

**Amplifying Pacific Voices in a
Christchurch (New Zealand) Secondary school:
A Study Guided by Tīvaevae & Talanoa**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch,
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by
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Abstract

Pacific voices are often drowned out in schools, as there are competing communities, issues, and value systems at play. The main objective of this research therefore was to engage with Pacific students, parents, and their teachers, to investigate several key issues. These include the perceptions and status of Pacific values within the school environment and significant relationships that exist between learners, parents & teachers. This, in turn, allows for talanoa regarding the educational aspirations of Pacific students and their families, and an analysis of the school's ability to foster a sense of belonging for its Pacific community. Additionally, this study aimed to explore areas for growth and development within the school and similar contexts.

The research is organised around the *tīvaevae* research model, a Cook Islands focused Pacific Research Method. It also utilised a qualitative, Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, seeking to collaborate with participants as co-researchers. Data collection consisted of individual interviews and focus groups, aligned with the talanoa research methodology. This approach ensured the inclusion of diverse Pacific perspectives, creating an inter-generational data set drawn from students, parents, community leaders, and teachers at the school. The findings of this research aim to encourage school leaders, teachers, and policymakers to engage in dialogue with their Pacific students, parents, local Pacific communities, and Pacific teachers, to improve outcomes for Pacific students. This may hold relevance for school leaders, teachers, and policy makers in other countries (i.e. Australia & USA) that are seeking to meet the educational aspirations of Pacific (diaspora) communities.

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Dedication and Litany

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam inque hominum salute

For the greater glory of God and the salvation of humanity

I dedicate this thesis to my former students, who taught me so much.

I offer this simple litany, for the intentions of all who have supported and inspired me on this journey.

Holy Mary, Mother of God

Saint Joseph

Saint John the Baptist

Saint Brigid of Ireland

Saint Bede the Venerable

Saint Thomas Aquinas

Saint John Houghton

Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Saint Francis de Sales

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus

Saint Zélie Martin

Saint Gianna Beretta Molla

Saint Theodore

Saint Dominic

Blessed Chiara Badano

'Ora Pro Nobis'

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Preface and ‘Akapapa’anga

I open this thesis with a brief ‘akapapa’anga (genealogy) in order to introduce myself, my family and acknowledge where I come from.

Teia tōku ‘akapapa'anga

Ko Joseph Bruce Tutonga tōku ingoa

Ko Diana Sullivan tōku metua vaine

Ko Bruce Houghton tōku metua tane

I te tua o tōku metua vaine, e mokopuna au na Owen Sullivan rāua ko Dinah Rongo Kea

I te tua o tōku metua tane, e mokopuna au na William Houghton rāua ko Margaret Borcoskie

Ko Chelsea Rose tōku va'ine

E rima a māua tamariki

Ko Zélie Rose te mata'iaipo

Ko Gianna Beryl rāua ko Chiara Margaret Teiva-Nui-O-Te-Marae te ngā tamaine

Ko Theodore Ignatius Tutonga rāua ko Dominic Joseph John te ngā tamāroa

Nō Aitu e Manihiki au, nō Tahiti katoa, e nō te au enua i Eūropa, Iāra, e Britain

I ‘ānau ia au e tupu au i roto i te ‘ōire Ōtautahi

In the Cook Islands, the craft of *tīvaevae* making involves processes of individual creativity and group co-creation. Those who create *tīvaevae* typically use the foreign tools of steel needles and cotton threads to produce ornately decorated quilts that represent Indigenous ideas (Maua-Hodges, 2019; Rongokea, 2001). This results in the production of a beautiful artifact that becomes a legacy gift, handed down in families, and communities, across the generations. The below poem by Cook Island poet, Kauraka Kauraka, captures the intent of this thesis, which metaphorically reflects my own attempt to honour the spiritual and familial links that have shaped me as a teacher and researcher. *Te Tui Nei Au* (I am sewing), speaks of the beginning of the work, and the resting of the *tavake* (tropic bird) – a symbol that speaks to me personally. The *tīvaevae* research model, developed by Teremoana Maua-Hodges, uses the metaphor of *tīvaevae* creation and is woven throughout this research. My hope is that this research can be offered as a gift, acknowledging past generations, and supporting present and future ones.

Te Tui Nei Au

Te tuitui nei au i taku tīvaevae

Ei rākei i tō tātou kāinga

E kara kura nō tō 'upoko

E kara renga nō te tino

Te tavake nō Havaiki mai

Kua 'oe ki runga

i taku tīvaevae

I am sewing this quilt
to beautify our home
Red for the head
Gold for the body

The tropical bird from Havaiki
has fallen asleep upon my *tīvaevae*

(Kauraka Kauraka from Rongokea, 2001)

Poem reprinted with the permission of Joy Tereora & Bridget Kauraka

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

This qualitative research draws upon talanoa (dialogue) amongst Pacific parents, students, and teachers at Shirley Boys High School (SBHS) in Christchurch, New Zealand, to provide in-depth insights regarding the status of Pacific cultures within that school. This study was prompted by my teaching experiences at that school between 2010 to 2021. It concerned me that while much research has already explored culturally responsive pedagogies in New Zealand's North Island school settings, there was a scarcity of similar research conducted with Pacific learners, families, and communities in Te Waipounamu (South Island) settings.

As a result, this thesis may be of interest to educators, researchers, and policy decision-makers in the South Island and elsewhere in New Zealand. It illuminates the diversity of Pacific community experiences and draws attention to the need for further in-depth research in urban and rural communities beyond Auckland and Wellington. This research may, in turn, also be of interest to educators, researchers and policy makers beyond New Zealand. After all, similar issues are faced by many Pacific diasporic communities growing in countries such as Australia and the United States of America (McGavin, 2014; Radclyffe et al., 2023; Ravulo, 2015).

SBHS is a single sex, state boys school located on the east side of Christchurch, New Zealand, the South Island's largest urban centre (see figures 1 and 2). The Pacific community affiliated to this school fluctuates between 100-120 students, forming approximately 10% of the total school roll (Ministry of Education, 2023f). This is reflective of many places in New Zealand, particularly in the South Island, where there are pockets of Pacific communities in both urban and rural settings.



Figure 1: Map showing the location of Christchurch, New Zealand (Google, 2024b).



Figure 2: Map showing suburbs of Christchurch city. **A** denotes the current location of SBHS (2019 – present). **B** denotes the former location of the school (1957 – 2019) (Google, 2024a).

While migration continues, Pacific communities have transitioned from consisting solely of new arrivals from Pacific nations, to established and integrated parts of New Zealand society (Salesa, 2017; Siope, 2011; Statistics New Zealand, 2023; Tongati'o, 1997). This study will therefore have relevance for many other communities contending with similar school and Pacific community relationships. Hence, the aim of this research was to explore how a Christchurch school could engage with its Pacific community to investigate the perceptions of SBHS students, teachers and parents regarding Pacific values and their role within the school environment. This included the extent to which these values were incorporated into teaching and learning, family, and community engagement.

This study also sought to examine significant relationships and their impact on the educational aspirations of Pacific students and their families using SBHS as a research site. Here, at SBHS, I was able to analyse the physical, social, and cultural environments and assess their ability to foster a sense of "place" and "belonging" for Pacific students, families, and affiliated communities. I also sought to explore the desired areas of growth and development expressed by Pacific students, their families, and teachers, in relation to Pacific success at SBHS. With regards to the importance of place, this research was designed, specifically, to support this school, and other Christchurch secondary schools to:

1. Deepen their understanding of the nuances that exist within local Pacific communities,
2. Identify any pre-conceptions held by teachers and/or school leaders to assist them to overcome perceived barriers (i.e., that prevent them from engaging with Pacific communities on a range of issues)
3. And, to assist teachers of Pacific students to engage more effectively with Pacific student, parents, and communities to *hear* their voices and respond to real (not perceived) needs.

Rationale

As indicated earlier, this study seeks to help educationalists, researchers, and policymakers to better comprehend and engage with the diverse range of voices emerging from Pacific communities in a range of New Zealand settings – beyond the large urban centres of the North Island.

Before proceeding, it should also be noted that in this thesis, there is reference to both Pacific peoples and ‘Pasifika’. These terms are commonly used (interchangeably) in New Zealand schools to “describe people living in New Zealand who have migrated from Pacific countries or people born in New Zealand who identify with a Pacific ancestry or heritage” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2021, p. 10). In terms of historical context, it is also important to remember that the pursuit of access to a quality schooling system, and the acquisition of academic credentials motivated many Pacific peoples to migrate to Christchurch and elsewhere in New Zealand. These migrants generally believed that this was necessary to enable individuals, families, and communities to enjoy economic success (Macpherson, 2006; Matapo & Teisina, 2021; Taufe’ulungaki, 2004).

There is an ongoing need for New Zealand educationalists, researchers, and policy planners to do more to grapple with Pacific voices in a wider range of urban and rural settings beyond the large urban centres of the North Island. The task of engaging with a diverse range of Pacific community voices (or perspectives) remains a task that is far from simple. In the context of Christchurch, New Zealand, it has long been my experience that Pacific voices can be misunderstood or simply ignored. Official statistical categories can oversimplify and homogenise the diverse views of a dynamic, heterogeneous, migrant community. Therefore, understanding the complexity of what the term “Pacific voices” means is critical to avoid manipulating and imposing views upon Pacific communities – across New Zealand. As a result,

this research strived to seek multiple perspectives or voices to understand the nuances that exist within one secondary school's Pacific community.

Inspired by the *ecological systems model* of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), this research was designed to create an inter-generational pool of data. As a result, the data discussed in this study not only reflects the perspectives (voices) of teachers, but also of their Pacific students, parents, and community members affiliated to the school. I felt this approach was vital because: (i) the number of Pacific families in New Zealand continues to grow and, (ii) as Bronfenbrenner (1979) might suggest, each student is a cultural being whose identity is formed within a *microsystem* (family). This, in turn, suggested that there was also a need to facilitate some intergenerational dialogue within and between local Pacific students' *microsystems* (families) and their wider *mesosystems* (i.e. communities, school). As a result, this research actively sought to offer a sound South Island response to the New Zealand government's the call for "more high quality research to improve the education system so it works for *all* [my emphasis] Pasifika learners" (Research Evaluation Team, 2012, p. 3).

During this study there was a change in the demographic profile of the Eastern suburbs of Christchurch, where SBHS is situated. The number of Pacific students in the Eastern suburbs of Christchurch rose by 65% from 2014 to 2022 (Ministry of Education, 2022a). This trend was (and remains) reflective of a growth of Pacific student numbers across the South Island, with Ashburton, Selwyn, Timaru and Waitaki districts all experiencing a significant rise in Pacific student numbers (see figure 3 for the geographical location of these districts). This ranged between a 15% increase for Waitaki, to a 62% increase for the Selwyn district, between 2018 and 2022 (Education Counts, 2023).



Figure 3: A map showing the different districts in the South Island of New Zealand (Wilson, 2016).

Multiple voices emerge from these growing South Island Pacific communities, which can struggle to be heard in the cacophony of competing voices in the New Zealand schooling system. These voices are comprised of various expressions of values, culture, interests, aspirations, relationships, and environments (Alton-Lee, 2003; Kaur et al., 2008). The challenge that faces schools and their teachers, principals and board members is to hear and know how to respond to these voices.

The schooling of Pacific peoples in New Zealand has not been without major complications (Houghton & Houghton, 2022; Seve-Williams, 2013; Spiller, 2012; Taleni,

2023). While New Zealand is a Pacific nation, it has a “Western” schooling system and structure that is “largely modelled on the British system” (Edgington, 2016, p. 72). Engaging with Pacific communities is a task which schools in New Zealand are ill equipped to do, despite the efforts of many researchers, school, and community leaders. Those involved in the administration of our secondary schooling system, for example principals and boards of trustees, often have little to no comprehension of what Pacific parents and communities want and need for their children’s education. Schools are challenged to channel Pacific students into the development of the various mechanisms of the schooling system, such as governance, management, curriculum, practice, and cultural norms within institutions.

These factors contribute to the urgent need for secondary schools to be better able to provide an education that works for Pacific learners. There is the need for the creation of a system that is inclusive of Pacific epistemologies, ontologies and languages (Amituanai-Tolosa et al., 2009; Chu et al., 2013; Nakhid, 2003; Tuiloma & Jones, 2022). This is not for the sole aim of avoiding underachievement for Pacific students, or to shorten the length of the so called ‘long brown tail’ that is often referred to in our schooling system (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020). Schools need to be able to establish and maintain consistent, meaningful and reciprocal relationships that allow them to better understand the various parts of the whole Pacific community (Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'aoi, Leali'ie'e, et al., 2009; Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; Poumale, 2016). The Pacific community needs to be able to understand and influence the environment in which their children receive schooling from the state. This has been supported by recent education policies, including New Zealand Pasifika Education Plans, developed by the Ministry of Education with Pacific communities. An example is the *Action Plan for Pacific Education* (Ministry of Education, 2020a), which was released after the Education Conversation Kōrero Mātauranga consultation in 2018. These official guidelines emphasises the need to “work reciprocally with diverse Pacific communities to respond to unmet needs”

(Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 18) in order to respond “to the identities, languages and cultures of each Pasifika group” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 3). These talk about the implementation of various curriculum, pedagogical and/or pastoral changes that can have a key role to ensure schools can respond more effectively to the needs of their Pacific community.

The purpose of this research was to explore Pacific voices concerning schooling, identify where Pacific families believe that changes need to be made and where needs are unmet, and what transformational changes are necessary to enable schools to become places of higher value for Pacific students. It then seeks to position the school leader, in this case myself as the researcher and teacher, as an active listener and advocate, sitting alongside the participants as co-researchers (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

My position in relation to the research problem

The research design was inevitably shaped by my positioning as a New Zealand born teacher with a mixture of European (English, Polish Scottish, Irish), and Pacific (Cook Island and Tahitian) heritage. As a result, I positioned myself in this study as a teacher/researcher of Pacific heritage, as well. For the sake of transparency, it should be noted that I was born and raised in Christchurch as part of a large, extended family. My Catholic faith is connected to my Polish, Irish and Tahitian familial heritage. It is foundational to all aspects of my life, and from it, I derive my vocation as a teacher and as a person called to address injustice. My immediate and extended family connect with and celebrate our Cook Island heritage, and this cultural connection has led to my involvement in Pacific development within schooling and the wider community.

I attended St Bede’s College, which is a Catholic, state-integrated school in Christchurch that follows in the Marist Fathers tradition (St Bede's College, 2024). I had a positive schooling experience and enjoyed the style of teaching and education. I was the first cohort of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) qualification,

undertaking NCEA Level 1 in 2005. My experience at St Bede's College contributed to my desire to eventually go into the teaching profession. I graduated in 2004 and proceeded to enrol at the University of Canterbury.

After completing my Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Classical Studies, I trained to become a secondary teacher. After graduating in 2008, I spent the next 14 years teaching in the East of Christchurch. I taught at SBHS from 2010-2021. During this time, I held several positions within the school. For example, I served as a teacher of English and Classical Studies, Director of Māori and Pacific Development, and Across-school Lead for culturally responsive practice in Kāhui Ako ki Ōtākaro (a cluster of early childhood centres, primary and secondary schools geographically located near the Ōtākaro river in Christchurch). My research was informed by my work in the Ōtākaro Kāhui Ako, through my experience of observing SBHS's growing Pacific population. My involvement in the NCEA Change Programme in 2019 led to a secondment in 2021 and this eventually led to my present role as a 'Principal Advisor - Secondary Transitions' at the Ministry of Education.

Given my experiences (above), I elected to adopt an eclectic qualitative research design consistent with Pacific methodological approaches. This allowed me the flexibility I required to explore the multiple cultural, ethnic, and social contexts of the research participants. As Pelzang and Hutchinson (2018) noted:

The rigor and trustworthiness of a qualitative study investigating an issue that has a cross-cultural dimension cannot be achieved without adapting and applying research methods in a culturally meaningful way—without in-depth knowledge and understanding of the sociocultural and political dynamics of a particular research setting (p. 1).

In terms of flexibility, I found that adopting a Participatory Action Research (PAR) was very helpful. This was because it enabled me to place emphasis on exploring the real (not perceived) needs of the Pacific communities who are most affected by the research I was conducting. I chose this because it also allowed me to utilise interviews and focus groups as

the main form of data collection, while combining this with Pacific research methodologies such as the talanoa approach (soon to be discussed). All of this occurred with the aim of gathering qualitative data to accurately represent the perspectives, narratives, and journeys of the participants. The participants consisted of four main groups:

- Pacific leaders in the community.
- Pacific Students who were a range of ages at SBHS.
- Members of the SBHS Pacific community (parents of current students).
- Teachers employed by SBHS (both Pacific and non-Pacific).

This research was, moreover, informed by two Pacific research frameworks. Firstly, I drew upon the *tīvaevae* research model, originally developed by Maua-Hodges (2019). It provided a rich metaphor to help me describe my process of stitching together the eclectic methodologies employed. It also provided a metaphor for describing my data analysis process – which involve dialogue with participants and my research supervisors (i.e., to verify and theorise my interpretations of data). Secondly, I drew upon the talanoa research methodology, developed by Vaioleti (2006), to conduct the data collection and analysis processes.

As a result, the *tīvaevae* research model and talanoa research methodology provided complimentary tools that enabled me to develop research “strategies that are Pacific in nature” (Sanga & Niroa, 2004, p. 48). These Pacific research methodologies have a central goal of identifying and promoting a Pacific world view, that “should be owned, directed and driven by Pacific peoples” (Anae et al., 2002, p. 12). At all times, I have sought to be sensitive to these factors to ensure that this research *is* “relevant and acceptable in a Pacific context” (Tamasese et al., 2005, p. 301). To explain how I strived to do this, I will discuss the *tīvaevae* model and talanoa methodology in much more depth later in the methodology chapter (3). Next, however, I will outline the structure of this thesis by elaborating on the chapters that follow this introductory chapter (Chapter One)

Thesis structure

After this introductory chapter (1), chapter two provides a literature review which situates the research problem and my research objectives. It provides a contextual backdrop for this study. This literature review primarily examines the context of Pacific peoples' experiences of secondary schooling within the local (Christchurch), New Zealand and some wider Pacific migrant diaspora contexts. It examines fundamental definitions associated with this discussion and locates them within a conceptual framework. This helps to establish connections between Pacific paradigms and some critical theorists' concepts. For example, I will relate Pacific research to dialogical approaches to education (Freire, 2005); cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973, 1974, 1990, 2002) and cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1992). These are internationally renowned ideas that I will relate to Pacific education, including issues of governance, leadership, the importance of relationships, place-based education, community engagement and effective teaching. As a result, this chapter serves to draw attention to the complexities that exist within the New Zealand Pacific education contexts most relevant to this study.

Chapter three next describes and discusses, in greater depth, the methodological approach that underpinned this research. It begins with a discussion of the participatory action research (PAR) approach that informed the co-design process of my research design (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). It also explains how PAR methods informed my exploration of the Tīvaevae model (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019; Te Ava & Page, 2018) and my adoption of the talanoa methodology (Vaioleti, 2006). Here, I also offer a brief reflection on the *ko'iko'i* (gathering of patterns) stage of tīvaevae creation (Te Ava, 2011). This stage provided me with a metaphor that helped me to imagine and conceptualise the research in consultation with Mama Teremoana Maua-Hodges – who first developed the Tīvaevae model or metaphor. This preliminary dialogue with Mama Teremoana, undertaken at her home in Porirua, Wellington, helped me to see a way of commencing the dialogue (talanoa) necessary to identify the

overarching research problem, objectives and questions in the context of my own school and Pacific community (Houghton, 2023). A description of initial talanoa sessions with key Pacific community members in Christchurch is also provided. This passage describes how these talanoa served as a culturally sustaining engagement exercise to guide the conceptualisation of my research design approach. I then describe my qualitative (talanoa) data collection process with the three participant groupings (i.e., SBHS students, parents, and teachers). Next, I outline the thematic analysis approach to the data central to this study. The chapter then closes with an account of the ethical considerations I had to address.

Chapter four addresses the *ecological systems model* that helped illuminate the socio-ecological contexts relevant to this study (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It commences by outlining the *mesosystem* (*school/institutional*) and *exosystem* (i.e. local community/regional) contexts encompassing the school and its affiliated Pacific communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This discussion is then supported by consideration of the *macrosystem* (national and international) contexts that inform the lived realities of my research settings at SBHS. This *ecological systems* approach has helped me, for example, to consider a range of contextual factors underpinning relevant socio-economic trends informing the lives of Pacific community members in Christchurch City and more specifically, at SBHS. This, in turn, sets the scene for a critical reflection on the *tuitui* (stitching) stage of *tīvaevae* creation. This is, metaphorically speaking, the stage where “theory and practice meet and the act of creating begins” (Houghton, 2023, p. 156). This sets the foundation for the talanoa conversations that made up my research and their analysis.

The next three chapters provide analyses and discussions of the findings that emerged from data collected during my talanoa with the three participant group interviews. These chapters, metaphorically speaking, resemble the *tuitui* phase of the *tīvaevae* creation where the patterns in the data collected were analysed and joined together to form the whole body of this

study – now ready for presentation. To that end, chapters five and six present the findings of interview data collected from the talanoa I had with the students. Chapter five begins by giving a brief description of the Pacific student community at SBHS and a profile of the talanoa groups. It then briefly describes the individual interviews I had with some students. The themes that emerged are then split across the two chapters. In Chapter five, I discuss three themes related to Pacific student identities. These include, Pacific identities, navigating collective success, and values systems. In Chapter six, I discuss themes related to the students' experiences of environments within their school. The recurring themes to arise from that talanoa included school structures and systems, teachers, the social and physical environments of the school, and the need for an inclusive curriculum. Each theme is supported by sections relating to specific ideas that arose, connected to that corresponding theme.

Next, chapter seven is divided into two parts to address the perspectives of several parents in the Pacific community of SBHS. The first (part one) commences by offering insights into the community and the role parents play in it. It also describes the nature of the school's engagement with Pacific families and draws attention to issues arising from Pacific parents' experiences of engagement with New Zealand secondary schools. Part two then discusses the themes that emerged from the talanoa with parents. This section includes a discussion of the following themes that arose from the data collected: Pacific identity; culture and family realities; support for the Pacific community at school; relationship with the school; and Pacific values in family and school settings.

Chapter eight, similarly, is also divided into two parts. The first (part one) concerns the voices of teachers – employed at the school central to my study (SBHS). This group consisted mostly of non-Pacific teachers. Only one Pacific teacher was interviewed. This initial stage of the chapter provides some brief insights into what the teacher participants knew about the contextual background to this study (addressed earlier in this chapter). It also provides some

insights into their views on post-earthquake developments that had impacted their professional practice. The second part of this chapter (part two) examines those recurring themes that emerged from my talanoa with teachers. These themes included: Pacific peoples in the school environment; Pacific teachers; Pacific values; stereotypes; and perceptions held by teachers and challenges in engaging with Pacific families and communities.

Chapter nine then provides a synthesis of the recurring themes from my talanoa with the three groups of participants. Here, I liken this stage of the research process to the last stages of the *tīvaevae* creation process. This ninth chapter is divided into three parts. The first (part one) of this chapter (metaphorically speaking) stitches together the four recurring themes that emerged across all three participant groups. Namely, (i) Pacific identities in the school context, (ii) the critical role of teachers, (iii) Pacific values, and (iv) the primacy of family. Next, part two (metaphorically speaking) provides some final embellishment by paying closer attention to some contextual considerations relevant to each group of participants. This is followed by part three provides the outer border that frames this *tīvaevae* (thesis). This closing discussion considers some potential implications of this research for the *macrosystem* (i.e., national and international) contexts that have informed my study (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

To close this study, chapter ten is likened to the reflection on the *tīvaevae* creation, known as ‘*akairi’anga* (evaluation and offering). As a researcher of Cook Islands descent, I understand this concluding chapter of my thesis to be the start of “gifting the finished piece represent[ing] the completion of the creation process, with a view to the legacy that it embodies” (Houghton, 2023, p. 156). The chapter begins by describing some of the challenges I encountered in undertaking this research. Next, it explores the key findings that have arisen, particularly in relation to the four recurring themes outlined in Chapter nine. Lastly, this concluding chapter examines future research possibilities related to Pacific education and

considers how this research has contributed to a growing body of knowledge in a plethora of local, national, and international settings.

Given this thesis began with a poem that captured the beginning of my research journey, it closes with second one from Cook Islands poet, Kauraka Kauraka, and a brief reflection.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review seeks to outline the scope of research, define key concepts, and utilise a conceptual framework to consider Pacific educational issues in relevant local, national, and international contexts. It develops literature around the importance of relationships and partnerships within educational contexts, and the need for creating a sense of place and belonging. It also details key understandings around power and voices in the context of New Zealand schooling and the wider landscape of Indigenous education. Part of this includes critical analysis of some key recent Ministry of Education reviews focused on Pacific education. Pacific peoples are connected to Indigenous education in the context of the Pacific geographical region (Matapo, 2021a; Uasike Allen et al., 2022). It discusses gaps in research and how this shaped the direction of this research. This provides the context of the following chapters that explain findings from student, parent, and teacher participants' voices. This chapter also conveys the sense of urgency that exists when working around Pacific education in New Zealand secondary schools. As Hunter and Hunter (2019) state: “unless the structural inequities and hegemonic practice Pāsifika students encounter in New Zealand schools are addressed, serious social and political consequences are signalled when considering the projected demographics” (Hunter & Hunter, 2019, p. 424).

Developing terminology around culture and ethnicity

This section outlines key terminology and set out important definitions concerning ethnicity and Indigeneity in relation to Pacific peoples in New Zealand. This includes terminology around Pacific peoples, diversity within the New Zealand Pacific community and their connection to global perspectives on migrants and Indigenous peoples.

Pacific vs. Pasifika

Questions often arise about what terminology is appropriate when discussing Pacific communities or groups outside of their home nations. Individually, ethnic groups might be identified as Samoan, Cook Island or Tongan, for example. However, collective terms for Pacific peoples are often used. At times, this has occurred within Crown structures for social convenience, data collection or creating the “largest natural grouping” for ease of policy administration (Mikaere & Hutchings, 2013, p. 52). It may also have occurred due to cultural bias and as an oversimplification of the complex ethnic and cultural identities of Pacific peoples. Other times, it might be a self-identified labelling that bands together groups with similar social or cultural expressions. At times, this can serve to support small or marginalised groups who have needed to band together for support and survival. In this way a collective term can act as a form of resistance, as described by Manning (1998) in his research exploring Polynesian cultural groups in New Zealand schools.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter (Chapter one), this thesis uses the term Pacific or Pacific peoples as an umbrella term to collectively describe people living in New Zealand from a Pacific ethnic background. However, it is appropriate to discuss the variation in terminology, as various references and documents throughout this thesis use Pasifika and other terms. There is contention around the usage of the words ‘Pacific’ or its transliteration ‘Pasifika’ to define a single group of people, or a community that contains people from a variety of Pacific nations or ethnic groups. As such, it needs to be used with sensitivity. It has been a challenge for me, as a researcher, teacher, and member of a diverse Pacific community in Christchurch, New Zealand, to settle on the use of this term. Particularly as there is widespread use of both terms in schools, and in a variety of other contexts. The following paragraphs comment on the use of these terms to contextualise and provide insight into some of the perspectives concerning them.

Like Pacific peoples, the term Pasifika is a collective term for people from, or who have descended from people who have migrated from Pacific nations (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Pasifika is a “multi-ethnic” term (Wendt-Samu, 2006) and was used widely throughout government policy, for example in health, education and social policy, over the last two decades. The Ministry of Education previously used the term Pasifika throughout their various policies concerning Pacific education. For example, from the first iteration of Pasifika Education policy in 2001 through to the Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017. However, the terms Pacific or Pacific peoples as collective references are currently used by the various New Zealand Government ministries and have been since 2017. For example, the current flagship Ministry of Education Pacific education policy, *The Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030*, uses the term Pacific instead of Pasifika (2020a). Interestingly, the talanoa in which I engaged with participants included a discussion around the term Pasifika. In this it was considered a strong and positive way to demonstrate unity among Pacific peoples within a school or community. This is more fully discussed in Chapters 5-8.

One concern around the use of these words is that they can lead to a view that Pacific people are homogenous with little cultural, social, or linguistic difference (Macpherson, 1996; Wendt-Samu, 2015). Similarly, ongoing efforts have sought to ensure that New Zealand Māori are not seen as a singular group, and that different iwi, hapū, and whānau are included in the discussion (Penetito, 2009). Another concern may include the reality that terms such as Pacific, Pasifika, Polynesian, Nesian, or Islander, continue to utilise Eurocentric vocabulary. This usage continues to allow the locus of control or power to be held within colonisation and non-Pacific languages. The challenge is that there is no singular, shared Pacific language, rather, there is a diverse range of languages. There is also the prevalence of youth subculture slang and language development, from which self-identifying labels emerge. Names and labels vary for different groupings associated with Pacific ethnicities and communities. For example, festivals such as

Polyfest around New Zealand uses the term ‘poly’ among young people. This may refer to the co-curricular group or a student’s own identity (Ladwig Williams, 2022).

The Pacific is one of the most linguistically diverse places on Earth, with almost 1400 languages existing or having existed in the region (Lynch, 2018). This equates to approximately one quarter of the world’s languages. While some Pacific languages are linguistically connected, there are unique differences across what is a very large geographical area. Recently, terms such as Moana (ocean) or Tagata o le Moana (People of the ocean), have begun to be more widely used (Matapo, 2021b). These terms seek to centre the Moana, as a linguistically, geographically, and culturally uniting term. Each island nation in the Pacific, and indeed many islands within the nations themselves, have distinct local and national cultures, languages, dialects, and cultures. These continue to be treasured and lived by many Pacific communities whose families have migrated to New Zealand and Australia among other places. The 2018 New Zealand Census highlights this reality with the following Pacific nations identifying themselves within New Zealand: Samoan, Cook Island Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Tokelauan, Fijian, Indigenous Australian, Hawaiian, Kiribati, Nauruan, Papua New Guinean, Pitcairn Islander, Rotuman, Tahitian, Solomon Islander, Tuvaluan and Ni Vanuatu (Statistics New Zealand, 2024b).

Ethnic and cultural diversity

Engaging with the notion of Pacific peoples in New Zealand requires an understanding of the concepts of ethnicity and cultural diversity. In approaching ideas around identity and exploring the way Pacific peoples in diasporic settings define themselves, it is important to outline what is meant by these concepts. Ethnicity can be broadly defined as a way of identifying people based on socio-cultural factors. It is a contested space and has been debated and discussed extensively over the last century. As Ratuva (2019) states:

Ethnicity needs to be understood as a form of collective identification constructed by a group or by others outside the group to emphasize exclusive claim to various forms of social symbolisms, historical experience, ancestry, or cultural heritage.

[...]

As a form of collective identification, ethnicity is closely associated with cultural norms, religious beliefs, claims to motherland, historical memory, collective mythology, land rights, nation states, and other forms of sociocultural symbolisms (p. 3).

This definition of ethnicity is helpful in understanding the way various Pacific peoples might view themselves in a layered and connected manner. For example, identification within a family network, village, geographical area, or people (e.g., tribal group) of origin. This can often lead to a broader connection within an island, national, or culturally networked group, through to belonging to a wider, diasporic group, connected by shared ancestry, language, cultural practice, and homeland affiliation.

The terms ethnic and cultural diversity indicates the way different peoples may fuse, adapt and change based on their interaction with others. This can be at the level of individuals, families, communities, and nations. Here, it is useful to draw on a definition of culture from Konai Helu Thaman:

I define culture as the way of life of a discrete group, which includes a language, a body of accumulated knowledge, skills, beliefs and values. I see culture as central to the understanding of human relationships and acknowledge the fact that members of different cultural groups have unique systems of perceiving and organising the world around them (Helu Thaman, 1998 as cited in Tongati'o, 2010, p. 57).

Pacific Island nations, as they now exist, have long been places of cultural and ethnic diversity, with cultural interaction occurring in the centuries prior to colonisation. Hau'ofa (1994) famously challenged the assumptions of “smallness” that arose in the colonial period and persist in current times. He described the Pacific as a “sea of islands” (p. 152) and emphasised the vastness of the Oceania region, both in terms of its geography and the power of its people. Peoples and communities in the Pacific were connected and their interactions encompassed trade, social networks, conflict, spirituality, and cultural exchange (Williams,

2021). This cultural interaction intensified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Indigenous cultural, educational, belief and knowledge systems across the Pacific encountered newly arrived European and Asian exploratory and colonial powers (Lee & Francis, 2009). What followed was a rapid adaptation and evolution of Pacific cultures, as they engaged with different forms of industrialisation, militarisation, and culture. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this led to the creation and expansion of the Pacific diaspora, which is discussed in Chapter four.

Indigeneity and Pacific peoples

Pacific peoples, as specified by this study, are not indigenous to New Zealand. Pacific peoples are indigenous to the Pacific places from which they derive ancestral connections. As Dei (2016) states:

Fundamentally, the Indigenous should be perceived as mostly about place-based knowing, and understanding of traditional sacred relationships between peoples, their cultures and their cosmologies (p. 294-295).

Puloka-Luey (2021), drawing on the thinking of Mason Durie, reflects on the reality that “most Indigenous people live at the interface of multiple worldviews” (p. 6). In the context of Pacific diasporic communities, this could mean that there is a need to exist and work within a complex web of cultures, languages, and places. Therefore, this concept of Indigeneity or ‘being Indigenous’ is understandably complex. However, it is often used in relation to the experience of Pacific peoples, both in their homelands and in diasporic contexts. Therefore, it is important to draw on relevant thinking concerning this concept at the outset of this thesis.

Understanding what it means to be a person of a Pacific culture or ethnicity living in New Zealand requires having a broad knowledge of the rich diversity that is contained within and across Pacific communities. When exploring different Pacific arts, one notes that, for example, *tīvaevae*, *tapa* (printed bark cloth) and *tatau* (tattoo) do not consist of a single shape, symbol, or colour, but rather of continuing and connected patterns among difference. Similarly,

there are differences and similarities among previous, current and future generations of Pacific peoples, and consequently, among the students who arrive in schools in diasporic settings (Airini et al., 2010).

The concept of Indigeneity and the discussion around who is Indigenous needs to be approached cautiously (Mika, 2017), as labelling with a “static definition is problematic and contradicts Indigenous practice” (Matapo, 2021b, p. 36). With this in mind, understanding Pacific peoples alongside the concept of transnational Indigeneity can be helpful (Fox, 2012). Matapo (2021b) describes this concept as follows:

Transnational Indigeneity for Pasifika peoples takes many forms, such as familial and cultural responsibilities, regular visits between Pacific Islands, New Zealand, Australia, and the provision of financial aid. It seems for many Pasifika peoples, cultural interactions extend beyond local borders and are intricately tied to an ethic of care within the collective. One example of Samoan transnational duty is the fa’amatai system that traverses and transcends the geographical borders of Samoa, demonstrating the cultural affective ties of the fa’amatai system and how this cultural framework binds one to the collective, economically, culturally, and socially (p.35).

In this way, we can develop an understanding of Pacific peoples as connected to Indigenous education movements around the world. While they are not specifically Indigenous to New Zealand, there are useful ways of making connections to the efforts concerning Indigenous education globally.

Another way to understand this is with the concept of pan-ethnicity. McFarlane (2010) describes pan-ethnicity as being a term used to describe an identity label that “transcend[s] national boundaries and [forms communities] based on cultural background and similarity of experiences” (p.101). This has become a reality for Pacific communities, as new ways of living and cultural changes are developed. This has occurred due to changes in social dynamics, such as marriage and family mixing with different cultures, and changes in the physical environment, resulting in rapidly evolving and developing identities. Judith Crawford, who is Fijian and Samoan and migrated to New Zealand in the 1980s, explains that others’ perceptions of her as a Pacific person are influenced by her “English name that does not match [her]

Indigenous physical characteristics” (Crawford, 2023, p. 2). She asserts that “the clash between my name and my face has been one of the major contributing factors in the construction of my identity” (p. 2). This cultural and social “clash” is one example of how Pacific peoples navigate identity in diaspora settings. This is the case in workplaces, new families, communities, and school settings. As Crawford (2023) goes on to state, “the diaspora of Pacific peoples worldwide is marked by our ability to preserve our cultural heritage while simultaneously adjusting to the new culture” (p. 2).

International Indigenous issues and politics of identity

Across the world, and despite the variety in language and culture, Indigenous peoples have faced and continue to face significant struggles and barriers to their own self-determination. These issues are often linked to land loss, loss of language and cultural knowledge, which can result in intergenerational poverty, high suicide rates, poor health, and low educational achievement in Western education systems (Arenas et al., 2009). Despite the significant presence of Indigenous populations worldwide, national education systems have “ignored, minimized or ridiculed [the] histories, pre and post Western contact, as well as their cultural contributions towards social and environmental sustainability” (Arenas, Reyes, & Wyman, 2009, p. 59). Since the mid-20th century, many of these Indigenous communities around the world have sought to “rescue and protect [their] values, practices, languages and knowledge systems” (Arenas, Reyes, & Wyman, 2009, p. 59).

A central idea behind the Indigenous education movement within modern secondary school contexts is to resist the pressure to assimilate into the dominant society (Si‘ilata et al., 2019; Smith, 2012a). This creates a significant tension, as the dominant culture and the schools that are set up within it subconsciously and consciously try to protect the values and traditions it holds dear, while the Indigenous culture struggles to survive.

Conceptual Framework: Voice and Power within Education

This section develops the conceptual framework for my research. This is based around the concept of schools as places of cultural and social reproduction. Within this, those who are perceived to be different or from marginalised groups are assimilated into the system of education. My conceptual framework draws particularly from theories by Pierre Bourdieu (1973; 1990; 1974; 2002), Antonio Gramsci (1971), and Michael Apple (1996; 2012; 2019). With it, I seek to explore the way that Pacific voices are engaged in the New Zealand schooling system, as well as various issues associated with power in education.

The New Zealand schooling system

The schooling system in New Zealand is modelled on a British system which is “built on a long history of centralising the western canon of knowledge and colonial norms” (Uasike Allen et al., 2022, p. 1). This system, which was introduced in the nineteenth century, has shaped the way schooling has developed in this country up until the present day (McKinley & Smith, 2019). New Zealand, as a country colonised by British settlers, has a school system and curriculum that reflects this historical connection, and is specifically English in structure and pedagogy (Stephenson, 2009). Te Ao Māori, that is, the worldviews of New Zealand Māori, have only recently started to enter the consciousness of the state education system in a widespread manner (Moko-Painting et al., 2023). The development of Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, Kura Kaupapa Māori and Ngā Kura a Iwi are examples of this (Stewart et al., 2017; Tocker, 2015). The intention of New Zealand schooling for Māori and other minority cultural and ethnic groups has been primarily that of assimilation and legitimisation of state power (Stephenson, 2006).

Over recent generations, Pacific peoples have experienced assimilation into the dominant culture that has been the foundation of the New Zealand schooling system. Communities such as Pacific churches, cultural groups and emerging Pacific educational

institutions have sought to retain what is left, as well as create strong links to home countries, languages, and cultural practices (Fehoko et al., 2022; Goodwin et al., 2002).

Central to deconstructing assimilationist approaches in schools are the concepts of representation and voice. The postcolonial term *subaltern* can be used in the context of this research, meaning the populations who are outside of the dominant group or class, and therefore unable to access power structures (Spivak, 2023). Pacific peoples are minorities within educational institutions across Christchurch, and therefore, may find themselves in the position of being *subaltern*. As Asgharzadeh (2008) suggests:

The education system reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of traditionally marginalised, excluded and subaltern segments of society (p. 339).

Across the global education landscape, there is a need for different marginalised groups to come together. They need to be empowered to “advance their common struggle for justice and equality” (Asgharzadeh, 2008, p. 339) within the education systems that they are currently part of. One way this is done is through the unity often seen among Pacific Peoples in the New Zealand schooling and community sectors. Collective funding models and celebrations of cultures and languages, while not without risk, are examples of this. Collaborative community organisations which serve all peoples in the Pacific collective can enable access for specific ethnic groups who might have small numbers. Risks include a dominant cultural, linguistic or population focus by the largest group. In the education sector, support for these collaborations is often strategically informed by critical analyses and interpretations of national education policy, such as the Pacific education and action plans (discussed earlier).

Pacific voices in education governance

There is a gap in the literature concerning non-western concepts related to the role of the Board of Trustees (Poumale, 2016, p. 2). There is also a longstanding recognition from the Ministry of Education of an urgent need for schools to be engaging with Pacific peoples at a governance

level (Ministry of Education, 2020a). Furthermore, there is a well-documented need for research into effective strategies for Pacific engagement and achievement by school boards (Chu et al., 2013; Ministry of Education, 2013). For example, the 2012 Pacific Education Plan included a target to “increase Pacific participation on School Boards of Trustees to be proportionate to the number of Pacific students at the school” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 5). The difficulty with the Christchurch context is that schools have a relatively small Pacific population, compared with some North Island areas, such as Auckland. This makes the challenge of ensuring Pacific community representation in Christchurch more nuanced and complex. Yet, the number of Pacific school board representatives in the Canterbury region have gradually increased from a total of 18 in 1997 to 82 in 2022. While this is an important numerical increase, Pacific peoples still only constitute 2.9% of board representatives (Ministry of Education, 2019b) whereas Pacific students constitute 6.2% of the overall student population (Ministry of Education, 2022a).

With the advent of the Tomorrow’s Schools policy (1989), school communities were required to appoint governing boards. These boards, in turn, were supposed to represent the diversity of each school community (Barker, 2023). Amongst other things, this was introduced to ensure students experienced educational experiences reflecting what the community prioritised. In theory, the responsibility for students’ educational would be reflected a partnership between the school, the community, and the state (Robinson & Ward, 2005). However, as Barker (2023) states:

While the devolved nature of Tomorrow’s Schools has enabled higher levels of local autonomy, it has also been criticised for opening up schools to marketisation and contributing to inequality between schools (p.11).

The Pacific community, in theory, was (like other contributing communities) supposed to play an active role in the leadership of the school and the formation of that school’s operational policies. This effectively made schools self-managing institutions (Wylie, 2012).

At one level, self-management can be understood to mean significant de-centralisation to the school to have the authority to make decisions related to their own allocation of resources (Caldwell & Spink, 1988, p. 4). The Board of Trustees therefore became responsible for aspects of school management such as property, finances, policy, employment, and community engagement (Openshaw, 2009). The principal became responsible for managing the school and implementing the vision and policy, as set by the Board (Robinson & Ward, 2005).

As the data regarding Pacific representation (above) suggests, it is still difficult to get adequate representation for Pacific peoples on Canterbury school boards. This problem is not unique to Christchurch however, as the growing Pacific population across New Zealand remains largely under-represented. Schools and communities need to become creative when it comes to creating space for Pacific community voices to be heard (Timoteo, 2021). To address this, appropriate methods of engagement and consultation need to be developed that are fit for purpose in each school community. However, more work is needed in this area. According to Chu et al. (2013) there has not been enough attention given to improve Pacific student outcomes. This should involve monitoring of Pacific achievement by Boards of Trustees, analysis of strategies and their effectiveness for Pacific, as well as awareness and usage of Pacific education strategies released by the Ministry of Education. Research by Amituanai-Toloa et al. (2009) suggest two key components required for school leadership to achieve positive change for Pacific communities: informing changes with student achievement data, and prioritising relevant professional development for teachers and school leaders. One of the participants in their study emphasised this:

I think the effectiveness comes from the fact that we participate in the PD [professional development], we participate in the clustering and then it's brought back to school and it's followed up, so we don't just go to the PD, come back, that's done, out of the way...what happens is we come back together, we plan and how that PD is going to be effectively implemented in our classrooms and it happens on a school-wide basis, so everybody is doing and saying the same thing (Amituanai-Toloa et al., 2009, p. 126).

However, it is essential to note that for professional development to be effective, there needs to be engagement between the leadership of the school and the Pacific community including students. Amituanai-Tolosa et al. (2009) assert that:

Accessing and understanding student voices provides very important insights from the students regarding all features of schooling including what works from their perspective. [...] In addition, their voices provide important evidence for the planning of interventions (p. 20).

Over the last decade the Education Review Office (ERO) has indicated a persistent need for schools to seriously address their approaches to working with Pacific students and their communities. In 2012, ERO stated that there are very few schools who have a specific focus on Pacific student achievement. Even fewer schools were engaged in a process of using student achievement data and other evidence to make decisions and improve practice:

ERO found that school leaders and teachers in most schools in this study were not recognizing and actively responding to this achievement disparity. Most of the schools studied did not carefully analyse Pacific learners' assessment results to determine actions they could take to accelerate their progress (Education Review Office, 2012, p. 1).

The ERO later released a report which examined the impact of Covid-19 on Pacific learners. They found that "Pacific learners have been especially impacted by Covid-19" and that "Pacific learners continue to have lower achievement rates than the general population" (Education Review Office, 2022, p. 2). This revealed a significant shortfall in the way school leaders operate in the context of raising and accelerating Pacific achievement. It might also reflect the lack of "meaningful governance relationships [schools have] with their Pasifika communities" (Chu, Glasgow, Rimoni, Hodis, & Meyer, 2013, p. 10).

A consistent lack of engagement is the outcome of unconscious bias and systemic racism that exists within the education system for Pacific peoples (Cahill, 2006). With most board members and school leaders coming from a dominant European cultural background, the value placed on the Pacific community is inadequate (Ministry of Education, 2019b). While Pacific learners may be mentioned in strategic plans and school goals, evidence suggests that

actions to address disparities in educational outcomes are not being prioritised (Poumale, 2016; Timoteo, 2021). It is important to understand systems of capital that exist in schools and how this can impact marginalised communities.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital

Bourdieu theorised that schooling systems reflect the cultures and values of the dominant culture of each society. Moreover, he concluded that schooling systems are explicitly and implicitly designed to reproduce hierarchies: "Education is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern as it provides an apparent justification for social inequalities" (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 12). The prevailing worldview of New Zealand's dominant (hegemonic) culture is primarily Eurocentric in scope (Hill, 2010; Salahshour, 2021; Torepe & Manning, 2017). This poses significant problems for people who enter the schooling system from minority Pacific migrant community backgrounds. This is because, as Bourdieu explains, the system privileges and reproduces the epistemologies and ontologies of the dominant (hegemonic) culture by:

... doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 80).

Due to the largely Eurocentric nature of curriculum design, delivery, assessment and evaluation procedures, many students who do not share this cultural capital are vulnerable and easily marginalised (Bills & Hunter, 2015). Subsequently, they are left with little hope of significantly improving their socio-economic situation (Dumais, 2002). As Bourdieu (1973) suggests, a knowledge of cultural capital is crucial to understanding how social mobility is supported or hindered by the schooling system. In his seminal work, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," Bourdieu (1973) defined cultural capital as "linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture" (p.80). Possession of this cultural

capital enables success within schooling, as it is recognized by teachers who most frequently originate from within the dominant culture. Not surprisingly, they reward those students who correctly regurgitate cultural capital they themselves transmit in their classrooms (Dumais, 2019). Cultural capital therefore entails a form of power within the schooling system. Through this power teachers and school leaders can control whose voices are validated, heard and acted upon.

As a result, Dumais (2002) proposed that cultural capital serves as a “power resource, or a way for groups to remain dominant or gain status” (p. 46) as well as “something established by one group to prevent another from gaining power” (p. 48). It is important to note that it is not necessarily something that students act on intentionally. Rather, it is embodied as an influencing factor on teachers who are able to better relate to students with ‘more’ or similar cultural capital (DiMaggio, 1982). While it might be said that Pacific students arrive in New Zealand schools bereft of cultural capital in general, the opposite is true (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010; Radclyffe et al., 2023). The cultural capital that students from a Pacific background bring is different to the European values and epistemologies favoured by the teachers and school leaders who dominate the New Zealand schooling system. Consequently, it is seen to be ‘other’, potentially deviant and threatening to the status quo or norm (Siope, 2011). To achieve success, Pacific students not experiencing success at school often have to learn “covert rules of engagement on how to behave, conceding to the pervasive culture of dominance” (Siope, 2011, p. 14). That, or they might have to leave their Pacific cultures at the school gates, essentially being told to succeed despite their culture. It is important, therefore, to develop a nuanced understanding of the way Pacific communities experience their own cultures.

Pacific peoples in diasporic settings, like other migrant communities, experience different levels of connection to their homelands. These homelands, alongside older

generations, can act sources of culture, language, and identity. However, different individual and community experiences are complex. Therefore, an understanding of the cultural capital they have access to can be complex. At school they can be seen to exist in a sort of cultural dilemma, where survival, in both a cultural and economic sense, is paramount. As subsequent generations are born in New Zealand, this reality becomes more pronounced, and in many ways, a new, post-migration cultural capital is beginning to take shape (Faitala et al., 2022; Lee & Francis, 2009). This understanding of cultural capital leads to a necessary discussion of cultural hegemony.

Cultural hegemony

Cultural hegemony is defined by Antonio Gramsci as the “permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations” (Burke, 2005, p. 39). Apple (2012) adds that hegemony “leads to, and comes from, unequal economic and cultural control” (p. 22). Williams emphasises that cultural hegemony “saturates the society to such an extent [that it] constitutes the limit of common sense for most people under its sway” (cited in Apple, 2012, p.22).

As in other countries which have experienced colonisation, the Indigenous people of this country and region, namely those from neighbouring Pacific nations, are effectively shut out of the system (Samu, 2013). These peoples have become the ‘other’ in the primary and widespread education system within their region. The dominant class use these schools as cultural institutions to maintain power and reinforce ideology in society (Hunter, 2022). The dominant culture replicates itself by propagating its own values and norms so that these become those of the entire education system (Bishop & Glynn, 2003). Thus, the status quo is maintained.

The Eurocentric foundation of the schooling system in New Zealand has long played a crucial role in maintaining the linguistic and cultural hegemony that exists in New Zealand

(Major, 2018). This severely limits the extent to which Pacific peoples are relatively powerless because they are often unable to have their voices (i.e., perspectives) heard or validated within the schooling system. As discussed above, Pacific peoples have had to attempt to assimilate into the New Zealand schooling system (Tongati'o, 1997). While there have been numerous successes for some individuals and communities without the required cultural capital (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010), this success has still proven difficult to come by. Notably, Naepi et al. (2017) have identified the nature of “epistemological dominance” (p.83) encountered by Pacific people in New Zealand’s tertiary education sectors as a major barrier to success. They assert that:

Within contexts framed by European epistemological dominance, there is limited possibility for collaboration or dialogue across different knowledges, because of the uneven institutional power accorded to non-European knowledges. European epistemological dominance is premised on the supremacy and universal value of European knowledge traditions, while non-European knowledges and knowledge holders are delegitimized or devalued, if they are recognized at all (Naepi et al., 2017, p. 83).

Similar assertions could be made in the secondary school context (Reynolds, 2017).

Enari and Haua (2021) argue that the collective concept of Pasifika in places like New Zealand and Australia, is representative of “diasporic nationalism” (Lie, 2001, p. 360) that challenges the established cultural hegemony. While they acknowledge that there are critical perspectives when it comes to the use of this term and concept, their belief is that it is disruptive to the dominant power systems in New Zealand. Shirley Boys’ High School (SBHS) research participants shared similar perspectives when it came to the use of the term Pasifika. They felt that the unification of Pacific peoples afforded them the ability to challenge the cultural hegemony that existed within the school and wider community setting. This is discussed more fully with the different participant groups in Chapters 5-8.

Gramsci’s theories concerning hegemony can aid us in our understanding of how Pacific peoples have experienced schooling in New Zealand, especially considering the

hegemonic dominance of cultural and institutional power that exists within the schooling system. The systemic racism and ongoing marginalisation of Pacific people's cultures and languages reflect a degree of dehumanisation that continues to perpetuate inequitable outcomes for Pacific students. There is no question that our schooling system is a significant piece of the puzzle of cultural hegemony which permeates our society, where the right form of cultural capital will give you a stronger chance of experiencing success at school. However, we must consider what the next steps for Pacific peoples are to achieve some semblance of voice and power and overcome some of the current inequities.

Towards humanisation and dialogue for Pacific Peoples

In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2005) discusses the concepts of humanisation and dehumanisation. Both are historical realities, but humanisation is the vocation of all people. Humanisation entails the realisation of the right to become “more fully human” and “restorers of humanity” (p. 44). One might consider how these concepts apply in a New Zealand schooling context, and whether Pacific peoples fit into the category of the oppressed, with those who control and dominate the system being the oppressors. Freire notes that “problem posing education” is a “humanist and liberating” approach that argues that it is “fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation” (p. 86). A core part of a transformative approach to education is the establishing and strengthening of dialogue. Freire calls dialogue an “existential necessity” and states that it is an “encounter among women and men” and “an act of creation”, that must exist in the context of “a profound love for the world and for people” (Freire, 2005, p. 89).

This view of dialogue being a transformative and humanising force is essential if we are seeing to influence the schooling system to become a place of safety and equality for Pacific peoples. Giving our Pacific students, families, and communities a voice concerns not only an

attempt to fight for dominance, but rather, to create opportunities for a profound dialogue to occur between schools and their communities (Uasike Allen et al., 2022).

Understanding key Pacific education issues

This section covers issues that affect Pacific education issues, different approaches to Pacific education, and New Zealand Ministry of Education reviews and policies. These are all important for understanding the wider landscape of Pacific education.

Pacific migration and education: history, challenges, and progress

New Zealand's Pacific community is shaped by dynamic and evolving migration patterns that have a substantial effect on diverse sectors and contributes to a Pacific demographic that is significantly younger than the national average (Statistics New Zealand, 2023). Historically, Pacific peoples migrated to New Zealand, forming the origins of New Zealand Māori in the fourteenth century (Anderson, 2016; Walter et al., 2017). This shared whakapapa (genealogy) provides a specific connection between Māori and Pacific peoples, "whilst distinguishing Māori as Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa (New Zealand), and Pasifika as migrants from other lands in the Pacific region" (Enari & Haua, 2021, p. 1). Some have formed close relationships with New Zealand Māori and there have been observations made about the growing number of Pacific people who also have Māori whakapapa (Vaka'uta, 2021).

Over time, Pacific peoples have engaged in changing and developing migration patterns. Large-scale migration to New Zealand from Pacific nations started around the mid-twentieth century. This has had a growing cultural impact on schools, the arts sector, and places of work (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020). Historically, Pacific peoples have played a significant role in several economic areas, particularly in the field of migrant labour (Connell, 2010) and have been negatively impacted by policies across a broad spectrum (Mallon et al., 2012). For example, various immigration policies, such as those leading to the Dawn Raids, have impacted on social and economic outcomes for Pacific Peoples. For example, the

deportation of family members, ongoing experiences of discrimination and racism, and an enduring sense of shame (Anae, 2012). It is crucial therefore that research concerning Pacific communities is ongoing and adaptive, particularly within education. Much of the research about Pacific educational issues over the last two decades has been trying to fill the extraordinary gap that developed in the knowledge and ability of schools to cater for Pacific peoples from the 1960s-2000s.

This knowledge gap occurred because research into its causes and to address it have not been prioritised. This has been influenced by different ideological factors shaped by successive New Zealand governments. One of these factors is a neoliberal economic approach where there has been a market-driven approach to schooling (Crawshaw, 2015). This resulted in a low level of investment into Pacific communities and their schooling experience (Salesa, 2019). Another factor has been successive assimilationist and racist education policies which focus on integrating minority cultures into the dominant culture. This approach to schooling meant that Pacific cultural and linguistic knowledge was not necessarily valued in teaching practice or pedagogy (Matika et al., 2021). A prioritisation of Eurocentric knowledges, languages and perspectives was the dominant cultural norm in twentieth century New Zealand schooling. This ensured that migrants from different Pacific nations and ethnic backgrounds often had their priorities, knowledge and language overlooked (Werry, 2020).

The marginalisation of Pacific students and their families, including racist practices, and a loss of home languages, created significant gaps in their educational experience (Samu et al., 2019). From the middle of the twentieth century up until the present day, this inequitable schooling experience has meant that much of the research looks backwards, examining what has gone wrong, and what is needed to address the injustices of the past and the present. Although change has been slow to come, the Lopdell House Conference in 1974 was a key point where the emerging field of Pacific Education began to take form. This conference

produced a Department of Education report with 74 recommendations, “directed at helping Pacific Islanders realise their full potential, first at schools and later as effective members of the community” (Department of Education, 1975, p. 3).

In the early twenty-first century, secondary schooling is not necessarily about educating Pacific migrants, but in most cases, children who are first or second-generation New Zealanders (Sutton & Airini, 2012). Notably, two-thirds of Pacific people in New Zealand were born here, with the remainder born overseas (Statistics New Zealand, 2024b). As Salesa (2017) indicates:

New Zealand [is] becoming more Pacific by the hour. This is not a change visible at the airport, or at the docks, as it was when we the Pacific population grew through migration. New Zealand’s borders are now largely closed on Pacific migration. These days, the chief ports of entry for Pacific peoples are the country’s maternity wards” (p. 7).

This demographic shift changes the dynamic when approaching the diverse complexities of Pacific communities engaging with the New Zealand education system. Frustration can occur upon realising that a ‘one size fits all’ model does not exist. Parent, family, and student perspectives are critical in understanding Pacific education, particularly when many Pacific students are disengaged in education and are underachieving as a result (Siope, 2011; Spiller, 2013). A crucial aspect to their education is the relationship they have with the school and, more importantly, their teachers (Amituanai-Tolosa et al., 2009). As Cunningham et al. (2022) explain:

Historically, for many Pacific families, a major reason for migrating to New Zealand was the desire to give their children access to greater opportunities to fulfil aspirations for education and employment. Although migration to New Zealand involved significant sacrifices, within Pacific communities, parental high expectations are evidenced in parents’ aspirations for their children and for academic achievement. Academic success is seen as the fruit of a collective effort, in which Pacific students are supported heavily by peers, their families and communities (p. 127-128).

Research has identified the relationship between home and school as crucial. As a result, some institutions have invested substantial resources into the development of initiatives to foster and strengthen it (Cahill, 2006; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b; Faleolo, 2020). However,

Pacific students and parents still cite barriers, the direct causes of which are difficult to pinpoint (Nakhid, 2003; Otunuku, 2011). In reality, many Pacific students can no longer be classified as recent migrants, and their first language is not necessarily the language of their parents or grandparents (Macpherson, 2006). While this alleviates some of the challenges that may have been perceived when educating previous generations of Pacific peoples, it has created other barriers within the current educational environment. Pacific students might generally see themselves as New Zealanders since many may never have lived or even visited the land of their ancestors. However, a European-dominated education system might continue to see them as foreign entities and thus are treated and discriminated accordingly (Anae, 1997; Iosefo & Iosefo-Williams, 2023; Radclyffe et al., 2023).

Another consideration not often discussed for fear of causing offence is the reality of unconscious bias and racism that Pacific peoples often encounter within schools. For example, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2018) reported experiences of racism from young Pacific peoples at school, both from students and their teachers. Similar evidence can be found elsewhere in Pacific diasporic contexts. For example, in Australia, "young Pacific Islanders [...] experience everyday racism and the drawing of symbolic boundaries that determine who belongs and who lies on the periphery" (Radclyffe et al., 2023, p. 2).

The New Zealand Education Review Office (ERO) has consistently found over the last decade that there has been little system-wide change for Pacific educational improvement. Moreover, many educators in New Zealand have not taken seriously their professional responsibility to create a positive learning environment for Pacific students (Education Review Office, 2012). In their more recent research, ERO reports that "learners from ethnic communities are achieving in education, but they have to overcome widespread racism, isolation, and lack of cultural understanding" (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 7). This is

perhaps one of the central issues in the education of Pacific peoples in New Zealand and has been a driving force behind my motivations for research in this area.

Culturally responsive practice and pedagogy

In a New Zealand context, various approaches to Pacific education issues have continued to be developed by researchers and practitioners such as Tongati'o (1997), Mara (1998), Maua-Hodges (2001), and many other pioneers. Instead of merely examining deficits and trying to address the problems experienced in the past, researchers continue to look at what drives Pacific success and how curriculum can connect with Pacific cultures (Lee-Hang, 2011). Terms like culturally responsive practice and culturally responsive pedagogy have become widespread. This reflects a desire to see teachers and classroom practice engage with the cultures that students bring with them, particularly students with Māori and Pacific cultural heritage. Over the last two decades, the Ministry of Education has consistently called for culturally responsive practices, leadership, and pedagogies to be enacted in New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2018). However, this is a somewhat fraught perspective.

