private. This event made me think seriously about my ethical framework for this research. Actually, it was the only time in the research period when I questioned whether I conducted my practice in an ethically sound manner. It was an illuminating experience as it brought to the surface the conflicting pressures that young people experience when negotiating issues between the home, school and their own aspirations for themselves. For some young people, keeping these important worlds separate but also functional and 'normal' is an emerging challenge especially, whilst they themselves are struggling and internally conflicted to keep on top of the numerous expectations and responsibilities.

Figure 6-3 Fila's story

Despite the unfortunate experience outlined above, the overall engagement of PI students at school was perceived by school staff to be positive, active and inclusive. There were incidents of lateness and poor attendance but these were true for only a handful of students. Apart from a few isolated incidents of violence, PI students were seen to be well-engaged and connected to their school community. A few stood out and were well-known in their school communities for their contribution to sports, music, drama and their willingness to organise and assist in school social projects. However, whilst all teachers agreed that PI students had good levels of engagement at the school at a social level, they were less complimentary about their engagement and achievement within the classroom.

"They are not super duper at bringing in their books....they are getting better but not always on time" (Year Coordinator, School E).

"They have such a positive outlook and are helpful but need to try harder in the classroom" (Principal, Junior campus of School E).

6.5 In-class engagement

Within the classroom, PI students worked generally well with their teachers and peers and showed keenness to participate and complete class tasks. However there were some differences in the ways that PI girls and boys engaged with learning in the classroom. Whilst girls were seen to 'chat a lot' but still engage well in class tasks and discussions, the boys were shy and quiet, preferring to sit back or chat to friends during class time. Generally, boys were said to become more participative, playful and even disruptive if there were more of them in the same class or group. A teacher described the difference in the participation of the boys and girls in her class as follows:

“Most of my girls are trying to engage and learn and if given the chances, they can do very well. They are confident and happy to give it a go. Some of the girls really push themselves, they like to be heard and be vocal and they push others around them which is good so they do try and are learning at a certain level. Boys are not giving anything. When I speak to them, they just nod. They are not really interested, do not put much effort in and have less output” (Teacher, School A).

These differences in class-room engagement by boys and girls bring to the fore key questions regarding the expectations and pressures placed on each gender within the home and school environments. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the educational expectations of some PI families was higher for daughters than for sons, with more responsibilities and stricter rules set for them at home while boys had more freedom, more opportunities to hang out with friends outside the home and were less pressured to go on to tertiary study. VCAL studies and TAFE seemed an acceptable pathway for boys but not for girls as applied study and their work patterns were seen as more physical and strenuous. An important question for this study is whether these gendered expectations and pressures which are reinforced at home affect the way that boys respond to their learning responsibilities and engagement at school.

Interviews with school staff brought to light an interesting observation regarding the power of personal and social relationships in working with young PI

learners. Three staff members each emphasized the fact that PI students' relationships with teachers was very important because it determined the level of engagement that a student invested into their work and their willingness to complete homework to a satisfactory level. The three statements below show the importance of teachers making a connection with PI learners as a way to motivate and engage them.

"Pretty much if they do not like you, just forget it ...they will not do much for you. They need to make a connection", (Teacher, School D).

"If they have a relationship with you, they do more work for you and if they have respect for you, they can give you work and work hard for you. Sometimes the girls can be difficult if you do not treat them how they want to be treated...that is, to be interested in them and have a good relationship with them. They see me as a nice teacher who they are happy to do work for. If you do not have that relationship, it will be hard." (Teacher, School A).

"I have VCE and VCAL students in my music class and I find this year, my VCAL students are the most motivated. The motivation comes from enjoying what they are doing.. more intrinsic motivation..not necessarily from outside ie results but more from enjoying themselves. Studyiing for an exam does not necessarily motivate them. (Teacher, School B).

These teachers were conscious of their own roles in encouraging students to engage with their studies and all of them had a good knowledge of PI learners' behavioural and emotional patterns of learning. The question to be asked though is whether, knowing the importance of these connections and relationships and the specific needs of PI learners, the schools were able to respond accordingly, such as providing the opportunities for individual staff to work more often and more closely with PI learners. Indeed the crucial question is whether this constitutes a role that a school perceives as an integral part of its supportive framework to cohorts such as PI, who in their view are consistently producing poor educational outcomes.

6.6 Homework

All the teachers in this study said that homework completion was the weakest aspect of PI student engagement at school and said that generally PI were well-known for not doing homework or for completing homework at the last minute or to an unsatisfactory standard. In the senior years, the expectation was that students spent at least three hours a night on homework and revision. In their responses, the learner participants had acknowledged that they expected Years 11 and 12 to be more challenging and demanding of their time and focus compared to the earlier years of secondary schooling. But the common perspective of teachers was that PI learners, particularly PI girls worked well in class and completed class tasks adequately but could not translate this behavioural pattern to tasks that were set to be completed at home. Even those who were keen to do well and get good marks were said to lose enthusiasm when it came to completing homework. Teachers questioned whether there were adequate structures put in place to support homework completion in PI homes. On their part, the schools reported that they provided homework sessions after school hours for all students to access, where teachers and past students supervised study sessions. In one school, attendance at these sessions was compulsory for students failing at least two subjects. In another school, there were home groups for students in Years 11 and 12 to do supervised homework. However, there was no indication that PI, as a group needing special attention in this area, were encouraged to use these supports more than others.

Many of the participants in this study revealed they did most of their homework after school either at a public library or at home with or without supervision from parents. Only one student said he attended an after-hours session at school and only because his teacher had suggested that he attend the session. Perhaps for this group of learners, a more institutionalized approach to homework needs to be developed and agreed between the school and the families to offer supervised on-site homework sessions for learners at school. These supported homework programs could start in the early years of

secondary school and continue to senior levels so they are seen as a necessary part of the school support structure for learners who may lack the encouragement, time or support at home to complete homework.

Some students had less homework than others. For example, VCAL students who studied practical subjects like music, physical education and technology and design did not get assigned much homework as most of their work could be completed in class. The difference in homework requirements between theoretical and practical subjects is an important factor, given that many PI tended to choose practical subjects at the post-compulsory level of schooling. But this point was not made, particularly in the participant interviews and learners' chosen pathways more closely reflected interest in a subject or pathway or a recommendation by staff. The teacher in School B attested to this fact when she noted that many PI learners did not see music practice as homework in the same way they would for theoretical subjects like history. She noted that some students accessed musical instruments by practicing and playing music at church or at social events. For these students, music was seen as a gratifying experience which was reinforced by regular practice for which they could derive intrinsic and extrinsic rewards through giving pleasure to others while being complimented for their efforts. In these practical subjects, the ability to gain instant rewards and recognition may have also encouraged these PI students to favor them above theoretical subjects. Consistent with Fairbairn-Dunlop (2003) and Samu (2007), the interest to give service to others may be played out in the ways that students are likely to choose 'humanitarian or social learning' subjects which Helme et.al (2014) refer to as 'high demand but low value' subjects within post-compulsory schooling level but which are highly regarded in Pacific cultures which value social relationships and maintaining group harmony.

6.7 Post-compulsory schooling

All the school staff conceded that at this transition stage, the majority of PI learners at their schools were generally expected to follow the VCAL and VET

pathways. While a few were recommended to do VCE, the expectation was that most PI would do the lower level subjects in VCE. Compared to the other four schools, School D, which is a single sex girls' school, had less of an expectation that PI girls would follow one pathway or the other. The reasons given for PI learners opting for VCAL subjects were that they showed more interest and ability in vocational and practical subjects like Music, Physical Education and Design and Technology which were offered through this pathway. Music was seen as a most popular choice for PI at one school because it was offered in both VCE and VCAL. Students were also more interested in it because of its focus on oral presentation and the fact that they could excel in it 'without having to be too good in reading and writing' (Teacher, School B).

In VCAL (VET), PI learners were said to enjoy Design and Technology and Furnishing and achieved awards for these subjects. Like Physical Education and Music, the enjoyment was as much related to the subject as well as to the positive relationship with the teacher. The importance of having a connection with staff was emphasised by all teachers attributing PI student interest and success in Music, Physical Education (especially rugby) and Furnishing to those who taught or coached them. It was interesting too that these practical subjects offered the best opportunity for PI students to stand out at school and to have a sense of belonging to the school confirming Meador's (Meador, 2005) claim that when students felt valued by teachers, they participated well in the work of the school.

While some students opted for VCE or VCAL subjects of their own will, there were also others who were recommended to do VCAL by the staff based on their perceived effort and attitude to study and academic achievement. In School B, where there was only one PI student doing VCE Year 12 and fifteen (15) in the VCAL Year 12 class in 2014, staff noted that most of these students had been recommended to do VCAL because they were 'not working hard enough' to do VCE. Interestingly, a staff member mentioned that this was a trend sometimes 'used to help schools improve VCE grades' (Teacher, School

B, August, 2014) as lower performing students could be exempted from the cohort in which the school would be judged. In one school, it was suggested that the PI boys were sometimes selected to do VCAL to keep them at school longer to increase maturity levels or improve language skills. This was noted in Schools A and C, where two teachers reported that some PI boys considered school to be just a 'holding place' until they leave to find work. This suggests that some PI students clearly did not see schooling as a pathway to university or TAFE and were not seeking strong results at Year 12 to access particular study or employment pathways. These boys tended to be keen on leaving school and finding a job. Only one out of the fourteen students in this study was in this position although his father wanted him to do the more academic VCE. The teacher from School C outlined a typical pathway for some PI boys at the school at Year 10 as follows:

"In Year 10, we would not recommend a repeat unless it is to do with effort. If it is to do with poor performance in academic work, we recommend them to go to Harvester and Fresh-aligned, a program run by the Western Bulldogs or follow another pre-apprenticeship. All the pathways are organised by the school. In Year 12, they are exited to a TAFE course that is at least 25 hours." (Teacher, School C).

The teachers in this study were able to predict with accuracies the subjects that PI tended to choose if they undertook the VCE pathway. A typical list of subjects picked by PI at VCE included English, Health and Human Development, Psychology, General Mathematics, Physical Education and Music. A few PI students chose Maths only if they liked the teacher but often switched to '*friendlier*' subjects midway through Year 11 if they found the subject too difficult. Interviews with student participants confirmed that these were indeed subjects likely to be chosen along with other practical options such as Physical Education (School A and E), Music (in School B), Media and Arts (School D) and Religious Instruction (School D). PI boys were more likely to choose Physical Education and Music while both boys and girls tended to choose Health and Human Development or Biology if they were aspiring to become nurses or teachers. Interestingly, these arts or humanities subjects also

aligned well with learnings or values that PI upheld at home such as the importance of relationships, team effort and experiential learning. On the other hand, Mathematics and Science were described as too difficult by most participants despite these being subjects which are highly rated in curriculum hierarchies for VCE preparation and which offer pathways to more and higher-status courses at university.

6.8. Academic performance

All the school personnel were unanimous in their view that academically, PI students performed and achieved at lower than average levels when compared to other groups at the school. The low level performance tended to be the norm across the theoretical subjects but there were exceptions in the practical subjects. PI tended to perform less well in terms of individual effort and their academic performances tended to decline as they moved to higher levels of schooling. Teachers were able, nevertheless, to identify one or two PI who had actually achieved some outstanding academic results. At School C, there had been a PI male school captain who was academically strong and who went on to study law at university. Another PI male student from School B had achieved good results in VCE and got accepted to study criminology at university. Teachers revealed that some siblings reported positive school outcomes and more often than not these students came from families where the parents were educated and well-informed about schooling, evidencing the importance of cultural capital.

Apart from these few instances, the general expectation from staff was that PI would follow a VCAL pathway that would take them to a training program or direct employment. In School C, the teacher revealed the school had recorded its highest number of PI that completed VCE in 2013, which was 4 students. In 2014, she said that there were only 2 PI out of 162 students doing Year 12 VCE and that only one was likely to complete VCE. In School B, only one student followed a VCE pathway in 2014 while the rest of her fifteen PI peers did VCAL in a class of 165 Year 12 students. According to the teachers, most PI who

chose the VCAL or VET pathway did so because of their interest in work-related VET subjects such as Building and Construction, Hospitality and Community Services. Others chose VCAL due to their talents in music and sport, or their preference for 'hands on' practical subjects because they did not enjoy writing or doing too much homework. At School C, students were recommended to follow VCAL if they were seen as being unable to cope with VCE. Whatever the reasons, PI tended to be moved to certain pathway options on the basis of academic performance and with direction from teachers.

6.9 Post-school pathways

In Victorian government schools, the process of selecting post-school pathways, conventionally begins in around the end of Year 10 and continues for most learners into Years 11 and 12. During this time, students and their families have the important task of deciding whether students stay on at school and follow the VCE, VCAL or VET pathway or exit from school altogether. Given the complicated process of subject selection, schools normally include and engage with the parents of students at this time, through school-based information sessions which explain the choices and procedures. These sessions also provide an important avenue for parents to be involved in the selection of subjects and to discuss their expectations of their children's schooling and possible career paths. From the schools' perspective, these were important sessions for parents to attend and to be informed of the likely opportunities and the challenges expected in the overall post-compulsory years. The attitude of parents in this study to these information sessions was mixed and whilst most parents acknowledged their importance, some did not see them as significant. One parent who did not attend these sessions believed that her daughter was doing well enough at school to warrant attendance at a parent-teacher meeting while another attributed her non-attendance to a lack of confidence in speaking English. As noted in chapter 4, the post-compulsory schooling period presented as a particularly difficult transition phase for PI learners where some participants in the study found themselves guided or exited into TAFE and employment pathways despite initially planning to complete VCE studies.

Some schools had arrangements with a select group of alternative education settings to provide pathways for learners who did not proceed to VCE within the school environment. School C, for example had arrangements with two alternative vocational education settings in the local area to send students who exited Year 10 and with the local university for those who exited from either Year 11 or 12. School A did not offer VCAL and so had a pathway for low-performing students to the College of Adult Education (CAE) or Sports Education and Development Australia (SEDA), a sports and education development academy. These pathway arrangements were also applied to students who were exited or withdrawn for poor academic progress or misbehaviour.

The various choices and options that needed to be made at this level of schooling sometimes presented issues for some participants, their parents and the school, especially when there were discrepancies between the expectations of parents and students or parents and the school. Teachers were able to recall some of these incidents where they had met with resistance in the pathway options recommended for individual students. Some parents who disagreed with the school's recommendation for their child to do VCAL or a modified program often approached the school to change their child's preferences. From the school's perspective, these parents sometimes suggested changes without acknowledging their children's *'low literacy and numeracy skills'* which constituted their ability to cope with VCE subjects. Sometimes the parents' expectations for their children were inconsistent with the student's strengths and interests as illustrated in a case involving a student who did very well in Physical Education but did not select it as a subject option for VCE because his parents wanted him to do more theoretical or academic subjects.

There were also concerns about learners becoming more disengaged at school as a result of being forced to do certain subjects by their parents. When students had been exited for serious offences such as using drugs or causing

violence on school grounds, the schools found some parents resisting the recommended pathways. At one school, the parents did not agree with moving their son to a TAFE provider. As a result, the boy left school altogether and joined the family business. In another situation which affected a participant in this study, the young woman pursued the school's recommended pathway without letting her parents know, fearing their disagreement with the decision. Again the possibility of violence at home was raised if school actions or recommendations were not accepted by parents, leading a teacher to suggest that schools often acted cautiously in this area for the sake of the student's safety at home.

From the school's point of view, high or unrealistic parental expectations were seen as a hindrance to academic achievement and positive pathways of some PI students. They claimed that some PI parents saw VCAL as a second choice pathway for their children, especially for daughters although they considered a school-based apprenticeship a suitable option for boys as it was a recognised pathway to a job. In this study, three families indicated that they would approve their sons doing a VCAL pathway if that was their choice while the rest were intent on their children doing VCE and moving on to university. Girls especially, were expected to follow a VCE pathway through to university although the information from schools showed that most were in fact undertaking a VCAL program. The teachers believed that parental expectations sometimes conflicted with the recommendations of the schools based on the learner's academic performances and reported that at times these high parental expectations led to students becoming discouraged and consequently losing interest in schooling.

“There are missed opportunities...sometimes there are students who are recommended to do a certain course such as music but parents say that is for recreation and advise their children not to pursue that pathway. When that happens, the student becomes disengaged, they miss classes and do not do set homework... and then another pathway has to be found for them or they have to be exited because their interest is no longer there. Parents see a difference between recreation and traditional school subjects. Staff try and set up the music pathway for the students after

looking at their interests and strengths but these are not the pathways that parents want for them” (Teacher, School C).

The common perspective of school staff was that PI learners often had to consider post-school pathways that did not always align with the students' personal aspirations, academic strengths or the pathways recommended by schools. Sela's experience as told in the prologue to this study affirms this observation. In the cases of Via (F16Yr10) and Lali (F14Yr9), both girls had aspirations of going to university which inspired them to try hard in class. Both were motivated to do better to improve their own financial situation as well as the social and economic wellbeing of their families. On the other hand, Eli (F14Yr9) who had spent a week working at a factory near her home during the school holidays was adamant that she would do her best in school so that she would never work in a factory again. There were also role models within the PI families who encouraged the young participants to consider certain courses and professions. However, these aspirations did not often result in positive outcomes.

Some staff were able to predict, on the basis of academic effort and test results the pathways of PI who would be capable of going to university or TAFE or an apprenticeship. Whilst girls mainly opted for nursing, community development, child care and aged care courses, the boys were more interested in trade areas such as, carpentry, plumbing, electrical and construction and building and in police work. At university, the common courses for PI were Law, social work and community development but these were few and fewer still managed to sustain university or TAFE study and complete their courses.

School staff were reminded too of their experiences with past PI students who had started TAFE or university only to drop out, take up work in a factory, security or labouring job. Even very bright and capable PI students had dropped out and taken short-term jobs, thus failing to make use of their opportunities. A boy who had started a Design and Technology course at RMIT, for example, had dropped out and worked at McDonalds where he is now a manager. Many

girls, even the ones that were 'hard-working', had also dropped out of study to start a family or stay at home. Some school staff took great pride in the fact that the majority of their students leaving at the end of Year 12 were able to secure tertiary level pathways. They agreed that for most PI, the likely pathway was TAFE (although a few went on to university) but that many dropped out soon after enrolment or midway through their courses. They attributed these withdrawals of PI students to unfamiliarity with tertiary forms of learning. None pointed to finance as being a possible reason for some PI students dropping out of university studies.

“School is quite a safe and helpful environment but when they get out to another institution, there is no monitoring and they suffer. We have students who start university or TAFE and then the self discipline becomes lacking and then they just find work. Not many stay at university or TAFE. Many have potential but just do work in a warehouse or factory and then it’s almost as if once the money is there, this is all I need. They do not think long-term and parents also rely on them” (Teacher, School B).

In all the schools, there were opportunities provided for students to return to the school after leaving to seek guidance on future training or careers. Some students kept close connections with the staff members with whom they had been closely involved at school and often returned to share achievements and accomplishments. In School D, a past PI student who was studying teaching at university returned to her old school to do part-time work. In school A, many past students maintained a social connection with the music teacher and the rugby coach, a well-regarded couple who were often invited to PI family and cultural events.

6.10 Teacher perspectives on the main challenges for PI learners

From the schools' point of view, there are certain challenges that impact specifically on PI learners in terms of their learning and engagement experiences at school. Interestingly, most of these challenges were related to home or family issues, most notably to poor in-home support for learning and

homework, unrealistic expectations from parents and the conflicting pressures placed on the learners by the home and school environments.

6.10.1 Learning and homework completion

All the teachers agreed on the perception that PI students did not get a lot of academic support at home and believed that they experienced many obstacles to studying or completing homework at home. A few teachers believed that the PI home was often crowded with many relatives, many children or elders to care for and that PI were often burdened with numerous household chores. They believed that young PI under-prioritised their school work due to having so many commitments at home, at church and within their community, including supporting parents and relatives with language support. Parents were said to have unrealistic expectations about their children's future and dismissive of the school's recommendations for suitable support structures and career pathways for their children. Families were also said to be unrealistic about the time and support needed for completing school requirements and needed to balance out the home expectations with those of the school.

“They get home and there are expectations and then they do not do the school work and come back to school with unfinished work and they get into more trouble. They also have expectations at home looking after family members, or practising church or doing household chores and there is a lot of guilt around meeting those expectations” (Teacher, School C).

One of the staff members reported that some mothers were supportive of their children's education at parent-teacher meetings but failed to follow through with agreed strategies at home, such as not freeing up time from home chores to provide time for study or homework. Because more girls than boys were involved in home chores, three teachers believed that girls had less freedom and that boys were less occupied at home with freedom to play sports or hang out with mates. They also said there was a lack of parental follow-up support at home, especially when students went on overseas travel at short notice which left teachers with little time to plan their work. Staff felt these home obligations often compromised the quality of learning expected at the various levels of

schooling and viewed these as particular challenges that added to PI learners having low levels of support at home. One staff member's description of PI students attitudes to prioritising school work is;

“Whatever requirements we have for them, the requirements from family and church are greater and more important”, (Teacher, School E).

This statement confirms the pressure placed on PI learners who basically operate in two very different worlds of home and school whilst simultaneously trying to keep these worlds functioning and real.

6.10.2 Communication with parents

An ongoing challenge for schools relates to the difficulties of communicating with parents to discuss academic or behaviour issues regarding their children. Some staff were concerned about the continuous absence of some PI parents at parent-teacher meetings as well as the difficulties of making contact with the same parents. Some teachers complained that they saw different relatives at each student progress meeting and described this practice as an unsatisfactory arrangement because the communication was sometimes incorrectly relayed to parents. They also reported that it was often the mothers or other female relatives who attended behaviour-related meetings while a few fathers came to meetings only for very serious behavioural incidents involving their child. Some staff expressed concern that some PI children faced possible punishment at home if their parents found out they had been misbehaving at school and therefore were careful about disclosing sensitive information in case the student found themselves in further trouble at home. However, this begs the question as to whether the situation warrants a level of non-action by school authorities and whether by not acting on the problem, further issues arise for the different parties involved.

Whilst bringing in parents to school has proved to be difficult for some schools, others found that parents were willing to come to school for social engagement purposes, such as dance practice or fundraising. Teachers acknowledged that

the hesitation of parents to attend meetings might be due to language barriers and low confidence. They also believed that students themselves may be responsible for keeping the worlds of home and school separate in order to protect their parents from having to deal with difficult, embarrassing or sensitive school issues. One staff member explained this point as follows:

"Some parents do not know what the rules are - what the schools expect. They are content so long as the kids are ok and attending. When you are not well-educated, you try and come and talk with people, it can be frightening. Many of the PI parents now are younger and perhaps born here. They are polite and can carry a conversation" (Teacher, School E).

This teacher's views were consistent with the positions expressed by some parents involved in this study who attributed language difficulties and unfamiliarity with schooling as the main reasons that they stayed away from schools. There were some parents who were confident enough to attend school meetings and who agreed to provide the support their children required, but did not subsequently follow up with supervision at home. At times, there was a sense of frustration from teachers, especially when the promised support was not followed through at home. One teacher spoke of a particular student who had been suspended and then returned to school only to revisit the same problems again and again as the parents had not followed up with the support promised. This teacher said that sometimes families were reluctant to utilise the inbuilt scaffolding supports offered by the school, preferring instead to deal with problems 'in their own ways' which sometimes did not work and made it difficult for schools to follow up or to offer more support to the learner.

As noted, there was a real belief by teachers that PI learners lived very much under the control of their parents and were resigned to the fact that they would be scolded or punished for any transgressions. There was some concern amongst teachers that parents emphasized strict standards of behavior at home which were difficult to monitor outside the home. Some PI parents were said to be so strict that they sometimes inflicted punishment at home when advised that their child had misbehaved at school. Daughters were also said to be placed

under stricter rules than sons. The teachers were uncertain about the effectiveness of some of these strategies and said that it was sometimes difficult to get a full sense or picture of a situation because PI students and even families preferred not to disclose information but rather sought to problem-solve themselves. One teacher referred to concerns regarding violence at home which sometimes affected student attendance or homework completion. As a welfare officer, this staff member had a role at a school that enabled her to deal with behavioural issues which were sometimes invisible to others in the school community.

“It is difficult for us to deal with student disclosure about home violence and can be seen as interfering, considering the secrecy around it. There is so much reluctance to get external help and often parents want to deal with it themselves. These families do not have the tools to deal with their children. There is lots of secrecy too and it is difficult to get the full picture. They are rather happy to deal with it themselves and not open to getting professional or external support.” (Welfare Officer, School C).

In summary, teachers acknowledged that most parents were supportive of their children’s schooling and wanted them to do well. However, they also believed that PI parents generally lacked the language skills, communication tools and the confidence to support their children effectively. Sometimes these parents were said to use strict discipline measures at home which were difficult to apply or follow up outside the home. Most of the teachers felt that parents needed to physically sit down with their children and assist them with the school work. While acknowledging that for many PI parents who work long and hard as factory workers, truck drivers and farm hands, providing the necessary support can sometimes be difficult, the teachers nevertheless believed that the necessary level of assistance could be made. One teacher, for example, said that PI families were very good at getting their children to complete home chores and that they needed to apply these same rules and principles to get students to complete school and homework tasks as well.

6.10.3 Parental expectations

All the teachers agreed that many parents, including PI recognised the school as a safe and fun place that can assist children to achieve their educational and career goals. They understood that parents expected their children to achieve a high Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score and go to university or TAFE, but said that parents were not always fully aware of the preparatory work and level of effort needed to achieve such good results. School staff also acknowledged there were pressures on learners from the school's 'side of the fence' that parents were unaware of and that they themselves knew little about what was happening at home. Other staff were certain that some parents simply did not have the skills to help their children and left students to make sense of their situation and work out options for themselves which placed conflicting and competing demands on these learners as shown in Fila's story earlier in this chapter. Some teachers believed that encountering such pressures at such a young age could cause young people to give up schooling altogether.

"Parents have unrealistic expectations and poor awareness of the effort and work that is needed. Students have to make sense of these expectations along with the requirements at school and have to work out the options themselves as some parents do not have the skills or the understanding to help them. Kids try to make sense of the many conflicting demands placed on them and sometimes cannot cope because they are still so young." (Teacher, School E).

But teachers were also sensitive to the fact that many PI wanted to perform well like other students although their struggles in this area were not particularly evident. Without having the parameters for study clearly set out at home, these learners were said to be unconcerned about the concept of time and thus disorganised. One teacher made the observation that PI students found it easy to disengage and this fact, combined with too many pressures at home and inconsistent homework completion or attendance, meant that their learning could be easily compromised.

"We are here pushing school but kids have other pressures. The kids also rely on us for certain perspectives and they do trust us to a large degree.. but when it conflicts with the world they live in, they put up a block. Once the uniform is on - you have to be a certain person. When you get home, you take on another role. There are just too many pressures and they have to protect themselves." (Teacher, School E).

One of the challenges seen to affect PI learners at school was the lack of connection to the culture of the classroom in an unfamiliar school setting and the resultant loss of a sense of identity (Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Pasikale, 1998; Thaman, 2008). This was a concern expressed very strongly by a teacher of Maori background who had taught PI students in New Zealand. She felt that the academic and formal set-up of the classroom was too doctrine-based and not conducive to learning for students like PI who learn better in a 'tribal system' of learning which is group based, oral and participatory. She felt that the school system did not encourage and nurture these cultural ways of learning and that the higher the level of schooling, the more distant the curriculum and the more lost some of the PI students became. To some extent, some PI parents would agree with this view because of their experiences with their own children whose performance and achievement declined at the higher levels of schooling. This teacher's view was that few teachers were attuned to this kind of teaching and learning style and that schools were not sufficiently equipped with the skills and the capacity to make changes. She also disagreed with learning through laptops saying it promoted individualistic learning which widens the knowledge gap between parents and students further, making it harder for parents to monitor and supervise homework.

