Relationships, relationality and schooling: Opportunities and challenges for Pacific Islander learners in Melbourne's western suburbs

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Many Pacific Islanders (PI) living in Australia have a high regard for education and have high expectations of the capacity of the school system to provide the learning experiences needed for their children to achieve successful educational outcomes. However, there are some challenges to achieving these expectations. Socio-cultural, financial, and physical factors, such as limited in-home supports for study time, space or schedules, have been consistently reported as common barriers to providing a supportive learning environment within the homes of young PI learners. This paper examines notions of relationships and relationality as experienced by a group of PI learners from Polynesia and Melanesia, as they lived and studied in a region of Melbourne from 2012 to 2015. It follows these learners' experiences as they navigate and negotiate the different spaces, structures, and systems found within their home and school environments. In particular, the study examined ways that PI learners engage and interact with various players within these two important spaces (home and school) and how these relationships affect school achievements and outcomes. The paper argues that complex relationship customs and relationality patterns can lead to both positive and negative impacts on learning for some PI learners.

Keywords: Pacific Islander learners; home and school influences; relationships and relationality

INTRODUCTION

The home and the school are spaces in which children and young people spend most of their time in the first 18 years of their lives. Within these spaces, they engage with many different actors and stakeholders, most of whom have a significant influence on their everyday lives and well into their futures (Bourne, 2008; Buckroth & Parkin, 2010; Sapin, 2013). These two primary spaces enable young people to interact with others and develop important, short- and long-term life relationships. Within these spaces, too, young people may experience positive and negative influences that can affect their personal lives, school and social experiences, including the relationships formed with others (Arnott, 2002; Lareau, 2003). The cultures and experiences acquired within and from these spaces can have ongoing, short-term or long-term influences on the life and schooling trajectories and pathways of learners (Abrams, 2010, Brofenbrenner, 1996). Using Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) notions of cultural capital, habitus, and space as a theoretical framework, this paper explores relationships and relationality patterns of a small group of Pacific Islander (PI) learners from Melbourne's western region within their home and school environments in order to understand the influences on school engagement, achievement, and pathways

LITERATURE REVIEW

As is the case with many migrants, PIs move to countries like Australia and New Zealand in search of improved access to better employment, health, and educational opportunities for themselves and their families (Chenoweth, 2014; Kearney & Glen, 2017; Ravulo, 2015). PI migration to Australia has increased substantially in the last 40 years. PI migrants have used various entry conditions to work and live temporarily or permanently in Australia (Pryke, 2014; Woolford, 2009). PI Polynesians, especially Samoans, Cook Islanders, and Tongans, have been the majority migration scene (Ravulo, 2015), followed by Melanesians and Micronesians. The peoples who originate from these three Pacific ethnic regions are all referred as Pacific peoples of Oceania despite the existence of distinct differences in culture, customs, language and physical appearances among and even within the various countries.

Despite differences, there are also commonalities among PIs as a collective group: their beliefs in principles of obligation, reciprocity, greater good, and strong family; and community ties and Christianity and spiritual connections to ancestors, the land and the ocean. Nevertheless, they are by no means a homogenous group, with individual countries, nationalities, and ethnicities having diverse and varied cultures, languages, belief patterns, behaviours, and physical characteristics.

While acknowledging these many differences, this paper seeks specifically to investigate the educational experiences of a collective group of PIs located in a region of Melbourne at a particular period. The study is premised on the understanding that PIs essentially share more commonalities than differences in terms of their historical past, migration experiences to Australia, and social and cultural values, beliefs, customs and perspectives. These commonalities affect their patterns of settlement and engagement in the communities within which they settle in their adopted country. Additionally, the small numbers of students from each PI nation attending school in the research area dictated that a collective approach be taken. Among the group, participants self-identified with other PIs as 'Islander' whether they were from Polynesia, Melanesia, or Micronesia. From the outset, the study's purpose was to follow this collective group of PI students, not to explore cultural differences but to seek patterns in their behaviours and relationships at school and how these impacted on their learning experiences and outcomes.