As Berryman et al. (2018) recognise, culturally responsive pedagogy or practice “is understood and defined differently across Aotearoa New Zealand, and indeed the world” (p. 4). This presents a problem, when there is widespread acceptance that a culturally responsive practice or pedagogy is a generic solution to problems of underachievement and disengagement. As Gruenewald (2014) notes:

The phrase "culturally-responsive" teaching begs an important question that needs to remain open: that is to what in culture should educators be responsive? Diversity educators have successfully fore-grounded one answer to this question: culturally responsive educators must be responsive to differences among students so that no child is left behind ... this response, as important as it is, tends to trap classroom teachers in the grammar of schooling and limits the role of teaching to a relatively narrow set of increasingly prescribed classroom interactions (p. 137).

Therefore, a critical approach needs to be applied to any question of schooling that can serve Pacific students and their communities, particularly in relation to so-called culturally responsive practice or pedagogy. As Hunter and Miller (2022) state, “culture is complex and includes a range of elements” (p. 113). It is therefore crucial, that “recognition, acknowledgement and use of the culture, language and knowledge of the learner within the classroom” accompanies any design of practice that is deemed to be culturally responsive (Hunter & Miller, 2022, p. 113).

Culturally responsive practice, as a broad concept, is clearly not a panacea. Local and familial contexts, as well as community specific nuances, need to be explored in an ongoing way. Pacific communities can enter these conversations, offering knowledge and perspectives, linked to their children’s learning at school. Taea and Averill (2021) explored this in the context of linking Pacific cultural dance with mathematics pedagogy for Pacific students in Wellington schools. Their work alongside Pacific communities revealed that “ancient wisdom is shared through Pacific dance”. For the students and families involved in their study, “dance, alongside music and storytelling, is used to pass down important cultural information and traditions from generation to generation in many Pasifika and Indigenous cultures” (p. 129). They concluded that dance can be utilised as a “culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy” and that “incorporating the arts [alongside] the New Zealand curriculum” in subjects like mathematics can “provide opportunities for appreciating and acknowledging Pasifika funds of knowledge and strengthening home school relationships” (p. 130).

Approaches described above are becoming more widespread across the education sector in general. It is necessary that Pacific-specific approaches emerge that not only draw upon lessons of the past, but more importantly, draw upon the familial and cultural context from which Pacific students emerge. Without this foundational approach, there is a risk that the education system and education research unknowingly exacerbate the isolation of Pacific

students from their cultural roots, family, and identity. In his research with Tongan males and their extended families, Dave Fa'avae (2017) captures various lessons that palagi (non-Pacific people) can learn when working with Tongan boys. For example, he states that “the kāinga (extended family) and the elders are central to understanding the collective aspirations and motivations that define Tongan males’ educational identity in New Zealand” (p. 49). He emphasises one way to achieve culturally responsive capability in teachers is increased understanding of Pacific families, their values, and their priorities.

Pacific community engagement in education

Knowing and understanding the students, and the community from which they each emerge, is a valuable approach in the education of students from Pacific backgrounds (Education Review Office, 2012). As mentioned above, migration has led to diverse communities across New Zealand, including a significant number of Pacific peoples who bring with them an assortment of different aspects of their cultures, familial connections and social structures. This presents a challenge to the New Zealand school sector, which largely relies on homogenous approaches to serve those from the dominant culture. This is also the case in a variety of other countries and locations such as Australia, where there has been a similar British colonial (cultural) hegemony, which reserves power for those who possess the required or desired cultural capital in ways similar to those described by Bourdieu (1974). Gramsci, in turn, offers a helpful theoretical perspective to understand the schooling experiences of Pacific peoples in New Zealand elsewhere. His theory proposes that dominant hegemonic class has developed in the colonialist state of New Zealand, one that can co-opt a diverse range of minority ethnic groups to maintain the status quo of socio-economic and educational inequalities (Burke, 2005).

To achieve a critical mass or power base, which is often seen to be politically necessary, minority groups have had to band together to create a stronger voice. In the case of Pacific peoples, a decision to strategically amalgamate with different cultural and ethnic groups could

be driven by the need for recognition, gaining political clout or cultural momentum, or for other practical reasons such as to access funding. It could also be performed by government or school leaders for bureaucratic reasons or to reduce obligation to any specific group that falls under the umbrella of Pacific peoples. Again, this is linked to the idea of co-option, or the maintenance of a cultural hegemony as described by Gramsci (1992). This is a difficult concept for individual school leaders and teachers to engage with, as they often sit outside of the various Pacific or minority communities. Nevertheless, they have students from these communities in their schools and classes. Pacific teachers and school leaders who may sit in positions of power can also experience significant challenges when they are co-opted to implement school or government priorities. In many ways, they might be forced to provide a veneer of legitimacy to policies or procedures that further marginalise their communities.

Here, it is useful to consider definitions of the terms consultation and engagement. These terms refer to different processes involving different groups or stakeholders within a school community. The process of consultation typically involves gathering specific feedback on issues that relate to the broader community (School Trustees New Zealand School Trustees Association, 2024a). There are certain aspects of school governance that require the board or the school to consult with their community. Examples might include the restructuring of a school zone, or the development of a strategic plan. The Ministry of Education is clear that specific parties must be consulted with. However, consultation must not be entered with a predetermined outcome in mind. Schools and other bodies, such as the Ministry of Education, must be open to making the decision using the feedback obtained in the consultation process.

Conversely, the term engagement is focused on an ongoing relationship and participation in a broader timeframe. Engagement might include dialogue and involvement around specific contexts, such as the experience of a child at school, the monitoring of their academic or social progress, or the manner in which communication occurs between home and

school (School Trustees New Zealand School Trustees Association, 2024b). In New Zealand, schools are tasked with promoting and facilitating engagement from parents or families in the schooling experience of their students. There can be a tendency for the obligation of engagement to fall on the student or even the parent, resulting in parental attitudes being blamed for a perceived lack of engagement (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b). Similarly, there can be an expectation that Pacific teachers carry the task of engaging Pacific families. In some cases, there can be an expectation that these teachers will assume responsibilities beyond their professional role, or indeed that these tasks constitute their job. This can lead to burn out of Pacific teachers and subsequent retention issues (Brown et al., 2008).

As a result of these challenges, schools are legally required to more pro-actively engage with their Pacific community (Ministry of Education, 2020b; Parliamentary Counsel Office, 2020). In some cases, it might be incorrectly assumed that the school board is representative of the parent community and therefore this fulfils the obligation of consultation and even engagement. However, it is clear that Pacific communities have often lacked representation on these bodies (Ministry of Education, 2019b). There is also a risk that boards and other bodies which support the running of a schools, might deem the presence of a single representative as sufficient. This person might be labelled as the Pacific representative and be expected to speak and make decisions on behalf of the variety of Pacific peoples in the school community. In these scenarios, there is a significant risk that individual Pacific peoples are co-opted and used to perpetuate the hegemony of the dominant culture that exists within the school community (Timoteo, 2021). An improved and effective understanding of consultation and engagement is required in order to safeguard against this (Mauigoa, 2014).

Ministry of Education reviews and policies

Both Ministry of Education literature reviews and education plans have played a significant role in the shaping of Pacific education in New Zealand since the 1990s. There have been three

major Ministry of Education reports compiled in the last twenty years, specifically concerning Pacific educational issues in New Zealand, and conducted by Pacific researchers. In 2013 the Ministry of Education released a literature review, *An analysis of recent Pasifika education research literature to inform and improve outcomes for Pasifika learners* prepared by Chu et al. (2013). It highlights and explores evidence to support improved learning and achievement for Pacific students. It also identifies important areas for future research in Pacific education and examines research evidence in the preceding ten years under five broad topics. Each of these topics contain findings around best practice, as well as significant information gaps and recommendations for future research. It builds on the 2002 *Literature Review on Pacific Education Issues* prepared by Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu and Finau (2002).

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education's successive Pacific Education Plans have aimed to provide an overarching and strategic policy approach (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2012, 2020a; Tongati'o 1997). These plans have sought to drive and support improved achievement, attendance and engagement outcomes, as well as the school practices, pedagogies and leadership upon which these improvements depend. Wendt-Samu (2020) describes the "fifth Pasifika Education Plan" and the resulting impact:

The fifth Pasifika Education Plan [PEP] 2013–2017 guided the Ministry's efforts to influence schools and early learning centres efforts in relation to Pacific/Pasifika learners, their families, and communities. This PEP steered educator attention to Pacific/Pasifika learners and their families, and embedded key discourses developed over the prior phase – that "Pasifika success" requires a focus on Pacific/Pasifika learners and their families' culture, identity, and language; for teachers to practice "culturally responsive pedagogy" and the importance of nurturing interpersonal "relationships." Arguably, the re-structuring of MoE funded [professional learning and development] PLD has ensured a streamlined flow of the Ministry's construction of Pacific/Pasifika learners, their communities and the how their education is to be known, understood, and delivered by teachers (p.201).

In a policy sense, Pacific education plans have formed the backbone of the education system's strategic approach to align action in early childhood settings, schools, and tertiary settings with the aspirations of Pacific parents, families, and communities. Their development has, to

varying degrees, been in consultation with Pacific communities, academics, and leaders over the last three decades (Tongati'o, 2010). Wendt-Samu (2020) emphasises this consultation as it took place to develop the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030*:

Early in 2018, the Minister of Education announced a three-year Education Work Plan, which began with a comprehensive national conversation "... about what New Zealanders want their education system to look like" (as quoted in *Education Gazette*). The Work Plan recognised that there was a "... specific need for deep engagement with Māori and Pacific peoples, the disabled and those with extra learning difficulties" (Education Gazette, 2018). Extensive and intensive Pacific community consultation over 2018 and 2019 shaped two high level national developments holding huge potential as levers of change for Pacific learners and families, particularly within the early learning and compulsory sectors. Those leading these developments appear to have collaborated and engaged with Pacific peoples—learners, families, professional communities and other stakeholders—at the level of national strategy and policy in ways hitherto unseen (Wendt-Samu, 2020, p. 202).

While this is seemingly an improvement and a consultative approach gives these policies some level of credibility, it does not make them immune from criticism and critical analysis (Wendt-Samu, 2020). For example, if one considers this policy formation process via a critical theory lens of hegemonic maintenance (Burke, 2005), one might be wary of how the government of the day uses engagement and consultation with Pacific peoples as a tool of domination and assimilation. Questions of co-option arise when Pacific advisory groups are formed, for example how Crown officials select specific individuals and communities to carry out consultation. Decisions can sometimes be based on appearance of endorsement or consent from Pacific peoples, when in fact, representation and widespread consultation has been inadequate.

Tongati'o (2010) in her analysis of New Zealand Pacific education policy and associated education plans stated that:

Pacific Education Plans are intended to be aspirational and recognisable across education sectors, from early childhood to tertiary. They aim to provide a road map for guiding the education sector with a vision for Pacific success by giving signposts as targets and making forecasts about the preferred future status of Pacific peoples in education (Tongati'o, 2010, p. 225).

The use of the word aspirational by Tongati'o (2010) is intended to encourage a positive perspective on these key Ministry of Education policy documents. For example, the goals

outlined therein around attendance, achievement and tertiary transitions aspired to achieve significant improvement in these areas. However, it is important to consider that underpinning educational outcomes for Pacific peoples with purely aspirational intent could reinforce hegemonic power dynamics and stereotype biases (Turner et al., 2015). This approach can indicate that there is nothing systemic causing underachievement, but rather that the fault lies with the individual student or their community. It can also reflect an assimilationist perspective that requires Pacific peoples to conform to dominant cultural norms to be successful.

The role of relationships

Relationships have repeatedly been shown in literature to have an impact on Pacific achievement. This section discusses the literature around the integral relationships, and its connection with Pacific voices and perspectives, familial and community relationships with school, belonging, place, and preconceptions by schools around these factors.

Relationships and Pacific voices

Pacific communities have long emphasised the need for strong, effective and culturally appropriate relationships which link the school, in particular its teachers, to Pacific students and their communities (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b; Mara et al., 1994; Mara, 1998; Taleni et al., 2018). This is an area of critical importance for schools and communities, as valuing Pacific student and parent voices (i.e. perspectives) can empower and motivate schools to strive for Pacific success. For example, during their research into the effectiveness of schooling improvement initiatives for Pacific students, Amituanai-Toloa et al. (2009) consulted a range of Pacific parent and student voices. They found that these voices reflected a recurring call for change that was “deep and wide” across the schooling system and noted that:

Improved Pasifika achievement does not come from accepting the status quo in instruction. Nor does it come from only improving some parts of the system, which includes schools, policy makers and researchers. Better outcomes come from the kind of change that is dynamic; a force that creates deep and wide change for all those taking part in a project of national importance. These are the kinds of changes that bring about

improvements in schooling necessary for better Pasifika student outcomes. In combination they signal key components essential to getting large scale high-quality school education cultures and practices geared towards Pasifika student success (p. 13).

Furthermore, they added that:

The most effective interventions are likely to be focused on classroom instruction as well as the relationship between the community and the school. The latter relationship is important not just for building practices that are complementary and mutually respectful but also so that students and families feel that the school reflects and constructs their identities and expertise in culturally appropriate ways (p. 14).

Due to a variety of different factors, schools often perceive parental and community voices as difficult to gather and work with. A commonly-cited barrier includes lacking the confidence and competence to develop such relationships (Chu-Fuluifaga & Reynolds, 2023; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021a). Perceptions of Pacific students and families, and the stereotypes that can accompany these perceptions can cause misunderstandings that can harm relationships or cause a deficit view, which determines the kind of education Pacific student can receive at school (Spiller, 2013). Examining teacher and school perceptions is crucial and can lead to the development of stronger relationships with Pacific students and communities.

Relationship between parent and school

Familial relationships and the involvement of parents in their children's education is a critical factor which can determine a student's level of success. Some argue that it is the right of the child to be supported by their parents to achieve to their full potential (Enemu & Obidike, 2013). The parents and teachers interviewed by Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afai, Taleni, et al. (2009) found a strong desire among Pacific parents for their children to succeed educationally, however, a variety of factors which prevent their involvement. One of the main difficulties surrounding parental involvement at home is the low economic status of many Pacific families (Statistics New Zealand, 2023), however, there are a variety of aspects which need to be considered.

One prominent issue is the different family structure that is created upon migration to New Zealand, and how that family structure aligns with the New Zealand schooling system. Fletcher et al. (2009) assert that many Pacific families seem to have closer extended bonds than non-Pacific families. For example, participants in their study commented that Pacific children live with both parents more often than non-Pacific children. However, as another participant in their study pointed out, there are differences. They emphasise that in places like Samoa, there are usually a lot of extended family such as, aunties, uncles, grandparents, and great grandparents living close-by to offer support while parents are at work or busy with other commitments. Another fundamental issue conveyed by Fletcher et al. (2009) is that Pacific parents seem to be largely uninformed of what is going on in their children's school life. This lack of awareness only increases the importance to utilise mechanisms which allow them to participate in their children's schooling more fully and to have their voices heard. One only needs to consider the low number of Pacific parents on Boards of Trustees to see how that problem manifests (Ministry of Education, 2019b). Pacific families often report feeling excluded and isolated in many cases, however, Hunter et al. (2016) poses a way to overcome this:

... when educators consider the language and culture of Pāsifika students and explicitly establish respectful and reciprocal relationships with the students and their family, learning is enhanced, and their cultural identity positively affirmed (p. 197).

In some ways, the school can replace the concept of the village for Pacific families, with the principal and leaders of the school being seen as matai (Samoan word for chief), which makes it crucial for the school to embrace strong, reciprocal, and visible relationships with families (Talení et al., 2018).

Despite the emphasis placed by Ministry of Education policy on developing relationships, particularly in the Pacific context, Chu et al. in their 2013 Pacific education literature review stated that the amount of research evidence in this area was surprisingly low:

There appear[ed] to be a dearth of empirical research that could inform policy and practice regarding approaches to family and community engagement” (p. 16).

This was over a decade ago. In the 2021 literature review, prepared by Chu et al., the authors list areas for further attention, including “the potential for and actual contributions of parents, families, and communities to Pacific education” (p.98), and developing strong connections between schools and Pacific families. This renewed call may suggest that we still have limited data to support the assumption of reliability when it comes to schools developing effective relationships and partnerships for the benefit of Pacific learners. As mentioned above, the Education Review Office (2012) highlighted in their report, *Improving education outcomes for Pacific learners*, that effective connections and partnerships between schools and Pacific communities are almost non-existent. Fairbairn-Dunlop (2021b) asserts that more research on effective practice for developing home-school relationships for Pacific peoples is required, particularly in places like Christchurch, the largest urban centre in the South Island.

An overwhelming body of research indicates that Pacific parents have high aspirations for their children, and wish to see their home languages fostered and encouraged at school (Cahill, 2006; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b; Gorinski, 2005; Luafutu-Simpson, 2006; Riwai-Couch et al., 2020). There is considerable evidence supporting the use of bilingual programs in the early years to support Samoan learners. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that acknowledgement and support for Pacific languages results in positive impacts on their learning and engagement (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010).

However, facilitating these positive impacts is not without challenges. It is rare for schools to have an established, sustainable model of Pacific home-school engagement and provision of Pacific languages (Hunter et al., 2016; Podmore & Sauvao, 2003; Tuifagalele et al., 2024). This is particularly the case in Pacific ethnic communities that are smaller and do not have a critical mass of people. This is true, for example, for Cook Islands, Kiribati and Niuean communities, who often have significantly smaller populations across towns and cities

in New Zealand. Retaining connections with home languages and cultures in subsequent generations can be difficult. As Si'ilata et al. (2017) explains:

For most migrating Pasifika peoples, there was no intention to cut off all ties with home, or, conversely, to wholeheartedly assimilate into the host nation. Concerted effort was made to maintain their respective languages, cultures, and identities. The transmission of language, culture, and traditional forms of identity on to the next generation was more problematic. Pasifika migrants tended to locate in the same suburbs, find employment in similar areas of the labour market and often worship in heritage island groups, in their traditional languages. Their children were exposed to wider influences, including the powerful process of state schooling. (Si'ilata et al., 2017).

This subsequent engagement of Pacific young people in schooling, while an object of hope and imagined guarantee of future prosperity for Pacific migrants, has often resulted in cultural and linguistic loss. Barriers and persistent inequities that exist within the school system have meant that success is not always realised, and marginalisation continues. Notably, many Pacific student do not feel a sense of belonging.

Relationships and belonging

Belonging is a relational concept that communicates a sense of connection to others, to place, to physical and emotional security (Antonsich, 2010). These connections may create within the individual or community an ability to belong and to grow in spaces where social and cultural aspects relate to these senses (May, 2011). These connections include family or friendships, language or cultural practice, or even a place where the person or persons can find safety and trust (Durham et al., 2023).

A sense of belonging to Pacific community, and the reciprocal nature of the relationships between the individual and the collective, permeate the lives of many Pacific peoples. Examples of these communities include churches, villages, and extended family networks (Durham et al., 2023; Fa'avae, 2016). The below excerpt from the speech of former Samoan Head of State Tui Atua Tamasese Efi gives a strong sense of the way that many Pacific

people see themselves entwined within the great network of family, village, culture, church, and community.

I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas, and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share a tofi (inheritance) with my family, my village, and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging (Efi, 2003, p. 51).

This spiritual and collective understanding of belonging provides an insight into the way some, but not all, Pacific learners might view themselves in relation to their identity as a Pacific person. Of course, exactly what this looks like on an individual basis, is very nuanced. For example, for many Pacific people in New Zealand being connected to a church can mean that you are connected to your wider family, a strong social group, your culture, and language (Chu et al., 2013; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b). This is in addition to a spirituality that binds your community together in both practice and belief. Churches also shape the worldview of the individual and the collective and have done so in ways that can be viewed as both positive and negative.

For many Pacific families, church and other community cultural organisations play a vital role in sustaining identity and can also contribute towards learning or attitudes towards education in New Zealand schools (Hunter, et al., 2016; Fletcher J., Parkhill, Fa'afoi, & Taleni, 2006). For others, there has been a distancing from Church or other religious communities because of changes to personal beliefs, or because of the role religion has played in the colonial and assimilation process (Manukia, 2021). This can be seen in many ways as a desire to recover a pre-colonial way of life or belief system and a strengthening of ancestral connections. It is also, for some, an act of resistance and defiance against a European dominated cultural and spiritual landscape that may seem foreign or distant.

The Youth '12 Health and Wellbeing survey states that 61.2% of Pacific students reported that spiritual beliefs are important, 59.7% attend a place of worship once week or

more, and 62.2% feel like they belong to their place of worship (Clark et al., 2013). The 2018 census indicated that 67.9% of Pacific people identified as Christian, with all other religious affiliations coming in at under 1%. This points strongly to the importance of spirituality within Pacific communities (Ministry of Education, 2013). More recent data from the 2018 census indicates that while religious affiliation is still high for Pacific peoples, there is a growing number who have no religious affiliation. Between 2006 and 2018, the number of Pacific people who identified as having no religion rose from 14% to 22.9% (Statistics New Zealand, 2024b). For schools, developing this awareness of religious affiliation and the priority placed on spirituality in general, might require the formation of relationships with churches or community groups. It could also involve the development of school actions or values which connect to some Pacific peoples' values and spiritualities that are distinct from a formal or institutional church.

It is important to note, therefore, what events and opportunities can serve as a catalyst for improving relationships and senses of belonging. Some work has been done which examines the potential of Pacific performing arts groups that perform at events such as Polyfest or other cultural events. These groups and events can serve as bridges between the school and the community (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). This was evident in the work of Faitala et al. (2022) who highlighted the potential of Polyfest, to enhance school community engagement activities. They noted that:

Polyfest has been used to create positive outcomes for student growth, engagement with school and academic achievement, as well as an opportunity for building positive relationships between school and home for Pacific families. Strong home-school partnerships are critical to Pacific student success within the school system. Teachers and schools that are able to build and nurture these relationships will enable much higher levels of educational success (p.3).

While events such as Polyfest, Pacific language weeks, and other cultural events can help foster a sense of belonging in school, it is vital that these events are not the end point. The

development of the home-school relationships, as well as an emphasis on family involvement is important too.

Considerations around the role of pastoral care in supporting a sense of belonging for Pacific students is also important (Barber, 2016). Challenging assumptions of what constitutes belonging for Pacific peoples in contemporary New Zealand secondary schools is crucial, as:

Cultural reference points have shifted and although some Māori and Pasifika students access major traditional cultural markers such as language and places of worship/meeting, for other students cultural connectedness in these ways is either not sought, or not readily accessible (Barber, 2016, p. 29).

Siataga (2011), in his examination of Pacific child and youth wellbeing states that:

Intergenerational and transgenerational dynamics continue to raise some concern for the psychosocial development of New Zealand-born and/or raised first-, second and third-generation Pacific children and young people. Gaining a sense of belonging is about much more than ethnic affiliation, particularly in a pluralistic multi-cultural social networking environment” (Siataga, 2011, pp. 154-155).

Ultimately, any attempt by schools to create a deeper sense of belonging for current and future generations of Pacific peoples will require an understanding of the concept of place.

Relationship with ‘place’

Place is the known and is full of memory and meaning. Space is unknown, and devoid of memory and meaning. Tuan (2003) offers an insight into how we might define or understand the concept of these concepts:

In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. “Space” is more abstract than “place.” What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. Architects talk about the spatial qualities of place; they can equally well speak of the locational (place) qualities of space. The ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition (p. 6).

Central to this is the experience of the individual and/or the collective, existing somewhere on a spectrum of connection. This spectrum considers both the physical and the emotional:

Place is a centre of meaning constructed by experience. Place is known not only through the eyes and mind but also through the more passive and direct modes of experience, which resist objectification [...] At a high theoretical level, places are points in a spatial system. At the opposite extreme, they are strong visceral feelings. Places are seldom known at either extreme: the one is too remote from sensory experience to be real, and

the other presupposes rootedness in a locality and an emotional commitment to it that is increasingly rare. To most people in the modern world, places lie somewhere in the middle range of experience (Tuan, 1975, p. 152)

This definition can offer a structured way of reasoning how a young Tongan student, born and raised in Christchurch, New Zealand and who has never visited the place where his parents were from, might perceive Tonga as home. This could especially be the case when he is with his peers who also have a connection to Tonga, or his family, who recreate the sense of place in the home or church. Fehoko (2015) in his research with Tongan males in Auckland, found that the activity of kava drinking: “plays a significant role in teaching, reinforcing and maintaining the Tongan culture and language [and acts as] a cultural classroom in which debates, songs and music rejuvenated and maintained Tongan culture and language” (Fehoko, 2015, p. 131). This emotional connection to cultural practices can create a sense of place in the mind of Pacific students. At the other end of the spectrum, a person living in Tonga might experience a local “rootedness” in place, which, for example, can offer a rich understanding of the physical realities of traditional ecological knowledge (Puloka-Luey, 2021).

Therefore, this connection with place, as defined by Tuan (1975), is important to consider in relation to Pacific peoples’ experiences in New Zealand. This is especially true in places like Christchurch and other South Island locations, which can seem a world away from ancestral homelands. Pacific communities in New Zealand tend to live in proximity to the Pacific Ocean, and perhaps a few short hours flight from other Pacific nations. Despite this proximity, geographical, social, and economic barriers can make it difficult to access traditional places, lands, and bodies of water. Other factors, such as assimilationist schooling practices and intergenerational disconnection can sever the social and emotional ties to ancestral places that might have previously nurtured traditional identity formation processes. This can impact cultural and identity development for those who have migrated (and subsequent generations).

Additionally, Fa'avae (2022) offers some insights about the nuances of Pacific people's identity formation processes when living on Māori whenua (land). He emphasises the importance of identity development in supporting Pacific peoples to navigate the complexities of life in Aotearoa (New Zealand):

Indigeneity politicizes Pasifika/Pacific's place in–relationship–with Māori as ancestral whanaunga (kin) in Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa as well as migrant settlers within Aotearoa NZ as a settler colonial nation bounded to the conditions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. An Indigeno–centric view homes in on the centrality of grounding one's critical consciousness, a sense of being–in–struggle and the reflexive thinking being with/in whenua/land/place. Adopting an Indigeno–centric view acknowledges the significance of relational positionalities and our socio-political as well social justice responsibilities. For Tongan and other Pacific migrants who have now settled on Aotearoa NZ whenua, appreciating and knowing our tu'ufonua (sense of belonging, sense of indigeneity and their impacts on other Indigenous communities) can help us navigate our social responsibilities in tu'atonga (outside of the homeland, the diaspora) (Fa'avae, 2022, pp. 8-9)

Among other transnational Indigenous peoples or people living in a diaspora, this relationship to place is consistent. However, it is diverse, unique in its approach and ungeneralisable (Lowan, 2009). Regarding the context of Native American communities, Cajete asserts that:

Every cultural group established their relations to [their place] over time. Whether that place is in the desert, a mountain valley, or along a seashore, it is in the context of natural community, and through that understanding they established an educational process that was practical, ultimately ecological, and spiritual. In this way they sought and found their life (Cajete, 1994, p. 113).

So, it is also significant to remember that Indigenous people from Pacific Island nations, too, have “long relationships” with their ancestral lands, and “pedagogies and knowledges [emerge] from those relationships” (Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014, p. 8). Land or place, including the ocean, can be considered the core of Indigenous cultural identity. Therefore, these places have the “potential to revitalize traditional cultural practices that have been silenced by dominant [educational] interventions” (Trinidad, 2014, p. 111). It is worth school leaders seeking out and adopting strategies that support schools to connect with places with which their Pacific students and communities identify.

Social justice within the education system in this regard would involve “privileging and centring Indigenous cultural knowledge, values and traditional ways that are validated by a specific cultural community” (Trinidad, 2014, p. 111). An example of how this is being attempted with Māori as tangata whenua at SBHS through the design elements of their rebuilt campus (discussed below). Pacific peoples are not Indigenous to New Zealand but can be considered as connected to a transnational Indigeneity. Therefore, it is important to listen to their unique voice on this matter. Unfortunately, the ties and connections to specific ancestral lands have the potential to weaken as a result of migration and generational distance. However, newly established connections to places and lands emerge, and fostering and understanding these could play a significant role in facilitating students and family connection to the school.

Preconceptions around engagement and relationships with Pacific communities

Certain preconceptions often exist in the minds of school leaders when they consider how to best engage or build relationship with Pacific families. In recent decades, many anecdotal stereotypes have arisen when considering the attitude of Pacific parents and families towards education (Fletcher et al., 2006). These range from the opinion that parents are not interested in being involved in the education of their children, to the view that parents see education as absolutely necessary and will, in some cases, pressure the child in the study he or she is undertaking (Spiller, 2012). In reality, while there might be certain conclusions or common themes that arise from engagement with Pacific voices, there is a diversity of thought among Pacific peoples. Any conclusions that might be drawn are dependent on various factors, as is true for non-Pacific communities (Tongati’o, 1997). These factors may include socio-economic contexts, cultural backgrounds, and parental experiences of schooling. Cahill (2006) found a strong desire among Samoan parents to see their children achieve to higher educational levels than they themselves were able to. For example, one of her participants stated:

We want them to get qualifications and get good jobs and secure themselves for their futures. We want them to get higher qualifications – educational qualifications – and get good jobs instead of what we are doing (Cahill, 2006, p. 62).

Research such as this needs to be acknowledged by school leaders and boards in order to eradicate stereotyping and marginalisation by those within the educational community.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn upon an extensive body of literature to illuminate key concepts and recurring themes in Pacific peoples' experiences of the New Zealand secondary schools' system. The first part of this chapter outlined key terminology and set out important definitions concerning ethnicity and Indigeneity in relation to Pacific peoples in New Zealand. It also examined the diversity within the New Zealand Pacific community and their connection to global perspectives on migrants and Indigenous peoples. Next, in part two, I discussed the underpinnings and issues concerning Pacific education in New Zealand. I also critiqued Ministry of Education Pacific education policies and strategies that are linked to the approaches undertaken by successive governments and schools. Part three focused on the role of different relationships experienced by Pacific peoples in the New Zealand education system. This included interactions with international literature to consider why more effort needs to be made in developing strategies that create deeper senses of 'place' and 'belonging' within schools that serve Pacific peoples. Finally, part three of this chapter has provided a conceptual framework, informed by some leading critical theorists. This has helped me to better understand the place of voice and power in relation to the schooling experiences of Pacific peoples in the setting that is central to this study. Here, I explained the ideas of cultural capital and cultural hegemony, drawing on the thinking of Bourdieu and Gramsci. Next, I emphasised the call of Freire for secondary schools to be transformed into vehicles for the humanisation and liberation of Pacific people. The authors central to this theoretical framework will also inform my analyses of data

discussed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. To conclude, the following chapter (Chapter 3) now outlines the methodology used in this research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological framework and approaches used in undertaking a study on representations of Pacific voice, from family, student, teacher, and community, in a Canterbury secondary school context. It builds on my positioning as a teacher-researcher as outlined in chapter one and summarises the qualitative research process. Part one of this chapter lays out research questions and objectives for this study. It also develops thinking about Pacific research methods, and the Pacific values and metaphorical language associated with them (Naepi, 2016; Powell, 2023). Part two explains the research design of this study by first outlining the role of the *tīvaevae* research model developed by Teremoana Maua-Hodges. Next, it discusses why a participatory action research (PAR) approach was adopted. Central to that was the application of the *talanoa* research methodology, as used by numerous other Pacific academics in recent decades. Part three outlines the data collection procedures. This includes a discussion about considerations around the recruitment of participants, informed consent procedures, and the identification and management of potential risks. It then describes my *talanoa* with focus groups and individual participants.

Section four then discusses the data analysis process, central to this research. Finally, section five discusses ethical considerations, including the choice of using PAR and ethical principles practiced in this research.

Research questions

The overarching question that informed this study was: “what do the voices of Pacific students and their families say are desired areas of growth and development at Shirley Boys’ High School (SBHS) with regards to Pacific success?” The research questions central to this study were:

1. What is the ideal role of Pacific values in the school environment and in what ways are they enacted or not enacted in curriculum design, delivery, assessment and evaluation procedures, community engagement, and school culture?
2. To what extent do significant relationships (i.e. amongst students; between students/teachers; students/families; families/school; school/church; family/church) impact positively and negatively upon the educational aspirations of Pacific students at SBHS?
3. To what degree does the environment of SBHS foster a sense of ‘place’ and ‘belonging’ for Pacific students, families, teachers, and communities affiliated to that school, and what, if anything, can be done to enhance a sense of place for Pacific students, teachers and communities at that school?
4. In relation to local, national, and international literature, what are the implications of the research findings?

These research questions were co-constructed in the sense that they were the direct result of a series of talanoa I had with Pacific leaders across Christchurch. The focus of these preliminary conversations was to scope what they felt about the lived realities of schooling experienced in Christchurch. These preliminary talanoa are further discussed later in this chapter.

Pacific research methodologies

It was important in this research to choose appropriate Pacific research methodologies that were applicable to my research purpose and setting. Pacific research methodologies have several key elements in common. As Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery (2019) state, “these commonalities highlight that Pacific and Pasifika communities share semiotic and representational perspectives rooted in Pacific realities” (p. 191). Two of these commonalities, Pacific values and metaphorical language—as they relate to *tīvaevae* and *talanoa* – are briefly

outlined here. This part also acknowledges the critical lens that can be employed when working with these.

Pacific values

Understanding and appreciating Pacific values is critical in working with Pacific peoples and Pacific research methodologies. This is not to imply a homogeneity among values systems across the Pacific, even if there are multiple expressions of common values that are found across the various communities (Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery, 2019). Values such as reciprocity, respect, family, love, service, spirituality, and collectivism connect communities and provide a foundation on which to build and conceptualise new traditions in environments that are different from the traditional homelands (Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery, 2019). These value expressions have helped form the foundations of life in Pacific communities in the diaspora. In countries such as New Zealand and Australia, communities use these values to emphasise a strengths-based approach to work with their people in education (Tongati'o 1997).

When it comes to Pacific research methodologies, values underpin much of the process (Enari, 2021; Fa'avae et al., 2016; Naepi, 2016). Both the *tivaevae* model and *talanoa* methodology have these underpinning values, offering a research design whereby the researcher views the participants through the lens of these values.

Metaphorical language in Pacific research

Pacific research methodologies are based principally around imagery that links to practices, concepts, or realities present in the Pacific. These are used to guide research as ethical practices (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017; Eseta Tualaulelei & Judy McFall-McCaffery, 2019). This metaphorical approach strengthens the accessibility of the methodology by grounding the research process, or aspects of it, in familiar customs or traditions. For the Pacific researcher, this offers a tool through which to culturally locate themselves within the research process, to anchor their identity, and engage and empower Pacific participants. If the researcher engaging

with a Pacific research methodology is unfamiliar with the specific Pacific practices that underpin that methodology, adopting a metaphorical approach offers a window into a deeper connection with Pacific epistemologies. This potentially develops the researcher's approach and fosters an understanding and appreciation of Pacific cultural approaches in research. However, there are also risks attached to the use of these methodologies, including if the researcher makes assumptions about the community they are working with. For example, a researcher may appropriate cultural knowledge or misuse the method due to limited knowledge of the specific practice. Care must be taken in any work that engages with Pacific research methods.

Research design

The design of this research drew upon various methods. Participants in this research were from a range of different Pacific and culturally diverse backgrounds, and the methodological approach needed to reflect and appreciate this reality. A PAR methodology was used for the initial research design (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This provided the basis for my research. PAR connects theory and practice by bringing people together to pursue practical solutions to their issues. This knowledge aims to be directly useful to the people (Shortall, 2011). PAR is more fully discussed below.

PAR was used in conjunction with two Pacific research approaches (the talanoa methodology and the *tivaevae* model) in the data collection and analysis of findings. These were selected to ensure that the research was oriented towards receiving and responding to Pacific voices, for example, by ensuring that participants were able to engage effectively with the researcher (Enari, 2021; Punch & Oancea, 2014). I also endeavoured to use “strategies that are Pacific in nature” (Sanga & Niroa, 2004). I have cultural connections to the Cook Islands, and I used the *tivaevae* model to ground and culturally locate myself as an emerging researcher. Most of the participants in this research project were of Samoan or Tongan descent. So, it was

appropriate to use the talanoa research method to enable them to engage in this study as informed participants – using a discussion format that they knew well (i.e. talanoa). This use of Pacific research methodologies has been “promoted as an alternative paradigm for research that involves Indigenous people’s issues” (Te Ava & Page, 2018) and can be seen to create contexts which promote Indigenous self-sufficiency (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008).

Tīvaevae research model

The tīvaevae research model and theoretical framework is a Cook Islands Indigenous research model that has slowly emerged over the last two decades as a Pacific research methodology (Te Ava & Page, 2018). It is based on the collaborative creation of tīvaevae. It has a clear process and a specific set of values attached to it (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019). The tīvaevae model is based primarily on the work of Maua-Hodges (2000; 2003). This initial work was further developed by several Cook Island academics, including Te Ava and Page (2018), Hunter and Hunter (2019), and Futter-Puati and Maua-Hodges (2019). The tīvaevae approach aligns with other Indigenous Pacific research methods, including the talanoa methodology, with which I found a particular synergy (Houghton, 2023). Pacific research approaches seek to connect with Pacific ways of life and cultural aspects:

Theorisation as an activity is seldom an isolated pursuit and genealogy need not develop within only one model appropriate for one locale, but also between models serving diverse communities (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p. 200).

Traditionally, tīvaevae are created by Cook Island women or mamas, often matriarchs within families or villages:

A tivaevae [is] unique to the Kuki Airani, is a handmade, bedspread-size quilt made by a group of people, usually women, who are led by a ta’unga tivaevae/expert in quilt making—who work collaboratively together to produce a quilt that will become the property of one of the group of sewers (Ta’unga / an expert, skilled craftsman, one with special lore or skill) (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019, p. 140).

Their skill and expertise, gives a tangible way to commemorate occasions, ceremonies, or memories. One might see these women creating tīvaevae in the Punanga Nui Market on a weekday or in Cook Island community centres at various places in the diaspora such as New Zealand or Australia (Tagata Pasifika, 2019). Tīvaevae are often associated with gifting and legacy in Cook Island culture - precious items to be gifted at significant events and to be treasured by future generations.

My own family had a past tradition of making tīvaevae, and we possess tīvaevae that were gifted to us. However, when my mother and her family moved to New Zealand in the 1960s, we stopped making them. Recently, my brother and grandmother, who are 28 and 85 respectively, have once again begun making tīvaevae. This is part of our family's growing understanding of Cook Island cultural practices. Furthermore, it is representative of the intergenerational gaps that can open and widen in families in the aftermath of migration. The subsequent cultural isolation and adaptation of cultural practice often means the loss of knowledge, like in this case. This research, and the work of my family members mentioned above, is helping to provide a platform for restoration and cultural reorientation.

As a result of this somewhat fragile connection to physical tīvaevae practice, I made the decision to travel to Porirua, alongside fellow Cook Island researcher Teariki Tuiono, to visit Teremoana Maua-Hodges, the architect of the tīvaevae research model. I was able to spend time with her to develop my own thinking about how this cultural practice of the Cook Islands could serve to frame my own research approach. These conversations were extremely valuable and gave me a powerful insight into her motivations around developing the tīvaevae model. Maua-Hodges revealed the way that she almost stumbled across the idea of research focus groups being like the vaine tini or groups of women creating tīvaevae that she had observed her mother in growing up. This opened the idea of research being something accessible to her as a Cook Islander and Pacific person and, in many ways, reduced her fears of being

intellectually inadequate. Here, Maua-Hodges is suggesting a metaphor to help demystify research. As she explained, “to understand the process of *tīvaevae* is to understand the process of research”. She also referred to *tīvaevae* as the collaborative creation or manifestation of something new, in the same way that research “manifests new knowledge using the wisdom of others” (Maua-Hodges, 2019).

The *tīvaevae* model as a metaphor for research processes

The three dimensions of the *tīvaevae* model reflect the *tīvaevae* construction process and are outlined by Maua-Hodges as follows:

1. *Ko'iko'i* – gathering of patterns and ideas to inform the creation.
2. *Tuitui* – the sewing of the pattern onto the canvas – the physical making of the *tīvaevae* within the community of expertise.
3. *Akairianga* – reflection on the creation and offering of the *tīvaevae* to others as a gift.

These three dimensions reflect the process undertaken by the researcher to develop a powerful ‘creation’ so to speak. In the following paragraphs, I share my thoughts concerning each phase:

Ko'iko'i

The *ko'iko'i* phase represents a beginning, the start of a collaboration or codesign process. This involves reaching out and searching for connections, motivations, and ideas. As Te Ava and Page (2018, p. 72) explain:

The *koikoi* process required knowledge and experience in planning, gathering the appropriate materials at the right time and at the right place and ensuring that the pattern tells a story of Cook Islands history. These stories are *tapu* (sacred), central to the values of Cook Islands cultural practice and made ready for crafting into a *tīvaevae*. The significance of this phase is that Cook Islanders learn to create their own way of understanding of the world in which they live. They, in effect, bring their own

knowledge and investigate how the “patterns” fit together and then are evaluated for success.

What is achieved in the process of ko‘iko‘i will underpin the creation of the tīvaevae and will form the basis of the legacy that outlasts the creators of the tīvaevae (Rongokea, 2001).

This applies to research in the same way patterns for tīvaevae are developed and discussed prior to creation. At the outset of this doctoral research, I had my own motivations and ideas about what I wanted to study and how I might do so. However, in a discussion with my supervisor, we determined that as part of my initial research design, I needed to consider an approach that involved a greater degree of co-construction. In effect, I needed to survey the Pacific education landscape locally and nationally. As an emerging researcher of Cook Islands descent, we agreed I also needed to talk with leaders in my field, like Teremoana Maua Hodges. This led to an initial scan of literature, and to a series of talanoa in Christchurch and elsewhere. This scoping phase helped me to identify my research problem and then develop some aligned research objectives and questions (discussed later in this chapter).

Tuitui

The tuitui part of the process is where the physical process of creating a tīvaevae begins, putting the planning and theory into practice. In the creation of a tīvaevae, the finished product is not achieved in a single session. Instead, it requires a collaborative effort. This will take many hours and may span several months or a year. This is all dependent on the complexity of patterns and the size of the creation (Rongokea, 2001). Technical skill and problem solving are the essential elements in this phase.

In this research, the tuitui process is a metaphor for the dialogue and engagement with participants, as well as the analysis of the data. The tuitui reflects that time when I entered what I thought was going to be the relatively simple exercise of collecting the data, doing so in an environment in which I had lived and worked for many years. However, the reality of the

Covid-19 pandemic brought with it various complexities such as lockdowns, limited group gatherings, mask use and physical distancing.

In much the same way as care needs to be taken in the creation of *tīvaevae*, time and care needed to be taken with the voices of the participants that they had shared with me. I had the perspective that the interview data I would collect were like a *taonga* or treasure that I had a responsibility to use wisely. I wanted to ethically present the participants ideas in much the same way that the ethics of stitching together the *tīvaevae* should occur. Here, ethical consideration relates to the way that various patterns and designs in *tīvaevae* fit within both a tradition and a local or familial context, arranged accordingly against a solid background of material. This needed to be seen against a background of research literature concerned with Pacific education nationally and internationally.

In her literary research, Powell (2013) used the *tīvaevae* as the basis for her conceptual framework. For me, the *tuitui* phase of my research involved working collaboratively with my supervisors to draft the thesis in much the same way that making a *tīvaevae* (metaphorically speaking) involves “sewing and stitching where my skills as a [researcher] become the needle that affixes my analysis to the backing cloth” (Powell, 2013, p. 6). While my use of the *talanoa* methodology allowed relative freedom for the participants, I still needed to ensure accuracy in my data analysis (Fa‘avae et al., 2022). Like the “sewing and stitching” of the *tuitui* process, my thematic analysis of the interview (*talanoa*) data needed to include cross-referencing of participant qualitative data. To assist me, I was able to draw upon the guidance of my supervisors and Pacific academics as reflective sounding boards. This, in turn, prompted my re-examination of literature concerning Pacific secondary schooling and school/community engagement models. This is a key part of the process, leading to the completion of the work, or *‘akairi‘anga*.

'Akairi'anga

The 'akairi'anga or gifting of the finished tivaevae, represents the completion of the creation process. The tivaevae is now presented and can be seen by all, showcased, and celebrated with a view to the legacy that it embodies (Rongokea, 2001). This step therefore involves returning to the community and making the offering of the completed work, often at a ceremony or occasion, understanding the reciprocal nature of the gift. While writing this thesis, my research was similarly on the cusp of something I liken to the 'akairi'anga phase. The ultimate intention was to complete and present a copy of the thesis back to SBHS. This meant presenting back to those who participated – staff, students, and teachers, in the form of a summary of the thesis and a reflective talanoa. It also meant sharing with the school's board as well as its current Pacific staff, to ensure the findings of the study are used, and the voices of the participants respected and treasured. The tivaevae model recognises the special relationship between the researcher and the participants, one characterised by the value of reciprocity that underpins the tivaevae creation process and comes to the fore in the 'akairi'anga phase.

As stated above, the tivaevae model continues to be developed by Cook Island academics. The inclusion of it in my research design is an appropriate way to acknowledge and develop where I am coming from as a researcher of Cook Island heritage. It is also a model to compliment the more popular talanoa research methodology. The koikoi phase, which involved initial collaboration to facilitate research design, is reflected below in the utilisation of the talanoa method to engage community members. I sought the advice and perspectives of collaborators, leaders and innovators connected to Pacific education specifically in Christchurch. This was intentional, as I sought Pacific perspectives specific to Christchurch around what might constitute a worthwhile research direction.

Talanoa research methodology

Alongside *tīvaevae*, I chose to use the talanoa research methodology (Vaiotei, 2006) from the initial development of my research, through to the actual collection of data. The talanoa method is “an existing cultural practice of the Pacific” (Fa’avae, 2016) and relies on the development of strong relationships between the researcher and the participant (Vaiotei, 2006). The concept of talanoa is recognised across the Pacific in countries such as Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Hawai’i, and the Solomon Islands (Prescott, 2008) and usually refers to a conversation and thus, likened to a conversational mode of research. The word itself is used across several Pacific languages for example Fijian, Tongan, and Samoan. A breakdown of the word indicates this: *tala* meaning to talk, and *noa* meaning anything or nothing in particular, thus indicating a conversation that could go in a variety of directions depending on how the participants feel. The specific focus of the talanoa is controlled by the “interests of the participants themselves and their immediate surroundings and worldviews” (Johansson Fua, 2014, p. 99).

I have chosen to use this method to give a sense of legitimacy to the research conducted. Talanoa is a phenomenological research method (Vaiotei, 2006) which focuses on understanding how the participants experience in relation to certain events, and being derived from Pacific philosophy, values and cultural traditions. It is “orientated towards defining and acknowledging Pacific aspirations while developing and implementing Pacific theoretical and methodological preferences for research” (Vaiotei, 2006, p. 25). Wary of adopting a homogenous approach in this regard, I took the following steps to ensure participants were comfortable with engaging in talanoa. Firstly, I sought to develop a talanoa approach that was contextualised in my research setting. For example, it was occurring within the community of our school. As well as conducting a literature review on the use of talanoa in research, I received advice from several parents within the school community, as well as cultural advisors

at the University of Canterbury. This was to avoid interpretations of talanoa being rigidly connected to a specific Pacific culture. Secondly, ensured that each participant received a full explanation of the talanoa approach before data collection was undertaken and had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

One of the central aims of this research is to break down the barriers that often exist between traditional schooling methods in New Zealand, and to allow the authentic voices of Pacific families and students to emerge. This is no easy task, as the judgement of what is ‘authentic’ or not can be hotly debated and contested. Vaiolleti (2006) discusses how the talanoa method reflects the “lived realities” (p.22) of Pacific cultures and peoples, and allows the researcher to collect authentic, quality data in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner.

There is need a to cast a critical lens over the talanoa research methodology. Firstly, there is a risk of cultural assumptions being made when this methodology is used in a diverse Pacific community. Therefore, I needed to ensure that I carefully considered my position in relation to the talanoa approach. Talanoa is often identified as a pan-Pacific approach, which implies a homogeneity across Pacific cultures and lexicons, risking an embodiment of a colonial or historical western perspective or approach (Tualualelei and McFall-McCaffery, 2019). To avoid these assumptions, I explained talanoa in Samoan and Tongan-specific contexts, as well as giving examples of similar practice in my own Cook Island context. Due to the intergenerational disconnection, which many Pacific young people experience, there were participants who did not connect culturally to talanoa practices or understand their relevance. In my approach, there was a need to be aware of the community in which I worked, and to be flexible in approaching and working with participants.

With the use of the talanoa research methodology, there is a reliance on a relational approach. Risks and challenges can include power imbalance or feelings of intimidation among participants. As an ethical consideration, I took steps to try to lessen the risk around power

imbalances, given my position as a teacher at the school. Some of the measures I undertook have been discussed earlier in this chapter, including developing a context specific approach, as well as giving participants a full explanation before the interviews and focus groups commenced. I also aimed to provide a welcoming atmosphere, with an open and semi-casual beginning and ending. Simple food was provided during the talanoa. I felt that my approach aligned with the assertion of Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2012) that “only with prolonged periods of participant-observation can the trust and mutual respect required of valid talanoa research be developed. Further, the long period of residence is necessary for our participants’ multiple ‘truths’ to be exhumed” (p.5). They go on to ask: “Is the mere effort to apply this approach enough or do short stints in the field have the potential to produce potentially invalid or even harmful research data?” (p. 5). In my experience, my long-term presence and work in the specific community that constituted my research field meant I was able to draw on shared understandings or concepts while in the talanoa.

Another element of the relational approach required for talanoa was the careful consideration needed with parents. In all cases, I was younger than the parents. Each was approached in a specific way, and I attempted to engage in talanoa that was both respectful and provocative, to create a space where they felt comfortable to share their thoughts openly. Fa’avae et al (2016) related that he needed to take particular care when engaging with older Tongan males. This required specific cultural protocols to be followed. In my own experience, I had both Tongan and Samoan parent participants. I followed specific protocols, showing deference and openness to their leading of certain parts of the talanoa. However, my social position as a teacher within the school required me to lead the conversation about schooling. This was clear from participant language and conversation cues. This collaborative approach to my data collection process also aligned with models of PAR.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

This doctoral research essentially employed a qualitative, Participatory Action Research (PAR) design. It was informed by the *tīvaevae* model and *talanoa* research methodology. Reason and Bradbury (2008), in their working definition of action research, claim that PAR “seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people” (p. 4). The knowledge produced from action research is aimed to be directly useful to people and to empower people through constructing their own knowledge (Shortall, 2011, p. 225). From the outset of conversations with my supervisor, this research aimed at serving the Pacific community. The initial formulation of research objectives and questions, as described in the following section, was designed to “maximise the participation” of Pacific peoples (Yanar et al., 2016, p. 123). Ultimately, this research is action research, co-designed with members of the school’s Pacific community to assist SBHS to understand their voices and needs.

Scoping and co-constructing the research design

I wanted my research to strongly connect to the lived realities of the Pacific community on the east of Christchurch. This was based on my experience as a teacher who has accompanied many Pacific students and families, from a diverse range of backgrounds, on their journey through secondary school. I wanted my research design to reflect a strong sense of reciprocity, similar to the *tīvaevae* process described by Maua-Hodges (2019). In order for this to occur, the research needed to be designed and conducted in partnership **with** them, rather than researching them as subjects (Smith, 2012b). Therefore, from the beginning, I needed to engage with the Pacific community to ensure that the focus of the research would be meaningful to in this regard.

Reflective of the *ko’iko’i* phase of the *tīvaevae* framework, initial *talanoa* sessions were conducted between April and November 2018. Here, I met with seven different (adult)

members of the wider Pacific community to begin exploring possible ideas for the research. In these preliminary talanoa, we discussed their Pacific backgrounds, their views of schooling, their vision for young Pacific people, and their thoughts on worthwhile research topics. The only prompt I shared with them was my genuine desire to hear the voices of Pacific parents and students. I added that the research would be conducted with the SBHS community, and that other communities may benefit from the outcomes.

These initial conversations were conducted with the aim of incorporating the talanoa principles described by Vaioleti (2006). These included the talanoa being a face-to-face oral personal encounter that was authentic and without a rigid framework, where people could collaboratively share their issues, realities, and aspirations. As such, time was taken to further build, nurture and consider the relationship between each participant and myself. Interviews were conducted at a place most convenient to the interviewee, such as at home or a place of work. These conversations occurred in an unstructured and semi-casual manner, as recommended by talanoa experts (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014; Vaioleti, 2006). For example, one took place at a McDonald's café, and another took place at the back of a homework centre while students were studying. If it was mutually agreed that further conversation was necessary, we had more than one talanoa. Participants were selected through careful discussion with my supervisor and considering various connections to Pacific communities and cultures. These community members were a variety of different ages, cultural backgrounds, they had different experiences of education and their children all attended different schools. By selecting them, I wanted a variety of perspectives. Table 1 (below) gives a brief description of each adult community participant:

Table 1: Pacific community participants selected to assist in the research design

Adult Participant	Description
A	Tongan, raised in Tonga, early childhood educator, mother
B	Samoaan, raised in Samoa, minister in a Pacific church community, father
C	Tokelauan, Samoaan, NZ-born, primary teacher, mother
D	Samoaan, high chief/matai, raised in Samoa, former teacher, education specialist, father
E	Samoaan, NZ-born, former teacher, works at Ministry of Youth Development, mother
F	Samoaan, NZ-born, works at Ministry of Pacific Peoples, mother
G	Samoaan, Pākehā, NZ-born works at Ministry of Education, mother

All participants in these (adult only) preliminary research design talanoa had a strong connection to both their specific Pacific culture and education in a broad sense. They each connected to the education and formation of young Pacific people in some significant way, for example, in a specific schooling sector, or in the context of church or community life. At this point I chose not to include young people in the research design, as I had not yet engaged in a process of applying for ethics. I was also seeking perspectives of those outside of the research site (SBHS). This preliminary activity was not the official data collection of the research and was engaged in to support me to formulate the approach and design of the research questions. The areas that these participants discussed were then developed into the research problem, objectives, and questions (see earlier in this chapter).

With action research, “the inquiry deliberately starts from a specific practical or applied problem or question. Its whole purpose is to enable action to solve that practical problem or answer that practical question” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 171). This led to the next stage to apply these research problems and questions to seek understanding through the collection of data.

Data collection procedures

Participants

There were three specific groups of participants in the study. Members of each group participated in either an individual interview or a group talanoa. These participant groupings included:

1. Senior students who are a range of ages and Pacific ethnicities at SBHS
2. Parents within the SBHS Pacific community
3. Teachers within SBHS

Structure of selection and informing participants

The selection of participants for focus groups was based on the following selection criteria:

- Alignment with representation aims specific to each group (see below)
- Desire to discuss the role of Pacific values in the school environment
- Some understanding of Pacific cultures, languages, and identities
- Able to express views in a group environment
- Current or recent experience with Shirley Boys’ High School

The selection of participants for the individual interviews, alternatively, were based on the following selection criteria:

- Had participated in the focus groups
- Had a desire to relate more information after the focus groups
- Strong communication skills i.e., particularly articulate

- Able to think critically about the topics discussed

Student data collection

The aim for student data collection was to have a range of Pacific ethnicities and age groups represented across the participant group. Participation in the study was advertised to the Pacific students within the school. This occurred through advertising through an email to parents and on a post on a private group on Facebook for informing Pacific students at SBHS. I also advertised by talking to small groups of senior students arranged by myself. Another member of staff was also used to identify students for recruitment. This staff member had the ability to communicate and contribute effectively as they were familiar with both the research and the Pacific student community. Research briefings were held wherever and whenever students were able to meet to discuss the project and receive an information sheet. Informed consent forms were then sent home with interested students for their parents. This resulted in ten students electing to participate in this study. The students were split into two groups of three students who were year 12 and 13. Later, I conducted four individual interviews with year 13 students.

Parent data collection

The aim for parent data collection was to have a selection of parents of Pacific students of different ages and Pacific backgrounds in the school. An invitation for parents to participate in this study was advertised via a school email. A process of selection was determined, which was carried out with the support of another staff member and supervisors if necessary. However, the number of parent participants was much lower than originally intended, which can be attributed to the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic (see below and Chapter 6 for more detail). Therefore, all parents who volunteered were invited to participate. In the end, one parent participant withdrew because of time and work constraints. Information sheets were given to the three parents who were able to participate. These described the research objectives

before they participated in any talanoa. Eventually, only three parents participated in this study. Thus, the talanoa with parents, which occurred in the immediate wake of the pandemic lockdown, only involved one group of two, and one individual interview.

Teacher data collection

The aim for the teacher data collection was to have a representation of staff across career length, position within the school, and subjects taught. I sought six participants, in accordance with these aims. Teachers were given information at a school staff meeting, and via a supportive email from the principal of SBHS. An information sheet and consent form were given to those who volunteered. This resulted in one focus group of four participants, and one individual interview.

Potential research issues and contextual considerations

This research relied on a strong relationship between me as a researcher and the Pacific community at the school. However, this did not mean that I had close relationships with every individual involved. To avoid any manipulation of the participants, there was a broad invitation to be involved, and the selection process was assisted by other staff members at the school. These colleagues who helped administer were asked to share the invitation to be a research participant and manage responses. Prior to the talanoa sessions, research participants were met with and given information and documentation explaining the research, as well as contact details for in-school support people and my supervisors. At the outset of each talanoa session, there was a chance for discussion and explanation, as well as an opportunity to make connections and become familiar, outside of the recorded data collection.

Many issues can arise when conducting research with colleagues, children, and community members. These might include issues revolving around informed consent, cultural differences, identity and power, contextual considerations, and the prior experience of the child (Brown, 2011; Morgan & Sengedorj, 2015). However, a transparent process, and consistent

communications with all parties, helped to ensure a relatively smooth data collection. With this in mind, considerations for this part of the process included:

- The location of interviews for students, parents, and community members
- Communication of the research and initial contact and permission from the school involved
- The establishment of a relationship between the researcher and the participants
- Communication of the research and initial contact with parents and community members
- Communication of the research and initial contact with Pacific academics and determining an appropriate interview process

Considerations during data collection included cultural and age differences between the student participants and the researcher. While I had a pre-existing relationship within the school, and wider school community, I ensured that I had plans in place if participants raised any concerns. Notably, I arranged to create an independent (third party) advisory panel for participants to seek advice from, or to express their concerns. The panel included the school counsellor, a Pacific staff member (who was not involved in the research), and my principal supervisor (Dr Richard Manning). I arranged this following the advice of Lee and Goodman (2009), who recommended such considerations be put in place to ensure participants have someone they can identify with to ask questions and/or to discuss concerns.

Talanoa focus groups

I adopted a focus groups approach to underpin my group talanoa activities. I chose this approach to yield a rich source of qualitative data arising in a different social dynamic to the individual interviews. Hence, I gave the participants the opportunity to hear, react to and collaborate with their peers (Fontana & Frey, 1994). In this context, participants were able to build on what other participants said, relate their experiences to others and provide insight into

what other participants had said (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The exploration of group dynamics and the potential for stories and experiences to emerge (from relative or similar experiences) enlivened the data collection. It enabled the participants to feel part of a collective.

This differed from an interview only data collection, offering alternative and richer data (Kamberelis & Dimitradis, 2005) moving away from the “dyad of the clinical interview” (p.902). In this way, the focus was shifted away from the researcher and the sole participant to a more natural discussion where social interaction can take place. Focus groups allowed the “tipping [of] the balance of power away from the facilitator toward participants and [the creation of] a comfortable engagement for most participants” (Raby, 2010, p. 13).

The purpose of the focus groups in the talanoa style was to allow different thoughts and perspectives to be shared and expressed. This expression of multiple viewpoints and ideas “help researchers and research participants alike to realise that both the interpretations of individuals and the norms and rules of groups are inherently situated, provisional, contingent, unstable and changeable” (Kamberelis & Dimitradis, 2005, p. 905). As the purpose of this research was to amplify Pacific voices, it was vital that the focus groups and interviews implicitly and explicitly gave permission to the participants to express their culture, language and identity in a way that is safe and empowering.