The above accounts confirm the existence of numerous gaps and fractures in the perceptions and expectations of school personnel and parents concerning PI learners' experiences of schooling and education.

6.11 Gaps in priority and expectations of schools and families

Many school staff perceived PI students to be socially engaged and connected to their school, teachers and peers. They respected the teachers, interacted well with peers and utilised leadership skills to organise social events at school.

The majority of PI students were seen to show a high level of engagement in vocational subjects and the social aspects of schooling such as organising fundraising events and participating in cultural activities. However, these talents and skills, which were emphasised and practised at home, did not translate well into the classroom scenario where individualised learning, focussed studying and achieving good test or exam results were regarded as the most important aspects for academic progression and successful achievement. In addition, vocational subjects like music, art, drama and Physical education which PI learners showed interest and talent in and for which they could achieve great results were not highly regarded by teachers, the schools or the external examination authorities (Helme et al. 2009). A teacher who taught music to PI students was conscious of this gap in priorities at her school.

“Last year, in my subject (music), 6 people got the top marks out of Victoria but there was not much promotion about it. It is a pity that at school, they promote VCE results but not the VCAL(VET) achievements”,
(Teacher, School B).

Academically, it was reported that PI were not putting sufficient effort and commitment to study, that there were unrealistic expectations from parents and students about the expected outcomes from schooling and that parents were not providing the necessary supports at home. From the school's point of view, the behaviour of some PI students at school affected their engagement as did the cultural disconnection between students and the learning styles and processes. Apart from the last point, all these barriers or obstacles were viewed as being related to family and home factors, with the onus placed squarely on parents and families to adapt, improve and transform.

This observation from one of the teachers sums up the school's view of PI home support.

“PI students are very laid back, relaxed, pleasant but do not do much school work at home. Their concept of homework is low. A lot live in big groups, sharing a small house and money is difficult for them. They care for one another and sometimes the care of a child is given to aunts

or grandmas, they live in extended families for long periods. They go to church and religion is important, singing and dance are important. They are fairly forthcoming in discussions but handing in the written work is on the other end of the scale. With homework, there is no quiet space, no structured time, too many home chores, including caring for young or old relatives and young people are so busy with sport and church.” (Teacher, School E).

From this observation and the other contributions from interviewed staff, it appears that school staff did have understanding of the ‘lived situation’ of PI learners at home but not to an extent that allows them to clearly appreciate or respond to the unique needs and specific circumstances of PI learners. Some of the perceptions about PI tend to be shaped by personal experiences of a few staff, or known generalisations about a cultural group, given the inaccuracies. In any case, it was not clearly evident that school staff were using their existing knowledge and understanding of the home and personal situation of PI to advocate for better learning experiences and stronger outcomes for the PI cohort at their respective schools. Whilst much of the emphasis from schools has been on asking families to develop better support structures at home, adjust their expectations from their children’s schooling, adapt to new ways of connecting with learning and to encourage students to work more efficiently and harder, schools have not articulated clearly the in-school supports that can be offered to PI students, given their consistently poor educational outcomes.

On the surface, the suggestions for improvements to home-support are easier said than done. Whilst they appear useful, some suggestions disregard important aspects of PI home life and the impacts on the levels of support available and accessible within the homes. These include, in some PI homes, the frequent use of a language other than English to communicate with family members, a strong oral tradition, a high priority placed on family and community which includes a deep respect for elders and for some families, a very low financial base. While it can be simple enough to deal with these issues individually, it can be challenging for learners and families to navigate more complex situations wherein some aspects of family living combine or even act in conflict with each other. When faced with a difficult or complex situation, young

PI will always give priority to family needs which means that other commitments must take second place. This is the nature of the 'lived' PI family life which is strongly underpinned by concepts of '*outward service*' and '*common good*' (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003; Samu, 2007). Without a deeper appreciation and understanding of the ways in which these factors interweave and play out on family relationships and home settings, schools will find it difficult and frustrating trying to understand the nature and forms of support required by this cohort of learners. Moreover, these challenges and difficulties are unique not only to individual learners but also to their families and communities.

Current research, such as this one serve as a conduit for articulating the gaps in information and communication between schools and homes about ways to support high-risk learners. Some schools are already implementing positive strategies such as setting up parent-teacher groups, school cultural days and school-based homework sessions, even considering using PI community liaison persons to bridge some of information and communication gaps that exist between the home and the school. Since both parents and learners agree that school is a good and safe place to learn, perhaps there is space and opportunity to develop more specialised programs at school to support PI learners, including on-site supervised home-work and allowances of time and support to school personnel who have close connections and positive relationships with PI learners to do more work with them. Similarly, there is a need for more proactive programs by schools to reach out and include PI communities in spaces and settings where they are comfortable and confident to engage.

6. 12 Chapter summary

This chapter outlined the perspectives of teachers in regards to the school engagement, performance and achievement levels of PI learners at the participating schools where the fourteen participants attended. School staff appeared to have a good knowledge of the issues affecting PI learners at school and placed emphasis on the need to improve and strengthen the level of

in-home support provided to learners. Schools also put priority on the academic aspects of schooling while learners tended to place more importance on social and personal relationships at school. While on a general level, PI students were found to be well engaged with their schools, teachers and peers at a social level, they were found to be less engaged with the academic requirements of schooling, especially at the senior levels of schooling. The content level and conceptual depth of the theoretical subjects offered at the senior secondary level proved most problematic for those students with low levels of cultural capital (in the form of adequate academic support) at home. Furthermore, there appeared to be minimal effort or commitment at school level to improve the low level school outcomes of this group. Some school staff claimed it was difficult to provide effective support to PI due to not always getting a full picture or sense of the actual situation within the PI home settings, especially when students and parents were un-cooperative or secretive about the challenges at home. However, schools would do well to also look within themselves for answers to some of the questions raised here. It would appear that whilst trying to model and maintain equality of treatment and services to all students, some schools risk further disadvantaging those with the most need and the least capable to help themselves.

Chapter 7 Negotiating waves: finding ‘place and fit’ between home and school

This is the first of two discussion chapters and is aimed at examining the ‘lived experiences of PI learners within the context of their personal lives and relationships with family members, peers and significant others to understand the effects of these experiences on school engagement, academic achievement and post-school transitions. The chapter begins by revisiting the original research questions, followed by a presentation of the results from the LSAY data and this study’s empirical data to identify the salient patterns of PI school engagement, achievement and post-school transitions on the basis of the trajectories of the eight participants who moved to post-school destinations during the research period. A discussion of the impacting factors follows and is organized around three main themes: young people’s perception of identity and belonging, their motivations for schooling and the nature and quality of their relationships within the immediate surroundings of home and school. This chapter pays particular attention to the role of family and the local community (both Island-specific and Pacific-wide diaspora) in facilitating and supporting a young person’s experiences of schooling, particularly their engagement, achievements and resultant pathways.

7.1 Research questions and findings

The main Question is:

1. How can young PI learners’ in Melbourne’s western region prepare more effectively for successful participation and engagement at the secondary school setting that can lead them towards smoother transitions and positive pathways in further education, training and employment?

The relevant sub-questions are:

1a) What are the common pathways of PI learners after leaving secondary school?

1b) How do these pathways reflect the goals and objectives of PI learners, their families and communities in terms of the opportunities and benefits of education and schooling provided in Australia?

1c) What are the factors that determine young people's patterns of educational participation and engagement of PI at secondary school? Are these factors socially or culturally induced?

7.2. Results from the LSAY data

The LSAY database provided valuable baseline information about the demographics, attitudes and performances of PI learners at the initial data collection level which added to the contextual background for this study. This dataset provided useful information on PI numeracy and literacy achievement levels at Year 9, learner perceptions of their performance and their future aspirations and transitions. But there were also some limitations in regards this study; the first and obvious being the relatively tiny numbers of PI in each LSAY cohort (where they accounted for less than 1% of each cohort) and the possible consequences on weight of the data in relation to PI pathways.

In examining just the 1995 LSAY cohort, the data revealed a high attrition rate amongst PI over the ten year period from 1995 to 2005, leaving fewer learners in the study, who were likely to be more aspirational and high-performing than their peers who had dropped out. This meant that the residue group within LSAY were likely to have more or less similar pathway patterns into higher education as that of the overall LSAY population for that LSAY wave. This provided a skewed result, exacerbated by discrepancies in coding within this already small group. This problem was exemplified in the case of Indo-Fijian students who represented 10% of the cohort who self-identified as PI in 1995. These students demonstrated higher aspirations than the PI learner population within LSAY, with 80% of Indo-Fijian boys describing themselves as 'well above average' or 'better than average' in terms of schooling ability. Half of the PI who said they did not speak English at home saw themselves as performing 'very well' or 'better than average'. In contrast, the largest group of PI (55%) who said they

spoke English at home were much less likely to view their academic performance as strong. This third group of PI was the largest and most robust of any of the groups and their lower level of aspiration compared to other groups is interesting, considering that they had higher levels of fluency in English which reflected a level of 'integration' into broader society. From these results at least, it could be said that language fluency worked well for social and cultural interaction but not so well for academic performance. On the other hand, the lowering of aspirations could be reflective of a relaxation in family control and discipline which possibly did not work well for students in school achievement terms.

A second significant finding from the LSAY 1995 cohort was that PI students consistently performed at lower levels than the overall cohort in reading and numeracy tests with a disproportionate clustering in the lower achievement quartiles. In the same LSAY cohort, there was a clear pattern of gendered performance where girls were seen to be more strongly represented than boys in higher reading and overall achievement while boys did better than girls in mathematics including scoring in the highest-performing quartile. This pattern of achievement is consistent with findings by Helme et al. (2009) that girls are traditionally biased towards Humanities and Arts subjects while boys tend to favour science and mathematics subjects (Helme et al. 2009).

A third important finding from the LSAY baseline data related to the number of people receiving a Senior Certificate or equivalent over the ten-year survey period. Using the LSAY 1995 data again, it was found that the proportion of PI receiving a Senior Certificate or equivalent in the ten year period was consistently lower than the whole cohort across the different states and Territories. Interestingly, no PI recorded as acquiring a School Certificate in either Tasmania or Northern Territory, reflecting the low numbers of PI in these states generally.

A similar pattern exists in terms of the highest qualifications achieved by PI over the ten year period from 1995 to 2005, when compared with the whole group as shown in Figure 7.1.

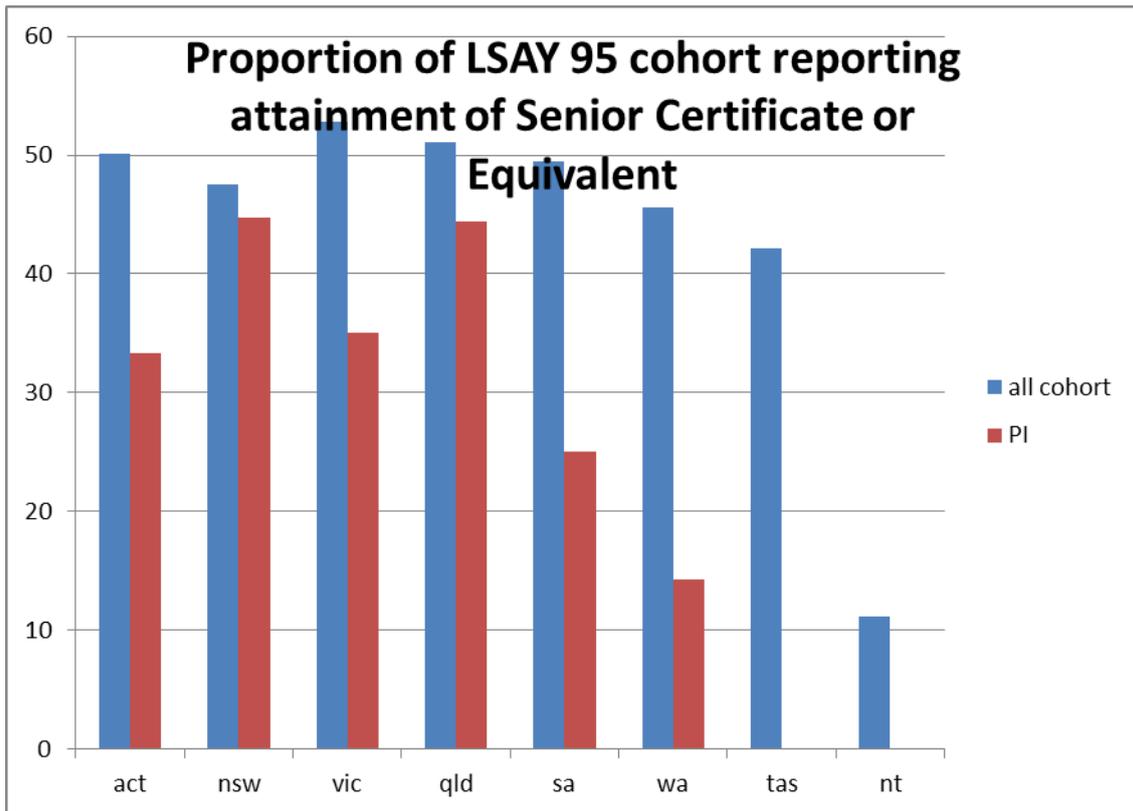


Figure 7-1 School certificate attainment of PI compared to whole group

Figure 7.2 presents an interesting result which contradicts the consistent pattern of low scores, low perceptions of ability and low performance levels of PI. This result shows PI attaining qualifications in Certificate 1, Certificate 11, Diploma, Bachelor degree and post graduate Diploma or certificate at above or similar level to the entire cohort which contradicts the results on numeracy and literacy scores, aspirations and performance. This pattern of results, however, illustrates the bias referred to earlier where high performers who remained with the study were more likely to have positive schooling outcomes and when considered in light of the small size of the PI group (just over 20% of what was initially a tiny group anyway), does not accommodate for the high rate of loss of lower-achieving learners. By comparison, the data on school completion (Figure 7.2) is much more robust and draws on a much larger group of young people who have not yet been lost to the study at that point.

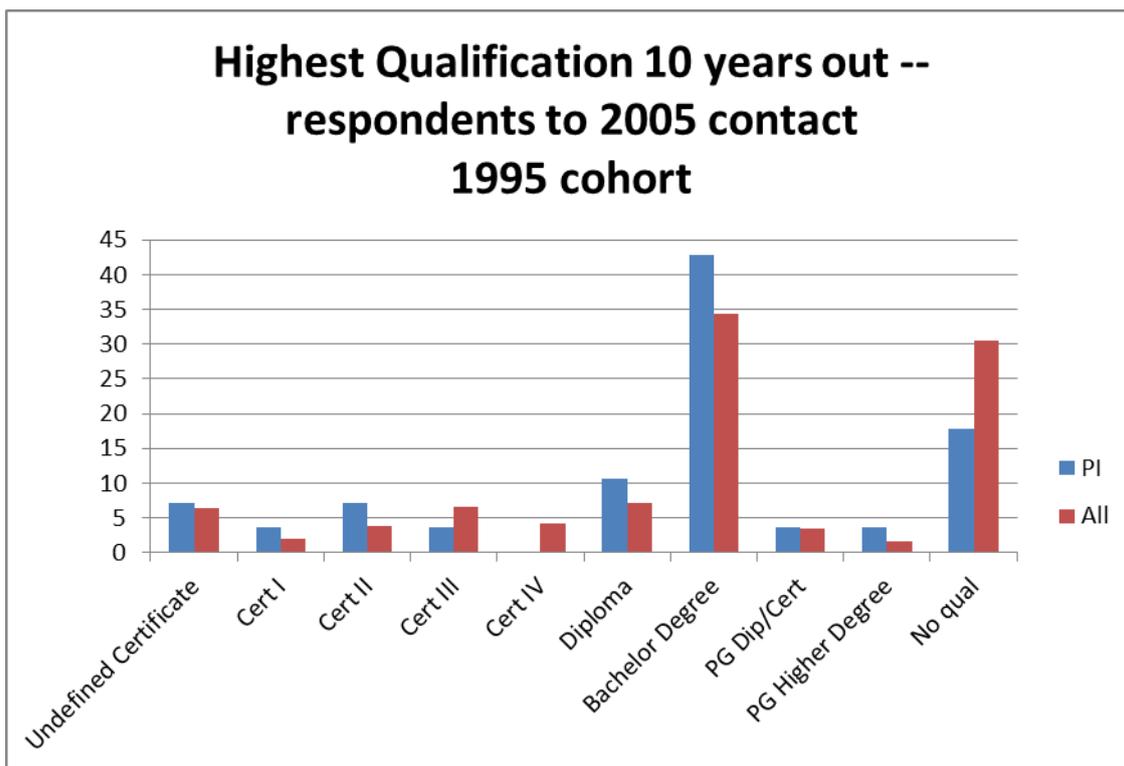


Figure 7-2 Highest qualification 10 years out by PI compared to whole group

Apart from this result, the main consistent finding in the LSAY data is the exceptionally high attrition rate for PI learners across the various waves of data. With a small sized cohort and a high attrition rate, it becomes easy for young PI to become 'lost' in the data as once they leave school, they become difficult to reach and their pathways impossible to trace. This reinforces the invisibility of PI within broader society. It results in invisibility statistics about this minority group and inevitably leads to further distortion in the available data and the risks of reading the data literally. Attrition aside, there are problems with definition, given the 'Pacific' grouping in LSAY are inclusive of other groups, such as Indo-Fijians and New Zealand-born PI. Nevertheless, there is no question that the LSAY has value in establishing important baseline information about demographics, attitudes and performances of PI at the initial data collection level.

The LSAY data supports current literature that present PI learners as consistently achieving less than successful outcomes at the compulsory and

post-compulsory levels of secondary schooling and even less success with higher education and employment pathways. These outcomes may be juxtaposed with parents' desire to fulfil the 'migrant dream' of achieving education and labour mobility success through their children's schooling experiences; the poor outcomes are also concerning as they imply that PI learners are poorly placed to effectively contribute, in the long term, to the social and economic development of their communities.

7.3 Results from this study

The data from this study resembles the findings from the LSAY 1995 cohort in a number of ways but not all. Firstly, there is a marked difference in the attrition rate of the study participants when compared with the 1995 LSAY cohort. Where the LSAY data showed a high attrition rate of PI, this was not the pattern found with the study group. None of the research participants were found to exit from secondary school prior to completing Year 10 level of schooling. Of the fourteen participants that started with the research, six participants (four girls and two boys) were still at school following either a VCE or VCAL pathway while another six (5 girls and 1 boy) were undertaking some form of post-school education at university or TAFE. Two male participants were engaged in employment as security officers, a job they have had since leaving school. This pattern of steady progression, however, changes when learners reach the post-compulsory schooling years of Year 11 and 12 where three participants were withdrawn prematurely from school.

Although these are the trajectories of only a few students, their transition patterns provide useful insights into the general pathway trends of PI learners. Of the eight participants who left school during the research period, only five successfully completed either a Year 12 VCE or VCAL pathway at their school. Of these five, three went directly to university to undertake degree studies while one participant transitioned to TAFE directly from high school. Two of the 3 students who had not completed VCE or VCAL went on to study certificate or pre-certificate level courses at TAFE while one started employment directly after

leaving school. One of the participants who had completed VCE also took up employment directly after school despite having an ATAR score suitable for enrolment at TAFE or university. This participant was a New Zealand citizen who did not qualify for CSP assistance for the payment of tuition fees. There were other reasons that affected this participant's decision not to pursue further studies but cost was one of the major factors. Table 8.1 illustrates the transitions of all study participants' over a four year period, with the shaded area showing the trajectories of the eight participants who transitioned to post-school destinations during the data collection phase.

Table 7-1 Pathways of study participants over 4 years

Name	Sex	Year 1 2012	Year 2 2013	Year 3 2014	Year 4 2015
Ama	F	Year 12 VCE	Degree	Degree	Degree
Visi	F	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE Year 12 VCAL	Certificate	Diploma
Sela	F	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE TAFE Certificate	Diploma	Degree
Jela	M	Year 12 VCE	Employment	Employment	Employment
Timo	M	Year 12 VCE	Employment	Employment	Employment
Lisi	M	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCAL	TAFE apprenticeship
Via	F	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE	Degree
Neli	F	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE	Degree
Esi	F	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE
Lali	F	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE
Esi	F	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE
Edi	M	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE
Sei	F	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE
Sio	M	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE

Overall, these results show some positive patterns of transition from school to post-secondary destinations for this group of learners, with their pathways and the courses of study reflecting to some extent their original career goals expressed at the beginning of the study. To some degree, these pathways also closely resemble the pathway trends that had been predicted for PI learners by teachers. The main difference is that there are more students studying at higher education (HE) level than at the vocational education (VE) level due to two participants' transiting to a HE course after studying certificate level courses at TAFE. After being withdrawn from school prior to completing Year 12 VCE due to low academic performance and poor attendance, both participants had been assisted by their schools to move to TAFE and both had returned to HE study after successfully completing their TAFE studies.

Of the two males who took up employment after leaving school, one had been withdrawn from school prior to sitting for VCE exams while the other had successfully completed VCE. The case of these two boys illustrates clearly how cost and affordability affect young people in different ways in relation to their educational pathways. While one participant was an Australian citizen who qualified for CSP assistance with the financial support to attend university or TAFE, he lacked the motivation or the academic results to do so, a factor at least partly linked to having low support at home. On the other hand, his cousin Timo who had the motivation to go to university to study nursing had the motivation and sufficient academic results to apply for tertiary level study but could not afford the tuition fees because of his non-Australian citizenship status.

While these personal and academic factors affected their different pathways, other family factors impacted their post-school options. The boys were cousins who lived in the same house with a single parent whose shift work and extended hours meant that he had little involvement in their schooling nor the time to effectively monitor their schooling responsibilities. While the parent (and guardian) wanted the boys to do well, he was not always able or available to provide the required support as his focus was on providing for the family's daily needs. The financial hardships at home even if not spoken about openly

affected the boys' morale at school and increased their motivation to find employment and contribute towards family income.

At the cultural level, weaker emphases on boys' performances at school may have contributed to lowering their aspirations to secure a direct employment pathway. As communities also allowed for boys to enjoy more social freedom compared to girls, the boys' lack of restrictions and supervision may have left little time for school work. Additionally, while the two boys enjoyed close social relationships with others in their Island community and had access to role models who could have assisted them with their school work, the cultural pride involved in presenting as '*being okay and self-sufficient*' prevented them from seeking the assistance they needed. In the case of these two boys, their family situation, visa status and community attitudes to gender and independence affected their school achievements and consequently their post-school pathways.

In different ways, these same issues could also be said to have impacted the pathway of the third male in this first cohort, who, from a young age wanted to become a tradesperson. His pathway at school was supported by both his family and his teachers and as expected, Visi followed a VCAL pathway at school before transitioning directly to a plumbing apprenticeship course at TAFE. Since the family had arrived in Melbourne from New Zealand after 2001, Lisi did not have Australian citizenship to qualify for Government support for his TAFE studies. Luckily both of his parents were employed and having experienced some educational success themselves, both were able to provide the financial, material and academic support for their son's schooling. They accepted their son's choice of a trades' pathway and a TAFE course, seeing this as a suitable pathway for him but not for his younger sister whom they hoped would go to university. Although the family has had to pay for his TAFE studies, both parents have the financial means to meet this cost and see it as a good investment for their son's future. Whilst this participant's pathway appears smooth and straightforward, having had good support at home and at school, the question in this case is whether the participant could have been encouraged

to pursue a VCE pathway that leads to university or whether his parents, being educated themselves felt that he could make his own choices in education. Whatever the reason, a nagging question in this case is whether his gender may have affected his parent's views and motivations about his choice of pathway.

The pathways of the three participants who entered university directly after secondary school can also be characterised by similar factors but in different ways. All three participants, all of whom were female, had experienced personal successes at school in the form of class prizes and positive school reports (Ama), good exam results and positive feedback from teachers (Via) and class prizes and a leadership position (Neli) which informed their aspirations and motivations to do well. They also came from families in which at least one person, either a parent (Ama and Neli) or an older sibling (Via) had satisfactorily completed a university qualification in which they were currently employed. All three participants were well supported at home, due to the main income earner's ability to meet material, financial and school supports at home. The main difference between the three was their Australian visa status. While Neli and Via had Australian citizenship, courtesy of their family's arrival from New Zealand prior to 2001 which provided them SVC visas and Government financial support to attend university, Ama as a more recent migrant who came directly from the Islands, did not have similar entitlement due to having only an Australian permanent resident visa status. With this visa status, Ama had been able to access Commonwealth assistance for her primary and secondary education but not for tertiary studies. Ama's family applied for citizenship for Ama in the year that she started her university course to enable her to continue her university education. In the cases of these participants, their personal agency to succeed, the successes experienced at school, the positive home support, family positive experiences of education and high expectations from schooling helped facilitate their strong pathways to higher education.

The pathways of the two female participants who moved to alternative education settings (Visi and Sela) are different from their counterparts in quite

distinct ways. Both participants had been withdrawn from school before completing VCE studies under difficult and sensitive conditions for themselves and their families. Although each of them had experienced some successes at school (Sela had attended a prestigious leadership camp in Year 9 and also achieved good results at school while Visi had been nominated for a volleyball scholarship in the United States and according to her mother had been getting good results), they were unable to sustain these positive results right through to school completion. While both girls were entitled to receive Commonwealth support for their university studies (due to their Australian citizenship status), their school circumstances and family situations provided some barriers that affected their transitions. Sela was asked to leave school due to low attendance and Visi's family reluctantly agreed with her school's decision to withdraw her due to low results in her School Assessed Component (SAC) exams. In both cases, their respective schools were found to be '*very helpful*' in finding and negotiating their subsequent pathways into alternative education settings. However, the reactions of the students and their parents to these school decisions were initially negative and unexpected thus providing some telling insights into the ways that schools, learners and their families act in conflicting ways to facilitate the pathways of PI learners from school.

Like her contemporaries who enrolled in university courses, Sela had also enjoyed schooling but she had less support at home during the VCE schooling period due to her elderly father falling ill and her mother having to provide for the family on a single income by working night shifts. Thus, Sela had to provide more assistance at home caring for her father and doing home chores to support her mother. Her attendance at school decreased and she was first warned and then withdrawn from school without her parents' knowledge. Sela's difficult situation at home, the low level of communication between her parents and the school and Sela's wish to avoid stressing her parents further helped to carve an alternative pathway that was not Sela's choice but which she pursued in order to gain respect for herself and her family. In Sela's case, the low level of physical and emotional support at home connected with parental unfamiliarity

and inexperience in education to profoundly affect Sela's achievements and transitions at school.

On the other hand, Visi's withdrawal from school was facilitated both by the school and her family. When Visi failed her English SACS exam in Year 11, she and her mother became very upset and blamed Visi's misguided focus on playing volleyball at school and club level as a barrier to her educational success. Her mother immediately approached the school for advice about supporting her daughter and was told that Visi could transition to an alternative education institution to do Year 12 VCAL. Although this was an unexpected proposition since Visi had been following a VCE pathway, the family reluctantly agreed with the school to move Visi to a VCAL pathway. This response by Visi's family was not an isolated case in this study as it also represented the attitudes of other PI parents towards the decisions made by schools for their children. In these instances, parents were seen to accept school decisions even if they disagreed with them and felt almost helpless in negotiating counter offers. Because the school acts from a powerful position and the parent does not have the confidence or tools to negotiate appropriately on behalf of their child, four parents in this study accepted school decisions and blamed themselves and their children for not being able to fit in to school requirements. Although Visi followed a pathway that she did not like at the time, she believed it to be the best and necessary option. Ironically, there were no other options provided to Visi by the school such as allowing her to continue VCE Year 12 and providing her with more academic support at school. In Visi's case, parental unfamiliarity with the demands of senior schooling presented as the main barrier to her educational success.