How well their children adjust to the demands of a new educational system and whether they are able to cope with the new roles and responsibilities that allow them to take full advantage of their schooling opportunities are important questions for many migrant families. Because of their own educational experiences, however, some parents may have insufficient information about a school's requirements of them and their children, and thus form unrealistic expectations or misunderstandings about schooling, which are further compounded by language and cultural barriers (McNaughton, Lai & Hsiao, 2012: Pakoa, 2005; Singh & Sinclair, 2001). Such differences in expectations from parents and the school staff may cause problems, particularly for migrant learners and parents who are unfamiliar with the new school systems and who need time and support to build appropriate "cultural capital" to assist their children. (Anae, Anderson, Benserman, & Coxon, 2002; Connell, 2005; McLaughlin & Hickling-Hudson, 2005). Without time and support to fully familiarise with these new requirements, many PI parents become dissatisfied, frustrated and, consequently, isolate themselves from the school (Anae et al, 2002; Bok, 2010; Chang, Park, Singh, & Sung, 2009; Youdell, 2012), leading to ever-

decreasing levels of engagement and understanding about their roles and responsibilities towards their children's education (Anae et al, 2002, Siope, 2005).

The home-school connection

A "home-school connection" (Oterro, 2011) is a collaborative partnership in which parents (at home) and teachers (at school) act as key agents for facilitating, providing and supporting the learning of children. This important partnership exists to ensure that teachers, parents, and other supportive adults can provide safe and positive contexts to improve learner motivation and achievement (Otero, 2011). Numerous studies have consistently attributed better student achievement, retention, and pathways to active parental and teacher involvement from the early ages of schooling up to the middle years of adolescence (Connell, 2003; Chang, Park, Singh & Sung, 2009; Daniel, 2015).

Past studies with PI learners (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Makisi, 2003; Nakhid 2005) found many PI parents regarded school as a foreign entity over which they had limited responsibility and knowledge, where "teachers were the experts and specialists" (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Makisi, 2003; Nuthall, 2007) and PI parents took on a passive role (Loto, Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Nikor, Karapu & Barnett, 2006) in their children's schooling and learning experiences. Furthermore, Hawk and Hill's (1998) studies with Māori and Pasifika students found them to be active gatekeepers, especially in keeping the worlds of school and home separate thus further reinforcing a perception of the home as a distinct and separate space from which academic learning occurs.

The tension between many family's aspirations for their children and the lived realities of children's lives in schools can create a sense of disjunction that may result in fragmentation of these children's lives (Siope, 2006). Many Pasifika children do feel the pressure to live up to their parents' unrealistic expectations of them but they also know that their parents do not feel confident/safe/comfortable in attending schools, and play this card in keeping the two lives of school and home separated as far as possible (Hill & Hawk, 1998; Loto et al, 2006). This finding is consistent with that of other studies (Epstein, 2011; Goyette & Lareau, 2014) that perceive the home-school connection is mostly a workable concept for middle-class families whose culture and organisation at home closely matches with the Western modern-day classroom.

Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical construct of capital provides a useful framework for interrogating and theorizing about various relationships and relationalities experienced by research participants in this study. This theoretical stance states that certain groups in society are enabled or limited in their opportunities and abilities to achieve various goals or outcomes because of 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,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. Bourdieu's constructs of cultural capital and cultural reproduction are particularly relevant in the discussion regarding culture and the ways that certain cultural norms may be privileged over others.

Pacific notions of relationality (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2003; Samu, 2007; Sanga, 2011; Thaman, 2008) also provide useful theoretical and socio-cultural frames of analysis to explain the nature, form, and consequences of some relationships common to PI learners. These relationships and relationality patterns are based on Pacific values, such as the

nurturing of safe and harmonious spaces for communication and cultural exchange, striving towards a common goal, having a strong connection to culture, respect for elders, maintaining traditional practices, such as speaking the language, knowing family roots, being truthful to one's heritage, and having a belief in higher spiritual powers (Thaman, 2008). All these cultural norms, as well as physical markers, such as age, gender, and social status, have important bearings on the types and forms of relationships that PI form with others within and outside of the home. As such these constructs are important markers for understanding relationships of PI between and among themselves or with other individuals or groups in various spaces.

Communication and relationships

Developing and maintaining physical and emotional relationships between parents and children is an important social expectation within all families. In a study of Samoan communities, Ochs (1988) and Gershon (2007) found typical village settings provided few opportunities for parents and children to interact, with children mostly cared for by age-similar others such as older siblings. Ochs' study (1988) found many parents communicated with children mostly through instructions or commands, with few opportunities for children to engage in lengthy conversation. These limited opportunities for communication and dialogue between parents and children were said to encourage distant relationships between them (Campbell & Sherington 2007).