Given this purpose, it was important that I as the facilitator was well prepared for these focus groups to ensure their effectiveness. This preparation included conversation starters, open ended questions and some catalyst questions to spark thinking. It was also important to plan and generate ideas about what I hoped to achieve from the talanoa and how participants might consider what they would like to see as an outcome (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Due to the interviews being semi-structured, there was less formal arrangement for questions and responses, however, a “general sense of the questions or topics to be discussed” was beneficial (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 189).

Talanoa individual interviews

From the group talanoa, I was able to identify individual participants for a follow up talanoa interview. These were designed to go deeper, allowing some participants to reflect on their own experiences in a more specific and deliberate way. In doing so, they can share in a way that might go beyond their contributions in group talanoa, including sharing more sensitive information. These verbal, face to face, interviews were undertaken and recorded using an audio recording device. While pre-arranged questions were formulated, the interviews were open ended and flexible in accordance with talanoa methodology and a semi-structured interview process (Punch & Oancea, 2014; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Vaioleti, 2006). This was because open ended interviews can “offer richer and more extensive material than data from surveys” (Yin, 2009, p. 12). They are also able to assist the researcher in gaining a more realistic understanding of the “lived experience of people” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 114).

For example, the conversations that occurred during these interviews were allowed to develop naturally and be co-directed in part by myself and participants in a way that allowed “in depth explorations of interviewees’ experiences and interpretations, in their own terms” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 184). As previously mentioned, this aligns with talanoa, which can also be “a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations” (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 14). I ensured that all participants were as comfortable as possible during their interviews to enable them to share in a school setting, which has for some Pacific peoples been a negative and embarrassing context.

Data analysis

While I recorded the interviews, I hired a third party to assist me with transcription. This transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement. Next, I coded the transcribed data using thematic coding, as described by Punch and Oancea (2014). I assigned codes and pseudonyms to each student and examining the transcribed talanoa, alongside notes I had made during the

sessions. While I had knowledge of the school and community contexts, I limited assigning knowledge of specific students during the group talanoa sessions by limiting the use of their names in the transcripts. The individual talanoa, however, were specific to the participant involved. I was able to develop the analysis of these transcripts with a more specific understanding of the participant in mind. Proof reading of the analysis chapters by my supervisors also enabled a critical lens to be placed over my immediate analyses. This, in turn, helped me develop a deeper consideration of factors I had not yet considered.

As Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) noted, it is important for the researcher to delve deeper than the transcribed word to produce a quality analysis of data. Taleni (2023) refers to a Samoan proverb, Tu'utu'u le uega i le loloto | Cast the net into deeper waters as a metaphor for deeper community engagement. He refers to the importance of contextual or environmental knowledge to better cast the net. This is particularly important when dealing with data gathered from talanoa, where participants can take the conversation in various directions. Furthermore, I interviewed people who drew on different languages in talanoa. While there was not extensive or prolonged use of languages other than English, there were words that were used in several Pacific languages, (i.e. Samoan and Tongan). Any clarification needed was obtained during both the individual and group talanoa, or afterwards (in discussions with individuals or reading relevant literature). This was in part done to mitigate the risk of the data analysis being done in an overly clinical manner. I sought to avoid the assumption that all relevant data or information was included in only the words spoken that I could rely solely on my ability to understand them (Sandelowski, 2001). The contextualisation of data “can provide richer information than would be obtained by using qualitative data alone” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009, p. 9). Hence, the assistance of my supervisors and the use of a wide range of literature and contextual knowledge was critical.

In addition to the methodological frameworks cited above, my data analysis drew upon an eclectic range of theories that I needed to broaden my range of theoretical lens to critique my findings. I began with a grounded theory approach to assist me to draw conclusions that emerged from the data, rather than to pre-determine findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1988). I constructed theoretical explanations of the data collected from participants in the interviews and focus groups, in order to understand the data in relation to the concepts of voice and power as it relates to Pacific peoples in the context of schooling and education.

Ethical considerations

This research was approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC). This involved a rigorous application process which helped me to present a proposal to ensure that I met the necessary requirements for ethical approval. It also included an evaluation of participant information sheets and participant consent and assent forms. The letters giving approval for my research are found in Appendix A

The value of Participatory Action Research in addressing ethical considerations

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is considered by many to be inherently ethical due to the research design process requiring collaboration between researchers and participants (Yanar et al., 2016). This collaboration was evident in the co-design of the research objectives and questions during my initial scoping of the project and as encouraged by my supervisory team. With the combination of PAR research design and the talanoa methodology, it was my aim to consider the participants as partners in the process, as opposed to subjects (Galletta & Torre, 2019).

Ethical principles

There are five main ethical research principles which I took into consideration in preparation for and during this research – respect, beneficence, justice, truth and freedom (Cohen & Morrison, 2018). These principles were drawn from relevant literature concerning research

ethics in education, namely Punch (2014) and Cohen (2018). Understanding and drawing on these principles was crucial, especially since my data were collected from communities where “significant tensions” could arise (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012). These nuanced historical and political tensions exist in and across Pacific communities in New Zealand. They include the reality of Pacific peoples as migrants with different experiences, legal, social and cultural relationships within New Zealand, and its schooling system. Moreover, it involves the competing views of Pacific peoples as transnational indigenous people who experience marginalisation and racism. This is discussed more fully in the literature review (Chapter 2). Social research is sensitive as it “involves collecting data from people, and about people” that may not gain from participating (Punch, 2005, p. 276). Reciprocity, which is a Pacific value cited in various Pacific Ministry of Education policy documents in New Zealand (2012, 2018, 2020a) is a desired outcome of this research and will involve the dissemination of the results for the benefit of Pacific communities.

Principle one: respect for others.

I showed respect for the participants by undertaking specific actions. The interviews that were conducted required some vulnerability, as participants could be disclosing information that was sensitive. Mindful of this risk, I obtained informed consent before any data were collected. To gain informed consent, I needed to present “all relevant information to participants,” ensure that they “understand this information,” and obtain “voluntary agreement to participate” (Girvan & Savage, 2012, p. 246). I exercised particularly sensitivity and caution in interviews with students, as various issues around adult/child power relationships can make it difficult for children to refuse to participate (Morgan & Sengedorj, 2015). Anonymity and confidentiality were also maintained, in order to prevent any harm to the participants (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012, p. 715). It was made clear to all participants that both positive and negative

aspects of Pacific education will be explored in the interviews and focus groups, with the aim of this is to promote dialogue and understanding.

Principle two: beneficence

The primary aim of this research was to listen to and amplify Pacific voices within the secondary school system in Christchurch, New Zealand. In particular with regards to values, expressions, relationships, and the environment that Pacific students encounter at secondary school. The research needed to provide a better understanding of the issues New Zealand Pacific students and communities might encounter in schooling, and an impetus to enact positive change. The question of benign research methods and whether the process being undertaken could cause harm was critically considered. Morgan and Sengedorj (2015) state that research that is “empowering for some children, may be disempowering for others” (p. 214). Thus, I sought to minimise risks to the participants by working collaboratively with my supervisors to ensure my research design was appropriate.

Principle three: justice

The research sought to be fair to all participants, allowing their voice to be heard in a talanoa setting. The primary focus of the research was to work with the voices of Pacific students, parents and their teachers. Given the participants came from a variety of ages, cultures, positions of authority and genders, I adopted a flexible approach to my interactions. I wanted to ensure that the different needs, of a diverse group of participants, would not result in barriers to participation. Therefore, I offered a range of talanoa times and group options to maximise convenience to and involvement from participants.

Principle four: truth

Because the voices of the participants provided the foundation of this research, significant care was taken to accurately record, analyse and communicate their experiences. In striving to

produce a fair account of the participant's perspectives, I sought to draw conclusions from the data that were fair and balanced (Punch & Oancea, 2014). My analysis was checked with supervisors and against recent literature in the field.

Principle five: freedom

The participants were free to engage or withdraw from involvement in the research. Cohen (2018) states that informed consent is critical in research and arises from the participant's "right to freedom and self-determination" (p.52). Because all participants were aged 16 and over, there was no need for parental consent, however, assent and consent forms were utilised alongside information sheets (see appendices). Pseudonyms were used for all participants to give them a greater degree of freedom in expressing themselves throughout the talanoa.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the eclectic methodological approach I co-constructed with Pacific community leaders and my supervisory team to undertake this research. As stated earlier, the need for this research was identified by Pacific education leaders I engaged with in Christchurch during the preliminary stages of this study. Their concerns were not dissimilar to those expressed by other Pacific community leaders elsewhere in New Zealand (Chu-Fuluifaga et al., 2021; Chu et al., 2013; Coxon, 2002; Taleni et al., 2018). The methodology developed for this research therefore required me to be an ethical and transparent Pacific teacher/researcher, operating in the space that sits between a Christchurch secondary school and the Pacific community it serves. I was also encouraged by my supervisors and local Pacific education leaders to privilege Pacific research approaches. I did this by using a design framework that validated my usage of the tīvaevae model and talanoa method.

My adoption of an overarching PAR approach enabled me to align these Pacific approaches with an accepted methodology that is used globally. The research objectives and questions that drove this study were also derived from my initial (scoping) talanoa with Pacific

community leaders. These preliminary talanoa helped me to identify the key research problem that faced SBHS, that needed input from Pacific parents, students, and their teachers.

This chapter has also outlined the data collection and analysis procedures, and the ethical considerations I needed to address. Principal amongst these ethical considerations was a desire to ensure respect for participants and limit the risk of any power imbalances that might exist between them and myself as the researcher. In the following chapter, I outline some relevant contextual considerations, international, national, and local, with regards to Pacific peoples.

Chapter 4: Research Contexts – A Multilayered Approach

Introduction

The following chapter outlines a series of contextual factors that have informed this study. Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development is used as a framework to examine the different contextual layers that have informed the experiences of the participants in this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that “such interconnections can be as decisive for development as events taking place within a given setting” (p. 3). For example, Shirley Boys’ High School (SBHS) and the Pacific communities affiliated to that school. This model has been used elsewhere to critique the teaching of Indigenous histories in Australia and New Zealand (Manning, 2017), and pastoral care approaches developed for Māori and Pacific students in New Zealand schools (Barber, 2016).

The chapter begins at the *macrosystems* level of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model. It offers a brief description of those international trends in Pacific diaspora communities, most relevant to the school central to this study. Next, I continue to discuss *macrosystem* contextual factors closer to home at the national level by illuminating some relevant demographic factors and educational policy trends. This is followed by consideration of those local community contextual factors related to Bronfenbrenner’s *exosystem* context.

Here, I describe the diversity of the Pacific community that feeds into the SBHS student roll, and its affiliated Kāhui Ako (cluster of schools) along with relevant trends in the Christchurch city area. I then work my way closer to the inner level of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model by describing the *mesosystem* setting of the school concerned (SBHS). Finally, the chapter ends with a personal position statement. This involves a partial description of my own *microsystem* (personal and familial context), to assist readers to consider how my own experiences as a Pacific teacher in Christchurch secondary schools has shaped my analyses. This position statement draws upon the process of creating a *tīvaevae*, to help readers

recall the metaphor underpinning this research. It is my intention that, like a *tīvaevae*, the interconnected contextual settings, of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model, can be metaphorically stitched-together in this chapter. By doing so, I aim to show readers the relevance of my study to local, regional, national, and international research discourses.

The *macrosystem* (international & national) contexts relevant to this study

This passage first identifies some recurring international contextual factors and trends that serve as a backdrop to this study. It then draws closer to home, by providing a discussion of national contextual factors.

International contextual factors and trends

Internationally, many countries around the wider Pacific rim, not just New Zealand, are experiencing significant increases in Pacific populations (Batley, 2017). It is important therefore to see the international and national contexts that informed this research with Pacific peoples at a Christchurch secondary school. The school's Pacific community in many respects is typical of the diaspora of Pacific Island nations communities that have evolved over time.

Pacific migration has resulted in pockets of similar communities around the globe (Hau'ofa, 1994). This has substantial implications for the education, health, and justice systems of these countries (Durham et al., 2019; Lilo et al., 2020). This summary of international trends therefore invites readers to apply a global lens to better see how the Pacific students at SBHS members of transnational (diasporic) community networks are (Dyck et al., 2022). This approach also supports me to refute any proposition that this study may have been too parochial, or too localised in its focus.

The diaspora of Pacific Island nations' peoples can be found in many Pacific rim countries that share a history of British settler colonialism – including New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the United States (Connell, 2015; Spickard et al., 2002). In these locations, Pacific diaspora communities have faced similar struggles, particularly in their experiences of

schooling. Recurring patterns in these countries show growing Pacific populations providing opportunities and challenges that are often under researched. The United States of America recorded 1.2 million Pacific peoples in 2010 or 0.4% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). This Pacific population in America, inclusive of the Native Hawaiian people, is one of the fastest growing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and most understudied (Subica et al., 2019). Research has been done into implications for this growth, primarily the need to acknowledge Indigenous ways, epistemologies, and cultural strengths to generate positive outcomes (Godinet et al., 2019; Smith, 2012a). Other insights into the Pacific population in America include the importance of family and other specific values at the core of Pacific peoples' experiences, especially within the context of migration, education, and intergenerational cultural adaptation (Holmes, 1980; Vakalahi & Godinet, 2014).

Australia has also experienced high numbers of Pacific migrants, moving there for opportunities centred around health, employment, and education (Kearney & Glen, 2017; Ravulo, 2015; Vasta, 2007). Many Pacific people arrived in Australia via New Zealand, often as first or second-generation New Zealanders. There is a growing body of literature concerning Pacific educational issues in Australia, previously drawing on New Zealand Pacific experiences. However, with the Pacific population in Australia predicted to double in the coming decades (Ravulo, 2015), it is important for Pacific and non-Pacific researchers to engage with Pacific communities in the context of education, health and other areas. This also presents powerful opportunities to collaborate.

As in New Zealand, Pacific peoples in other Pacific rim countries face challenges in terms of education and socio-economic status. Pacific peoples have some of the lowest rates of high school graduation and have low college admission rates, as well as being disproportionately low income and numerous health disparities (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Research has mention of “culturally relevant” practice and emphasizes on the importance

of the “duality of their transnational identities”, which aligns with current way of thinking in the New Zealand health and educational landscapes. It places respectful engagement with Pacific voice as a high priority.

National contextual factors and trends

Like other Pacific Rim countries, New Zealand has experienced a rapid growth in its Pacific people’s population over the last seventy years (Statistics New Zealand, 2013, 2024a, 2024b). This has posed challenges for Pacific migrant communities, policy planners and teachers alike. As Faleolo (2020) observed, Pacific peoples – like other migrant communities around the world – have long needed to “create settings within diaspora contexts to use their material culture, or redefine spaces where cultural behaviours [...] are maintained” (p. 67). Because strong links are often still held in relationships with those relatives and friends they have left behind in their home countries, members of the SBHS Pacific community belong to “family webs that interconnect people in Pacific Island homelands and diasporas allowing for the continued exchange and circulation of cultural knowledge and resources” (Faleolo, 2020, p. 67). Despite these strengths, official statistics still indicate that Pacific communities have faced significant challenges over the last decade, particularly regarding outcomes within the health and education sectors. For example, Pacific peoples have the highest proportion of people without qualifications, that is without NCEA level two or higher. They also constitute one of the most likely groups to be underemployed, at 29.3 percent (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2015; Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010).

It should also be noted that New Zealand has strong cultural, historical, social, and political ties to the Pacific. This is especially true for those islands that fall within the realm of New Zealand; Tokelau as a current dependency, and the Cook Islands and Niue, both former dependencies that possess free association with New Zealand (Quentin-Baxter, 2021). Over

recent decades, a larger and increasingly diverse amount of Pacific people have come to call New Zealand home (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020). This migration to New Zealand began in the 1950s (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2015). It is widely acknowledged that employment was a major pull factor for Pacific peoples, and that a significant labour shortage was one catalyst that sparked the opportunity (Anae, 2012; Salesa, 2017).

This growing population, which according to the 2018 New Zealand census sits around 8.1% of the population (Statistics New Zealand, 2024b), makes certain demands on various sectors of New Zealand society. New Zealand’s Pacific peoples population is a relatively young one, with a median age of 23.4 years, and 33.6% of the population under 15 years old (Statistics New Zealand, 2024b). This means the development of all education sectors from early childhood to tertiary is crucial for Pacific educational, social, and economic success. The table below shows the growth in Pacific populations by ethnicity in New Zealand from 2001-2018.

Table 1. Growth of Pacific peoples from 2001 to 2018 (Statistics New Zealand 2013, 2024a)

Pacific Ethnicity	Growth		
	2001-2006 (%)	2006-2013 (%)	2013-2018 (%)
Tongan	24.0	19.5	36.6
Samoan	14.0	9.9	26.8
Cook Islands Māori	10.4	6.6	30.2
Niuean	11.6	6.3	29.3
Tokelauan	9.9	5.2	21.0
Fijian	40.1	46.5	36.5

Since the 1990s Pacific students have been included in educational policies, strategies, and plans. During this time, they have been identified by successive governments as priority

learners, as discussed in the literature review (Chapter Two). This prioritisation has occurred primarily due to consistent patterns of underachievement in national standardised tests, for example NCEA and National Standards (Tongati'o, 1997; Ministry of Education, 2012). Underachievement indicated a significant gap in the ability of schools to cater for the needs of Pacific students. Responses to this have been twofold. On the one hand, schools have tried tactics of active engagement to include Pacific students and family. On the other hand many have shown a less proactive approach, citing low Pacific populations (Chu et al., 2013) or a lack of capability in teaching staff (Houghton & Houghton, 2022).

There is an emerging movement of identifying and utilising Pacific students' cultural strengths. However, this does become increasingly difficult as students move into higher levels of schooling, where their voices tend to be drowned out not only by the majority, but by the very system itself (Uasike Allen et al., 2022). In the primary school setting, there may be a more tangible relationship between home and school, for example more parent-teacher connection at either end of the school day. However, as Mauigoa (2014) found, there are leadership practices at New Zealand primary schools that both hinder and help Pacific achievement at primary school. She explains the need for an increase in leadership accountability to Pacific communities in relation to achievement, as well as the development of authentic relationships (Mauigoa, 2014).

The underlying principles of leadership practices that encourage successes or failures have been well supported by research. Teachers and schools who do not build connections and allow for opportunities for Pacific students to connect to their own culture, fail to provide an equitable learning environment for these students (Dooley et al., 2000; Mutch & Collins, 2012). The value of a 'Pacific space' within schools is supported by research and provides both students and staff with a forum from which to allow different voices to be heard (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b; Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010). In opposition to this, the foundations of the

Western colonial schooling model were to isolate children from their families in order to assimilate ‘other’ cultures in a systematic fashion (Stephenson, 2009).

Assimilationist structures “deny the value of uniqueness which has been claimed for Pacific-origin world views and work against emancipatory self-description” (Reynolds, 2017, p. 248). The New Zealand Royal Commission on Social Policy (1988) recognised that there was “a situation where minority groups are recognised only for their disadvantage or deprivation in assimilationist terms. In effect this protects and privileges the majority English status” (New Zealand Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988, p. 176). The recognition of different cultural capital, other than the mainstream European prominence, could trigger the development and use of educational tools or approaches that will better serve Pacific students and their families. This activates prior knowledge and deepens the learning experience, enabling students to lead their own learning, take ownership and maximise engagement (Ministry of Education, 2003; Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010).

The research for this doctorate is underpinned by connecting with Pacific voices, values, and relationships, as developed in the methodology (Chapter Three). Listening to and engaging with the voices of Pacific families and students is a crucial first step to building an education pathway that is an authentic, student, family and culture focused pathway towards successful outcomes for Pacific students (Chu-Fuluifaga & Reynolds, 2023; McDonald & Lipine, 2012). However, listening and merely being seen to engage is not enough. This needs to be followed by decisions to make change within school and even political contexts.

There is a significant risk that our schooling system, at its various political layers, is seen to listen but not seen to act. Action requires a desire to relinquish power to respond to the voices of the community. As discussed in Chapter Two, schools need to be viewed considering Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, and Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction. The existing power structures within schools can serve to alienate and marginalise alternative

perspectives that might arise from the voices of Pacific communities (Burke, 2005). The reinforcement of the dominant cultural values by schools can form a barrier to any changes driven by these voices (Bourdieu, 2002). Within the experience of formal education, schools should aim to keep the identities of students intact to create a pathway responsive to Pacific voices. The dynamic nature of these communities and their cultures need to be taken carefully into account. Hence, dialogue needs to be ongoing and open to the generational changes and innovation that are present both within the school's ecosystem.

There has been significant and pioneering work conducted by recent generations of Pacific academics and community leaders about ways that schools can engage with and understand Pacific communities. This research can help us understand wider trends in schooling experienced by Pacific communities in various diasporic settings, including New Zealand. Power relationships and principles of control are key to this issue, and achieving a more equal distribution of power and empowering the community is central to this research. Achieving this is not easy or simple, as the hegemonic structures that are found throughout schools are not limited to one ethnic group or class. However, as Teaiwa (2005) states: “the paradox of colonialism is that it offers us tools for our liberation even as it attempts to dominate us. Education is the perfect example of this colonial paradox” (Teaiwa, 2005, p. 2). This is a challenge to both Pacific and non-Pacific school leaders, to question how the “colonial classroom” (Teaiwa, 2005, p. 2) and current school structures, are able to serve as tools responsive to the voices and needs of Pacific communities in places like Eastern Christchurch.

The *exosystem* (local community) and *mesosystem* (school) contextual factors relevant to this study

SBHS is located in East Christchurch. It was originally located in the suburb of Shirley and was relocated to New Brighton following a post-earthquake rebuild in 2019 (See Figure 4).

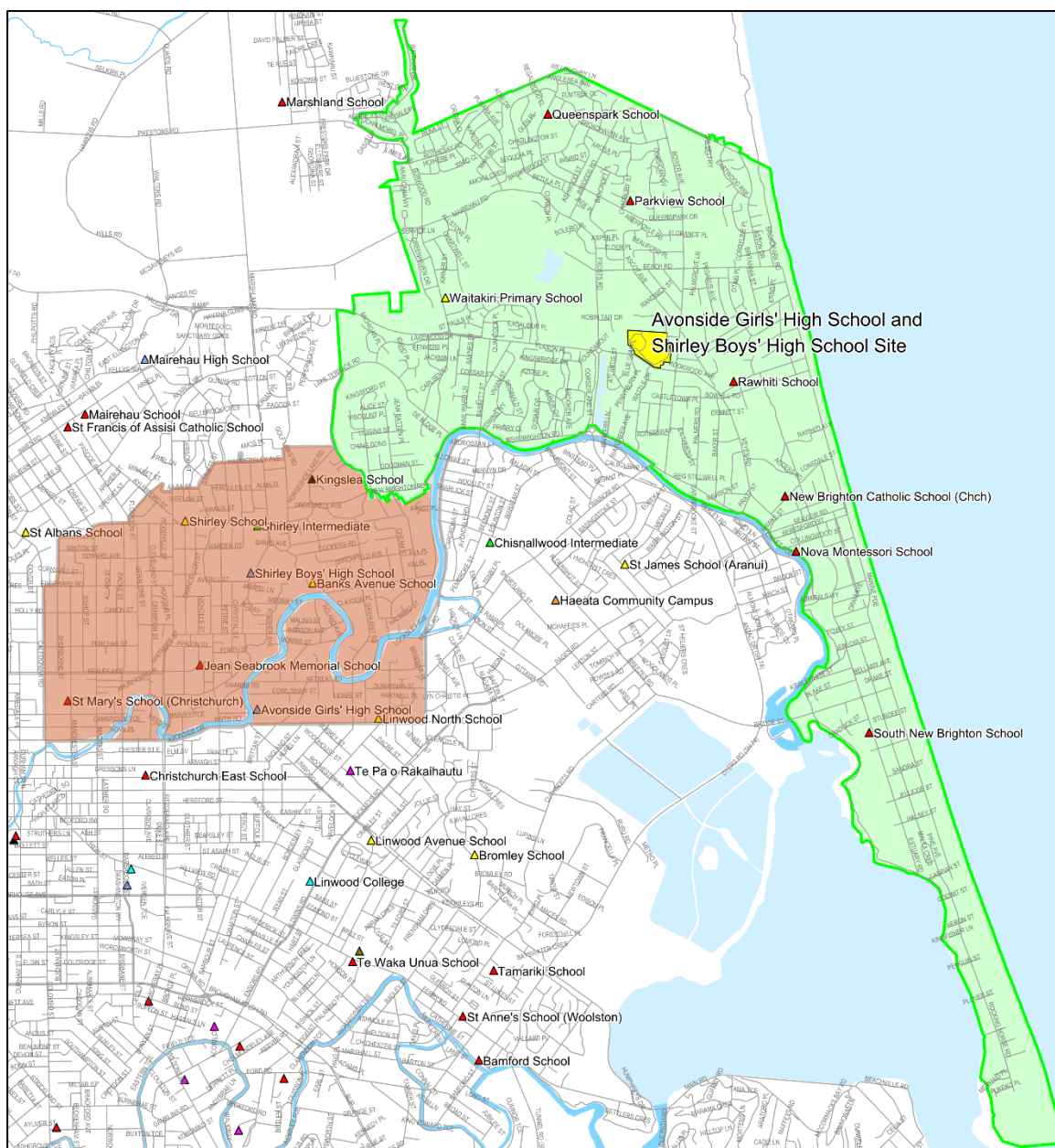


Figure 4. Shirley Boys' High School enrolment scheme zone map. The green shaded area denotes the home zone of the current site, while the orange shaded area denotes the transitional zone, based on the zone of the original site (Shirley Boys' High School, 2024)

New Zealand's South Island has a total Pacific population of approximately 25,000 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013), with approximately 14,000 residing in Christchurch (Statistics New Zealand, 2024a). Many of the schools in the Eastern suburbs of Christchurch have high numbers of Pacific students. This is a trend which Finn (1973) noted from the 1960s, the area encompassing the SBHS zone tends to have higher a higher Pacific population than

nearby areas, such as Rangiora, Kaiapoi, Papanui and St Albans (Ministry of Education, 2023f).

However, the Pacific communities are still a minority (Statistics New Zealand, 2024a). This can make it challenging to effect positive change and to ensure that they are visible beyond the stereotypes. For example, lower numbers can make statistical comparison challenging, and dominant narratives and perceptions can be difficult to shift. As has been well documented, minority groups are often marginalised and not prioritised within schooling institutions (Allen & Webber, 2019; Cahill, 2006; Dooley et al., 2000; Nakhid, 2003). In a school like SBHS, this might mean that Pacific visibility is limited to Polyfest performance groups or other specifically cultural domains. While schools might challenge this perception, there needs to be a thorough examination of this visibility, both internal and external to the school.

SBHS has a stable Pacific student roll, with approximately 110 Pacific students enrolled per year over the last 5 years. The below table (Table 3) indicates this stable number. It also shows other ethnic groups in the school, which are also relatively stable.

Table 3. Shirley Boys' High School roll by ethnic group (2019-2023)

Ethnic group	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Māori	239	255	251	260	251
Pacific	110	113	110	115	110
Asian	88	88	83	80	79
MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin America, African)	27	25	20	20	19
Other	4	4	1	4	4
European/Pākehā	1,024	1,050	1,010	1,022	1,041

However, within the context of Kāhui Ako ki Ōtākaro, to which SBHS belongs, there is an increasing Pacific roll, mirroring other parts of Canterbury and the wider South Island (Education Ministry of Education, 2024b). Table 4 shows the Pacific roll over the period from 2014 to 2020. This is the first seven years since its creation, and before two other large schools joined the Kāhui Ako in 2021. This increase potentially represents a growing number of young Pacific students at the primary school level, which could result in a growth in the SBHS Pacific roll in coming years. Alternatively, many Pacific students might be attending a different high school.

Table 4. Kāhui Ako ki Ōtakaro Pacific roll, as at 1 July (2014-2020)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Pacific students roll	225	263	277	286	308	475	481

Table 4 shows a 114% increase of the Pacific roll over this seven-year period. This considerable and steady growth within the local Pacific population demands a specific focus from school leadership to ensure actions are undertaken to facilitate strong engagement.

Pacific teachers and community representation at SBHS

Numbers of Pacific teachers in secondary schools have historically been low and inconsistent (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b). It is relatively common for teachers to move between schools, and the trends in Pacific teacher numbers at SBHS reflect this. Before my arrival there were isolated instances of teachers of Pacific descent, for example, one commerce teacher who was Samoan taught at SBHS from approximately 2002-2007. When I first arrived at the school in 2010, I was the only teacher of Pacific descent. At the time this research was conducted (2019-2022), the school had seven Pacific teachers. This included four Samoan teachers (one female and three male) all born and raised in New Zealand. They were supported by a colleague who identified herself as having Tongan and NZ European, parents, who was born and raised in New Zealand. She was joined by a Tongan male, who was born and raised in Tonga. Finally, there was me, a Cook Island Māori and NZ European male, born and raised in New Zealand. This group, me included, possessed varying levels of experience in engaging with the Pacific community at the school.

For various reasons, this group was able to respond effectively to the needs of Pacific students and communities present at the school. Firstly, this group included a diverse range of Pacific identities and worked in a cohesive manner. Numerically, this number of Pacific teachers is also significant. In 2022, the total number of Pacific secondary teachers was 57, representing an average of one Pacific teacher per secondary school across the Canterbury region (Education Ministry of Education, 2023i). The presence of seven Pacific teachers at SBHS, represents a strong internal network of Pacific staff, able to lead and work collaboratively. At the time of writing this thesis, several of the teachers had gone on to significant leadership positions both at SBHS and at other schools.

Research is clear around the benefit of having Pacific teachers as visible, active role models within the school environment (Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, Leali'ie'e, et al., 2009). In

her 2021 *Pasifika PowerUp* parent and student voice evaluations, Fairbairn-Dunlop (2021a) found that:

Parents strongly believed that having Pacific teachers in schools was crucial for Pacific parents and for Pacific learners. In schools where there were few or no Pacific teachers, learners and parents missed out on opportunities to engage with educational role models who understood their cultural perspectives and funds of knowledge. They were also denied the protective elements that Pacific teachers afforded Pacific learners (p. 77)

Pacific board representation has been a national priority and has been identified as a key goal in recent Ministry of Education *Pasifika Education Plans* (2009, 2013). It has also been a focus for the Ministry of Education (2020a) in its most recent *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* and a focus for recent resources from the Ministry of Education to support Pacific school communities (Timoteo, 2021). In New Zealand, school boards, among other things, “govern and manage their school or kura”, set “the strategic direction and targets for the school/kura” and “employ the school’s principal” (Ministry of Ministry of Education, 2024d). At board level at SBHS, there had been little to no parent representation of Pacific families or communities. There had been three Pacific student representatives over the previous twenty years. This meant that there had been serious inadequacies when it came to communicating with communities, as board representation of Pacific peoples is an important part of delivering change at a governance level (New Zealand School Trustees New Zealand School Trustees Association, 2013; Tongati'o, 2010). This is discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

While SBHS has enjoyed relative success in terms of its NCEA results in comparison to many schools of similar nature (single sex, decile six, in a relatively low socio-economic area), the achievement of its Pacific students has been very similar to national trends (Ministry of Education, 2013). For many years, the proportion of the student body who were enrolled by their parents under Pacific ethnicity was to approximately 5%. This meant that data collection and subsequent analysis around this group was virtually non-existent. As mentioned above,

numbers of Pacific teachers and students fluctuate, but are growing and becoming more stable. This means that small changes can be seen as large statistical variations, both in roll and achievement data.

Pacific students at SBHS are experiencing similar issues to those encountered elsewhere in New Zealand, particularly regarding social and institutional barriers that hinder educational achievement. Social factors include lower levels of educational capital to support high achievement (Fletcher et al., 2006), and instances of deprivation which can impact school attendance and/or parental ability to engage with the school (Marriot & Sim, 2015). Institutional factors include a lack of effective teaching practices for Pacific students (Chu et al., 2013), and the difficulties experienced in navigating academic pathways through school (Horrocks et al., 2012).

SBHS architecture and new campus

In the wake of damage caused by the Christchurch earthquakes (2010-2012), many communities across the city found themselves reeling, physically, mentally, and socially. Their schools, in turn, struggled to serve as community hubs in the following years. This was due to rising levels of uncertain futures, damaged facilities, and fragile families. SBHS spent nine years of teaching from a damaged campus in North Parade, Shirley. In 2019, SBHS relocated to its new campus, Ōrua Paeroa, in New Brighton. Here they co-locate with Avonside Girls High School. A significant player in the development of the new campus was a subsidiary of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, Mātauraka Mahaanui, whose purpose was:

Inclusion of Māori and Ngāi Tahu content in the spaces, curricula, hearts and minds of education providers in Greater Christchurch and to assist in raising their bilingual capacity and the achievement of Māori students (Mātauraka Mahaanui, 2019).

As a result of this collaboration the new campus includes significant design elements drawn from local and wider New Zealand Māori motifs. Throughout the building, windows, and signage, there are a range of patterns that connect the values of the school with motifs drawn

from te ao Māori (The Māori world). While there has essentially been a transformation in terms of ‘place’ and ‘space’ for SBHS, there is a risk that this could remain surface level.

At this point (2024), there are three main, visible focal points concerning Pacific design and identity embedded in the school. All three pieces are artworks that connect Pacific culture and students to the campus and can offer an initial access point for the Pacific community to see themselves reflected in the campus. The first is an integrated, Māori and Pacific sculpture, which contains a large piece of pounamu gifted to the school (see Figure 5). This represents the mauri (lifeforce) (Moorfield, 2004a), of the school, and integrates a piece of wood from a tree that was on the original site. This tree, known as the Sa tree, was the tree where a group of Pacific students would sit at lunch time, and it became a focal point for Pacific students to gather and a symbol for their student community.



Figure 5: The Mauri of the Shirley Boys' High School and a piece of the Sa Tree. This piece was created by Caine Tauwhare.

The second is a series of two images created by Christchurch Samoan artist, Silvilio Fasi in 2020. These were a product of an engagement project that occurred when the school arrived on the new campus. The students engaged with Fasi in a series of talanoa where they discussed the concepts of belonging and identity. They co-constructed in written and visual form how the students felt about their identity within the context of the school. Fasi then produced the two pieces which are now displayed in the school. The paintings are called 'Leave Your Mark' and are highly regarded and treasured by students and staff alike (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: 'Leave Your Mark' 2020 by Silvilio Faso. A representation of student identity produced through talanoa with Pacific students. Reproduced with the artists permission.

Lastly, there is a large Tongan siapo, which is displayed on a wall. This siapo was purchased by the Pacific teachers to display an item rich with Pacific artistic skill, to be inspiring for students and teachers who see it (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: Tongan ngatu (tapa), artist unknown. On display in the Shirley Boys' English Department.

There was consultation that occurred with the community when the campus, named Ōrua Paeroa, was initially designed. However, there have not been any further discussions had with the Pacific community about what they would want to see developed in the school to better connect their community with the campus. This is a necessary next step for the campus as they seek to ensure that the Pacific community can see themselves as a valued part of the school community. However, the simple addition of artworks does not necessarily equate to a transformation of a multicultural school environment. For example, Banks and Banks (1995) provide a continuum model to assess how deeply schools are incorporating the diverse cultures of multi-ethnic communities. The risk is that schools will stay at the contributions level. Here, discrete cultural elements are incorporated, while transformational and social action approaches to curriculum design, delivery, assessment, and school governance are avoided (Banks & Banks, 1995). Large-scale development, such as the design and build of a new

campus, can present opportunities, to support changes in institutional culture. However, Banks and Banks offers a lesson for schools undertaking changes in the physical environment of the school, or to policy and pedagogical practice – that there is a need to go beyond a surface or aesthetic level. One way in which schools seek to do this is by working in a collaborative manner within a Community of Learning or Kāhui Ako structure.

Communities of Learning or Kāhui Ako

The vision of a Kāhui Ako is to create a coherent pathway for the learner and their family as they navigate their schooling journey (Ministry of Education, 2023d). For any vision of success to be powerful and sustainable, it must be shared and co-constructed. Kāhui Ako “operate as a voluntary cluster of schools that come together to agree on shared achievement challenges in their efforts to establish collaborative opportunities for learning within and across the network” (Constantinides & Eleftheriadou, 2023, p. 342). Many schools have made the choice to work in clusters called Communities of Learning or Kāhui Ako. SBHS is part of the Ōtākaro Kāhui Ako, which includes Avonside Girls’ High School, Chisnallwood Intermediate, Te Oraka Shirley Intermediate, Waitākiri Primary School, Shirley Primary School, Pareawa Banks Avenue Primary school, Parkview Pārua Primary School, Queenspark Te Hua Mānuka Primary School, South New Brighton Primary School. As well as 12 early childhood centres.

The microsystem of the researcher - Personal positioning in relation to tīvaevae and the research context

As discussed in Chapter 3 (methodology), the imagery of a tīvaevae provides a metaphor for much of this thesis. I have drawn inspiration from my family experiences of tīvaevae (see Figures 8 and 9, below), Teremoana Maua-Hodges and her vision for tīvaevae as a research model, and other Cook Island academics.



Figure 8. Example of a tivaevae ta'orei (patchwork tivaevae). Created by my great-great-grandmother, Nitika Rongo Kea, ca. 1975. Reproduced with the permission of Dinah Sullivan nee Rongo Kea'.



Figure 9. The beginnings of a tīvaevae tātaura (appliqué and embroidered tīvaevae) in progress. Created in 2022 by my brother, Josua Te Maru Ariki Houghton, and grandmother, Dinah Sullivan (nee Rongo Kea). Reproduced with their permission.

I have also found inspiration from New Zealand born Pacific artist Michel Tuffery (Cook Island, Samoan and Tahitian) whose art is “shaped by his research into the histories in Polynesia and his personal encounters with the islands and their peoples” (Vivieaere, 2010, p. IX). In his piece, *Ula Tīvaevae*, Tuffery creates a contemporary interpretation of a tīvaevae in his chosen medium (see Figure 10). He “reflects on how the Pacific became the ‘Proving Ground’ for nuclear testing” utilising images of death, nuclear power and explosions surrounded by floral images of the Pacific (p. IX).



Figure 10. Ula Tīvaevae by Michel Tuffery, 2004. Reproduced with the artists permission.

In a similar fashion, I have sought for this study to be shaped by Pacific people of a Christchurch school community, and to serve as a tīvaevae like medium to convey their diverse voices. This tīvaevae-like research also inescapably reflects my own experiences as a teacher and my interpretations of what I have heard participants say.

To further explain the realities that have informed my positioning as a teacher/researcher, readers should note the way in which my relationship with Pacific communities beyond my family began. Apart from my family, I had never been a part of a Pacific community before beginning university. This was because the number of Pacific students at the schools I had attended, including St Bede's College (a Catholic, single sex boys' high school in Christchurch) was so minimal. There, I just merged into the crowd. As a teenager there was a need for me to fit in. Because of my pale complexion, I was not readily able to be

identified or labelled as a having Cook Island heritage. I had strong family ties to the school, with my father, uncles and great uncles having attended there previously. My British ancestry, as well as the fact I was a practicing Roman Catholic, ensured a strong degree of belonging.

However, when I started university in 2005, I soon discovered that the strength of the Pacific community was its ability to forge, foster and maintain relationships. I started my Bachelor of Arts at the University of Canterbury in 2004, after being accepted into the Tupulaga Lumina'i scholarship program for undergraduate Pacific students. Some of the students and mentors I first met that year (2005) are people that I still see as role models, with some counted as close friends. They were examples of people able to walk and succeed in multiple worlds, in a way similar to what Giroux has described as border crossers (Giroux, 2007). To be accepted into this program, I had to attend and interview and explain how I would 'give back' to the Pacific community with my qualification. I promised that once I became a teacher, I would work hard for the Pacific community at my school. This commitment was based on my own understanding of reciprocity.

After finishing my Bachelor of Arts and Graduate Diploma of Teaching and Learning, I got my first teaching job at Marian College (2010). After my contract at Marian finished, I applied for a job teaching English at SBHS. During my successful interview, I was told the teacher who ran the small Pacific cultural performance group had resigned. I was then asked whether I would be willing to take on the role of managing that Pacific students' group. For me, it seemed like an opportunity to fulfil the promise I made in my first year of university. So, I accepted the position as well as the role of Pacific co-ordinator. On my first day, I was told by one of the senior teachers at the school, that I would have "instant mana" because of my relationship with the Pacific students.

In my introduction to the students, I was led into the room where they used to practice, and I remember feeling slightly intimidated by my being only a few years older than some of

them. However, the senior teacher was right. Within hours, I was being greeted by them as I passed them in the corridors and in the quad. Fifteen years later I continue to enjoy close association with many of my former Pacific students, with some even choosing to pursue careers in education. Because of this relationship, a strong sense of belonging was forged between many Pacific students, their parents, and me.

After four years of being involved in leading Pacific education at SBHS, the principal's assistant gave me a flyer advertising a master's level course at Massey University – *Understanding Educational Issues for Pacific Island Students*. This seemed like the next logical step for me as an educator who was committed to lifelong learning. I had started to dig deeper into what was going on for these students and realized that I was not dealing with surface level issues. Working on this course with Prof. Jodie Hunter opened my eyes to the wider, national context of Pacific education and research literature. It helped me to develop my critical thinking skills. Over the next few years I experienced something I would liken to the phenomenon of conscientization described by Freire (2005). I came to question accepted norms within my school, particularly to do with Pacific community engagement. I also worked closely with my colleagues, pushing to develop SBHS to be better positioned to serve Pacific students. Reflection on my studies with Hunter, resulted in my supporting the school board to actively engage with the Pacific community, as well as the recruitment of other Pacific teachers. As Freire (2005) states, "Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis" (p.84). Eventually, this led to my enrolment in doctoral studies (2018), to conduct this research for those reasons already outlined (see Chapters 1-3).

Conclusion

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development has proven helpful in providing a framework for understanding contextual layers that have informed the development of this research. The interconnected systems described in this model, have allowed me to

manage a discussion of key contextual factors that informed design and development of this project. This, in turn, provided a way of illuminating the broader “ecological environment” in which the research participants and I have interacted (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3).

This chapter began by exploring the macrosystem context of Pacific peoples, internationally and nationally (New Zealand). Several countries in the Pacific Rim, including New Zealand, have seen a significant growth in Pacific diasporic communities. These communities often maintain significant transnational links, including to their Pacific Island homelands (Faleolo, 2020). This chapter then explored the exosystem, represented by the local community of Christchurch, and the mesosystem, focusing on the SBHS community. I outlined some specific details concerning the Pacific community at the school in order to better contextualise this study. Lastly, I considered the influences of my own microsystem experiences to lay out my positioning as a teacher researcher in relation to the *tivaevae* research model. Given this foundation, the following chapters (five, six, seven and eight) will now engage with the voices of the student parent and teacher participants.

Chapter 5: Shirley Boys' High School Student Talanoa: Reflections on Identities

Introduction

This chapter is the first of two chapters (5 and 6) which discuss and analyse the views of the student participants shared in our talanoa and subsequently positions their collective voice at the forefront of this study. Each of the two student chapters discuss themes under two broad ideas. Chapter 5 explores themes related to Pacific student identities. This recalls the research aims, which included a desire to investigate perceptions of Pacific values and explore the relationships among the Pacific communities at Shirley Boys' High School (SBHS).

As a teacher and researcher, I knew it would be imperative to create a space where student participants could express their past experiences and look to the future. It was intended that the group and individual talanoa sessions would provide ways in which students could engage in a relational way, similar to research carried out in other Pacific education contexts (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012; Puloka-Luey, 2021; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). This approach also sought to serve as a platform that might also inform their school's future decision-making processes for the better.

This chapter contains two parts; the first (Part One) provides a brief description of the contextual background concerning Pacific students in Canterbury and SBHS. This serves to give a profile of Pacific students at the school and in the research setting. The second part (Part Two) discusses the various themes connected to student identities that emerged as key themes in our talanoa.

Part One: Contextual Background

This section provides some brief insights into the student talanoa and the circumstances surrounding them. A detailed exploration of Pacific student contexts is given in the literature review (Chapter 2) and research context chapter (Chapter 4). The student talanoa sessions,

central to this chapter, took place throughout a school year very much disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. As stated in the methodology (Chapter 3), there were two talanoa group sessions with these students, followed by four individual talanoa interviews. These two types of talanoa complemented each other, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Their aim was to provide a time of listening, with prompts provided to the students in the form of gentle questions and wondering comments. The findings presented in this chapter are the result of these talanoa. The way this chapter engages with Pacific student voices is the result of my dwelling in the talanoa with participants, not only in the interviews but also in the months and years preceding them.

In this chapter, the voices of the student group and individual talanoa are presented and analysed in a way that looks towards practical solutions (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). They explore some of the challenges and issues that Pacific students and communities face within their secondary schooling. However, the talanoa also sought to base itself on a strengths focused position, particularly around the values systems that students connected with and promoted in their conversation. Discussion around the problems they experienced, such as racism, system deficit and relational difficulties, was also accompanied by a focus on Pacific student community values and strengths that sustained the students in their identity as Pacific within the wider school.

I asked students to express interest or volunteer for the talanoa sessions, on our private, online Pacific student forum. I then followed up with an information session, with support from another Pacific teacher with pastoral responsibility. At this point, I gave them consent forms to consider. Students who returned these forms were invited to participate in the sessions. Contextual problems caused by Covid-19, such as concerns around large gatherings, transmission of the Covid-19 virus, and fluctuations in attendance, impacted numbers involved. I decided to make the best use of those who were able to participate during this time and not to extend the period of data collection.

The sessions took place after school, in rooms adjacent to the school library, which were determined by the students to be a comfortable and convenient place for them to talanoa. These areas were akin to places students might wait around after school, talking and keeping each other company – physically in the world of school, but tucked away from the formalities of class and teachers. For each session, we had pre-arranged to meet, having gone over the consent and context for the talanoa. At each session an initial time of casual conversation occurred, aiming to ensure that students were comfortable and suitably prepared before the audio-recorded talanoa began. Due to my ongoing and working relationship with the students as a teacher in the school, I took this opportunity to inquire about the families, friends (other students at the school) and their studies. As discussed in the methodology section of this thesis (Chapter 3), both individual and group sessions were undertaken with a talanoa approach. This meant that it depended on strong relationships between researcher and participants, and was an open conversation which allowed the participant to play a role in the direction of topic (Fa’avae et al., 2016; Houghton, 2023; Vaioleti, 2006).

A series of prompt topics were used throughout both the group and individual talanoa sessions, connected to the research questions that I had formulated with the assistance of Pacific community leaders at the outset of my research. They related to concepts of Pacific identity, relationships important to them as students, their perspective of the community from which they emerged, and their experience of education at school. As the talanoa occurred, discussion went in different directions. This was the case particularly with the individual talanoa sessions, where the students could delve deeper into their own experiences and give more detail, with the benefit of privacy. In the group sessions, I found that the students naturally gave each other opportunities to speak and waited patiently while others expressed their perspective. There were also times when humour and joking were evident. For example, when a student perhaps came across as too serious or answered in a way that portrayed them as an expert. This was

part of the dynamic particular to one of the group-talanoa, and rather than hinder conversation, it contributed to a relaxed atmosphere. This was helpful when the students could have been self-conscious while the conversation was being recorded. A student might say something serious, then there would be laughter at the comment, and then they would return to the topic to finish the thought. The humour distracted from the formality of the recording.

In terms of my own involvement, the nature of the students being around 16 and 17 years old meant that there was more of a peer dynamic. I had known all the students since they had started at the school in year 9 and had only been the direct subject teacher of one of them. This put some distance between me and their actual classroom experience. However, it also gave me some understanding of their overall experience at the school. This was useful in helping me draw more out of their statements. As well as being able to read between the lines and help flesh out some of their comments. Mostly, the tone was respectful, but open. Participants wanted their contribution to the conversation to reflect their desire to contribute towards better outcomes for Pacific students in the future.

Profiles of Participants and their backgrounds

I facilitated two talanoa group sessions, followed by four individual talanoa interviews. The students involved were across the two senior years of secondary school, specifically, year 12 and 13. They were primarily of Samoan and Tongan ethnic and cultural origin, which, are the two most numerically significant Pacific ethnicities in the school. However, as several of them noted, they knew there was a diversity in their ancestry beyond the last two generations, with distant links to Fiji, Niue and the Cook Islands. The individual talanoa interviews involved students with fictitious names; Vaea, a year 13 Samoan/Tongan student, Rangi, a year 12 Samoan student, Malosi, a year 12 Samoan student and Fetu, a year 13 Samoan student.

In the group talanoa sessions, the nature of the conversation and the way that the audio was recorded made it difficult to identify individual students. Quotes from the two group

talanoa sessions are used throughout this chapter, this is indicated. Throughout the interview transcripts I am referred to as “Joseph”.

Part Two: Findings of student talanoa

Part two discusses and analyses the key themes relating to reflections on identity that emerged from the talanoa. These themes were Pacific identities, navigating collective success, and value systems. The discussion of these thematic findings is supported by examples given by student participants that emerged during both the individual and group talanoa. It is presented alongside local and international literature to support a critical understanding of their voices in a wider New Zealand and diasporic context.

Pacific Identities

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), the word Pasifika is contentious. This became quite evident when that word emerged as a topic for discussion amongst the students themselves. Student opinion differed regarding the word’s merits and drawbacks. There was, for example, general acceptance that the term Pasifika entailed a sense of pride and unity amongst the boys themselves. There were, however, also acknowledgements that this was a loaded word holding some negative connotations amongst some non-Pacific people. In the ways that it was used within the school context, students acknowledged a dual purpose: “I guess it does put us in a category, but also recognises us as who we are, as a culture” (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan and Tongan).

Others considered it simply a self-identification label, one that Pacific students were able to either wear with honour or avoid. In the context of their school setting, the students generally viewed usage of the word Pasifika as being largely synonymous with group camaraderie and fellowship. It also helped as a self-identifying label, to link them to a values and belief system. One student encapsulated this view when he explained: “Yeah, there’s lots

of different ways you can be, that you can identify as Pasifika here actually” (Student Talanoa one).

Stereotypes

An ever-present risk of categorising groups of people is that certain stereotypes become attached to these groups. As discussed in the literature review, stereotypes that have been attached to Pacific students and communities have been, and continue to be, damaging to their education and wellbeing (Hunter, 2022). These stereotypes can often be connected to racist thinking and actions within a school. *The Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* is explicit in its mentioning of racism and the necessity of addressing it in the education system (Ministry of Education, 2020a).

Both the group and individual student talanoa revealed the students’ thinking and experience of stereotyping. Participants mentioned that they felt there was a disparity between how they were perceived and what their ability was, both academically and regarding sporting and cultural endeavours:

That we’re probably, not as smart but choose the easy pathways. You know, how the majority of Samoans or any Pasifika take trades rather than like law, accounting, engineering, stuff like that (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan).

This remark was made by a student who was taking a full university entrance course and left school to take up an engineering degree. His perception of how he and other Pacific students are viewed by their teachers reflects his own experiences of schooling. Another participant in the group talanoa claimed that Pacific students are seen to be: “[...] not as bright. I think that’s the main stereotype, that Pasifika kids can’t excel as well as others do” (Student group Talanoa One). Here, there is a comparative comment – “Pasifika kids can’t excel as well as others do”, which portrays the experiences Pacific students might feel when sitting in a class environment, as members of minority ethnic/cultural groupings. The comment emphasises the

feeling of being different, and this can manifest itself in a variety of ways. In this case, it is in relation to academic achievement or ‘excelling’ in an academic subject or class.

Another participant remarked that: “I’m the only brown boy in the class itself. So, it would just be awkward like, you know” (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan). This comment was in relation to discuss of class content, where the subject of the lesson was African American slavery and the student’s experience as a “brown boy”. This can result in a student experiencing cultural or social isolation, which effects students engagement and comfort within the wider class (Blank et al., 2016). The change in curriculum content in New Zealand, such as the *Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Guidelines* (Ministry of Education, 2022) includes Pacific histories and perspectives (Ministry of Education, 2023c), which makes this an important example to note. Students who sit in classes where they are the “brown” minority or the cultural minority, are at risk of experiencing further isolation from their peers.

Perceptions of students and their pathways was also mentioned by a participant, in a relatively offhanded manner. The concept of a “dropout” might not necessarily represent a student who leaves school early, rather, a student who leaves school without a meaningful next step, such as tertiary.

Joseph: When people see a big group of boys; and they think, ‘There’s the Pasifika students’, what do you think they see?

Student: I think they just see a whole lot of dropouts.

Joseph: Why do you think they would see that?

Student: ‘Cause it’s what they always think, to be honest. (Fetu, Year 13, Samoan).

This comment was made by a student who remained at school until the end of Year 13 and was part of a cohort with a high retention rate (meaning to stay to the end of year 13), comparative or higher to the non-Pacific retention rate. However, he believed that the teachers’ shared perception of him and his peers was that they were “dropouts”. While this phrase might no longer give a black and white sense of being at school and being not at school, it conveys

the sense of being disengaged and as not performing in a meaningful or successful manner. It also suggests a way in which he, and perhaps others, experience deficit theorising and racism as part of their day-to-day school life (Barber, 2016). Student experiences and perceptions concerning stereotypes can be connected to institutional racism. As Jones (2000) states:

Institutionalized racism manifests itself in [...] access to power. [...], examples include differential access to information (including one's history), resources (including wealth and organizational infrastructure), and voice (p. 1212).

Perceptions or stereotypes that are held within a school of a certain group of students being dropouts or troublemakers raises the question of their place at that institution. Do these students have “access to power” and the ability to express their “voice”, within the structures of the institution as they currently operate? As Bishop (2011) states, “patterns of dominance and subordination that exist in the wider society of New Zealand also exist in our classrooms” (p. 52).

Several of the student participants had previously or currently held student leadership positions within the school. These official positions included prefect, house captain and head boy. Therefore, the talanoa around leadership also connected to the themes of stereotypes. In a discussion about how a Samoan student would feel about being the only “brown face in the leadership group”, Vaea for example said: “He would probably feel like he's not included at first. I probably reckon. But if it was a strong leadership team then they'd encourage people. Or encourage the team or show them how to do better” (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan). This student recognised that the same cultural or ethnic isolation that occurs during lessons in a classroom also takes place in school leadership settings. The feeling of not being included or of being perceived as a stereotype can emerge in different ways and settings. Earlier in the talanoa, Vaea also reflected in his earlier leadership experience:

“I was a prefect in year 10, but like it was just so busy like being a junior... I got approached by Mr X. I wanted to be a prefect in year 10 and me being year 9, I just said yes. Then I just never turned up to any meetings and stuff and I kind of regret it” (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan).

In my experience, if students are engaged and invested in the specific activity, their level of commitment is high – for example, having to turn up to early meetings or practices is not necessarily a barrier. Forms of cultural isolation and a feeling of not “being included” might result in a lack of investment from the team member. In contrast, high engagement and Pacific students visible in leadership roles can have the effect of empowerment for the wider Pacific community. For example, one student in talanoa group two reflected on this:

The question was ‘when was a time that we really felt empowered as a group?’. I think even just having students that are Pasifika in leadership roles throughout the school is super encouraging to all the other boys. I feel that’s empowering (Student Talanoa Two).

The understanding that flows from this is that, when something can be seen, and is ‘visible’, it can have an empowering effect for others in the same community.

Pasifika as a unifying concept

Student participants generally viewed the term Pasifika as a positive one and didn’t hesitate to refer to it as an umbrella term that was inclusive of various Pasifika peoples that existed in their community. Malosi referred to the sense of unity that can be experienced when connecting with a collective ‘Pasifika’ event or ethos:

For me I get like a massive sense of unity whenever we do our events whether it’s Polyfest, or just hearing someone from the community that’s Pasifika speaking at our school. It gets everyone who is Pasifika, in our school, I think it gets us firing a little bit and there’s a sense of unity that starts to form with what’s already there, but it’s growing (Malosi, Year 13, Samoan).

This comment reveals what might be called the energy, or the vigour that can exist behind the collective use of the word Pasifika by students or people who identify as Pasifika. This is like many efforts within the schooling context that might require a team effort to achieve a goal or a sense of unity. This connection is not limited to the word Pasifika, however, students in this study described its use in a positive manner.

Many of the Pacific ethnicities at SBHS are numerically small, and as such, individually are at risk of being culturally invisible. This is particularly the case in New Zealand cities in

the South Island such as Christchurch, where the research site is located. The following comment reveals a sense of safety felt by this student when using the term Pasifika:

I feel it [the term Pasifika] keeps me safe. If someone calls me Samoan then obviously that's fine and I'd say it as well, but Pasifika as a whole, is I think, a good word to address everyone in that area of the map" (Malosi, Year 13, Samoan).

Referring to "everyone in that [Pacific] area of the map" can be a controversial way to group people. Nonetheless, from Malosi's perspective, the intention is to view each other in a broader, familial sense. Many of the students reported a strong sense of unity among Pasifika or "Polynesian" students, conveying a sense of worth internally as individuals within a broader Pacific community. "We value each other as our Polynesian brothers and sisters, we are one" (Student, group talanoa one). The colloquial use of the term Polynesian, much like the term Polyfest in recent decades, has also been commonly used to refer broadly to people from a Pacific ethnicity. While it is often inclusive of Melanesian or Micronesian peoples, it linguistically excludes them. Its use is not as common as it once was.

The term Pasifika or Pacific does not limit to one specific 'nesian' grouping. There has been ongoing debate around the use of the terms Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian, which are both geographic and racial (D'Arcy, 2003). While they could be deemed to be outdated, there are also perspectives around people claiming the terms and using them according to their own preference (Kabutaulaka, 2015). Rangi emphasised this when he explained his feeling regarding the term Pasifika:

Respect, love. I think it means unity, family. [...] I think it brings brotherhood, family, and especially the Polyfest group because once you're a part of it, you're part of the family (Rangi, Year 12, Samoan).

Students did not think of the comment "we are one", as claiming a homogenous culture, language, or identity. Rather they alluded to a shared connection as diverse Pacific cultures or identities. Pacific students articulated shared family experiences and the understanding that they could relate to other Pacific students and the difficulties they had was a positive thing that

bought them closer together. Some students in the group talanoa referred to the inclusive nature of their group, with some commenting that people of non-Pacific cultures or identities were welcome to be a part of what they had:

Student one: I think we're all really inclusive as a group.

Student two: We bond well together, like it's a brotherhood. (Student talanoa two)

In this way, the sense of belonging that they referred to transcended ethnic lines. Across the student focus groups and interviews, the participants felt that the term Pasifika was useful in being able to unify them, with focal points being around large-scale community events or interactions such as Polyfest and family celebrations. Many referenced external or wider community connections such as church, island groups and villages, as well as sports clubs, family, and friend groups. Here, there were distinct overlaps in peoples and identities, with Pasifika playing an important role in driving an inclusive, values-based culture (Spiller, 2012).

Navigating collective success

As referred to in the literature review, the achievement and engagement of Pacific students at school has been a focus for governments, schools, and communities for over two decades (Ministry of Education, 2020a; Office, 2012; Tongati'o 1997). A significant portion of the pedagogical emphasis within early childhood, primary and secondary education has been concerned with creating higher expectations for students. These expectations come from teachers, the school system/leadership, parents, and the wider community.

In their talanoa, students identified the importance of ambition and drive as a key component of their individual and collective success. The individual is seen as important because of the emphasis placed on their own personal achievement and engagement. The collective is present in their identity as Pacific people and the reality that a student or students represent the wider group. The students often self-identified as a collective, aligning themselves with traits concerned with success and ethos: "We can be very hard working; we

just need the right motivation towards it” (Student, group talanoa one). The concept of finding and maintaining motivation, both in and out of the classroom context, was discussed by the students.

The issues raised in connection to personal ambition and drive included collective success, Pacific students striving to be successful, difficulties experienced and needing a stronger understanding of pathways. These will be discussed through this section.

Collective success

Throughout the student talanoa, many students reflected on the way that Pacific students operate as a collective. Firstly, in a physical sense with reference to gatherings and activities, sporting, cultural and academic. Secondly, in terms of how they view what is going on around them or how they perceive the world. This will be discussed more in the section on the values theme, however, there was a general theme which referenced the collective successes that they felt as Pasifika. Phrases like, “We can be very hard working” (Student, group talanoa one), indicate that the performance of other Pacific students matters to them and is noticed by them. In their responses to my questions about how their academic success could be improved, the students consistently referenced peer pressure impacting their experience.