In both these cases too, their attrition stemmed mostly from their inability to fit with the requirements of the school system and partly to home or family circumstances where families did not have the educational experience or the confidence to deal with school issues and were unable to provide the optimum in-home physical and emotional support required. The fact that both girls had been able to experience success at school previously raises questions as to the

precipitating factors leading to their withdrawal from VCE and whether the school might have offered more positive assistance to them for keeping them at school. The tendency for parents to so readily accept the quite far-reaching suggestions of schools regarding their children also implies that this is a community that is not sufficiently confident about making the necessary but important decisions surrounding their children's future. The experiences and pathways of these two young women, in particular, bring into question the role of schools in appropriately supporting the pathways of a cohort that has consistently experienced low educational outcomes. One is left to wonder if there is any interest on the part of schools to improve the pattern of educational achievement of PI to align with parental expectations and learner aspirations or whether it is just easier to maintain the status quo of poor educational outcomes and low-level pathways for this cohort.

In summary, the pathway patterns for the participants in this study generally followed three main courses – a direct pathway from school to university or TAFE, a pathway to university via an alternative education setting and a direct pathway to employment. For most of these participants and their families, these pathways, whether forced or designed, were fraught with many challenges along the way, including having to adapt and change learning programs and institutions and personal goals and career pathways to fit with academic results, school expectations, personal commitments and family circumstances. Nevertheless, these pathways, whilst still evolving and emerging have mostly been positive for many of the participants and their families when viewed in the context of their personal situations and experiences. While home and family factors affected the nature of these transitions, there were also personal and school factors that shaped and defined these pathways. In a way, these learners may be regarded as still having a competitive edge against their contemporaries back in the Islands in that being resident in Australia, they have opportunity to access other alternative education settings when and if they are unable to experience success in formal schooling. This flexibility and the availability of opportunities allow young people and their parents to still view their educational experiences as being worthwhile.

7.4 Educational pathways and personal goals

7.4.1 Perceptions of self, belonging and identity

The study participants, who were all first generation migrants, identified closely with their country of birth or the country of birth of their parents regardless of whether they had been born in New Zealand, Australia or another Pacific Island country. Their sense of identity and belonging was closely tied to their historical origins, socio-cultural influences and personal self-concept. The migration journey was regarded as an important part of the participant's historical story whereby they were consistently aware of their migrant status as 'visitors' to the land of settlement. The participants constantly used phrases such as '*in my country*', '*where I come from*' and '*my roots in the Islands*' which implied a special physical and emotional connection to their country of origin. This was a place that remained both important and real to them and where they saw themselves returning to visit, work or live. This connection to the land and the past were important sensitivities that affected their perceptions and understanding of their self-identity and belonging. As migrants, these learners held certain expectations about their own rights and privileges in a land where they did not yet fully belong or feel accepted and where they are likely to remain in the margins of broader society (Woolford, 2009; Vasta, 2004).

On the other hand, the young people's deep-rooted ties to their family, culture and tradition also caused them to interact with external influences, institutions and structures such as schooling, employment and the broader community with uncertainty, anxiety and trepidation. These external spheres or layers of influence (Broffebrenner, 1979) were important but were of less importance when compared to the safety and familiarity of home, with its cultural and traditional rules and mores and the close links to their socio-cultural past. Against these deep socio-cultural roots that were already strongly embedded in their life experiences, participants tended to view other aspects of their lives as external, separate and secondary layers to their identity – layers that were somewhat unpredictable, difficult and risky compared to the known, familiar and

safe layer of family, cultural heritage and traditional identity. These separate layers of schooling, education and employment were worlds that needed to be negotiated and tested according to unfamiliar benchmarks for which success was uncertain and unpredictable. Nevertheless, these participants and their families were also aware that success in these '*other*' worlds could be achieved and that successful achievement in these worlds could lead to enhanced self-worth, acceptance and belonging in their new home setting and the global environment. More importantly, the participants were aware that these successes could bring pride to their families and prove to others that migration to Australia has been worthwhile and beneficial. Most participants had strong motivations to succeed in these secondary layers of influence and to develop identities that were accepting of the new culture. For others with less successful experiences, there were more uncertainties and difficulties in developing a sense of belonging which also led to poor adaptation and settlement to the new setting. When faced with the complexities and ambiguities of these separate layers of influence, some participants' found themselves in conflicted states in terms of maintaining their 'Islander' socio-cultural background whilst responding effectively to the socio-cultural requirements and expectations of an Australian way of life. In the schooling context, this conflicted state of being led some participants to experience various difficulties which led them to seek alternative pathways or withdraw from schooling altogether.

Throughout this study, there were many examples of learners who continuously experienced tensions in trying to assert their identities whilst negotiating and compromising these with the expectations from home and school. In these situations, learners found it easier to prioritize the social and cultural expectations and requirements of home, family and community because these were culturally and socially familiar, safe and real to them. The pressures to 'fit in' and adjust to their other surroundings, such as a school sometimes had to take second place as the requirements and expectations within these different settings and systems became more difficult and uncertain. At the same time and all around them, these learners saw few role models from within their local

diaspora in prominent spaces within the community whilst being constantly reminded of the negative past experiences of other PI in schooling or employment. These consistent negative observations and reminders of past PI experiences contribute to enhancing the uncertainty and hopelessness felt by some PI in these secondary worlds. These experiences, in turn, cause PI learners to develop superficial or even marginal (Park, 1950) identities in their new environment which adds to feelings of not being '*fully belonged*' or accepted to levels or stages where they are able to fully realize their 'migrant dreams' of being successful in Australia.

This sense of transitional or superficial attachment to new identities may have positive or negative implications on the aspirations and goals of PI learners and their schooling or employment outcomes. Young PI may feel discouraged about their aspirations and opportunities, depending on their past or existing circumstances in the country of settlement. Ama (F17Yr12), for example, felt more encouraged and positive about achieving her schooling and employment goals in Australia after seeing her mother experience success in education and employment and in receiving positive feedback from school. On the other hand, Jela (M17Yr12) whose father had not experienced similar success in education and worked a casual job felt less motivated about his opportunities in Australia due to the difficulties experienced by his family. His plan to move overseas to work for a family security business signifies a low level of confidence in getting long-term paid employment in Australia. Additionally, Sei's mother seriously contemplated sending her daughter to a Pacific regional university after Year 12 (in 2016) due to the cheaper tuition costs, considering that Sei (F14Yr9) would not be eligible for CSP funding when she starts university studies. Sela, as well as her parents, looked forward to returning to the Islands to retire. What was significant about these views was that they were often triggered by experiences of emotional or physical difficulty, challenge or even failure to live up to the expectations of living in a new country and the successes that could be derived from the '*migrant dream*'. To some extent, the continuous connection to home country or homeland may be seen by PI families or young people as a 'buffer' or

a 'next or second option' if things do not turn out well or according to plan in Australia. The danger with having a '*second or other*' option, however, is that some learners may be tempted to feel relaxed about their options and become less motivated about their opportunities in education or employment in their adopted country whilst idealizing their 'other' options.

On a social and cultural level, the participants in this study enjoyed a strong sense of social capital, with strong links within their families and their same-language and similar-culture communities. Their social and close-knit networks also extended to trans-national relationships with extended family members and communities located overseas and inter-state. Although, most of the participants in the study enjoyed a level of affinity with other PI groups, these connections were not as deep or as close as the relationships with others with whom they shared a similar nationality, language, ethnicity or other association (such as church or sports team). Those who identified as Samoans tended to relate closely with other Polynesians (from Cook Islands, Hawaii, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Tokelau) while those who identified as Solomon Islanders tended to relate more easily with other Melanesians (from Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Vanuatu) than with the Polynesians or Micronesians (from Kiribati, Guam, Marshall Islands, Nauru and Palau). However, where there were opportunities for interaction with other PI groups in social settings such as at school, church, sports field or at community based events, young PI tended to acknowledge each other in civil and respectful ways. Being lumped together at school as a cohesive social and cultural group did not concern the participants in this study and they all reported that PI learners got on well with each other and were sometimes collectively referred to as 'fobs' (fresh off the boat) or 'Islanders'. The use of these terms at the school level signify that as individuals or in their collective groups, PI tended to be identified (and identify) as one cultural and social group within the school and within the broader community.

Additionally, the learner's identities were sometimes complicated by the mixed messages received from families and the local PI diaspora community in terms

of the goals for moving to Australia. Whilst some migrant families viewed Australia as a place of educational and economic opportunity, they sometimes simultaneously also discouraged their children from overly accepting Australian ways of life, preferring them to maintain their Islander cultural and social ways of life rather than committing to 'Australian' values. For some families, there were real fears about young people becoming distanced from their cultures and traditions and adopting western influences, concurring with Lee (2007) and Macpherson et al., (2000) that migrant populations hold on strongly to their traditions as part of maintaining their identity and their 'competitive edge' in a rapidly changing global environment. Such fears also stemmed from cultural pressures to prevent young people from having 'too much freedom' which could lead them to engage in socially unacceptable behavior that might bring disrepute to families. Most of the families involved in this study were very aware of these pressures and made deliberate efforts to keep their children away from community or social events that would introduce their children to socially unacceptable behaviors. One mother kept her daughter away from community events to minimize opportunities for her daughter to socialize with other young people or engage in aggressive behavior, drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes. This mother recognized that there were negative influences even within her own community. However, she was happy to let her daughter attend church and to socialize with other young people in that space whom she viewed as "*more disciplined in their behavior and focused on their education*". Unlike this mother, most parents in the study encouraged their children to attend community cultural events and regarded these avenues as effective and necessary spaces for maintaining family and community connection and spiritual wellbeing but also to keep children away from situations that might encourage engagement in risky behavior.

Whilst the connection to specific Island nationality was maintained through language and the cultural mores that were practised on a daily basis at home, participants also had strong cultural connections with the elders and leaders within their local diasporic communities with whom they interacted on a regular

basis and who had important influences on the ways that young people conducted their lives. These wider relationships and networks were very important to young people's identity and belonging because they provided important information to PI youth about their culture and traditions, appropriate forms of behavior and in clarifying their specific roles within the community. Whilst many of the parents in the study saw this connection to community elders as a positive thing, one parent (social worker) viewed this action as an intrusion on the priorities, rights and responsibilities of young people which also increased their isolation from broader societal networks.

Additionally, for some participants, there were obvious tensions in negotiating the priorities between the preservation of island cultures and traditions and adaptation to Australian culture. There were a few parents and community elders who held reservations about the social and cultural influences that their children were exposed to as a result of identifying too much with Australian values and culture, particularly in terms of independence, freedom and choices for young people. While some parents were eager for their children to access benefits in the educational and employment sectors, they also simultaneously did not want their children to lose their cultural or social identity. On their part, the participants were also seen to be consistently conflicted by the need to maintain cultural values and expectations and to deflect pressures to assimilate into Australian society. Such apparent mixed and conflicting messages contributed in some ways towards the making of shifting and non-permanent identities in PI young people, leading to identity crisis and a feeling of isolation or marginality in an unfamiliar environment.

On a personal level, the participants were proud of their heritage and enjoyed a strong sense of community within their cultural and social groups at home, school or in the community. At the same time and despite their claims to be '*confident in their own skin*', the interviews revealed in most of the participants an underlying sense of wanting to '*fit in*' to wider community norms and expectations. The need to '*fit in*' was most obvious in the way the young people

expressed their career goals and aspirations, all of which were related to and dependent on successful schooling.

The school was viewed by all the participants as the best place that could help them achieve their aspirations and goals. They, therefore, placed a great deal of importance on schooling to provide the necessary support to perform and achieve the required outcomes to relevant standards that would help them achieve successful pathways. Similarly, their parents recognized schooling as an important space in which their children could achieve their educational goals and strive for economic success. While some parents were able to easily respond to the physical requirements of schooling, such as ensuring their children attended class, wore correct uniform and brought necessary resources to school, had a place to study at home and planned career goals with their children, they also became increasingly less confident in providing homework, test and exam support and in monitoring school progress at the senior levels of schooling. A low level of cultural capital such as unfamiliarity with these core aspects of schooling and having insufficient information about post school pathways caused some parents to have unrealistic expectations about their children's educational outcomes and pathways.

7.4.2 Fears and concerns

Most participants in this study claimed not to be pressured to be anyone other than themselves and said they were proud of their Islander heritage which confirmed a deep sense of loyalty to their cultural and social identity. However, a few participants admitted to having some fears growing up in Melbourne. Some of these concerns were related to stereotyping and being 'negatively labelled', attributing these misrepresentations to negative media publicity about PI in general. Interestingly, at the time of the interviews, a new comic mock-documentary on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) channel called '*Jonah from Tonga*' by Chris Lilley was aired. All four research participants from Tonga expressed embarrassment and disagreement with the negative portrayal of Tongan youths in the documentary, saying that their peers at school had

teased them about it and they felt strongly that the documentary had depicted their customs and cultures very poorly. Whether true or not, this incident and others like it contribute towards furthering negative publicity and labelling about PI as illustrated in the two statements below.

"I sometimes get scared of being 'jumped' in public places because I am an Islander and young Islanders are usually presented as troublemakers...other people might mistake me for someone who may have beaten them up in the past" (Via -F15 Yr10).

"At work, the girls were talking about a PI woman who had aborted her baby and disposed of it in a bin... I was a bit conscious of my heritage amongst my work colleagues and ashamed of her actions because I knew it is wrong to do that" (Sei - F14Yr9).

Another concern commonly expressed by the participants centered on school achievement, and on doing poorly at school resulting in low grades, negative educational pathways, lack of future employment and an inability to fulfil parental expectations. The fear of not doing well at school and thus not meeting the expectations of parents was common to all participants' in the study. It was clear that all of them, even those whose parents were not so forceful, desperately wanted to please their parents by doing well at school so that they could secure a job that would assist their family in future. Success at school represented a flag of a broader set of achievements and respectability, necessary in a context where there was a sense of being part of a cultural group that had not yet achieved full acceptance.

"My main fear is that I will not be able to get a job at the end of my schooling and not able to help my family" (Visi F16Yr11).

"All I want is to get a good ATAR score and go to university... that is what my family expects of me," (Neli, F15Yr10).

These concerns were different to those expressed by the parents whose main concerns were about getting young people to complete schooling and finding stable and secure employment that would provide economic security and certainty for their families while at the same time maintaining and achieving

community respect and cultural validation. The differences in the fears and concerns between the generations show that parents and older members of the PI community were sometimes oblivious to the complex challenges faced by learners in terms of their immediate and long-term social and economic integration in a new culture. Whilst families held strongly the view that successful engagement at school would bring positive social and economic rewards, the participants showed themselves to be more realistic about their options and opportunities from schooling and employment, showing clear disparities in the perceptions of learners and parents. These gaps in information were further reinforced in settings where learners had limited opportunities to share their views and concerns openly with parents due to fear of exposing weakness or failure to live up to expectations. Such gaps in information are likely to perpetuate if and when negotiations, strategies and interventions to benefit young people are conducted with community ‘elders’ who are sometimes unfamiliar or out of touch with the changing needs and experiences of learners.

7.4.3 Public perceptions of PI

Whereas in the home and amongst Island community groupings, a young person is identified according to their nationality as ‘Samoan’ (from the Island country of Samoa) or ‘Fijian’ (from Fiji), many people from outside Oceania incorrectly assume PI as belonging to one ethnic or socio-cultural group. The most common assumptions are that PI belong to one cultural ethnic group. However, those with knowledge of the Pacific Islands do know that PI come from many different Island countries, speak different languages, have dis-similar physical features and belong to three distinct ethnicities – Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian. These common misunderstandings about PI show a general lack of awareness about the distinct characteristics of PI within the broader community. Such inaccuracies in public perception may be caused by the small size of the PI population in Australia where PI have remained generally invisible (Pryke, 2014; Rose et al., 2009; Woolford, 2009) except in

areas such as sports (rugby union and rugby league), the arts, community participation and juvenile justice.

Conversely, viewing PI as a cohesive group has had some benefits. At the community level, there have been many small scale projects or initiatives that have focused on presenting PI people as a cohesive social and cultural group. Academic and community groups such as the Australian Association for Pacific Studies (AAPS), Contemporary Pacific Arts, Pacific Arts Network and the Council of Victorian Pacific Islander Communities (CVPIC) have maintained a consistent presence, at both the state and national levels to promote a collective PI community to raise its profile as a cohesive and vibrant socio-cultural group. Despite being small and heavily reliant on community and state levels of funding, these networks and groups have become quite successful in establishing and promoting a shared PI identity, presence and focus within the broader community in Australia.

At school, PI learners generally saw themselves as a unified and positive social and cultural group. In most of the schools, teachers also perceived them as a collective group with clear strengths and weaknesses; with prowess and talent in sport (Macdonald, 2014), the arts and music but with consistent poor performances in academic work with a tendency to engage in troublesome behavior. The media has also often presented PI, especially young males as being aggressive, prone to engaging in risky behavior and gang culture, with higher than normal rates of incumbents in juvenile detention or in jail (Grossman & Sharples, 2010). These public perceptions of PI, even if partially well-founded, do affect the way that PI learners are understood at school, work or public settings and can indirectly affect perceptions and stereotypes about their schooling trajectories, outcomes, and post-school pathways.

7.4.4 Family and identity

The family is a very important part of the identity of a young PI. The lives of most of the participants in this study were so closely inter-twined and affected

by their respective family values, beliefs and culture that they could not see a separation of themselves from this core unit. Consequently, their goals, hopes and fears were seen as part and parcel of family-wide experiences, achievements and challenges. Within their immediate family circles, young PI were seen to be comfortable and relaxed about themselves. As they reached adolescence, many of the participants were drawn physically and emotionally towards similar-age and same-sex relatives whilst becoming more distant from older family members. The relationships and connections with same-age and similar-sex family members became stronger as participants reached their mid adolescence years which was also the period in which the interviews were conducted for this study. Peer influence, particularly from same-age members within the family or local diasporic community, significantly affected the schooling trajectories of a few participants. Boys were particularly vulnerable due to their access to greater freedoms and mobility but this also affected some girls in the study. Sela, who was withdrawn from school due to sporadic attendance was involved in a court case involving some out-of-school cousins while Visi lost focus on her studies due to spending too much time playing sports with her friends. But peer influence was also a strength factor for other participants who had strong family role models around them to keep them focused on their studies.

The family had the most significant effect on the decisions and choices that the participants made in terms of their general well-being, life goals and career pathways. Their lives were closely connected to that of their families with a strong desire to protect its sanctity and the stability or 'calm' of the family unit, consistent with Pacific notions of 'vaa' and 'faa' (Thaman, 2008) and a need to maintain a safe space. Amongst all the participants, there was a strong sense to provide service to the family and to reciprocate and be relied on whilst trying hard not to inconvenience or bring unnecessary problems or harm to family members (Samu, 2007). The desire to protect family also extended to the sphere of schooling. Most participants expressed fears of not being able to fulfill their educational goals and thereby failing to assist their families. This was a

constant factor in the minds of all participants and invariably affected their decisions and choices about life and schooling. A consistent pattern observed was that where goals, achievements, relationships and decisions were made in alignment with family ideals and aspirations, the educational experiences and results were smoother for both parties. Alternatively, when the educational decisions or outcomes contradicted with family wishes, there were tensions for both the learner and the family concerned.

Outside of the home sphere, young PI saw themselves as an extension of their family and were protective of matters relating to the family. Individual achievements were celebrated by the entire family who viewed such success with pride and as honor for the entire family. On the other hand, individual failure was seen as a way to bring shame and disrepute to the entire family. The pressure to keep negative information hidden from others sometimes caused some families to prefer dealing with certain sensitive matters themselves. This action was perceived by some school personnel as 'being secretive' but to the PI learner and even their families, this was a way of keeping families safe, secure and insulated from external criticism. To these families, maintaining a distinct separation between the school and even their own community was necessary for maintaining family honour and suppressing family vulnerabilities. Some parents rationalized the importance of keeping a distance by saying;

"I prefer to speak with the teachers myself rather than through another community member because I do not want them to know if there are problems with my daughter" (Parent of Lali, F15Yr8).

"I want my daughter to do well at school so that others in my community will think that she is not dumb" (Parent of Sela, F16Yr11)

"Some community members do not ask for help for their children from others because of their pride... they think others will gossip about them seeking help" (Parent of Ama F17Yr12).

In past research with PI learners, Onikama, Hammond & Koki (1998), noted that PI parents perceived teachers to have sole responsibility for their children at the school site while they themselves had full responsibility at home (1998). This

distinct separation of space and responsibility was also observed in this study where some parents and sometimes learners experienced discomfort in seeking assistance from school personnel to support their children. This reluctance to seek support is explained in Broffebrenner's terms (1997) as typical of people who blame themselves for the inability to conform to dominant expectations for which they are culturally ill-equipped (Broffebrenner, 1979). A lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) makes PI parents and their children reluctant to seek help and when combined with feelings of '*shame*' or '*pride*' and the over-riding quest to maintain calm and harmony, PI may be seen to -marginalise and isolate themselves from the essential services and assistance that they need. This self-imposed isolation can also affect the aspirations of learners and the dreams of parents when and if these are not clearly articulated to school staff who have the responsibility and the resources to respond accordingly. Fila's story (See Figure 6.3) and her discomfort at answering questions about her family clearly illustrates the importance of maintaining the affairs of home and family private.

All the participants and families in this study maintained close relationships with family members who lived overseas or interstate, with some having more relatives living overseas and interstate than in Melbourne. These family connections were maintained and reinforced through regular communication and visits for significant events such as holidays, weddings and funerals. The costs for such travel and visits to the Islands were a priority in many family budgets and money could always be found when required. Of importance too were the relationships kept with other community members living in the local area with whom similar associations were shared. The community members who attended the same church or whose children went to the same school or trained with the same rugby team often associated more closely with each other than with extended family members who did not share comparable associations. The location of family members also determined the closeness of relationships, with proximity proving to be an important strategy for maintaining family connectedness and community cohesion (Hau'ofa, 1994).

7.5 Family perceptions of schooling

All the parents in this study held a high respect for education and schooling and trusted that through successful engagement in schooling, their children could achieve educational and economic success. One of the reasons for parents valuing education highly was to maintain self-respect and esteem, and to prove to relatives within the local diasporic community and in the Islands that the children were doing well and making use of their opportunities in Australia. A second reason was to validate and justify the decision to move to a new country. Within the local diaspora and island communities, there was pressure for children to do well at school and parents took personal responsibility for children either doing well or poorly. Three parents in the study emphasized the importance of their children doing well at school as a way of proving to their community that they were '*not dumb*'. For these parents, the high value placed on education which had started the 'migrant dream' seemed to remain strong as most continued to encourage school attendance, participation and achievement amongst their children despite the risk of culture loss. Some parents consistently expressed the view that schooling was '*so much better and easier here*' which implied an expectation and hopefulness in education to fulfil their hopes for success. For them, this sense of mystification might be compounded by a lack of confidence or preparedness for dealing with the requirements of a new system but nevertheless this was a mystery that was worthy and valuable if successful. These parents continued to place faith in the education system by continuing to send their children to school, hopeful that they would one day be successful. If not successful, these families kept their hopes up by encouraging younger children and siblings to do better or they worked to improve their own education to assist their children further.

Whilst the view of many parents was that schooling in Australia was 'much better and easier', this outlook was somewhat misguided as it applied to less critical aspects of schooling such as access to education, affordability of basic resources (uniform and stationery), quality of teachers and learning resources. Some parents compared their own schooling experiences to that of their

children saying that the children travelled by bus, had clean uniforms, ample stationery and had kind teachers (while they themselves had walked to school, had one set of uniforms and few stationery items with teachers who sometimes slapped their wrists). It was obvious that these parents' experiences of schooling in their home countries also informed their perceptions of learners' needs at school. From these past experiences, some parents perceived their role and involvement in their children's education as being limited to providing physical requirements of schooling such as encouraging attendance, providing uniform and stationery and giving space and time to study at home. The danger with having such a 'disciplined' view of schooling though is that parents may focus attention on less important aspects of schooling and overlook the academic aspects that are most critical at senior levels of schooling where decisions about future pathways are made.

Some parents grossly under-estimated the levels of their own involvement needed to support their children's education. The expectations of a close relationship between the home and the school typical of Australian schooling was not familiar and some parents did not fully anticipate having an active role in supporting their children at the levels of academic focus and depth required at senior levels of secondary schooling. Without prior experience in these levels of study, some parents found they were culturally ill-prepared to deal with the requirements of an unfamiliar schooling environment. On the other hand, a few parents who themselves had experienced positive and successful outcomes from undertaking schooling in Australia or overseas were more adaptable to new ways of supporting their children.

Even if parents were knowledgeable about the requirements for preparing their children for senior level study, their capacity to provide actual support was also hampered by the low level of cultural capital in the schooling aspects of study skills, time management, oral and written communication, writing in specific genres, or critiquing knowledge, all of which are skills not learned or emphasized at home. For some of these learners, the home support required for the most essential aspects of schooling was often missing, leaving some PI

learners without the language, communication and study tools needed to effectively navigate the higher levels of schooling, a point made by one of the participants as follows:

'...the best way for family to support is to give us time to do study and actually realize and understand how hard school is' (Sela, Interview 3, 2013).

Only two out of fourteen participants overtly expressed a need for parents to provide more assistance towards schooling. Both participants came from homes where the parents worked long hours and were also absent from home during the evenings. All other participants claimed that parents were already doing more than enough and did not see the need for more support. The commonality of this response amongst the participants was interesting but also concerning as it gave an impression to parents that the children were doing well at school and did not need help when some actually did require substantial support. The fact that only two participants articulated this need suggests that the majority of participants were anxious to please their parents, taking care not to give them additional burdens especially if they were already laden with more pressing concerns such as paying rent or caring for young or sick family members. Even in well-to-do homes with two earning parents, the participants were reluctant to show weakness or discuss problems related to their schooling. This finding suggests that perhaps in the case of PI families, it is important for parents to become more receptive to hearing the challenges associated with schooling and acknowledge that learners do experience multiple challenges within the Australian school context and that as parents, they have an important role to identify issues and help resolve these challenges which can manifest in different forms and layers.

In the Australian schooling context, a particular challenge for many second language speakers is the emphases placed on oral and written English as the dominant form of communication. Abrahms (2010) acknowledges the difficulties of certain groups by stating that 'the starting race (at school) is not the same' (Abrahms, 2010) for all students. For the PI learners and families that were

involved in this study, it was apparent that more effective and confident ways of communicating with their children and school personnel about issues related to schooling needed to occur to improve home-school relationships and to minimise confusion between these two stakeholders.

A common theme also emerging from this study was the existence of serious communication gaps between parents and school personnel regarding school needs and issues. Low level parental language proficiency and confidence in communicating with school staff played a hand in worsening the communication flow. Whilst language and communication barriers played a part in producing an information gap, low attendance of parents at school meetings or failure by children to bring home important information from the school also compounded the extent of the information gap. Despite the apparent gaps, however, many parents in this study were hopeful about their children's achievements at school and continued to hold high expectations of the school system to deliver on their children's educational goals. In response, some schools suggested that families sometimes had too high or unrealistic expectations of their children in terms of success at school (Teacher – School A and Counsellor School D), proving further the existence of many disconnects and misalignments between parental and teacher goals for this group of learners.

Not all the parents had a clear sense of the depth and volume of assistance and support needed by their children. Some parents who had had more experience and familiarity with education were seen to be more proactive in seeking honest and accurate information from schools about their children's progress, opportunities and options and also more confident to approach the school if their children were already doing well at school. Others were less confident to approach the school if they did not already have a good rapport with school staff or if their children were doing less well or experiencing behavioural issues at school. Ama's mother for example, who knew her daughter was doing well at school on the basis of her school results and through regular communication with the school, took steps to negotiate her daughter's reinstatement in the VCE Chemistry class. On the other hand Jela's father and Sela's mother who

were physically unable to communicate regularly with their children's respective schools due to night shift work were often tired during the day, put in less effort and time into communicating with the school, resulting in their further isolation from the school and fewer options to assist with their children's issues when their intervention might have been helpful.