When transferred to a classroom context, this context can shape the learning patterns and communication behaviours of PI children, where they are observed as mostly passive learners with low confidence in communication, experiencing difficulties questioning what they are told or challenging contrary ideas out of respect for teachers (Nakhid, 2005). At school, this inexperience in communicating with elders may lead to students struggling to adapt to learning approaches and social relationships (Mafi, 2005; Pakoa, 2005; scull & Cuthill, 2008; Siope, 2010). The question, then, is whether this important cultural attribute of respect for elders also reinforces social and emotional isolation of young people from family elders, and whether this results in difficulties for young people forging meaningful and lasting relationships with their elders, including teachers in the school.

Some indigenous authors (Nabobo, 2012; Sanga, 2011; Thaman, 2008) have argued that these cultural behaviors, which are practised daily at home, are important for nurturing Pacific principles of harmonious relationality and upkeep of cooperative effort to reach consensus results. Here, we observe an example of conflicting situations where that which is nurtured as good and appropriate behavior at home is viewed differently at school where a PI learner might be seen to be displaying "reserved, passive or uninterested" behaviour by teachers or peers.

The importance of upholding harmonious living in PI homes also mean that young people obtain limited experiences or practice in discursive and interactive forms of communication. When translated to the classroom context, PI learners may have difficulties communicating in assertive language that questions or critiques the views of others (Gershon, 2007; Ochs,1998). The corollary of this practice is the development of a communicative framework where interactions are either positive and compliant, or extremely rude and aggressive when there is disagreement. Because of limited practice in articulating views of disagreement in civil ways, some young PI might "act out" or become confrontational towards others (Lareau, 2003). At school, such behavior may be

perceived as rude and aggressive, leading a young PI to engage in difficult confrontations with peers or teachers at school.

Engaging with peers

A common complaint among PI parents is that children often start to disengage from schooling when they reach adolescence. Some parents assert that their children start to develop risky relationships with peers when they reach the middle and senior years of secondary schooling. The risk is mostly associated with the interference or disruption to children's goals for education (Connell, 1983). Given that the secondary school is a site "where aspirations are either developed or diminished" (Kearney & Donaghy 2008, p. 8), these concerns are, to some extent, justified and may also extend to young PI peoples' perceptions about universities being unfamiliar, foreign, and out-of-reach spaces (Kearney & Donaghy, 2008). The danger with such views is that these young people, when they themselves become parents, use their own jaded experiences of schooling to inform the decisions they make for their own children's education, thus perpetuating a damaging cycle of low aspirations and motivation to pursue further and higher education.

There are many Pasifika children who do wish to live up to their parents' expectations of them to get ahead in school, but this means denying their own cultural identity in order to amass the "cultural capital" of the monocultural classroom and school structure (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Alternatively, Pasifika students that do excel academically are put in a dilemma of whether to continue on this path and fall prey to the tall poppy syndrome, thereby opting to play down any academic abilities or potential so as to fit in with their peers (Siope, 2006). But the flipside to this argument is the view that many PI parents lack the cultural capital required to assist their children to reach the levels expected, and some have limited understanding of what schooling requires (McNaughton, Lai & Hsiao (2012). This is true for many new migrating families who may be constrained by communication issues to confidently navigate and adapt to a new school system.

The existing literature shows that relationships with key stakeholders at home and school affect a learner's experiences, performance and achievement at school (Oterro, motivation guru here). Yet, little attention has focussed on how the "lived in" experiences and home situations of PI affect their adjustment, engagement, and achievement in school; a space they are not culturally familiar with. Examining these PI notions of relationality and the ways they might affect the nature of relationships formed at school and with teachers, and the possible consequences of these relationships on schooling is therefore imperative.

This study looks specifically at PI learners' engagement and interactions with various players within the home and school spaces, with a view to explain how these relationships and relationality patterns can affect school performance and achievement. Through this interrogation, it seeks to assist parents, teachers and school personnel of PI learners to understand better how relationships and relationality affect the school experiences, participation and outcomes of some PI learners.