As mentioned above, there are risks for Pacific students, who often identify themselves in the collective sense, when they become culturally or ethnically isolated. In a classroom context, the students identified the reality that they often sit alone in classes, and that comes with difficulty relating to those around you:

“For example, in my English class there’s no Pasifika and there’s only Palagi and that’s all, and it’s actually harder to work in that sort of environment than with your own I guess, like even just one person that you can relate to, because I feel there’s more support for each other and kind of building that friendship” (Rangi, Year 12, Samoan)

Students articulated that it became difficult for them when they do not see or feel that tangible support in a person that they connect to culturally. It then becomes even more important for a

teacher, or for those around them, to continue to have high expectations of them, so they can remain motivated.

Students noted that they were not able to connect to the collective classroom unless there was a drive from the teacher to work deliberately and intentionally with them. Often, the students felt as though they were ignored, both when they were seeking help for work, but also when they were off task and not doing work. As one student suggested: “In a way maybe feeling left out if the teacher won’t help you but might help others around you” (Student, group talanoa one). In this way, the student hopes that he is not ignored when in need of assistance as was made clear in the following exchange:

Joseph: If you were to describe the perfect teacher what would that be like?

Student: Effort! And so, even if you’re not asking for help to come over, and yeah, just supervise and kind of push the student (Rangi, Year 12, Samoan).

This student thus also believed he needed the active effort from the teacher, the “push” factor (i.e., extrinsic motivation), to use his word, to achieve that motivation in a collective sense and to not be left out. Students also noted the cultural difference between the collective with Pasifika versus the collective Palagi (Samoan word for person of European origin) in the classroom:

I feel with the Palagis they’re kind of in competition mode and everything’s individual and they kind of just do their own thing [...] Whereas Pasifika I feel it’s less snobby and it’s more, “I’ll help you pass.” We want to pass together, like feel good (Rangi, Year 12, Samoan).

In contrast to the perceived “Palagi” approach, throughout the talanoa, parents were repeatedly referenced (this will be discussed further in the values theme). When asked what excellence looked like for them, the response was “making our parents proud” and “to please our parents” (Student talanoa one). In a similar way, the students shared a collective success with the Pacific teachers in the school. One student, for example, advised me that having a

Samoan Assistant Principal was empowering, and part of his success, and that of his peers.

This was evident in the following exchange between us:

Student 1: We had Miss X who was our assistant principal, like that was awesome to have.

Joseph: Why was that awesome to have?

Student 1: She's one of the bigger roles.

Student 2: Yeah, it's a Polynesian that has a high role.

Student 3: It's super encouraging to us. Well, I think we all looked up to her.

Student 4: Yeah, like all of us. (Student, group talanoa two)

This reflects the importance that these students placed on having visible role models.

Pacific teachers were specifically discussed throughout the talanoa, indicating that knowing and understanding pathways to success is important for Pacific students. Rangi also mentioned that overcoming fear, and seeing others do so, is important here:

What's positive is Pasifika seniors stepping up and going for those sorts of roles, like me going for Board rep, and even though I didn't get it it's still stepping up. I'm hopeful that we're kind of slowly getting over our fear of failure (Rangi, year 13, Samoan).

Reynolds (2017), in his research with Pacific male students in Wellington, also examines what this collective success, linked to brotherhood, looks like:

However, what is distinctive about Pasifika education [...] is that members of the brotherhood can be part of a collective identity, a force with its own potential in regard to resilience. What is at issue in the alterability of resilience, therefore, is the relationship between education and this distinctive culturally enabled potential. Although the brotherhood is made of individuals with their own links and connections, students talk of it as a collective such that access to the relational resource of the brotherhood is a main form of Pasifika success (p.235).

An understanding of success and appropriate pedagogy for Pacific students' needs to take this collectivism into account (Airini et al., 2010). While traditional markers of success at school, such as grades and awards, will continue to exist, there needs to be continued consideration for the times in-between. This includes the process by which students move towards individual successes, where they are typically supported by their peers. A student can

achieve academic success and individual accolades. However, if they are isolated culturally in terms of their identity, the system through which they have moved through has not enabled this collective success (Nakhid, 2003).

Difficulties experienced by students

Maintaining motivation and drive in secondary studies has challenges for students of any background. In the talanoa the students revealed some of the specific challenges that they faced. The students stated that they felt high expectations from their parents in a variety of different areas, academic achievement being one of them. However, connecting the ambition and drive they felt from their parents, and the push needed in the classroom were two different things. In the following comment, the student states how the work in class is unable to be understood by his parents, so while they are not able to give him the support needed in this regard, the push needs to come from his teacher:

Oh, our generation with homework I guess, like the work we do now they wouldn't understand, at home. And if we don't, I guess, experience any sort of urge to push on from our teachers, it sort of makes it harder (Student, group talanoa one).

The notion of work being set, and the student being left to their own devices is a theme that emerged in the talanoa. Students felt like they were often lacking in direct, active support from the teacher, which they needed to keep motivation levels high:

Joseph: What do you think we'd like to see in the classroom?

Student: A bigger push to help those Pasifika students. A bigger urge to help keep them motivated instead of just giving us the work and letting us be.

Joseph: Why, what makes them unmotivated?

Student: Not feeling support from the teacher (Student, group talanoa one).

This type of support that the student indicates is needed, is often a relational support, able to be offered when the teacher is aware of who the student is and where they are at in relation to the work set. When the student states that more push is needed to help the Pacific students, this indicates that a group of Pacific students in a class might be left without the direct

support needed. As with the discussion of collective success above, the challenges experienced in the classroom are often felt collectively. The following comment also indicates a shared struggle, with the use of the words we, our and they: “I think it’s just part of why we can’t stay motivated, because everyone knows usually our parents don’t go to university, you know, they’re not the brightest. They don’t understand how our generations work” (Student, group talanoa one). This sense of despair, articulated by this student, emerges from a stereotypical view of Pacific parents. It is a perspective of low abilities and low expectations of success.

Recent studies in Auckland, New Zealand, have indicated that there is a relationship between teacher expectations and student ethnicity. Pacific students, alongside Māori, have among the lowest expectations placed on them by teachers when it comes to academic performance (Turner et al., 2015). This is largely based on deficit or racist beliefs and approaches by teachers, including taking a lack of responsibility for student learning and poor understanding of student family dynamics (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006). There is often a lack of understanding among teachers when it comes to how their perceptions of Pacific students are formed by, and therefore how their expectations are set and communicated (Rio, 2017). There is an urgent need for Pacific student, parent and teacher voices to support and influence teacher perception and subsequent expectations of Pacific students (McDonald & Lipine, 2012; New Zealand School Trustees Association, 2024a; Taleni et al., 2018).

The need for a comprehensive understanding of pathways

Both the group and individual talanoa pointed to a need for more comprehensive support around pathways through and beyond school. This was in conjunction with how students spoke about their desire to academically achieve, and to demonstrate excellence in co-curricular involvement and other ambitions. Pathways can be defined to be the steps that students need to take as they progress through school, and choices they are able to make particularly in the lead up to leaving school. It could concern subject choice in the senior years, where the

difference between chemistry and art could dramatically affect tertiary education options. Alternatively, it could be decision making around tertiary institutions or employment options upon leaving school. One student spoke of his father's ability to encourage in education, but inability to assist with specific pathway advice:

My dad tells me to go to school and stuff, but he doesn't really know the pathways. He encouraged me to go to school and classes like he doesn't have the pathways, but when it comes to sports, he's happy to see people from our culture playing sports, like top teams in this high school, like he believes it's good to see (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan/Tongan).

The result of this is a heavier reliance on teachers and other adults when making decisions around pathways and transitions. Davidson et al. (2014) in their work with over 900 Pacific students between year 9 and 11 in New Zealand schools found that there is a need for "increased access to support" (p.5) in this area concerning pathways. When asked what he was worried about in relation to the Pacific community at his school, Rangi's response was:

Academics. I'm not the best at academics, but that we need to realise how important it is, like I get that if you want to do a trade that's a pathway to go but not as a last resort because I failed. It should be you want to do that instead of using it as a last resort like heaps of us students (Rangi, Year 12, Samoan).

Rangi identifies that having an academic pathway is important to him and that his choice should not be solely determined by failure at this point, or a lack of understanding and narrow pathway choices. Similarly, Davison et al. (2014) found that for Pacific students, awareness also needed to be increased around understanding trades pathways in order to ensure more successful transitions. They state that "despite supportive surroundings (at school and home), psycho-social factors such as self-belief, confidence and motivation are lacking for many students" (p.5). Fetu affirms the importance of adequate and appropriate help. For, without support, motivation for Pacific students is at risk of waning: They might not get that much help for them to achieve what they want to do in life. And then they just start to give up, start bunking!" (Fetu, Year 13, Samoan).

In their research with Australian Pacific youth Kearney and Glen (2017), found that “Pacific-heritage youth residing in Australia need to be a targeted equity group in terms of accessing and participating in higher education”. Also, that “responsibilities associated with a collectivist cultural orientation are likely to act as a de-motivating influence on the individual aspirations of a young person to attend university (p.287). These findings, supported by Davidson et al. (2014), point to a need for career strategies to examine structural and institutional barriers for Pacific students in career and pathways education.

Value Systems

The concept of values used in education settings has been critical to this research. I define the concept of values in chapter two. My initial talanoa sessions with Pacific education advocates, outlined in chapter three called for the development of a better understanding of Pacific values within schools. Collective Pacific values are specifically noted in the various Ministry of Education *Pasifika Education Plans* (Ministry of Education, 2012, 2020a). Students in this research refer to the values that they see in their community and that they try to live by. The naming of these values, while not unique to Pacific cultures and ethnic groups in general (Rimoni et al., 2022), appear to have a relatively unique expression in the secondary school setting. This was reflected in these research talanoa, as well in literature concerning Pacific students in New Zealand schools (Fonua, 2018; Hunter et al., 2016).

This is an important emerging finding, because as Thaman (2008a) asserts: “Pasifika cultural values and ideals are often de-valued and discouraged because they tend to conflict with the values that the school is trying to promote” (p. 4). She found school systems are often at odds with this collective approach, alluding to the conflict that presents itself: “While schooling and the educational bureaucracy rely on notions of universalism and impersonality, Indigenous education systems rely on specific contexts and interpersonal relationships.

Schooling promotes individual merit while Indigenous education is rooted on the primacy of the group” (Thaman, 2008a, p. 4).

It is important for critical perspectives around values and various Pacific value expressions in schools to be examined. There is significant risk that values systems can be co-opted and used in a way that dislocates the power from Pacific students, families, and communities. School leaders, teachers, and government departments such as the Ministry of Education, need to be aware of the role that they play in distorting or stereotyping Pacific values expressions. Smith (2012a), in her seminal work on decolonising research methodologies, discusses the concept of essentialism or authenticity when it comes to Indigenous cultures. She explains that “at the heart of such a view of authenticity is a belief that indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse, or contradictory” (p.74). She also states that, “the idea of culture is much more difficult to control” (p.74). This belief may result in the use of so called cultural or “authentic” Pacific values being used to control or remove power from Pacific peoples in school communities.

Values and their expression, as articulated by the students, manifest in various ways within the school and wider community setting. They have reference points of traditional Pacific understandings, family needs and ways of working, external school relationships such as religious and church community connections, Pan-Pacific relationships, and specific intra-school relationships tied to the school values and philosophies. The students strongly indicated that they see themselves as a collective and that in many cases, they act as a collective, both in and out of school. Paulsen (2018), in her research into Pacific communities in Melbourne suburbs, found that it was common for Pacific values system to arise and be associated with the collective. These “social and cultural values” which can develop collectively in school

communities are reinforced by the fact that there are often “small numbers of students from each [Pacific] nation attending [a] school” (p.40).

The collective offers an opportunity for acknowledgement: “acknowledging your culture and acknowledging who you are and where you’ve come from, and those before you. Acknowledging all of that stuff is super respectful, and that’s what we do” (Malosi, Year 13, Samoan). This sits within a wider ethic of care that needs to exist within a school, considered to be “an essential component of learning-focussed teacher-student relationships” (Averill, 2012, p. 106). Therefore, this culture of acknowledgement can exist in an active way in the classroom. For example, Siteine (2010) examines how teachers can act as cultural providers and mediators. She explains that these approaches include the “recognition and affirmation of [student] ethnic identity” which “acknowledges and affirms the diversity of ethnic cultures [...] within classrooms” (p.5).

Student participants consistently acknowledged their values throughout the talanoa and the following discussion under this theme will explore this from a variety of perspectives. The values described by students were intergenerational in nature and included the values of respect, humility, and service. They also included values specific to the school, Pan-Pacific values, the influences of church and religion, and the connection to teachers who shared values with the students.

Articulation of values

Intergenerational nature of values

Students in the talanoa, when asked about values, proceeded to specifically mention several values. These values were linked to an intergenerational connectedness and often referenced family, parents, elders, and places where students had come from or originated, in the sense of home, community, and various Pacific nations. Students wanted to make their parents and previous generations proud. More than that, they looked to their peers as well, with

a perspective that looked for intergenerational success to proceed ‘down’, as well as ‘up’. Rangi articulated this:

Since I’ve been brought up as Pasifika, we have a habit to act like we do at home; and so, kind of in the back of our minds there’s your mum or dad telling you to do this, do that, and subconsciously we do that in around the school, and we have no problem with it (Rangi, Year 12, Samoan).

This statement captures the sense of intergenerationality that can be seen to exist alongside Pacific values (Fa’avae, 2022). It also portrays the way in which students, may also generalise their family experience, as part of existing within the Pasifika collective.

Students in this research indicated that the primary source of their value systems is the home. Rangi discussed how much of his life had been intergenerational, with grandparents present in his home. This family way of life transferred to a sense of duty at school. In his words, this was a “subconscious” behaviour. Rangi and other students went on to say that the idea of family is strong when it comes to values development. This might be the biological family from which the student comes, or it might be the family that they feel exists in the community sense - students, parents, and teachers, connected through a structured collective.

When discussing his parent’s perception of his friends, Vaea commented that: “Because [my friends] are Pasifika they see them as another like family and stuff like that. [...] they immediately put their trust [...] because they’re like Pasifika” (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan and Tongan). When asked where he thought his value set came from, he stated: “I reckon it’s like impacted from our parents as well growing up. It also involved with culture like Pasifika culture” (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan and Tongan). This assertion that a combination of home and wider culture was the source of Pacific based values, which supports the earlier comments about a collective formed around Pacific identity.

Cunningham et al. (2022), in their research into intergenerational storytelling in Pacific families found that:

Parents select and tell stories to their children with goals of teaching, bonding, and transmitting values. [...] Through reminiscing about parents' and grandparents' experiences, children come to understand different perspectives and ways of being in the world, and "begin to reflect more deeply on values and commitments, in ways that shape their own individual identity" (p.129).

The intergenerational connections referred to by the participants reflect this values transmission. Fivush et al. (2011), in their work on adolescent identity development, found that "narratives of the self are embedded within families in which narrative interaction is a common practice. This is particularly the case in adolescence when issues of identity and emotional regulation become key (p.45). Pacific families often have different experiences of migration, international family connections, and potential distance from places that are considered homelands, meaning the narrative transmission of values can play an important role. This can often occur outside of a formal schooling structure (Rogoff & Toma, 1997).

Respect as a value

All student participants in the talanoa indicated that, to them, respect was one of the primary values for Pacific peoples. This aligns strongly with the literature around Pacific values, for example in educational (Rimoni & Averill, 2019; Spiller, 2012) and health contexts (Durham et al., 2019). The concept of a value such as respect might be stereotypical or standard practice within a school context. However, students reported that they often felt as though there was a gap in the understanding of respect that they brought into the school environment. In her recent study concerning mathematics education and cultural values, Hunter (2021) found that respect was one of the values ranked most highly by Pacific students in relation to their mathematics education. She comments how certain behaviours exhibited by students in a class setting are a demonstration of the value of respect, perhaps not necessarily understood by the teacher:

The acts of listening and refraining from asking questions may be interpreted as passive or disinterested behaviour within the classroom by some teachers. However, as shown in the findings, it was clear that the Pasifika students in this study associated this behaviour with a key way of demonstrating respect. An implication of this is the need

for teachers to recognize listening as a respectful action in Pāsifika culture (Hunter, 2021, p. 321).

This insight outlines a clear example of how respect shown through a Pacific paradigm could be mis-interpreted by teachers, when in fact, the students feel as if they are demonstrating appropriate, respectful behaviour.

The following talanoa between myself and Malosi, emphasises the importance that he felt respect has as a value:

Joseph: What kind of things are those values focused around? If someone asked you a question like I am now I suppose, what are some values for Pasifika peoples?

Malosi: Respect is a massive thing.

Joseph: More so than like a Pākehā or palagi value, or different? [...]

Malosi: I mean, it's different, I guess. It's really important obviously, within the family itself, like within church what you do and how you hold yourself up is a big thing.

Joseph: What are the most important things for Pasifika peoples, or for Samoan people, things really high on the priority list?

Malosi: Respect, and family is a massive thing. (Malosi, Year 13, Samoan)

This talanoa exchange (above), indicates that respect is key when considering a values set for Pacific people and that there is a difference between Pacific and non-Pacific expressions and origins of this value. For Malosi, respect is linked strongly to the family and community of origin, as well as taking into consideration of whakapapa (intergenerational) lineage and culture. Ladwig Williams (2022), examines the way different Pacific values, including respect, are expressed during the process of preparing for cultural performance, specifically at the Auckland, New Zealand Polyfest. She notes that:

Giving cash gifts at events like the *fiefie* [showcase] enables adults to model *fe'onga 'iaki* (the values of mutual help, respect, and empathy) to young people. Cash gifts presented as part of dance performances are a reification of the families' commitment to the community of practise, and also legitimate Polyfest cultural groups as part of their greater cultural world (p.176).

Comments from other students in the various talanoa supported this by stating that respect for elders and a hierarchical, intergenerational system of respect was present for them and their families. Fetu discussed this with me:

Joseph: What about your family; what are the most important things to them?

Fetu: Respect. Respecting our elders.

Joseph: What does respect look like for you?

Fetu: Listening to the older people; when they tell you to do stuff, then you get it done. You don't talk back.

(Fetu, year 13, Samoan)

For Fetu, his notion of respect was also tied into the value of service or helping:

Joseph: For you, for a teacher to show you respect, or a person to show you respect – what would that look like? What should that person do?

Fetu: Helping out when they know that you're in need.

This offers an insight into how a student might view whether a teacher respects him as a student – whether they help him and his peers when they are in need. Another student (Vaea) went on to say that showing respect for teachers is important to him, specifically with a sense of gratitude towards school and teachers for teaching him: “I know for a fact one of my values towards school is huge respect. Just anyone that teaches me anything, such as teachers, I show respect” (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan and Tongan).

Rimoni and Averill (2019), in their research into the value of respect in New Zealand schools, emphasise “the importance of reciprocity of respect in positive relationships” between Pacific students and their teachers. This reciprocal respect is also present in key education policy documents such as Pasifika Education Plans (Ministry of Education, 2020a) and Tapasā (Ministry of Education, 2018). The emphasis on respect and on the values of humility and service (discussed below) demands a sense of caution. Critical examination must be applied to avoid co-option of Pacific values such as these.

For the students, respect and other values arise out of familial and cultural contexts. These are dynamic and changeable, particularly when migration and dislocation occur. Ratuva (2014) describes the importance of kinship and social connection for Pacific peoples:

One of the most resilient mechanisms for social protection in the Pacific is kinship because it provides the basis for collective support for the community's social, economic, and psychological needs in times of crisis (p.46).

It is from these “mechanisms” for “collective support” that various Pacific values expressions emerge. Hence, schools and teachers need to resist the temptation to stereotype them and use them as mechanisms for control within schools. Pacific communities must be listened to when it comes to these values and given the freedom to create and continue their use for their children in schooling contexts.

Humility as a value

The students who participated in this study also identified humility and staying humble as important to them. They also described behaviour in which being humble was expressed. This seemed to stem from both their desire to demonstrate respect to teachers and other people such as parents and elders, as well as not be seen as above or better than their friends, peers, or those around them. Humility is often referred to as a “common value to Pacific cultures” (Flavell, 2017, p. 47). It is referred to often by those undertaking educational research in Cook Island and Samoan cultural settings. For example, Fa’amaualalo in Samoan (Poumale, 2016) and tu ngakau maru in Cook Islands Māori (Te Ava et al., 2011). Recent research with New Zealand Pacific families affirms “that a key component of being respectful was being humble and demonstrating humility” (Tuifagalele et al., 2024, p. 11).

When asked about what kind of values he tries to live by, Vaea identified humility and, in the following passage, gave me an example of what he meant:

Vaea: I know for a fact one of my values is like stay humble and be humble. [...] So, like some of the boys are in the nineties club*, and then when the boys get it, they're like “nah, just got lucky” or something like that. And then like winning any big

achievement they're just like humble themselves like they didn't want to sound too cocky or anything because they didn't want to be seen above others.

Joseph: So, the boys they don't want to be seen above others, what do they want to be seen as?

Vaea: Like equal to each other, so we're still brothers but we're not above each other. So, yes, I may be older [or achieve higher], but I still see you as a brother.

* To belong to the nineties club is an award that is given to students who achieve an excellence endorsement in an NCEA subject.

As well as a desire to show humility, students discussed ways in which this value might hold them back or limit them in their pursuit of opportunities. Following a discussion around Pacific students in leadership positions at the school, Rangi (Year 12, Samoan) commented on the difference between a humble mindset versus a shy one:

Rangi: Like it's not drastic but it's just the little things like stepping up and giving it a crack even though you're not sure what's going to happen, like getting over that, I guess, humble mindset. I think there's a difference between being humble and being shy. Like [student name] for example, and how he doesn't really want to go for head boy because he feels like he's not being humble, like that whole mindset I think it's slowly changing [...]

Joseph: Like it's good to be humble, but it's also good to be able to serve in a leadership role.

Rangi: Yeah, like you don't think you're the man if you go for a role, like the tall poppy syndrome, I guess.

He concludes that humility shouldn't preclude one from taking an opportunity. We can also infer that specific support, or a specific approach might be helpful when discussing opportunities such as leadership positions or tertiary study with Pacific students. This could ensure that forgoing such opportunities is not seen as necessarily aligning with humility as a value.

There is potential scope for humility, among other Pacific values expressions, to be integrated into character education in schools. For example, Sanga (2019), in his research into a Solomon Islands Indigenous ethics curriculum, identifies the teaching of humility as a specific component. This "character-shaping" (p.243) education in an Indigenous Pacific

setting is conducted in ways specific to tribal groupings. It is shaped by the voices and experiences of the community. It provides an example of how Pacific values might be developed in relation to curriculums in the Pacific region, when carefully shaped by local parents and families. The value of humility is given as a core example of this, and Sanga (2019) relates an example of this when he describes how students in the Mala'ita tribe are "socialized to show humility by reflecting wisdom through applied understanding and deep comprehensive thinking" (p.247). This observation provides a strong example of how values, developed through Pacific lenses, can be integrated into curriculum, specifically character or ethics education. An approach, advocated for by international literature (Bosco et al., 2010).

Service as a value

Service is another value clearly expressed both by the students in our talanoa, and in the literature as important to Pacific peoples (Fa'aea & Enari, 2021; Rimoni et al., 2021). The students saw service as being of use to family, friends, and community, helping where they could, being mindful of the needs of others, and playing their role within family, group, team, or organisational structures. For example, in church, sporting, or cultural pursuits. As mentioned above, service is a value closely aligned to respect. An often-used Samoan proverb states, 'o le ala i le pule o le tautua' – the pathway to leadership is through service. As Fa'aea and Enari (2021) state, "Enacting tautua (service) is one of the key fundamental tenets of being Samoan, both in traditional village contexts of the (mother)land and diaspora communities in transnational societies" (pg. 2).

When asked about service during his interview, Rangi talked about its practical applications, as well as commenting on the role of service in an aiga (family):

Rangi: To be Pasifika it means to serve others. And so. It's kind of to live a life of service inside the school whether that be picking up rubbish or making sure that you're following the school rules, and I think offering yourself up to help someone move something.

Joseph: Do you think that's different to a lot of other non-Pasifika students.

Rangi: Yeah, definitely.

Joseph: Tell me about that?

Rangi: Since I've been brought up as Pasifika we have a habit to act like we do at home; and so, kind of in the back of our minds there's your mum or dad telling you to do this, do that, and subconsciously we do that in around the school, and we have no problem with it (Rangi, Year 12, Samoan)

The physicality of the service described by Rangi reflects being helpful to those around them and is an acknowledgement from the student that the person they are helping is worthy of respect. In my experience as a teacher, it was not uncommon to see Pacific students at SBHS offering their physical service to help teachers. For example, carrying or moving objects or furniture. While as a teacher, this was something I was pleased to see, it was also something that needs to be critically interrogated. For example, is this behaviour more common or unique to Pacific students? Is there an uncritical assumption by student and teachers that service means obedience? And how have the manifestations of the value of service been created? Rimoni et.al. (2021), state that "service is fundamentally important to Pacific people, with many learners and their families holding substantial service roles outside school" (p.14). They go on to state that teachers can "enact and nurture the Pacific value of service in ways that can make a positive difference for many Pacific learners", through the way that they as teachers demonstrate service (p. 17). This is a good starting point to begin to understand the value of service.

It is important to note that while Rangi and other students in the talanoa held a similar perspective, the value of service should not be seen as homogeneous across Pacific cultures. It is a myth that Pacific Peoples are a homogeneous ethnic group (Anae, 1997). Much of the literature I reflected on frames the Pacific value of service as almost exclusively beneficial to students (Reynolds, 2017; Rimoni et al., 2021). While understanding service as a value for different Pacific families and communities it is essential for school leaders and teachers to

avoid and at times challenge assumptions and stereotypes. Not all Pacific students will view service as a core part of their cultural identity, just as not all Pacific students are religious or attend a church (Durham et al., 2023; Gerace et al., 2023). Service is a positive value when it looks to care for the vulnerable and demonstrate respect, however, there is a risk that it could promote unnecessary obligations or exacerbate hierarchical norms (Iosefo & Iosefo-Williams, 2023). Teachers should be wary of any values promotion, particularly around service, that seeks to control the actions or aspirations of Pacific communities or take advantage of their generosity.

The tangible nature of service is something students were particularly prepared to offer in the culture of the school. This could be considered reflective of the way a parent and child might work together in a household where there are physical or social jobs to be done (Anae, 1997). It is also an expression of leadership, demonstrating care and pursuing achievement or success (Luafutu-Simpson et al., 2015; Samala, 2009). For example, Malosi linked service to ways in which his fellow Pacific students connected with identity and the work they are prepared to put into different pursuits. This was evident in the following exchange:

Joseph: What are some of the things you've seen in terms of the different ways that our students express themselves and are proud of their identity?

Malosi: Well, you've got boys who express their identity through the sports they play, and the amount of work they put into their sports and honing their craft, and then you've got boys that are more artsy, like music and art, and obviously that's two different students but they're both connected.

Joseph: Through the Pasifika kind of side of things?

Malosi: Yeah [...] their values could be really similar in the way they do their thing, like the value of service. (Malosi, Year 13, Samoan)

Malosi's thinking suggests that a way students connect to the value of service, both individually and collectively, can be found in the effort they put into activities such as sports and other pursuits. His comment suggests a diverse way of approaching how values, such as service, are expressed. An example might be found in the time given by students to prepare for

sports teams or cultural arts groups such as Polyfest. The older students give time to train and prepare younger students, prepare uniforms and organise other logistical needs, which they can view as service to the group. The performance itself can also be seen to be dedicated or gifted to the community, their families, and their school. In other words, “success is not just in the final outcome but also it is about how one goes about achieving that final outcome” (Luafutu-Simpson et al., 2015, p. 22). This process was alluded to by participants in several talanoa in this study and is reflective of a Pacific understanding of service as described by recent studies (D Fa'avae, 2017; Reynolds, 2017; Rimoni, 2016).

Values connected to the school

The students involved in the talanoa were all senior students who had been at the school for between 3 and 4 years, and therefore had a strong connection to the school. Many of the students said that they felt an affinity with some of the specific values of the school, as well as the single sex nature of the school. The strongest two concepts that emerged from the talanoa were ‘better than before’ and ‘brotherhood’. ‘Better than before’ is a formal value of the school. This is displayed throughout the school and in formal documentation such as their website and annual report (Shirley Boys' High School, 2022). ‘Brotherhood’ is a more loosely defined value that the students self-identified with in relation to Polyfest and their Pacific community of students, past and present. The students saw the expression of these values as critical to their success in the school setting and felt that they transcended the specific school environment into their lives beyond.

Better than before (BTB) is a value of the school (Shirley Boys' High School, 2023), where students are encouraged to focus their efforts on surpassing previous personal achievements no matter where they are at. Former headmaster, John Laursen, invoked the idea of BTB as an incremental improvement model, similar to the Japanese concept of kaizen (Suárez-Barraza & Rodríguez-González, 2015). It is a key value and phrase retained from the

previous school site and culture, and is a familiar saying among students, past and present, as well as an idea or motto often used by co-curricular groups. For the Pacific students at the school, it is a phrase that is used commonly to support their efforts at Polyfest, sporting events, academic endeavours, as well as a connecting phrase used among the school's old boys' network.

While it was connected to the theme of personal ambition and drive described above, BTB was also a phrase that arose in talanoa specifically in conversations around values as shown here:

BTB – be better than before. And I think that's what our Pasifika community has really enjoyed this year, just to be better than before. I think that's what made most of our Pasifika boys get to where we are now – to graduate" (Fetu, Year 13, Samoan).

Here, Fetu indicates that this value is a motivating factor for Pacific students, particularly in his cohort or group of peers. Another student indicated that better than before was one of the values that he identified with, but that he felt it did not necessarily "come in with the majority of Pasifika" and that he thought "most boys just try and scrape through to pass, and [...] cruise" (Rangi, Year 12, Samoan). This talanoa, across two individual students, reveals how student perception of themselves and their peers in relation to specific values, can vary significantly (Hunter et al., 2016). Fetu felt that the value of 'better than before' helped ensure that the students crossed the finish line and graduated, whereas Rangi thought that 'better than before' was present in his value set but that he did not necessarily see it in the academic attitude of his peers.

In their study into academically successful Pacific students, Tait et al. (2016) found that Pacific students' motivation and academic achievement were influenced by relationships with teachers, parents, and friends. Students in their study related that it was factors such as the "opportunity to demonstrate their academic competencies" and being "influenced by ability and family values" (p. 50), that drove their desire to participate and succeed academically. The

BTB school value seeks to support students' personal ambitions in a similar way, by inspiring personal belief in relation to success. For the Pacific students at SBHS, the value of BTB represents individual and collective persistence across several domains.

Across the various group and individual talanoa, the value of brotherhood emerged strongly for the boys as being a value and an experience for them throughout their schooling. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Reynolds (2017) emphasises the importance of this values-based concept in relation to other Pacific boys schooling contexts. It was linked closely to identity and how they saw themselves as a Pacific community both at school and beyond. Their brotherhood did not seek to take away from their relationships with other students and groups. However, they saw it as a special and highly prized part of being part of the Pacific student group and, more specifically, the cultural performance group for the Polyfest (Pacific cultural dance festival): "I think altogether there is like a brotherhood throughout the whole school, but it definitely isn't as strong as our Pasifika group" (Student, group talanoa one). When asked about how he perceived Pacific identity at school, one student's response was: "Brotherhood. Culture. Family. A bond" (Student, group talanoa one). Similarly, Hawkes (2023), in her ethnographic research into Australian Pacific rugby league communities, identifies the presence of a "brotherhood between the Pacific nations" (p.1543). She notes that in contexts such as rugby league, there can be similar communal and collective similarities to faith and family for Pacific communities, drawn from "cultural values such as Christian faith and the vā" (p.1539). I would say that this can also be the case in school environments if Pacific expressions of values are able to thrive.

The following exchange reveals one student's view that the sense of "brotherhood" was a key factor for students wanting to come to the school. As evident in the following exchange, when I asked Fetu (Year 13, Samoan), "What's awesome about the future of our Pasifika community here at Shirley?", he commented:

Fetu: Probably that there's more and more Pasifika students coming into Shirley. Probably because of our brotherhood that we have here.

Joseph: You feel that Pacific students want to come here?

Fetu: Yeah, people wanting to come here just because we're like a whole family; our massive family.

Other students in the two group talanoa also believed that strong Pacific family and community networks, as well as the student experience at the school, were well known and were attractive to potential students and their families. The students were particularly proud of this:

We are like family we call each other the brotherhood. Even outside of Polyfest some of boys are still active with each other, especially the old boys coming down to our practices and supporting us and looking after us (Student, group talanoa two).

The students seemed to demonstrate what might be considered an ethic of care (Barber, 2016). This had stemmed from collective Pacific structures within the school that they themselves had experienced and which they in turn wanted to share and continue with others.

This theme of looking after and watching out for each other in the form of a brotherhood connects to the idea of collective agency and ethos as described by Marat et al. (2011) in their examination of Pacific student and parent agency in tertiary education. They state that for Pacific communities and families, this can often contrast with an individual or narrow pursuit of success that might be seen in a school. It is also comparable to a sense of team unity that one might see within sports (Hawkes, 2023), but rarely across other significant ethnic groups or populations of students that spans all year levels. In this school (SBHS) and in many others, there are house systems that attempt to create this sense of brotherhood or metaphorical family unity. Connection in these types of groupings can be varied, from superficial to deep. Throughout the talanoa with students, none of them referenced a specific feeling of belonging to their school house. While this does not necessarily indicate that they do not feel this belonging, there were many opportunities where they could have used their house or house

class as an example of supporting their identity or wellbeing. However, they did not, which poses an interesting question to school leaders as to their effectiveness in this regard.

Reynolds (2017) examines the ideas of collective success and brotherhood in his research into Pacific male experiences of schooling. In his research, he observed a Pacific brotherhood which “[cut] across age and primary school-based boundaries” and provided “immediate support” (p. 138). He noted some potential issues around the notion of acceptance and competing forms of success, where there were elements of risk for students. These risks, which I can also see existing in my own research context, could take the form of exclusion of those outside the group and limited or narrow expectations, as discussed in the stereotype theme of this chapter.

Pan-Pacific Values

One of the risks of using collective terms such as Pasifika or Pacific peoples, is that there can be a tendency to categorise all Pacific peoples as a single, homogeneous group. Pacific peoples come from different national and ethnic backgrounds and possess a variety of different cultural and linguistic expressions (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). Given that most Pacific students at SBHS affiliate to Samoan or Tongan families, the risk is that the smaller groups of students from other Pacific nations might be overlooked or be unable to express their own cultural identities.

In both group talanoa, as well as in individual talanoa with Malosi and Fetu, the students expressed a vision for the Pacific community connecting common goals and using the strength of their values to achieve and demonstrate their abilities. There was a togetherness and collective that ran through their talanoa, and as a result, they saw and spoke about shared values that, to a certain extent, could be considered pan-Pacific in a New Zealand or diasporic context. This aligns with a significant amount of thinking in Pacific educational research over the last two decades – with shared Pacific values being a cornerstone of policy documents such as

Pasifika Education Plans (Ministry of Education, 2012), and other tools such as *Tapasā: Cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners* (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Several examples from the talanoa indicate how different students viewed Pacific shared values: “Well, across all the cultures it’s all sort of similar; we all sort of grow up the same” (Student, group talanoa one). While not necessarily accurate, this comment is reflective of the shared experiences that many of the students possess, growing up as Pacific in the same large city, in the South Island of New Zealand. Of course, while not all Pacific students at the school experienced the same upbringing, these strong shared experiences of family, socio-economic and educational realities contribute to a shared value system. Internationally, this is similar to the experiences of other communities. Trinidad (2014), in their discussion of Hawaiian epistemologies and values, examine the role that shared experiences of place and values can have on young, native Hawaiians. They found that this approach, embedded into an education setting, can “be a transformative approach that promotes social justice and social change” (p. 124).

One of the students involved in this research was born in Samoa and came to New Zealand as a young child. Most of the overall Pacific roll at SBHS are New Zealand born and only a small amount are born in places like Samoa and Tonga. These shared experiences and values result in dialogue between students, with another student reflecting on his position as a Samoan: “When you talk to a Tongan and tell them your life story about growing up, you’d be surprised how similar you are. That’s common, it’s Polynesian excellence, Polynesian values” (Student, group talanoa one). A third student in student talanoa group one goes on to share that his perceptions of Pacific values connect with the potential for excellence that lie within: “I associate [our values] with potential and excellence, because there’s so much potential in Pasifika” (Student, group talanoa one). This is a considerably oppositional view to many of the

deficit stereotypes students reported that they face (Hunter, 2022; Spiller, 2012). In the following dialogue, the student is asked about shared values:

Joseph: But do you think that some of these values that you're talking about are shared across the different island groups or do you think the island groups have their own ones as well?

Vaea: I strongly believe they do share across all islands but like, it's just different because some people may have different religions. So, like, church stuff like that. They may believe in different things. But I believe they're like our values are similar throughout all Pasifika people.

Joseph: Take yourself, for example, Samoan, and then you take like the [name] brothers, who are Tongan. Do you think you guys have shared values or do you think you're quite different?

Vaea: I believe we have shared values. Like I have respect for him, he has respect for me. I ask him questions and tells me things. He asks me questions about some other things. You know, we're both similar, I say that I'm part Tongan as well (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan and Tongan).

The perspectives of the students around pan-Pacific values are similar to Pacific educational policy, which encourages teachers to view Pacific values as shared (Ministry of Education, 2012, 2018). As Vaea notes, this Pacific value system, which he sees as shared, is reciprocal (Dyck, 2021) and can be used as a platform for dialogue – questions within the context of a relationship, in order to advance understanding (Chu-Fuluifaga, 2022).

Church and spirituality

There is strong acknowledgement that spirituality is a "cornerstone of traditional Pasifika values and cultures" (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018, p. 7). From this spirituality flows diverse experiences of church, religion, traditional beliefs, and wisdom such as proverbs and mythology (Chu-Fuluifaga, 2022; Laumemea, 2018). Churches and religious institutions can have influence among Pacific peoples in relation to values and education. This has been noted by recent research. For example, Hunter (2020) states that for many Pacific peoples' social groupings such as church communities would be considered a form of extended family.

Fletcher et al. (2006) also stressed the important role that the family and church and associated activities played in the strengthening of Pacific academic achievement, for example, literacy:

[This research] emphasised the importance of acknowledging the cultural capital of Pasifika students and their families in the school setting. Both the Pasifika values of respect for elders (such as parents, ministers, and teachers) and the church, plus the centrality of the Bible and reading it at home and at church were highly evident (p. 25).

This central positioning of church for many Pacific families connects strongly to the talanoa undertaken in this research. Interestingly, all the students involved in the research, except one, regularly attended church, and this came through in both subtle and tangible ways in the talanoa when discussing values. Several students ascribed faith or church as something that they valued, or a source of their own values:

Joseph: [...] going to some stuff around values. What [is] some of the stuff that Pasifika value, and why?

Student: “Faith, and always having that connection with God, and church.”
(Student, group talanoa one)

Another student seemed to equate church with family and stated that church was an example of a place he considered to be of importance. When asked a question of what or where values might be focused on, he stated: “I mean, it’s different, I guess. It’s really important obviously, within the family itself, like within church, what you do and how you hold yourself up is a big thing” (Malosi, year 13, Samoan).

Church can be considered a place where various aspects of a person’s life converge, such as social, spiritual, familial, cultural, economic, and educational. It could be considered a contemporary form of a village for many Pacific people, or “island connection within diaspora contexts” (Faleolo, 2020, p. 73). It makes sense that values are shaped by it as an environment: “Another value like I mentioned before is service, it’s big, and I think what contributes to that value is the church; and so, we’re all religious, and we know what’s right” (Rangi, year 12, Samoan). Rangi’s understanding of his value of service and his perception of the origin of this value is shaped by church. While not all Pacific families and students attend a church, this

perhaps indicates the specific importance of spirituality. As mentioned in student group talanoa one, this could exist in the context of faith and a “connection with God” or it might be due to social behaviours that are expected and developed in the church or community environment. For example, the serving of elders, involvement in youth collectives or social justice activities.

Considering the connection with religion, church and spirituality, it is important to consider relationships with Pacific communities. However, in a similar way to other values, school leaders and teachers must take care with making sweeping assumptions. There is a need to develop an understanding of the different roles that spirituality plays in different Pacific families and communities. In her work with Pacific migrants in Brisbane, Faleolo (2020) notes the role of spirituality in relation to wellbeing:

Pasifika migrants define wellbeing beyond just a state of physical or emotional health and include important familial and spiritual dimensions that connect them as Pasifika people to their extended family networks, their village or church community and avenues for the continuation of cultural ways of living (p.71)

The question is, how can teachers be aware of and supportive of heterogeneous Pacific communities present in the wider school community? Chu-Fuluifaga (2022), suggests that the answer lies in “an appreciation of the diversity of Pacific people; awareness of the cultures of Pacific people and the culture of the school as it seeks to be welcoming; and mindfulness of the prominence of spirituality and the church to Pacific people. Strategies that embody these factors are likely to be successful in encouraging engagement” (p.80). Here, appreciation needs to be understood as a process which leads to “positive and strengths-based operations or actions of educators that result in student learning” (p.30). Appreciative inquiry or appreciative mediation by educators, can be an effective way for them to transform schooling experience for Pacific communities (Abella, 2018; Flavell, 2023).

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a platform for the voices of the student participants in relation to their reflections on Pacific student identities. Having presented their comments in

relation to the key themes that emerged under this idea, it is clear that the students are navigating complex realities in their schooling. Our talanoa explored the opportunities and challenges that they as students experience at school, the important role that their Pacific identities play in their experience of success, and the way in which Pacific values systems are deeply embedded in their lives and communities.

Throughout our talanoa, the students drew on the various aspects of their Pacific identities to conceptualise their understanding of their schooling experience. With care, they conveyed their perceptions of the stereotyping that Pacific students might face at school. They also described the way in which they felt collectivism and unity underpinned the way they operated as a community. While this did not eliminate challenges or difficulties, it gave them a way in which to bring the values of their families to life. These values systems, guided by intergenerational and diverse cultural expressions, provided a shared language for the students. They also provided a point of reference around which the students could ensure their identities, collective and individual, were able to develop and grow in the school context. Their perspectives analysed alongside relevant, local and international literature must be considered by school leaders, teachers, and policy makers, as they consider the way in which schooling is delivered to Pacific communities in diasporic contexts.

This chapter constituted the next step, as I continued the metaphorical task of creating this *tīvaevae*. As discussed in the Chapter 3, the *tuitui* phase involves working towards the creation of a *tīvaevae*. I do so humbly alongside the participants involved in the talanoa, for the materials being used are their voices in which are contained their hopes, ideas, concerns, and experiences. The next chapter (Chapter 6) further develops the student talanoa by examining their reflections on school environments.

Chapter 6: Shirley Boys' High School Student Talanoa: Reflections on School Environments

Introduction

Chapter 6 continues the discussion and analysis of the talanoa I had with student participants at Shirley Boys High School (SBHS). The chapter explores several themes under the broad idea of reflections on school environments. It recalls the research aims, which sought to explore the physical, social, and cultural environments at SBHS.

With the contextual background of the participants and the research approach having been discussed in the previous chapter (5), this chapter consists only of the discussion of the four themes and their related ideas. These themes include school structures and systems, teachers, the school environment, and empowering Pacific students through inclusive curriculum. Each theme presents the voices of the participants. They draw on the examples and reflections that emerged in the talanoa. These themes are discussed and analysed alongside local and international literature to critically understand the participants experiences in relation to wider findings.

School structures and systems

The nature of a school is complex, particularly in a large school like the research site, which has over 1300 students and 100 staff (Ministry of Education, 2023f). Students must negotiate interpersonal relationships with their fellow students, teachers, coaches, and support staff. They must also navigate the varied environments and structures that exist, for example, curriculum departments, the SBHS house system, classes, and co-curricular groups. Curricular programs concern their academic achievement, while extra-curricular activities concern their sporting and cultural pursuits. Pastoral systems look to provide support, manage behaviour, and inform students around pathways and transitions. The house system is a way of organising students and aims to create a sense of belonging and order within the school environment.

In the talanoa sessions with students, I was able to gain an insight and perspective into their experience of the structures and systems that exist within the school. I heard about the way they negotiate these daily, both inside and outside of the classroom. These insights contained valuable comments about the disconnect that often exists between how the school operates and the value systems Pacific students possess. This reminded me of the way in which schools can “[reinforce and undermine] the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of traditionally marginalised, excluded and subaltern segments of society” (Asgharzadeh, 2008, p. 339).

Several of the students in the talanoa talked about the barriers that they have faced and a lack of responsiveness that exists by default. For example, Malosi talked about Pacific students as actively “seen” by staff because “we’re always out there doing stuff whether that’s good or not”. This comment reflects this student’s perception of his visibility within the structures and systems of the school. It also reflects the paradox that students are often seen in the negative, but invisible in the positive. This will be further developed in this section, specifically in the context of negotiating academic success and pastoral care.

Negotiating academic success

Students across the group and individual talanoa discussed how they had to negotiate academic success in the context of the classroom. They emphasised how aspects of the very system that many consider to be designed to facilitate student success and agency, in fact provided barriers to their engagement and achievement. In response to a question about how teachers view Pacific students, a comment from one student indicates a deficit perception: “In some cases bad grades I guess, and a lot of excuses on why they’re not doing well. A lot of laziness, and potential, but potential is probably the big word, and [we] get a lot of pity from teachers - they’ll pity this and pity that” (Rangi, Year 12, Samoan).

These feelings and perceptions that Rangi points to refer to the classroom environment as he has experienced it. The reference to being seen as achieving “bad grades” and giving “a lot of excuses” indicates how he might notice the deficit theorising or veiled racism of a teacher (Hunter, 2022). The use of the word “potential”, which many teachers might consider to be a positive expression, seems to reflect a similarly deficit position, closely linked to “pity”. From the perspective of the student, the pity is attached to the potential that they might be destined not to achieve in the eyes of the teacher. When discussing what might contribute to strengthening a student’s academic success in the classroom, two students in the group talanoa commented:

Student one: Seeing our values in the classroom could change the attitude on actually wanting to be better as well.

Student two: If you were to interweave that into subjects and stuff, it’s like keeping the boys aware and making them want to show off their values more if that makes sense? They would be capable of really using their values to be better if those small things were implemented within school education (Student group talanoa two)

This represents a shift away from focusing on the shortcomings of students, and their further marginalisation. As international research has indicated, this type of discourse can pervade curriculum delivery and pedagogy (Adiredja & Louie, 2020; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). The students in student talanoa two expressed a belief that seeing their values represented and being able to live or express their values in the classroom would contribute to an increased capability and an intrinsic motivation to “be better”.

One of the principles of the current *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) is high expectations. This is underpinned by research which supports the value of high achievement expectations for students, supported by quality teaching (Alton-Lee, 2003). The desire to avoid conflict with Pacific students can lead to teachers potentially loosening the rules for them, and as result, lowering expectations. It is clear from the literature, particularly from the last two decades, that deliberate and high expectations for students are essential (Mauigoa,

2014; Weinstein, 2002). Teacher expectations in multi-ethnic classrooms need to be critically considered. Rio (2017) examined New Zealand teacher and student expectations, with a particular focus on Māori and Pacific students. Her research suggests that Pacific students are often be engaged by teachers in lower-level tasks. She found that this resulted in lower achievement and that “students were astute at knowing which teacher behaviours portrayed alternatively high or low expectations” (p. i). The expectation gap is a phenomenon that “tends to be a fundamental part of human nature” (p. i). Research into the role of expectations in the teacher student relationship has been explored for over half a century, with Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) comparing this dynamic to the Pygmalion story from Greek mythology (Ovid, 2018). There needs to be a continued emphasis on transforming practice by using research informed approaches in this area.

I asked Vaea in his individual talanoa what he thought could be done to improve outcomes for Pacific students at school. He indicated that high expectations could assist in academic achievement and that he would like to see an increase in being “strict” or “hard”:

I reckon we should be stricter. Like being harder on us, like yes, we can relate, we can also encourage our students to strive better. Rather than slack, what we say in rugby is, like going through the motions. So, like actually doing the thing with purpose (Vaea, Year 13 Samoan and Tongan).

This comment was reflective of his understanding that striving leads to higher achievement outcomes across various domains. Vaea indicated that having a purpose and increased extrinsic motivation, such as more rigid structure around the learning, would be useful for many students. Therefore, for Vaea a well-structured approach and an understanding of why he is learning was important for academic success. Other students in the group talanoa shared this thought when they affirmed that the various Pacific cultures had cultures of high standards and excellence. This striving and desire for success can be related to different parties – teachers, students, family, and community members. All of whom need to be engaged in the discourse around high expectations for Pacific students (Rubie-Davies, 2007)

Pastoral care

The nature of pastoral care in New Zealand schools varies. Schools employ a variety of different methods with the aim of providing care for their students and the wider school community, including families (Barber, 2016). Schools usually have several points of contact for students and parents/caregivers that are orientated towards pastoral care. For example, form teachers, deans, school counsellors and a senior leader (Barber, 2016; Denny et al., 2014). For three years, I was a dean at SBHS, which is a central position within the pastoral care structure. Consequently, I had a particular interest in the student talanoa concerning the concept of care with the school.

Many of the student participants in this research expressed a desire to see their own value systems reflected in the pastoral care they received. They wished it to be responsive to their identity (Renihan & Renihan, 1995). One student stated that trust and respect go hand in hand: “It would just be my natural instinct to go to someone that I trust, [someone] I’ve been respected [by]” (Vaea, Year 13, Samoan and Tongan). A student in group talanoa one gave an example of how a significant occurrence within his family life went unnoticed by school pastoral care structures – in his case it was two bereavements:

Joseph: Do you feel that they try and make an effort to connect with your families?

Student: Not really because I had two first cousins pass away this year, and I don’t think we get much response from teachers when it comes to family, like yeah, there’s the individual, but you spend most of your time with your family.

His reflection notes that while the school is primarily concerned with the student as an individual, he comes to school from the context of a wider family, which is where he spends most of his time. Therefore, it makes sense for the structures of care that exist within a school to connect with family (Bevan-Brown, 2009; Edwards et al., 2012). As Barber (2016) emphasises, “pastoral care which is neither student-centred, nor family-centred, does not

appear to provide adequate support or nurturing for Māori or Pasifika secondary students” (p. 49).

Within the pastoral system of a school there is also a component that focuses on behaviour. This is where student life is regulated by the adults within the school in order “maintain discipline and order” (Darlow, 2011, p. 14). Punitive measures are often administered by similar staff in this area of the school. Thus, the line between a pastoral system and a discipline system is often blurred. Within this system, particularly at traditional single sex schools, there is often a uniformity desired by various groups within the school community, ranging from parents and teachers to the students themselves. This can sometimes be perceived to leave little room for individuality and expression (Spielhagan, 2013). It is interesting to note that the students did not directly challenge this in the talanoa. None of them called for the abolition of certain rules. However, they did express concern toward ways in which they might be seen within this system that seeks uniformity when they as a minority so clearly stand out. In the group talanoa, the topic of how Pacific students are perceived within the school environment arose. The students commented on how they felt they were viewed:

Student one: Detentions, wrong uniform.

Student two: I think from a dean’s perspective it’s really easy to assume what a student is, or that can be, even if it’s just based off one Pasifika student got told off. They’ll look at us as a whole.

Student three: Yeah, so if they tell off one then it gives a bad name for all of us.

Student four: it gives us a bad name. We really stand out throughout the school because the majority of the school is white. (Students, group talanoa one)

The students are clearly stating here that they feel that they are, at times, the victims of racial profiling. Alansari et al. (2020), in their review of racism in New Zealand schools, found significant evidence to support the reality that these students describe. They note that racial profiling, and other forms of group stereotyping is common in schools. Mayeda et al. (2014) examined the experiences of Māori and Pacific students with racism. They note that forms of

covert or implicit racism, which are described by the students above, exist within educational institutions in New Zealand. They state that there is often an “ambiguity and lack of intentionality that allow perpetrators to remain oblivious of their own racism and its impacts” (p. 5). I am inclined to believe that raising the consciousness of teachers to this reality would support the transformation of oppressive school pastoral and discipline structures into ones that are more just and effective for Pacific students.

Students revealed in their talanoa that trust plays a key role in pastoral care. This trust depends on the two parties knowing and having a degree of understanding towards each other. For example, one student in the group talanoa concluded: “Yeah, I do think students can definitely hold relationships with teachers, and especially teachers that can acknowledge your culture. That’s the teachers you want, and I think all teachers should be like that” (Student, group talanoa two). Similarly, Barber (2016)’s research in relation to Pacific student experiences of the pastoral systems at school found that knowledge of students was key to successful pastoral intervention.

The relational space that the student refers to here is linked to concept that emerges from Pacific epistemologies – the *vā*. This can be defined as “a spatial way of conceiving the secular and spiritual dimensions of relationships and relational order, that facilitates both personal and collective well-being” (Airini et al., 2010, p. 10). It is particularly important for teachers to understand the *vā* in the context of pastoral care for Pacific students. The following dialogue from Student talanoa one gives an insight into how they perceive the *vā* to be nurtured:

Joseph: What should that support from your teacher look like for Pasifika?

Student one: Like a need to care.

Student two: Checking in on us, in close, and maybe even outside of class just acknowledging our existence rather than in class.

Student three: Instead of emailing our parents the work that we don’t do.

Student one: Yeah and trying to help us directly.

Student four: I reckon it goes back to having a sense of belonging; and so, feeling you're included, you know, that you are valued (Student, group talanoa one)

The students give a very practical description of how they view support should be given by teachers – care-orientated, acknowledgement focused, direct and connected to the student, linked to values and strong in relational trust. Their views are similar to findings from recent research with different Pacific student groups across New Zealand (D Fa'avae, 2017; Flavell, 2017; Hunter et al., 2016).

In their ethnographic reflection on schooling experiences for Pacific students, Tuiloma and Jones (2022) relate similar experiences of disconnect and division. Their experience of structural inequities and racism resulted in different experiences based on teacher approach: “In the classes where the teachers took time to get to know me, including my ancestral language, culture, and identity, I did well. But, for other classes including maths, I remember feeling unknown, unseen, and unmotivated” (p.16). It is their perspective that student focused care needs to be based on establishing mutual respect and trust between the communities who are engaged. If there is a cultural or linguistic divide that exists between teachers and students, then a proactive way of caring needs to be established.

These findings are echoed in international contexts. In her work exploring Mexican immigrant and U.S. born achievement, Valenzuela (1999) examines the concept of subtractive schooling. This is when school environments enact assimilationist approaches and consequently erode student social capital. Valenzuela's findings include the assertion that schools can be “organized formally and informally in ways that fracture students' cultural and ethnic identities, creating social, linguistic and cultural divisions among the students and between the students and the staff” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 5). In a comment that echoes the worst-case scenario of the students in the talanoa, who emphasise the importance of trust and care in pastoral responses, Valenzuela states that:

The feeling that ‘no one cares’ is pervasive - and corrosive. Real learning is difficult to sustain in an atmosphere rife with mistrust. Over even comparatively short periods of time, the divisions and misunderstandings that characterize daily life at the school exact high costs in academic, social, and motivational currency (p. 5).

This highlights the important role that the adults within the school environment can play. Behind the comment that “no one cares” are the many teachers and staff members in the school community. This chapter will now attend to the student participant voices concerning teachers and the role they play in their lives.

Teachers

One of the key points of discussion in the talanoa related to teachers and the way they behave in the various settings of the school. The role of the teacher is important in the development of relationships. In their 2013 literature review on Pacific education issues in New Zealand, Chu et.al. (2013) stated: “At secondary level, there is evidence that Pasifika students—more so than other cultural groups—report being more motivated when their teachers show they care about their learning (going beyond caring about them personally)” (p.2). To me, this speaks to the need for relationships to break boundaries that marginalised students encounter in schools. Particularly those that “[perpetuate] the existing social pattern” (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 12). Chu et.al. (2013) went on to emphasise that teacher development was critical around home–school engagement:

There is urgent need for validated organisational approaches for home–school–community engagement and for the development of individual teacher knowledge, understandings and use of culturally responsive approaches to promote positive connections to family and community for Pasifika (p. 3).

I see the improvement in this home–school engagement as a way for school leaders and teachers to develop their understanding of Pacific peoples’ diverse sets of cultural capital. By seeing and hearing the “linguistic and cultural competence” within a student’s family, there is the opportunity for the teacher to see that student as a whole person (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 12).

For example, my talanoa with the students revealed the importance they placed on teachers and how certain teachers were effective in supporting them. Many of these pedagogical practices connect directly with themes already covered in this chapter. This highlights the way in which teachers connect to all elements of school life, and the critical nature of the role they play. However, in our talanoa, the role of Pacific teachers stood out as something particularly noteworthy.

The importance of Pacific teachers

Recent research from the Ministry of Education in the *Talanoa Ako: Pacific Education Literature Review on Key Findings of the Pacific PowerUP Longitudinal Evaluation 2016–2018* (Chu-Fuluifaga, 2022; Chu et al., 2013), and *The Action Plan for Pasifika Education 2020-2030* (Ministry of Education, 2020a), have emphasised the critical role that Pacific teachers play in schooling. At this point, it should be noted that Pacific teachers do not have a monopoly on connection with Pacific students (Averill, 2009; Houghton & Houghton, 2022; Nakhid, 2003). However, the literature does indicate that relationships with non-Pacific teachers tend to be more focused on the function of teaching and learning and related to specifically siloed contexts such as the classroom. It is important to emphasise that often these relationships can and do produce fruitful outcomes for students and teachers alike (Reynolds, 2019). However, in contrast, Pacific teacher relationships with Pacific students can often be broader and go beyond whether students are in their class or sports team (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b). Specific support or assistance might be sought from them, in a way that other students might seek support from a parent (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Rather than take away from or undermine the role of the parent, these relationships have potential to add to the student's support-system, as they try to navigate the spaces they come across in school (Riwai-Couch et al., 2020).

It is important to state clearly that employing a Pacific teacher is not a guarantee of success for Pacific students. This is often an assumption made in school settings. Si'ilata (2019), in her research into teacher professional practice with multilingual Pacific students, found that successful engagement of Pacific students “was not solely the province of Pasifika teachers” (p. 188). There are risks for both Pacific communities and Pacific teachers that these assumptions can lead to cultural taxation in ways not dissimilar to those experienced by Māori teachers in the Canterbury region (Torepe & Manning, 2017). The employment of Pacific teachers can also result in co-option, whereby the Pacific teacher enables a school to appear more inclusive or responsive to the needs of the Pacific community. They can also experience coercion if pressured by colleagues to enforce long standing institutional practices and policies that are harmful to the students. It is therefore essential for schools to engage in constructive dialogue with Pacific teachers to ensure safe workplace practices. School leaders, both Pacific and non-Pacific, can fall victim to stereotype bias as well as the power structures within schools that seek to reproduce the norms of the dominant culture.

Students in the talanoa identified Pacific teachers as a significant contributor to Pacific student success and engagement at school. They stated various ways in which they provide support, which often aligned with the values theme as described above. Several students spoke about Pacific teachers as if they saw them as members of their extended family. For many of them there were church, family, village or island connections that existed before they came to school and will endure after. As Rio and Stephenson (2010) state:

Pasifika teachers can play an important role in making schools successful for Pasifika students [...] In sharing cultural knowledge and understandings, they have created possibilities for cultural specificities to be appreciated and reinforced at the level of the school. [...] they hold the potential to create a shift in attitude, and thus to bring about wider transformation (p. 8).