In some families, like that of Jela (M17Yr12), Sela (F16Yr11), Edi (M15Yr9) and Lali (F14Yr8), the information gap between the parents and the school was further widened if and when children were already experiencing academic or behavioural issues at school. Some participants actually preferred to 'manage' the information gap between the school and their parents and ensured that some information from the school did not reach their parents especially if they were not doing too well at school. For example, Sela (F16Yr11) was able to withhold information from her parents about her withdrawal from Year 12 for a significant period of time, suggesting that this important information may have been deliberately intercepted from reaching her parents.

It is difficult to believe Sela's claim that the school had not attempted to speak to her parents about her situation, considering its seriousness. It is of course also possible that the school may have decided against contacting the parents due to their unsatisfactory attendance at school meetings. What might be closest to the truth, however, is that Sela, knowing that her parents would be angry and upset at the prospect of her leaving Year 12 may have decided that it was better to withhold the information from them than upset them further. This was not an isolated incident as other participants were seen to manage information flow in various ways, such as providing incorrect phone details (Edi, M15Y10), staying back at school after-hours on pretence of doing homework at school (Visi, F16Yr11) and deliberately suggesting that parents not come to parent-teacher meetings (Jela, M17Yr12 and Lali, F14Yr8). This kind of behaviour concurs with Connell's (2003) seminal work with disadvantaged families in Sydney where disadvantaged learners were found to make deliberate efforts to keep school matters separate from the home and vice versa. Similarly, Nuthal's (2005) studies with PI learners in New Zealand found that some of the young people

worked hard to keep the two worlds of home and school separate from each other by actively managing the interface between these two spheres of their lives to their benefit. Like Connell's study, this study also found that the young people whose parents were less educated than themselves tended to engage in this behaviour more often than those learners whose parents had themselves experienced higher levels of education.

The danger with parents and their children having distorted realities of schooling and education did lead, in some instances to a deliberate separation of these two worlds by the person who most understands it - the young person. Whilst both parties (the teachers and the parents) struggled to know what was happening 'on the other side of the wall', the participants may deliberately wide this gap for their own advantage or protection. This separation between the worlds of home and school was manifested clearly in the way that communication flowed or gets distorted between the school and the parents. A common complaint by school personnel was that PI parents viewed home issues as their own business and did not want school staff to interfere, especially when the matter was related to a behavioural or academic problem encountered at school. One staff member viewed this action by parents as 'being secretive' and one school (School C) even hinted that sometimes students found themselves subjected to violence at home for misdemeanours at school. On their part, the parents explained that they sometimes preferred to deal with matters concerning their children at home to maintain privacy about family affairs but also because they saw it as their problem to solve. When the matter was related to their children's bad behaviour or poor achievement at school, some parents were anxious to keep these issues private from other community members for fear of being seen as failures or having children who are 'troublesome and dumb'. The pressure from the Pacific diaspora communities for children to achieve and succeed at school was well-illustrated by one of the mothers in the statement;

"We expect Sela to go to university as her older siblings did not do well at school... it is important for us because my community might think we are

'dumb or useless' if none of our children are successful at school', (Parent of Sela (F16Yr11)).

Another mother exclaimed, *"I don't want others to know what my daughter's needs are... they may think that she is dumb"* (Parent of Lali F14Yr8).

This same reason was given by two other parents (parents of Esi, F15Yr10 and Via F16Yr10) whose sons had been suspended and expelled for misdemeanours at school. Both parents had not approached the school to discuss the issue. These incidents suggest that despite giving the appearance of a close-knit community, many PI community members also struggle with needs for privacy and discreteness within their own local diasporic communities. Because parents saw their children as extensions of themselves, any achievement or failure by a family member was regarded as the whole family's success or a collective weakness. When there was a risk or failure on the part of learners, families took measures to protect and guard their privacy from both the school and their local diaspora or island community.

Another important issue related to family perception of schooling rests with the preservation of traditional culture and the adaptation to new culture. Many parents in this study were aware of the risks of culture loss through schooling and education but continued to be supportive of their children following the education and employment opportunities available in Australia. Young people themselves were also aware that they could risk losing their culture and traditional values in the process of adapting to Australian values and culture. Indeed, this was a dilemma that many Pacific parents consistently found themselves in; whether to allow their children to become successful in education and adapt Australian values or to keep young people close to home and maintain traditional cultural knowledge and values. Whilst the goal of many parents was to have children achieve success in education whilst holding on to their culture, the reality for some of the young people was that this expectation caused confusion about their priorities and responsibilities. Those who found schooling difficult also found it easier to hold on to the familiar and known requirements of the home setting and its supported cultural norms. Others were more adaptable and able to manage both worlds with some success while

others found their schooling was compromised by home requirements and vice versa. Most of the parents in this study, however, seemed resigned to the fact that they wanted their children to be successful in education, even if this resulted in some loss of culture. One parent expressed his pragmatic view as follows;

“I made the decision to move to Australia to seek education and employment opportunities for my children so if my daughter is successful in her education, then culture will have to come second place” (Parent of Esi F15Y9).

“In this country, you have to be educated and have a job to survive so if my daughter is successful in education, so be it... it will help her and help us in the future” (Parent of Lali F15Yr8).

These responses illustrate that the setting in which families have found themselves also dictates the priorities for the children and both parents and their children are willing to adapt to new challenges in order to experience a better life. Having said this, it was also evident that it was mostly parents whose children were already doing well at school that were more open to changing their views of education. These parents were also more understanding and accommodating of their children’s decisions to change career goals and pathways and supportive even if these adjustments were inconsistent with their initial goals for their children.

Some parents were also more lenient about prioritizing education over culture in respect of their daughters than their sons. For example, the two parents whose sons had been suspended and expelled from school often contrasted the achievements of their sons to their daughters, both of whom were participants in the study and of whom they were very proud and had high expectations at school. There was a tendency for parents to put more pressure on girls to follow the direct pathway to university from school and to get a decent job while there was less pressure on boys to go to university. Boys also had more freedom to select their pathways and TAFE and apprenticeships were regarded as acceptable pathways for young males. At the same time, some parents, especially fathers saw sports (especially professional rugby) pathways and trades careers as suitable for boys for both the short and longer term if they

were able to make it (Macdonald, 2013). However, for a few parents, particularly those with daughters, sports, drama and music goals were still secondary options to the traditional path of attending university to become a lawyer, doctor, teacher or nurse and if children were doing well enough in school, parents took the extra steps to direct them towards these traditional careers. Tensions in perceptions about courses were evident, especially amongst parents that did not see TAFE or direct employment as suitable options for their children. The pressure for girls to succeed in education, go to university and follow traditional career pathways was quite common amongst the families in this study. A possible reason for this persuasion is that girls are seen to be more family-oriented and nurturing and more likely to support their families throughout their lives whereas boys may leave home when they start their own families and not be committed to supporting the family in the long-term (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003). The cultural expectation of looking after one's family is therefore a strong cause for girls becoming highly protected from social interaction and integration compared to their brothers.

In Pacific society, Christianity as a doctrine and church as an institution play a central role in the lives of PI families (Crocombe, 2001). The parents in this study provided many reasons for their commitment to church and all regarded church-going as part of their responsibility and routine. Many parents reported that the church provided personal spiritual well-being and a sense of inner peace, but also as an important space for community togetherness where families could socialise safely and respectfully with others. Others claimed that they went to church seeking physical and emotional support from church elders who could provide meditation and private consultation for issues experienced at home. Parents also viewed church as an institution that would teach their children good behaviour and assist in monitoring behaviour and discipline. These positive views about the benefits of church attendance and involvement allowed church elders to draw a lot of support from the community which also put them in positions of power and influence. The participants in this study held these positions with great respect and saw church attendance and giving as an inherent part of culture and family tradition. Only one parent was sceptical about

the advantages of church involvement, claiming that they took up too much time and also asked for financial contributions that members sometimes found hard to ignore or refuse. These views, however, were often ignored by other family members. Interestingly, none of the study participants expressed an interest in becoming a future church elder and none of the parents wished their children to take up this career.

7.6 Home and school – a constrained relationship

This study brought to the fore the distinct disconnections between the worlds of home and school for PI learners in terms of the skills, knowledge and relationships to be learned and acquired at the adolescence stage of their lives. Whilst there was a strong realisation of the civic and economic opportunities that could be derived from successful schooling in a western culture, most participants were also aware that the cultural skills, attitudes and relationships learned and emphasised at home were not so relevant in the classroom and the cultural forms of learning common to PI, such as experiential learning, role modelling, observation, practice, repetition and application under the supervision of a master (Gegeo, 2001; Huffer & Qalo, 2004) did not fit within classrooms that put emphasis on learners being innovative, creative, critical and inquiry-minded. These were skills and qualities that young Pacific people did not regularly practice at home where values such as volunteering, helping and caring, collective effort and function and equitable rewards were prioritised and regarded as highly important qualities for young PI. The contradictory perceptions and expectations from home and school personnel of the learning goals, styles and outcomes of PI learners contributed greatly towards a situation of confusion and uncertainty for these learners when navigating their school experiences. Following Bourdieu (1977) and Yosso (2005), some of these participants and their families lacked the cultural capital or wealth to draw the relevant opportunities and benefits from the school system. Pacific Indigenous researchers would agree with this observation, stating that the learning experiences, relationships and spaces provided and promoted at school or other public settings are contradictory to Pacific concepts of social group

harmony, service and obligation and equitable outcomes as promoted by the 'vaa' and 'faa' spirituality (Thaman, 2008), unlike in the secondary school setting which emphasizes western learning models such as individualised effort, competition with peers and testing of knowledge and skills in unfamiliar academic content and instruction methods. As seen in some of the participants in this study, the differences in learning methods and priorities caused a few learners to become disinterested and dis-engaged with the academic aspects of schooling. Not being able to fit into these different modes of learning and forms of inquiry inevitably means that PI learners start school not only from a different point than their other peers (Abrahms, 2010) but also from a culturally disadvantaged position. Sadly, this disadvantage originates not entirely from cognitive difficulties but more with low levels of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997) and the lack of experience in adapting to and acquiring the skills set required by school policies and processes. Thus the differences in the world views and learning processes of PI and the western structures of schooling account for many of the challenges that PI face at school and in broader society.

7.7 PI learners and friendships

Given the intensity of connections within immediate and extended families the majority of friendships for Pacific young people consisted primarily of similar-age and similar-sex family relatives and other community members who shared a similar cultural background, ancestry, church or community and with whom they interacted on a daily or weekly basis. Young males had more opportunities to 'hang out' and interact with each other in public places whereas young females had less freedom and tended to stay at home and assist with household chores. The close and strong bonds within families and communities meant that most young people had sufficient access to the physical, social and emotional networks that provided them with a high sense of social and cultural capital, in Bourdieu's terms. Whether these strong internal networks within families and communities increased the young people's opportunities to 'bridge and bond' (Putnam, 2002) with other young people within the wider community members is an important question for this group as it raises implications about

the group's contribution to facilitating further self-isolation and social exclusion from the wider society .

Many of the young participants had friendship groups formed from within their families or communities and because of the strong connections within their known and existing networks of family, local diaspora community, church and school, had little reason to look outside of these social circles to find friends. Most participants were however closest with similar-age and same-sex young people from within their families and local diaspora. For half of the young people in this study, their best friend was also a cousin, with whom they attended school, church or community events. Four participants in this study expressed a strong connection to a same-age and similar-sex cousin for social, physical and emotional support, highlighting the importance of such relationships and friendships for young PI. Sela (F17Yr 12) was grateful to a cousin for encouraging her to pursue a TAFE course after she was withdrawn from school. Jela (M17Yr12) and Timo (M17Yr12) were cousins that went to the same school and lived together in a home with a single father who worked night shifts, so they mostly depended on each other for physical and emotional support. On the other hand, Via (F15Yr10), who lived with her grandmother but had her parents, siblings and extended family living on the same street, looked to her best friend and cousin for support with homework. After her cousin fell pregnant in the last year of school, Via went to school by herself and did homework herself but she also took on new responsibilities to help care for her cousin's baby.

The young people described themselves as fitting in well at school and developing friendships with school peers, from both Pacific and non-Pacific backgrounds. These friendships, however, tended to be confined to school themes and restricted to discussions about homework out of school hours. Most participants hardly ever visited a school friend's home or invited a school friend home on weekends. Apart from the school-based friendships, young people had limited opportunities to connect with others outside of their family or community circles because they already had busy schedules themselves from in-home

responsibilities or through community participation in sports, arts or church events and in part-time employment.

All participants agreed that at their schools PI learners identified closely with each other and formed lunch time, sports, music and worship groups amongst themselves. They were proud of who they were amongst their peers and were comfortable presenting to others what they stood for as PI. In turn, the schools generally provided a safe space in which learners could meet and socialize with peers and experience success or failure. Whilst most participants used the school setting to display positive behavior, there were others that showed more negative behaviors. For example, Neli (F15Yr10) was elected to be a school co-captain at School F in her final year and was able to develop leadership skills and also bring pride to her peers and her family. Others, on the other hand, had a reputation for fighting or bullying at school which caused embarrassment to the whole PI group. In these groups, PI learners showed support for each other and demonstrated solidarity with the group, sometimes with negative consequences, such as defending friends who had caused problems and putting themselves in trouble with teachers. This sort of behavior was sometimes seen as being courageous and some PI actually derived some satisfaction out of helping others. These examples also show the benevolent nature typical of PI peoples where an individual is prepared to sacrifice for the good of the broader group and shows the strength of the in-group culture and connection where PI band together in solidarity to protect themselves from external forces, whether for good or bad reasons. Many PI parents were known to be very wary of this sort of behavior which can cause a young PI to suffer consequences, not of his or her direct making. However, this behavior is considered acceptable and almost 'heroic' by PI young people making it difficult for parents and teachers to discourage.

In an earlier reference in this chapter, the church was mentioned as an important venue for families to interact and socialize with each other in a safe environment. All the participants in this study belonged to various Christian

denominations, namely Christian Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Methodist and Wesleyan and Enjoy church. All participants except one had close connections to their local church, attending regularly with family members or individually. These churches also catered to many other Pacific diaspora communities, giving opportunities for young people from different PI island countries to interact and socialize with each other. Some participants had significant roles to play at their church requiring them to spend at least four to five hours a week at church for band or choir practice, youth leadership meetings and bible study. Their families supported this active participation at church as a way to keep young people busy and engaged and to refrain from engaging in anti-social behavior.

For this group of participants, part-time employment was not a popular option for spending out-of-school hours although it was agreed to be a worthwhile pastime if they could spare the time after doing school or home responsibilities. Over the study period, only 3 (three participants out of the six worked part-time on weekends at McDonalds fast food outlets. Two out of the three participants had been encouraged by their families to work, seeing it as a good opportunity to gain experience while the third was working to get pocket money and to help with family finances. This young person stopped working after two months due to transport problems whereas the other two have continued working due to better supports at home (where their parents dropped them off and they had less responsibilities at home). Like the friendships made at school, the work friendships were also mostly restricted to the work place and did not extend to the home or community.

It was clear from this study that PI learners were open to making acquaintances at school, church or work with people from different social or cultural circles but they mostly kept close connections with young people from within their family and community locally and trans-globally. These networks consisted of many individuals, families and extended communities with whom the young people frequently interacted and from whom they derived a strong sense of social capital without the need to venture outside of these familiar circles.

7.8 Cultural mores and how they impact on education

Like the findings of Coxon et al. (2006), Parkhill et al. (2005), Fairbairn-Dunlop and Makisi (2003) and Nakhid (2003) on their studies with Pacific migrants in New Zealand, this study found a distinct separation between the lived experiences of Pacific learners and the school requirements on learning and behavior. Whilst others may link this physical or emotional separation to a lack of interest or aspiration by parents for their children to achieve success at school, this study found that parents were very interested in their children's education and wanted them to succeed but were sometimes not always equipped with the culturally-relevant skills, tools or confidence to provide the necessary support to their children in a culturally-biased space of schooling. Their unfamiliarity with the cultural requirements of the education system led some parents to have unrealistic expectations from their children's education and also a failure to provide culturally relevant support to address the complex and often unfamiliar demands of the Australian education system.

To some extent, some Pacific cultural mores and customs, common across Pacific countries were blamed for impeding engagement and academic progress at school. One of these is the authoritarian or formal relationships between adults and children which is often couched in the form of deep respect to elders (Samu, 2007). Whilst this formal and authoritarian relationship has a place at home, some PI learners found themselves placed at a disadvantage when this formal relationship scenario was translated into a typical classroom context where learners were encouraged to be inquisitive, participatory and self-directed in their learning. At school, a young PI may present as quiet, reserved or conservative in their attitude, behavior and communication styles as a result of their home teaching and experiences which put emphasis on harmonious and cooperative effort and being respectful to those who hold cultural wisdom (Gegeo, 2001; Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Nabobo, 1998; Sanga, 2011).

Additionally, in a formal classroom setting, a PI learner may expect the teacher to provide the learning content and knowledge which the young person must

accept without question or criticism – similar to the master and apprentice relationship (Thaman, 2008). What is nurtured as good and appropriate behavior at home is thus not regarded in the same positive light at school where the learner might be seen as ‘reserved, passive or uninterested’ by teachers and peers. In many PI homes, young people do not get many opportunities to experience or practice this discursive interactive form of communication and may encounter difficulties communicating in assertive language that questions other’s views and assertions within the classroom context. At home, there are no such communication strategies used and information or instruction is expected to be obeyed and accepted. The corollary of this is the existence of a communicative framework where interactions are generally positive and calm in context of compliance whilst being aggressive or rude when there is disagreement. Without practice in articulating views of disagreement in civil ways, young PI might ‘act out’ or come across as confrontational or aggressive towards others. At school, such behavior may get a PI learner into trouble or be perceived as rude and aggressive and lead them to suffer negative consequences such as suspension or withdrawal from school. As one teacher put it:

“An expectation from some teachers here is that the PI boys are likely to be more troublesome than others”(Teacher, School B).

Gender played a role in mediating ways in which young people approached engagement and communication in school settings. The interviews with teachers in the schools confirmed that female students of PI background showed themselves to be much more engaging at school while the young males were often quiet and reserved. This shows a change in the attitudes of young women to schooling and a desire to fit in and adopt more active patterns of engagement and communication with other adults and peers within a school environment. Whilst these transformations may not yet be accepted practice in some homes, this study found that some parents and families actively and deliberately allowed for open and free interactions with their children or encouraged them to see school as a space to exercise non-traditional patterns

of engagement. These changes were more obvious in homes where the parents had experienced positive educational pursuits themselves and achieved some success in schooling. Parental understanding of the value of education and their successful experience of education therefore, was a key driver for facilitating transformations in the attitudes of parents towards schooling. The more parents were willing to change to fit into the schools' accepted patterns of engagement, the more successes their children were likely to experience and achieve.

In the case of male participants, however, cultural accommodation was arguably less intense than for their female counterparts. Some families saw opportunities for boys in the trades and in manual work and had the perception that boys did not need school to the extent that girls do. In consequence, three of the four young men involved in the study did not aspire to attend university but rather opted to transition to a TAFE course after VCE. In Lisi's (M16Y10) case, his focus on going to TAFE to do trades because '*that is where the courses are*' (Lisi, Interview 1, June 2012) was accepted by his parents and teachers who did not encourage him to look outside of this option. The softer stance taken by families towards males and their engagement in schooling also explain the concerns shared by teachers about PI boys being disengaged and uninterested with low participation and achievement in the classroom when compared with PI girls.

7.9 Success factors

The next section looks specifically at the factors that helped drive the successes and challenges of the group as a collective cohort of PI learners.

7.9.1 Valuing education

For all the young people involved in the study, schooling was viewed as a necessary undertaking and acknowledged as an essential pathway to achieving life and career goals. The participants all had school and life goals that included having friends, happy families, positive outcomes at school, getting a good job and being successful in life. They all envisaged that doing well at school would

help them achieve these goals. Schools were seen as the right space in which they could prepare themselves for achieving their goals as well as offer the appropriate resources for achieving these goals. All the participants found school to be a fun, safe and comfortable place and embraced their involvement through a connection to a school goal, achievement, a friend or teacher, subject or an extra-curricular event.

"My education is vital to me...school has helped me realize what I want to do in the future and help me achieve my goals ...my short term goal is to get my ATAR score that i want", (Sela, F16Yr11).

"It is vital to have an education not only for the purpose of getting a job, but also just to live in this country you need a basic education. Schooling has helped me learn about Mathematics and English, but to find myself and seek what the future may hold. My education is one of the main foundations in life that will play a vital role in what happens after school". (Lali, F15Yr9).

"Education is vital to me big time ...school has made me realize that my future is really important ...school helped me to achieve some of my goals...I think if there was no school we might be loitering in the streets...I thank God for school" (Lisi, M16Yr10).

Despite the high value placed on schooling, it was evident that the young people also needed confirmation of success and validity for their engagement and participation at school. Whilst the participants generally offered positive responses about their friends, favorite subjects, best teachers and the extra-curricular activities that they enjoyed, a common negative comment was that Mathematics and Science were very difficult subjects which they preferred to drop when allowed to do so. The commonality of negative responses about these subjects was significant, especially as by dropping these subjects at VCE, learners also narrowed their access to high-yield subjects likely to contribute to a high ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) score and a pathway to their choice of tertiary course and institution (Helme et al. 2009). The most common subjects likely to be chosen by PI were 'high enrolment, low value' subjects (Helme et al. 2009) such as the Humanities or Arts based subjects or a TAFE or vocational pathway. Interestingly, some of the participants connected success at school to more practical-orientated subjects such as music, sports, drama

and media and to extra-curricular activities such as playing rugby, participating in school concerts or musicals and volunteering in school events. The successes of past PI students in these aspects of schooling may have played a part in sensitizing PI learners to aspire for similar success in these areas. The recurring emphasis placed on subjects that support human and social relationships and the tendency for PI learners to stick with familiar and known aspects of schooling was clearly evident. But this trend is concerning in that learners and school staff may see these options and pathways as typical for PI learners and refrain from looking at other options that they are capable of or show an interest in.

Another negative schooling aspect for these participants rested with their actual engagement and participation with the academic aspects of schooling such as written tests and examinations, which ultimately determined their further engagement with schooling and education. Those who coped sufficiently well with these aspects, such as Ama (F17Yr12), Neli (F15 Yr 10), Via (F15Yr10) and Sei (F15Yr9) were more likely to enjoy their schooling and keep focused on their goals. On the other hand, others who performed poorly in tests and exams, while still enjoying school, became less certain or confident about their career goals and less focused on school work.

Finally, for PI learners, behavioral issues were an important determinant of their consequent attitudes towards schooling, general engagement and pathway outcomes. This point was well-illustrated in the case of Jela (M17Yr12) whose attitude and demeanor towards his studies and schooling was shaped somewhat by a past behavioral incident that resulted in a serious reprimand. This one incident made Jela feel vulnerable, intimidated and 'picked on', causing him to disengage from his studies for the rest of his schooling years. Jela left school in Year 12, just two weeks short of sitting the VCE exams. Jela's non-interest in school work was also affected by his home situation where his single father worked hard to keep food on the table by working night shifts. These various events throughout schooling were

compounded to directly or indirectly affect Jela's view that school was not a suitable place for him.

7.9.2 The importance of setting clear goals

One of the key factors for success in education rests on the individual's ability to set clear schooling and life goals from an early age. This point was clearly illustrated in the case of Ama (F17Yr12) who from an early age was encouraged by her parents to set a clear goal for herself and her future. From her primary school years through to the secondary school years, Ama maintained her goal of working in the medical profession, as her mother (a qualified nurse) had done. The realities of achieving this goal were reinforced and strengthened for Ama and her family when Ama won subject prizes and received above-average grades during her middle secondary school years. Ama herself was focused on the importance, value and potential reality of these goals to her future life and for her family as she states below.

“Personally I believe that education is very important and is vital if you want a decent job in the future. These days you would need more than just a year 12 certificate for a skilled paying job. I believe that once you have a proper education you are set for life and you will have many opportunities in the world. My time in school has helped me so far in my progress of reaching my goal of entering university after high school” (Ama, F17Yr12).

Ama's family believed in her ability to pursue her goal through secondary school and on to university, allowing Ama to focus on her goal and plan her educational journey accordingly. The fact that Ama was able to proceed to university and enroll in a course relevant to her aspirations is testament to the importance of having a clear goal and the support of family in keeping the young person focused on that goal. On the other hand, Jela (M17Yr12) who had set a clear goal for himself to find a job after school was unable to do this because it conflicted with his father's dream of seeing his son go to university. Although Jela himself knew that he did not have the interest or the grades to achieve this goal, he stayed on at school to please his father while at the same time lowering his own personal goal for the 'greater good' of his family. The

inconsistencies in goal setting and the absence of consistent supervision on Jela's studies clearly forced him to remain at school while being disengaged, bored and frustrated.

7.9.3 Family support and personal agency

Buckroth and Parkin (2010) say that the concept of agency is interpreted through our identity, as how we see ourselves (Buckroth & Parkin, 2010). Sapin (2013) refers to identity as self-esteem, self-image, self-knowledge and self-confidence. Young people's sense of agency and control affect their transition into adulthood and their various stages and forms of independence (Evans, 2002). In this study, having clear goals helped facilitate Ama's success at school where she combined a healthy sense of personal agency with strong support from family and positive feedback from school through winning prizes and receiving positive school reports to achieve her goals. Three other participants also benefitted from a high level of personal agency which they each developed out of receiving good results at school and from positive feedback from teachers and peers. All three learners felt in control of their schooling situations and felt able to make decisions and trust their own judgement and to follow through with tasks required. What was common with these learners was the fact that they received validation from parents, teachers and friends that their efforts and results at school were worthwhile and important.

On the other hand, a few of the participants did not always enjoy a high sense of personal agency when it came to their schooling. One such example was Visi (F16Yr11) who had failed her Year 11 English SAC exam. This experience caused her to lose motivation in her school work and lose focus on her goal of getting a sports' scholarship at the end of Year 12. The action that was taken by the family in response to this exam result was that they took the school's advice to withdraw her and place her in an alternative education setting to complete Year 12 VCAL. In this situation, Visi felt vulnerable and needed her family to help make an important decision for her, a decision which she later appreciated. Similarly, Jela (M17Yr12) experienced a loss of personal agency after his

fighting incident in Year 9 when he felt '*picked on*' by school staff for the rest of his secondary schooling. Despite his apparent disinterest in school, Jela was kept at school until just before the VCE exams, an action he felt had disadvantaged him because he could have used that time to be working and earning money for his family. In the case of Sela (F16Yr11), her parents saw her withdrawal from Year 12 as a failure without realizing that Sela had other options available to make her dream of studying nursing come true.

In all these three situations, a common factor was that just one negative event at school, whether academic or behavioral in nature, ultimately led a young person and their family to make an important but adverse decision about their future schooling and career goals. The reactive and sometimes drastic actions taken by families show a low level of parental understanding of the options and choices available to learners in the education system. In Sela's case, the lack or absence of the right information led her parents to believe that their daughter had failed schooling and thus could no longer achieve her educational dreams and career goals and their expectations of her.

While all the participants gave the impression that they had ability to make important decisions concerning their schooling, it was clear that parents had much more influence on their goals and motivations for schooling. Where these goals aligned with those of parents, there was less conflict between them. The case of Sela (F16Yr11) makes this point succinctly. Sela, a usually bright student had been withdrawn from school prior to completing Year 12 due to poor attendance at school. This outcome disappointed her parents who wanted her to complete Year 12 and go to university to train to become a qualified nurse. Sela, however was able to exercise personal agency when she decided to continue a certificate level course at TAFE, knowing it would lead her back to university. Sela was brave enough to make this decision because she understood the system better and trusted that her decision would eventually make her parents proud in later years.