METHODOLOGY

This longitudinal qualitative case study, undertaken as part of the author's doctoral research, involved working alongside 14 PI learners and their families and teachers over a four-year period from 2012 to 2015 to gather information about the learners'

educational experiences and school trajectories at secondary and post-secondary stages of schooling. Over the study period, eight learners completed senior secondary schooling and transitioned to university, Technical and Further Education (TAFE), or employment. The other six participants continued into senior post compulsory stage of schooling (Year 11 and 12) after the research period ended.

Information for the study was gathered primarily through conducting 78 semi-structured interviews with the 14 learner participants, 22 parents and guardians, and 12 staff members from the participants' schools. All 14 learners—five boys and eight girls—lived and studied in Melbourne's western suburbs, a common settlement area for migrants and refugees, well-known for its cultural and linguistic diversity as well as high levels of unemployment, and social and economic disadvantage, poor housing, low levels of access to social, health, and economic services, and generally lower than average outcomes in health and education (Growing Melbourne's West, 2004).

Twelve of the 14 learners self-identified as Polynesians from Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu, and Niue, whose parents had step-migrated to Australia through New Zealand between 1995 and 2005. The other two participants were Melanesians who migrated directly from Papua New Guinea between 2000 and 2005. Parents and guardians were aged between 35 and 60, with educational backgrounds ranging from tertiary level qualifications to trade certificates. About half of the parents were employed in jobs that were relevant to their previous training while the other half were engaged in semi-skilled trades or secretarial related employment. Two sets of parents had no formal qualifications and three of them were unemployed while one was engaged in casual factory work.

Most of the data collected were qualitative in nature, comprising stories of experiences as shared by a small group of participants over a period of time. These stories and narratives form the evidence base for this paper and also account for the case study approach and constant comparative analysis used to formulate the study's main findings and themes (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The emphasis on personal stories and narratives within the research called for strict protocols on preserving confidentiality of the information received, which was supported by the Victoria University Ethics Committee.

This study involved working with a small group of PI learners living in the western region of Melbourne from 2012 to 2015 and therefore the study findings and learnings are specific to the group and their families and teachers. Nevertheless, the study seeks to highlight the importance of understanding relationships and relationality as key determinants in supporting or challenging PI schooling experiences, achievements and outcomes.

FINDINGS

Home relationships

The claim that parents and their children, according to cultural expectation, are not closely connected with each other (Ochs, 1998) was unsupported in this study, which found the relationships between parents and their children, in the majority of families interviewed, to be physically close and connected. This was true for both boys and girls where close physical connections with parents were clearly evident in the ways they interacted with each other during the interviews, in which parents sat together close to their children and

everyone interacted openly and comfortably with each other. Except in one family, which comprised a single parent father and his son and nephew and where gender may have affected the closeness of the relationship, there was little evidence to show that the relationships between parents and their children were disconnected. Furthermore, claims that traditional monocultural ways of living among PI families provided unclear avenues and opportunities for communication and interaction between and amongst PI families (Och 1998; Gershon, 2004) proved unsubstantiated in this study. In most instances, parents and children participated willingly in the interviews in each other's presence, suggesting a level of reasonable comfort and openness within that space.

In this study, parents showed a familiarity with their children's learning interests and goals by accurately naming their future goals and best subjects at school, which matched closely their children's responses; for example, two parents, in the absence of their children, correctly shared their children's careers goal which matched that of their children. But, although most parents interacted easily and comfortably with their children and were aware of their schooling goals, it remained unclear whether these interactions extended beyond that space; in some families, a few learners withheld important information about schooling from their parents, especially when and if the information was sensitive or personal. For instance, one participant dropped Mathematics as a subject in Year 10, knowing that her parents disapproved of this action. Her willingness to share this information with others, such as similar-aged relatives and the interviewer but not her parents demonstrate that this learner carefully managed the flow of communication and information, including being selective of the audiences with whom information is shared with.

Developing and maintaining meaningful and effective communication and interactions with school personnel has been highlighted as an ongoing concern for families in PI homes (Ravulo, 2015). This study's data suggests that this is an ongoing challenge for many PI parents as they navigate a new school system and try to develop the skills and confidence needed to deal more effectively with schools. Some parents confirmed that they experienced anxiety when asked to come to their child's school and were sometimes reluctant to communicate with school personnel saying: "*Sometimes I do not know what to say when teachers ask me questions about my child because of my English and also I am shy to speak with them*". Another parent shared that the school was an important place that he had no business entering such a '*formal and unfamiliar*' space. These anxieties were sometimes compounded by low confidence to interact with school staff or communicate in English, resulting in low overall "cultural capital" in entering, engaging and achieving within the school space.