It was notable that the students' talanoa placed value on the empathy and similar world view that a Pacific teacher might possess. They saw this as contributing to a shared

understanding and sensitivity to the experiences of the students: “[We need Pacific teachers] because they would know from our growing up; how they’ve grown up the same way. I think they’ll be a little bit more sensitive to our situations.” (Student, group talanoa one). This was not to say that they felt Pacific teachers were more lenient on them. However, they saw a greater degree of empathy which, in turn, resulted in a more equitable pedagogical approach and learning outcomes: “It’s easier for a Pasifika teacher to connect with the Pasifika student because they understand each other better.” (Student, group talanoa one). Tu’imana (2022) emphasised the strength that Pacific educators can bring in her reflection on a Tongan understanding of relationality within school leadership. For example, when describing a school event, she explained how, “Tongan parents, grandparents, and teachers were able to converse freely about successes as well as concerns with student outcomes” (p.12). Moreover, Tui’mana added that Pacific teachers are capable of “enacting quality practices that are responsive to the cultures of their students” and that “by advocating alternative methods, [they] challenge the dominant system” (p.4).

The role of Pacific teachers links directly to the comments in the discussion about pastoral care, where the *vā* is nurtured by teachers. The students advised me that their Pacific teachers have a specific way of working within the *vā*, and this assists them to “relate” and connect” with Pacific learners. Similar research outcomes have been found elsewhere. Rimoni (2016), in her research with Tama Samoa (Samoan boys) and their experience at secondary school, also heard from participants that “more Pacific teachers [could] make a difference” (p. 137) for Pacific students. She found that there were specific benefits around pastoral care when teachers were able to connect culturally and linguistically. Her participants stated that they appreciated the way their Pacific teachers were “very friendly”, helped students to “feel they belong” and, “[spoke] Samoan” (Rimoni, 2016, p. 119).

Another way in which Pacific teachers can support and nurture the vā is by fostering powerful engagement with Pacific families (Chu-Fuluifaga, 2022; Cunningham & Jesson, 2021; Laumemea, 2018). For example, this could be achieved by facilitating positive interactions in a school where most teachers are non-Pacific. Pacific teachers can help parents see a tangible support for students within the context of a school. In our individual talanoa I asked Rangi how he felt Pacific parents and families felt about SBHS:

Rangi: I think they think our school is a really good school for Pasifika. I think they really appreciate the work of [names two specific teachers] and all the Pasifika staff, and I think that they think there's a lot of support at Shirley for Pasifika students, and there is. I think that's how they feel about Shirley. (Rangi, year 12, Samoan)

This comment from Rangi indicates that he felt that support for Pacific students is personified by Pacific teachers and their efforts within the school. I feel that this relates strongly to Pacific teachers as enablers of student voice. The following exchange with Vaea specifically points to Pacific teachers in this way:

Joseph: Do you feel that like our Pasifika boys here have a voice in the school?

Vaea: Probably through [names Pasifika student in a leadership position] but it would probably be more reflected by Pasifika teachers because they like basically carry Pasifika students.

Joseph: So, our teachers, our Pasifika teachers give a voice to our Pasifika students. Is that what you're saying?

Vaea: Yeah. (Vaea, year 13, Samoan and Tongan)

Vaea's comment that Pacific teachers "carry Pasifika students" highlights the critical role these Pacific teachers play in the eyes of the students who participated in this study.

This finding aligns with research elsewhere. For example, Smaill et al. (2024) explored how schools in New Zealand support Pacific students to achieve University Entrance. They state that:

Pacific teachers, career advisors, school leaders and board members played a crucial role [...]. They positioned themselves as advocates for these students and worked tirelessly to build relationships with them and support them to succeed. They also understood that they were uniquely placed to establish relationships with whānau Māori

and Pacific families. These relationships helped to ensure that families had access to information about UE requirements, which in turn enabled them to support their young people to fulfil these. In addition, Māori and Pacific teachers, school leaders, and BOT (Board of Trustees) members frequently took responsibility for spearheading and running initiatives that were designed to support ākonga Māori and Pacific students to succeed (p. 8).

Throughout their report, Smaill et al. (2024) emphasise the importance of schools supporting a culture that enable Pacific teachers. Specific steps that schools could take include, “actively recruiting [...] Pacific teachers, senior leadership team members and [board] members” and “valuing and remunerating [...] Pacific teachers for the additional work they did supporting [...] Pacific students and their [...] non-Pacific colleagues” (p. 8). This resonates with Vaea and Rangi’s comments above, as well as with several comments from teacher participants (discussed in Chapter 7). This underscores the value that Pacific teachers and staff can bring in creating a school environment conducive to Pacific student success.

The school environment

This theme concerns the various spaces within the school environment, both physical and social, which the students identified and discussed. These spaces have an impact on their identity formation process and ability to enjoy academic success, and social and emotional wellbeing. Within the talanoa, students said things like “we really stand out throughout the school because the majority of the school is white” (Student talanoa one). This illustrates that consciousness around difference in appearance might be obvious to someone who stands out as different and in a minority group. However, it might not be so for those in the dominant culture or ethnic group. This is important to note as the wider student and staff body in Canterbury schools are majority New Zealand European or Palagi (Ministry of Education, 2022a, 2023i). Students in the talanoa reflected on the importance of creating an environment of acknowledgement or visibility:

School has to, I don’t know, just take into account all of the Pasifika students or all who identify with it, like even if it’s making sure that they’re known, and the school knows they’re there as well (Malosi, Year 13, Samoan).

This visibility and being “known” must be manifested in the both the social and physical environments of the school. This demands a prioritisation and a sharing of power. This will be further unpacked in the discussion of raised issues, which concern Pacific understandings of the school’s physical and social environments, and the experiences of racism at school.

The physical environment within the school

SBHS has undergone a complete rebuild in recent years, even moving sites to a neighbouring suburb. As such, there were opportunities to redesign the way the school looked and felt for the whole school community. In the talanoa the students were asked about their perspectives on the physical space, what they saw and experienced as they lived in the building. The students commented on the way they see their culture and traditions around the school. Physical manifestations that connect to the culture of Pacific students, such as art, objects, or specific displays connected specifically to the Pacific community of the school were discussed and determined to be important for communicating and valuing cultural heritage. Students stated that they want to see themselves reflected in the artwork and the cultural tapestry that adorn the walls of the school. The students in group talanoa two reflected on some of the Pacific art that does exist within the school:

Student one: I just sometimes stare at it. I think there should be more.

Student two: When you stare at it it’s pretty powerful.

Student three: And you know that that’s where you’re from kind of thing, and that’s who you are and it’s like a representation of that, and if that was spread around the whole school that’ll be pretty significant for all those who identify as Pasifika (Students, group talanoa two).

This dialogue was in reference to a large Tongan siapo (Tapa cloth) that had been recently hung in the school. Students saw this as demonstrating Pacific excellence, representative of practices that exist in the Pacific and are respected and honoured within the school institution that they attend.

The students in group talanoa one discussed what it would mean if there was a dedicated Pacific space on the school site:

Student one: If we ever had a fale on site doesn't mean its only islanders are allowed, but it can be a safe space for islanders to come to.

Student two: We would want it to have some symbols and motifs, like I know some history; and so, anyone can come in and have a look, and learn more if they're curious.

Student three: Like the Māori space is for Māori; Māori wording and translations like karakia, and all that.

Student one: I think the Māori space, the cultural space here is very appealing especially to us Pasifika, and even our Māori boys, because when we go in there, we see everyone and they're just like us.

Student two: There's not really a split thing between Māori and Pasifika. We're all kind of one in the end because it's a cultural space.

Student three: Yeah, we are one (Students, group talanoa one).

The students mention the possible inclusion of a fale in the future, as a pan-Pacific space, in which all people were welcome. Their desire to see this is connected to the "Māori space" and the recognition that this provides. In the redesign of Ōrua Paeroa Campus, on which SBHS is located, there was a deliberate attempt to incorporate cultural narratives produced by Ngāi Tuāhuriri hapū (subtribe) of the Ngāi Tahu iwi (Ngāi Tūāhuriri, 2015). The school's efforts to incorporate this tribe's cultural narrative, amongst other things, included a dedicated cultural space which resembles the shape of a whareniui or meeting house (Moorfield, 2004b).

The students note the important role this meeting space or whareniui plays within the school because they feel significant relationships exist between their Pacific communities and Māori in their school, for example, shared cultural experiences in Polyfest, Kapa Haka and class experiences. Marae (meeting spaces) are also present in other Pacific Island nation's cultures, where physical, community-oriented spaces, are constructed in a similar socio-cultural fashion (Smith, 1903; Wallin & Solsvik, 2010). In other parts of the talanoa, students expressed a desire to see their cultural roots made more visible within the school – whether that be through the placement of Pacific art or even plants. Their thinking is that it should connect

to the legacy of Pacific peoples as it pertains to the school. They wanted the physical environment to reflect and represent them and where they came from.

International research suggests the importance of the school's physical environment in connecting with the communities which inhabit it (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). This is attained by the school, and its teachers having a strong connection with the community in which it is located and being strongly equipped to incorporate relevant social and cultural identifiers into the classroom (Guillory & Williams, 2014; Skinner, 1991; Sparks, 2000). While this needs to be a baseline for a physical environment within a school, Banks and Banks (1995) warn of the risk that it could limit cultural engagement to an additive or contributions approach. This would keep cultural engagement to a merely surface level presence.,

So, while there is merit in what of the student participants propose, in terms of giving visible or tangible effect to Pacific cultural expression in the physical environment of the school, care needs to be taken. An additive or contributions approach would be satisfied with being limited to this. A transformative or social action approach, as outlined by Banks and Banks (1995) would seek to leverage the physical environment, among other things to achieve a change in pedagogy. I see the potential for physical environments to be catalysts for change and as a platform for Pacific student and community perspectives. Teachers of all backgrounds need to understand the importance of engaging with the cultures of their Pacific to the extent that it transforms teaching practice.

The social environment within the school

The social environment of a school includes the relationships between students, teachers, parents, and wide community. It also includes the various academic, cultural, and linguistic, and co-curricular domains within the school. This environment has a significant impact on the students' sense of wellbeing and engagement (Lovat et al., 2010; Matika et al., 2021) .

The amount of time spent at school is substantial in a young person's life. In their group and individual talanoa with me, students described different pursuits and social activities that enabled them to feel a strong sense of belonging and cultural connection. For example, positive relationships with teachers, the ability to represent their family in different pursuits such as sport and cultural performance, and the brotherhood or network of students. They also shared social experiences that negatively affected them. These included personal and institutional experiences of inter-personal and institutional racism, and a lack of connection with some teachers. Underpinning their understanding of a social environment in which Pacific students could thrive was a desire to see a place that emphasised knowing students for who they were, and a sense of belonging within the school. Despite the differences that might exist between students, one stated:

I would want to see all Pacific students feel welcomed and safe [...] and to do that you would have to make it really known, and [add] small little things throughout the whole school rather than just the Pasifika group doing their stuff. [...] every single part of the school can do something small (Malosi, year 13, Samoan)

For Malosi, the Pacific view of the collective being important for the wellbeing of the individual is captured in this statement. He specified it is not the sole responsibility of the Pacific community at the school, as a minority, to ensure that they are welcomed within the dominant social culture.

McDonald and Lipine (2012) conducted qualitative research with Samoan students across six Auckland and Wellington secondary schools. They found that these students were often put in situations where they had to choose between cultural and academic success. This navigation of multiple worlds (Phelan et al., 1991) can often lead to a social tension within the school environment. McDonald and Lipine (2012) asserted that the broad social environment, including peer relationships, was important in determining positive attitudes towards learning:

A supportive school/teacher was regarded as important but there were indications that students actively sought and used support practices/processes themselves (e.g., peer support; using Samoan language to advantage). The students reported valued feelings

of being included in the ‘community of learners’ and they sought meaning from the educators with a recognition of the conditions that promoted positive attitudes toward their learning (p.157).

It is important for the adult family members, community leaders and school leaders to be involved in creating an environment where the navigation of multiple worlds can be carefully negotiated. This environment goes beyond the school gates. McDonald and Lipine (2012) also found that “the family and immediate contacts in the educational environment [can act] as a central support [...] related to success” (p.157). Also, that “strong inter-connections with the wider community and agencies (e.g., church) [...] acted as a supportive ‘suburban village’” (p.157).

Similarly, Rakena et al. (2016), found that relational and social factors were able to support student success for Māori and Pacific students in a New Zealand school of music. They concluded that “Pasifika epistemologies are formed by the fundamental understanding that one is part of a collective” and that “Pasifika students see learning as a social phenomenon”. In a similar way, Pacific students can see Polyfest (Pacific cultural performance festival) as a specific example of this way of learning. This was emphasised by students in my own research, across both group and individual talanoa. An example of this is when Fetu (Year 13, Samoan) describes the preparation for Polyfest as a specific learning environment where students can experience progress and develop a strong sense of belonging.

Various students in the talanoa identified Polyfest and the conditions that surrounded it as creating a social environment where Pasifika and other students can come together and go from shy to confident. As one student observed:

[Preparing for Polyfest], we get to see all the boys really getting into it, and how they start off real shy and then as they go through to the end, they really come out of their shell. [...] they have somewhere that they feel like they belong to [...]. [With Polyfest,] they have somewhere that they feel like they belong to. Because everyone just looks after each other; and as we teach the whole group, we’re not just teaching one person, we’re teaching everyone and making sure they’re up to date as one team, but not just one individual. (Fetu, Year 13, Samoan)

This comment from Fetu emphasises the collective nature of Polyfest as an example of cultural education. He sees it as beneficial for generating a sense of belonging that other students have identified as crucial for the social environment of the school. For many, an endeavour such as Polyfest might seem to be an innocuous, co-curricular activity, of little or no importance to a student's educational achievement. However, in many schools and Pacific communities Polyfest and the necessary preparation is a place where pedagogy and culture tangibly meet. It can also significantly impact Pacific student wellbeing and engagement (Faaea-Semeatu, 2015). One student described Polyfest as a place: "where poly students come together to know more about each other, and more about our culture." (Student, group talanoa two).

The environment of Polyfest can exist as a bridge between home and school. The choreography and preparation of traditional costumes can occur in home living rooms, whereas the many hours of practice occur in school halls and gyms. This environment creates a place where Pacific values, as discussed above, can be incubated and expressed: "It's one event where Pacific cultures come together with different performances, and we can learn from other cultures as well as our own values" (Student, group talanoa two). Students commented on the empowering nature of Polyfest within the school:

It probably comes back down to the cultural performance from different cultures rather than just singing a song, and we sing songs only in our languages and stuff like that. Well, we are obviously performing to our friends and family, but we're performing our own ethnicity and our culture (Student, group talanoa two).

There is a growing body of literature around the impact of Pacific cultural festivals in New Zealand. In her recent article based on her doctoral research into the Auckland Polyfest, Ladwig Williams (2022) asserts that: "it is during these hundreds of hours of social learning that identity-forming experiences are played out and a place of belonging is created, constructing socio-temporal space where the work of cultural construction takes place (p. 158).

I believe that school leaders and researchers need to examine the social environment that is created to produce successful learning environments for Pacific students, both inside and outside the classroom. This is underpinned by a need to better understand the socio-cultural principles that encourage Pacific students, and others, to thrive. Examples of these principles have been articulated by the student and parent participants in this research. Puloka-Luey (2021), referencing Bourdieu (2002), states that challenging a school and its teachers to be inclusive of Pacific communities “would inevitably require a pedagogical approach that ensures learning is relevant and builds on students’ cultural capital rather than ignoring it” (p.182). This approach also has the effect of combatting stereotypes and racism, which Pacific students continue to experience in schools.

Experiencing racism at school

Student participants described instances where they experienced racism at school. Racism can be understood to be present when “cultural difference is combined with physical difference and the concepts of superiority/inferiority” (Spoonley, 1988, p. 6). Racism has various forms and comes from institutional systems, groups, and individuals. Nakhid (2003) defines institutional racism in the context of Pacific schooling as:

Discrimination that act[s] overtly to obstruct Pasifika communities and their students from achieving academic success in schools [...] the conflicting perceptions held by schools and teachers of Pasifika students lead to educational responses ill-designed to improve Pasifika achievement (p.207).

Came (2012) concludes that institutional racism displays “a pattern of differential access to material resources and power by race, which privileges one sector of the population while disadvantaging another” (p.89).

Racism has been acknowledged in the *Action Plan for Pasifika Education* (Ministry of Education, 2020a), along with an imperative for schools and communities to address it. In my research student understanding of racism was perceptive. Student participant comments ranged

from the identification of discriminatory behaviour that they felt was racist, through to feelings of discomfort that they had experienced in certain situations. Fetu described encounters that had had with racism:

When I was in the library. There were other kids sitting down and [the teacher] just came and pointed me out, so I won't get out of line and with the other boys [...] I felt like, he just didn't like people like me – Pasifika.

The student then attempted to rationalise what he had experienced: “Maybe just the fact that they don't like where you come from, your background” (Fetu, Year 13, Samoan). Rangi also made comments which suggested he had tried to think positively about potentially racist experiences:

Rangi: I think I'm kinda quite optimistic about the whole thing, but have I experienced racism; yeah, I guess so.

Joseph: Any examples?

Rangi: Hallways, just the hallways and that, like we'll get told to stop eating and the white kids are eating and walking, and then they'll stop us instead of them. I feel that's prejudice. I haven't thought about racism at school. I know I've experienced it but I kind of think of the school in a positive way (Rangi, year 12, Samoan).

Rangi had also experienced situations where his name was changed because it was difficult to pronounce, which can be considered evidence of racism. This had taken place at a school in a different country and seemed to make him more tolerant of what he felt was a less severe experience in his current school setting. Students in talanoa group one discussed the impact that racism can have on Pacific students:

Student one: I don't think they take it lightly, because if you look at the situation and you're the only one that gets picked up on it, you're like, 'I'm just the same as everyone and just a different colour!'. That's the only difference, and you get picked up on it!

Student two: That's what hurts. Like that really hurts.

Student three: It happens so often that you just get used to it...

Student four: Yeah, it's just normal ...and you don't want to call it out because, just to call out racism, like play the victim card even if it's happening because then, oh it's always about race.

Student one: that's the bad thing about today. Society's normalised it, and you give too much power to someone, and they abuse it, and then they want to talk about respect. (Students, group talanoa one)

The existence of racism is part of a power dynamic within a school setting and can be prevalent within the teaching body, as well as institutionally. It has a significant impact on the social wellbeing of Pacific students.

These student voices support the call from the *Action Plan for Pacific Education* (2020) to confront racism because it can “diminish the learning opportunities available to [...] students” (Shah & Coles, 2020, p. 584). Castagno et al. (2008), in their discussion of racism in American schooling, examine the forms racism might take:

Students experience racism in a number of ways and from a variety of sources, including paternalism, prejudice, harmful assumptions, low expectations, stereotypes, violence, and biased curricular materials. Another common form of racial oppression [...] is the use of euphemisms. Through euphemisms, issues of concern are presented in ways that do not make the majority or dominant social group uncomfortable (p. 950).

This resonates with much of what student participants expressed in our talanoa. The evidence strongly suggests that if a student does not encounter overt racism directed at them personally, they would experience it institutionally. Using this knowledge is important for the consideration of school and community leaders so that action might be taken to address racism. One such action would be to address power dynamics within a school context.

Empowering Pacific students through inclusive curriculum

Throughout the group talanoa and individual interviews, several students made comments that they felt like they had an element of control over what they able to engage with at school in terms of subjects. This was largely based on their interests and passions. When asked what he thought about who is in control when it came to his education, he made the following statement:

Well, we don't teach ourselves obviously, but what we choose to learn is up to us, and that's we have control over that. Obviously, I took subjects that I was interested in, and I was really keen to learn about, and those subjects weren't forced upon me (Malosi, Year 13, Samoan)

Here, Malosi was placing the primary responsibility for his day-to-day education on himself. He describes his own motivation and personal interests as a key decision-making tool. This highlights the way he feels he accesses the curriculum. For example, he notes school subject choice and success being attributable to him. His influences might have included his parent/caregivers or teachers. However, they also include hidden, implicit or unstated social norms present within the curriculum (Snyder, 1973). Kidman et al. (2013) explored this hidden curriculum in a New Zealand and Taiwanese curriculum contexts, and concluded that there is often the:

Development of a pedagogical code [...] that selects, regulates, and monitors “valid” curriculum content and knowledge, while excluding that which falls outside the domain of what is perceived as “legitimate” (p.53).

I believe that this “code” often goes unnoticed by the different layers of the community, including teachers. This can make it more difficult to explore, as the reproduction of the status quo often drives pedagogical action, which “seeks to reproduce the [arbitrary culture] of the dominant or of the dominated classes” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5). The desire for stability in schooling, sometimes expressed as tradition or school culture, can be a reaction to the instability seen to exist in wider society.

Wood and Sheehan (2012), in their examination of *The New Zealand Curriculum*, explain that the content taught in New Zealand secondary schools has a strong degree of flexibility. It is often the choice of the teacher, or a decision made in collaboration with a department or group of teachers. This presents a risk, as an overly flexible curriculum design approach can result in a culturally biased perspective on the value of content. It is often reflective of the dominant culture favoured by teachers. There is also the risk that content perceived to be relevant or engaging for Pacific students could be taught in a way that reinforces stereotypes and negative or racist perceptions. For example, Johansson (2012) explored Pacific

representation in the teaching of NCEA Drama. Referring specifically to the teaching of drama, she notes that there is real risk in an uncritical approach to teaching Pacific content:

This stresses the need for teachers to be equipped with cultural efficacy, and for them to bring understanding and critical awareness to the texts. Educators also need to explicitly arm their students with the tools of critical analysis [...]. In this way, Pasifika students will be able to recognise and combat negative stereotyping, inequitable representation and systematic racism in their school environment (p. 85-86).

A co-design approach with community could be one way to avoid this. Students in the talanoa made comments about their desire to see a change in the content or material taught with a more inclusive lens, placing value and importance on the cultures and identities of them as Pacific students. As Malosi observed:

I think it would be really cool if there was our history in a history class. That'd be really cool. I don't know. Well, in this school there are quite a lot of students who identify as Pasifika and they're spread across all these classes, and even if in a history class they got to learn a small thing about their history and who they were in that class, and so did the rest of the class. Not necessarily have to identify us as Pasifika. It's almost likely they wouldn't but yeah, they would also learn, and then they would be like, "Oh, we know a little bit about you." (Malosi, Year 13, Samoan)

This statement, alongside similar expressions in the following chapters, is reflective of the push for the introduction of Pacific studies and Aotearoa New Zealand histories into future New Zealand curriculum. Russell (2022), examining Pākehā teacher discomfort with these changes, states that these types of shifts have the "potential to change how this country's young people think and feel about themselves" (p.37). The absence of systemic or curricular integration of various Pacific histories and perspectives in New Zealand is a "suppression of history" (Giroux, 1997, p. 6). It is what Gramsci would call ideological hegemony present within curriculum delivery (Gramsci, 1992).

In a response to a question about empowerment of Pacific voice, one student noted the imbalance in content in the languages' curriculum. This raised Pacific languages as a topic that needs to be raised when considering power dynamics in relation to Pacific communities in schools:

Joseph: So, what could we do then? What should schools do to better empower Pasifika voice and give more power to the Pasifika community over their own education?

Student: Include Samoan classes. That's something we can have. We have French classes; we have Japanese classes. We have a bigger group of Pasifika here than the other colleges apart from [palagi]. Why don't include something that we can learn about our own culture. (Student, group talanoa one)

For many Pacific peoples in New Zealand, the ability to speak their specific Pacific language is strongly connected with cultural identity (Matika et al., 2021). The ability to retain fluency in Pacific languages has been viewed in different ways since Pacific peoples began migrating to New Zealand in high numbers. For some families, English as the language of schooling, tertiary education, and business, became the desired language. Often, there was little attention paid to maintaining fluency for younger generations in the various Pacific languages. In some cases, these languages were actively shunned (Hunkin-Tuiletufuga, 2001). The Lopdell House Conferences (1975) issued a report entitled *Educating Pacific Islanders in New Zealand*. This report made recommendations that both Pacific languages and cultures become “an integral part of the whole curriculum” (p.12). The report also recommended that a Pacific “languages resource unit be set up” (p.5) and that “Pacific Island studies” be considered as a school certificate subject (p.13). It is a source of considerable frustration that fifty years later, that there is still very little acknowledgement of the recommendations and that there has been limited implementation of them.

The inclusion of parents and wider community is needed to support curriculum design because in many areas of culture and language, they are knowledge holders (Averill et al., 2016). The students felt that school should be a place where they can learn about where they are from and what their roots are, therefore, strengthening them to carry them into future learning. One student in a group talanoa explained how he had to essentially take Samoan language as a subject in his own time:

I've taken the subject Samoan on my own time to do. That's including my six subjects that I used to do as well as Samoan on top of it, but that's in my own time. Polyfest and

the taking Samoan is probably the only time I've ever spoken my [native] tongue, and that's cool. (Student, group talanoa two)

Like other communities, Pacific students are engaged in an assimilationist school system where languages other than the dominant one are marginalised and, in many cases, eradicated (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2017; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Locally, Fletcher et al. (2009), have called for Pacific cultural knowledge and languages to be “an implicit part of teaching and learning practices throughout the school” (p. 32).

There was also a discussion among student about the teaching of histories, and what would be relevant to them as a baseline, in-depth historical study. This was most evident in the following extract:

Student one: In history you'll learn about what happened in the World Wars, or Indian American conflicts which has nothing relevant to what is based on your own background.

Joseph: What would make it more relevant for you?

Student one: Learn about the origins of New Zealand. I don't think we learn that though; we learn about past events in New Zealand like the Springbok tour and stuff, but nothing specifically about the origins of this country, as well as Pasifika.

Student two: The only one that is taught is the Springbok tour. We all learn that in Year 10 social studies, and then history has nothing else, like there's way more to New Zealand than just a Springbok tour. E.g., The Treaty of Waitangi.

Student three: Why do we have to learn about America! We don't live in America we live in New Zealand. You see Pasifika people everywhere you go, and even though we're not originally from here we live here. We'd be more interested in learning about New Zealand than I don't know learning about Afghanistan (Student, group talanoa one)

This is particularly pertinent as the New Zealand Government has recently committed to the mandatory implementation of the new *Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories Curriculum Guidelines* (Ministry of Education, 2023b). There has also been inclusion of content which communicates the impact of the Dawn Raids on Pacific peoples. This has included funding various projects to make historical voices more accessible and able to be connected to

curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2023c). Students went on to discuss this point in relation to Pacific studies:

Student one: Pacific studies! As an example, over the whole time I've been at school I've never heard anything about the Polynesian panthers. No-one's heard of it. I don't think no-one's ever heard about how islanders were attracted to come to here for a new living and then ended up being slaves here.

Student two: The blackbirding. I don't reckon no-one really knows that that.

Student three: And being in the dawn raids.

Student one: No-one knows about the dawn raids!

Student three: I know some schools trapdoors; so they could hide their Islander kids so they wouldn't get sent back. I'd rather know about that stuff than World War II, World War I (Student talanoa one).

A decision was recently announced that Pacific studies would be made an accredited NCEA subject in 2026 (Hipkins, 2021). However, after the 2023 change in government, this has been delayed to 2028, along with a significant portion of the NCEA Change Programme (Stanford, 2024). The student talanoa around curriculum design gave a strong sense that they desired a greater degree of control and input into the decision making around content. Their comments also indicate that teachers need to better reflect on the way they make decisions around content delivered as part of the curriculum for Pacific students. As Chu et al. (2022) illustrate in their analysis of recent Pacific education research, "Where the value placed on things Pacific is visible to Pacific learners, they are likely to flourish" (p. 31).

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore student participant voices as they described the schooling environment. The talanoa that I had with them spanned a range of topics concerning their experience and many of these reflected on the social and physical environments that they encountered when at school. As a significant place where students spend a substantial amount of time, it was valuable for me to hear their perspectives. This chapter presents a strong

argument for schools to develop and improve the way their environments enable Pacific students to learn and achieve, while keeping their identities and dignity intact.

Throughout our talanoa, the students described the way in which school structures and systems influenced the way they encountered the culture of the school, learning and the sense of care they felt. I was reminded of the way in which schools can so easily reinforce societal injustices, when attempting to create necessary conditions and boundaries, both in and out of the classroom. The existence of racism within school environments is an ongoing call to reject practices which enable and sustain it. Although the student participants were frank about this and other challenges they faced within and because of school environments, they were hopeful and discussed ways in which school could be a place in which they thrived. Their voices were clear when they said that they wanted the school to be a place to which they felt connected and by which they were supported. The role of teachers, and in particular, Pacific teachers, in creating an appropriate place where Pacific students can learn and grow, was clearly articulated. There was demand for a curriculum that was inclusive of Pacific knowledges, so that the classroom was a place in which they saw their cultures and languages as relevant.

The next chapter introduces us to these people who are part of the school but spend most of their time outside it - parents. Chapter 7 engages with the voices of several Pacific parents who were able to participate in talanoa for this research. They provide an important perspective, which sits alongside those of the students described in this chapter.

Chapter 7: Shirley Boys' High School Parents' Talanoa

Introduction

This chapter discusses and analyses the views that a group of Pacific parents at Shirley Boys' High School (SBHS) shared in their talanoa. These talanoa revealed insights into how parent participants described their experiences of schooling, particularly in relation to what they have undergone as parents of then current students. The chapter discusses issues of the recurring themes to emerge from these talanoa. This includes the importance of various relationships, Pacific peoples' values and how they perceive the Pacific students' experiences of the SBHS environment. To understand their positionality, it is first important to recognise these parents' historical contexts, and their roles within a network of families who have migrated from Pacific nations. As Wendt-Samu (2010) explained:

Migration is an important historical, and in many cases, a contemporary and on-going causal factor to the enlargement of a Pasifika family's world and is usually driven by aspirations for a better life for the migrant and for those left behind. For Pasifika migrants to New Zealand and other Pasifika Rim countries, this aspiration has included the desire for better educational opportunities for their children (p. 5)

As explained previously (Chapter 3), I invited Pacific parents to participate in this study to discuss their children's experience in schooling. This enabled me to hear their aspirations for their children's generation, and for those that follow. Moreover, I wished to better understand their perceptions of the school's relationships with parents and Pacific communities. This, in turn, allowed me to compare their views with those of the Pacific students and teachers who elected to participate in this study. However, as noted previously, the restrictions imposed by Government Covid-19 regulations significantly impacted upon my collection of data. The restrictions on social gatherings limited the parents' ability to meet in groups. Many parents were also understandably hesitant about gathering due to the risk of infection.

This chapter will commence with a contextual background section designed to further consolidate information provided in chapter 4. It serves to reiterate and highlight the roles that Pacific parents play within the school community. This, in turn, provides more insights into the nature of the school's engagement with Pacific families. Next, more time is spent identifying and analysing those recurring themes that emerged from the talanoa with parent participants.

Part One: Contextual background

Like the student talanoa (Chapters 5 and 6), the parent talanoa sessions took place amid significant social disruptions in the wake of the Covid-19 lockdown in late 2020. Whereas the students were able to gather onsite for much of the school year, my collection of data from parents proved challenging. This was because parents and other external visitors were either prohibited, or only allowed entry onto school grounds in certain circumstances. This impacted upon my ability to proceed as initially planned because parents were understandably hesitant about being in proximity with others due to the potential risk of infection. The effect of this was fewer participants than anticipated. However, there were still enough interested parents, and a decision was made to continue with this phase of the data collection.

As explained earlier in Chapter 3, the parents' talanoa was audio-recorded and involved one group session with two mothers and one individual interview with one father. The two mothers had expressed that they would rather have their talanoa in a group together, whereas the father preferred to talanoa with just me. In terms of ethical considerations, it is important as a researcher to note that talanoa is built on trust and mutual respect (Farrelly and Nobobo-Baba, 2012). Hence, an established relationship is necessary to create a safe space for talanoa to occur in which truths can be more freely forthcoming. In terms of the broader context of Pacific research and practice in education, the concept of Teu Le Va (Airini et al., 2010) is

significant here. This is because this research directly involves the key stakeholders concerned with Pacific education.

The relationship between myself and the participants was cultivated with respect and reciprocity at the forefront. Their children had been attending the school for a range of years, so I had known this group of parents for at least a year. I had met them due to their children being involved in the Pacific cultural group preparing for Polyfest and in my capacity as Director of Pacific Development at the school. Therefore, for me it was essential that this research was conducted in a manner of *Teu Le Va*, as suggested by Airini et al. (2010). This required me to care for the *vā* (space between us), and to respectfully nurture the relationships that existed between myself as teacher and researcher, and the community I was working with.

The parents were invited to meet with me at a time that was acceptable to them and that suited their family routines. Each *talanoa* took place in a comfortable meeting room in the school. To open each *talanoa*, I explained the nature of the research being undertaken. I explained my hope that the metaphorical *tīvaevae* process would empower their Pacific community and benefit Pacific education both nationally and internationally. The time that was allowed for the *talanoa* was open ended. This meant that there was no set time for it to end. The length time we spent talking was determined by the flow of the conversation and the availability of the participants. While the *talanoa* sessions were semi-structured with some light prompts and questions provided by me, the parents felt comfortable deviating and asking questions of their own. This allowed all participants to raise questions and to provoke thoughts, challenging our thinking about topics as they arose in the *talanoa*. I also invited them to unpack the concept of *talanoa* with me and offered them my own perspective.

Although I held similar *talanoa* with students, the parents were in a different position in relation to the school. For the most part, they sat outside of the school, so the experiences and perspectives they shared were from this position. The parents were also all older than me,

and therefore, the tone of conversation was different. At times this arose in a humorous way, with reminders of what I had in store with my own children in the future. They were able to relate stories of parenthood to me. We were able to relate to each other on this, as well as the fact I was a teacher to their children.

In the group talanoa, the two participants, Sefina and Samaria, were mothers of students at the school. Sefina had been part of the school community for the last nine years, with an older son and nephews being past students. Her youngest son was still in year 12. Samaria was a mother of a year 9 student, who had started at the school for approximately a year before the talanoa session took place. These mothers were known to each other as they attended the same church. As a result, Sefina was able to introduce her friend to the relational trust that her and I enjoyed.

The single interview was with Lagi, the father of a year 10 student who had been at the school for just over a year. We had met various times since his son had started and shared many conversations about his son and the way in which the school operated. Originally, his wife had intended to join him in the talanoa. However, at the last minute she was unable to make it due to work. They had shared with me in previous discussions that the Pacific cultural group at SBHS was one of the driving factors for them enrolling their son there. They lived outside of the school enrolment zone (Ministry of Education, 2022b) and had to enter the ballot system for their son to gain entrance.

Like the student talanoa central to Chapters 5 and 6, a thematic analysis approach was applied to each parent talanoa transcript. The findings presented in part two of this chapter provide an overview of the key (recurring) themes that emerged from these two talanoa sessions.

Part Two: Findings from the talanoa

Four key themes emerged from these talanoa. The four themes that comprise the focus of much of this chapter are:

1. Pacific identities, cultures, and family realities
2. Support for the Pacific community at school
3. Relationship with the school
4. Pacific values

The discussions will be supported by quotations from the participants, who will be anonymous (given a pseudonym) to protect their identity. In the case of a quote, their status as mother or father and their Pacific ethnicity will not be indicated. These will be made distinct by either being called Parent Group Talanoa, or Parent Interview Talanoa.

Due to the small number of participants in the parent talanoa being significantly smaller than the student group, less data was generated. However, it should also be noted that the parents tended to speak in more detail. So, while my talanoa with three parents produced less quantity, it still produced information rich in ways that differed to the student and teacher participants.

Pacific identities, cultures, and family realities

As noted in the introduction of this chapter, the migration history and present realities of Pacific peoples is a critical consideration in educational research. Both in terms of the migration of parents and grandparents of Pacific families, and the current migratory flow of peoples between Pacific nations, particularly to New Zealand. This migration has created an evolving, complex, inter-generational, diasporic web of Pacific communities in New Zealand (Chu-Fuluifaga, 2022), Australia (Faleolo, 2019, 2020; Pale et al., 2023), and the United States of America (Lynch, 2022; Vakalahi & Godinet, 2014). Many parents I have met at SBHS describe themselves as ‘first generation’. By this they mean that they are the first generation of a family

born in New Zealand. They are positioned between their parents' generation who may have migrated in the 1960s and 1970s, and their children who sit as second-generation New Zealand born Pacific Peoples (Gray, 2001).

This can be a confusing space for parents to be situated. They are often unable to speak the language of their parent's homeland and raised in an environment separate from their culture. As a result, the concepts of ethnic hybridity and diversity have become increasingly relevant in academic discourse concerning Pacific education (Hermes, 2018; Webber, 2006). This is discussed more fully in the literature review (Chapter 2) and contextualised in Chapter 4. These concepts are relevant to my study because Pacific families in the school community have also blended with families of other cultural and ethnic groupings through marriage and community interactions (Macpherson, 1984; Pasifika Futures, 2017). Against this backdrop, many New Zealand schools seek to provide an education that engages with the student's culture, language, and identity.

The traditional roles of parents and the parent's understanding of Pacific identity and culture were topics that the parent participants in this research discussed throughout the talanoa. Sefina noted the breadth of Pacific experiences when she explained her perspective:

I'm a bit more literal. So, I think brown, to be honest, any shade. It can be any shade of brown. I think culture, I think language, I think food. I think of rich history, I think of colonisation, values, pride (Parent group talanoa).

The diversity of experience is described here when she states "any shade" of what could be considered a metaphorical brown colour. There is acknowledgement of the richness of the Pacific cultural experiences, as well as the realities that colonisation overlays. This speaks to her own family and community experience, where she has had specific experiences, but they are urban, diasporic, and diverse. This might be juxtaposed with a traditional or Samoan understanding of Pacific identities (Anae, 1997).

When they were asked how they perceived Pacific communities, Samaria acknowledged how family featured strongly:

I think family. When I see the word Pasifika, I always think the word family. I also think responsibility, when we think about our Pasifika families there's a lot of responsibility placed on each individual being part of Pasifika (Parent group talanoa).

This concept of family as a key element of identity for many Pacific peoples can be considered from a variety of different angles. There is the nuclear family which can be defined as an immediate family circle, with parents and siblings. There is also the extended family of aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. Then there is the village concept of family, where the wider community who feel a kinship or a sense of familial belonging can be considered family (Samu & Suaali'i-Sauni, 2009). However, as Ioane (2017) notes,

Arguably for many of our young Pasifika people in Aotearoa, family continues to play an integral part in one's development; however, it may be more nuclear than extended, and therefore requires further exploration (p. 39).

Here, Ioane points to a shift in understanding of what has been traditionally portrayed as family. This is important, as families and the dynamics that exist within and around them is much more complex than what has been presented as an ideal or traditional reality. For example, solo parent families, families with same sex parents and other arrangements, who continue to encounter serious discrimination and marginalisation (Stewart-Withers et al., 2010; Thomsen et al., 2021).

Samaria's assertion that family is a significant aspect of understanding Pacific identities needs to be further explored in the context of this diversity and exploring the experiences of contemporary Pacific families in Christchurch. Samaria links the concept of family to a sense of responsibility, alluding to the different roles that may come into play within different Pacific families (D Fa'avae, 2017). The value placed by Samaria upon her love for family aligns with much academic literature (Rimoni et al., 2022; Surtees et al., 2021). It is also reflected in New Zealand education policy documents (Ministry of Education, 2018, 2022c).

It was also notable that Sefina and Samaria were practicing Christians, whilst Lagi was a regular church attendee in his youth. Therefore, it was not surprising to find that we discussed the place of church in relation to Pacific identities. While Lagi stated that he did not currently attend a church, he emphasised the role of church as a place of Pacific culture and a place akin to a village. Sefina and Samaria mentioned that their church was an example of a place they could interact with each other, and other families. As a result, all three parents identified churches as places where schools could foster enhanced relationships with Pacific parents (this will be expanded on later in this chapter). Lagi describes his experience as follows:

Lagi: We'd be at church every Sunday and that was up until probably my mid-teens and then kind of... I don't know if my parents lost interest. So, my connection to my culture, I guess, all kind of stemmed through the church.

Joseph: Because it was like the village?

Lagi: It was. School kind of facilitated culture in a way, but not as much as when you were at church because it was all encompassing. I was probably at church probably more often than not after school (Parent individual talanoa).

This experience of church as a cultural focal point aligns with the findings of Faleolo (2020) who examined Pacific diasporic experiences in Brisbane, Australia. Faleolo proposed that:

Pasifika migrants define wellbeing beyond just a state of physical or emotional health and include important familial and spiritual dimensions that connect them as Pasifika people to their extended family networks, their village or church community and avenues for the continuation of cultural ways of living (p.71).

Faleolo also found that “the church is viewed by Pasifika living in Brisbane as their new ‘village’, ‘āiga (extended family)’ and ‘island connection’ within diaspora contexts” (p.73). This resonates with the comments made by parent participants in this research.

In my talanoa with Sefina and Samaria, I asked what they associated with Pacific communities. Sefina simply stated: “Big gatherings, church” (Parent group talanoa). Here, we can hear an echo of Lagi's comment about of village and community life being all encompassing. In the context of their Hawaiian research, Koki and Lee (1998) identified

parents' prioritisation of church and other community events as a potential reason for a lack of engagement at school. They note that:

Some Pacific barriers to involvement reflect unique cultural conditions. In many instances, community comes before education. Therefore, if a village or community event takes place at the same time as a school event, the former takes precedence. Likewise, in some communities, the church plays a vital role in the community or larger society. School activities therefore may take a backseat to church activities that require community participation (p.3).

The relationship between schools, churches and Pacific communities has been a consideration in relation to recent policy initiatives. Efforts have been made to utilise this relationship to raise achievement and improve engagement.

In recent years, elements of key Pacific educational initiatives such as *Pasifika Power Up*, *Talanoa Ako* and *Reading Together* have been contracted through Pacific church communities in New Zealand (Chu-Fuluifaga, 2022; Oakden, 2019). This has sought to ensure that resources are given to organisations where many Pacific parents and families may prioritise their time (Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, Leali'ie'e, et al., 2009; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2021; Siope, 2011). While churches and other secular Pacific community hubs, not including schools, can support educational access and aspirations, there needs to be caution exercised with a blanket approach. As evident in the parents' talanoa, not all Pacific families have a relationship with a church community, and for Lagi, support for his family could be better provided through the school community. As Salesa (2017) states: "young Pacific people are [...] far less likely to go to church regularly, or identify as religious – and if they do go to church, it is more likely to be a non-traditional Pacific church or denomination" (p.5).

My talanoa with the three parents also highlighted some social disadvantages experienced by local Pacific families. For example, Sefina expressed concern about health outcomes which impact the wellbeing of Pacific families:

Sefina: I think some of our Pasifika families are quite vulnerable and are disadvantaged in some ways. When I think the word Pasifika in health, cos I come from a health

background, definitely disadvantaged, vulnerable, not given or not given options to succeed. Left behind in the health field (Parent group talanoa).

Sefina's assertion aligns with concerns within medical research literature in New Zealand. Lilo et al. (2020) state that "Pacific people living in New Zealand are more likely to have [non-communicable diseases] including type 2 diabetes, [cardiovascular disease], and obesity compared to all other ethnic groups in New Zealand" (p. 8). Increasing Pacific health literacy "using a culturally and ethnically tailored approach" is a focus for many health providers and community groups (Lilo et al., 2020, p. 8).

Despite these negative realities for Pacific communities, parent participants involved in this study had an optimistic outlook for the future of their students. They saw many of the current students as successful, striving for a strong future, and leading the way in many respects. For example, academically, in sports and various cultural pursuits. When asked to describe how they saw Pacific students experiencing school, Sefina replied:

Sefina: I see them [Pacific students] as achieving. I see them as high achievers in sports, the 'Polyfest', maybe some of the things that the Ministry of Education put out for our Pasifika kids. The Pacific speech [competition], those sorts of things. But then do you think humility sort of feeds into that as well? We don't really hear parents raving about their kids doing really well, and so we just think, they're doing alright (Parent group talanoa).

While this comment affirms the success that some Pacific students experience at SBHS, Sefina also indicates that this success can be downplayed. She seems to be saying that humility can sometimes block a true understanding of how students are doing at school. This is similar to Spiller's (2013) findings, where she found that humility can mask achievement. In her study, she found that some Pacific "students would feel "ashamed" if they were getting an award in an award ceremony" (p.31).

However, the parent participants believed that school was a place of great opportunity for Pacific students. They discussed the way that students were able to enjoy strong relationships, with other students, teachers, and particularly Pacific teachers. The parents

referred to the way that a school can be part of their extended family village, emphasising the significant role it plays. This was reflected on by Lagi, who linked the experience of his son with his own experience growing up:

Lagi: When I was at school that was the best time of my life because I met all my life-long friends at high school. We all came from very similar backgrounds because it was easy, and we were all Polynesians. I can see it in my son because he's grown up in a predominately European school. I should make mention when the guys from the school came up for the [Polyfest] performance, they really did something for him. Like I said, I'm probably quite plastic in a sense and I haven't really pushed our culture or my Samoan heritage on my kids. I know they have wanted to learn, and I know they want to learn. I'm almost a little bit ashamed that I have lost touch with the language. I've lost touch with the protocol. I've lost touch with a lot of that stuff and I kind of feel a little bit embarrassed because I can't pass that on to them. But when my son came to the school, and he saw those kids do their cultural performance I know it did something in him.

Then coming to the school, it helped him even more because I think he met other kids that are like him. I mean, you know, it sounds a bit cliché, but you know kids that are his colour, he can relate to. They know what they talk about. It's funny because it must be an ache. Well, he's been brought up a very kind of, oh, I don't even know if that's the right word, a European Palagi kind of way. When he meets with these other kids, they just connect (Parent individual talanoa).

Lagi's comments best encapsulate what the parents collectively felt was an important aspect of school life for their children. Namely, their ability to engage and interact with other Pacific students and in a wider sense, their Pacific cultures, and ways of being (Barber, 2016; Cahill, 2006).

This ability for young Pacific peoples to engage with their cultures is particularly relevant in Christchurch, where Pacific people's population numbers are low, both numerically and proportionately (Ministry of Education, 2022a). In the example given by Lagi above, the cultural isolation experienced by his family had bought on what some research has identified as a source of shame (Samu et al., 2019). Lagi references his own lack of proactivity when it comes to developing the cultural identity of his family and this has resulted in a sense of shame. His comments about what his son is now positively experiencing, through friendships and

relationships with teachers at school, indicate the importance of school being a place of cultural activity and consciousness (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2017).

Lagi's view of school as a place where cultural identity is developed aligns with the views that some of the student participants expressed in their talanoa. It also raises the question of how schools might facilitate this identity development effectively. My research suggests that the fostering of a deliberate and meaningful relationship between the school and Pacific parent community is critical for any identity development to be achieved safely and with authenticity. Without this relationship, there is a risk that schools and communities could fall victim to cultural essentialism (Alvaré, 2017). In doing so, schools could consciously or unconsciously homogenise Pacific students and communities. It is important to understand that culture is dynamic, and inextricably linked to education. As Thaman (2001) states:

Education is [...] an introduction to worthwhile learning, and culture as a way of life of a people which includes their store of important knowledge, skills and values expressed through a language and transmitted to the young for the sake of cultural continuity and survival. In this context, education and culture are inextricably interwoven since the content of all education has value underpinnings that are always associated with a particular cultural agenda, given that no education can be "culture-free" (p.1).

Thaman's assertion that the "worthwhile learning" of education in schools is not "culture-free", demands that schools become conscious of the cultural contexts that their students come from. Therefore, care needs to be taken to create strong dialogue between school and families so that schools can support ongoing cultural transmission in families, rather than be a barrier to it. Some ways in which this occurs will be explored in the following section.

Support for the Pacific community at school

The parent participants involved in this research felt that there was support being provided to Pacific students at the school. They acknowledged that there were systemic factors at play that meant that Pacific students might need specific or targeted support for various reasons. For the parents, teachers play a key role in determining what that support looks like.

Pacific teachers

A common thread throughout the parent talanoa was the essential role that Pacific teachers played at the school. Parent participants particularly emphasised the importance of their role in integrating Pacific cultures, languages, and identities into the life of the school. The parents also highlighted the various ways in which Pacific teachers engaged with parents, the students, and the wider community. They also felt that Pacific teachers showed a specific type of care for the Pacific community at the school. Samaria best encapsulated the parents' appreciation for Pacific teachers:

Samaria: I've really appreciated the support that the Pasifika team give our boys. Starting all the way back from the initial meeting that we had at the beginning of the year, Polyfest and then just the updates that [are] continually put on the [Pacific community] Facebook page (Parent group talanoa).

The parent participants further outlined the various ways these teachers have worked collaboratively and beyond their normal roles, to support the academic success of the Pacific students. Sefina gave this specific example: "When I think of Pasifika at school, here at Shirley Boys', I think of the [Pacific] teachers and the work that they've done to support them. I think of the work that's been done to support our boys in regard to NCEA." (Parent group talanoa). This support provides reassurance to the parents interviewed. Lagi discussed his feelings as a father of a student, feeling reassured by the presence of a Pacific teacher:

Lagi: Yeah, it was great having [names Pacific teacher]. Even reassuring, you know, [he'll] keep an eye on him. Those sorts of things I miss because, not that he has to do that sort of stuff to keep an eye on my boy but just to know that someone's there, kind of looking out for him. You know what I mean, it's quite comforting to know. [...] So having someone like that even, you know, say something like that can go a long way for us as parents. I think, if I was to say what the Pasifika boys or the community here brings to my family is just reassurance, I guess, that if I can't give [my son] what I've grown up with, you know, maybe in the school system they'll be able to fill that gap, maybe. And I guess if he wants to learn more, like he can ask or he can pursue that or can press me to see if I need to do something because he's been talking to [names Pacific teacher] about speaking Samoan (Parent individual talanoa).

This feeling of a cultural and language gap is a common theme to occur in research conducted elsewhere with New Zealand born Pacific peoples and their children (Cahill, 2006;

Riwai-Couch et al., 2020). Hence it was not surprising to find that, in his talanoa, Lagi expressed gratitude for the school employing a teacher who has strong capability in fa'asamoa (Samoan culture) and Gagana Samoa (Samoan language). He felt this teacher might be able to support his son in the development of his Samoan identity. One setting in which students can engage with Pacific cultures and identities is Pacific cultural festivals. Pacific teachers and community members are often expected to take leading roles in these contexts.

Mackley-Crump (2015) examined the role which Pacific festivals in New Zealand play in the negotiation of place and identity for students. He found that they acted as a catalyst to embed Pacific cultures within the school in a way that engaged the parent community. They also had the potential to improve academic performance and provide a platform for Pacific teachers to engage students in the practice of Pacific cultures and languages. Similarly, Faitala et al. (2022) state that “the Polyfest experience provides a platform for Pacific students to develop and share cultural expertise, exhibit pride in their cultural identities and cultivate leadership skills” (p. 1). I believe that the relationships able to be developed between Pacific teachers and students can be supported in the context of events like Polyfest. Student participants in the group talanoa for this research shared similar perspectives. However, relationships are not only important for students and teachers, but also for teachers and parents. This will be discussed in theme three, later in this chapter.

These are key points to consider when planning school engagement activities as teacher visibility is important for parents of Pacific learners. This might involve the presence of a Pacific teacher or someone who has a proven cultural connection with the Pacific community served by a school. As Tuifagalele et al. (2024) note:

Whānau of tamariki Pasifika are guided by Pasifika values and teachers must develop a better understanding of the ākonga and whānau Pasifika they serve and reorient their teaching practices to support them accordingly (p. 2).

The parent participants agreed that it is important for their cultures to be appropriately incorporated during critical school and family interactions.

One such example given was the initial interview after enrolment, where the student and family make first contact with the teaching staff. This is an important and starting point in the school-family relationship. Samaria, for example, affirmed that the presence of a Tongan teacher in this process enabled her family to feel supported: “I’ve found it to be very supportive. My eldest girl is going to [names school] next year. At the initial Year 8 interviews, it was with a Tongan teacher”. The effective incorporation of Pacific peoples’ cultures in these initial interactions consequently provides a significant first step to engage with parents. This is particularly important in places like Christchurch, where the number of Pacific teachers and families within schools are relatively low, compared to elsewhere in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2023i). My research, like research conducted elsewhere, indicates that healthy school/community relationships *can* be instigated with well-designed (culturally responsive) engagements between school and parents. A well-planned initial encounter between school and home, as described by Samaria above, can ensure a stronger sense of cultural safety and have a ripple effect that helps build stronger ties between various Pacific ethnic communities affiliated to the same school (Kana’iaupuni et al., 2017). It is therefore important for schools to prioritise the recruitment, growth, and support of Pacific teachers due to the strategic roles they can play.

For example, Sefina commented on the importance of a recruitment strategy and her perspective around recruiting the right teachers to stand in front of the students. Her advice was:

Sefina: If you’re wanting to engage with our Pasifika boys and our Pasifika parents, the whole community, then you perhaps need to look at what’s happening, who are you hiring. Because if it doesn’t match up then there’s always an imbalance” (Parent group talanoa).

Sefina saw the hiring of teachers who have the cultural competence and confidence to engage with Pacific students and families as an essential action for schools. She expressed a belief that it would lead to better outcomes for Pacific students. Sefina also highlighted the vital role that Pacific teachers play in community engagement, and how she, as a school parent, communicates this to others:

Sefina: To a certain extent I think [the school] connect well. But like I said before, if we didn't have the six teachers, if we didn't have the push from [names teachers], if we didn't have [them] leading the way, then I don't believe there would be a connection. You know what, when I say that my son goes to Shirley Boys' I always emphasise that they have at least six Pasifika teachers and really two that are leading the way so that our boys can do well (Parent group talanoa).

With regard to Sefina's stance, it is worth noting that the Cook Island proverb, "E kai venevene te tuatua a te monomono kōrero", which translates to "delicious food is the words of the teacher" (Short, 1951). This proverb thus lends itself nicely to describing the value that the parents and student participants in this study placed on the role of Pacific teachers. It underscores the leadership that many Pacific teachers have in the eyes of their Pacific students and their families. This also aligns with the research of Toumu'a and Laban (2014), who studied Pacific achievement and engagement in the tertiary education sector - where Pacific academics also played a significant role. Pacific students frequently informed Toumu'a and Laban that the role of "qualified, experienced, professional, caring and committed Pasifika staff ... was a pivotal component in Pasifika student success at the University" (Toumu'a & Laban, 2014, p. 52). This was because Pacific staff were crucial in supporting Pacific students' research, improving their visibility, and providing supportive relationships.

Similarly, Laumemea (2018) found that having Pacific teachers on staff was "a significant condition that supported leaders in engaging with Pasifika families and communities" (p.43). The participants in Laumemea's study indicated that Pacific teachers, in their experience, had been able to remove barriers, enable engagement and reflect the culture of groups within the community. Rio and Stephenson (2010) also note that Pacific teachers

“created possibilities for cultural specificities to be appreciated and reinforced” (p. 8). However, this is not to suggest that there are not significant challenges encountered by Pacific teachers. These include risk of cultural isolation, excessive pressure and cultural taxation, and the assumption that they hold a vast, diverse knowledge set from across Pacific cultures (Brown et al., 2008; Laumemea, 2018). There is an ongoing need for schools to explore ways to acknowledge Pacific teachers for the significant role they play. The next section explores parent participant thoughts around the need for acknowledging the success and achievement of students.

The importance of acknowledging the success and achievement of Pacific students

Parents in the talanoa expressed the importance of parents’ having educational expectations for their children as being a factor worthy of closer attention. This echoed the work of Reynolds (2017) who proposed that these high expectations can manifest in various forms of participation. For example, “opportunities to speak; being seen as capable; the experience of high expectations; and the contours of particular learning environments” (p. 213). He also found that students experience these high expectations through their “experience of pedagogy”, which can be understood as the “behaviour of teachers as they relate to students in learning-focussed contexts” (Reynolds, 2017, p. 213). In our talanoa, parents raised the behaviours they had observed at the school, as they related to learning or academic contexts.

Like many other New Zealand secondary schools, SBHS provides parents with a significant amount of information via different communications platforms. This flow of information generally concerns the performance of students, school sports teams and cultural groups. Not surprisingly, the parents in this study expressed a strong desire to see the success of Pacific students also celebrated on these platforms. Sefina described her wish to see the school acknowledge a wider range of successful student experiences in various school communication platforms:

Sefina: I think there's things that they acknowledge what the boys are doing in that they've made it to this level and that level, which is great. But even if the boys are just passing NCEA or have just passed, I think that's a great chance to acknowledge their achievement, but we don't really hear that. We hear who's head boy and we hear who has achieved at the high level of NCEA, but I just think [it's worth celebrating] if your boys are passing NCEA level one.

Another parent, Samaria, held similar views about widening the focus to celebrate all who have enjoyed NCEA successes – not just the top grades:

Samaria: You know what, let people know about it and put their photos up and put it in the newsletters and put it in your Facebook pages. Don't just put those high achievers that get all the scholarships that go to university. That's the other thing we see a lot of (Parent group talanoa).

These statements clearly demonstrate how parents as members of the school community, wish to see and celebrate achievement of all students, including their own.

As suggested by recent research, this type of celebration could strengthen a partnership between schools and Pacific students' families and their wider communities. Laumemea (2018) reports that strong and visible school partnerships with Pacific families result in improved outcomes when it comes to student behaviour and parental engagement. Mutch and Collins (2012), working with data from the Educational Review Office, also examined the factors that enhance these parent and community partnerships. They noted that celebrations of success are trust-based engagements which build stronger relationships between schools and parents.

In her study of science education in Tonga and Vanuatu, Puloka-Luey (2021) recalls contrasting ways of celebrating achievement in Tonga. She asserted that announcing exam results on the radio can cause some schools to be “publicly stigmatized due to their lowly rankings” (p. 171). She contrasted this with a teacher who celebrates student achievement in a family or relational manner. She uses the example of a party, where “each student's strengths (despite their lowly assessment grades) were celebrated and prayed for” (p. 172). Puloka-Luey also advised that “the memory of this party has stayed with me over the years since it was so different to my behaviourist practice of only ‘rewarding’ those students who mastered

assessments” (p. 172). Examining the core reasons for existing ways of acknowledging and celebrating student success is necessary. Mutch and Collins (2012) conducted research into Pacific community engagement with schools. They found that “it was not just what the school did but the spirit in which it was done that led to successful engagement” (p.177). As also suggested by Hunter et al. (2016), an effective approach to building school community relationships must be co-designed with the school’s Pacific community members, in order to prioritise reciprocity and respect and avoid ongoing marginalisation.

Relationship with the school

The parent participants in this research considered their relationship with the school to be complex and multi-dimensional. They described it as inclusive of different people and connections across the internal network of the school. They also described varying levels of communication and understanding in those relationships. This was similar to the findings of Averill et al. (2016), who called for “schools to nurture strong parental involvement in their children’s learning” (p.124). They found in their research that effective practice for Pacific students and families involved “two-way home–school communication, supporting learning at home through engaging in curriculum-related activities, and incorporating parental input into curriculum decision making” (p.125). While this might seem relatively straight forward when considering a home and school connection, Averill et al. emphasised that:

Strong commitment by school leaders to integrate parental involvement within the culture and structure of the school, rather than as an add-on to busy school activities, is crucial to forming effective partnerships between schools and parents (p.121).

As mentioned previously, the parents held significant regard for the Pacific teacher group, which enabled and supported parental engagement with the school. However, there are also many other people within the school with whom they held relationships. In the group talanoa, parents expressed a desire to see more care taken in nurturing these. Sefina, for

example, emphasised that a key aspect of relationship building for her is helping other Pacific parents feel part of the school:

Sefina: It's very much like that for our Pasifika people when we talk about relationships, relationships, relationships. Because if you really wanted anything to happen with our Pasifika community, you have to develop a good relationship and that takes time. But, it also means that when our Pasifika parents come in, that they feel like they're a part of the school. I don't feel when I've come in that I'm a part of the school. I don't actually think [names a group of staff] are very friendly.

Both Sefina and Samaria felt that for Pacific parents and community members, relationship building needs to be approached in ways that consider their specific needs. This finding aligned with research conducted elsewhere. For example, Fairbairn-Dunlop (2021b), in her synthesis of Pacific parent evaluations of the Pasifika PowerUp programme, found that Pacific parents often experienced difficulties in that there is a vulnerability in being a minority group within a school community. Moreover, that “learning to question” and “talk education” [...] increased parents' and learners' agency in education” (p.18). This aligns with the findings of my research that there is a need to improve engagement with Pacific parents. School improvement initiatives, therefore, need to consider how even basic dialogue occurs between parents and teachers. This became most evident in my study during the group talanoa, when Samaria said:

Samaria: I've come in here a few times, and it might just be me, it might be anybody else, but as a Pasifika person and as I guess a minority, I would want to be greeted a little bit nicer. I know they're really busy but hey, this is a school that's wanting to really engage with not only Pasifika but engage with parents, then you know, just a bit more friendliness up at the front office would be welcoming.