A surprising finding from this study was that some participants tended to exercise personal agency to different degrees in different settings. There were two participants who showed high levels of motivation, personal agency and leadership traits in church and sports but did not show similar levels of enthusiasm and confidence in other spaces, such as at home or at school. In the home environment, some participants displayed a high or low sense of personal agency depending on the quality of their relationships with family members. Some participants that showed active personal agency within the school context actually showed compliance and even passivity at home and vice versa. This was an interesting observation which raised the question of whether participants carefully selected the settings and spaces in which they exercised personal agency.

A possible explanation for this selective use of personal agency rests with differences in which boys and girls are treated within families. This study found that, within the home environment, boys were given much more personal freedom in terms of time use and choice of friends and places to hang out while the girls were more restricted in their choice of friendships and activities and expected to spend more time at home and to assist with home chores. Boys were also found to be less pressured by their parents to go to university and encouraged more towards practical subjects within the TAFE sector. The case study of Lisi (M16Y10) illustrates this point well. Lisi was encouraged by his parents to follow his dream of becoming a 'tradie'. However, his parents did not have the same aspirations for Lisi's younger sisters whom they expected would '*go to university to get a better job in future*'. Girls, like Lisi's sisters were placed under more pressure at home than their brothers and as a result, had more expectations and encouragement from parents to do well at school and to pursue tertiary studies. Consistent with the expectations that they do well at school, girls were also encouraged to stay at home and socialize less with friends except in family and community gatherings. The more time spent at home would have allowed the girls more time to focus on homework and study but in some homes, these times were also spent on other tasks, such as caring

for relatives or contributing towards home chores. In homes where parents were aware of the need to place priority on homework and study, the girls were often relieved of some of these chores. However, in the few households where the parents were sick or absent due to work, the young people were expected to put in their share of work to the household. With the exception of two, all the participants accepted the additional responsibilities at home, recognizing these to be an essential part of their cultural responsibilities to the family, claiming also that these responsibilities did not prevent them from completing homework.

This study found that young people were able to self-direct their personal agency towards activities and programs that they enjoyed. Edi (M15Yr10) who was described as shy by his teachers was comfortable playing the guitar for the church band while Lali (F15Yr9), who was usually quiet around her family and at school had no qualms about leading a youth prayer group at church. Even more surprising was the case of Jela (M17Yr12) who had been involved in a fight at school in Year 9, who did not get along with his teachers, had low level of physical support at home and had been uninterested in school up to Year 12. Jela was, however, an active youth leader at church and in his community. These findings suggest that these young people took on multiple identities which required them to perform different roles and responsibilities from time to time and from setting to setting. As a result, their sense of personal agency or initiative was either enabled or challenged depending on the audiences with whom they interacted and the spaces within which they found themselves.

Within a school setting, it could be said that due to 'cultural misrecognition' (Gale & Densmore, 2000) P1 learners were not often encouraged to actively exercise their sense of personal agency. According to Gale & Densmore, (2000) cultural misrecognition refers to a school situation where teachers or the system do not recognize the different identities, talents and skills of their learners and thus fail to provide spaces or settings in which different cohorts of learners are able to practice and demonstrate appropriate forms of personal agency. There were incidences during the study in which some participants demonstrated significant resilience and capacity to stand up for themselves even in difficult

situations. One such participant was Sela who managed her own pathway after she had been withdrawn from VCE and had continued her studies even though her parents did not agree with her decision. But there were others who were not as confident. For example, Ama (F17Yr12) who was easily the brightest of the participants in this group was quite passive in the face of her mother's demands to refrain from associating with community members. Amas' decision to follow her mother's advice could be read as obedience but also as lacking in confidence and having a high sense of trust in her mother's ability to '*read the game*' (Mills, 2008). In some of the participants, this passivity was most obvious where the participants were younger and more or less resigned to parental authority and discipline. The younger participants, in particular, were found to be quite open to being reprimanded or chastised by parents if they did anything wrong and did not think much of it.

7.9.4 Role modelling

Role models such as parents, cousins or older relatives played an important part in the schooling and well-being of the research participants. In this study, most of those identified as role models were family members. However, in cases where the internal family issues such as financial hardship were too great for adults to consider alternatives and adoptions for their children, role models were not much use. Timo's case (M17Yr12) serves as a good example. Timo lived with his uncle who was a night shift worker and always absent from the family home during evenings. The rest of Timo's family lived in New Zealand where his mother who was also his role model was a school teacher. In Melbourne, Timo was closely connected to his community and was an active part of the youth group which was coordinated by his aunt, a well-respected and highly educated community leader. Despite being encouraged to seek help by the aunt, Timo did not do this and kept his school issues to himself.

The seemingly low profile given to consulting with available role models within communities could be related to PI patterns of help-seeking behavior. In PI communities, family honour and personal pride are important characteristics

and seeking for help or assistance can sometimes present as a sign of weakness or inadequacy (Huffer & Qalo, 2004). In some of the study families, as in Timo's example above, there were family members within the community that could be asked for assistance but were not approached. In another example, Ama's mother revealed that in her community, there were parents who were hesitant about asking for assistance about schooling issues or to discuss concerns about their children's education. Her view was that community members did not seek assistance because it would give the impression of being 'needy' or showing weakness. These were not isolated cases as there were other incidents in the study of a reluctance to seek help, either from extended family members or from external sources.

As shown, this demonstrates an intricate web of supports and networks within PI diasporic communities which are linked in various forms and ways but which are not always supportive of each other. Thus role models, whilst being seen as important members of their various PI diasporic communities were not always fully utilized as useful sources of knowledge and information due to 'shame' in exposing personal weaknesses and inadequacy. Many parents in the study consistently referred to the concept of shame or '*not being good enough*' in terms of their educational background, language fluency, communication and negotiation skills and their understanding of the Australian school system. This sense of self-doubt and unwillingness to seek help from others such as schools or community members sometimes caused families and learners to make decisions that were not always beneficial for their children's schooling goals and outcomes.

In a related example, some of the parents in the study reported that they would not use the educational services offered by Local Government organizations in their communities for fear they may be turned away due to non-entitlement. These services were not always convenient in terms of timing or purpose and seen as more suited to refugee migrants with refugee driven approaches and services that were not always suitable for PI communities whose needs were

quite different. The low-access of PI to these services also suggests that the western concept of service or 'social justice' may be perceived differently by PI who although they need assistance are culturally hesitant and reluctant to seek or demand for services or assistance (George & Rodriquez, 2009).

7.9.5 Cultural preservation and adaptation

The family and culture are very important influences on the life of a PI learner. Many participants' lives are revolved around the family whose members are located in their immediate local diasporic community, inter-state or overseas. This close affinity to family, community and culture both influence and determine the priorities, motivations and achievements of young people in schooling and education. This does not mean that education and employment pathways are not important to these young people. These are also important priorities so long as they can fit with and adapt to the family lifestyle and socio-cultural and economic situation which is the more familiar and permanent sphere to the young person. Anything outside this known and familiar sphere of the family is regarded as temporary or superficial and therefore up for negotiation and uncertainty. If failure is experienced in the external spheres, young people feel there is a safety net to return to – a space comprising immediate and extended family members located within the local community or interstate or even in transnational settings. These options create for the young person a sense of communal support and a familiar host of alternatives but may also distract their perceptions and motivations about schooling and achieving educational success in their new place of residence.

7.9.6 Family service and obligation

For PI, there is a very strong sense of service or obligation to family which can be utilized to positive or negative ways. This can present as a strong drive for motivating young people. If there is poverty or hardship or a history of non-success at school, young people are further motivated or pressured to do well at school as a way to reward their parents. All the participants felt a sense of indebtedness to family and comments such as these were common;

“My parents are doing more for me than I could ever expect or repay” Esi (F16Yr10).

“My parents want me to do well so I will work hard at school”– Lisi (M16Yr10).

“I can see that my father is struggling to make ends meet so I will help him in a way I know... by leaving school and finding a job”– Jela (M17yr12).

However, family obligation can also act in negative ways. A learner who is not doing too well at school might see employment as a better way to prove their worth to their family. This was certainly the case with Jela who was withdrawn from school prior to sitting the VCE examinations. Although he was disengaged at school, Jela felt obliged to stay at school to please his father. This pressure caused Jela to decide that it was better for the school to withdraw him than for him to drop out, an action that was unacceptable to his father who wanted his son to stay as long as possible at school. In another family, Lali was encouraged by her father to find a part time job to pay for personal needs and to experience the world of work. Lali’s father thought that the work experience would deter her from thinking about dropping out of school early to find employment. In another two families, Lisi and Sei were both encouraged by their parents to find part-time employment to experience work that would prepare them for life in the outside world. Interestingly, both the mothers in these two families were working mothers who both had friends at work whose children were working part-time but also aspiring to go to university. In one of these families, the father had actually argued strongly against sending his daughter to work in case she got distracted with the earnings and lost interest in studying. In the end, both the daughter and the mother were able to convince him that it was a good idea and the daughter started work at the local fast food restaurant. Whilst the idea of earning might be attractive to learners as a means to assist with family finances, only one of the three participants was working part-time as a means to ease family financial stress while the other two participants did so to increase workplace skills.

In this study, two parents claimed that some PI learners dropped out of school early so they could earn money for their own needs (Abrahms, 2010) and that other peers encouraged them to do this. However, only one of the fourteen participants expressed external pressure to leave school to find work and this pressure was from her parents who were experiencing economic hardship at home. On the other hand, another participant was interested in leaving school early but was encouraged not to do so by his parent and the school. From this study at least, the decision to leave school prematurely rested mainly with the school rather than with parents or the individual learner and was often based on performance and behaviour at school rather than for any other reason. In Sela's case, after being withdrawn from school, she continued her education and did not work whereas Jela could not wait to get out of school to find employment. In both these situations, the school made the final decision in terms of the timing of their departure, without clear consultation with the families concerned.

7.10 Risk factors

7.10.1 Financial pressures

Cost continues to be a major barrier to the attainment of higher educational goals and outcomes of many PI migrants wanting to undertake post-secondary levels of education in Australia (Chenoweth, 2014; Kearney, 2012; Rose et al., 2009). Cost plays both as a motivational and a structural deterrent to the aspirations of young PI wanting to participate in post-compulsory levels of education. For some Pacific families, the high cost of tertiary education can discourage them from giving support to their children's aspirations to study at university or at TAFE institutions. A family's hope to send a child to university may also be negatively affected by their personal and socio-economic circumstances, such as low parental educational experiences or background which indirectly affects their level of support and general affordability. These factors can have long-term, ongoing impacts on families' abilities to provide appropriate levels of economic, social and physical support to the young learner. Moreover, a learner's own aspirations for higher education study may be diminished, owing to a perception that it is too difficult and takes too long to

complete. Learners can also be discouraged from pursuing higher education if they realise that the high costs of tertiary level study are too costly for their families, especially if they come from households where employment is non-secure, incomes are low and the day to day focus is on meeting basic livelihood necessities.

7.11 Chapter summary

This chapter has reinforced the fact that young people's personal identity and sense of belonging has an important role to play in the way they form their priorities in life, including their schooling outcomes and career goals. For this group of participants, their identity was closely affected by and connected to their historical and cultural traditions, their family's social and economic circumstances and cultural pressures from their specific Island diasporic communities. PI learners were found to be consistently conflicted by these somewhat contrasting and conflicting circumstances in their efforts to deal with schooling requirements. Even when schooling requirements were deemed to be important to the learners, home and family matters were always given higher priority, facilitated by the importance, familiarity and ease with which young people could negotiate these requirements. The priorities for schooling, friendships and work were also important to both learners and their parents but the levels of achievement and success in these worlds were less certain and easier to give up, if learners were already experiencing difficulties. When confronted with difficult and uncertain options, PI young people were likely to select family service and obligation over school requirements as these were priorities that were also harder to give up or take second place, especially if things were not going satisfactorily well at school.

Whilst the separation of important worlds in a new setting is an inevitable experience for many PI migrants, their historical and cultural backgrounds also drove the identities, motivations and attitudes towards schooling and their consequent post-school pathways. The adjustment and settlement patterns of PI in a new country, together with family poverty, parental in-experience and

unfamiliarity with the education system are seen as critical factors in the pursuit for educational achievement. The next chapter discusses these challenges further and outlines how PI negotiate their place whilst facing diverse expectations and pressures from the worlds of school and community.

Chapter 8 Crossing tides: navigating the external environment

In the previous chapter, it was established that the interactions and activities of study participants' were confined mostly to home and school settings rather than in other spheres within the broader external environment. However, the influence and impact of the broader external environment has significant direct or indirect repercussions on the ways that PI families and individuals negotiate their everyday 'lived experiences' (VanManen, 1982). This chapter looks specifically at the wider worlds of community and society to assess how these broader social spheres and spaces interweave and influence the personal lives and school and post-school experiences of PI learners. Bronfenbrenner's (1996) human ecological framework and Park's (1950) concept of 'the marginal man' are used to examine the historical, political, economic and socio-cultural factors that impact on the settlement and adaptation patterns of PI in their new place of residence and consequently, the influences on their participation and engagement at school and their post school pathways. Both these theories are helpful in exploring PI responses to the influences and impacts of their wider social and cultural environment, particularly in the ways they access services and navigate their resources in their communities. References are made to Pacific Indigenous frameworks where these affect patterns of settlement and adaptation of PI in general and PI learners in particular. This chapter also examines structural and systemic inequalities that affect PI learners' access to services and opportunities and the ways that they negotiate these challenges while trying to create successful transitions and pathways in spaces and spheres outside the familiar social settings of the family and the PI diasporic community.

8.1 Research questions and findings

Main Question:

1. How can young PI learners' in Melbourne's western region prepare more effectively for successful participation and engagement at the secondary school setting that can lead them towards smoother

transitions and positive pathways in further education, training and employment?

Relevant Sub-questions:

1d) How has the school system, the immediate community and broader society responded to the needs and interests of PI learners in Melbourne?

1e) What supportive frameworks and partnerships can be set up at community and state-wide and national levels to allow PI to better engage and contribute towards social, economic and cultural fabric of Australian society?

8.2 PI engagement with the broader community

In Australia, PI are considered an equity group who present with multiple disadvantages including low socio-economic status with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and a significantly small-sized population. Historically, they have experienced low levels of economic, social and community participation (George & Rodriguez, 2009; Vasta, 2004) which have had flow-on effects on their health and educational outcomes where PI have been known to experience serious challenges (Anae et al., 2002; Rose et al, 2009; Scull & Cuthill, 2008). Not surprisingly, PI have been identified as disproportionately represented in the categories of peoples from low socio-economic backgrounds, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), living in remote or rural regions and the first in their families to attend university (George & Rodriguez, 2009). Vasta's study (2004) of PI in the New South Wales region of Illawara evidences the marginalization of PI from mainstream concepts of citizenship and community who despite their alienation, often do not see themselves as immigrants and ignore many immigrant services (George & Rodriguez, 2009).

Bronfenbrenner's social ecological theory (see Figure 2.2), illustrates clearly the importance of the innermost spheres of personal, family and community interactions, engagements and relationships. As shown in Figure 8.1 the family, consisting of extended members living locally, interstate or trans-globally

comprise the most direct and closest of relationships for PI learners. For some families, the church, sports and cultural events were seen to overlap and intersect within this inner circle as and when whole families shared such similar associations. For many families, the school was an important influence, placed alongside other PI and non-PI groups in the immediate community within which young PI interacted directly and frequently although these relationships remained secondary to the family sphere. The outermost sphere consisting of wider society with the relevant policies and regulations had the least direct connections and relationships with the participants and their families but nevertheless still had important impacts on their settlement, integration and engagement patterns in broader society. Three factors contributed significantly towards the ongoing alienation and isolation of PI from mainstream society; poor access to essential services, systemic poverty and self-marginality. All three factors are connected and each one influences and affects the other in complex ways.

8.2.1 Accessing community services

Whilst there appear to be many local level services available for migrants within the local community, many of the families in this study reported not using them, tending to view community level services and assistance with reservation. Local Government services such as homework clubs and English language classes were poorly attended due to the perception that these services were specifically targeted towards other types of migrants such as refugees (Woolford, 2009). Whilst a few of the participants occasionally used their local library as a homework space, most of the families made little attempt to access or benefit from other community-wide services claiming them to be mostly unsuitable to their needs or inconvenient to their schedules. This finding supports the view that any 'meaningful use of any personal resources (only) happens through trusted relationships with others and that there is a distinct difference between access and availability' (Wyn & Woodman, 2007, p.506) of services. For these families, there was little direct relationship between their needs and the support provided and available.

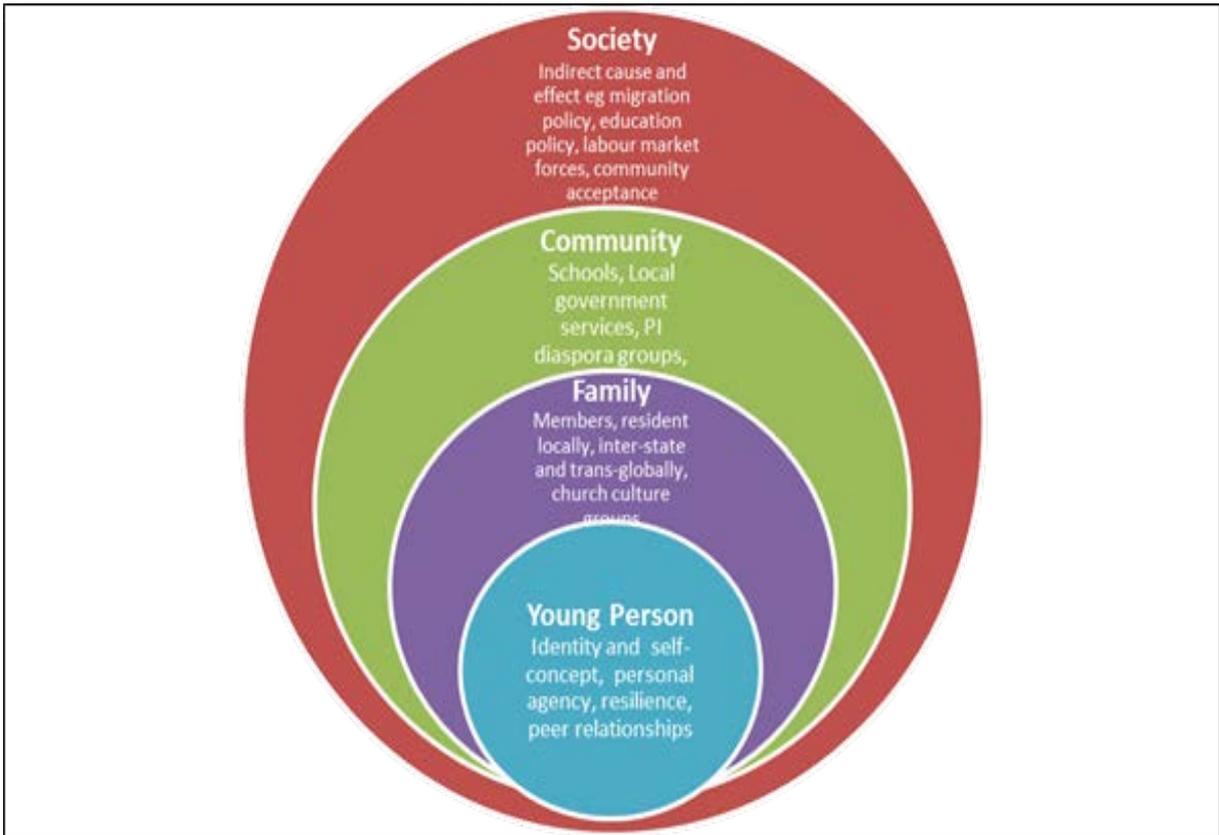


Figure 8-1 Cycle depicting typical spheres of influence and support for PI

Findings from this study concur with George & Rodriguez (2009) that some PI did not see themselves as immigrants and ‘ignored’ immigrant services. However, there were also many PI who were aware of some services but did not try to access them due to mis-understandings about what they were entitled to or not, based on their historical and migration status. When compared with PI sense of pride to appear self-sufficient, facilitated by a reluctance to seek help, PI were seen to do themselves a disservice in terms of service access at the broader societal level. Broffenbrenner’s (1999) view that people often blame themselves for the inability to conform to dominant expectations for which they are culturally ill-equipped is relevant to the PI situation where ‘shame’ and ‘pride’ combined with the cultural quest to maintain ‘calm and harmony’ leads to increased marginality and isolation.

With so many different entitlements and restrictions tied to various visa and residency statuses, some members of the PI community were uncertain about the benefits which applied to them, making them hesitant to use the services

widely available within their communities. Even amongst families that had entered Australia from the same country at the same time, there were variations in terms of the benefits and services that could be accessed. Subsequently some services were found to be restricted to certain groups within the Pacific local diaspora. On many occasions, cost became a determining factor as to whether PI learners could access certain services, resulting in this group being reluctant to attend community programs in case they had to pay or got turned away due to non-entitlement. As one parent remarked,

“We do not normally encourage our children to attend because we are not sure if we qualify for the assistance or whether these programs will help our children or if we have to pay for them. What I understand is that those programs are mainly run for refugees and other people who are on humanitarian visas” (Parent of Ama, February 2012).

The uncertainties regarding migration-related benefits and restrictions meant that many PI families were often left to deal with many settlement and adjustment problems with little external support or intervention. This was made more difficult when the community itself tended to be culturally self-contained and insular preferring to deal with concerns and needs privately and in their own preferred ways, through family or community methods. Being a small sized community too, PI themselves have also not been vocal in advocating for their needs and in demanding for more culture-specific services despite the cohort being seen as visibly disadvantaged and marginalised within the community (George & Rodriguez, 2009). Moreover, the public perception towards those who are choice migrants has often been less sympathetic compared to groups that have migrated on the basis of conflict or persecution in their home countries. As choice migrants with smoother migration trajectories, PI have felt less entitled to accessing and benefitting from government services compared to other migrant groups. When combined with PI's tendency to discourage or frown upon the display of *'help-seeking'* behaviour, it is little wonder that PI feel constrained by community notions of *'pride'* and *'shame'*, both of which indirectly and negatively impact on their preparedness to seek help.

While many PI may be seen as living on the margins of society and being visibly disadvantaged in material and economic terms, many PI families and individuals in this study were quite resilient and self-sufficient drawing much capital and material strength from within family or specific island community networks. The closeness of these networks provided a safety net that made up for the lack of social and economic services from state or local council sources. But these networks were also clearly not adequately sufficient and tailor-made to meet broader societal goals such as educational achievement and labour market advancements. Whilst these were useful for day-to day interaction and networking within familiar and immediate networks, they proved insufficient in effectively bridging the needs and interests of the PI cohort to wider community and society services and policies. This is due, in part, to the generally poor outcomes experienced at secondary schooling and the subsequent challenges faced in transitioning to further and higher education and onto long-term forms of employment and lasting careers. The danger with only a few people going on to further education is that few are able to confidently advocate for the PI community and to assist them in navigating the education and employment opportunities and services available within the broader community and society. Essentially, this also means that PI young people continue to be restricted to economic engagement and employment that is non-secure, temporary and produces low incomes and thus unable to effectively advocate for the PI local diasporic community.

8.2.2 Educational reform, access and equity

Despite the continuing and continuous low patterns of educational achievement for PI learners, there has not been much emphasis placed by government, community services or even schools to address the specific needs of this community group. This is not unusual, given the small size of the PI community but also the fact that this is a community that presents as self-contained or insular, thus remaining in the fringes of mainstream society (Rose et al., 2009), and unable to advocate for its specific needs, including in education. This inward focus makes the PI group seem to contribute towards its own invisibility, isolation and lack of voice in wider society circles. Some PI attribute this attitude

to being a proud people who have a culture of not wanting to seek help and preferring instead to handle issues themselves within the family or community. At the same time, PI are not confident in articulating their collective needs (due to the varying differences between ethnic and country specific groups) or in advocating for their needs with a wider and higher level audience. This same attitude seemed to transpose to school-home relationships where some families were seen to accept school decisions regarding their children, even if they disagreed with them. In other instances, PI parents were seen to prefer solving school issues themselves and did not seek or accept assistance from schools or other school-linked services.

At the same time, the effect of neo-liberal government policies in the 1980's and 1990's which included the privatisation of educational services brought a host of problems for many disadvantaged families. For PI migrants, this disadvantage was most visible and pronounced at the post-compulsory level of education, a stage of schooling when young people and their families are expected to make important choices about their participation and pathways in education. In the case of PI, many families were not only ill-prepared to adapt to the neo-liberal sense of individualisation which did not gel well with the cultural norm of community cooperation but also many of the earlier Pacific migrants did not have the educational qualifications, employment experience or communication skills to equip them for other types of jobs apart from the manufacturing work they had been able to secure on their arrival. Many were forced to take on any work available, often with low pay and poor conditions (Ash, 2014; Vasta, 2004). Although some PI returned home, there were others who remained to continue the 'migrant dream' and to fulfil the family and community expectations and pressures to make things work in the new country. From an educational point of view, it could be said that whether directly or indirectly, the privatisation or individualisation of education in the last two decades has worked against PI families by limiting and deflecting their access to a broad range of social services, including education.

National changes in the education and migration policies continue to affect PI families up to the present day. The differences in migration history and visa status mean that different sections of the PI population tend to be more disadvantaged than others whilst others may be disadvantaged in different ways. This difference is most evident at the post-compulsory level of schooling and involves cost, both in terms of support and affordability. Whilst the children of older migrants have citizenship that allows them to access CSP (Commonwealth supported place), or Fee-help to pay for TAFE or university studies, the long-term poverty experienced by these families affects the ongoing levels of material, physical and social support they can provide for their children's schooling. Having a low level of experience and familiarity with education, these parents are also less able to offer relevant advice and appropriate physical and academic support to motivate and encourage their children to aspire to higher education. Whilst these children can enter tertiary level study at a discounted cost or through accessing CSP, the family's ongoing poverty has not provided the long-term support and emotional confidence needed to aspire to, access or manage higher level education and training.

Then there are the newer migrants whose educational qualifications, past employment history and skills and confidence allow them to access better employment options and social services available within the community. Whilst these families are generally able to provide ongoing academic aspirations and support to their children's participation and engagement at school, their challenge lies with the inability to afford university and TAFE costs for their children who do not qualify for CSP assistance due to non-citizenship or permanent residency status. The irony for this group of families is that their children have the aspirations to succeed and are better prepared and supported at home for advancing to tertiary level studies but their families cannot afford the high cost of tertiary education due to their citizenship status and worse still, cannot pay for these fees upfront.

Some of the families in this study were able to solve this problem by applying for Australian citizenship for their children. However, for many PI, like other

choice migrants to Australia, it is a condition of visa that they must first hold a permanent resident visa for at least two years in order to be eligible for citizenship application. Permanent residence costs are quite expensive compared to the cost of citizenship application⁹. These costs can be a deterrent for some families, especially those who are struggling with transition and settlement costs.

There were a few families in this study, particularly those who had recently arrived from New Zealand who regarded the non-SVC visa category as more amenable to their current needs. These families chose not to apply for Australian citizenship and were considering other alternatives for when their children completed Year 12. These alternatives included sending the children back to the Islands or to New Zealand to attend university. Some parents were considering TAFE study as a suitable pathway for their sons due to the lower cost of courses and the likelihood of transition to jobs whilst recognising recent Government reforms to provide Commonwealth support to some certificate and diploma level courses. Whilst some parents were aware of these changes and making plans to assist their children, there were others who were unaware of the higher education costs, assuming that their bridging visas or permanent resident status would qualify their children for Government assistance at the tertiary level as had been the case at the primary and secondary levels of schooling.