In contrast, the majority of parents in this study regarded the school as an integral part of their child's life and of their own through their child: "We want our children to be successful as the community looks down on us if our children do not do well at school". They all shared one common purpose: that their children do well at school, attend TAFE or university if they wished, find a good job and live fulfilling lives. Not all parents, though, were familiar enough with the school system to make informed decisions that effectively supported their children's educational needs. While all the learners showed themselves to be well disposed to school and had career goals that depended on educational success with apparent strong familial support, there was a lack of confidence displayed by some families in managing some aspects of the school system. This lack of confidence increased and was most noticeable when the children reached senior secondary school years. This low confidence affected the relationships with school staff

and the ability with which assistance or guidance on school matters, such as student progress, career choices, and pathway options, could be sought. Where parental relationships and communication with schools declined or weakened, a few learners assumed these responsibilities themselves with varying consequences in terms of educational achievement and subsequent choice of post school options.

In four of the 12 study families, there was clear indication of active and strong support from families in terms of homework supervision and active communication with schools. The consistent factor in these families was that the parents themselves were physically present at home, monitoring homework completion with one or both parents sufficiently equipped to provide academic assistance. Some parents in the study admitted to needing more skills and confidence to effectively respond to school's expectations of them at the senior secondary level of schooling, saying: "*I have to educate myself so I know how to help my children better*". A clear finding from this study was the strong relationship between parental educational background and improved in-home support for learning. Concurring with Anae et al. (2002), this study found that the better educated parents devoted more time, assistance, and support to their children while those engaged in shift or casual work were often absent from home during homework time but also unlikely to possess the skills and confidence to assist their children academically.

School engagement

School staff agreed there were general declines in interest and engagement from PI students at the senior level of schooling and attributed these declines to individuals developing interests outside of school such as starting paid work, peer influences, social relationships and increased family responsibilities at home. Home responsibilities tended to increase as young people reached adolescence and became physically able to assist with more household chores or get a part-time job. However, adolescence also happens to be a time when conflicting pressures from both the home and the school can cause young people to make choices and decisions that are counterproductive to their schooling goals. It is also a time when young people acquire a heightened sense of self-awareness about their strengths and capabilities, and whether or not they fit with parental or personal expectations from education. This conflict or tension was quite strongly evidenced in this study, shown by conflicting pressure to put school goals behind family needs. Consistent with this view, some of the learners in this study became less certain about their own goals and educational position as they moved towards higher levels of secondary schooling. One parent expressed this disappointment, saying: "My son was doing so well until he got to Year 10 then suddenly lost interest". Parents themselves could also take responsibility as some were not always aware of the higher demands on time, commitment and support required at these higher levels of schooling when issues of cultural capital and habitus, in Bourdieu's terms, become critical benchmarks of performance and achievement. It could be argued that, at this stage of schooling, some of these PI learners sense a clearer picture of their schooling position and make decisions about their pathways that are inconsistent with earlier aspirations.

Contrary to the belief that young PI experience difficulties developing effective and meaningful connections with adults outside the home, this study found these learners were active and willing participants in classroom tasks in most contexts. School staff confirmed that the building of relationships with PI young people was critical in order to improve their engagement and participation in class. One teacher expressed this behaviour as: "PI students will do work for you if you have a good and trusting

relationship with them". At school, most PI had a reputation of being quiet, polite, and well-engaged in practical subjects and related extra-curricular activities like physical education, drama, and music, in which a few excelled. At school, they willingly and actively took up leadership and volunteering roles which they were familiar with at home. They generally enjoyed positive relationships with most teachers and other students and were respectful of others and of each other. Teachers also noted that PI engagement at school improved if and when the school offered subjects or extra-curricular activities that appealed to them such as rugby and music lessons. These findings evidence the importance of teachers acknowledging students and building positive and trustful relationships through encouragement of learners' cultural capital within the school environment.