It is clear that “the better the engagement between parents, families, and schools, the greater the positive impact on student learning” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 168). These types of interactions with the formal school system and those associated with it, can determine the impression a parent might have of the school (Oakden, 2020).

It has also been my professional experience over many years that there is often discomfort experienced by many Pacific parents in their interactions with the local schooling

system (Cahill, 2006). For example, parents might experience challenges communicating with teachers due to language barriers, differences in cultural norms and their own childhood experiences with teachers (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021a). The negative experiences of parents can determine the ways in which they respond to the relationship that the school might be trying to promote. Parents have also described ways in which they feel schools can inspire greater confidence, through consistent, culturally connected, and warm interactions. These provide a strong platform on which to build relationships. Niuean researcher, Ikiua (2018), examined the effectiveness of Pacific pedagogies in an Indigenous Māori education setting (Te Wānanga o Aotearoa). She found that aligning the existing structures of the programmes of learning with different Pacific cultural expressions resulted in positive outcomes for Pacific students. This was centred around the understanding of shared values. Enabling a shared set of values in home-school relationships, and the way in which parents can engage with school staff, is necessary to develop effective classroom engagement (Hahambu et al., 2012; Sleeter, 2012).

Many parents wish to experience a culture of care, both for themselves and their children. Care is a key driver of relationships with teachers and the school and is based on a co-constructed approach between teachers, students, and community. As Cavanagh et al. (2012) found this sort of work involves:

values and practices that make it safe for all to engage, build relationships that make it safe for students to contribute on the basis of who they are, without threat to their individual cultural identities, values, beliefs and practices” (p. 453).

Elsewhere, Fairbairn-Dunlop (2021a) were advised that teachers who were “good” for their children generally “had a good understanding of Pacific cultures, languages, and education journeys; and demonstrated the spirit of tautua (service) of “going the extra mile” (p. 17). This involved demonstrating genuine care for their students and for their academic progress. All of this might suggest that a question that needs to be asked more frequently in schools is simply:

what is the parent's perspective about the culture of care that exists? For example, Lagi emphasised that an attitude of care that can be conveyed, via simple gestures:

Lagi: It's not so much the food [i.e., that a teacher may share with a class as a gesture of hospitality] It's the fact that someone cares, you know what I mean? I think that's important in Pasifika communities. I like that example because when I was back in Samoa, people would do that and they wouldn't have much, you know what I mean? But what they had they shared. You know now that I think about that's one of the best things about being in Pasifika is that sense of sharing (Parent individual talanoa).

This sense of cultural care, where tangible actions are carried out to make Pacific parents feel welcome and comfortable can also demonstrate a concrete alignment of stated school and Pacific communities' values as explained by Rimoni (2016). Her work with male Samoan students in three Wellington secondary schools highlighted the importance of collective perspectives in Samoan culture, as found in New Zealand school communities. The culture of sharing, mentioned by Lagi, reflects the collective values that arose in the student talanoa. It also underscores the value placed upon maintaining the wellbeing of a family. This is a prominent practice across various Pacific communities (Hawkes, 2023; Katoa-Taholo, 2019; Manuela & Sibley, 2014). It would therefore be worthwhile for New Zealand secondary school leaders to engage in talanoa with Pacific parents to ascertain how they feel about the level of care extended to them and/or their children. They might then explore the simple actions that might extend that care and contribute towards their feeling of belonging in the school environment.

An examination of Pacific ways of relationality would complement an understanding of the culture of care, which places relationships and trust at the centre (Habib et al., 2013).

For example, Reynolds (2018) states that:

Well-configured relationships are those where acts which *teu le va* are occurring. Teachers, because of the social-interactive nature of their work should aim towards an ideal state of relatedness. Pasifika students expect relationships between themselves and teachers to be positively configured through care of one form or another (p. 73-74).

There are various ways in which the *vā* plays a central role for Pacific peoples, which, when nurtured, can convey care as expressed by Lagi above (Cunningham et al., 2022). Similar findings have been drawn from international literature. For example, a comparative study of schools in New Zealand and Peru examined practices in Indigenous education, and that:

Pedagogies of care enable us to recover the centrality of holistic education and claim the possibilities for secondary education that truly contribute to inclusion within diversity (Fickel et al., 2017, p. 58).

Developing this culture of care (between parents and school) is thus the focus of this section of chapter 7.

Digital connection

Both Samaria and Sefina emphasised the importance of communication, in particular digital communication platforms. They believe that these are vital to strengthening the school's relationships with parents. Samaria appreciated communications from the school. Especially when that communication helped her to better support her son with his academic work:

Samaria: I have appreciated the fortnightly reports that the teachers send out. I was not really reading them until Sefina pointed out how valuable they are, so I thought, 'Okay, I'll actually have a look properly into them...'. Not that many comments were put on but when I did notice the comments, it was just helpful for me to engage with the particular teacher that was noticing things and then working together to just support [student name] a bit more in that particular class and other things that were going on for him. So, I found that really helpful. The communication's pretty good as well overall from the school.

Sefina added that a specific Facebook group, created for the Pacific community at the school, was very helpful in strengthening her interactions with the school. She saw this platform as a powerful tool to not only engage her as a parent, but to make Pacific people feel part of the wider school community. She said:

I think if it wasn't for the Pasifika Facebook page and for the teachers here, I wouldn't feel connected to the school at all. [...] I only feel engaged between the communication with the Pasifika Facebook page. When I come in here, I see no engagement and I'd think, 'Oh Gosh, this is a really white school but we're in an Eastern suburb, you have larger numbers of Pasifika. There needs to be some sort of acknowledgement for our Pasifika people.'

This observation recalls the work of Paulsen (2018), who examined the home-school relationships between school and its Pacific community in Melbourne. She noted that while Pacific parents sought engagement with their children’s education, the type of engagement in the home is not necessarily the same as experienced at school. She emphasises that the “nurturing of safe and harmonious spaces for communication” (p.41-42) is key to the creation of relationships centred on Pacific values. This communication has changed in recent years, particularly post-Covid, with schools often now favouring digital communication. Fehoko et al. (2022) for example examined the emerging idea of developing and maintaining a digital vā. This concept has gained traction particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. They, too, found that “Pacific peoples are becoming adept in reimagining [the] vā as a digital vā” (Fehoko et al., 2022, p. 321). They also encountered research participants who could offer practical examples of the effective use of online platforms to enhance Pacific education and health outcomes. As Sefina’s comment below suggests, the parent participants in my study also shared a desire for communication processes that could: i) make their children more visible and, (ii) give them better knowledge their children’s successes and struggles:

Sefina: I think the school has a responsibility to our Pasifika boys and probably other groups, but because we don’t come and we don’t reach high in the NCEA levels, I would’ve liked to see a bit more engagement with the Pasifika children. So, for an example, I decided to check up on my son’s NCEA and I said to him, “I’m gonna email all your teachers cos you told me that you’re tracking along great and that’s cool, but I’m emailing all your teachers to find out how you’re actually going. A couple of them came back and said, actually there’s some concerns. So, my thing is, if there’s some concerns and you know that Pasifika students don’t do well in NCEA, then why haven’t you contacted me? That should’ve been a concern.

There are many barriers to effective communication between schools in New Zealand and the Pacific parents they serve. Many of these have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent issues (Education Review Office, 2022). This is not surprising, and my findings reflect research conducted elsewhere in New Zealand.

A lack of communication from Pacific parents to schools has been often attributed to a lack of parental interest and/or cultural differences (Mutch & Collins, 2012). There are international parallels, too. For example, in their U.S. based work on school-family engagement, Mapp and Bergman (2021) found that, “The dual pandemics of Covid-19 and systemic racism are forcing a recalibration of family-school partnerships” (p. 6). I found similar patterns in research documenting the experiences of diasporic communities. For example, in relation to the Latino diaspora in the U.S. state of Wisconsin, Lowenhaupt (2014) identified a need for more effective “engagement practices to ensure immigrant families have agency in determining their own needs. Also, to ensure they can meaningfully participate in the design of engagement practices to enhance the educational experiences of their children” (p. 541).

New Zealand schools also need to ensure that institutional and systemic racism does not continue to limit Pacific parental engagement in their children’s education at school. This is an urgent shift that has been called for by a broad range of community, academic and policy sources (Maquiso, 2019). Fairbairn-Dunlop (2021b) in their engagement with Pacific parents throughout the Pacific PowerUP programme, note that:

Parents said that the more they learnt about school processes, the more aware they became of the challenges their children faced, including incidents of cultural bias, racism, and inequity. Parents said this knowledge had spurred their more active engagement with their children’s teachers (p. 90).

The parent participants in my research affirm this perspective. All three parent participants had a strong interest in hearing and seeing the ways that they can champion and support their children and address issues such as racism. They indicated that a collective communication approach is preferred. This might resemble a form of communication that links cultural and schooling aspirations, driven by teachers who are able to relate and understand the Pacific parent community. Such an approach would also reflect the collective values articulated by the students in their talanoa. Flavell (2014) found that Pacific parents did not necessarily relate to individualised communication strategies employed by the school. Interestingly, digital

communication platforms, such as Facebook, were mentioned by the parents as effective tools to engage Pacific parents.

There is significant room for further research in this area. Particularly as it has been my observation that there is a growing number of schools using targeted social media pages for cultural or ethnic groups within their communities. Effective use of these platforms can serve to enhance interactions between school staff and Pacific communities.

Staff interactions

Parental interactions and relationships with staff are crucial aspects of the school's ability to create and maintain relationships with parents (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b). As previously discussed, digital communication, such as web-based platforms like Facebook, provides much of the essential detail and information needed to run the logistical side of schooling. It is also used extensively to inform parents of student learning, despite debates about its effectiveness (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). However, Facebook has its limitations. For example, personal interactions are critical points at which, if positive, a greater depth of relationship can be created, or if negative, marginalisation can occur (Riwai-Couch et al., 2020). So, it was not surprising to find that parents participating in this study emphasised the importance of their interactions with teachers.

Lagi recognised that a key aspect of a teacher knowing their students is also knowing about where they come from. He emphasised that for Pacific students, family plays an important role in their identity. Echoing the sentiments of student participants in this research, Lagi recognised the centrality of family to Pacific values and cultural strength. His suggestion is for staff to go beyond the classroom and to reach out to Pacific families to establish dialogue. For example, in response to a question about how teachers might better relate with Pacific students, Lagi said:

Get to know their family. Get to know what's important to them, you know, ask them. What is important to you if school was not your thing. You know, kids of that age want to talk to teachers and tell them what's important to them or open up. But I guess, trying to understand where they're coming from at a deeper level like, you know, not just through grades. Not just through marking their work and, well writing them off there, but actually getting to know them. Not intimately, but family's probably a good start, getting to know their family.

Lagi raised some important matters worthy of consideration that have drawn the attention of other researchers too. For example, Mutch and Collins (2012) also found that "it was not just what the school did, but the spirit in which it was done that led to successful engagement" (p. 177). This finding recalls an insight shared by Lagi earlier in this chapter in which he explained that even simple gestures, carried out in a spirit of welcome, can convey a significant sign of engagement. To repeat, he said: "It's not so much the food. It's the fact that someone cares". This finding has international parallels, too.

In their study of school leadership in American settings, Khalifa et al. (2016) suggest that it is critical that school leaders can engage students and their communities in culturally appropriate ways. They argue that:

The ability of a school leader to understand, address, and even advocate for community-based issues, [...] as well as the role school leaders may play in promoting overlapping school-community contexts, speaking (or at least, honouring) native students' languages/lexicons, creating structures that accommodate the lives of parents, or even creating school spaces for marginalized student identities and behaviour (p. 1282).

Effective parent engagement in New Zealand settings, similarly, demands school leaders to pay active attention to those issues confronting Pacific communities. Sefina and Samaria identify that for some Pacific parents, they do not feel they receive enough basic, appropriate verbal acknowledgement when interacting with both teachers and other staff:

Sefina: I guess also with [teachers and staff], is if you know that your Pasifika parents aren't engaging or your Māori parents aren't engaging, then why don't you make that extra effort? You may not know where we're from but even just a "kia ora" - just an effort to say something with a smile instead of not looking up from your desk and just talking to me through the computer. This is why our Pasifika [parents], especially some of the older parents, won't come because they feel devalued, but they also feel really mā [ashamed] on coming in in the first place, but when you're greeted like that then straight away there's barriers.

Samaria: And it does take, for some of our [...] older Pasifika parents, it will be a big thing to come into a big school like this and say something about their son or their daughter. (Parent group talanoa)

Sefina and Samaria therefore suspected that Pacific parents might be reluctant to enter dialogue with staff at SBHS due to such experiences and that there are still, often, challenges that undermines interactions between Pacific parents and staff. This experience is not unique to SBHS or Pacific parents in New Zealand schools. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) examined the role of culture in the leadership of schools with diverse communities in America. They found that staff need to work harder to listen to minority community parents' perspectives with respect and to be more proactive in sharing information. These changes were considered vital to "enhance their [parents'] understanding of the school and its expectations" (p. 185).

Flavell (2023), in her work with teachers and Pacific parents in New Zealand schools, also found that it was challenging to get alignment in home-school partnerships. She argues that there is a need to create a:

... system which enables families to be heard in an equitable and collaborative manner, so that they know how to influence and contribute to decision-making within schools". She states that "without an effective system to include Pacific perspectives, the potential for answers to come from their communities remains untapped" (p. 404).

It is important for school leaders to understand the potential that exists within their parent community, as well as some of the differences that may make collaboration challenging.

Internationally, this can be seen across different communities in relation to schooling. Sosa (1996), investigating barriers to involvement in school activities for Hispanic migrant parents, similarly found that teachers tended to be critical of parents' lack of involvement. She suggests that "The root of the problem is that Hispanic parents cherish beliefs and expectations different from those cherished by the schools and by the parents whom the schools most frequently engage" (p. 341). This echoes Pacific parent voice in New Zealand (Riwai-Couch et al., 2020), with parent participants in this research conveying a feeling of being devalued or excluded. Khalifa (2016), in his synthesis of findings concerning "culturally responsive school

leadership” in America, emphasises that “being aware of such cultural clashes between schools and migrant families is necessary for school leaders who sincerely care about the education of all students regardless of their culture” (p. 1292).

This point leads to the next section and theme, which will discuss the role of Pacific values at school, home, and the wider community.

Pacific values in family and school settings

The parents I spoke to as part of this research believed that living-out values played an important role in their children’s lives at home, and in the wider community. They were hopeful that their children would also live-out these values at school. Hence, they wanted their children to have more cultural congruence between what they experienced at home and school to ensure these values were central to their adult lives. As Rimoni and Averill also contend, values are “concepts and beliefs that people regard as desirable and good, and worthy of demonstrating and passing on to others” (Rimoni & Averill, 2019, p. 4). These values are inextricably linked to Pacific students’ ontologies and epistemologies. As such, there is an ever-present risk that the implicit bias of teachers, and dominant cultural structures will marginalise Pacific students’ ways of being and knowing. This is because they do not always align with those of the dominant culture. As Enari and Matapo (2020) explain:

For many Pacific peoples, traditional education was always situated within the collective, meaning that learning occurred within the village with a commitment to every learner having a broader relationship to the community. A concerted commitment to retaining such knowledge systems is needed to ensure Pacific ontological ways of being and knowing are present (p. 9).

In this study, I found the place of Pacific epistemologies and ontologies in the education of Pacific students was expressed by parent participants under their umbrella-like concept of “values”. However, as stated in Chapter 2, care needs to be taken not to view Pacific cultures

or values as homogenous and static. The different values expressed within different Pacific communities are dynamic and adaptable to new environments and contexts. For the parents I interviewed, this reality was manifested primarily in the nuanced ways they described their children's lives and hopes for their development into adulthood. Lagi expressed his hopes for his son, when he shared how he wished the values he holds dear will assist his son's preparation for adult life:

I'm hoping that he will walk away from here knowing, it's a little bit wishful thinking, but I hope knowing what he wants to do going forward. I think the values that he learns from here will set him up to be the type of person people will either want to interact with or not. I'm hoping that it is the former, you know, that people will want to interact with him because he [has good values], he's had a good upbringing, he's surrounded himself with good friends.

The pivotal role that values play for these parents seemed to align with the talanoa that emerged with the students (see Chapter 5). Participants explored what it means to live a good life, in a way that is connected to familial expectations and values. For example, the idea of service implies that you will be a person who is connected to and aware of the needs of your community. The Samoan notion of tautua (service), provides a good example of this. Fa'aea and Enari (2021) report an example of this value in action during the Covid-19 Pandemic:

With the new threat of Covid-19 and the backlash of being identified with positive cases, Samoans are galvanising their communities to ensure that their service results in distribution of food parcels and caring for one another. It is a chance for individuals to take a closer look at their situations and note any changes that could jeopardise livelihoods and living conditions (p. 96).

While subscribing to values widely purported to be common amongst a wide range Pacific families (Rimoni et al., 2022), the parents I interviewed also recognised that their students were unique individuals. As teenagers, these students were developing their own worldviews and perspectives.

This is important when considering the risk of cultural essentialism, which can pervade efforts to create schools attempting to be culturally engaged (Watkins & Noble, 2019). Cultural essentialism is “the assumption that all members of a category of people share one or several

identifiable, defining cultural features” (Alvaré, 2017, p. 34). In my own experience, colleagues have often expressed what they feel to be essential aspects of what it means to be a Pacific person. This has often come from a simplistic understanding or interpretation of something they have heard or a social stereotype. This problem is not unique to SBHS or New Zealand school settings. As Alvaré (2017) found in his research concerning the mediation of cultural differences between American and Trinidadian educators:

An essentialist perspective ‘assumes uniformity and stability’, suggesting cultural systems are homogenous, discrete, and overly coherent. Rather than viewing culture as a nuanced, constantly shifting series of historically determined, interrelated processes, we fell victim to the essentialist assumption that, while its defining feature may be the celebration of diversity and hybridity, there is such a thing as ‘Trinidadian culture’ that has meaning at a national level. We assumed a degree of cultural similarity based on shared national citizenship that does not exist in practice (p. 34).

Similarly, Pacific peoples in New Zealand may face cultural assumptions around their abilities, strengths, weaknesses, or their values. This is a risk that Pacific teachers and those who deliver professional development around Pacific cultural competencies need to be aware of and take care to mitigate.

The parent participants discussed values as they saw them and expressed hope that their shared or collective values would remain strong and equip their sons to work effectively with those around them in the adult world. However, they also mentioned the importance of individuality when it came to ways of expressing them. When asked what she felt her son brought to the school, Sefina quipped, “He would say, ‘what do I bring to the school? I bring me.’ That’s what he would say and laugh.” This comment reflects Sefina’s desire for her son to be himself. As a mother she desires that Pacific students to be able to bring their personal identity, alongside their cultural identity, with them as they navigate schooling. Her comment emphasises an example of the humour that is part of her son’s personal identity and is a touching example of the affection that she as a mother has for her teenage son.

Respect and humility were valued by all three parents in the talanoa. I appreciated the way in which the parents were able to describe what these values looked and felt like as their sons progressed through school. At times, the parent's description of these values seemed to value of their sons developing a disposition for being good at listening. They encouraged their sons to develop an ability to question, seek knowledge and/or to challenge behaviour that undermined their treasured familial values such as humility and critical thinking:

Sefina: I'm hoping the boys bring respect, or humility.

Samaria: I think that could probably look quite different in the different years. Humility in the earlier years is probably just keeping quiet and not saying anything.

Sefina: He can be loud and sociable, but we're trying to encourage him to ask questions when he doesn't understand. So, I think humility in the maybe NCEA, the senior years, I would hope looks like questioning but in a respectful way. Questioning to understanding anything that's going on in class, questioning things that are going around school that may not sit well with him, whether it be around racism or unconscious bias, or anything that may go against values that they're taught within their homes (Parent group talanoa)

For Lagi, the concept of respect was clear-cut, structured and quite important. For example, He offered the following comments to emphasise the importance of demonstrating respect to appropriately maintain intergenerational relationships:

I guess for me it's always been about respect. I think respect in a sense that, I guess, I've always had respect for people older than me no matter what background or culture they've come from. [...] I guess that to me it's always been about respect to your elders. I don't know, that's probably one value that I've always walked away with.

This form of intergenerational respect – within family or social structures – is often visible to those working in schools with Pacific students and families (D Fa'avae, 2017). In New Zealand and other diasporic settings (including Australia), Pacific family structures have developed and become extended villages and metaphorical islands, with their own complex and inclusive connections (Enari & Taula, 2022). Collective values, alongside economic and cultural capital often support the needs of individuals and drive opportunities for families (Stead & Eltman, 2019).

Lagi's perspective recalled the sentiments of the students I interviewed (Chapter 5). They, too, valued respect for parents and elders. To him, the importance of respect was instilled within him by his family and other social organisations, most notably his church. When asked about his childhood and upbringing, he said:

Lagi: We always do the chores. We'd do all the cleaning, all the cooking and, you know, there was a lot of respect given to our parents and obviously their parents when they came over. We were always to be seen but not heard kind of thing. As I say we had to speak Samoan, you were expected to speak Samoan in the house, especially if our grandparents were over. They didn't like us really talking Palangi, so I did my best in my broken Samoan. We always had to wear 'ie lavalava, you know that was important even if it was over pants (Parent individual talanoa).

Sefina also wished to see her son being “respectful of elders, those of authority, those in leadership positions”. Her desire resonated with Lagi's comments above. Respect, as described by both parents, seemed to demand a mindfulness and acknowledgement of others that goes beyond showing simple courtesy. As Rimoni and Averill (2019) also observed:

The value of respect is held reverentially by Pasifika students, and is often a reflection of their home environment, where elders, parents, and older siblings are held in high regard by virtue of age, gender, experience, and position in the family or community. Respectful behaviour and respect for others are instilled in Pasifika children across home, church, and community settings well before they start school (p. 4).

While Rimoni and Averill express a view that is widely held, there remains a risk that an over-emphasis placed upon values such as service and respect, could result in harm to Pacific communities. This was evident, for example, in the findings of Wilson (2017) who studied the use and value of Samoan language in New Zealand Samoan families. She found that different expressions of respect were important in the lives of her participants. This was a Samoan context, underpinned by fa'asamoa (Samoan way of life), and there was a diverse range of ways that respect was expressed. Wilson (2017) concluded that 'how' respect is demonstrated can negatively impact young Samoans in multiple ways. For example, if a young Samoan does not speak the Samoan language or conform to traditional notions of a “respectful attitude”, this can lead to attacks on their cultural authenticity (p. 108). To illustrate this risk, she explained

that: “A ‘plastic’ Samoan [...] denotes connotations of inauthenticity; whether one speaks Samoan or not has an influence on this judgement” (p.108). This perspective, which can be pervasive, can have a harmful impact on young people’s self-esteem and the formation of their identities.

The risks involved are well-described by Fuka-Lino (2015) who identified some potential risks and problems that can arise from rigid or stereotypical expressions of a cultural concept like ‘respect’. This finding arose from her research that explored communication issues for Tongan youth experiencing mental health distress. She (Fuka-Lino) noted that there were barriers for the participants in speaking to their parents about what they were experiencing and feeling. Fuka-Lino (2015) attributed this to some anti-dialogical aspects of “the culture of respect for their parents” (p.59). For her Tongan youth participants, respect simply required them to, “not question [their parents’] instructions” (p.63) and/or not to voice their own opinions.

These findings might suggest that it is critical for Pacific communities to critique how unhealthy, stereotypical expressions of ‘respect’ may become entrenched within their families and communities. Also, to consider the historical roots and motivating factors that underpin harmful interpretations and expressions of cultural concepts – like ‘respect’. Schools too, need to be aware of the risk of adopting homogenous or rigid expressions of concepts like respect. I am not the only researcher who has drawn this conclusion. Hunter et al. (2016) also noted the importance of respectful and reciprocal relationships between Pacific students and teachers in school settings. They, too, found that respect can take many forms, like those described by the parent and student participants in my study (mentioned earlier). Of further interest, Hunter et al.’s key finding in this area was that reciprocity should underpin these relationships to ensure a mutually respectful environment is created, irrespective of who holds the most power in that relationship. What this might look like in a teacher/student relationship will/different to a

teacher parent relationship or parent/student relationship. For Hunter et al., reciprocity is underpinned by affirmation of cultural capital, sincerity within relational interactions and attentiveness to the needs of one another. As described above, there can be problematic outcomes that accompany a blind obedience to a stereotypical definition of respect. I agree with Hunter et al. that reciprocity is a helpful way in which to temper this.

It is therefore important to consider the variations that might occur in any Pacific communities' expressions of culture. For example, Mara (2006) in her research into the construction of Pacific identities in New Zealand has questioned church and family hierarchies that "do not respect free choice" (p. 172). These hierarchies can often perpetuate rigid and controlling value systems that consolidate their own power base, all in the name of preserving culture. As a result of this sort of scenario, Mara found that tensions can arise between New Zealand born Pacific people and those born in the Pacific due to competing preferences for how core cultural concepts should be enacted. Likewise, Mara, (2006) drew attention to tensions that can sometimes arise between New Zealand's Pacific communities, and those back in Pacific homelands. For example, she notes different perspectives around gender roles within church contexts.

There have been similar findings in American and Mexican indigenous and migrant communities, as noted by Castagno and Brayboy (2008) and Valenzuela (1999). For example, Castagno and Brayboy state that children

...should learn traditional values from elders, that tribal languages and cultures are an important aspect in the education of Indigenous youth, and that schools ought to become clearinghouses for community traditions and cultures. [...] successful teachers of Indigenous youth also work to transmit values, beliefs, knowledge, and norms that are consistent with their students' home communities (p. 960).

This is a similar position to research conducted with Pacific parents and students, and reflects the voices in my own research. Valenzuela (1999), exploring patterns of immigrant achievement in the United States, notes that there is often a divergence between the

“mainstream values of the high school” (p. 76) and those of migrant communities. In contrast to the preferred approach articulated by Castagno and Brayboy above, Valenzuela asserts that “students who are marginal to the mainstream values of the school overwhelmingly conform to the “uncaring-student” prototype” (p.77). The importance of cultural values is a recurring pattern here, and it is critical that schools who are connected to Pacific diasporic communities seek to incorporate structures that reflect this. This will require a transformative approach to be enacted throughout curriculum design and delivery, as well as a significant strategic shift in school pastoral care and community engagement delivery.

The parent participants emphasised the importance of teachers understanding the different cultures and values that Pacific students brought to the school. In the group talanoa, Sefina expressed a desire for the school to understand the different ways school values could be expressed to ensure better cultural congruence between school and home. She called for opportunities for different Pacific students and parents to participate in co-design processes to develop programs. Sefina envisaged programs that help translate and display the synergies that do exist between the school’s stated values and those of her community. Sefina was cognisant of how the norms within various Pacific communities might differ from those of the dominant culture within the school. Hence, she expressed a desire to see these norms challenged for everyone’s benefit:

I would like teachers to understand different cultures but specifically for our Pasifika boys to understand a bit more what their culture means. And to value that someone who’s quiet [i.e., someone who has humility] can also be a leader. You don’t have to be outspoken, which is like a praised Western ideal of what a leader is. As the teacher appreciates those strengths that our Pasifika boys bring, it enables the children, the child, the boy, to be appreciated in his own space and to come into the classroom already having those values.

Despite evidence and claims of shared Pacific values, there are different interpretations and expressions which need to be explored within diverse communities such as schools (Averill et al., 2020). I believe that it is critical for Pacific parents and communities to engage with

schools and communicate their own expectations and values for their children. In this way, the diversity that exists across families and cultures will be evident.

How one family might practice their values will often differ from day to day, and to another family's expression of it. Yet, the problem remains that in many schools, the unconscious expectation might remain that Pacific families share a particular set of values, and therefore a homogenous way of expressing them. These values and expressions of them may or may not align with those who otherwise dominate the school's institutional culture. My research has found that there is ample evidence to suggest that, upon joining a school, it is often necessary for Pacific students (and their families) to conform to the institutional culture imposed by those who dominate that school's decision-making procedures (Surtees et al., 2021).

My research consequently suggests that more work needs to be done to understand and appreciate how and why diverse Pacific values systems can be ethically and effectively integrated into New Zealand secondary school settings. As Tongati'o (2020) also found, it is vital that strong relationships do exist between Pacific families and the school and that, ultimately the, "values important to Pasifika peoples [are] explored in the context of achieving educational success" (p.57).

Conclusion

Despite the small number of parents involved in the parents' talanoa central to this chapter, the participants contributed to some rich dialogue. This centred on a vision for their sons being able to thrive during school and well into their adult life. Listening to these parents gave me the opportunity to hear their concerns and suggestions – as a fellow parent, researcher and teacher. Despite the challenges of raising children in the 21st century, my talanoa with these parents adds further weight to a growing body of literature documenting the desire of Pacific parents to have more meaningful input into their children's education (Flavell, 2023; Nakhid,

2006). Indeed, it is quite clear from my study that “Pacific students [also] value the active involvement of their family”, and that this growing body of research “counteracts ideas that Pacific parents either do not care or lack the skills to care effectively” (Chu-Fuluifaga et al., 2021). Similar observations have been made amongst diasporic Pacific communities elsewhere in the world – particularly Australia and the U.S.A (Faleolo, 2020; McGavin, 2014; Radclyffe et al., 2023).

The risk of disconnection between the parents and the school was evident in both of my parents’ talanoa. This finding recalled the research of Laumemea (2018), who also found her Pacific parent participants felt “disconnected and unaware of student learning” (p.37). The parents in my research saw a relationship with the school being important, but equally felt that there had to be approaches to engage, enacted by the school, that are appropriate and effective for Pacific parents. The parent participants in my study also expressed a desire for interactions that were relational and reciprocal (Hawk et al., 2002). They felt strongly that coming into the school sometimes meant leaving their culture at the door. That or they were only engaging in a transactional interaction that lacked warmth. Many of their thoughts and recommendations were not earth shattering, let alone new. What the participants in my study called for simply were steeped in history. Their desires, for example, clearly aligned with those recorded in the dialogue of the Lopdell House Conferences on Educating Pacific Island students in 1974 (Department of Department of Education, 1975). It concerns me that little appears to have changed for Pacific parents since 1974.

The parents involved in this talanoa also provided rich insights into their perspectives of Pacific students’ familial lives. They firmly believed their family and community perspectives could be more proactively be sought to support their children’s teachers and school leaders. Especially, when planning programs to create school environments that are more inclusive of Pacific identities and culture. This, in turn highlighted the value of prior

research which has also highlighted a need to give tangible and effective support for Pacific communities in schools (Fa'avae, 2017). When the parents I interviewed saw evidence of reciprocal relationships with Pacific families, and the prioritisation of their values at school, they felt more valued and included.

They were also confident that Pacific cultural values, such as humility and respect, played a pivotal role in their sons' adolescence experience. It was interesting to observe how their views aligned strongly with those shared by the students I had previously interviewed. There was also a similar vibrancy to their discussions about the importance of incorporating Pacific cultures into school-life. This shared stance reminded me of the words of Freire (2005), who advised that it, "is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (p.44). Pacific families and communities can play an active role in addressing the systemic injustices that they face in schools.

The following chapter will now examine how teacher participants perceive their Pacific students and community in the different environments connected to the school.

Chapter 8: Talanoa with Shirley Boys' High School Teachers

Introduction

This chapter discusses Shirley Boys' High School (SBHS) teachers' understandings and perceptions of their Pacific students and community. When engaging with this group of teachers, I sought to position them as a third cohort of research participants, to triangulate their views with the findings of my talanoa with students (Chapters 5-6) and parents (Chapter 7). The key objectives of my talanoa with teachers was to learn how they: (i) viewed the Pacific community in their school; (ii) how they engaged with the students as Pacific peoples in their classrooms and wider school settings; and (iii) how they felt about their own behaviour and actions as a community of teachers in relation to Pacific students and community members affiliated to their school. As Thaman (2001) indicated, teachers play a critical role when it comes to the schooling of Pacific students and bridging those cultural incongruences that often exist between home and school:

The contrast between the culture of modern schooling and most Oceanic cultures as these are lived today and its implications for formal education (learning and teaching) cannot be over-emphasised. It is, however, not an unbridgeable gap. The main bridge, in the view of many Pacific Island educators, must be the teacher (p.7).

The gap between cultures that Thaman (2001) refers to could be in any one of these specific areas, and the work of the teacher can cause and exacerbate the divide or bridge it. Thus, it is essential to reflect on the role of the teacher to avoid the risk of their roles being overstated, or over relied on to address significant systemic barriers in schools or wider society. My research questions (see Chapter 3) were therefore designed to enable me to facilitate talanoa with some of my former teaching colleagues. These questions further helped us to explore the values, relationships, and environments that they may draw upon to connect with Pacific students and their communities, in their workplace setting. After receiving ethics approval from the University of the Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC), permission was obtained from the school's Principal and Board of

Trustees. Teachers were then able to self-select or volunteer to participate in this study. My talanoa with the teacher participants from SBHS was audio-recorded in after school timeslots to avoid clashes with teaching. Four of the teachers participated in a (group) talanoa conducted in September 2020. This was followed by another (single) talanoa with a fifth teacher in the same month, which was close in time to the Covid-19 lock downs. Therefore, like the parent talanoa sessions, care had to be taken around the transmission of Covid-19. This was particularly important because of the relational and personal nature of the methodology.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first commences with a brief contextual background to illuminate factors that had impacted the teaching profession at SBHS. This serves to build upon information provided earlier in chapter four (Research Context). It then provides a brief profile of the participants. Part two discusses and analyses teacher participants' reflections shared during their talanoa. All of this, when combined, serves to highlight the role that this group of teachers played within the school community to support Pacific students. It also provides interesting insights into the nature and effectiveness of that school's efforts to engage with Pacific student families and communities.

Part One: Contextual Background

As mentioned in the first chapter, I was a teacher at SBHS for twelve years. During this period, significant changes occurred throughout the school, which impacted the school community substantially. Firstly, the Christchurch earthquakes (2010-2011) had a severe impact upon the eastern suburbs of Christchurch City, where SBHS is located (Gilbert, 2011). The following extract from a report produced by the Education Review Office, best captures the impact of these earthquakes on teachers in Christchurch:

When Canterbury was struck by a severe earthquake at 12.51pm on 22 February 2011, staff in the education sector in the region rose to the challenges presented with great professionalism, courage, and calmness. [...] The earthquakes [...] had an immediate and significant impact on the provision of education in the region. (Education Review Office, 2013)

The earthquakes resulted in several years of staffing difficulties and uncertainty, including the co-location of SBHS students at Papanui High School (in a nearby suburb). During this period, a Curriculum and Pastoral Needs Assessment (CAPNA) was also conducted to reduce staff numbers (Laurenson, 2014). The SBHS school property was severely damaged, and it was announced that the school itself would either close or merge with Christchurch Boys' High School (Law, 2012). Eventually, the Ministry of Education decided that a rebuild should occur. This was completed in 2018 (see chapter two).

Understanding the turmoil experienced by the school community at this time does provide an important backdrop for my talanoa with teachers central to this chapter. When I first arrived at the school in 2010, a year before the Christchurch earthquakes, I was the only staff member of Pacific descent. Subsequently, I was given a role of responsibility looking after the 'Polyfest group' or the Pacific culture group. It then dawned on me that Pacific teachers were rare in the teaching profession. It was also my first experience of the existence of cultural taxation, which impacts the professional lives of many teachers from ethnic minority groups (Reid & Santoro, 2006; Santoro, 2007; Torepe & Manning, 2017). This will be discussed more fully throughout this chapter.

My role largely involved organizing those boys who wanted to perform in the annual Canterbury Polyfest. It did not seem to matter to the school leadership that I had no credibility in the performing arts. They saw someone who had the word Pacific on their CV and who expressed a desire to support Pacific students. It became clear as my career progressed, and my experience broadened, that schools would grasp at anyone who appeared to possess confidence or capability in this area, despite any lack of experience or assurance in the area.

As outlined previously (Chapter 1), I am a pale, New Zealand born, English speaking person of British (English, Irish, Scottish), European (Polish), and Pacific (Cook Islands, Tahitian) descent. The Pacific students involved in the group I managed would describe

themselves as brown. Generally, these boys were bilingual and largely affiliated to Samoan and Tongan families. Despite our differences, I tried to work effectively as a border-crossing cultural worker in ways that recall the work of Giroux (2007). For example, I attempted to bridge cultural boundaries and establish dialogue between students' families and the school, where previously such dialogues had been absent or limited.

There were other challenges experienced along the way, particularly as I took-on different leadership roles over the next decade. At times, tensions arose in various parts of the school's broader community. These included staff conflicts, a lack of motivation to change pedagogical practices, varying student and family engagement levels, and different political pressures across the community beyond the school's gate. However, as Freire (2005) states, work towards transformation occurs "not in terms of explaining to, but rather dialoguing with the people about their actions" (p.53).

Like many, if not most schools in New Zealand, the staff at SBHS have had opportunities for professional development and learning concerning Pacific education over the last decade. This has ranged from small group discussions around individual learner needs, to whole staff sessions around successive governments' *Pasifika Education Plans* and other related official strategies. This professional development has been facilitated both internally, by me and other teachers, and externally, by Ministry of Education officials and professional learning providers. These professional development activities largely aimed to strengthen teachers' engagement with Pacific students and their families and sought to develop pedagogies that met the needs of diverse learners (Alton-Lee, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2018, 2019a).

From these experiences, I learned that a key challenge for schools is to know how to evaluate the effectiveness professional development. Often academic achievement information, such as curriculum levels or NCEA data, or the attendance rates of students are used like standardised benchmarks. This tendency resembles a blunt tool approach, one which

can serve to exacerbate existing social or class differences between schools. It is difficult to measure the levels of engagement of students and communities, who are not academically, socially, or culturally homogenous. Schools have continued to grapple with this issue, with one approach being to collaborate within and across kāhui ako (school clusters).

Since 2017, SBHS's involvement in the Ōtākaro Kāhui Ako has led to more collaboration amongst schools in that cluster. This need for collaboration in turn has led to increased calls for relevant data is evident, as indicated by this following extract from an Achievement Challenge document:

Our data suggests that schools are not currently meeting the needs of certain groups of ākonga - this is indicated by the fact that Māori and Pasifika ākonga are achieving below the desired levels in literacy and numeracy. There is a need to collect more specific evidence to highlight particular areas of need, for example, year levels, student and parent voice, as well as evidence concerning teacher confidence and capability to engage in a more culturally responsive or enhancing manner. (Ōtākaro Kāhui Ōtākaro Kāhui Ako, 2020, p. 9)

Within this kāhui ako there have also been attempts to diversify and innovate around approaches to engaging teachers with Pacific cultural competencies (Ministry of Education, 2018). These have included a podcast, digital app, and collaborative workshops with teachers from the various schools and early childhood centres that are part of the kāhui ako (Education Gazette, 2020). Like discussion of culturally responsive practice, cultural competencies can also be problematic. Hence I echo Gruenewald (2014) and query: "to what in culture should educators be responsive?" (p.137). Or in this case, in what aspects of culture should teachers be competent? Before addressing the findings of my talanoa with these teachers, I will now pause to provide this following profile of those teachers who participated in this study.

Profile of the teacher participants

I held talanoa with five teachers affiliated to SBHS. Four participated in a talanoa style focus group, and one in an individual interview. To protect their anonymity within the school community, I have not provided an individual profiles for each teacher participants. It shall

suffice for me to explain that the teachers ranged in age. One male participant was in his sixties, and two were in their forties. The two female participants were both in their thirties. The teacher participants had varying degrees of experience, as well as different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The participants identified their backgrounds as Pacific/New Zealand European, New Zealand European or Pākehā, and international migrant. Two had taught for between five and ten years, another two had taught for between ten and twenty years. The final teacher participant had taught for over thirty years. They taught five different curriculum areas. These included: languages, mathematics, technology, commerce, and social science.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the talanoa research method, integral to this study, was conducted with participants who were known to me. They had been my colleagues for between five to twelve years. The implications of these relationships were carefully considered in conjunction with the development of my ethics plan presented to the University of Canterbury's Human Ethics (in research) Committee (see Chapter 3).

While there were challenges and risks associated with this insider approach (Carling et al., 2014; Merriam et al., 2001), it aligned with key principles of the talanoa method, which essentially requires a relational and dialogic approach to data collection and analysis. As Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2012) have indicated, talanoa conducted after significant periods of presence and relationship development can serve to build trust and respect resulting in dialogue that allows authentic voice to emerge. They asserted that “only with prolonged periods of participant-observation can the trust and mutual respect required of valid talanoa research be developed. Further, the long period of residence is necessary for our participants’ multiple ‘truths’ to be exhumed” (p. 5).

These authors further asked: “Is the mere effort to apply this approach enough or do short stints in the field have the potential to produce potentially invalid or even harmful research data?” (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012, p. 5). So, while I was mindful of the risks that

my chosen data collection approach presented, these were carefully managed with guidance from my research supervisors (see chapter three). The talanoa reflections of the teacher participants are now presented in the following passage.

Part Two: The Shirley Boys' High School teachers' talanoa

Five issues emerged during my talanoa with the teacher participants, and each encompassed several intersecting matters worthy of discussion. The following discussion therefore will address these issues supported by quotations from the participants. In each instance, their identities are withheld to further protect their identities. Like the parent talanoa discussed in chapter six, there were a smaller number of participants than the student talanoa (chapter five).

The following five themes provide the scope for the discussion that will follow:

1. Pacific peoples in the school community
2. Pacific teachers
3. Pacific values
4. Stereotypes held by teachers.
5. Challenges in engaging with Pacific families and communities

Pacific peoples in the school community

In both talanoa sessions, the teachers seemed to make conscious efforts to avoid stereotypes. The exception was one teacher who identified as Pacific, specifically as a self-identified hafekasi (half caste), the Tongan transliteration used to describe a person of mixed ethnic background (Hermes, 2018). She (Teacher 1) was able to reflect on her own experiences as a student at school. She further commented on how these informed how she viewed Pacific students as a teacher. Teacher 1 noted that she felt a degree of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). She recognised that there was an element of her viewing Pacific students as others might, indicating that she had internalised these views from elsewhere in ways that recall how

Freire (2005) described the ways in which oppressed people groups internalise the world views of their oppressors:

Teacher 1: I think of all of the stereotypes, and I know you aren't supposed to do that. [...] Instantly I think of good and bad. So, like sporty, loud, big, laughing, naughty sometimes, if we are going right into the stereotypes. I think that as a Pasifika person myself, I probably think of those because at school I tried to avoid those things. Like I remember I was asked to play for the senior A volleyball team because I was brown, and I'd never played volleyball before, ever. So, I think that those things always come up for me when I think of Pasifika, I think of what other people think.

Her experience as a student (of having assumptions made about her by her former teachers), had clearly moulded on her thinking as an adult/teacher. Upon reflection, she clearly became more 'conscientized' (Freire, 2005), and alert to the subconscious role that a "good and bad Islander" binary had previously played in shaping her view of Pacific students. Similarly, McGavin (2014) discusses the way negative stereotypes are sometimes used in an ironic or subversive manner to positively express one's identity as a member of a minority community. This may be particularly relevant in diasporic groups where through "the active use of stereotypes, a set of practices acquires emergent authenticity" (McGavin, 2014, p. 140).

In this way, Pacific people perhaps born and or raised in New Zealand and being schooled here, start to subvert various stereotypes previously imposed upon them by the dominant culture. This is typified, for example, by subverting the once negative "FOB" or 'fresh off the boat' stereotype to form a positive identity label (Radclyffe et al., 2023, p. 1). This was something that Teacher 1 alluded to when she reflected upon her thoughts. This was interesting because student participants also highlighted how they similarly sought to subvert negative stereotypes.

At this point, I wondered how non-Pacific teachers might reflect upon their perspectives on student ethnicity or culture. To that end, it was notable that Teacher 2 (a British teacher who had taught in several Christchurch schools and worked with Pacific students and teachers), explained that he sought to take a "people-focused" approach. He elaborated as follows:

Teacher 2: I think of people as opposed to countries, to me it definitely signifies peoples rather than the individual islands and its one of those unanswered questions that I've always really had. How do Pasifika people feel about having that generic term, how do Asians feel about being lumped together when they are distinctly different, so how do Pasifika people feel, when they're Samoan or Tongan or Tokelauan actually feel about being grouped, because not everyone likes their group. I personally feel as though it applies to people and to me it feels as if in teaching in NZ it has always been peoples and young peoples.

This was an interesting observation, one which many teachers, Pacific and non-Pacific, grapple with. Teacher 2 is stating that he feels that while group dynamics and categorisation exist, his duty as a teacher is to see the students in front of him in a more individual way. This relates to a stronger perception of the diversity that exists in New Zealand classrooms. Alton-Lee (2003) observed that: "Teaching needs to be responsive to diversity within ethnic groups" (p. 5), not merely an exercise in generic understandings of broad, umbrella groups. She further explained that:

There is also marked heterogeneity within broad ethnic group descriptors, for example, Pākehā European, Asian, Māori and Pasifika [...] Pasifika students include students whose heritages are Samoan, Cook Island Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Tokelauan and Tuvalu Islander, and within group diversity by gender, recency of immigration and other characteristics creates wide diversity under the 'Pasifika umbrella' (p. 5).

Teacher 2's statement (above) indicated that he, as a teacher, could be led by the students or community when it comes to discussions around their identities. Elsewhere, Wendt-Samu (2015) also cautioned against the homogenising effects of a Pacific or Pasifika umbrella term. She suggested that:

[...] quality teaching for Pasifika learners requires the development of teachers' and educators' in-depth, contextualised knowledge and understanding of their Pasifika learners. [...] this is a pre-requisite for the overall process of developing the most effective, site-specific and tailor-made pedagogical response plan possible (Wendt-Samu, 2015, p. 130).

While forming a critical mass can lead to positive outcomes such as funding to support a Pacific performing arts group to enhance Pacific students' sense of identity and belonging, it can also involve risks. This strategy must, for example, ensure equitable visibility for each of those ethnic communities that have collaborated to form that critical mass (i.e. Pacific

performing arts group). If that group is seen to be captured/dominated by one ethnic group, the critical mass could quickly dissipate. This also brings into consideration diverse concepts of success within schools and communities.

Teacher 1, who works closely with Pacific students in the school, also recognised that, in her experience, she was starting to see a divergence in the definition of Pacific success:

Teacher 1: Also a few more boys coming through who are more comfortable in recognising themselves as Pasifika but also strong academic and culturally and not necessarily sporty wise. It's not just a really good Samoan rugby player doing well in school it's the [names Pasifika student] who are doing well in music and academics, and I feel like having boys like that who are role modelling that Pasifika can be good this way is good for the younger ones coming up.

Her comment indicates her own perception of the stereotypical ways in which schools or communities define success. It is positive for students to see a more diverse approach than what is assumed to be an expectation. Allen and Webber (2019) note that “educators must actively work to counter the negative stereotypes” that are encountered by ethnically diverse students such as Pacific. They go on to state that “long-standing cultural myths” about the potential and abilities of “ethnically diverse students have been shown to diminish the expectations of educators, resulting in differentiated learning opportunities” (p. 1408). It is critical that teachers can develop pedagogies that do not reinforce stereotypes or limit Pacific student success. The role modelling and diverging perceptions of what success looks like, as mentioned by Teacher 1, supports a developing understanding of Pacific success, combating negative stereotypes (Altschul et al., 2006).

The value of humour

The teacher participants observed that humour was an important part of the identities of Pacific students. While their comments portrayed this as a strength, it should also be noted that there are risks around naïve perceptions of humour. Their views of Pacific student humour were connected to the variety of interactions that teachers have with students, including in the

classroom and general school. In the group talanoa, both Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 observed that their Pacific students often used humour to express themselves:

Teacher 2: I see laughter, joy, happiness, celebrations, I don't see that from any other groups of students in the same way.

Teacher 3: I really think there seems to be a sense of light heartedness, the first thing that came to mind was smiles or laughter which I notice the boys doing a lot. (Teacher group talanoa)

Teacher 4 also suggested that for him, humour plays an important role in developing healthy reciprocal relationships with Pacific students:

Teacher 4: I often think of the humour that is in there. The ability that my initial way to get to know them is to show my sense of humour and to appreciate their sense of humour. And I always know that there is great sense of humour in there and it's the place where I can find connection quite quickly [...] I know I'm not of necessarily that culture and I've not necessarily got that great a knowledge in that; but I have found through my years of dealing with Pasifika [that my] humour is very similar to Pasifika humour. [...] my initial response is actually to smile. I know it sounds funny but it's actually to greet and to actually look forward to having Pasifika people in my classroom. [...] I know that I can have fun and I can have the enjoyment that goes with [teaching them]. (Teacher Individual talanoa)

Teacher 4 notably mentioned that he must “show [his own] sense of humour” and “appreciate their sense of humour” to develop a relationship. It is also noteworthy that he understands humour to be a cultural bridge for him, a way to “find connection”. I found this interesting because elsewhere, Averill (2012) had also noted that humour plays a vital role in care-based pedagogical practices, particularly in the creation of an engaging classroom environment for Pacific students. She notes that this includes “allowing for student- and teacher-initiated humour and laughter” (Averill, 2011, p. 116).

For the teacher participants, humour and laughter were frequently cited as defining features needed to engage with the Pacific students and community they serve. This is supported by comments made by student participants in our talanoa. Specifically, that the value of respect can go hand in hand with humour. This finding also aligns with the research of Reynolds (2017), who also found that teacher humour and warmth made Pacific students

comfortable in the classroom. The Pacific students he interviewed commented that a teacher should smile and laugh often with the students. He also found that parents viewed humour and laughter as important when it came to student relationships. He states that often “participation and comfort”, which are “relational aspects of close interpersonal action, are prioritised [by parents] over the development of a range of relational skills which are located in wider relationships” (Reynolds, 2017, p. 187). He found humour to be an example of interpersonal behaviour which nurtured relationships in a group of Pacific students, serving to “fulfil an obligation of care” and “intensify connectedness and belonging” (p.141). This recalls a comment from the parent talanoa (Chapter 7) where one participant identified the importance of humour in her son’s identity.

In their Pacific Schooling Improvement Research, Amituanai-Toloa et al. (2009) also found humour to be a key attribute of effective teaching for Pacific students. Their findings noted that positive experiences with teachers was often complemented by “Pasifika oriented humour” (p. ix) and that “positive relationships [which] may be marked by humour” (p. 45) presented a powerful way to connect with students. Humour can be an effective way to break down barriers and forge positive relationships.

However, Oring (2016) suggests that it is important for a critical lens to be cast over humour as a social tool that may be used to mask certain realities. Cabrera (2014) found that the use of humour or joking around can be a stereotype used by both students and teachers to mask the reality of poor achievement or low engagement. It can also frequently be used to excuse racist or sexist behaviour. A naïve view might also suggest that if a student is smiling and laughing, they must be happy and engaged.

Educators must be conscious that humour, while important in forming and maintaining a relationship, should not replace high expectations for academic achievement and appropriate behaviours. The professional boundaries and respect that must exist in their teacher/student

relationship needs to continue to exist, alongside the presence of humour (Amituanai-Tolosa et al., 2009).

The role of Pacific teachers

As per my talanoa with the parents and the students, I found the teacher participants emphasised the vital role that Pacific teachers played at the school. Most of them expressed their admiration for Pacific teacher colleagues. The non-Pacific teachers also shared their own feelings of inadequacies and claimed Pacific teachers were valuable because they were able to assist non-Pacific teachers like themselves. In listening to their thoughts, a picture started to emerge of a group of teachers felt their competence was enhanced when they were able to have a better understanding of Pacific families and their different cultures (Ministry of Education, Talanoa Ako, 2023; ERO, 2013).

In my experience as a teacher, and having worked across several schools in this manner, it is interesting to reflect on the staffroom conversations and perspectives of Pacific teachers. It has made me wonder whether the appreciation expressed by most teachers, is more likely to be a gratefulness that they themselves do not have to do the work of engaging the diverse and complex Pacific community. This can be viewed as an attitude of cultural taxation. This was first described by Padilla (1994) in the context of her work examining mentoring for ethnic minority scholars in the United States:

This “taxation” poses a significant dilemma for ethnic scholars because we frequently find ourselves having to respond to situations that are imposed on us by the administration, which assumes that we are best suited for specific tasks because of our race/ethnicity or our presumed knowledge of cultural differences (p. 26).

Elsewhere, Padilla (1994) goes on to give various examples of what cultural taxation looks like in practice. These include, being called on to be the expert called on to give input or educate “on matters of diversity”, “to translate official documents” and acting as “liaison between the organization and the ethnic community” (p. 26). Māori teachers also find

themselves in similar positions (Torepe & Manning, 2017). Hence, the work of Padilla (2014) and Torepe and Manning (2017) prompted me to reflect more carefully on the challenges that accompany the tasks faced by teachers that serve culturally distinct communities, like those described by Kaur et al. (2008). While the literature is sparse, there is also evidence to suggest that Pacific teachers have the potential to make a significant and positive impact on the outcomes for Pacific learners.

An example of this is noted by a Pacific student, in the *Best Practice for Teaching Pacific Learners* report: “When I see a Pacific teacher, I see a role model, someone who made it” (Ministry of Education, 2019a, p. 18). This comment echoes the voices of most Pacific student and parent participants in this research. The way these Pacific participants talked about Pacific teachers highlighted the way they had seen their impact on Pacific students. In particular, the way that their skill set often enabled and supported the school’s Pacific community to be engaged and visible. Examples of these attributes can be seen in parent and family engagement, student classroom engagement and integration of Pacific languages and cultures in the school (Brown et al., 2008; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b).

There was an implication in the teacher group talanoa that Pacific teachers have a specific way in which they work with Pacific communities at the school. Furthermore, the participants felt that the approach of Pacific teachers, in their experience, deviated from the norm. They felt that the pedagogy and leadership style of Pacific teachers was a critical support for Pacific student success. Teacher 2, for example, shared that:

Teacher 2: I think that we have some really strong Pacific teachers here now. The group of Pacific teachers here now allows Pacific students to be stronger and more confident and prouder of what they stand for. I think they’re able to express themselves much more now with that confidence because they know they aren’t going to be knocked down. Because it is celebrated. Because not only are they a strong group, but

they have strong leaders and some huge characters in our Pacific teachers. I think that is allowing them to express their peoples and their countries so much more.

While this was a positive affirmation of the teacher's Pacific colleagues, it is important to emphasise the moral, ethical, and legal obligations that non-Pacific teachers have as teachers of Pacific students. In their research into Pacific and non-Pacific teacher engagement with Pacific values, Averill et al. (2020) found some broad differences in practice between the two groups. They cautioned that "Pacific learners taught by non-Pacific educators need to navigate educational settings that may not reflect the Pacific values as strongly as they experience them outside formal education" (p.30). This is important for school leaders to consider when examining the experiences of Pacific students in school. As I have noted in Chapter 4, most teachers of Pacific students in New Zealand are not from Pacific backgrounds. Further research is therefore needed to better understand the confidence levels of these teachers in carrying out their obligations as registered teachers in New Zealand (Hill & Thrupp, 2019).

The participants discussed the ways in which they had seen different schools operate. It was interesting to hear Teacher 1 speak about her own experience in relation to the importance of Pacific teachers. In her talanoa, she explained how she had seen the ability of Pacific teachers to break down stereotypes and overcome tokenism:

Teacher 1: Coming from a school that didn't have [Pacific teachers] and then coming to work in a school that does have them. There's a huge difference in that. When I was at school [it was] like I was a stat, a number. Here it is more of a community vibe with the teachers who are leading, who have important roles in the school as well, not just a Māori teacher who got a management unit for counting stats ... which is what it was like for me.

Teacher 1's own experience as a Pacific student contrasted with her experience as a teacher. The teaching role that she experienced as a student seemed to be sterile and she felt as if students were seen as a number. In the case of these roles, which may be designed as a support or liaison role for Pacific students and families, the real intent is often about raising achievement. At times, there may be little regards for the identity or culture of the student. It

is clear from Teacher 1's comment above that this was her experience. While what she experienced might have been aimed at raising her achievement, it made her feel marginalised. She concludes that it is powerful to have Pacific teachers within the community around Pacific students.

Stanley (2003) emphasises the importance of students having "ready access to a responsive and reasonable adult" (p. 26). Siope (2011), in her research into Pacific student schooling experiences, expands on this notion. She states that this responsive adult needs to be "able to activate the appropriate connections in [a student's] educational pathway that would utilise or ignite their learning potential" (p. 53). These findings from Stanley and Siope seem to be a stark contrast with the experience of Teacher 1 described above. It is critical for all teachers to be supported and expected to make these appropriate connections.

Teachers in the talanoa explained how they felt that Pacific teachers supported them, as non-Pacific teachers, in their practice. Cultural and community knowledge, specific to the Pacific community at SBHS seemed to be valued by this small group of teachers, as a small sample of the SBHS staff. Teacher 4 explicitly stated that he, and others, approach Pacific teachers for help:

Teacher 4: I think our teachers go running to [Pacific teachers], well that's what I do. If I'm honest. You've seen me, I come along when I've got a Pasifika problem. I go to that natural response, which I'm fully aware puts huge pressure on you. [...]

I've got the young [Pacific] man that I was talking about earlier, getting better and better and I wanted to talk to his mum. But I'm nervous about doing it so I approach a Pacific teacher for advice.

In my view, Teacher 4's acknowledgement, above, is important. It seems to signal a growing awareness of cultural taxation, like that described in by Padilla (1994) who was working ethnic minority scholars at tertiary institutions. Similarly, Torepe and Manning (2017) reported that Māori teachers in Canterbury (New Zealand) felt they acquired additional tasks that "often went unrecognised either financially or by written or verbal acknowledgement" (p.

112). Hence it was not surprising to discover Pacific teachers in this study also sharing experiences of cultural taxation. Teacher 4 acknowledges that this places pressure on Pacific staff. However, the wider question is whether there are structures and systems within the school that provide support for teachers to engage with Pacific students and their families. Alongside this, there is a need for systems to protect Pacific staff from cultural taxation.

Internationally, research has been conducted into the experience of teachers with a cultural or ethnic link to marginalised or minority communities. For example, African American teachers have been seen to help and support African American students in schools (Fairclough, 2007). Recent research has examined the toll that this positioning has taken on these teachers. Cadogan (2021) states:

Black teachers are still uniquely positioned between the hopes of the Black community and the forces of White supremacy within educational institutions that work to criminalize Black bodies. As in past years, Black teachers are faced with this impossible task, the difficulty of which has taken its toll on the workforce. Yet despite these challenges Black teachers continue to persist (p. 2).

Similar to this, Pacific teachers in New Zealand might find themselves in a position where they stand as advocates for Pacific students and communities, potentially addressing issues such as systemic racism within schools (Ministry of Education, 2020a). In Australia, Indigenous Australians have explored the demands placed on them when teaching in schools, as well as the assumptions made about them by others in the profession. Hogarth (2019) relates her own experience as someone in this position:

I felt there was a presupposition that as I was Aboriginal, I knew all things about Aboriginality [...]. The assumptions were held by all; from fellow teachers to the principals of the schools. I found that schools assumed I embodied the Aboriginal. Being the only Aboriginal teacher within a school is hard. There is a constant tug of war as one builds relationships within the school and community. (Hogarth, 2019, p. 49)

The tension described here can also be seen in the experience of Pacific teachers in New Zealand. It suggests that there needs to be attention paid to the voices of Pacific teachers in schools. Especially as it relates to their positioning between school leaders and the Pacific community to which they also affiliate. For example, it was both humbling and somewhat troubling to consider how other teachers view their Pacific teacher colleagues. I believe that Pacific teachers are often “agents of hope” (Houghton & Houghton, 2022, p. 7). This is because I have found many Pacific teachers, either consciously or by accident, seek to bring about a more equitable and just education system.

However, Pacific teachers should not be seen as a panacea for enhancing Pacific student achievement and community engagement. Over-reliance on this group of teachers, who only constitute approximately 2% of the teaching workforce, carries significant risks. The presence of Pacific teachers in schools must be complemented by non-Pacific colleagues who are professionally competent, culturally knowledgeable and strategically led to achieve positive outcomes for Pacific students. Alongside an ethical obligation for this to happen, there is also a professional impetus. For example, the Ministry of Education’s (2018) *Tapasā: cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners* is linked to the professional code of teaching standards in New Zealand (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2024).