Some school staff were also unaware of the visa restrictions placed on some PI learners and the potential impact that visa status had on the post-school pathways of these learners. Some learners were encouraged to apply for TAFE or university places if they were doing well enough at post-secondary school but

⁹ An application for permanent resident visa costs AUD1060 per adult and an additional \$700 if applying within Australia. After holding permanent resident visa for at least 2 years, migrants can then apply for Australian citizenship which costs \$260 per adult ([www. border.gov.au](http://www.border.gov.au); Department of Immigration and Border Protection fees and charges for visas, accessed 23 October, 2015).

when they reached these post-school destinations and could not afford the fees, had to withdraw soon after. Some teachers believed that these withdrawals were due solely to difficulties in adjusting to TAFE or university studies without acknowledging that cost may have been a factor in the decision to withdraw. The issue of fees was also a factor for some learners whose aspirations or motivations to study further were affected by their family's income situation and their inability to afford tertiary level studies.

As circumstances differed from group to group (and family to family), many agencies and institutions were also uncertain of the entitlements and restrictions applicable to specific groups as did PI families themselves. These uncertainties caused some PI learner needs to be overlooked due to the small size of cohorts within individual schools and the difficulties of justifying the use of scarce school resources to support such small numbers. Even if these at-risk learners and families were identified and provided with assistance, the on-going poverty at home also presented ongoing challenges for the young person. For most of these parents, cost was often an important consideration, whether in the form of ongoing consistent support for the young person throughout their compulsory levels of schooling or at certain critical points in the student's educational journey, such as the beginning of tertiary education level of study when affordability becomes a serious cause of concern.

Some of the families in this study were sensitive to the need for parents to be educated in order to understand the Australian education system and be able themselves to experience success in schooling and the job market. There were four parents in this study who had undertaken further tertiary level studies since arriving in Australia to improve their job market opportunities and to better assist their children. Two more parents had considered furthering their own education but were undecided whether to invest in their own education or save the money for their children's tertiary-level studies. It was clear that some families consistently faced anxieties and dilemmas about their ability to support schooling and to afford tertiary level study while the young people were always keen to please their parents by doing well at school but also conscious of their

parent's constant struggles to provide the necessary support. The constant scarcity of financial resources at home sometimes meant that securing direct employment became a more attractive option where and when affordability for schooling became a barrier, and especially if a learner had begun to encounter difficulties at school.

8.2.3 School engagement and achievement

On the whole, the young people in this study had a high regard for schooling and accepted its importance to their current and future lives. They also expressed aspirations to complete Year 12, get a good VCE or VCAL result and go on to university or TAFE. Most participants in this study had the support of their parents in terms of their goals in education and for some, these goals were more clear and specific than others and mostly tied to and dependent on educational success at high school. The motivation to do well at school and TAFE or university was closely linked to students' individual and family motivations, identities and circumstances. The learners wanted to gain individual success and recognition for themselves but more importantly desired to secure a good and steady job that would enable them to support their families. This was an unquestionable and ultimate goal for many participants who clearly saw their success and achievements in terms of the recognition and rewards that could be gained for themselves and their families' future. The need to feel 'relied on' by family was for many of these young people a critical marker of success, consistent with PI concepts of '*obligation and reciprocity*' (Hau'ofa, 1998), 'relationship nurturing' and the maintenance of '*a common good*' (Thaman, 2008) and 'outward service' (Samu, 2007) to family members and the wider diasporic community.

This study revealed the importance of social connections to PI families and young people as evident in their choice of place (residence, school, work, church), school programs and activities (VCE or VCAL, sports activities) and the key relationships (family, friends and teachers) they experienced on a day to day basis. As such, schools were often chosen by families on the basis of

locality and through existing and known contacts or networks and relationships, especially with persons with whom there was a point of connection. The tendency to operate in group or community clusters was obvious within the study cohort. The young people in the study often had one or two similar associations with others and often knew each other or each other's families.

In consequence, the participants mostly found school to be a generally safe, comfortable and happy place and the school environment engaging and inclusive. Within some schools, the special connections with individual school staff through classroom interactions or informal and extra-curricular activities were treasured by learners and improved their connection to the school. Through these connections, some participants were assisted to recognise personal ability, passion and interest in an aspect of learning which in turn, improved their motivations and willingness to achieve and provided validation of effort and success. The positive teacher-student and student-student relationship contributed to learner's sense of safety and comfort at school. For some learners, enjoyment at school was often associated with their experiences of subjects and teaching as shown in the following statements.

"Oh... the teachers are nice and helpful. I really like my Humanities (or other subject) teacher. I can always ask them for help if I need it" (Eti, F15Yr10).

"My teachers are so helpful... they expect us to ask for help from them" (Via, F16Yr10).

"There is a teacher at school that I am close to. Her sister's boyfriend is an Islander and so she always looks out for us Islanders at school" (Eli, FYr10).

"I do not like some teachers... they always pick on me" (Jela, MYr12).

Undoubtedly, for these students, the expectations and attitudes of teachers was a significant force in terms of their engagement, participation and expectations from school. Teachers represented a powerful figure in terms of their positive or negative engagement at school and were held in high esteem by most participants. For a few who did not have access to consistent adult support at

home, the school staff represented the 'significant other' figure that young people sought for their personal development and wellbeing. While most teachers were aware of their important connections and roles towards these PI learners, they were also often constrained by time and work commitments to provide the intensive and specific assistance that PI learners, whether as individuals or in groups required.

A question that emerged in this study related to student's positive sense of engagement and participation at school and whether this came at a cost to their overall academic achievement. There were clear inconsistencies in the views of participants and school staff regarding attitudes and performances of PI learners. While learners felt safe, happy and engaged in the school environment, this positive approach did not translate to their academic work which teachers described as generally of a low standard. Most staff personnel confirmed this fact, stating that PI learners were friendly, helpful and polite but less engaged or successful in the academic aspects of schooling. The statement below from a student illustrates this point.

"I love going to school ...school is fun and has a relaxed atmosphere and I have nice friends and supportive teachers, subjects are good and interesting but I do not really want to do the work" (Timo, M17Yr12).

This revelation encompasses some of the complexities of the PI learner and contradicts the earlier image presented of learners who are well-motivated, aspirational and interested in undertaking TAFE or university studies and carving out successful careers. It also confirms the views of some teachers about PI school engagement and participation, particularly the 'bored and unengaged' attitude of PI boys, as illustrated in the statements below;

"The PI boys here are bored and just waiting to leave school- they do not engage and have little input into class activities", (Teacher, School A).

"Some parents see school as a holding place for their children", (Welfare officer, School C).

These views confirm there are inconsistencies, misunderstandings and misinterpretations about schooling amongst school staff, learners and their families. For example, the ease with which students settle into the schooling environment, the friendliness of teachers and the fun and friendly relationships with peers were perceived by some PI learners as reflecting positive social and learning engagement when in fact, the core business of schooling, reflected in the levels and breadth of academic output were overlooked. This contradictory view of schooling accounted for some of the frustrations felt by parents when they did not see positive results from their children's schooling. This confusion and shock also extended to other aspects of schooling such as the choice of university courses and institutions where some participants in the study scored results lower than what they or their parents had anticipated.

Another common misinterpretation involved the stereotypical view of school staff towards PI as consistently having low aspirations, little interest in schooling and having poor in-home support for schooling. Some of these views were based on experiences with past PI learners whose ambivalent attitudes towards learning, consistent low school engagement and achievement and poor academic outcomes seemed to have affected the general perceptions of schools about PI learners. On the contrary, this study found some of the participants to have high aspirations, clearly defined goals and informed and supportive parents who clearly valued educational success. But the trouble with having these stereotypical negative misunderstandings about a group of learners is that it affects future relationships and interactions with such learners, which could in turn affect their aspirational levels and overall attitudes towards schooling.

Another area of misunderstanding concerned tertiary level fees and associated costs. Some teachers were understandably unaware that some of their PI learners did not qualify for government support that affected their enrolment at tertiary levels of study. Some staff even wrongly concluded that PI were not interested in taking up further study or that they dropped out of university or

TAFE because they could not cope when in fact, unaffordability was the real reason for their actions. Ama's difficult experience with enrolling at university confirms that there was little awareness by the school or the parents that such a cost existed which could have been earlier addressed during parent- teacher meetings and pathway planning sessions.

A further area of misunderstanding concerned parental communication and visits to their children's schools as shown in the statement below from two parents;

"I do not know why the school wants me to visit when everything is going okay with my daughter. Anyway why should I bother teachers who are always busy...School is not a place to go visiting... it is an important place! I only go if I need to" (Parent of Esi, Interview 2, July, 2014).

"Oh... I did not know that the school wanted us to visit or communicate with them. Why or what is there to communicate about when everything is going well?" (Parent of Lali, Interview 2, October, 2014).

These parents' understandings of their role in supporting their children were clearly different from the school's view that 'good' parents show commitment and interest in their children's progress and engagement by constantly communicating with them and turning up to parent-teacher interviews. While the school attributed the lack of communication and visits to 'a lack of interest' in the child, the parents perceived visiting or communicating with school, particularly when everything was going well, as almost an intrusion into a space that was important and where they did not feel fully belonged. Parents with little experience of education themselves were more likely to experience inconsistent and less meaningful engagement with schools and teachers while those with more educational experiences and familiarity and the appropriate language skills were prepared to step outside of their 'safe space' to approach schools for advice, assistance or support. This supports the findings of Onikama et al. (1998), and Fairbairn–Dunlop & Makisi (2003) that Pacific parents preferred keeping a physical and cultural distance between themselves and the schools, viewing the school as a space that they were not comfortable in. The consequence of this reluctance, however, ultimately adds to PI parents' sense

of isolation and inadequacy, making them less confident to advocate for their children's needs whilst increasing their marginality from their children's schools.

In concurrence with Connell's studies amongst working class parents in Sydney (2003), this study found some learners played a significant role in facilitating some of the uncertainties, misinterpretations and contradictions between the home and school. In some of these families, the learner had the most knowledge and understanding of the school system due to their direct and daily interactions with the school setting. In this prime position, the young person held some responsibility for transmitting important information about school to their parents and enabling the communication and information flow between these two key stakeholder groups. Whilst most of the participants ensured that information from home reached the school and vice versa, there were others who did not.

In these situations, those students with the least amount of parental supervision and support at home tended to be less transparent about their achievements and challenges at school, preferring to restrict and contain this information. Such actions resulted in parents failing to receive information from school regarding their child's progress. On the other hand, the learners whose parents were active in communicating with the school were more likely to be upfront about schooling requirements, their own performances, successes and challenges. They were also more likely to enjoy their schooling experiences and openly share their difficulties or change their preferences and goals, knowing that their parents would understand their choices and decisions. Where the communication flow was less free and open, learners were reluctant to pass on information that they felt might reflect badly on them. As can be seen from these examples, the level of parental engagement with schooling greatly affected their access to accurate and important information from the school. For those families that did not have this active engagement with schools or had this information tampered with or blocked, their access to important information was restricted, making them less aware of school events and activities, thereby increasing their sense of isolation. These findings concur with Connell's (2003)

studies with working class families where young people were found to manage the information content and flow between the school and the home to suit their needs at the cost of isolating their parents and compromising family-school communication.

8.2.4 School pathways and transitions

The participants in this study were aware of the importance of the senior years of schooling and the impact of these years on their future transitions and pathways. They understood the importance of exams and of getting good results and the need to focus and work hard to achieve the results expected by the schools and the fulfilment of their goals.

“The senior years are most crucial for students who want to go to uni... Everything is much more serious in these years. I think the biggest challenge is time management. If you are not using your time appropriately, it can affect you... even missing one class can make you fall behind and it would be difficult to catch up” (Sela, F16Yr11).

“Years 11 and 12 for me is when the real learning kicks in, it is when you put all your hard work and effort and bring up everything you have learnt” (Neli, F15Yr10).

While the learners were sensitive to the importance and demands of the post compulsory years, there were parents who did not view these years with the same level of importance or urgency. Whilst some parents deliberately increased or expanded their levels of support or interactions with the schools as a result of their children moving to higher levels of schooling, there were others that increased their children’s domestic responsibilities. These were families that mostly needed extra support with family and home obligations and who also could not provide the time and attention themselves. This was most obvious in homes where parents were employed in night shift or casual jobs and who needed their older children to contribute towards home needs but also unable themselves to provide support for the depth and breadth of academic study needed for senior levels of schooling. Most participants took on these home-based responsibilities without question, seeing them as necessary

contributions towards their family's wellbeing. In other homes, the young people were able to sidestep such roles because their parents could assume these responsibilities themselves due to their own successful experiences with education and their familiarity with the demands of secondary schooling. In other families where both parents were employed, choices were made to outsource some of these tasks.

From a school's perspective, many PI learners were generally ill-prepared for the demands of schooling, especially the senior levels of secondary schooling. Thus learners were expected to generally have poor academic outcomes, starting at the lower grades and to follow predictable low-level pathways due, according to school personnel, "to home factors such as limited competencies in English language and literacy, poor communication styles, inexperience in peer and adult interaction, lack of self-directed and self-regulation of learning and low levels of personal agency" (Teachers, Schools C and E), factors also cited by Biddle (2015); Fry (1996) and Furneaux, (1973). This generalised stereotyping of PI learners and families still exists in some schools where the unique and personal circumstances and successes of individual PI's have gone mostly unacknowledged and unrecognised. These stereotypical views have also been perpetuated by some PI learners themselves who internalise these stereotypes and accept these factors as plausible reasons for the ongoing difficulties encountered at school.

This study found that the educational journeys of the PI learners were unique, and complex. While PI learners shared some similar characteristics, the many differences in their personal, home, school and community circumstances interacted, combined and conflicted in different ways to shape and influence their transitions and pathways from post-compulsory secondary school to post-school destinations. Whilst the schooling waves ebbed and flowed and bounced back and forth, these learners experienced both successes and challenges along the way and yet held on strongly to their goals and the support of their families. Consistent with their attitudes to schooling which often changed from

enjoyment to frustration to celebration and depending on their personal, family and community changes and circumstances the transitions and pathways experienced by the young people tended to be evolving and unpredictable on an individual level but generally predictable as a collective unit.

8.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has paid close attention to the systems, processes, and systematic gaps that affect the educational achievement and pathways of Pacific learners on a broader community and societal level. There were many contradictory expectations and perspectives about schooling by the different parties involved suggesting the importance of clarifying these misunderstandings for the different stakeholders involved. Whilst school-personnel appeared to be reasonably knowledgeable about the schooling needs of PI learners, attempts to effectively address these concerns have been largely insufficient. More support with proper initiatives to respond to the needs of this specific cohort, which, according to them has historically and consistently achieved low level outcomes in education is required. Despite some attempts made at the school level to acknowledge the talents and strengths of PI and to create appropriate opportunities, space and time to celebrate and appreciate these talents at school, more needs to be done at the school level to address the specific needs of PI learners.

Chapter 9 Main findings, conclusion and lessons for practice

This final chapter presents the main findings, conclusions and lessons from the study and outlines recommendations for future research in the niche area of PI learner migrants and education. It begins with an epilogue which describes Sela's schooling journey over the three year period and outlines the various events, occurrences and actions that have impacted her educational trajectory. Her story reflects just one of the multiple and complex trajectories experienced by the research participants as they negotiated their schooling goals, outcomes and experiences at different times and spaces and in their interactions with various people and influences. The second section comprises a short researcher's self-reflection on conducting the research, focussing on the methodology and practical context of working with the research participants, their families, and schools. This is followed by a list of the study's main findings, conclusions and lessons learned with some suggestions for future research.

9.1 Epilogue - 'Sela's alternative'

When we first met Sela, she had been confronted with a dilemma to leave school and find a job to assist her family's financial situation or to remain at school, complete her VCE year and go to university to complete a nursing degree. Neither of these options occurred. Instead, Sela's school made the final decision of withdrawing her from school for not meeting the VCE attendance requirement halfway through her Year 12 studies. Simultaneously, Sela found herself entangled in a court case involving one of her school friends. Her out-of-school commitments had increased; she spent more time preparing for a youth rally at church and her responsibilities at home grew as her father's illness continued and her mother spent significant time away from home working night shifts to bring income for the family. The financial stresses and low educational support at home, combined with Sela's choice of peer relationships ultimately led to a situation that compromised and conflicted with her personal goals, family expectations and schooling outcomes. These various events and situations occurring within Sela's family life over the three year period were not

the only factors affecting her ability to fulfill her personal ambitions and the expectations of her family. The main reason for her being withdrawn from school was for not meeting the attendance level required for VCE studies.

With help from the school, however, Sela enrolled in a TAFE Certificate level course at the local university campus immediately after being withdrawn from school. In her second year at the same institution, Sela enrolled in a Diploma of Nursing and was still enrolled in that program after her fourth and final interview. At that stage, she was still hopeful of pursuing her original goal of completing a university nursing degree. Although she had encountered a number of personal, family and school challenges along the way, Sela was optimistic and resilient enough to want to continue her education and to chart a pathway that would lead her towards achieving her initial career goal of becoming a qualified nurse and to also gain back respect for herself and her parents.

The challenges encountered by Sela over her post-compulsory secondary school years are not dissimilar to those encountered by other study participants or other PI learners. Sela's withdrawal from school prior to completing VCE was a plight also shared by two other participants who were withdrawn due to poor academic performance and general school disengagement.

When Sela left school, she left behind her school friends and had to adjust to a new educational setting. At home, her father's ongoing illness and her mother's night-shift job required Sela to take on more caring responsibilities. These physical and emotional stresses at home had not only contributed towards Sela's poor attendance at school but at a critical point, had escalated to the extent that she was asked to leave school and find employment. Despite these challenges, Sela enjoyed strong support from friends and similar-age peers at school, family, church and within her island community. She participated actively in community activities and joined a Pacific youth documentary program as well as travelled overseas with her church group to attend a youth rally. One

person from whom Sela was able to draw emotional and social support from was her cousin and best friend who also studied at the same university.

Sela's story reminds us of the conflicting nature of the support structures that individuals are able to draw from within their social and cultural networks. Sela's family, her school and her friends contributed in some ways towards her loss of focus of her schooling and life goals but these same people and networks also helped her find her way back up and on track. The significant factor that made the difference in Sela's journey and educational outcome was Sela's own personal agency and resilience and the choices and decisions she made for herself and her hope for a better future, including an improved relationship with her parents.

9.2 Researcher reflection on research context and methodology

Like Sela, the researcher experienced both positive and challenging times over the course of this research study. This study provided a unique opportunity to deepen understanding about the educational experiences of PI migrants, an ethnic and cultural group with whom I share similar historical, socio-cultural and educational characteristics. As a result of doing this work, I have been alerted to the deep-seated structural and systemic inequalities that exist for certain groups in accessing, participating and achieving in education and schooling. Importantly, it has confirmed the existence of serious challenges that affect PI levels of educational access, participation and achievement which subsequently affect their post-school destinations. The rich and deeper understanding of the issues affecting PI in Australia has also brought a sense of concern and sadness about the enormity and complexity of these challenges. These learnings send a clear message to think differently and creatively about ways to assist PI in attaining their 'migrant dream'.

In making the decision to migrate to Australia nine years ago, I had entertained similar hopes and dreams as other PI compatriots who viewed Australia as a land of opportunity. Like many of them, I had also gone through a western model of education in the Islands and found a need to broaden my personal and

professional opportunities, seeing these to be unavailable or scarce in my island country, which was considered at the time as a 'failed state with a failing economy'. An important aspect of this dream was to seek and provide opportunities for family members to access better educational opportunities and to improve standards of living. Fortunately, I have been able to provide the in-home supports that my children and I needed to succeed in education. To some extent, my personal goals have mostly been achieved: my children have completed their education and secured employment that they enjoy and I am about to complete my PhD studies. All of these education related outcomes would have been difficult to achieve back in the Islands due to high competition for limited places in education and employment. It is a fact that migrating to Australia has made it easier and more realistic for us to access these educational and employment opportunities.

Many PI migrants have also been successful in achieving their dreams in education, employment and social wellbeing in Australia. They too, have been able to integrate into their adopted country of settlement. However, there are many more PI migrants who have not been as successful in transitioning to a new system of schooling and the associated labour market due to various factors, not least of which are their migration history, the unsupportive school and community structures and the restrictive social networks available to them. They need assistance and support. As highlighted by many participants in this study, education provides the necessary tools, confidence and capabilities to navigate both the immediate and broader social environment and the accompanying opportunities and challenges that Australia can offer to PI. Education can and does have the potential to change and transform lives and it is imperative that those who need it most are properly supported so that they too can improve their schooling outcomes and experience positive pathways to further and higher education and secure career-related employment. This study has raised a level of consciousness whereby I feel duty-bound by my culture to put to practice the value and importance of the concepts of 'outward service' towards 'a greater collective good' and to support the community from a policy and practice perspective. This same attitude of 'outward service' was observed

throughout the study from participants and informants who shared willingly their experiences to improve the lives of PI learners and their families.

Throughout the study, it was important that as a researcher, I kept my 'academic' position in check and in perspective as I observed, interacted with and represented the ideas, values and experiences of the research participants, their peers, families and teachers. At times, the researcher's position as a university lecturer, while generally respected, also threatened to affect the willingness of participants to offer and disclose information. However, the superiority of this position was often balanced out by my role as a parent and an older mature woman, two attributes which made interactions and participation with young people and their families more relaxed whilst also being robust. Many opportunities were provided to attend cultural functions, events and celebrations, all of which offered further opportunities to participate and observe at close range but to also withdraw when necessary. All the participants, their families, friends and teachers shared their information willingly and honestly, recognising the purpose and value of the study to improving the educational outcomes of PI learners in Melbourne's west but also in Victoria and Australia. It is within this same spirit of learning, hope, partnership and collaboration that the thesis findings are presented and shared.

9.3 Study findings

This study set out to investigate the patterns and trends of PI learner's participation, engagement and achievement in the secondary and post-secondary stages of schooling in Melbourne's western region and their subsequent pathways into higher education, further training and employment.

The main research question asked was:

How can young PI learners' in Melbourne's western region prepare more effectively for successful participation and engagement at the secondary school setting that can lead them towards smoother transitions and positive pathways in further education, training and employment?

In addressing this broad research question, it was necessary to first of all gauge the patterns and trends in the achievements of PI learners at the secondary school level and to identify their trajectories from senior secondary schooling to further post-school destinations. Using data from just two LSAY cohorts (1995 and 1998), the database helped identify PI aspirations and perceptions of ability in schooling as well as patterns of reading and mathematics achievement at Year 9, both of which are effective predictors of future performance and achievement. However, the LSAY data proved to be limited in its utility to shed light on the subsequent pathways of PI due to the small size of the PI population (comparatively) and the high attrition rate amongst the PI group in the study. A decision to over sample Indigenous learners in LSAY (Ainley et al. 2000) but not other minority groups added to the obscurity of PI in the data. However, LSAY authorities were well aware that different migrant populations experienced different levels of success working with the education system, contending that some groups performed worse than others in certain areas (Ainley et al. 2000). This point was illustrated in Table 1.1 (page 6) where PI were the lowest performers of any of the broadly defined groups in terms of numeracy test scores. The LSAY information, along with the existing literature on Pacific learner's engagement in education and the anecdotal evidence from community and personal observations provided the contextual basis to situate and ground the study.

This study examined PI family and community perceptions towards education and schooling to assess whether there had been changes in the views towards education and if so, the extent of the shifts or otherwise in the course and process of settlement and adjustment to new educational policies, practices and settings. Additionally, the study sought to evaluate the preparedness and willingness of Pacific parents and the local diasporic community to adjust their schooling expectations and in-home physical, economic and socio-cultural support structures and measures to fit with the requirements from school and broader societal institutions.

Of equal importance was the need to explore the expectations of schools concerning Pacific learner engagement and achievement levels and patterns and to evaluate the levels of support provided by schools, and the wider community towards supporting or challenging the educational experiences and pathways of PI learners. On the basis of these questions and responses, the overall research goal was to identify particular opportunities and challenges relevant to PI learners and to recommend suitable support structures and models of practice to better support PI learners' experiences and pathways in secondary and post-secondary school sectors.

9.3.1 Low-level pattern of pathways and transitions

The overwhelming result from the LSAY data, literature review and the empirical data was that PI learners continued to attain low level outcomes in education despite some slight improvements. While the transitions of PI within the compulsory levels of schooling were mostly uninterrupted, with all students progressing to post-compulsory secondary school levels without interference, the post-compulsory transitions tell a different story, presenting as a typically problematic period of schooling for many PI. Importantly, the nature and types of transitions and pathways of PI learners appeared to change very little over this important period of schooling which begs the question as to the effects and impacts of national, state and community educational policies on levels of educational participation, post-school pathways and social and community inclusion of the PI diaspora in Melbourne's western region. These results suggest that there continue to be marked inconsistencies between parental and community expectations of their children's participation and engagement in education in the search for the 'migrant dream' and the actual achievement of successful outputs and outcomes from education by PI learners.

This study found that family and learner's views of education have not changed despite the continuing low level outcomes of PI learners. On the contrary, the families involved in this study continue to be hopeful and optimistic about the education system's ability to improve their children's achievements and outcomes, increase their pathway opportunities and transform their children's

lives and their own. In all the families, there was hope and trust that things would improve and that education would help families escape poverty even though some considered it a huge gamble considering their own schooling experiences and the difficulties encountered with providing the necessary support required by the children. From all accounts, the study confirmed that the processes within home and at school for realising PI learner goals continue to be muddy.

All the parents in this study had high hopes for their children to experience success in education. However, while some were more understanding and flexible if their children achieved low or different outcomes to those that they had expected, there were others who, in their focussed search for the 'migrant dream', placed unrealistic demands and unattainable pressures on their children's educational goals, achievement and pathways. Interestingly, this second group of parents tended to be less educated themselves, making them culturally unprepared and less able to deal with the academic challenges that their children faced at school. At the same time, these parents were also less likely to access the services needed by their children due to limited social networks and low confidence to seek assistance. The limited access to essential services combined with low incomes brought forth situations of compounded disadvantage for the more vulnerable families that were involved in the study.

9.3.2 The importance of parental education and employment

The most important factor that significantly influenced young people's ability to integrate and engage successfully and confidently in education and other institutions and policies of a new environment rested with parental educational background, parental employment experience and social networks, all of which added cumulative value to each other. The educational level of parents or family members mattered significantly in terms of preparing a learner for their whole schooling experience, including instilling and nurturing appropriate aspirations and motivations for schooling from an early age, providing ongoing academic assistance to the learner at all stages of learning from pre-school to post-

secondary levels of schooling and in providing the ongoing in-home physical, emotional and academic support needed throughout all stages of schooling. The more educated parents understood better the level of competition and challenge faced by learners in the crucial senior years of secondary schooling and more likely to provide the necessary academic assistance and resources at this stage. They were also more likely to gain access to information and advice from their education and employment networks that provided further access to goods, resources and services. Following Bourdieu's social theory (Bourdieu, 1977) on forms of capital, this group of parents were able to use educational and employment capital to enact contingency and change within their situations unlike those who did not have similar economic or cultural capital needed to succeed in a western-dominant schooling system. These parents were found to experience many difficulties in changing or improving their situation. Where parents had good educational outcomes, they were also better able to secure long-term employment to support a stable, safe and warm home environment that in turn, provided the physical, material and emotional supports required by the children at school and for the day to day general health and well-being at home. All these aspects of home support were found to be present to various degrees in the homes of the participants. Where all these aspects were present and active, learners were able to successfully draw more useful and focussed support. However, in homes where these aspects and structures of support were unavailable or absent, learners found themselves to be less supported.