Connell's (2003) study of western Sydney schools showed that low income families were mostly content with their children completing Year 12, having completed lower levels of secondary schooling themselves. This study, however, found that the PI parents involved in this research were keen for their children to succeed in education. Of all the parents interviewed, only one expressed a desire for their child to leave school early and to find employment. But, while parents were mostly supportive of their children's schooling and prepared to support them at all costs, this "support" was not always clearly reflected in their schooling choices, resulting in some learners exercising more control over their pathways than parents acknowledged. More often than not, this situation occurred in homes where parents still held on strongly to traditional views about successful schooling, placing emphasis on academic results and a preference for children to directly pathway to university or TAFE from secondary school. It was clear from this study that encouraging children to follow their interests brought forth happier educational outcomes for the learner and the family in the longer term.

Gender played a role in mediating ways in which young people approached communication in school settings, with young PI females more engaged at school and males being quiet and reserved. In the case of some young men, however, the need for cultural accommodation was arguably less intense. 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. 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.

Peer influences

Many young PI have friendships that are formed within their families or communities. Because of this very strong social capital within known and existing networks, PI young people have little reason to step outside of their cultural and social circles to find friends. Many of the PI young people in this study formed the most meaningful relationships with similarly aged family members with whom they interacted regularly, either at home, church, or public spaces, and even at school. The special bonds with which young PI had with similar-aged family members, especially cousins, provided a strong social network for these young people which tended to form from a very young age (Ochs,1998).

At school, young PI identified closely with other PI and formed lunch time, sports, music, and worship groups among themselves. Young PI were proud of who they were among their peers and were comfortable presenting to others what they stood for as a distinct group. But, while schools provided a safe social space in which PI young people could

interact and socialize with other each other and with other non-PI, it was obvious also that PI learners experienced some challenges in the academic learning requirements of the school for which they had lower cultural capital and, therefore, more challenges in their school performances.

DISCUSSION

The home-school (dis)connection

The apparent disconnections between the home and the school in terms of cultural organization, schooling expectations and academic responsibilities of learners and parents were quite obvious from this study. Families and learners with more familiarity and past successful experiences with the school system have higher cultural capital which allows them to engage more actively and successfully with the school. These opportunities further strengthen their communication and relationships with schools, thus yielding better school experiences and results for their children, concurring with Bourdieu's concept of reproduction.

Young peoples' ties to family, culture and tradition, for example, have lasting effects on their relationships within the school space, including their relationships with teachers and peers as well as their schooling experiences, aspirations, and outcomes. The emphasis on maintaining safe and harmonious relationships with others provided opportunities for some PI to thrive within the school or classroom space and to lift engagement in some aspects of the school such as developing positive relationships with teachers and school personnel, other PI, and non-PI peers. Where the school offered opportunities for PI learners to exercise cultural capital, such as in volunteering in school tasks or fundraising activities, these learners were engaged and felt included.

Parental unfamiliarity with a new school space largely determined the types and forms of relationships and relationalities developed within the school space. While most PI parents placed a high level of importance on the physical aspects of schooling, such as encouraging children to attend school regularly, wear correct uniform, provide necessary resources for learning, these proved insufficient for an overall successful engagement at school. Learners also needed to be academically strong to meet the academic requirements of the school. In homes that had lower "cultural capital" in terms of modern-day classroom learning approaches and support systems, there were less effective strategies for adapting to a new and unfamiliar school environment. It was obvious that more time, effort, and support is required by these learners and families to prepare effectively for schooling, concurring with Bourdieu's notion of "cultural and social capital".

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, and they were uncertain about their rights to inquire or intervene on behalf of their children on important school matters. They were less adept at providing academic assistance in areas such as study skills, time management, writing in specific genres, critical inquiry, or critiquing knowledge and passing tests and exams; all skills that draw on cultural capital that is not learned or emphasised at home, and which sometimes contradicts Pacific 'lived in' approaches of communication or behaviour. In contrast, the everyday 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 more generally. These cultural norms, viewed as important traits for community cohesion and inclusion, were not seen as valuable aspects of schooling, although these PI learners were consistently praised by teachers for their willingness to volunteer time and effort towards social programs at school.