The role that Pacific teachers should play within the school system, also needs to be considered. This is a critical question because it concerns the professional wellbeing of Pacific communities in diasporic settings. A lack of consideration could have significant impacts on part of the teaching workforce that is already vulnerable (Brown et al., 2008). This is relevant not only to the New Zealand schooling system, but wherever the Pacific diaspora communities engage with schools (Pale et al., 2023). This is challenging when there is a lack of research literature concerning the experiences of Pacific teachers. It is also important to be mindful of the limitations of Pacific teachers and leaders, who are often considered to be superhuman

(Vasau & Fuata'i, 2022). This perspective can be held by colleagues, students, and the wider community. These different parties can come to rely on Pacific teachers and leaders, holding them in high esteem for the work they do with Pacific students (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b).

Realistically, there are limitations among any group within a profession. Ongoing professional development and support is needed in order for Pacific teachers to be successful (Abella, 2018). There is a risk that Pacific teachers might be seen by senior leaders at a school as too busy for time consuming programmes that develop their professional capabilities. This might also spill into the engineering of their career pathway by senior school leaders (Mara, 1998).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Freire's (2005) notion of humanisation seems an apt way to view the vocation of teaching as it relates to Pacific teachers, amongst their non-Pacific colleagues. Freire states that "This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (p. 44). He discusses the concept of "humanisation" as being the vocation of humanity. Humanisation entails the realisation of the right to become "more fully human" (p. 44). This concept connects with the realities that Pacific communities face in the New Zealand schooling system. The value of Pacific teachers and their closeness to Pacific students is a way for liberation to be achieved for Pacific communities. I believe that it is critical for the role they play to drive conscientisation among their colleagues and leaders of schools. This, in turn, should drive increased care for them in schools, as well as ongoing critical reflection on the diverse roles Pacific teachers play. One key area that this affects is the development of a deeper understanding of Pacific values in schools and communities.

Pacific Values

This section will focus on teacher understandings around Pacific values in the context of SBHS.

Teachers in relation to Pacific values

For teachers in schools, the influence of values comes from a variety of directions or sources. There will be the values of the school institution, the values that they personally and professionally bring with them, and the values brought into the school by the students and their community (Lovat et al., 2010). From place-to-place, different schools hold different values. These are specific to their individual environments and communities. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), in turn, theorise that educational institutions perpetuate the value systems of the dominant (hegemonic) culture, and that this is a very difficult reality to escape. Therefore, it is necessary that this perpetuation of dominant values systems be considered when discussing perceptions of Pacific values and their integration within mainstream school institutions.

The need to understand Pacific values emerged when teacher participants reflected on experiences that they had with their Pacific students in classroom or co-curricular contexts. They reported behaviour that they had seen students exhibit, as groups and as individuals. The following reflection from Teacher 3 shows how his view of Pacific values connects to the migration story of the students and their families:

Teacher 3: I was just thinking that heaps of the Pasifika families have chosen to come to New Zealand and there is a lot of bravery in doing that, a lot of courage in lifting up from your family or ancestral home and to start a new life often with not very much in a whole new country where the language may be challenging for some, different cultural aspects to learn. But many still manage to hold onto their own culture which is really awesome.

Teacher 3 clearly appreciated the courage of Pacific families when learning of their journeys to New Zealand, and their efforts to maintain cultural practices and develop links to their ancestral homelands. All of this informed his understanding of Pacific values. This aligns with research conducted in New Zealand schools. Ensuring that teachers in a school understand where their students come from and the nature of migration stories within their communities should form a key part of teacher education. This would give teachers a foundation on which to build strong relationships with students and the families and communities from which they emerge (Spiller, 2012). For example, Allen et al. (2009), studied an experiential professional

development programme for non-Pacific teachers, that drew a similar conclusion. Their participants found that by developing a deeper understanding of Samoan culture helped them to improve “specific teaching strategies; relationships with students; and interactions with families/community” (p. 57) at their schools. As other researchers suggest, “to teach in these ways in relation to Pacific heritages, New Zealand teachers need strong knowledge and understanding of Pacific learners” (Rimoni et al., 2022, p. 23).

The role of values and how they are expressed and appreciated cannot be reduced to exercises in cultural essentialism. This is because there are a wide range of values amongst Pacific communities. Another important critical consideration should be alert to how value systems can be weaponised. In my initial talanoa with Christchurch Pacific education leaders (see Chapter 3), their desire to see Pacific values was not merely a superficial recognition of difference. Rather, values understood in Pacific contexts often cut to the heart of structural power and priorities. Theorists, such as Freire (2005) and Apple (1996) relate that while schools can challenge oppressive social realities and inequitable power structures in society, they are not neutral in their work with students. On the contrary, schools perpetuate existing ideological hegemonies and can be understood as “a reproductive force in an unequal society” (Apple, 2019, p. 26).

Schooling integrates new generations to conform into the New Zealand’s socio-economic system and the wider global economy. This “conformity” as Freire (2005) puts it, can be seen as extended both vertically through hierarchical structures and horizontally within Pacific communities. For example, institutions can ‘co-opt’ Pacific peoples and their culture and value systems to maintain inequalities and power structures (Burke, 2005; Naepi & Manuela, 2019). This represents a significant obstacle when attempting to challenge existing power structures within schools and communities.

This talanoa made me wonder what specific structures might exist within schools and communities to give their staff the capability and capacity to connect with their Pacific community. Schools often set aspirational goals around partnership with families in order to better “design and deliver education that responds to their needs, and sustains their identities, languages and cultures” (Ministry of Education, 2020b, p. 1). However, the reality is that there are significant challenges in developing an authentic and effective approach within the system as it currently stands. As Adamson (2022) states, this system is “focused on competition, high-stakes assessment results and a narrow interpretation of educational success and equity” (p.559). It is important, therefore, to dive deeply into how well-known values, such as service, are perceived by teachers within a school environment.

Service as a Pacific value with complex expressions in the school environment

The emphasis on the value of service also emerged from talanoa with the teacher participants. However, their perspectives tended to reflect an overly simplistic understanding of complex values in different Pacific cultures. The value of service has deep connections to reciprocity and family and cultural sustainability (Fa'aea & Enari, 2021). This can sometimes be at risk of becoming a de facto form of compliance or obedience (Giroux & Penna, 1979).

In our group talanoa, Teacher 1 commented on the role that service plays in the value system of Pacific students and families (Rimoni et al., 2021). This echoed the strong emphasis that the student and parent participants in this study placed on service. They linked it to various aspects of their lives, including family life, cultural obligations, and church. Teacher 1 also linked service with faith and religion:

Teacher 1: I think they're more about service, especially those who have moved over [migrated], they've moved for their kids and then their kids go off to university and that's how they serve the family. They have religion too, so not just serving the family but their faith and God and stuff as well. That's the biggest difference [in comparison to non-Pacific].

Christianity, which has played a profoundly significant role in the lives of Pacific peoples over the last three centuries (Riddell & Riddell, 2023), is closely linked to this idea of service. This can be problematic, as churches have played various roles in these communities, including being tools for colonisation, assimilation, and capitalism (Massam, 2008). As institutions, they have the potential to support both liberation and oppression. An example of this in New Zealand Pacific communities was the work of the Polynesian Panthers, who utilised networks of Christian churches to address injustices faced by Pacific peoples (Anae, 2020). Simultaneously, they identified the ways in which religion and church cultural norms were used to control and restrict the behaviour of Pacific peoples. For example, the restriction of action by younger generations, driven by a hierarchical model of leadership.

Teacher participants in my research also linked the value of service to the way they perceived relationships developing between Pacific students and their (adult) teachers. For example, Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 shared these thoughts:

Teacher 2: I think and feel that there is a gentleness about the pupils, they never feel aggressive. I never feel like the Pasifika boys show aggression towards me, there is a gentleness and calmness and relaxed attitude that I think they seem to bring to the table, and I really like that.

Teacher 3: could that be like a bit of respect for your elders maybe?

Teacher 2: Yes, possibly.

Teacher 3: which might have been really valued at home and church and other various parts of life. Traditions. Value traditions

Here Teacher 2 was describing the relationship, as he saw it, that a teacher might experience with Pacific students. Teacher 3's comment in response, was to link service to an intergenerational perspective. This is similar to how the student participants described it (see Chapter 5). The shared perspective among these participants is that respect for elders, and the value of service are closely related.

The narrative expressed by the teachers reflects their limited understandings of Pacific value systems, specifically regarding their experiences of seeing Pacific students' service. However, service does not come without challenges and complexities. Iosefo and Iosefo-Williams (2023), in their auto-ethnographic work, examined the way Pacific people can “demonstrate resistance towards the dominant political system” (p. 495) that seeks to oppress the marginalised. In their poetic expression of scenarios that Pacific people might find themselves in, one stood out to me as an example of the challenges that might be faced with the value of service in a non-Pacific specific context. The following is an extract from their performance work:

Scene: High school graduation:

Fetaui: I'm a guest speaker at a high school graduation. I walk in and am ushered into the staff room I'm shown where the coffee is, so I go over to make me a coffee. As I'm making it, the head of the science department walks up to me and says 'white and two sugar'...I have two thoughts... The first was, oh hell no you didn't! The second was...

Together: O le ala o le pule o le tautua.

Joshua: The pathway to leadership is through service.

Fetaui: And so, we serve!

Fetaui and Joshua both motion their hands in service.

(Iosefo & Iosefo-Williams, 2023, p. 496)

This extract (above) demonstrates one instance when the value of service can become highly questionable and exploitative in its interpretation. Pacific leaders, academics and communities rightly extol service as a key aspect of their values system, with different cultural expressions existing across the various Island groups (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022; Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission, 2022). Mara (2006), in her research with Pacific women in tertiary education is explicit in calling out hierarchies. She notes a specific example of “church hierarchies and family hierarchies” (p.172) which can hold back Pacific peoples, often citing the value of service. Schools need to approach conversations about Pacific values,

aware of assumptions that can inform stereotypical expression of these values. To address this, a carefully considered dialogical approach, for example talanoa, could be useful in engaging with Pacific communities to support schools to develop appropriate understandings of service, among other values. This approach is supported elsewhere by the research by Puloka-Luey (2021), who found that “dialogical approach both inside/outside the classroom” was effective in the context of science education in Tonga.

However, in diasporic contexts such as New Zealand authentic, structured ways of understanding these values can often be missing. Also, they might be reliant on tenuous links to the bodies of knowledge that sit behind them. The risk is that service can be shrouded in a cloak of religious, institutional, or familial duty, which schools/teachers can then view as something they have a right to expect from students. This can then exacerbate the dichotomy between good kids versus bad kids, or compliant versus non-compliant students, that already exists in schools (Barber, 2016; McCreanor & Watson, 2004) . The result of which can be seen in both the talanoa from teacher participants in this research, and the example given from Iosefo and Iosefo-Williams (2023), which emphasises the pathway to leadership is through service. This dichotomy can also be seen elsewhere, in contexts like Aotearoa New Zealand, where Māori have been divided into passive versus demanding categories, with Pacific peoples often aligned with them when this happens (Nairn & McCreanor, 1991). Schools will look for ways to enforce the assimilation of difference, to ensure “cultural and economic reproduction” (Apple, 2019, p. 29). By undertaking an uncritical approach to incorporating certain values in a school system, there is a risk of ignoring the “political and economic context in which such social values function and by which certain sets of social values become the dominant values” (Apple, 2019, p. 30). Care needs to be taken when any discussion of cultural values takes place, and assumptions of benefit should be challenged when it perhaps can result in simple tokenism. For example, this might be seen when schools seek to engage Pacific families and assumptions

are made around the cultural knowledge they possess or certain practices. Hence, teacher awareness of Pacific student and family cultural practice is a way in which further knowledge of this can be developed.

The teacher participants felt that activities such as cultural performances, that expressed cultural pride and a sense of doing things properly, were prioritised by Pacific students and their community:

Teacher 3: Seeing them perform and how proud they are in their performances and putting on the right garb.

Teacher 1: cultural attire.

Teacher 2: and singing. Really a group of boys singing together its lovely to see and hear. They are obviously happy and proud of doing so. Whereas I can't imagine a group of Pākehā boys saying we are going to sing some hymns, carols, or traditional songs.

The students' desire to exhibit pride in their cultural performance is seen by the teachers as an aspect of the value of service. However, these teachers express a very limited perspective, as service is a nuanced term that is often mentioned in relation to Pacific communities. This term holds a deeper meaning that can be distinct in different ways. Their comments suggest a contributions or additive approach to multi-cultural education, as described by Banks and Banks (1995). This is when there is a limited understanding or integration of cultural practices and knowledge. Little change occurs in terms of practice or dialogue with the community concerned.

Teacher 2's comment about being unable to imagine Pākehā boys singing "traditional songs" made me think of the cultural distinctions between groups within a school, or even between schools themselves. It also suggests a deeper implicit assumption that Pākehā boys are devoid of culture. This assumption is also problematic because it can also potentially serve to other or exoticise Pacific peoples (Dervin, 2016). There are local schools where male singing occurs with a variety of cultural groups, for example, large performance groups, such as choirs, consisting of mostly New Zealand European boys. These exist within SBHS, as well at other

boys' schools around Christchurch, such as St Bede's College or Christchurch Boys' High School.

Teacher 2's comment draws a contrast between what he sees as distinct cultural groups that exist within his experience of schools. Of note is the comment that he sees the Pacific boys in this school "happy and proud" to perform. Again, this illuminates a widespread stereotype, reminiscent of tourism advertisements, that Pacific peoples are uncomplicated, happy and have a desire to perform. This is a harmful perspective that needs to be robustly interrogated within school settings. The comments of the teachers above link this aspect of Pacific cultural activity to the value of service to their community. This is because Pacific performance groups will often dedicate their performance or achievement to their family or seek to honour them with it. This, and the comments of the teachers above, raises questions about how Pacific performance culture in schools might often unwittingly serve to reinforce stereotypes about Pacific students. In limiting their forms of expression to cultural song and dance, we can seek to other them in the wider context of the school. Of course, as Dervin and Dervin (2016) rightly suggest, "we are all others, 'otherers' and 'otherees'" however, "there are different levels of othering and some of us are more privileged than others in being able to modify and even avoid our being othered" (p.107).

As Matapo (2021) also suggests, "For too long, Pacific Indigenous peoples, Indigenous ontology and epistemology have been 'othered' through a European Imperialist habit of thought which produces a negative ontology of difference" (p. 127). This can also take place with gender stereotypes, which occurs briefly in Teacher 2's comment above regarding male singing. There is a need within in our schools for more work to be done in order to better understand masculine Pacific values of service, among others, as this perspective is either negatively geared or overlooked entirely (Fa'avae et al., 2022). Lastly, a consequence of this stereotyping and labelling of Pacific students as the 'happy other' extends the narrative that

they are best suited to entertainment and performance, and happy to be doing so. This avoids and negates the realities that Pacific people are facing, especially in the contexts of climate change and mental health among other things (Newport et al., 2023).

The visibility and integration of Pacific values in a school

The teacher participants also repeatedly commented on the visibility of Pacific values in the schooling experiences experienced by Pacific students. Service and leadership were emphasised as visible ways in which Pacific students and families expressed their values in a tangible way. Teachers in the group talanoa noted an interesting form of expression related to the way food was part of Pacific cultures. Teacher 1, for example, commented that food plays a big part in the collective life of the Pacific communities that feed into SBHS (Akbar et al., 2022). These teachers would have seen the way that Pacific events at the school were communally catered. Also, that where possible, families were able to sit and eat with young children and babies present, as well as grandparents and other elders from the community. For the teacher participants, this intergenerationally stands in contrast with other events at the school, where communal eating is rather separate or seldom as family focused.

The communal sharing of meals among students and teachers at Pacific cultural group practices is also common at SBHS. Whilst SBHS as a secular state school, the Pacific students' sharing of meals is also framed by non-denominational, Christian, prayer and acknowledgements that are led by teachers, students, and parents. So, I asked the teachers how they felt about this prioritisation of food and other elements, for example the linking communal meals to their Pacific students' Christian values system. Teacher 1's response was simply that it helped them prioritise "being together", suggesting that this assisted in developing an atmosphere where Pacific values could be lived out. Akbar et al. (2022) explains the role that food plays in Pacific communities:

Food plays an important social and cultural role in all Pacific communities, often beyond nourishment. Forming a central component of Pasifika cultures and everyday living, food plays a vital role in keeping traditional practices alive. In traditional contexts, food is a means of maintaining societal norms and practices and affirms one's identity and sense of belonging. Food and its sharing is the social cement that provides a framework for shared social, cultural and communal experience and includes nurturing and sustaining individual, family and communal relationships, particularly intergenerationally for Māori and Pasifika peoples where food has and continues to be core to Pasifika concepts of love, reciprocity and respect (p. 8).

In Pacific diasporic contexts, this connection between the traditional and the contemporary in food practices is often a platform for an exercise in values. Therefore, practices and values that surround the sharing of food need to be taken carefully into account when school leaders and teachers explore opportunities for community engagement, or even pedagogical practices. Care needs to be taken that appropriate relationships and practices are established or nurtured. This is particularly the case when dealing with food that might have nuanced cultural practices or value systems attached to it. For example, the use of kava, which has varying levels of protocol around it, depending on which Pacific culture is engaged (Fehoko, 2015).

The teachers felt that the integration of Pacific values at school, such as shared meals, placed a significant emphasis on maintaining hierarchical leadership and social structures. One teacher (Teacher 3) said "I feel like they have a particular hierarchy", and that Pacific students and parents value leadership "because of like reverend, big dogs, and value showing the right respect to the right people". This perspective linked to the way that students in their talanoa expressed the importance of showing respect to the significant adults in their lives, including parents, elders, teachers, and religious leaders such as ministers. It also shows that the teachers believed that the students are alert to hierarchies and hegemony as part of this value system. Considering these comments, particularly in contexts where small numbers of students from different Pacific nations form a collective, it is important to seek to understand the power

dynamics at play. In particular, the way power structures might play a role in the ongoing marginalisation of Pacific students in school.

It is critical for New Zealand teachers of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds to have a basic understanding of what an integration of Pacific values looks like in a New Zealand school. Teacher 3 described the need to “create an environment [in the school] where we can have rich conversations”. This could drive a deeper understanding of the needs of Pacific students and assist in understanding Pacific cultures and values. While this is worthwhile, it is a complex task, as Pacific cultures are dynamic and continue to evolve (Anae et al., 2001; Hunkin-Tuiletufuga, 2001). Therefore, understanding needs to flow from dialogue between school leaders and Pacific students and communities. Anae et al. (2001) strongly emphasised that:

Educators must recognise the nature and extent of intra-group diversities; they must take a more pro-active role in becoming aware and informed of these and acknowledge the cultural bias inherent within the structures of New Zealand's education system. Having done so, such educators would creatively consider their own practices in terms of how to bridge the quite complex cultural and social gaps, or mismatches that exist (Anae et al., 2001, p. 91).

This suggests that a critical eye must be cast over any assumptions that are made around Pacific values and attempts to integrate them in school settings. This is because there is a risk that cultural biases could further sustain or even create systems of oppression for students and communities in the schooling system (Johnson & Nelson-Barber, 2018).

It is also crucial that teachers and school leaders understand ongoing and embedded issues of power, structural racism, and vertical and horizontal forms of oppression to continue to exist. While Rimoni et al. (2021) suggest that the Pacific values system “involves nurturing connections with others” (p.13), and that teachers can be unaware of students’ values and “can hold stereotypical views of students who are of ethnic groups other than their own” (p.13). It is therefore important that ongoing development of teachers’ knowledge and understanding of Pacific cultures occurs. This can help to ensure teachers are well-informed about the evolving and nuanced worlds of their Pacific students. My review of academic literature also

suggests that, in the first instance, teachers need to be alert to consistently reflecting upon their own epistemologies and ontologies, particularly in relation to the cultures of their learners (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Porter-Samuels, 2013). This increases understanding of their own cultural location and how this shapes their teacher identities. It is also part of the *Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession* in New Zealand (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017). However, reflective practice is not without its challenges. As Glasswell and Ryan (2017) note, while “[teaching] standards promote critical reflection, they rarely suggest that teachers be reflective about the larger sociopolitical aspects of schooling and education systems” (p. 3). It is important that this is addressed across the teaching profession as a whole to support increased visibility and effective integration of Pacific values for the benefit of Pacific communities.

The integration of Pacific values in school contexts offer opportunities, as well as challenges. Hunter et al. (2016) reported that engaging with Pacific values in classroom practice can help maximise Pacific learner success. This could look like specific pedagogical practice, curriculum design or pastoral practices. Hunter et al. note that doing so “enabled [...] Pāsifika students and parents’ access to education” (p.200). However, as D Fa’avae (2017) asserts, Pacific values are “rarely identified by schools as valuable in the classroom context” (p. 51). Fa’avae’s assertion aligns with the concerns of all participant groups in my study. Similarly, Sharma (2020), who looked at inclusive education across Pacific nations, concludes that “incorporating Pacific values and practices in teacher-education curricula has the potential to dramatically shift the teaching practice of all teachers and may result in better outcomes for all Pacific learners” (p. 197). All of this underscores the importance of pedagogy and curriculum design procedures being connected to Pacific values systems (Ministry of Education, 2022c).

Often, educators and schools adopt tokenistic approaches to integrating Pacific values, without understanding that these values are much more nuanced and transmitted through Pacific peoples' languages. So, as Matika et al. (2021) found, it is vital to value these languages as this can have a direct impact on Pacific student wellbeing and engagement with their schooling. Therefore, it is critical for school structures and teachers to engage with strategies that foster, teach and encourage Pacific languages. Unbeknownst to some teachers, students and young people may very well be judged harshly for being unaware of the language or knowledges of their ancestors. They are often straddling two worlds and attempting to make the best of both:

We have criticized them for not knowing their language and culture, yet we don't take the time to teach it. I have been in numerous meetings where administrators and teachers clearly do not see a need for multiple histories or epistemologies or anything that is not in par with mainstream culture and values. Yet, the minute our young people show any sign of resistance in this mainstream classroom they are labeled as having a behavior disorder, tracked into ESL and special education courses and their Pacific cultures blamed for their so-called failures. The same culture that they are not allowed to practice or even emulate. The same culture that they hardly even know! (Ka'ili, 2009)

This is important for both teachers and communities to understand. The provision of Pacific languages in school settings could provide worthwhile academic pathways, which are currently underutilised (Kennedy, 2019; Si'ilata, 2019). For example, the Pacific languages which are NCEA subjects, can be used to support the achievement of NCEA levels 1-3, as well as the University Entrance qualification. In the context of schooling in Pacific nations, Puloka-Luey (2021) discusses the barriers that students can face when assessments are conducted in colonial languages such as English or French. The valuing of Pacific languages in schools across the Pacific and in diasporic settings can serve to support improved outcomes for students, as well as the revitalisation of these languages, which are themselves at risk (Gegeo, 2017).

My initial talanoa with Pacific community leaders' (see chapter three), also signalled their desire that my research needed to explore the role of Pacific values in schools. The fact

that there are multiple cultures and value systems present in schools, also means there are competing interests. The diverse nature of New Zealand schools, alongside the delineation of power between teachers and students, poses challenges for the values of minority communities to emerge. As Giroux and Penna (1979) explained:

In short, working in classrooms means learning to live in crowds. Coupled with the prevailing values of the educational system, this has profound implications for the social education established in the schools. Equally significant is the fact that schools are evaluative settings, and what a student learns is not only how to be evaluated, but how to evaluate himself and others as well. Finally, schools are marked by a basic, concrete division between the powerful (teachers) and the powerless (students) (p.30).

This power differential that exists between teachers and students will now be explored considering the stereotypes and perceptions of Pacific students held by teachers.

Stereotypes and perceptions held by teachers.

Many students in New Zealand schools experience both systemic and personal racism (Barnes, 2013; Hancock, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2019a; Pack et al., 2016). The Ministry of Education's response has been to call for teachers to have higher expectations of their Pacific students and to proactively "confront systemic racism and discrimination in education" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 6). They have also invited Pacific parents to be more demanding in their own expectations of teachers and schools (Ministry of Education, 2012).

So, it is worth noting that research indicates that teacher perceptions and expectations of students can be variable (Rio, 2017; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006). In the talanoa with teachers, Teacher 1 was forthright in her experience of teachers seeming to write off Pacific students and their parents:

Teacher 1: [teachers can] have low expectations. Not all. And those that do, don't think they mean to. I think it's still a low expectation thing and not just at the kids but [teachers can] look down at the families that the kids come from. You hear about them not coming into school to do interviews and stuff like that.

It felt somewhat jarring for myself and the participants when the talanoa began to examine the stereotypes that members of their profession held. For example, Teacher 3

somewhat candidly commented that their colleagues tend to have a narrow view of Pacific communities:

Teacher 3: They [some colleagues] see them [Pacific communities] through very one-eyed glasses I suppose. [With] all their preconceptions.

I felt that both teachers in this case attempted to soften the realities of their comments. Teacher 1 did this by saying that it's not all teachers, and that those that have low expectations generally do not mean to. Teacher 3's comment was open ended. While they did not explicitly mention specific examples of stereotypical views, they indicated that they were present. This perspective can lead to an avoidance of deeper analysis of potential stereotyping and racism within schools and educational institutions (Tuiloma & Jones, 2022). Therefore, there is a need for the development of specific tools for schools to be able to use to create constructive dialogue about these issues.

Elsewhere in my talanoa with teachers, there were some specific comments that also spoke to stereotypes and perceptions. Teacher 1 mentioned the way Pacific students are often perceived as "getting and needing extra help". Teacher 2, in response to this, mentioned a Tokelauan student who did not want to be associated with the Pacific community. Her assumption was because this might be because of a fear of being labelled with similar stereotypes. This again highlights the need for guided dialogue among staff addressing and their subconscious biases around Pacific student expectations. As Jussim (2012) found, "teacher expectations could profoundly influence student achievement" through "racism, as manifested in teachers' low expectations for, and unfair treatment of minority students" which contributes "to educational inequalities" (p. 34). For example, teacher biases can determine their selection of curriculum content, textbooks and other pedagogical props (Rubie-Davies, 2007). This, in turn, can have a significant impact on their levels of achievement as suggested by authors like Bishop and Berryman (2006) Brophy and Good (1974) and Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968).

When analysing the transcripts of my talanoa with teachers, I consequently looked for small comments that might reveal the teacher's awareness of "dangerous stereotypes" which constitute "barriers to learning" (Houghton and Houghton 2022 p. 12). For example, one comment from Teacher 1 mentioned how he/she felt teachers perceive student pathways beyond school are limited by their parent's career – thus constituting a subconscious glass ceiling:

Teacher 1: you just hear comments in passing and even like PLD the other day there was a comment [from a colleague] about how an uber driver can't have a doctor for a son.

In another phase of the teachers' talanoa, my participants were discussing support programmes for Pacific students, where the following (illuminating) dialogue about how their other colleagues viewed Pacific students:

Teacher 5: I think there is a lot of support around Pasifika boys, a lot of events, lots of academic help happening.

Teacher 1: I think that its hard sometimes because I've heard other people when they're talking about Pasifika things like [extra study support] going on, other teachers think that it's unfair that all the support goes to Pasifika which is sometimes a negative swing, when they're like 'why can't the white kids do that?'. So, when they see all the support sometimes, they see it as unfairly being given extra resources.

Teacher 3: Do you think that's exacerbated by some of our teachers' experience teaching Pasifika students as challenging, difficult, loud, or disruptive or whatever so then to be given all this extra support when they're not actually just doing the work?

These observations reveal the perceptions that teachers may have and share in their staffrooms or private conversations. This can contribute to entrenched beliefs about minority groups within the school community, as well as ineffective pedagogical practice.

Some of the teachers were cognisant of the fact that there is a need for solutions to inequitable outcomes. Teacher 2 explains his perspective, with regards to his understandings of equity:

Teacher 2: I think it's also that equality or equity issue. A lot of our colleagues see the issue that everyone should be treated equally and therefore if one group gets an advantage over another group then they see that as being unfair and not equal. Whereas

those of us who fully understand the issues of equality and equity realise that there is a difference, and when there is a society that is unequal you do need to have positive interventions. I personally believe we need positive interventions to help disadvantaged members of society.

As Giroux and Penna (1979) might suggest, the “positive interventions” that Teacher 2 refers to might be seen as an attempt to “intervene in the world in order to change it” (p. 22). It is important therefore that interventions that occur within educational institutions foster powerful relationships and build trust between teachers and students (Towner et al., 2017). Interventions also need to be designed to reflect the specific needs of the students. For example, cultural identities and protocols should be taken into account (Luafutu-Simpson et al., 2015).

Reynolds (2017) provides an example of a pedagogical intervention in his analysis of teacher interactions with Pacific students in a Wellington school. Reynolds observed the difference between teacher and student perspectives of a shared classroom setting. For example, the teacher observed by Reynolds would question a Pacific student in class, with the aim of getting them involved in the learning. This well-intentioned question, however, created a sense of embarrassment for the student concerned:

[...] the emotion involved can create a sense that intentional relational damage has been done. What may have seemed to a teacher as discipline can be experienced as punishment. This may have the potential to colour future interaction. While some may justify teacher action of this nature as a form of discipline intended to focus learning, the effect it may have on a willingness to engage in question/answer rituals and on the clarity of the relationship between questions and learning can be negative. When emotional uncertainty is added to general fears of being wrong, being in a minority, the threat of racist peer judgement and a cultural background of being quiet in certain contexts, a complex picture emerges of the strength needed to succeed as a participant in this context for Pasifika students (Reynolds, 2017, p 163).

This example brings to light the way in which ignorance of students’ cultural needs can exacerbate stereotypical perceptions held by teachers. It also highlights the importance of teacher practice and pedagogy reflecting an understanding of these needs. Interrogation of teacher practice is critical. When predicted outcomes are not achieved, this might result in the shift of teacher expectations, and a reluctance to further engage (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006).

Reflection on their practice, informed by student and parent voices, can help teachers to understand the effect of their actions or assumptions. The findings of Smith and Glenn (2016) support this. They found that reflection on “cultural and linguistic diversity” in their classroom is critical in allowing teachers to interrogate their own “beliefs and assumptions” (p. 314).

In our talanoa, Teacher 4 commented that the voices of Pacific students often goes unheard:

Teacher 4: So, there’s an essence to me that I often think of Pasifika that they haven’t been treated fairly. And so, when it comes to the voice side of it and what I think, I think often that their voice isn’t heard loud enough.

This comment cuts to the heart of the power and voice disparities that Pacific students and communities experience at schools. This has also been identified by Uasike Allen et al. (2022) and Riwai-Couch et al. (2020). The assumptions and stereotypes that exist are rarely able to be addressed either in the staff body or the strategic and pedagogical approaches enacted by the school. This is because the cultural capital of the staff is often distinct from that of Pacific students and communities (Bills & Hunter, 2015). In contrast with this, Mila-Schaaf and Robinson (2010) offer the concept of “polycultural capital”. They draw on Bourdieu’s (2002) theory of cultural capital, adding the prefix ‘poly’ to denote the “ongoing exposure to more than one culture” (p. 2) Pacific students might experience. Thus, while the education system supports “the reproduction of the social structure by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 17), a “polycultural capital” lens might challenge this.

Challenges in engaging with Pacific families and communities.

Pacific family and community engagement evoked a variety of responses from the teachers. These ranged from positive experiences at events and in community engagement, through to difficult experiences. Teacher 4, who is a non-Pacific teacher, was reflective when outlining the complexities of him engaging with the Pacific community:

Teacher 4: Too intimidating for me to do that [confidently engage at a Pasifika event at school]. My knowledge of Pasifika is very limited. I haven’t been brought up in New

Zealand, so my knowledge is very limited. I'm very aware of offending people; I don't like doing [offending people]. So, if you put me in a room with the adults that are all Pasifika and then come and meet the teachers, I find that quite intimidating. I know it sounds strange but, you know. Yeah, it's intimidating.

Teacher 4's feelings of inadequacy or intimidation in interacting with Pacific parents thus posed a barrier to him fully engaging with the wider world of his students. While he might be offering quality teaching and learning in the classroom, he felt very disconnected from involvement in the familial and community contents of his Pacific students and feared this may pose barriers to learning. Teacher 4 went on to explain his perspective as follows:

Teacher 4: I phone parents and that's not a problem but because I'm nervous about offending, and I'm not sure about the protocols on here, this is why [I ask] do you want to come and... you know, and you can hear me go, [names Pacific teacher colleague], do you want to sit in on a meeting with me? So, I'm going to use you as my "in".

He added:

... But it's [the school] a very Westernised culture [...] what happens is that when you're a bit nervous about something you either get an expert or you actually get an old tie, someone [i.e., a Pacific colleague] with a connection [to the family/community], to actually introduce me and actually introduce me and go, actually, he's [Teacher 4] not a bad guy.

His nervousness therefore seemed to stem from a desire not to offend. Included in this might be a deeper fear of difference or to engage with the cultural other (Dervin, 2022; Santoro, 2007).

This finding recalls research in in New Zealand, USA, Canada and Tonga, which has found that teachers can often feel culturally isolated or limited in their ability to connect with the communities they serve (Manning et al., 2020; Puloka-Luey, 2021). This reality, which could be very common in the teaching profession, stresses the importance of schools building strong relationships with their communities. Manning et al. (2020) conclude that "building relationships between Indigenous parents, communities, and schools constitutes one of the most significant steps that can be undertaken to improve the levels of "success" experienced by Indigenous students" (p.2030). The voices of the student (Chapter 5) and parent participants

(Chapter 7) also stress this. Teacher 4's desire for assistance to support his development of trust-based relationships makes sense, especially for someone who is a new migrant to New Zealand, and who might have limited understanding of cultural or social nuances. As previously mentioned, a key document that has been developed to support teacher development of these sorts of cultural competencies is the Ministry of Education's *Tapasā: cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners* (Ministry of Education, 2018). This points to the characteristics of a good teacher according to feedback from Pacific learners and parents, which included these three desired attributes:

[The teacher] knows that I want my parents to be part of my learning journey and that my parents value being part of that journey
[The teacher] communicates well and isn't afraid to ask me and my parents questions
[The teacher] does research to know more about me, my family and my culture and island nation(s) that we come from (Ministry of Education, 2019, pg.7)

These desired attributes point to a yearning, shared by Pacific learners and their parents, for a well-connected relationship between home and school. But, the other hand, it appears that my teacher participants wanted a similar reciprocal relationship. This stance was again typified Teacher 4 when he explained:

Teacher 4: I'm fully aware that we've [teachers] got to put the help in and I wanna be part of the solution. But I need to feel that I'm invited [by the parents/community] into it [i.e. able to enter familial/community spaces beyond the classroom].

This need to be invited seems to reflect Teacher 4's own cultural values (i.e., politeness). Clearly, Teacher 4 wishes to avoid "pushing" in, and/or appearing rude. For him, it was a case of ensuring he did not appear entitled to be part of a cultural experience that is not his own. It is important to recognize the epistemology and ontology of Teacher 4 because, as Andersen et al. (2012) affirm, teachers are emotional beings themselves. Each teacher will have their own ways of showing fear or confidence when dealing with the variety of scenarios they encounter in their professional lives. Hence, the risk that racism can flow from teacher inaction,

and inability to engage with Pacific learners and communities, remains problematic (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b; Ministry of Education, 2020a).

Hence, more needs to be done to support teachers like Teacher 4 who have a clear desire to be “part of the solution” (Teacher 4). From my perspective, his willingness to be open and honest about the barriers that he experiences is part of what needs to happen among staff (Chuluifaga et al., 2021; Grudnoff, 2012). This is particularly important for uncomfortable topics as racism (Shah & Coles, 2020). The teachers within the talanoa expressed a desire to present themselves as allies to Pacific communities, which is a strong foundation on which to build inclusive practices at the school (Thaman, 2001).

The teachers’ talanoa about their engagement with Pacific parents, reminded me of my talanoa with the parents (chapter 6). One of the parents, felt that “the school had a responsibility to Pasifika [students]”. She was concerned that she had to “chase up” the teachers to find out how her son was tracking with NCEA. Sefina added that if the school is aware of Pacific students’ underachievement, the school needs to be more proactive by contacting parents when things were not going well for students (*like her son). Parents in other New Zealand studies have reiterated similar concerns in recent times (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021a; Riwai-Couch et al., 2020). International research into migrant education has also produced similar outcomes (Sosa, 1996; Valenzuela, 2020).

All of the above clearly suggests that there is a recurring (trans-national) issue of disconnect that presents itself very clearly here. This disconnect exists between the teacher and parent expectations, of the student and of the school and how it engages with its community. Interestingly, Paulsen (2018) in her Melbourne study of Pacific school relationships, notes that the school, as an environment, might cause anxiety for Pacific parents. However, it would also seem that more research needs to occur with teachers working with Pacific diaspora

communities to gauge the extent to which teachers also experience a degree of anxiety that may arise from engaging of with parents of different cultures.

Almost two decades ago, Gorinski and Fraser (2006), conducted research that reviewed Pacific engagement levels in New Zealand schools. Their research provided firm evidence that a monocultural paradigm informed many schools' decision-making procedures. While considerable work has been done by Pacific communities and school leaders, persistent problems concerning engagement and achievement for Pacific students are ongoing. Gorinski and Fraser (2006) emphasised the need to strengthen relationships between key partners by “empowering, consultative, collaborative communication”, underlain by “principles and practices of inclusion, rather than marginalisation” (p. 2). While this is a valid assertion, it is essential that a critical perspective is taken. Particularly as considerable time has passed, and poor achievement outcomes persist for Pacific learners. While a significant amount of work has been done, the evidence indicates that teachers need to be continually inspired and encouraged to connect with Pacific communities in a humanising way that allows a flow of dialogue and power sharing to occur (Laumemea, 2018; Mutch & Collins, 2012).

Conclusion

The talanoa with the teacher participants involved a robust conversation among colleagues. Pacific educational issues have been a focus in the national education conversation, as well as in local staffrooms and classrooms. The teachers expressed their admiration for Pacific students, communities, and cultures, seeing incredible strength and resilience in their values and ways of being. However, they also acknowledged the challenges that were faced by students and their families. These ranged from assumptions about Pacific students and their aspirations, to teachers' inability to engage with them as a community.

Teachers play a vital role in the experience and motivation of Pacific students at school (Fletcher et al. 2011; McClure et al. 2011; Tait et al. 2018; Spiller 2012). They also have a

powerful impact on the relationship between the wider community members such as parents, and the school as an institution. Like the students and the parents in the talanoa discussed in chapters 5, 6, and 7, teacher participants emphasised the strengths that Pacific teachers bring to the school environment. They saw Pacific teachers acting as a catalyst for support and a sort of force for stability – a type of “agent of hope” (Houghton and Houghton 2022, p. 7). However, over 95% of teachers in New Zealand school do not possess Pacific ethnicities/cultural capital. Therefore, it is crucial that non-Pacific teachers are also understood as cultural beings who can recognise their own cultural location and exhibit cultural humility (Gruenewald, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Reynolds, 2019).

The teachers also affirmed the need for school leaders and communities of teachers to play an active role in engagement with Pacific values, to ensure a culturally positive learning environment for Pasifika students. Being forthright in addressing and confronting stereotypes and assumptions was also understood to be necessary to combat racism within SBHS and other schools.

This chapter concludes the three talanoa results chapters, with the next chapter (8) looking to synthesise the various themes that emerged and explore possible solutions or steps to take for schools or communities in similar situations.

Chapter 9: Synthesis and Implications of Talanoa

Introduction

This chapter synthesises the research findings and discusses their implications. It briefly revisits and expands upon the *tīvaevae* metaphor developed by Maua-Hodges (2019), originally designed to assist Pacific researchers in demystifying the research process, as previously explained in Chapter 3. The purpose of this chapter (9) is to metaphorically ‘stitch together’ the recurring themes or patterns identified from the three data sets (students, parents, and teachers). This approach aligns with the *tīvaevae* research model’s logic of fostering community dialogue. As demonstrated in this chapter, the research findings are a co-created product, much like a *tīvaevae*, with contributions from all research participants.

Chapter 9 is structured as follows: Part one explores the overarching themes that emerged from the talanoa sessions with students, parents, and teachers at Shirley Boys’ High School (SBHS). These include: (i) Pacific identities in the school context, (ii) the critical role of teachers, (iii) Pacific values, and (iv) the primacy of family. Part two discusses the unique contextual and complex local factors that make this research unique. Part three demonstrates the local, national, and international implications and significance of this study.

Part One: Recurring themes

This section discusses and explores four recurring themes that emerged from the talanoa I engaged in with participants. As explained, I have used the *tīvaevae* research model as a way of conceptualising this research and framing my engagement with the participants involved. The recurring themes explored in this part of the chapter emerged as a series of patterns that, when layered and stitched together, form a metaphorical *tīvaevae* (Maua-Hodges, 2019). This is the final stage of the *tuitui* process, which is the last aspect of creating the physical, or in this case, metaphorical *tīvaevae*. This *tīvaevae* reflects the voices of the participants, set against the background of my own voice and those of researchers in this field.

Theme One: Pacific identities in the school context

The student and parent participants in this study repeatedly called for children from Pacific communities to be able to bring their whole selves into daily school-life. This confronts the reality that they often feel the need to leave their cultures at the front gate. This finding is not surprising, as it resonates with a long history of educational research in New Zealand and elsewhere (Anae, 1997; Macpherson, 1996; McGavin, 2014; Siteine, 2010). For example, in 1975, Lopdell House Conference members made a wide-ranging series of recommendations that sought to improve outcomes for Pacific students and their communities. In the foreword of *Educating Pacific Islanders in New Zealand*, the Minister of Education, Phillip Amos, stated that:

The nature of the educational provisions for Pacific Islanders coming to live in New Zealand is one of the most important issues facing the education system at the present time (Department of Education, 1975, p. i).

More recently, Si'ilata (2019), referring to the education of Pacific students in the context of ongoing marginalisation, has called for the:

Utilization of linguistically and culturally sustaining/culturally revitalizing pedagogies, and in the creation of classroom environments that normalize and privilege multilingual children's linguistic and cultural resources, and family knowledge systems at school (p.187).

Examining these two perspectives and the research that has occurred over the last four decades, it is obvious that there are still significant inequities that exist for Pacific communities in the New Zealand education system. This, in turn, recalls Bourdieu's (1974) analysis of cultural capital in schools, and his description of how dominant cultural norms within schools, demand homogenisation. He notes that "traditional education is objectively addressed to those who have obtained from their social milieu the linguistic and cultural capital that it *objectively* demands" (p. 25). The lack of significant improvement for Pacific communities in the New Zealand schooling system also adds weight to Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction. In this way, schools and other educational institutions legitimise "the reproduction of the social

hierarchies by transmuting them into academic hierarchies” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 153). Pacific communities and academics have long called for change; however, it seems slow to come.

The Ministry of Education and the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand have called for Pacific cultural competencies to be incorporated into teaching practice in New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2018; Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2024). This is because there is an acknowledgement that system wide change is needed. The Ministry has also built on previous policy documents to map system changes in order to improve education for Pacific learners with the release of the 2023 refresh of the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2023* (Ministry of Education, 2023a). However, participants in this study clearly indicate that there is a further need to strengthen Pacific identities in a schooling context.

Participants recognised the profound importance of schools as places where Pacific talanoa identities and cultures should be fostered, visible, and prioritised. The concept of identity is often viewed by teachers and wider society in a simplistic manner, where each person within a group is seen as having their own individual identity. However, in this context, identity is understood as a broad concept that encompasses the diverse cultures and languages of the Pacific. These identities are collectively linked yet individually unique and driven. As Mackley-Crump (2015) observed:

... the act of migrating to New Zealand, where the generic term “Pacific Islander” did not differentiate among nations or islands, and certainly not among villages, created a commonality based on historical connections and cultural similarities. In addition, a new commonality was created, the result of migrants being located in similar sociocultural circumstances once in New Zealand, within the same geographical and social communities, workplaces, churches. These factors created a mind-set of being “of the Pacific,” a part of the broader Pacific diaspora in New Zealand.

This observation recalls the comments of my student talanoa participants who affirmed and embraced the term ‘Pasifika’ as a unifying concept (see Chapter 5). This concept captured how

they saw each other within their school and beyond, into the community, in sports and in church communities.

Hunter and Hunter (2019) in their work examining cultural identity in relation to mathematics education, highlighted the challenges faced by Pacific students. They noted that many Pacific students enter New Zealand schools fluent in their own language and with a rich background of knowledge and experiences. However, within a short period of schooling, they join the disproportionately high numbers of Pacific students who are failing within our current education system (p. 425). This underscores the need for a structured approach for teachers and communities to nurture Pacific identities within the context of schooling as a way to strengthen Pacific student achievement and engagement (Tongati'o, 2020). This is necessary when cultures can be easily absorbed or diluted into the dominant cultures or narratives that exist (Rimoni et al., 2022; Tuifagalele et al., 2024).

Pacific identities have continued to evolve, as there is a shift from a new migrant Pacific population to established communities with shared migrant experiences of adapting to a new land. Far from being homogeneous, fixed, and static, these Pacific student identities are dynamic. Their roots stem from the various Pacific nations, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, unlike earlier generations, they have grown-up in New Zealand's schools and communities. Their ethnic communities have also taken on new perspectives, as they have grappled with societal issues over time, and forged new conceptualisations of culture (Ladwig-Williams, 2022). This has also been the case for Pacific peoples in other countries, such as Australia (Pale, Kee, Wu, & Goff, 2023) and the United States (Kim & Cooc, 2020). In both of these countries, growing Pacific populations not only consist of new migrants but also established and culturally present populations (Lynch, 2022). In some cases, migration was undertaken for future opportunities and prosperity, in others, an option that was perhaps forced or endured through hardships and harsh realities, such as economic or climate displacement

(Cass, 2018; Farquhar, 2015; Ghosh & Orchiston, 2021). Nevertheless, this phenomenon has many opportunities and challenges that accompany it, which the student and parent participants in the talanoa were particularly aware of.

One such challenge for Pacific peoples is the problem of cultural and linguistic loss. Many Pacific children grow up predominantly learning and using English in school, with many having it as their first language (Amituanai-Toloa, 2010; Matika et al., 2021; Samu et al., 2019). In their talanoa, parent participants said they felt separated from their Pacific language and cultural practices, and that this was accompanied by a sense of shame. Lagi best typified this view, when explaining:

I'm almost a little bit ashamed that I have lost touch with the language. I've lost touch with the protocol. I've lost touch with a lot of that stuff and I kind of feel a little bit embarrassed because I can't pass that on to my children (Individual Parent Talanoa).

The parent participants felt that they might have had access to their language and culture if they lived in communities or places where there were larger numbers of people with shared language and culture. They had also seen intergenerational language loss and were experiencing this with their own children. Student participants shared similar concerns about the need for language revitalisation and wanted Pacific languages and content included in the curriculum.

This is the experience of many Pacific people in New Zealand. Amituanai-Toloa (2010) argued that the loss of language for different Pacific communities living in New Zealand has also resulted in cultural loss and “a sense of disconnectedness” (p. 80). For example, Samu et al. (2019), in their research with New Zealand born Pacific young adults, found that “New Zealand-born Pasifika young people often feel undermined, inauthentic or even unworthy to take on their specific island identity, if they cannot speak the languages that their parents spoke fluently” (p. 132). For these young adults, language is often an important factor, influencing their sense of identity and belonging. Their engagement with Pacific languages, including in a

school setting, can impact their long-term wellbeing (Samu et al., 2019). When reflecting upon my own family's experiences, I can now see more clearly 'how' the fluency of a Pacific language (Cook Islands Māori in our case), can be lost in a single generation. My grandparents moved to New Zealand from the Cook Islands, fluent in Cook Islands Māori. They did not pass this onto their children. As a result, out of their 18 grandchildren, only one (my brother) has a degree of fluency in the language. This has a significant impact for many in my generation on their degree of comfort in Cook Islands or Pacific contexts.

This clearly indicates the importance of Pacific language programmes in schools, where students can receive support in sustaining a second language or even begin to be exposed to it. This is particularly important if they come from a family who has no competence or confidence in using the language at home. In regions like Canterbury, where there are often small pockets of Pacific peoples in communities and schools, opportunities to connect to language and culture at places like school are vital, despite being challenging to provide.

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter two), Pacific identities in diasporic settings like New Zealand are diverse, changing and interwoven with other cultures and ways of life. Many students who fit into the Pacific category on a school roll have affiliations to more than one ethnic community. The student participants in this research reflect this reality. My own experience as a border-crosser with a diverse European and Pacific identity also speaks to this. In their research on Pacific student identities, Tait et al. (2018) reported the importance of understanding the diverse identities of students. Their participants, like mine, also described themselves as possessing "fluid identities, springing from complex, intergenerational family histories and cultural heritages and changing in different spaces such as school and family" (p. 357). One parent participant in my research described how his identity had developed as a first-generation New Zealand born Samoan. He also described how he could see his children constructing their own identities in relation to their Samoan and Tongan heritage. The

increasingly diverse dimensions of Pacific identity in New Zealand, Australia, and other places play a role in understanding how communities perceive themselves in relation to success at school. In contrast, teacher participants had a relatively simplistic view of these increasingly complex identities. Many of their comments seemed to generalise across Pacific ethnic groups, which represents a common perspective in schools (Spiller, 2013).

Another key idea to emerge across all participant groups was the importance of unity associated with Pacific identities in the communities associated with the school. This unity or collectivism was noted by teacher and student participants in the way that Pacific students collaborated to experience success in academic, sports and various cultural settings. Student participants specifically described what this collaboration looked like in the classroom, in their families and friendships. In an individual talanoa, Malosi described the strong “sense of unity” that he felt when he experienced this success with his peers. Rangi, another student participant, described how he felt the collectivism amongst Pacific students in classroom settings differed from other groups. He described it as a feeling of: “I’ll help you pass. We want to pass together” (Student individual talanoa). In the context of this theme, collective success was connected to their family and their identity. It served as an intrinsic motivator for students to work towards significant goals in their education.

Several students expressed their feeling that an identity connected to their specific Pacific heritage, for example, Samoan or Tongan, could be a unifying factor for them during schooling (Chapter 5). This was similar to research conducted with Pacific students elsewhere in New Zealand. For example, Rimoni (2016) explored experiences of Samoan, male students in New Zealand secondary schools. Her findings were like mine in that her participants emphasised “that their identity formation was an important aspect of their secondary school experience” (p. 189). However, Rimoni’s participants also “revealed their ability to switch identities” (p. 189) in the context of school. This was not something that student participants

in my research explicitly related to me. The diversity of Pacific identities within the school was acknowledged as a powerful, potential, and tangible reality, that was visible and alive in the actions of the community - able to be 'seen, heard, and touched'.

Theme Two: The critical role of teachers

All the participants in this study believed that teachers play a critical role in the lives of Pacific students. Student and parent participants saw teachers as potential advocates and viewed Pacific teachers as champions of Pacific cultures and identities. Teacher participants viewed their role as important, but identified challenges that Pacific teachers face which differ to their peers. Teachers have the potential to be agents of hope for students, families and their communities in a way that supports aspirations and opens pathways for the future (Giroux, 1997). In contrast to that vision, teaching within a colonial or industrial education system can sometimes perpetuate, or even worsen, structural inequalities and inequities. This could be in the form of racism (Barnes, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2005), sexism (Calder-Dawe & Gavey) and classism (Freire, 2005).

The participants in this research affirmed that a vision for teaching as a profession that drives learning in relationship with culture is what is needed. The voices of the participants in this research reinforced my belief that we need to explore teaching as a model where both tradition and innovation go hand in hand. This means affirming and strengthening existing practices that result in success for students, as well being creative in exploring new possibilities. The voices of students and the communities from which they emerge, must be prioritised, and need to be at the centre of strategic and operational considerations (Fickel et al., 2017). This is not a simple objective, as there are diverse and competing voices.

The increased use of dialogic practices can be used by teachers and communities to provide solutions. For example, the talanoa methodology underpinning this study aimed to provide time and space for the voices of the participants to be heard. It was also intended to

model a way in which teachers might be receptive to the ideas emerging from Pacific students and their communities. Another example of this in action is the Puna Kōrero project (Riwai-Couch, Bull, & Nicholls, 2020), which sought to centre Māori and Pacific parent voices. Puna Kōrero was developed by Riwai-Couch (2015). It was utilised in Covid-19 lockdown and post lockdown settings in order that “new possibilities might emerge that could make the school experience more positive for all learners” (p. 59). Approaches like this can be powerful in providing a structure for school communities to engage with Pacific parents. This is particularly important for Pacific parents and communities, as there can often be a multitude of voices surrounding schools, competing for attention. As related by parent participants in this study, they feel that their voices are sometimes the least heard and rarely acted on.

Attempting to achieve dialogue with multiple voices in a culturally, socially, and economically diverse society, where different cultures and belief systems abound, is a significant challenge. This is because teachers and students do not necessarily have shared experiences or pools of knowledge (Dyck, 2021). These inequities are also driven by a capitalist economy that seeks to leverage competition and existing inequities and inequalities to orientate outcomes around profit and economic growth. This is the fraught ecosystem in which teachers work, and it is an environment which is both hostile to change and is at the whim of high impact policy changes on a regular basis. School leaders, teachers, and staff members are the most physically and socially present adults within the school system. Therefore, their roles are critical and need to be considered and critiqued in any attempt to challenge the dominant cultural group.

It is possible for teachers to experience the teaching context as an ever-repeating cycle of students coming through education. In this cycle, teachers simply deliver the curriculum, and marginalised students experience low achievement and other poor outcomes, such as higher rates of suspension and exclusion (Maquiso, 2019). Freire (1998) offers a reflection on

the nature of humanity, which I believe can be accurately applied to the teaching profession and may be helpful to consider. In this reflection, Freire reminds us that through praxis, change is possible, and it is worth having hope that outcomes for students and community are not fixed:

I like being human because I know that my passing through the world is not predetermined, pre-established. That my destiny is not a given but something that needs to be constructed and for which I must assume responsibility [...] Consequently, the future is something to be developed through trial and error rather than an inexorable vice that determines all our actions (Freire, 1998, p. 54).

While somewhat cliché, the phrase “trial and error” is a way of viewing the action and reflection that is necessary when engaging in praxis. The development and improvement of praxis in teaching offers hope when working as, or with, marginalised communities and students whose communities have faced oppressive structures such as racism.

I believe that teachers’ awareness of this helps position them to better serve the communities in which they work. Freire (1998) was critical of a dehumanising or oppressor world view that seeks to maintain oppression: “Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human” (Freire, 1998, p. 44). I believe that there is an ongoing tension in the teaching profession, whereby the teacher understands the power they have to improve the education, and thus the future, of their students, and the oppressive way in which schooling has been used in the past. I have felt this tension throughout my career, and in my current role within the Ministry of Education. A call for transformative change within our school system is necessary, albeit challenging. The voices of the student participants in this research confirm this when they call for a curriculum in which their languages and cultures are included. In this way, both teachers and students would be able to become “more fully human”, as Freire puts it.

Many teachers may logically understand that the future outcomes of their students are not fixed, and that students have their own agency with which they will live their lives. All

parent participants in my research emphasised this when they described their aspirations for their children. However, the literature indicates that the way many teachers perceive Pacific students and hold certain types of expectations for them, is something that needs attention (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006; Turner et al., 2015). This holds potential to be the development of what Freire called conscientisation (Freire, 1996). Conscientisation involves the development of a critical consciousness in both parties through a dialectic approach leading to a humanisation and the development of an openness to dialogue (Montero, 2011). Freire also underscores the importance of inquiry, leading to change, and hopefully, improvement:

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1996, p. 72)

This inquiry cannot happen outside of a specific context, where transformation is sought. In other words, a superficial response or simple desire to improve will be inadequate. The conscientisation of Pacific communities and school leaders is needed to break and undo systems of oppression that hold Pacific peoples in place. This transformational desire underpins the change that parent and student participants in this research emphasised that they want to see. For example, both groups expressed a strong desire to see Pacific values contextualised in classrooms and other school settings. Their view was that this would create powerful links between school and their own identities, which are embedded in cultural and familial expressions.

Throughout this research, I heard from student, parent, and teacher participants about the essential role that the teacher plays for Pacific students. In particular, the teachers who strongly identified or worked with Pacific communities, either through their own cultural or ethnic background, or through their willingness to engage with Pacific cultures. This willingness may be a form of conscientisation, as described by Freire (2005). Another way of understanding this might be by the display of cultural humility (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016).

Cultural humility is a way a teacher can become trusted, demonstrate integrity, and build strong relationships with students and parents. As Reynolds (2019) explains, in the context of teacher development for Pacific education:

A development from cultural competence, cultural humility is a “stance” or “way of being” where persistent self-awareness maintained through self-reflection pays attention to power and its ongoing effects. Through its open nature, cultural humility disturbs the idea that one can ever tick the ‘competence box’ in respect to culture. [...] Cultural humility suggests a high degree of reflexivity as an ongoing means to this end, entwined with a contextual awareness of how the value of various elements of capital is established and maintained (p. 25).

This contrasts with what might be considered cultural dominance, where teachers might seek to impose different cultural norms, consciously or subconsciously, upon students and their communities. For example, one of the participants in Reynolds’ (2019) research indicated that teachers can be used to “being the dominant presence in the classroom” (p. 31). Dialogue is one way in which this dominance can be disrupted, particularly in terms of understanding issues of power and identity (Bakhtin, 2010). Its use is a critical aspect in the development of relationships between teachers, students, and the wider community.

Teachers need to be enabled and have appropriate professional structures around them to understand “Pacific education as a partnership” (Chu-Fuluifaga, Abella, Reynolds, & Rimoni, 2022, p. 22). It is more likely that they are then going to be able to provide a type of teaching that parent and student participants in this research described as best for them. This aims to be beneficial for Pacific communities, as well as providing an environment in which Pacific students can thrive (Lipine, 2010; Nicholas and Fletcher, 2017; Siope, 2011; Toumu’a and Laban, 2014). As one of the student participants, Malosi, stated:

I would want to see all Pasifika students feel welcomed and safe [...] throughout the whole school rather than just the Pasifika group doing their stuff. [...] every single part of the school can do something small (Malosi, year 13, Samoan)

This emphasises the need for all teachers of Pacific students in diasporic contexts to take responsibility for actively engaging Pacific students and their identities. These teachers

need to examine their approaches and develop a deeper understanding of different Pacific cultural and contextual knowledges. This understanding will enable them to develop new ways of teaching and learning (Chu-Fuluifaga et al., 2021). For example, Beatson et al. (2018) explored Pacific student experiences in tertiary education, specifically in the health field. They found that the experiences of Pacific students were similar to those in this research. Like my student participants, these students were determined to succeed within the context of an intergenerational family. Beatson et al. (2018) also found that there was a need to adapt and change teaching programmes for Pacific students to fully realise success, particularly in terms of collective success and achievement.

As a result, it might pay for SBHS and other Christchurch secondary schools to develop or enhance similar approaches in their classroom pedagogy. This could lead to increased Pacific family and community engagement with the school, especially as creative ways of integrating Pacific knowledges are sought. Pacific communities in New Zealand are developing innovative ways of connecting with schools. For example, Tagata Moana Trust provides programmes that support practical linkage between Pacific arts and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) education (Tagata Moana Tagata Moana Trust, 2023). At schools across Christchurch, including SBHS, they deliver programmes of learning that amplify Pacific arts, languages and cultures. Irrespective of their ethnicity, all teachers at SBHS and other Christchurch secondary schools can support these initiatives by advocating for their inclusion within school programmes of work, curriculum delivery and pathways discussions.

Care for Pacific teachers

In all participant talanoa groups, there was an emphasis on the importance of teachers of Pacific ethnic and cultural backgrounds in leading powerful engagement for the Pacific community within the school. All student participants identified Pacific teachers as role models, as pillars

within the school community who they were able to relate to, and as cultural guides in an institution where they were a minority. Parents, on the other hand, described Pacific teachers as points of access, and as people within the school who were able to provide safety and cultural connection for them and their students. There was a shared sense that many Pacific teachers had high expectations of Pacific students, accompanied by a kindness and almost a parental sense of care (Houghton & Houghton, 2022). Participants felt that this was accompanied by a desire from Pacific teachers to ensure students represented their community with pride, upholding social, cultural, and academic standards. This was similar to the findings of Fairbairn-Dunlop (2021b) who also carried out research with Pacific parents and students.