A families' migration history also combined with parental education and employment backgrounds to produce opportunities or challenges in school engagement and achievement. Those whose migration histories involved longer periods of temporary visas resulting in continuing low level access to social welfare, education and health benefits experienced more hardships in terms of their integration into the community. For these groups of PI families, their inability to negotiate and access certain social benefits affected their economic circumstances to the point where they were unable to provide short-term or long-term physical and financial supports to schooling, which in turn also affected learner motivations to pursue further and higher levels of education.

This study found overwhelming evidence that amongst PI families, affordability and cost continue to present as huge barriers for some families. The financial problems did not always present in similar ways. Some families were affected by long term poverty while others were affected by one-off high costs of tertiary education. For those experiencing ongoing poverty, the scarcity of resources affected their day to day decisions and actions by making them look for immediate or short term solutions to deal with urgent and pressing needs. Living in the 'here and now' economic cycle affected people's abilities to plan for the longer term, such as saving for their children's tertiary education costs. The income levels of some families were also affected when providing the cultural acts of 'outward service' to others in the local diaspora or in the islands who they viewed to be in worse situations than themselves. Sometimes these actions were perceived by schools as parents not paying enough interest to support their children's education or PI not caring enough about their children's future. On many occasions, these school-level evaluations were made without an understanding of the specific economic, social and cultural circumstances affecting PI families and communities.

9.3.3 The contradictory worlds of home and school

A clear message from this study was that there are significant disconnections between the home and the school in terms of cultural organisation, schooling expectations and academic responsibilities of learners and each other. While some parents admitted to not having all the knowledge and information about the requirements and expectations regarding support for their children from school staff, particularly at the senior levels of schooling, they were also uncertain about their rights to inquire or intervene on behalf of their children. In only three cases were parents able to muster the courage and confidence to approach the school to ask for clarification or support. All three parents were tertiary educated. If and when parents knew about the expectations of school and their rights to question school decisions, they were sometimes constrained by a lack of confidence to follow-up or communicate with school personnel, preferring to keep the issues to themselves.

On the other hand, many of the school personnel were quite well-informed about the culture, behaviour, performance potential and academic outcomes of the PI learners at their schools. Despite having the knowledge and understanding that PI typically have less than satisfactory academic outcomes, the schools were not noticeably pro-active in implementing programs or services that specifically targeted this cohort of learners. Slee's (2011) observation that "in a competitive education marketplace, schools compete to attract those students whose academic participation will improve and sustain the schools' position on the academic leagues tables" (Slee, 2011, p.42) is on point as PI have been known to consistently follow predictable low-level pathways and as a result, unlikely to attract much attention. As such, PI may be somewhat viewed as liabilities for the schools' academic credibility.

Many parents had misunderstandings about their own roles. While a few parents concerned themselves with administrative and practical aspects of schooling such as regular attendance, conformity to proper uniform guidelines, following school rules and respecting teachers, they were less adept at providing the kinds of support that learners needed to achieve academically, such as support for study skills, time management, writing in specific genres, critical inquiry or critiquing knowledge and passing tests and exams. Noticeably, these are all skills that draw on western or formal forms of cultural capital that are not learned or emphasized at home and which sometimes, moreover, contradict Pacific cultural ways of communicating or behaving.

In contrast, the cultural skills encouraged at home such as volunteering and contributing to the 'common good', helping and caring for others and collective action were not explicitly valued in the classroom or school setting generally. These cultural norms, viewed as important traits for community cohesion and inclusion and 'relationships nurturing' (Thaman, 2007) were not regarded as valuable aspects of schooling although PI learners were consistently praised by teachers for willingly volunteering time and energy to conduct social programs at school. These study findings concur with the literature (Epstein, 2011; Goyette & Lareau, 2014; Henderson & Raimondo, 2001; Lareau, 2003) that

view the home-school connection to be a workable concept for mostly middle-class parents whose culture and organisation at home matched closely those of the western classroom. As most of the PI learners in this study did not have similar cultures and structures at home, they were often conflicted by the expectations and requirements placed on them from teachers on the one hand and from parents on the other.

Staff members were also quick to point out that these same students were not strong academically and thus destined for predictable low-level pathways. It was clear from these observations which aspects of schooling were important to the teachers and to the school setting and obviously PI did not fit with these requirements. The mismatch between the everyday values taught at home and the aspects of schooling that were most valued at school meant that PI students were consistently culturally unprepared to deal with the academic aspects of schooling and combined with teachers' low expectations of their abilities, some PI appeared to struggle on a regular basis at school.

Faced with the 'soft' bigotry of low expectations, one of the cultural challenges that some PI faced at school concerned language use and communication (Beaver & Tuck, 1998). Whilst all the learners were able to successfully navigate the language and communication demands of schooling at the earlier years, some learners found the senior secondary school years to be more challenging as emphasis was now placed on the critical academic approaches to learning. Some PI did not have the language skills or confidence to adapt effectively to school requirements due to the differences in communication styles practised at home. While at home, young people were encouraged to '*listen, obey and take instructions*', they had to do the complete opposite at school and voice opinions, think for themselves and question ideas. These cultural differences in home and school approaches to communication and problem solving meant that some PI found it difficult dealing with the language and communication skills required for successful navigation of higher level schooling. Ama, for example who had won subject prizes in the earlier years of secondary schooling found herself coping less well with the content and as she

moved to higher levels of schooling and at VCE, could not achieve the marks or ATAR score that she hoped to receive to enter her choice of tertiary course.

Conversely, the demands on language and literacy by school authorities paid little recognition of the fact that PI learners were also learning their native language at home for communication and participation in cultural rituals, performances and celebrations as well as for maintaining their national identity. These important cultural expectations were not known about or acknowledged in school systems where students were expected to communicate in and be formally assessed on their understanding and fluency with the English language. Moreover, Pacific languages are not built at all into the school curriculum, unlike other well-known languages like Mandarin or Vietnamese which allow learners to receive rewards through the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). The issue of language is interesting in the sense that language fluency can often be associated with cognitive ability. In a cultural context such as the school which is dominantly mono-linguistic, those learners who have communication difficulties may be incorrectly regarded as being academically weak and unable to fit into the norm.

Language literacy, however, is only one aspect of cultural capital that affects young PI in the classroom. At school, PI are known to be unusually quiet and reserved, have a relaxed attitude towards their studies and do not seek attention or assistance. All these attributes can be interpreted as learners being uninterested or unmotivated when in fact these students have not yet acquired the cultural skills and tools needed to communicate and interact confidently. Such behaviour can sometimes be misconstrued as 'deficits' inherent in learners and their families, which only they are able to fix in order to fit into the school's expectations and requirements. As an accepted institution within the cultural context, it appeared from the research data that some schools felt entitled to make these demands on learners and families with little appreciation of the learner's other cultural and linguistic commitments.

One of the ways in which the Pacific families and communities differed from that of school culture related to gender construction and conceptualisation. There were gendered differences in parental and community-wide perceptions about the schooling achievements and consequent pathways of learners. Some families involved in this study were more lenient with boys in terms of mobility, responsibilities at home and freedom to choose friendships. Boys were encouraged to undertake trade apprenticeships and TAFE destined pathways if they wished and there was not much concern if they were withdrawn from school. Some parents readily accepted a TAFE pathway for their sons but for their daughters a better performance at school and transition to university was expected. This gendered pressure to succeed was accompanied by giving daughters more responsibilities at home and less freedom overall, making for stressors on two important fronts. According to some parents, girls needed to do better at school due to the lower employment opportunities available to them. For others, keeping girls at school for longer helped to prevent them from starting families too early while others said that girls tended to become better providers for their initial family on a long term basis whilst boys were likely to move away from home soon after they got married (Morrow, 2009). On the whole, the girls responded well to these family demands and pressures and seemed to accept their more demanding commitments to the family.

As a result of the higher expectations from families and the community, this study found that the girls were more focussed on their schooling, had some clear goals for the future and showed much more interest in staying at school for longer periods. Out of the 8 students (5 females and 3 males) who completed senior secondary education by the end of the data collection phase, all five girls had followed the VCE pathway until Year 11 or 12 before transiting to either a university or alternative education institution to continue their education. All five girls have continued their education to this day. Of the three boys that completed Year 11 and 12, two are currently employed while the third has started a trade course at the local TAFE. These pathway patterns not only align with teacher expectations but are also generally still tied to students'

original goals for themselves. While there have been elements of success experienced along the way, there have also been many struggles encountered by these learners and their families.

9.3.4 The predictability of school pathways

Schools are powerful places where young people interact with others outside of their immediate family and community circles and develop a sense of their place in society. Through the day to day connections at school, young people learn about themselves and carve their relationships, actions and behaviours accordingly. They formulate their identities, based on how they are perceived and how they perceive others around them. All participants in this study found school to be a welcoming and safe space. However, while they enjoyed schooling and the social environment it offered, these learners were also aware of the distinct differences between the priorities, focus and culture of the school and that of their family and community. The school's focus on a particular language, methods of communication and forms of assessment would have reminded them from an early stage that the game and rules of schooling are different to those with which they are familiar. While at home, they were expected to be passive, obedient and helpful and to understand their place in the group, they were now required to be individualistic, competitive, confident and outspoken at school. Such contrasts in expectations caused confusion for some learners, making them anxious to 'mediate' between the worlds of school and home and to make things easier for the two parties to understand each other. Some of the learners worked hard to manage these relationships and sometimes felt it easier to keep the two worlds separate. Some learners felt obliged to build up resistance as a way to protect their families who they felt would not understand or be hurt by the school's assumptions or demands on them. On a personal level, being aware of the many barriers and challenges at school would have alerted PI to the realisation that they can only and always perform and compete at a lower level than their peers. These self-perceptions can have a significant effect on learner motivation, self-esteem and identity development confirming Biddle (2015) and Singh (2001) that the low

expectations from teachers can help reinforce a learner's own low expectations of himself or herself, leading to unsatisfactory results and outcomes.

Learners' low perceptions of self and learned low self-esteem showed up in various practical ways throughout this study. In line with teacher predictions, PI mostly selected vocational or non-traditional subjects for VCE, knowing that these were areas they could showcase their talents and afford opportunities to success. These were also regarded as 'easier or softer' and low status subjects in VCE that teachers predicted PI would follow and in which they were happy to enrol in. Subject choices saw little resistance or contention with parents when these softer options were selected for students. However, it was not evident in this study if school staff thought of suggesting other VCE subjects, if they felt a PI student was capable of pursuing a higher level pathway.

More often than not, students and schools' views were aligned and students were content with opting for pathways that staff suggested for them as these fitted closely with their own goals. However, in agreeing to select these options, learners also create a predictable pathway, which in turn perpetuates the stereo-typical view that PI students are only capable of doing lower level subjects. This streaming of young people into predictable low level pathways, including the VCAL stream, does not help address the difficulties that PI experience in raising the profile of the cohort nor does it encourage a closer engagement with the cognitive aspects of schooling. An important question to ask then is whether schools are helping to adequately prepare young people for the skills needed in the 21st century and whether they address the problem now for PI learners in the future.

There were a handful of study participants who ventured into non-typical pathways due to staff support and intervention. These staff took responsibility to suggest certain pathways to students which helped them to improve personal agency and develop trust in their own capabilities. The connections with staff were highly valued by the students and allowed young people to feel engaged with the activities of the school and the school personnel. One of the main observations from this study was the realisation that PI sought validation and

recognition of their schooling efforts and successes from both teachers and peers and took whatever feedback received from them seriously. Undoubtedly, these validations and celebrations of school effort and achievement were important to the participants and helped them to carve out potential opportunities and future pathways for themselves as well as provided positive feedback on their progress at school.

As seen, students sometimes lacked personal agency due to culturally-influenced relationship patterns enforced at home and thus actively sought confirmation and validity of efforts from teachers. But the study also showed that some teachers generally held low expectations of PI learners despite the successes of a few. Whether derived from past experiences with PI learners or from media representations of young PI, the expectations regarding the low academic potential and disruptive behaviour of PI have negative repercussions on learners and school staff. Because PI is a cohort that is known historically for producing low educational outcomes, teachers may knowingly or unknowingly contribute to perpetuating lowered self-esteem and a sense of disempowerment amongst PI learners who are in most need of encouragement. It is a serious concern that as professionals, some teachers use these generalisations to inform their interactions with and their expectations from PI learners.

9.3.5 The centrality of schools and the marginality of parents

This study brought home the realities about schools as institutions and wielders of power and influence in society. The perspective that 'schools are agents and places of change' (Freire, 1997; Mandela, 2009) found little resonance with this study's findings. Instead what seemed relevant to the emerging themes of this study were adages such as 'schools are a reflection of the communities or societies they serve' and 'schools are designed to maintain the status quo' (Helme et al, 2009; Cobbald, 2015; Schmidt, Burroughs, Zoido, Houang, 2015). Most teachers interviewed in this study were aware of the problems that PI faced and applied useful strategies at subject and classroom levels. They were not always successful, however, at promoting or implementing change at the

whole school level. There were few programs or activities run at school-wide level that catered specifically to PI learners. The few programs that existed were in areas recognised as stereotypically appealing to PI such as rugby and music, but not in academic aspects of schooling. Other staff were less sympathetic towards less academically inclined learners and perceived cultural and social needs as more of an 'interference' and distraction to the main purpose of schooling; passing exams and achieving successful transitions. The fact that schools through the staff were aware of the problems faced by PI but could not do much to change the situation gives the impression that most of the issues affecting marginalised learners, including PI, are structural and systemic in nature and cannot be easily and quickly fixed by one group of people. The diversity of the cohorts whom teachers and schools work with also adds to this complexity.

The school's dominant position not only marginalised and isolated parents but also put blame on individual or home-based factors for the low achievements of PI learners. The perspective was well-internalised by the study participants who often attributed school failures to their own limited capabilities rather than on teaching methods or limited support or resources from school. This example gives credence to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of 'deficit' wherein society places people in situations where they blame themselves and their circumstances for their challenges and failures. Visi's mother's agreement to the school's suggestion to transfer Visi to an alternative educational setting, Sela's withdrawal from school without her parent's knowledge and the withdrawal of Jela from school two weeks before his VCE exams are examples of the school exercising its dominant authority on vulnerable learners who are also perversely willing to take the blame for these consequences.

Some schools were seen to assume a '*gatekeeping*' role, with power to preserve certain spaces and opportunities at school for certain groups. Some examples of this gatekeeping role included teachers' directing and guiding PI into VCAL or alternative pathways and expressing frustration when families and communities did not attend school-initiated meetings, and avoiding the

arrangement of further meetings with such parents because it was just 'too hard'. This was evidenced in the case involving Sela's parents who were unaware of her withdrawal from school until a later time. Similarly the teachers at Edi's school were frustrated with his parents for not answering their phone calls and suggested that he was at risk of failing. One of the teachers aptly described the dilemma of some of the teachers at his school as follows;

"A few teachers find it easier to blame learners and parents for low engagement. The attitude is 'if you cannot communicate, then you must learn English and if your child is not passing or achieving at the expected standard, then your expectations are too high'" (Teacher, School E).

Whilst many parents and families in this study were supportive of their children's' future goals, and expected the schools to help their children achieve these goals, the teachers were not so hopeful about the ability of PI learner's to improve their academic results and be successful at school. They had lower expectations of PI, predicted that PI would normally follow a VCAL or a lower level pathway and were unaware of the career goals that the young people and their parents clearly expressed. Teachers were also not confident about the ability of PI students to transition smoothly to the higher levels of study or training, much less about their chances of transitioning to university. Although complimented for being friendly, polite and helpful, PI were also seen as second language speakers who lacked motivation or communication skills, found schooling difficult and tended to under-perform and have low academic achievements.

Poor support at home was the main reason given for these low aspirations, compounded by poor interest of PI learners and their parents in schooling. These assumptions were found to be false for the majority of participants in this study as some spoke English fluently, held high aspirations for education and had supportive parents at home. In this cohort, one student had won the English subject prize in Year 9 and another had been commended on her written English skills by her teacher and on the basis of that compliment, had done well in VCE and was at university studying to become a teacher. Not all the young people struggled with their English language skills and there were some families

who actively supported their children's educational endeavours at home. These observations are consistent with Dickie (2000) and Alton-Lee (2006) whose work with PI learners in New Zealand found that teachers tended to underestimate how much PI students knew and the rate at which they could progress, and also assumed that their parents lacked commitment and did not have the interest or ability to contribute to their children's learning (Dickie, 2000). Singh (2001) also observed similar misunderstandings amongst school staff in Queensland and pointed to '*cultural distance*' as a serious challenge for teachers working with students of diverse backgrounds.

There were many instances in this study when and where staff perceptions of learners and their families collided, including mis-understandings and mis-interpretations of information between staff and parents about the capabilities, progress and commitments of learners. Whilst parents were highly optimistic about schooling and its opportunities for their children, the school staff mostly had reservations about PI students' abilities to succeed at school although they were confident that the behaviour of PI students had improved. It is obvious that negative and stereotypical views of PI may have accumulated over time based on the performance and behaviour of past PI students. Sadly, however, these stereotypes are still relevant and influential in schools today and if allowed to continue, could affect the expectations, achievements and pathways of future PI learners.

At the goals or expectations level, it would seem that both the parents and school staff agreed on the role and purpose of schooling but each party used different social and cultural benchmarks to test the successes of schooling. While parents looked to schools for assistance in helping their children realise their long term goals, the schools' priorities were different and focussed on learners achieving high academic standards and competing well in examinations and tests. It appeared that some teachers put less effort on learners who performed less well in these areas or paid less attention to the specific goals and needs of a cohort who consistently did not do well at school.

These low expectations of teachers also resulted in young people being offered limited pathways despite teachers' understanding and awareness of the Pacifica cohort as an at-risk group who would benefit from more assistance and encouragement into non-typical pathways. Whether teachers and schools were unwilling and unprepared to challenge the systems that could accommodate these different levels of needs or whether schools were satisfied with maintaining the status quo of poor educational outcomes and predictable pathways are questions that require further research. But the evidence from this study clearly suggests that there are differences in the ways that parents, teachers and learners perceive the role and purpose of schooling and the types of support and assistance needed to achieve high quality outcomes. Additionally, the negative perceptions about PI and the ways they engage with and manage their learning within the school's structured frameworks puts many young PI at a disadvantage. As Alton-Lee (2006) observes "*external benchmarks and effective diagnostic and formative assessment play a key but not sufficient role in supporting high achievement for diverse learners, especially where pedagogies follow a 'mainstream cultural voice'*" (Alton-Lee, 2006) in terms of curriculum, assessment and reporting.

The deficit model concept is relevant when applied to the PI situation whose proud heritage and non-help seeking culture make them hesitant to seek for assistance or attract attention to themselves which in turn makes them more marginal or isolated from the rest of society. Within their immediate community, most Pacific young people's experiences were restricted to specific activities such as sports, arts, church that involved physical and social interaction mostly within their specific island community. Outside this internal and protected space, the worlds of school and wider local community which constitute Bronfenbrenner's third sphere of 'institutional community' remained spaces in which PI have not been able to fully and successfully integrate. In this study, successful schooling and education which leads to secure employment are key factors for facilitating community integration and inclusion into broader society. but the ongoing challenge for PI learners is that this outer sphere is not culturally aligned with their 'lived experiences' and the familiar world of home.

By focussing within its own specific community and restricting social and cultural engagement within these two inner spheres, many PI have been able to develop strong social capital with members of its own community but not with others outside of these spheres, such as in the broader worlds of school and work. In both the school and work settings, PI tend also to cluster in particular programs, pathways and activities. For example at school, PI are clustered in the VCAL program and consequently follow a TAFE or direct employment pathway. In the world of work, PI also tended to cluster in particular employment areas such as security, logistics, agriculture and manufacturing and in sports, there are many PI involved in the two rugby codes of league and union.

9.3.6 Structural mis-alignment and cultural mis-adaptation

Bronfenbrenner's human ecological theory is useful in ascertaining PI's ability to adapt to their wider community and external environment. It helps to explain the effects and impacts of social, economic and cultural factors on the ways that young PI affect and are affected by the immediate layers of the family and local Pacific diaspora and the immediate community and the external or outer layers of political and social influence within community and society. These are spheres, which according to Bronfenbrenner, have little direct influence or function on a young person's life but nevertheless can hugely affect their physical wellbeing and social inclusion in many ways. In an economic environment that values the privatisation of education, both physical and emotional independence are valued and encouraged and families and individuals are expected to be independent and self-sustaining. However, such values run counter to the cultural customs and mores of PI who value communal sharing and collective purpose, effort and outcomes for families and communities. When these cultural mores and values contradict or clash with dominant cultural attributes, PI learners are likely to encounter difficulties when navigating these unfamiliar expectations.

Conversely, the study highlighted the fact that PI communities placed great pressure on themselves and each other to succeed in the pursuit of the 'migrant

dream'. Due to the stigmas associated with help seeking behaviours, some PI families preferred drawing on their own resources and resisted seeking help from outside sources if they felt the outcome would bring shame or guilt to the family. These contrasting cultural mores played out in various ways in a practical sense. For example, a PI family may acknowledge that it needs assistance but only choose certain means and ways of solving the issue which in a small community, implies a restricted number of available support sources and networks. Even within the specific communities, there were obvious reservations about sharing information in case there is disapproval or ostracism from other parts of the same community for not following certain communal expectations and pressures about acceptable behaviour. In these instances, some families sought to protect themselves from possible anxieties and apprehensions that could arise out of negative community perception and stereotyping and opted to deal with problems on their own.

With so much energy and activity going on in the immediate worlds of family and the immediate community, it is not surprising that PI learners did not venture too much outside of these familiar circles for their social capital and networking needs. Many of the activities and events that they attended were either internal to the family or closely connected to their immediate communities in spaces (such as in church and in the sports fields) where PI have been known to experience some success. These successes have been seen most obviously in sports, especially in rugby (Lakisa, Adair & Taylor, 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Macdonald, 2014), where a few PI males have been able to reach professional rugby level. The success in rugby has resulted in many parents and learners re-focussing their attention on the rugby pitch, believing this to be an area where talented young PI males can experience success. On the flipside to this success is the negative publicity relating to PI and juvenile justice and domestic violence where the high numbers of PI offenders in these areas has been attributed to systemic poverty (Pacific Island Communities in Victoria Report, 2012).

9.3.7 A continuous state of temporality

Low income and ongoing poverty associated with casualized or unstable employment was seen to significantly affect the ability of some families in the study to provide the necessary material, cultural and educational support for their children. A consistent lack of finance and the scarcity of resources have been known to affect the ways that people with limited resources plan their lives (McLachlan, et al. 2013). In some of the families, the day to day was focussed on the 'here and now' and the more important issues that affected their daily lives. These families also held high aspirations for their children but were restricted in their ability to prepare or support their children for senior level studies in education. The ongoing poverty and low incomes results in people focusing attention on the immediate and day to day needs rather than plan for the future – not because they do not care about their children's education but because they do not have the capability and the resources to plan for the longer term.

One of the reasons given for PI's inability to adapt easily to their new environment was the constant longing to return home to the islands. Sometimes this longing reflected experiences of failure or disillusionment in the settlement and acculturation process or an inability to live up to certain family or community expectations. The disadvantage, though, of having the option to choose to return home, is that young PI might be encouraged to place little effort into adapting to the Australian way of life. Alternatively, it also actually reflects a deliberate effort by some PI to maintain a marginal position in the fringes of society as a way to maintain close connections with their Island identity, cultures and traditions, and maintain a cultural 'competitive advantage' (Lee & Kumasharo, 2005; Scholtze, 2005). There are parallels here to Park's concept of the 'marginal man', a person who is comfortable remaining in the fringes of society and who, by virtue of that position, is better able to traverse or border cross (Yuval-Davis, 2010) cultural and social spaces and blending their social and cultural identities in the process. According to Park (1950), this marginality allows these individuals or groups to be more physically mobile and transient.

The participants in this study evidenced this chosen marginality in different ways. Jela who had worked as a security officer believed he would get better work and pay in the Islands due to his work experience in Australia and his ability to communicate in English. Similarly, Sela who was the youngest child in her family acknowledged her responsibility to care for her parents by returning with them to the Islands after completing her nursing degree. These examples show that PI young people are active agents, clearly thinking about how they would transfer skills, knowledge or learnings to the Island context. When viewed in this context, these young people are still able to contribute usefully and meaningfully to their specific island country even if their educational outcomes are not seen as fully successful in their 'temporary' home.

9.4 Conclusion, expectations, dilemmas and hope

This study has uncovered some important themes in terms of PI engagement in education and the ways they negotiate the complex and multiple realities of home, school and community to achieve successful schooling outcomes and positive pathways to further education, training and employment. First and foremost, this study has uncovered that the educational goals of learners, their families and school staff are generally aligned but the processes used to facilitate their achievement vary considerably in terms of the contexts and relationships that are involved. This brings home an important point about schooling engagement, achievement and pathways; that these trajectories are unique to each individual and that differing contexts, situations and circumstances can all have an impact on the outcomes and outputs. It was found that the family educational context and income situation played a central role in determining the support levels that a learner could access at home and the level of scaffolding support that needed to be provided at school and community levels.

Both the home and the school presented as two important settings in which PI young people are able to review, negotiate and select their educational goals and their consequent pathways. PI learners were seen to consistently face a dilemma of whether to uphold family and cultural values or adopt western forms

of culture and values, evidencing the marked contrasts between PI worldviews and western ontologies and epistemologies. Schooling was seen as an essential part of western culture and the further and more successful one's educational experiences were, the higher the risk of culture loss. Both of these worlds were highly valued and considered as markers of success in the eyes of PI families and communities although they did not necessarily uphold, support or enable each other. The rules, expectations and requirements that governed success in each sphere were different and mostly contradicted each other leaving many PI learners confused and conflicted about their priorities, roles and responsibilities to themselves, their families and peers and other stakeholders with whom they interacted. This is the realistic dilemma that PI face as they traverse and negotiate each of their transitions and pathways through secondary schooling and onto post school destinations. In most cases, the young people considered their options in light of family, peer or teacher suggestions but eventually and more often than not, pursued decisions and actions that were likely to bring the most benefit to their family's immediate and urgent needs. Sometimes, the pressure to do right by the family caused young people to put their own educational and career goals on hold. In a school context, this meant that a learner saw it as more important to drop out of school and find a job to assist the family finances than remain at school. Sometimes the pressure to drop out of school was encouraged by already poor results at school, or a need to save face on behalf of themselves or their parents.

The need to please and appease parents is a huge motivation factor for students to achieve and succeed in education and employment. The desire to succeed was often couched in a language of service, obligation and reciprocity which both learners and their families expected and acknowledged. At times, the pressure to please parents drove learners to mask the realities of their performances and achievements at school which, when uncovered, led some parents to become frustrated and disappointed in their children. However, these disappointments and frustrations did not stop families from being hopeful and trustful of the education system to deliver the necessary outcomes. Sometimes

learners who were not doing too well at school deliberately built walls between the home and school to isolate these two worlds from each other and to prevent parents from knowing what was truly happening at school, especially if they were not doing well and not living up to parental expectations. At other times, school staff were kept 'in the dark' about events or situations at home as a way to shield family weaknesses or vulnerabilities from being exposed. These strategies consequently led to further alienation of parents from the school or staff from the home context, causing these two parties to have distorted and unrealistic perceptions of schooling or the home. Learners, however, were found to readily apply such techniques on parents who had fewer experiences with education and less confident with their communication skills. Parental education background, combined with steady employment and income helped provide physical, material and academic supports that learners required at school. Almost half of the parents that participated in this study took steps to educate and train themselves as a way to improve their employment situation but also to enable them to assist their children academically at school.