Despite some concerns that educational pursuits and success might contribute to culture loss, there was generally an acceptance that this was a risk worth taking, especially for successful settlement in an urban environment such as Melbourne. In these homes, there were more structures and systems for encouraging free interactions between parents and their children. Such adaptive changes were encouraged in homes where parents had experienced more positive educational pursuits themselves and achieved success in schooling. Parental understanding of the value of education and their own successful experience of education proved to be a key driver for facilitating transformation in the attitudes and approaches of parents towards schooling. The more parents were willing to change to fit into the schools' accepted patterns of engagement, the more success their children were likely to experience and achieve, evidencing the influences of "cultural capital" in navigating the home and school spaces. The obvious irony of the situation is that compliance and conformity to school expected patterns of behaviour become prioritized as a pre-requisite for success in education. The consequence is that those who are able to increase this cultural capital are able to reproduce it (Bourdieu, 1977) and extend the capital to other sectors, such as social and economic capital.

Some PI did not have the necessary language skills or confidence to adapt effectively to school requirements because of the differences in communication styles practised at home. While at home, young people were encouraged to listen, obey, and take instructions, at school, they were expected to voice opinions and question ideas. These cultural differences in home and school approaches to communication and problem solving resulted in challenges with utilizing the abstract and more complex language and communication demands at senior levels of schooling. Language literacy, however, is only one aspect of cultural capital that affects young PI in the classroom. The quiet and reserved and, sometimes, relaxed attitudes of PI learners, encouraged by the home insistence on maintaining a harmonious and safe space for interaction and collaboration, may be incorrectly interpreted as PI learners being uninterested, unmotivated, and bored at school.

Teacher relationships

In today's classrooms, critical and inquiry approaches to learning are emphasized, as opposed to role modelling, observation, practice, repetition, and application (Sanga, 2011; Thaman, 2008), which are common learning strategies used in PI homes. The skills and qualities regularly practised at home by young PI, such as volunteering, helping, and caring—putting in collective effort for equitable rewards, were regarded as less valuable within the school or classroom space, which puts emphasis on individualized learning, competition, and testing of knowledge and skills in unfamiliar academic content, and language and instruction methods (McLaughlin & Hickling-Hudson, 2005; Reid, 2015). These differences in the methods of learning and priorities also contribute to the low-level school achievement, outcomes, and pathways of PI (Ainley, Frigo, Marks, McCormack, McMillan, Meiers & Zammit, 2002). Inevitably, this means that PI learners start school from a different point than their other peers (Abrahms, 2010; Farrugia, 2012) and are disadvantaged at school from the beginning.

Differences in the perception of school visits also contributed to nurturing weak relationships between parents and schools. While schools attributed the lack of parental communication and school visits to "a lack of interest" in the child and learning, parents themselves perceived visiting or communicating with school, particularly when everything is going well, almost as an intrusion into a space where they did not feel they fully belonged. Parents who had less familiarity and little experience of education themselves were the most vulnerable, resulting in a reluctance to approach schools for advice, assistance, or support. This finding supports Onikama, Koki & Hammond (1998), and Fairbairn–Dunlop & Makisi (2003) that Pacific parents preferred to keep a physical and cultural distance between themselves and the schools, viewing the school as a revered space that they were not comfortable in, which then added to their sense of isolation and inadequacy, making them less confident to advocate for their children's needs and increasing their marginality from the school.

CONCLUSIONS

The PI parents and learners involved in this study showed a continuing commitment towards schooling and made conscious and deliberate efforts to provide the physical, socio-cultural and emotional supports needed within the home to support children at school. Some parents even made social and cultural adjustments within the home to prepare and support children better at school. However, some of these supports were found to be insufficient to support children adequately at school because of inflexibilities around cultural accommodation between the two worlds of home and school.

Providing parents with the skills and knowledge to confidently navigate the education system is critical towards providing the appropriate levels of support at home, including homework assistance and monitoring. Additionally, providing better support structures within the home in terms of study time and supervision as well as minimizing home and other responsibilities is needed at the senior levels of schooling to cater for the higher levels of concentration and focus needed at this critical time.

Some shifts in perception and attitudes towards educational success need to occur so that young people can be encouraged to pursue their interests whether these are academic or vocationally oriented. An important lesson for school authorities is to work more closely with these families and communities to ensure that there is better communication and information flow between these two important spaces, using culturally appropriate and convenient communication methods.

This paper has touched on a very small aspect of relationality and relationships among PI learners. There is much more to be learned in this area, including providing in-school activities and structures for improving PI learner engagement at school through improved relationships with peers, teachers, and other important stakeholders at school.

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