PI generally regarded schooling and educational pathways as an important phase in an ongoing journey that would take them to different directions and destinations but were also open to the fact that the journey is dependent on many and different contingent circumstances. Sometimes they expected these pathways to be simple and uninterrupted, linear and straightforward, or even difficult and painful or circular and irregular but with a hope that somewhere along the way, there would be better results. This kind of hope or expectation is sustained because of a belief in forces and influences bigger and stronger than oneself, and an acceptance of self as part of a wider collective that is open to the influence and impact of higher external forces. This belief is a very strong part of PI spiritual culture and is the reason that church is a significant force which plays an almost symbiotic association with culture. For PI, there is a constant need to find place and fit within a harmonious setting and this can usually be difficult in spaces and with audiences that promote individualism and self-determination. Samu (2007) refers to this concept as *'I am part of a wider*

audience' in which PI acknowledge that the choices that individuals make can have significant implications on family and the wider community (Samu, 2007, p. 21).

Despite the belief in more powerful influences in their lives, PI are not necessarily passive or dependent agents. PI learners do make choices on issues that affect their day to day lives and are actually self-aware and sensitive of and to the world around them. Sela's decision to manage her post-school pathway outside of the influence of her parents is a clear example of a young person exercising personal agency to achieve a goal that would eventually prove beneficial to her family and to herself. For some PI learners, this personal agency could also be applied in negative ways wherein a PI learner exercises choice which prompts them to take action which might constitute a negative consequence. Such situations have been known to cause problems for young PI at school where they indulge in disruptive behaviour or show a willingness to carry the blame for the actions of others. Sometimes the choices are more complex and include allowing parents and teachers to make decisions for them that the young people may not agree with.

9.5 Lessons for practice

This study constitutes a first step towards gaining a better understanding of PI migrants' experiences of schooling and pathways in a metropolitan region of Melbourne. It has uncovered important learnings about the general patterns and trends of engagement, achievement and pathways of learners within the secondary and post-compulsory secondary years of schooling and identified some gaps in the-home and school settings of learners. It found that some of the 'lived in' experiences and expectations of PI did not fit well with school systems and processes and that some school requirements did not gel well with home responsibilities. The study also found that wider historical, social and cultural factors affect the types of support that PI learners can access and depend on and that these also influence their personal well-being and school engagement, achievement and post-school pathways. There is still a lot more to learn about and from PI learners, their families and schools to improve the

educational services needed and the supports that can be provided to this cohort.

The challenges faced by PI learners at school are complex and multi-layered and cannot be addressed by one single group of stakeholder. These challenges are further compounded by mis-understandings and misinterpretations that exist between parents and school staff as to their respective expectations, roles and responsibilities to learners. These two stakeholders must commit to bringing about better and more positive outcomes for PI learners and others in similar disadvantaged positions at school. This ultimately means putting in place better communication channels between the different parties and developing strong and respective partnerships that are mutually beneficial to the different parties. This partnership must include strategies for working together in respectful, inclusive and cross-cultural ways to bring about positive changes and outcomes for PI learners.

Parents can improve support to their children by providing clearer and better structures and strategies for learning at home, especially around supervision and monitoring of homework and in effectively communicating with their children and their schools. Families must recognise that learners nowadays have different needs, are more aware of their rights in society and more attuned to the recognising and navigating the world around them. They are also more aware of classroom and schooling requirements and more attuned to the opportunities and risks and can match their strengths and weaknesses to fit the pathways and opportunities available to them. Learners also have a better sense of their surroundings and the external environment and if and when encouraged to exercise self-efficacy, can develop self-esteem and cultural resilience, with increased capabilities to make decisions and choices that are right for them, whilst self-protecting themselves from external influences. This means that parents need to trust their children more and provide opportunities to relate and communicate in more flexible ways with each other and to adapt appropriately to a learner's changing physiological and psychological needs.

Socio-cultural factors such as family relationships, attitudes and values and parental expectations were seen to significantly influence school success, evidencing that parental academic and educational wellbeing of both generations is very important, especially in the areas of English language communication and understanding of the school system. One strategy seen to be effective amongst the parents in this study was to engage in further study and training to improve their own educational understanding and to increase employability. Some of these parents, through their social networks were able to acquire information and knowledge to improve their skills, strategies and orientations for better communication with schools and even with their own children. This positive attitude by parents to learn more as a way to improve their own education and employment options as well as to better understand the education system to help themselves and their children is an important step towards improving community-wide engagement and collaboration on education and must be properly promoted and supported.

Schools can also do more to provide the enabling learning environment that nurtures positive outcomes for PI young people. Recognition, validation and celebration of PI cultural differences, as for other cultural migrant groups is an important consideration. Some structural changes in terms of school-based academic supports for PI learners, beginning in the early years of secondary school could be useful as would early identification of learners and families who are most in need of material, physical and academic support. An area of most need from schools for the PI cohort is careers and pathway planning, beginning from early secondary years to gain better understanding of the skills and challenges that PI learners have and to assist learners and families to plan more realistically and strategically for post-school options. Some teachers were already using positive engagement strategies with PI at subject and classroom levels and these could be shared and promoted at school-wide level.

At the broader community level, the small size of the PI population and the vast differences in language, physical appearances and subcultures between

peoples of the various island countries has made it difficult for state and community agencies to cater more suitably to the needs of this population and affects the level of services and benefits afforded to this group. This has resulted in some PI feeling isolated and marginalised in their adopted environment with insufficient opportunities to experience a sense of full social and cultural belonging (Vasta, 2004). The media also influences the ways that group identity is constructed and framed and can significantly affect public perceptions of PI learners and communities. Those who make and drive social inclusion policies must look closely and deeper into the affairs and wellbeing of small cultural groups and adjust migration, education and social inclusion policies which have been known to further isolate and marginalise vulnerable groups, as evidenced in this study.

9.6 Way forward and future research

This study constitutes an initial but necessary step towards developing a body of knowledge and literature about the ways that PI learners engage with the educational services and institutions available to them in Melbourne's western region. Generally speaking, PI patterns of engagement, achievement and pathways at secondary schooling have continued to be low despite the successes of a few. The continuing low educational outcomes of PI as a vulnerable group in education has not translated to real or tangible support programs and services to this group at the school or community level. Similarly, the in-home support provided to learners has been inconsistent and ineffective in some contexts.

These findings are not necessarily new to educational providers but this study's unique contribution has been its presentation of the authentic and original viewpoints and voices of PI learners and their families about their needs and challenges in education. As seen in the LSAY data, quantitative data can sometimes provide value-laden findings about certain cohorts of learners and this study, despite being small, has found that there are some positive stories about PI pathways that can be missed in large-scale studies. These findings provide equally important lessons for improving future practice and improving

the educational outcomes of the PI learner cohort. A logical step from this study, then, is to translate the findings into actual policy, practice and application within the broader community which requires the collaboration of schools, learners and PI families and their wider communities.

Four areas of study are suggested as possible follow-up to this work:

1. Build stronger collaborations with the PI community

Future research must look into practical ways of strengthening collaborations between schools, families and the PI community with a focus on developing and implementing supportive meaningful frameworks and models of school support in the areas of homework supervision, career and pathways planning. An important aspect of this collaboration will be on clarifying the specific roles and responsibilities of schools and parents towards each other and to their learners.

2. Focus studies on the junior secondary levels of education

This study focussed specifically on the senior level of secondary schooling and found that young people's participation at the lower levels of education greatly impacted their later performance, achievement and pathways at the middle and senior levels of schooling. More structured programs for PI must be provided at the lower secondary level to better equip learners for the difficult but important years of senior secondary schooling. Conducting similar qualitative studies with participants at the early secondary levels of schooling would help in the early identification of the specific needs and challenges of PI prior to them starting the middle and senior secondary levels.

3. Record and document accurate data pertaining to PI

As found in this research, the small size and the ongoing invisibility of PI leave it prone to obscurity in national level data collection approaches such as the LSAY data. When lumped with other groups, the data on tiny groups like PI become lost and difficult to disaggregate from other groups or the whole cohort. Approaches such as the oversampling of Indigenous students in past LSAY

surveys could be useful for working with small groups like PI to highlight their special needs and allow researchers to work more confidently with the data available. Additionally, accurate and authentic data on PI learners is necessary to shift some of the pedagogical stereotypes about PI learning styles and behaviour school expectations, achievements and pathways.

4. Conduct more studies on PI as a collective group

There is very little data available on PI learners and education in Australia generally. Much of what is available is about Polynesian young people and very little about Melanesian and Micronesian learners. Despite Polynesians making up a larger portion of the PI population in Australia, just focussing on one group of PI in research studies could lead to incomplete or even inaccurate representations of PI learners as a collective group. Future research would do well to look at the PI cohort in its totality (include Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia) whilst being conscious of the similarities and differences between and within the individual Pacific Island countries.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questions for the learners

The researcher will use semi-structured interview questions following these schedules to gather data.

General

- When others ask you where you are from, what do you say? Why do you self-identify as such?
- What are your hopes and fears, concerns as a young PI growing up in Melbourne?
- What are some opportunities/ challenges that you have as an islander? What do you think you miss out on due to your culture?
- How are young PI viewed by other people in the community/school?

Family

- What are your goals and how can your family help you achieve these?
- Is there anyone at home that has been particularly helpful to you? What did they do? Why? How does this attention affect your attitudes to life, schooling or subjects/wellbeing etc?
- How can your family help you meet your learning aspirations/needs/challenges better? Give some examples of these events and explain why or how this action impacted on you.
- How can the home be a more engaging/interesting/welcoming place for you? Do you find anything at home particularly difficult or challenging? What are these?

Schooling

- What has been your experience of schooling so far? Identify major highlights and challenges. At what stage of schooling did you experience these lowlights or highlights? What or who played an important part in the ways you felt about this event?

- What are your goals and how can the school help you achieve these?
- Is there anyone at school that has been particularly helpful to you? What did they do? Why? How does this attention affect your attitudes to schooling or subjects/wellbeing etc?
- How can school/teachers help you meet your learning aspirations/needs/challenges better? Give some examples of these events and explain why or how this action impacted on you.
- How can the school be a more engaging/interesting/welcoming place for you? Do you find anything at school particularly difficult or challenging? What are these?
- Who do you go to for help/advice about your homework/ school needs/ career choices? How often do you ask for/receive this information?
- What do you/your friends/parents think about VCE studies/TAFE/university/employment?

Outside School

- How /where do you spend your time outside of school? How do these activities/relationships impact on your studies?
- What do you see yourself doing in 2 years' time? What would your parents like you to do when you are older?
- What does a good life mean to you?
- How do your parents speak to you about how you can achieve a good life?
- Who is your role model? What about that person makes them a role model to you?
- Who or what has made a difference to the way you think about education?
- How did this come about ie is it ongoing or one –off?
- What happened? How did you feel?

Second Set of Interviews with Students (Started March, 2013)

Focus: General wellbeing, social capital and connectedness to school, family and community.

Aim: differentiate between dream and real goals in education, own and parental goals for career, Attitudes towards schooling in general, teachers, school personnel, studies, homework, extra-curricular studies, opportunities, relationships with other peers, parental and other support structures eg church, community, clubs.

Introduction

How have you been in the last six months?

Is there an event that occurred at home that stood out for you in the last six months? Tell me about it.

How did you feel before or after it? How could it be changed or improved for the future.

Is there an incident in school that stood out for you in the last six months? Tell me about it. Why was it important for you? How did you feel before or after the incident took place? How could you have changed the situation if it occurred again in the future? Who has been the most important person at school for you in the last six months? Why and how?

What are your expectations from school, from teachers? Are these being fulfilled? Do you think school is helping you achieve your goals?

School staff

How do teachers normally treat you? Is this the same kind of treatment they would give to other islanders/ migrants/ groups? What qualities do you like in a teacher? Do teachers interact with your parents at any time?

What other staff in the school do you work with? How do you find their attitudes towards you? Are they kind, helpful and friendly?

Other students

What do you think about other students at the school?

Home/family

Social capital socio gram

How do you identify yourself with other people eg friends, teachers, school, community members?

How do others in the community view PI? Why? How do PI want to be viewed/ Would you identify yourself as PI or Tongan or Samoan etc?

How would you rate the support that family members have provided to you in general? What do you do for money eg pocket money, educational resources ie books, stationery, camps, uniforms? Do you pay for these yourself or does a parent buy these for you?

Is there anyone else within your family that provides you with support? What sort of support would you like your mum/dad/parents/other family members to give you more of?

Connection to home/country

How do you keep in touch with family members?

Do you speak a native X dialect? How often do you speak it?

Do you keep in touch with cousins back at home?

Friends

Who would you consider to be a close friend? What is it about your friend that you most like? What sort of qualities do you look for in a friend?

How important is your friend in your schooling or personal life?

Is there an event that occurred in the last six months with a close friend that you remember? What happened? How did you feel before or after the event? If given the chance how would you change or improve your response in future?

Post school options

Last interview, you said you liked school because..... Is this still the same? What are your feelings towards your studies in the last six months? Have you changed your views about VCE/VCAL, your pathways etc. What do you think influenced these changes or what has helped reinforce your goals from six months ago. Do you think these may change in the next six months, one year or two years?

Careers Advice

Last time, you said you would like to do X when you leave school. Are you still interested in doing X? If yes, what have you done to further this interest in the last six months? What have you done so far to help you achieve this goal./ Does school help you achieve this goal? Have parents helped? How?

If you have changed your interest, why do you think it changed? What or who influenced the change? Why do you think it changed?

Who would you take advice from about your career or future job? Teacher or friends or dad or mum?

Third Interview with students (started 31/10/2013)

Significant events in the last six months

What are the most important things that have happened to you in the last six months?

What important event has occurred at home in the last six months?

What important events have occurred at school in the last six months?

Home support

How important are the following to you? To your family? To your friends?

- Family relationships
- Friends
- Schooling
- Church
- Money
- Island community

In what ways is your family important to you?

Providing food, accommodation

Physical and Mental support

Helping with homework

Helping with money

How can they improve their support?

Rate (from 1 to 5) the levels of support received at home for the following:

- Assistance with homework from mum

- Assistance with homework from dad
- Assistance for homework from a family member (brother or sister)
- Pocket money
- Emotional support – Wellbeing, feeling loved, happy, confident

Schooling Support

What things that occur at school are you happy about?

Which two people in school do you relate well with? Why?

What are the things that bother you at your school?

What are some things at school that you wish you knew more about? What subjects do you want more help with?

What kinds of help do you get from school? Rate the level of assistance you get from school.

Transitions

- How can you describe your progress in schooling /education so far?
- Have there been any shifts in terms of your aspirations/ attitudes towards your education or future career since your last interview? Give examples of these shifts in thinking and explain how they affect your journey as a student completing post –compulsory education?
- What support /assistance /challenges (whether at home, school or other) have contributed to these shifts in thinking/attitude?
- Can you list some moments in your educational journey that have contributed to your motivation for continuing/discontinuing your education after post compulsory schooling?
- Can you share some thoughts about what you see yourself doing in three to five years' time?
- How will you go about trying to achieve this goal?

Interview 4 (Started March, 2014)

Think about two of your best childhood friends from Primary school. What are they doing now? How similar or different from you have their experiences

been? Do you think these chosen pathways have been successful? Why do you think their pathways are different or similar to yours? What influences have impacted on their outcomes?

Two years ago, you said you wanted to do What has become of those plans? Why have they changed or stayed the same?? Has anything or anyone been responsible for these changes? So far, what has been the turning point for you in your educational journey?

So there have been some changes in your schooling journey in the past two years. How do you feel about making such changes? Have you had some influence over these changes? What are the factors in life that influence these changes/choices/decisions etc. Is it easy or difficult to make these changes and is there any pressure to stick to these goals?

To what extent does your family impact your educational choices and decisions? There are some people in the school community who say that parents do not provide much support to students. What do you say to these views?

What constitutes success for you?

What supports can family members realistically provide? Are you satisfied with the help that they have provided? How would you advise parents on ways to better support their children at school?

How many hours would you spend on home work after school? How else do you spend your time after school? In a typical weekend, how much time would you spend on the following things -homework/ study, personal, family and house chores.

Activity	Tasks	Time spent
Study	studying for a test, reading a textbook, writing an essay, reflecting on class notes	
Family chores	Washing, cleaning, cooking babysitting, watching other	

	children	
Personal time	Visiting or chatting with friends, movies, shopping, reading, facebook, watching TV	
Community	Church, youth group, sports	

ABOUT ME

	Tick any that apply
Learning Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One on one • sitting down with me and showing me how to do it • reading it myself and taking time to understand • listening to a teacher explain it
Learning space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal setting eg in a classroom, Library • Non-formal setting eg sports field • Informal – youth centre, camp
Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VCE or VCAL • TAFE or University
Complete these prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe my learning would improve • I prefer to learn • I like learning • I would like a job that • I would do anything to

What do you hope to do in the next few years? How has being involved in this research impacted on your schooling? Has it improved anything ie personal development, study skills, attitudes to school, parental resourcing?

Appendix 2: Interview schedule for Family participants

The researcher will use semi-structured interview questions to gather data and focus the interview sessions on questions such as:

- What are your views about education and schooling? Identify high and low moments you experienced during your own educational journey. How have these impacted on your life/career so far?
- Are you generally satisfied or happy about where you have reached in terms of your own education? If you were able to study further, what sort of studies would you like to do? Why?
- Have other members of your family been to University or TAFE? What has been their experience of these institutions?
- What are your hopes and goals for your child in terms of education, work, career and life in general? Are these goals similar or different for each child? Do you think these goals are on their way to being achieved?
- How similar or different are your children's educational goals or attitudes to schooling compared to your own goals/attitudes to schooling? What might be the reasons for differences and similarities?
- How often do you speak with your children about these goals? How can you /the school/others help your child meet their learning aspirations/needs/challenges better?
- How do you support your child's studies at home? How can the family support him/her better?
- What can you say about the school's support for your child? Are you satisfied with it? How can schools/teachers work with you to support your child/children or other learners of similar background? Are you able to voice your concerns for your child if necessary?
- What do you/your child and your family members think about VCE studies/TAFE/University education/employment? Why do you have these views? Do you have conversations with your child about their post-school options?

- How well do you understand the education system? Does the school provide information to you about Tafe or university or employment options for your child? If not, where do you get this advice?
- Do you speak with your child about what subjects they should take? How much advice can you provide to your children about furthering their education?
- Who do you seek information from about matters such as homework, school help, subject options, career options that your child might need? What sort of advice about education do you find that you are not aware of or do not have enough of?
- How much assistance do you get from the school?
- How would you describe your own influences over your child's educational choices or decisions? How about that of other members of your family?

What do you see your child doing in 2 years' time ie in terms of schooling, training or employment?

Interview 2 (started April 2014)

The second interview session with the family unit will occur in the second year of data collection and be used as a follow-up to the first one. The interview will be semi-structured in format and ask questions such as:

Demographics

Where did you do your secondary education? What is your highest qualification?

When did you come to Australia? Why did you choose to live in the suburb you are in now? Have you always lived in this area? Why did you move? Was it a difficult or easy choice to move to Australia?

Introduction

What are your thoughts about the Australian education system as a whole? Is it supportive of Pi students? Do you know much about what the students learn and how it is learned in the classroom? Is it the same as how you viewed it when you first came to Australia?

Your child

What have been some of the difficult choices/decisions you made concerning your child's education?

What are some of your joys about your children's education in Australia?

What are your greatest concerns about your child studying in Australia?

What constitutes success for you in terms of your child's education and career?

How do you think your own education background and experience has affected your child's experiences of schooling?

Think about when your child was in Year 7, 8 and 9 and now in Years 10,11 and 12. Have there been any differences?

Some teachers tell us that for PI young people, their attitudes to schooling change when they get to senior years. They say that the changes are in the areas of homework completion, time spent on homework, support for extra-curricular studies eg tutoring, time for church and other community events? Do you think these things affect children's schooling? How?

What are your views about church and schooling? Do these go together? In what ways? How much of your children's time would be spent on church or community tasks?

What do you think about non-traditional subjects such as music, Art etc? Do you think it is good to follow a sports or music career from an early stage ie secondary schooling? Are you aware of the supports provided for young people in your LG area?

- Library
- Homework groups
- After –school care
- Parents and children support groups at LG

Would you attend these or ask your child to attend these. If not, why not? How useful are these to your family?

Are there partnerships we have not spoken about that you know can help you with your children's schooling? Do you sometimes feel angry or overwhelmed in thinking about your child's education?

Do you see school as an important partner in your child's education? Why? Who are other people/groups or institutions you think should be partners in the education of your child? What other things can schools do to help you help your child better?

The last two years

- Tell me about your family /home circumstances. Has anything changed? What have been some important events and activities since our last meeting?
- What are your views/attitudes about education and schooling since your last interview? Have any of these changed? Why? Has any significant family event affected your attitudes about your child's education? Has this been triggered by your child's experience/activities? What have been your response/ reaction to this change?
- How can you describe your child's progress in education so far? Are you satisfied with their experiences? Who or what has helped them achieve / not achieve this progress?
- Have there been any shifts in terms of your aspirations/ attitudes towards your child's education since your last interview? Give examples of these shifts in thinking and explain if and how they affect your views about your child's journey as a student completing compulsory schooling or post –compulsory education? How have you responded to the changes in your child's learning needs?
- What support /assistance /challenges (whether at home, school or other) have contributed to these shifts in thinking/attitudes?
- Can you list some critical moments in the last two years that have occurred which may have affected your views about the education of your child? How have these shaped your views about supporting/ not supporting your child's education up to and after post compulsory schooling?
- What changes/adjustments need to happen in the home/ school /community to help your child achieve his/her goals in education, especially at post compulsory levels of schooling?

- Can you share some thoughts about what you see your son/daughter doing in three to five years' time?
- How will you go about trying to help your child achieve these goals?
- Do you think schools are supportive and are there for you when you need that support? How can they support you better? If your child's school asked you to provide some suggestions about how to support your child better at school, what would you say?
- What can schools/universities do to help your child achieve his/her goals?

Finance

How much of a factor is finance in terms of the decisions you make about your child's education?

Homework time

How important to you is it that your child finishes their homework? What strategies are in place at home to ensure that your child finishes homework? What support or help can you give? Have you considered getting a tutor to help?

Extra- Curricular activities

What extra things do you do to support your children's education? Have you considered tutoring assistance or homework clubs?

Sports, Arts and Music

PI are known for their love of sports? How much sports do your children play? Would you encourage your children to follow a sports career if they showed some encouragement and interest in it? How would you go about furthering their interest in this area?

Community

Have you made any changes to your living arrangements since our last meeting? Did these changes have anything to do with your child's education?

School

What can your child's school do better? Do you feel you have the skills to be able to communicate with the school about your child schooling?

Learning Styles and Spaces

Where do you think you learn best?

Careers

VCE or VCAL/ Tafe or University/Professional vs vocational jobs/

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3: Interview schedule for staff members

The researcher will use semi-structured interview questions to gather data and focus the interview sessions on questions such as:

Personal and Teaching experiences with PI young people, communities

- Tell me about your work at the school? What do you teach? How long have you been here? What sort of interactions have you had with PI at the School?
- Tell me about any interactions you have had with PI parents or communities? How did these interactions come about?
- Have you had any interaction with PI families recently? What was it about? What do you think about the event?
- Is there one significant person or incident that you can remember /what caused it, what did you do about it/ what was the outcome?

General information about PI

- How many Pacific islanders attend the school? Which schools do they mostly come from? How many start at Year 8? How many leave after Year 10? How many go on to post-compulsory levels of schooling? How many finish Year 12 and gain VCE?
- How do PI present themselves in and outside of the classroom? Are they identifiable? How?
- Are there any PI young people you remember? What for?
- Are there any expectations from PI students? Are these different or similar to other students?
- How do other members of the school community see PI young people?

In class Interaction

- How do Pacific island learners in general interact with teaching and learning?
- What are their common patterns of engagement with the curriculum, with teachers and other learners within the classroom? Describe the general attitudes of PI families towards teaching and learning at the school?

- How do teachers view PI learners in terms of their learning, response to class tasks and homework and overall engagement?
- What are teachers' general perceptions of PI learners' attitudes towards learning, cognitive abilities, attitudes towards schooling?

Outside class Interaction

- How do Pacific island learners in general interact with other students in the school? How do they interact with each other?
- How do other students view Pacific islanders at the school?
- Describe the general attitudes/behaviours of Pacific Island learners towards extra-curricular activities at this school? What activities do Pacific islander students generally participate in at school? Why do they participate in such events?

Friendships and groups

- In your view, are there differences between friendships made at primary and secondary schools? Why?
- At the schools, who do PI students mostly associate with? Inside the classroom, outside the classroom and in the community?
- What make these friendships possible?
- Are there structured ways for friendships to happen ie at school, within community groups, outside school etc?
- Are there different friendships formed at various stages of schooling/
- In your own practice, do you purposely set up opportunities for students to do work in particular groups? Can you share some experiences of your efforts to do formulate these groups?

Learning or studying patterns of PI

- Comment on the general performances/ achievement levels of PI learners at school, at the various level of schooling? Are there any changes in performance or achievement at the post-compulsory levels of schooling?
- In general, how do PI students respond to uniform, resource (books / pens) requirements?
- How do they respond to class room tasks or homework requirements?

- How can PI learners get the most benefit out of schooling, especially at post-compulsory education?
- What are some common characteristics/factors that have helped past or current PI learners become successful/ not so successful at the post-compulsory level of schooling?
- What are some strategies the school has used to assist PI learners achieve their education and career goals?

Transitions/ pathways/ contact post school?

- What are common pathways for these students prior to and post compulsory stages of schooling?
- How do Pacific island students respond to information about career options, pathways and further education?
- Does the school maintain any contact with students after school? Are there any PI that maintain contact with the school? Why and with whom?

Home support and conclusion

- How would you describe the level of support that PI students receive at home / from family? How do you think home support could be improved?
- Would it be possible for you to keep a journal between now and the end of 2013 that records interactions/critical incidents you have experienced or observed with PI students ie what was the issue/ problem, who initiated the interaction, how was it solved? How did the school, the student and her/his parents help to resolve the situation? How can this be a lesson for the future?

Appendix 4: Online Blog posts 1- 8 (May 2012 to October 2013)

Blog Post 1: Your views about the purpose and value of schooling. Tell us about your understanding and views about the purpose of education and schooling? Has your time in school so far helped you to achieve some of your education and training goals? In what ways? What do you think your life would be like without school?

Blog Post 2: How useful is schooling to you?

What skills and knowledge have you been able to develop as a result of being at school? How useful have these skills and knowledge been to you so far? What do you hope to achieve by remaining at school longer ie Year 10 and beyond?

Blog Post 3: Short term goals (about 1- 2 years)

What are your short-term goals in terms of your schooling ie what do you see yourself doing in two years' time and how can your current schooling help you achieve this goal. Also how can your family members help you achieve your goal?

Blog post 4: Choosing to do VCE or VCAL

Some of you are already in Year 11 and others are still in Year 10. You may know that Years 11 and 12 are seen as post compulsory stages of secondary education? What are some of the benefits and challenges of attending this level of schooling? What are some of the reasons for young people leaving school before they reach these years of schooling?

Blog post 5: Questions about identity

When other people ask you about your cultural identity or where you come from, how do you normally respond? What makes you respond in this way?

What are important factors that other people should take note of when asking about your identity? What factors make you different from or similar to other cultural or ethnic groups?

Blog Post 6: Your favourite person at school and why?

The person you choose can be a teacher or student.

Blog post 7: Belonging, importance and options

Do you feel that you are important? Do you feel like you belong? Give examples of when you feel important or feel that you belong. What options and choices do you make for yourself?

Bog Post 8: Participation in this study

You have now been involved in this study for a period of 1-2 years. Have you learned anything from being part of this research? You can use the prompts below to guide your answers or you can just write whatever or however you wish.

I feel.....

I think.....

I would have liked.....

Thank you for participating in the Youngpacific blog.