Parents in her research:

... strongly believed that having Pacific teachers in schools was crucial for Pacific parents and for Pacific learners. In schools where there were few or no Pacific teachers, learners and parents missed out on opportunities to engage with educational role models who understood their cultural perspectives and funds of knowledge. They were also denied the protective elements that Pacific teachers afforded Pacific learners (p.77).

The leadership provided by Pacific teachers was appreciated by students and parents and aligned with the thinking that Pacific teachers acted as pillars or role models, especially when they were seen in leadership positions across the school. Teacher participants also saw Pacific teachers as critical access points who were able to support them as colleagues and provide strong leadership to the Pacific community within the school. This is reflected in the findings of Ladwig Williams (2022) who described the extraordinary work of Pacific teachers who provide cultural leadership in preparation for the Auckland Polyfest. Teacher participants in this research admitted that cultural taxation was an issue. They also acknowledged that there were roles that Pacific teachers played that they did not necessarily see as easy for themselves as non-Pacific.

Faitala et al. (2022), also explored the contexts of Pacific success across New Zealand, specifically in Auckland, Lower Hutt and Canterbury. Their reflections on the emergence of

Polynesian Festivals as levers for “Polysuccess” (p. 16) champions the work of Pacific teachers leading in powerful and collaborative ways. They also note the significant differences that exist in these different locations across New Zealand. Maria Lemalie, a Samoan principal in Christchurch, emphasises this when she reflected on her own work in this area:

The significant difference for Canterbury, in comparison to others around the motu, is that the teachers who were in charge of the Pasifika Group were not always of Pacific heritage [and Pacific teachers] would assist them through how to best meet the needs of our Pasifika students and also their families. I’ve viewed it as 19 years of ‘Culturally Responsive PD’ for schools (Faitala et al., 2022, p. 14).

This reliance on Pacific teachers, who are often working in volunteer capacities, asks the question of whether this can be seen as a form of service for their community (Tominiko, 2020), or as a form of cultural taxation (Padilla, 1994). The answer is a combination of the two. Almost three decades ago, Mara (1998) claimed Pacific teachers were, “often “given extra (out-of-class) responsibilities such as taking school-wide cultural performance groups, linking with Pacific Islands parents and networks, and working with Pacific Islands students to meet their social, cultural and educational needs” (p. 37). There is a need for further research across the various contexts in which Pacific teachers work in New Zealand schools in order to ensure that appropriate professional structures are in place to support them.

In New Zealand, there has been some progress in developing support for Pacific leadership in schools. For example, Si‘ilata et al. (2023) discuss the development of a professional learning and development pathway for Pacific principals – Tautai o le Moana. This programme draws on the metaphor of Pacific wayfinding in order to contextualise Pacific leadership in New Zealand schools. Si‘ilata et al. (2023) state that:

Pacific specific leadership capabilities support tautai [Pacific principals and leaders] to actively disrupt institutional racism that diminishes Pacific identities, languages, and cultures in the everyday practices of schooling (p. 10).

They go on to describe some of the key outcomes from their research into this programme:

Tautai [Pacific principals and leaders] benefited from professional development in leadership that was underpinned by Pacific cultural practices and research methods. Aspects of Pacific educational leadership as wayfinding can inform directions for future TolM [Tagata o le Moana] cohorts. TolM shows that Pacific wayfinding leadership is a key lever in enacting system change, in partnership with families and communities (p.11).

While this presents a significant opportunity at the leadership level, I still hold strong concerns that Pacific teachers are overly relied on and often experience cultural taxation. This has also been the experience of Pacific academics in New Zealand tertiary institutions (Ahenakew & Naepi, 2015; Baice et al., 2021). As McAllister et al. (2020) state, “Pacific academics report cultural taxation when working in universities—repeatedly sharing stories of being overworked (p. 281). Another factor to consider when considering Pacific teachers and staff within schools, is the ever-growing cultural and ethnic diversity they represent. For example, a teacher may have Samoan and Cook Islands Māori heritage and be a second-generation New Zealander. While this can be seen as a strength, and as an inevitable reality in a diasporic country such as New Zealand, there needs to be care taken that they are not seen as cultural experts in every sense. Laumemea (2018) found that:

For some New Zealand-born Pasifika teachers, this was in fact a challenge for them in engaging with Pasifika families due to their lack of language and cultural knowledge. This is the reality for many Pasifika teachers as well as students. It adds to the complexities of Pasifika identity and highlights the importance of maintaining the Pasifika languages for these migrant groups (p. 53).

School leaders, who have a duty of care to both Pacific students and teachers, must seek ways to ensure that the school is mindful of these complexities, and provide adequate support. Key shift five in the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* aims to “Grow, retain and value highly competent teachers, leaders, and educational professionals of diverse Pacific heritages” (Ministry of Education, 2023a, p. 7). In this plan, it outlines several actions.

However, these are largely limited to the policy level. Many of the actions are aimed at the recruitment of Pacific teachers, as well as the implementation of programmes for professional development that limited numbers of teachers would be able to practically access. I find it concerning that it seems to be limited to a focus on the recruitment and development of Pacific teachers, while failing to outline how these teachers will be valued and cared for by the schools they work in.

Highley's (2023) research explores Key Shift Five of the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2023* by examining the lived experiences of a group of Pacific teachers. One of her key findings was that "support from senior management [was a] key enabler for Pacific educators feeling valued and happy in their role (p. 28). She lists several actions that typify this support, including:

Trusting Pacific [teachers]... Building strong collaborative and consultative relationships with Pacific [teachers]... Recognising and acknowledging Pacific cultural knowledge [of Pacific teachers] and supporting them to share knowledge and build capability of non-Pacific colleagues and school communities... Acknowledging and valuing the strong connections and knowledge that Pacific [teachers] have within Pacific communities... Checking in with Pacific [teachers] to see if they felt validated, valued and supported as Pacific people... Giving Pacific [teachers] opportunity to challenge policies and systems around Pacific learners and issues (p. 28).

Without this support, there is a risk that Pacific teachers will have expectations beyond their capabilities. They could be put in a position where they experience shame due to their inadequacies in front of the community and their colleagues.

In places like Canterbury, isolation and undervaluing of Pacific teachers could occur due to the sheer low numbers of Pacific students and teachers and the small size of the Pacific community around schools (Ministry of Education, 2023i). However, this could also be the case in other contexts across New Zealand, where there are higher proportions of Pacific or higher numbers. It could also be similar to the experience of New Zealand Māori teachers (Torepe & Manning, 2017). Internationally, examples can be seen in African American communities, where similar pressures are placed on African American teachers, who

experience cultural and other forms of taxation (Cadogan, 2021), or Indigenous teachers in Australia (Hogarth, 2019).

Creating, embedding, and sustaining relationships between teachers and Pacific students, in partnership with Pacific parents and communities, could serve to decentralise and disrupt the locus of control within schooling. Gorinski and Fraser (2006) outline various strategies that serve to support home-school engagement. These include employing staff to act in a liaison role, involving parents as tutors for educational activities, the provision of workshops for parents, improving communication and reporting, and ongoing collaboration between the school and Pacific parents. Teachers play a pivotal role in enabling these to occur in school settings. It is important to understand that “teachers bring a knowledge of education that should be shared with the Pacific parents, families, and communities that support Pacific learners” (Chu-Fuluifaga et al., 2021, p. 22). However, there are issues when it comes to power dynamics in the schooling of marginalised communities, such as Pacific, and their ability to achieve self-determination in education (Ahenakew & Naepi, 2015). There is a great need for schools and Pacific communities to be aware of these dynamics.

The challenge can arise when it comes to a school or community formulating and enacting a method of sharing or communicating, where relationships are valued and nurtured. It can also exist in determining what could or should be taught (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). In this situation, teachers often feel that they have no choice but to teach what they know and can be reluctant to explore alternative bodies of knowledge (Apple, 2012). They may perceive these as not relevant or even flawed.

Puloka Luey (2021), when describing community partnerships between teachers and Indigenous knowledge sources in Tonga and Vanuatu, describes the approach as “the essential doorway leading out of the colonial classroom environment and into culturally and ecologically meaningful learning experiences” (p.190). She goes on to state that “this pedagogical approach

may well be liberating for the teacher who is no longer expected to endure the pressure of being the sole source of knowledge in the learning community” (p. 190). This represents a potential shift in teacher attitude and practice, which, in a New Zealand schooling context, requires deliberate structural support from the leadership levels of a school.

Theme three: Pacific values

In my initial talanoa with Pacific leaders, the role and positioning of Pacific values within schooling was raised as a key concern. This resulted in a research question that sought to explore the role of Pacific values in the school environment. When I raised the idea of Pacific values in the talanoa groups and individual interviews, the participants had a significant amount to say. For the Pacific student and parent participants in this study, their familial and community values played an important role in relation to their cultural identities. They referred frequently to their families as a place where values were nurtured and sustained. This resonates with other prior research in New Zealand (Averill et al., 2020). Teacher participants noted that in their experience working with Pacific students and families, values were often a lens through which they could come to understand Pacific communities. They were able to enhance contexts within which they could build relationships.

The role of values in the New Zealand school system cannot be overstated. Many schools articulate their specific values and link them to behaviour, pastoral, and academic functions in their context (Shirley Boys' High School, 2023). There is an explicit section on values in the introductory section of the current New Zealand Curriculum which states:

Values are deeply held beliefs about what is important or desirable. They are expressed through the ways in which people think and act. Every decision relating to curriculum and every interaction that takes place in a school reflects the values of the individuals involved and the collective values of the institution (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 10).

The following values are then listed: excellence, innovation, inquiry, and curiosity, diversity, equity, community, and participation, ecological sustainability, integrity, and respect.

These values, and the quote above, have been re-articulated in the draft form of Te Mātaiaho, the refreshed introduction of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2023g). However, in this refreshed version of the curriculum (which is still in draft form at the time of writing), there is a vision for a more connected and more related curriculum. Dr Wayne Ngata describes this vision in a video commentary provided on the Ministry of Education website:

Te Mātaiaho is about strands. If we think about weaving, the warps and wefts of weaving, then that's what you're looking at when you look at the curriculum - that interplay between learning areas, curriculum areas so on and so forth (Ministry of Education, 2023h).

Te Mātaiaho itself, describes the way that values will operate throughout the refreshed curriculum and acknowledges the connection to the current curriculum, developed in 2008:

The content of the learning areas of Te Mātaiaho is value-rich and demonstrates what the values look like in each discipline. The incorporation of mātauranga Māori in all learning areas supports the development of values that give effect to Te Tiriti and its principles and are inclusive. The values [...] enjoy widespread support because it is by holding these values and acting on them that we are able to live together and thrive. This list was developed for the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum. It is neither exhaustive nor exclusive, but the values in it are to be encouraged, modelled, and explored (Ministry of Education, 2023g, p. 27).

This is a continuation of the way the New Zealand Curriculum has sought to link values with the identity development, for example cultural identity, and it appears that the Te Mātaiaho will strengthen this approach (McPhail et al., 2023; Siteine, 2018).

This focus on the role that values play in schools also reflects international literature, which sees the embedding of explicit values education in schools as important to effective pedagogical delivery (Lovat et al., 2010). However, while the New Zealand Curriculum states that students need to also develop their ability to “express their own values, explore with empathy, the values of others [and] critically analyse values and actions based on them” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 10). It leaves the question of student, family, and community values open. This leaves room for a significant gap in knowledge, on the part of school leaders and teachers. This gap in knowledge was a concern of the student and parent participants in

this research, who stated their desire to see teachers better able to understand different cultural expressions of Pacific values.

Parent participants in the group talanoa were explicit when they stated their desire to see teachers engage with Pacific values. Student participants also repeatedly emphasised the importance of their shared Pacific values. A student in group talanoa one stated:

We're able to see things from a different perspective [...] what we've been taught, the values that have been embedded in us.

This reflected how they saw themselves as a collective, with their shared values reflecting this. Students also described the ways in which they, as Pacific students in the school, viewed the official school values and were able to apply them in a way specific to them. This is an example of how Pacific education policy can be contextualised in schools.

The Ministry of Education's (2018) *Tapasā: Cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners* outlines the responsibility that teachers have when caring for students who may have different cultural values:

Teachers are responsible for groups of learners with histories, perspectives, values, and cultures that may differ from their own. These differences can even vary between each learner, in significant ways. This is the beginning of the development of the openness and reflection that teachers need to create relationships for learning with learners who have cultural knowledge, languages and experiences different to theirs. Knowing yourself is not only about identity and self-reflection it is to also understand ones' own biases, prejudices and actions of privileging (p. 7)

A practical application of Pacific values for senior New Zealand secondary schools is exemplified in the development of the Ministry of Education's (2022c) *Pacific Values Framework*. This was designed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Pacific Peoples NCEA Review Panel. This panel consisted of Pacific secondary school principals and teachers, as well as Pacific academics in the fields of Pacific studies and education. Their terms of reference required them to advise the Ministry of Education in the development of a revised NCEA qualification framework (Ministry of Education, 2024c). The *Pacific Values Framework* was developed to:

support teachers to build their capability to design programmes of learning that are inclusive and relevant to Pacific learners and contexts. It aims to support kaiako [teachers] to develop local curriculum that incorporates Pacific knowledges, languages, cultures, and identities as inherently valuable to the teaching and learning of respective subjects.

This framework is an example of how a lens of Pacific values can be used to explore teaching, learning, and assessment with regards to NCEA subjects. The resources provided apply the values of alofa (love), kuleana (responsibility), vaka (literally meaning canoe, representing wayfinding, innovation, and courage), vā (navigating relational space), and fonua (literally meaning land, representing belonging) (Ministry of Education, 2022c). An example of a Pacific value in relation to a secondary subject is vā in English:

In English, nurturing the Vā is celebrating the relationships that are created by using and appreciating language. This could include ākongā using their own understanding of the Vā to explore how text creators use language to show the complexity of relationships. Ākongā could also explore how language enables us to understand why characters have made decisions (Ministry of Education, 2022d, p. 3).

This example, and others, can be helpful for teachers who wish to contextualise Pacific values in their subject areas. However, as Veā (2023) points out, there can be challenges in aligning terms with translations, into English for example. She concludes that the Pacific Values Framework presents an opportunity to investigate correlations and connections between Pacific values and Western educational principles.

As discussed above, the importance of Pacific values has been emphasised in Ministry of Education Pacific education policy and strategy in the last three decades (Alton-Lee & New Zealand. Ministry of, 2003; Education, 1996, 2012, 2020, 2022), as well as in recent literature (Fonua, 2018; Hunter, 2021; Surtees et al., 2021). However, in a culturally and socially pluralistic community, understanding what giving support to cultural values looks like might be challenging for teachers. As Rimoni et al. (2022) conclude, while education policy mentions shared Pacific values:

...neither the policy nor associated resources delve deeply into how the values are considered, lived, demonstrated, or nurtured by Pacific people or how these can be enacted in educational contexts (p. 3).

This emphasises the importance of research which explores Pacific values in schooling contexts.

During each of the talanoa central to this research, I found explicit and implicit references being made by students and participants to the cultural values of Pacific communities and families. These sat alongside references to values of the dominant culture or school values, which determine, in large part, the way the institution operates. These school values shape the education that Pacific students experience at SBHS, and this can be observed at other secondary schools around New Zealand. There is a risk that the values that may play a crucial role in the lives of Pacific students, are constantly at risk being marginalised and sidelined. The voices of parent and student participants in my study have indicated that this marginalisation is one way that they see themselves as leaving their culture, or their own values at the school gate. The negative perceptions and stereotypes of Pacific achievement that currently exist, are thus perpetuated by the gap between the competing value systems. The generic approach a school might take when incorporating values in its programmes of teaching and learning, could inadvertently hinder engagement.

In the various talanoa that occurred, students were able to comment on the learning environments that they had experienced. They distinguished between the classes and activities that supported and gave visibility to values they aligned with, such as collectivism, service, and leadership, and those which separated them from meaningful cultural expression. Students also spoke of the loneliness that existed when they felt isolated from others who shared their values. Their description of this cultural isolation indicated the way shared values can foster relationships (Wilson, 2011).

Student and parent participants spoke about seeing and experiencing relationships based around values, while teacher participants described seeing this in their classes. It raised the question for me of how the values of an individual and a collective can be respected and made explicit within a diverse school classroom. There needs to be more visibility of Pacific cultural values in schools, and opportunities for them to be tangibly expressed (Averill, 2009; Fonua, 2018). For effective pedagogical practice, it is essential that their consideration and detailed planning by teachers, with students and community as co-creators (Lovat et al., 2010; Notman et al., 2012) .

Teachers and school leaders need to give serious consideration to the expression of Pacific values in a wider school context. Research should explore how Pacific values, ideas, and approaches to learning can enhance the student experience. The visibility of Pacific values in secondary school classrooms needs to be both practical and linked to the Pacific communities of the school. This could include integrating Pacific cultural practices into the curriculum, inviting Pacific community leaders to share their knowledge and experiences, and celebrating Pacific cultural events within the school. For instance, incorporating Pacific storytelling traditions in English classes, using Pacific art forms in visual arts education, or integrating Pacific history and perspectives in social studies can make the curriculum more relevant and engaging for Pacific students. Fonua et al. (2022) explored the explicit use of the Tongan values *mālie* and *māfana* in the tertiary-level science classroom. These values are connected to engagement, enjoyment, and success in the subject area—three aspects of schooling that any teacher should aim to support. Similar efforts should be made in secondary schools, tailored to the specific learning and community contexts.

Rather than adopting a tokenistic or superficial approach, which Banks and Banks (1995) describe as an additive level of cultural education, these activities should be seen as valuable by teachers and beneficial for all students, particularly Pacific students. By adopting

these approaches, schools can create an inclusive environment that recognises and values Pacific identities. This can lead to improved student engagement and achievement, as well as stronger connections between the school and the Pacific community. Teachers at SBHS and other secondary schools can support these initiatives by advocating for their inclusion within school programmes, curriculum delivery, and pathways discussions.

Schools need to explore and understand the differences and distinctions among Pacific peoples in New Zealand to understand Pacific values. While student participants acknowledged that the term Pasifika or Pacific serves as a unifying concept, it is evident that homogenising Pacific communities in this manner is inappropriate. This could be supported by building competencies across the various Pacific cultures. This should also include an unpacking of how these values relate to Pacific students with regards to their specific cultures. For example, distinguishing between Samoan and Tongan family dynamics, or Samoan and Cook Island perspectives of leadership. This should be determined by engagement with the specific Pacific communities within the school. Spiller (2012) warns about the risk of teachings having a poor understanding of Pacific values:

[...] teachers assumed the students' poor behaviour was caused by Pasifika values. Teachers' beliefs about Pasifika students' values determined the teaching strategies they used with these students. For example, they agreed that Pasifika students were not assertive in their classes. Unlike their palagi counterparts, they did not ask questions or ask for help. (p. 62)

Spiller found that this limited perspective of Pacific values and the influence that they have on student behaviour and performance altered the way that teachers taught. She goes on to describe the impact:

For example, teachers would avoid singling out students to answer questions, and minimised discussion so that Pasifika students were not “put on the spot”. Instead, they would quietly approach the students who they thought looked lost and needed help. Underpinning these decisions was a belief that the reluctance of Pasifika students to participate in lessons occurred when they felt uncomfortable because the work was too hard. In this situation, teachers would often reduce the amount of work they saw as acceptable to hand in, with the aim of helping students feel they had achieved the task. Teachers changed their lessons to make the work “manageable” in ways that lowered

the academic level the students worked at. Typically, they were working at Level 3 of the New Zealand curriculum, whereas Year 9 is usually aligned with Level 4 or 5 (Spiller, 2012, p. 63).

This supports the participant voice emerging from my research, indicating that teachers need a strong understanding of Pacific students' values to effectively teach them. The barriers that exist include a lack of leadership capability and confidence in cross cultural values, as well as an absence of Pacific community and family voice. Addressing these barriers could result in a strengthened partnership and improved pedagogical approaches, better suited to Pacific student needs.

Theme four: The primacy of family

The intent of this discussion is to reflect on the participants collective concerns about: i) the intergenerational connections in Pacific families, ii) the way students, parents, and teachers in the talanoa perceived the concept of intergenerational transfer of knowledge, and iii) the role that Pacific families might play in relation to schooling in New Zealand.

The Pacific students and parents involved in this study, saw the place of family as paramount. Student participants consistently acknowledged the intergenerational nature of their families in relation to values and their vision for the future. Both parents and students placed family at the centre of the world view that they were describing. For many of them, success revolved around this. One student in a group talanoa noted a key motivation factor being to “[make] our parents proud”. Some teacher participants also related the way they saw importance placed on Pacific family connectedness when it came to success. Teacher participants also agreed that family played an integral role for Pacific students and the Pacific community affiliated with the school. Many of the conversations that occurred within the talanoa sessions with all participants ended up linking to the importance of family and the way that they are often the centre of Pacific motivations and structures (Haua & Enari, 2023).

The way many Pacific students and communities generally understand family connections could be considered to deviate from a 'normal' or fixed definition of the nuclear family. For example, Fa'avae et. al. (2022) discusses the concept of intergenerationality in Tongan culture, which may resonate across various Pacific cultures. Fa'avae describes intergenerationality as connecting the individual to the much larger whole. This could be simply defined as extended family across multiple generations. However, for many Pacific peoples this extended family is linked to complex, intergenerational, and culturally embedded structures. There is often a critical link to grandparents and parents and the aspirations of previous generations are often a priority. There are also spiritual and genealogical components, from which a strong sense of belonging can be derived (Fa'avae, 2016; Ka'ili, 2005). The presence of a culture of intergenerational care and connection was expressed by many of the student participants. Several students commented on their desire to reflect the values of their wider family and to ensure they made parents and grandparents proud. There was gratitude for what they had been provided within this intergenerational family dynamic.

Many Pacific students and families in New Zealand continue to live in environments with intergenerational structures. A 2023 report into Pacific housing states that, "intergenerational living can be important for Pacific peoples, where grandparents, parents and children are able to live in the same household" (Statistics Statistics New Zealand, 2023). This needs to be acknowledged and recognised in our schooling. Support from schools for this intergenerationality has been shown to have benefits for language retention, identity, and relationship development (Cunningham, Jesson, & Wendt Samu, 2022; Fa'avae, 2018). While there are often challenges associated with increased engagement with intergenerational families, such as additional strain on family and teacher resources, there are also opportunities and strengths that can link to the educational aspirations of Pacific students and their families.

When Pacific students and parents in the talanoa discussed family, there was a genealogical consciousness (D Fa'avae, 2017), of which they see themselves a part of. There was a prioritisation of family and the values and aspirations that flowed from it. For example, several students indicated that their conceptualisation of the value of respect was centred on an understanding of their place within a family structure. The students also reiterated that their families wanted the best for them, had provided for them, and that they, in turn, wanted to reciprocate. All parent participants, meanwhile, desired to see the development of their sons at school, attuned to the success and aspirations of the family from which these boys emerged.

This confronts the historically-grounded, industrial nature of schooling, whereby the local hegemonic class creates and develops the student in its own image, with little regard for the cultural capital that Pacific students may bring with them (Bourdieu, 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Burke, 2005). Through this a disconnect is often created, one that can be detrimental to Pacific students. Instead of being supported to thrive, the student may struggle to find a balance between the individual pathway of success, encouraged by the school, and the aspirations arising from the family. While there are shared goals between Pacific families and schools, for example, academic success and positive tertiary and employment outcomes, there remains a significant gap when it comes to the achievement of these objectives. Parent participants in this study, while supportive of some of the structural elements within the school system, also highlighted the tension that can exist around this gap. This tension is something that must be consistently negotiated by Pacific communities.

It is important that school leaders, teachers, and boards have a strategic focus on connecting with Pacific families. This was suggested by the participants in this study and is supported by research conducted elsewhere in New Zealand and Australia (Gerace et al., 2023; Poumale, 2016; Timoteo, 2021). As discussed in Chapters 3, 7, and 8 it is also notable that school leadership teams and teachers are often frustrated with the lack of connection they feel

they have experienced with Pacific families. One teacher participant reflected on his own inadequacies when it came to engaging with Pacific parents. He talked about his “limited knowledge” when it came to Pacific cultural norms and cited that as a barrier. He also acknowledged that he needed to take the initiative to overcome this barrier.

Another example, experienced in many schools, is when there is a parent information or consultation engagement. Pacific parents and community members are likewise frustrated when engagement activities are conducted or structured in ways that do not work for them or reflect their needs (Flavell, 2023). This frustration could be due to social or cultural barriers, or even after previous negative experiences (Tuiloma & Jones, 2022). These systemic barriers were emphasised by parent participants, Samaria and Safina, in the group talanoa. They explained that it is difficult for many Pacific parents to come into the school and that there is often a feeling of shame. Particularly for older Pacific parents who might not feel as confident communicating in English. While schools try new and sometimes creative ways with which to approach family engagement, there has been a widespread failure to acknowledge and act on the reality that a one size fits all approach does not work.

Further research is necessary to explore the Pacific voice in schooling, aiming to understand the experiences and perspectives of Pacific parents across New Zealand. In various regions of the South Island, such as South Canterbury and North Otago, there are small but growing Pacific populations. These areas present a real potential to support schools and communities in building structural elements that benefit the entire school, including the Pacific community. The rapidly changing demographics in these regions offer an opportunity to evaluate existing models, eliminate ineffective systems, and replace them with structures co-designed with the community. Similar challenges can be found in Pacific communities in Australia, where research has been conducted into the alignment between home and school that could have parallels to this research undertaken in Christchurch (Kearney et al., 2011; Pale et

al., 2023). For example, Kearney et al. (2011) suggested the need for teachers and school leaders to “recognise and respect the significance of the family home as a site [...] that facilitate[s] school achievement” (p. 154). Efforts to do so “requires the collaborative effort of [...] families, teachers, and others in school communities to better understand each other, to work as partners, and with some role reconstruction based on shared understanding of what can and should be achieved and how so” (p. 155).

The findings from this research indicate that Pacific student participants consider family central to their notions of success and their future. Students in both the individual and group talanoa stated that the origin of their values systems were at home and in family connected places, such as church. This is consistent with research into Pacific migration realities and student perceptions of their parents and migration (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010). For example, Cunningham et al. (2022) found that intergenerational storytelling and associated cultural activities supported New Zealand Pacific families in sustaining the practice of their values. They state that “embedded within these conversations, [are] values and expectations [that] were expressed as reciprocal relationships with family members over time” (p. 137). This perspective is supported by Bronfenbrenner (1979), who notes that from an ecological perspective, values flow forth from family practices.

This is not to say that Pacific young people listen to every word that parents say, and that there are not issues of intergenerational disconnect present in Pacific communities. Mila-Shaaf and Robinson (2010) discuss New Zealand born Pacific peoples, and the idea of the second generation. This being the first generation born in New Zealand, as opposed to the Pacific nation that their parent or parents are from. Mila-Shaaf and Robinson discuss the potential negative outcomes for this group. Namely, “dismal prospects, adversarial outlooks and permanent poverty traps in environments with declining economic opportunities” (p. 4). This may be seen as a potential consequence of intergenerational disconnect, as well as the

influences of other post-migration factors (Lee & Francis, 2009). My research presented an opportunity to weave the fabric of family and school together in a way that works for Pacific communities. According to the Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities (2020), New Zealand schools have a responsibility to ensure that “Learners with their whānau are at the centre of education” (p. 1). They state that schools must:

Have high aspirations for every learner/ākongā, and support these by partnering with their whānau and communities to design and deliver education that responds to their needs, and sustains their identities, languages and cultures (Ministry of Education, 2020b, p. 1).

This is embedded within the Education and Training Act (2020).

The preliminary talanoa I held with Pacific community members to co-design the research indicated a desire to explore the relationships and partnerships that exist in and around schools. The consideration of the place of Pacific families, raised by participants in this research, is key to these relationships and partnerships within schools, which can exist internally and externally. It is critical that the dynamic that exists between teachers, students, and parents in a community, is interrogated. This dynamic is a complex web of individuals and communities. Present within this are teachers, parents, and students. Parent participants in the group talanoa in this research clearly stated that a collaborative, communication oriented, and culturally located approach was needed to navigate this. Some of the teacher participants, notably Teacher 4, also indicated the need for a structured way of building relationships and ways of working with Pacific communities.

While schools and clusters of schools, for example kāhui ako, continue to construct ways of working in this area, there have been nationwide examples that can be examined. These include two structured programmes which aimed to achieve strong partnerships between Pacific parents, learners, and teacher. Firstly, Pasifika PowerUP (Oakden, 2019) and secondly, Talanoa Ako (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021a). The Pacific PowerUP initiative was brought in under a National led government (Parata, 2013) and was described as follows:

Pacific PowerUP is an education programme that sits within Pacific communities. It is operated by Pacific people for Pacific people, to build the knowledge of Pacific parents, families, and communities about education and schools to support Pacific children's learning journeys. The PowerStations, or sites for Pacific PowerUP, provide academic support for learners from early learning to Year 13. They also provide culturally safe spaces that the Pacific PowerUP evaluations reveal to be resources that let parents and families champion their children and be more demanding of the education system. The PowerStations also foster significant changes within families so education as it exists in Aotearoa New Zealand becomes a priority that can be actioned (Oakden, 2019, p. 9).

The research that followed these initiatives, which, similarly to this research, centred Pacific voices, found that:

Relationships [were] reconfigured in positive ways so that respect and expectation inform how those involved interact [...] Thus, building the capacity of those involved in Pacific education, especially through developing the capability, voice, and knowledge of parents, families, and communities" (Ministry of Education, p. 9).

Another programme, Talanoa Ako, was introduced following the 2017 election of the Labour government, and had similar objectives, with a slightly different approach. It is a Ministry of Education programme "delivered in Pacific communities by community groups, Pacific churches, trusts, health providers, Pacific teachers, Board of Trustee collectives, and schools" (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021a, p. 4). The programme aimed to grow "parents, families, and community educational knowledge so they can champion and support their children's learning journeys and form partnerships with their children's schools to achieve Pacific success" (p. 4).

These programmes, primarily driven by Pacific communities, enabled key educational partnerships to be enhanced. A key outcome included a shift in the understanding of education processes, for example, in Literacy and Numeracy, NCEA, and pathways beyond school (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021a). These shifts echo the desires expressed by parent participants in my own research. School leaders and teachers can explore the approaches delivered in programmes such as these and seek to apply emerging themes to their own contexts. My research points to the need for schools to work in close partnership with parents in a structured and ongoing manner.

Part Two: Unique contextual factors and complex local factors

The participants involved in this study were able to bring their individual and collective experiences, knowledges, and contributions to the talanoa. As co-creators of a metaphorical *tīvaevae*, based in Christchurch, their insights are invaluable. They are precious both in and beyond their own lived environments, here in Christchurch and in similar settings. This context would hold some similarities that could be applied to other locations around the South Island, other centres in New Zealand, and internationally (see Chapter 2). This makes research focused on Pacific education in Christchurch, such as this thesis, important across a significant area of the country.

While there are similarities between Christchurch Pacific communities and Pacific communities in other centres across New Zealand, there are also distinctions that need to be considered. The cultural, social, and educational landscape for Pacific students in Christchurch is important to note. The Pacific community at SBHS is part of a wider network of school students, families, and communities dispersed across Christchurch City. While these communities are not homogeneous, they are connected in various ways. For example, historical and family ties, and contemporary community connections such as church groups and sporting clubs. This strong dynamic across Pacific communities in Christchurch was established in the mid-20th century (Finn, 1973) and continues to evolve, impacting on young people and students as they grow within them (Luafutu-Simpson, 2006; Siauane, 2006). The Pacific cultures of these students are celebrated in various external ways, both locally, in schools and communities, but also on wider scales across the city. Examples of local opportunities for students to engage with their Pacific cultures include school Pasifika groups, language week events, and church or sports club events. City or regional opportunities include events such as the Canterbury Polyfest (Gill, 2023), speech competitions, and large-scale sporting tournaments (Christchurch City Council, 2022). This socio-cultural landscape has comparisons

that can be drawn with other main centres. For example, every main city in New Zealand has a Polyfest of its own, and they have recently begun to be held in several Australian cities (Le Roux, 2022). However, these are driven by local people, and seek to provide local support and opportunities to express culture for the Pacific students of Christchurch.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, Pacific students in New Zealand schools can experience perceptions based on negative stereotypes (Hunter, 2022; Mayeda et al., 2014). As such, they can be academically and socially disadvantaged within the context of New Zealand schools (Allen & Webber, 2019; Hunter et al., 2016). For example, Turner et al. (2015) found that teachers appeared to have differing expectations of students, depending on their ethnicity, often resulting in a significant gap between expectation and achievement levels for Pacific students. These findings are echoed and emphasised by students in this research, with students stating and describing their own experiences in the talanoa. While certain challenges and barriers to success have been experienced, there was a strength and resilience displayed by students, perhaps unexpected to be so visible because of their small numbers. It is worth noting that their experience as a numerical minority with an identified and celebrated culture within the school has resulted in a community that has shared values that underpin ways of working together. This places importance upon specific ways of leading and fosters intergenerational connectedness. Participants communicated a desire to seek and retain a reciprocal relationship between children and adults. Whereas Pacific students may have a structured system of support within schools, parent engagement is far more likely to be left to chance. For example, it might depend on the degree to which they are connected to community initiatives and networks that support educational aspirations.

From the outset of this research, in the conversations undertaken in initial talanoa with Pacific leaders in Christchurch, an emphasis has been placed on relationships. I sought to explore the views of parents within a talanoa that perhaps could be viewed as opening the door,

or even stepping outside of it. My aim was to position myself as a listening researcher, receptive to Pacific parent voices which are often unconsidered, and perhaps face even more stereotypical assumptions than the students themselves (Allen & Webber, 2019). I heard from parent participants that research into Pacific parent involvement in the schooling system in New Zealand must be undertaken with care. Educators must engage parent voice with a view to critical examination of the ways we structure the relationships between school and home. As the talanoa revealed, these relationships are complex and are predicated on a stubborn and somewhat exacerbated power imbalance present in schools (Riwai-Couch et al., 2020). This is similar to the experience of other marginalised, migrant, and Indigenous peoples (Cajete, 1994; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Recent efforts undertaken in the context of the Talanoa Ako project, have sought to centre Pacific parent voice (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b). However, there is much work to be done to ensure that this lands in schools effectively and in a way that continues to acknowledge and benefit Pacific communities.

Teaching, like other professions that purport to have at their centre a desire to help and empower others, is one that could be considered to experience elements of marginalisation itself. Debates around pay and conditions rage on across decades (Beechey, 2019; Gerritsen, 2022), and a severe lack of teacher supply can exacerbate the situation (Gerritsen, 2023). While salaries are close to OECD averages (OECD, 2023), it is common to hear talk of teachers having an ever-increasing list of jobs within their one job—social worker usually topping the list. For beginning teachers in particular, the challenge of taking up the profession can be stressful and difficult (Grudnoff, 2012; Kitchin, 2023). When asking my colleagues to be part of this research, it did enter my mind that I was now asking them to put yet another hat on, namely one of being co-researcher alongside me. However, also in recent times, there has been considerable emphasis placed on teachers having some element of reflective practice. That is

the ability to identify ways to improve teaching and learning, based on their own experiences and those of their students (Benade, 2017).

In terms of their Pacific students, the consciousness of teachers as a collective will certainly have been raised in recent years, if not decades. However, there seems to be some way to go before we start to see widespread confidence when considering the needs of these specific learners (Turner et al., 2015). Teachers involved in this research reported high levels of admiration and respect for Pacific students, their families, and their cultures. They also acknowledged the stereotypes and the assumptions that still exist. Targeted support for Pacific students and families, both academic and pastoral, still seems to be primarily the domain of Pacific teachers.

Part Three: Implications of this research

This research holds various implications for a range of audiences, including Pacific communities, teachers, school leaders, school board members, policymakers, and researchers in local, national, and international contexts.

This research asserts that it is important for schools to enter meaningful dialogue with Pacific voices in their communities. This meaningful dialogue is a form of reciprocal collaboration where power is shared and a change in practice leads to a change in outcomes. For example, improved achievement outcomes for Pacific students, addressing systemic and personal racism that students and families might encounter and the strengthening of Pacific identities, languages, and cultures. The perspectives of Pacific students, parents, and wider community must seriously inform decisions that are made within schools. These voices can support school leaders and Pacific communities in building a more equitable and schooling system. Tokenism and other additive approaches, which conceal the real issues, must be critiqued and seen for what they are – an over simplified approach to significant challenges faced by Pacific communities.

Pacific students bring their ethnic and cultural identities with them into the classroom. This diversity is present in communities across New Zealand, as well as other diasporic settings, such as Australia and the U.S. (Gerace et al., 2023; Kim & Cooc, 2020). It presents an opportunity for integrated ways of teaching and learning. As discussed earlier in this chapter (9), the diverse nature of Pacific communities also means that there will be varied expressions of Pacific values, cultures, and languages. The participant voices in this study called upon school leaders, boards of trustees, education professionals, and teachers to broaden their thinking and their conversations when it comes to Pacific education. They saw the opportunity for changes to be made in active partnership with the community they serve (Ministry of Education, 2020a; Penetito, 2009; Taleni et al., 2018). Participants were clear that stereotypes and assumptions of Pacific students and communities are still firmly present in their experience, and that there is a need to continue work that eliminates these. All participant groups indicated that Pacific teachers and leaders play a key role in doing this.

Growing Pacific teachers and leaders

Participants in this research reiterated several times the importance of having strong leadership from teachers. The transitory nature of teachers (Winch, 2004) and challenges around recruitment and retention (Kane et al., 2006; Papay et al., 2017) is a reality that must be dealt with by school and government policy. This is a particular issue for teachers from Indigenous and migrant communities, for example, in New Zealand, Australia and Canada (McLean & Saqlain, 2016; Tessaro et al., 2021). This means that it is crucial for specific structures to be built into the schools' overall approach that ensure ongoing connection and relationships with Pacific teachers and their communities. These could include formal relationships to support the training of teachers, or the mentoring of potential candidates and early career teachers. Brown et al. (2008), in their research into the recruitment and retention of Pacific secondary teachers found that:

Reference was frequently made to the importance of mentoring by individuals of standing in the profession who had made career suggestions, or who had supported Pasifika [teachers] at critical points in their professional lives. A good mentor, it was felt, was someone who “sees your potential [which the Pasifika teacher may be sometimes too modest to acknowledge] and advertises it—someone who will bat for you (p. 21).

Without a focus on and care for the growth and retention of Pacific teachers, there is an ever-present risk that effective practice or change for improvement will only be temporary. Brown et al. (2008) also note that factors such as poor relationships with colleagues and being treated as the solution for any problems associated with Pacific students, are examples of reasons for “early departure” from the teaching profession (p. 5). What is needed to improve achievement outcomes or sustainably foster Pacific success in the school is consistency in the quality of teachers and systemic support for the growth of the Pacific teaching workforce in general.

There has been a growing body of academic literature examining different aspects of Pacific education, such as the place of Pacific values, identity construction and teaching practice (Chu-Fuluifaga, 2022; Pale et al., 2023; Rimoni et al., 2022; Wendt-Samu, 2015). However, there is little in the way of how New Zealand schools, particularly those in the South Island contexts, might frame an overall approach to improved practices for Pacific success. Schools in this context often have small, minority Pacific communities, which means that care must be taken to establish and sustain Pacific community engagement procedures.

Connecting the layers of the school

A key implication arising from this research is consideration for how the different layers of a school community might come together to effect transformational change for Pacific students and their families. This research, and the recent work of Pacific academics suggests that engagement with Pacific voices is important to be able achieve this (Alansari et al., 2022; Tuifagalele et al., 2024). I believe that this research aligns with other work that seeks to engage

the different layers that exist within the school system, both in New Zealand and the Pacific (Chu-Fuluifaga & Reynolds, 2023; Hunter, 2022; Puloka-Luey, 2021). There is a clear mandate for school leaders to engage in this way of working, as outlined in the *Action Plan for Pacific education 2020-2030* (Ministry of Education, 2020a), specifically in Shift 4 – “Partner with [Pacific] families to design education opportunities together with teachers [...] so aspirations for learning and employment can be met” (p. 9). The voices of participants in this research encourage school leaders to embark on a process of active listening and engagement with their Pacific community. This demands a shift in pedagogical approaches, curriculum design, assessment practice, and the social experience of Pacific students in schools. Ongoing dialogue would also look to ensure that the social, physical, and cultural environment within the school is receptive to the diverse Pacific identities, values, and cultures that enter the school gates. As this chapter and thesis draws to a close, it is necessary to briefly reflect on and reemphasise the important role that leadership plays.

In their research, listening to the voices of Pacific community leaders, Taleni et al., (2018), state that for the challenges that are facing Pacific communities, “according to Pasifika leaders, it will take true leaders in education to lead the voyage to safe destinations for lifting Pasifika success and achievement” (p. 178). They expand on what this leadership might entail in the following description:

an effective leader, a leader with high integrity (aloaia) and standing who is driven by culturally responsive principles, values, aspirations and world views of the students. Such a leader utilizes a personal approach of humanitarian with self-belief, courage, determination and perseverance to wholeheartedly take students from where they are currently at in learning, to where they need to be (p. 179).

This is a call, like those made in my own research, for those in our school communities to be driven by motivation for Pacific student success. The student, parent, and teacher participant groups articulated their vision of academic, cultural, and social success for Pacific students. They desired to encounter teachers who know and understand their Pacific students

and can relate to and teach them in the context of their identities and values. They expressed a desire to see a diverse range of Pacific cultural capital present and acknowledged throughout the school. They expressed a desire to see leadership that was not limited to the domain of the principal position or the senior leadership team. Although senior positions play a crucial role, a shift in the locus of leadership is necessary to support Pacific success in schools. Student participants spoke to the need for leadership to be distributed throughout the school, in its teachers, students, and parents, its values, the social and physical environment, and most importantly, in the *vā* that exists in the space between all of these (Airini et al., 2010; Reynolds, 2017).

Conclusion

The layering that has occurred in this synthesis and implications chapter connects once again to the image of a *tīvaevae*. I have called on this image to represent thinking in the way teacher-student-community relationships can exist in harmony. This layering in *tīvaevae* that occurs in relationship with the different hands that direct its creation, offers a methodological approach for Pacific education research, as well as praxis (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019; Te Ava & Page, 2018). In my journey as an educator, I have seen the necessity of being engaged and connected with community and student voices to shape an education best suited for the young people entrusted to the care of the school. Engaging in this research has involved a significant degree of conscientisation for myself, both personally and professionally.

This doctoral research underpinned the development of my own understanding of Pacific voices as they relate to New Zealand schooling, specifically in a Christchurch school setting. I have attempted to do this by interrogating ideas connected to school and community engagement, as well as questions concerning the identity development experiences of Pacific students at SBHS. The series of *talanoa* that was undertaken with participants resulted in a powerful interface with Pacific community and teacher voices. Like a *tīvaevae*, patterns have

emerged, giving rise to connected and recurring themes. These themes have included i) the importance of cultivating Pacific identities within the school context, ii) the role of teachers as drivers and champions of culture within schools, iii) the building and understanding of culturally contextualised and appropriate value systems within school, and lastly iv) the primacy of the family for Pacific communities and the need for schools to develop effective relationships with Pacific families.

These findings, which have emerged from the voices of the participants involved and connecting the themes to local and international research, offer a way of thinking about actions for schools to undertake and questions for teachers and school leaders to critically reflect on. Pacific voices need to be valued and considered in the structured education of Pacific students in schooling systems like New Zealand. There is a strong imperative for this in New Zealand education legislation and policy, including system wide policy such as the National Education Learning Priorities, and Pacific specific policies such as the Action Plan for Pacific Education. A wide range of research findings in New Zealand, alongside a growing body of literature from countries such as Australia and the United States, also provide support for schools to develop dialogic tools which conscientise teachers and leaders, supporting transformational shift in outcomes for Pacific students and communities.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Introduction

As a teacher and researcher of Cook Island heritage, I have used the *tīvaevae* research model (Maua-Hodges, 2019) to metaphorically describe the layering of my research participants' voices. This has helped me to identify recurring and contrasting patterns in the data; and to liken my thesis journey – as a teacher-researcher – to the creation of a *tīvaevae*. For example, during my analyses of data, I have occasionally sought to relate my vocation as a teacher to the Indigenous pedagogical processes involved in the production of a *tīvaevae*. Likewise, the metaphor of producing a *tīvaevae* has helped position me as a Pacific researcher and learner (see Chapter 3). This was because, as Powell (2023) rightly observed:

Metaphors are among the most powerful intellectual tools that we have in the Indigenous Pacific academy. Used well, metaphors allow many of us to convey the deepest cultural beliefs of Pacific peoples without belabouring the vocabularies of western knowledge systems that often fail to represent our world-views accurately enough to be useful to us (p. 41).

The purpose of this final chapter, therefore, draws upon the *tīvaevae* once more to help summarise my research journey and its implications. First, it describes the challenges that I encountered in undertaking this research. It then explores the key findings that have arisen from the implications of this research. These will be framed around the four recurring themes that were discussed in Chapter 9. Lastly, this chapter will reflect on future research possibilities and the contribution that this research makes to knowledge. With a final (metaphorical) stitch, to close this *tīvaevae*-like research process, I will conclude this thesis with a brief poetic reflection.

Challenges

As stated earlier, this section of the chapter offers critical reflections on the process of conducting this doctoral research. For many communities, the time in which I conducted this

research has been a time of change and challenge. This has meant exploring new ways of working, driven by change both in New Zealand and globally.

Being a teacher-researcher

In undertaking this research, I have had to initially position myself as a Pacific teacher employed by the school central to this study (as outlined in Chapters 1-4). I also had to be transparent with all research stakeholders about my roles as researcher and as a member of a Pacific community. I therefore had to consider how I could best manage any conflicts of interest to make an effective contribution to Pacific education discourse in Christchurch. As the journey unfolded, I became more aware of the complexities that exist in our Christchurch Pacific communities as they engage with the local schooling system. I was fortunate that in my own tertiary study and the first decade of my teaching career, I became part of a strong network of Pacific educators, community members and leaders. Some of these people participated in talanoa integral to the conceptual design of this research and its objectives. So, it pays to now pause, and to consider, again, the role of talanoa in this study.

Developing an understanding of talanoa

As discussed in Chapter 3, I needed to develop an approach to the research design and data collection processes that would best ensure the effective engagement of my diverse group of participants. I also needed to be mindful of the power dynamics in the talanoa and my positionality as a teacher. To do this, I relied on advice from parents and leaders in the community.

As discussed throughout this thesis, I have drawn on the work of theorists such as Freire (2005) to inform my understanding of the importance of dialogue and power dynamics that inform Pacific education contexts. This emphasis on dialogic practices, and the role they can play in creating more a more equal power balance informed my reflections on the talanoa

approach. As Gremillion et al. (2021) asserted, I too could see that "Power sharing between researchers and participants is a key element of Talanoa" (p. 45).

Alongside the exploration of academic literature, my initial talanoa with a variety of Pacific leaders and families (about the role of talanoa in their lives) gave me ideas and inspiration about how I could proceed. One good example of such a conversation was one I had with a Tongan family whose child attended Shirley Boys' High School (SBHS). As I was writing this final chapter, I reflected on the notes I made after that conversation six years ago. The following is an excerpt from those notes:

For Kalo (mother), talanoa forms an important part of the family's way of life. They talanoa about goals and aims and use it as a method of reflection in daily conversations. In the evening, in the family setting, it is used to gauge emotions and to let children bring up things. Talanoa is used to generate aspirational thinking in this family. Education is at the centre of a lot of what they think about, talk about, and do. It is a method of reflection – to ask the question "why" about a lot of things and try and "solve problems in a positive way". It is also used to share memories in a comparative way. In this way it is a platform for storytelling – comparisons between life now and "back then" (July 2018)

I found this, and other conversations about talanoa, valuable in terms of deepening my own thinking around the importance of dialogue. Although the practice of talanoa has nuances in the various ethnic, or family-specific practices about which I lack broad expertise, I wanted to relate to participants in a way that was familiar and comfortable, whilst providing a platform for us to share ideas and experiences. These initial conversations provided the tools to give my data collection a cultural foundation, drawn from the community surrounding the school. Another challenge I faced was a change in profession partway through writing my thesis.

Change in profession, leaving the research site

In June 2021, I was seconded by the Ministry of Education. I was eventually offered, and accepted, a permanent position as a Principal Advisor Secondary Transitions from October

2021. This meant I was no longer working at SBHS and had fewer daily interactions with that school's Pacific community. It did, however, give me more space and time to reflect on the research and particularly the nature of my former role as a teacher. By its nature, in participatory action research (PAR) the problems and challenges experienced by communities or participants are explored and solutions are formulated. After leaving the school, I have had to reflect on the ways in which I critique the system as a public servant, while remaining authentic to my desire to confront the issues associated with schooling with honesty.

The impact of Covid-19

My doctoral research began in 2018, just before the Covid-19 pandemic began. As a result, most of this study was conducted amidst a global pandemic that had local implications. Here, I will highlight two specific challenges the pandemic presented to my research.

Firstly, the restrictions around gatherings and face to face meetings made it difficult to arrange the talanoa sessions, and this posed a dilemma. On the one hand, I was unwilling to put people at unnecessary risk when vulnerable communities were trying to avoid contracting the virus, especially as the extent of this risk was unknown. On the other hand, I was unwilling to radically change my data collection method, for example to survey or conduct online talanoa, which has seen a rise in use since the pandemic (Fa'avae et al., 2022). Having reflected on the literature, I came to view face-to-face dialogue as important in nurturing the vā (relational space) between the researcher and participants (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012; Gremillion et al., 2021; Vaioleti, 2006). I took care to negotiate this time in a way that kept participants safe, but also kept talanoa face-to-face and as unrestricted as possible. For example, safety precautions such as masks and hand sanitisers were taken. Participants were also advised not to attend if they had Covid-19 symptoms. This resulted in fewer participants being involved than I originally intended.

The Covid-19 pandemic was often front of mind, largely as a result of the media coverage and unmissable changes to daily life. While there was some discussion of Covid-19 and its impacts during my talanoa with participants, I tried to avoid giving it too much attention. It seemed the participants were often grateful to have something different to focus on, especially as the mental toll of the pandemic was severe at the time of data collection. With further reflection, there is no denying that the Covid-19 pandemic affected my research. In hindsight, however, I would still have maintained a face-to-face approach as opposed to conducting talanoa online. While I was not able to interview as many participants as I had originally intended, my approach still yielded rich conversations. I suspect that this depth of data might have been difficult to replicate online, especially as many people, students in particular, were only beginning to experience online, audio-visual forms of extended group communication. However, in a perfect world, I would have welcomed the opportunity to extend the duration of my data collection in order to increase the number of participants involved (and collect more data).

Curriculum change context

A significant challenge to arise during this research was the changing political landscape and its impact on educational policy. My doctoral research began at a time when Jacinda Ardern's (Labour-led) coalition government facilitated the *Education Conversation*, a nationwide programme of consultation (Ministry of Education, 2024a). This extensive consultation resulted in a series of change programmes. These included, for example, the *NCEA Change Programme* (Hipkins, 2020) and the *New Zealand Curriculum Refresh* (Tinetti & Davis, 2021). Later, the 2023 election resulted in another significant change in educational policy direction for New Zealand (Stanford, 2024). Both the NCEA and curriculum change programmes were halted or redirected.

This political backdrop of policy changes and uncertainty limited my discussion in various ways. For example, the changes to the curriculum refresh programme have led to confusion in the education sector. While, the 2007 version of the New Zealand Curriculum is still current, it continues to be gradually replaced with the introduction of new curriculum guidelines. This started with the introduction of the *Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Guidelines* (Ministry of Education, 2022). The uncertainty about this gradual curriculum change made it difficult to discuss in relation to my participants' views on curriculum. Another example of educational policy change was the delay to some of the NCEA changes. The creation of Pacific Studies as a subject and the revision and extension of Pacific language subjects was an exciting proposition for many within the local Pacific community. While these subjects have now been delayed, Pacific communities continue to experience marginalisation in the schooling system. Hopefully, the following key findings of this research can contribute to addressing this well-documented problem.

Key findings

Pacific communities in most New Zealand schools, especially those beyond Auckland, are minority groups, usually comprising between 1-20% of the school roll (Ministry of Education, 2023e). However, most research in the field of Pacific education has been dominated by the North Island and Auckland specific context. As a result, my South Island-based research, conducted in a Christchurch (South Island) secondary school, holds findings that are of interest to school leaders and researchers, particularly those seeking to develop a broader understanding of Pacific education experiences in other diasporic contexts. This passage, consequently, summarises the key findings of my Christchurch study outlined previously (Chapter 9), to help readers consider “practical solutions” to challenges that might arise in places where Pacific communities often constitute a minority of the local population (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4).

Theme one: Pacific identities in the school context

The concept of Pacific or Pasifika identities was discussed in different ways across participant groups. Students emphasised the importance of their identity, for example, as Samoan or Tongan, while also acknowledging the power of a collective identity as Pasifika in the school context. They described this collective identity as providing a sense of safety and unity. Parent participants echoed these comments. Teacher participants described a diversity of Pacific identities at the school, which, from their perspective, had a lot to do with outward expressions such as performance. They also highlighted the way they observed Pacific identities evolve over time, in ways that were both similar and dissimilar to other groups or communities at the school.

The students and parents who participated in this research were primarily concerned that Pacific students often felt they needed to leave their cultures at the school gates. They believed that this contributed to the inequities Pacific students and communities often experience in education. Both student and parent participants emphasised the urgency needed to support Pacific identities in order to strengthen Pacific student achievement, engagement and overall wellbeing (Siteine, 2018; Tongati'o, 2020). Throughout our talanoa, we discussed improving teacher understanding of Pacific identities, consideration for the school environment, and a curriculum designed to meet the needs of Pacific students. This has implications for Pacific diasporic communities in other places. For example, in Australia, Pale et al. (2023) observed a need to deliver the Australian curriculum in ways that allow Pacific students to embrace their Pacific identities.

In my talanoa interviews with students, we discussed the school environment and how it could contribute to strengthening Pacific students' experience. As discussed in Chapter 6, it is important that learning spaces convey knowledge and contexts that resonate with Pacific students in both a social and physical way. In her Auckland-based research, Mauigoa (2014)

also found that schools must do more to ensure that the school environment reflects the diverse array of Pacific identities that the students bring with them from home. Pasese's (2024) auto-ethnographic research into Pacific identities in New Zealand classrooms also supports this perspective. Reflecting on her own experience at school, she states:

My cultural and ethnic identities were being moulded by not only those who I met in those five years, but also what I was being exposed to within the educational space [...] I was able to develop pride in my culture, seeing how positively Pacific cultures were being represented and celebrated in my school (Pasese, 2024, p. 58).

This exposure could involve the inclusion of tangible places or artefacts, integrated across school spaces. For example, artwork from different Pacific cultures or cultural practices relevant to the learning taking place (Lei, 2006). The student participants in my study emphasised that this type of physical or practical exposure is a way of visibly demonstrating the connection between the school's culture and the cultures of Pacific communities. Student participants were explicit that this was a way to strengthen a sense of belonging for Pacific communities within the school.

While I can see the value in the students' thinking, it is also important to highlight the risks associated with potential surface-level inclusion of visible changes to school aesthetics. This approach can lead to an appearance that things have improved or that Pacific engagement issues are solved. As discussed in Chapter 9, surface-level changes constitute an additive approach, which can lead to the assumption that there is no need for broader transformational change (Banks & Banks, 1995). The way the design or construction of physical learning spaces occurs needs to challenge assumptions and stereotypes about Pacific students and communities by sharing power with them. For example, this might involve a school's Board sharing power with Pacific students and communities to contribute to decision making around such initiatives. This could enable Pacific students and communities to lead projects that create physical spaces or design pedagogical and assessment approaches.

In turn, this power sharing could confront the reality of schools being places where the dominant culture or hegemonic class is merely replicated instead of challenged (Gramsci 1992; Bourdieu, 1974). As Bourdieu (1974) theorized:

The school [...] is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is to a social gift treated as a natural one (p. 19).

Here, Bourdieu challenges the assumption or myth that the school as solely a force for liberation, when in fact it is “a conservative force which owes part of its power of conservation to that myth” (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 27). Amongst other things, my research was designed to help participants to consider how schools can operate in this manner. Developing this understanding is key to conscientisation (Freire, 2005), and in turn, to the transformative behaviour of challenging the way that schools marginalise Pacific students and families and their identities.

Some of the parent participants described feeling separated from their Pacific language and families, usually experiencing shame as a result. This is not uncommon among first- or second-generation New Zealand-born Pacific peoples (Samu et al., 2019). The parent participants did not want their children to feel the same sense of shame and separation from culture. Hence, they also chose to discuss the school’s overall curriculum and the need for inclusion of Pacific languages. This, they believed, could enable students to connect and learn what their parents had potentially missed. The student participants, similarly, stated the need for policy decision makers to critically examine academic subject provision. They wanted to see priority given to the inclusion of Pacific languages and content that mattered to them across all subjects. This echoes Si’ilata’s (2019) call for the “creation of classroom environments that normalize and privilege multilingual children’s linguistic and cultural resources, and family knowledge systems at school” (p. 187).

Both the parents and students agreed that curriculum programmes grounded in Pacific knowledges, such as Pacific Studies and Pacific languages, would be helpful in supporting

Pacific students to maintain their familial and community cultures (Hunkin-Tuiletufuga, 2001).

This finding was not surprising given that Hunter et al. (2016) also found:

When teachers and educators drew on the language of Pāsifika students they provided rich opportunities for them to engage in learning and build positive identities. In contrast, when Pāsifika students and their parents were not able to use their home language their opportunities to engage, contribute and feel valued diminished (p. 202).

With this in mind, schools could co-design and co-create structures and systems with Pacific students, challenging dominant cultural norms and prioritising Pacific expressions of identity.

This finding also suggests that school curriculum leaders (i.e. those responsible for guiding teaching and learning), should be engaged in ongoing professional learning and development (PLD) programmes to learn about Pacific cultural content (Laumemea, 2018). This can help those leaders to integrate Pacific contexts across a wide range of subjects in ways relevant to their specific ethnic communities. This localised curriculum approach would likely reduce stereotyping and/or the oversimplification of Pacific knowledges (Ministry of Education, 2018, 2022c). This approach may also involve modifying existing events, such as assemblies, school competitions and celebrations, and other school events to highlight or be influenced by Pacific cultures.

The teacher participants, meanwhile, were open in acknowledging the problems they encountered around cultural stereotyping and colleagues' assumptions about Pacific students and families. They also described, with regret, the way that they, and their colleagues, could discriminate based on ethnicity or skin colour. They expressed concerns about the various labels that were applied and how biases about Pacific communities were held by teachers. While this relates to what the Ministry of Education (2020b) *National Education and Learning Priorities* refer to as “racism, discrimination and bullying” or “barriers to education” (p.1), it left me wondering what can be done to address these issues in Christchurch and New Zealand schools.

This research suggests that the use of dialogic approaches, in relation to pedagogy and relationships, could address the issues both teachers and Pacific communities face (Freire, 2005; Puloka Luey et al., 2024). The teacher participants felt a need for themselves and their colleagues to develop “in-depth, contextualised knowledge and understanding of their Pasifika learners” (Wendt-Samu, 2015, p. 130). Their voices called for teachers to challenge their own assumptions around Pacific students. Hence, the role of teachers was seen as critical to transformation.

Theme two: The critical role of teachers

Throughout this research, student participants highlighted the critical role that teachers played in their experience of schooling. They emphasised that the way a teacher interacts with Pacific students is important in developing a relationship. The students pointed out behavioural aspects which made teachers effective and resulted in positive learning or pastoral experiences. These included the use of humour, the way in which teachers expressed care for their students and their learning, and an appreciation of the values held by students. The students also acknowledged that the differences in the social or cultural environment from which teachers and students emerge could sometimes be a barrier. They therefore suggested it was important for a teacher to be able to relate to Pacific students by having some knowledge of their language or family background. This finding recalled the work of Chu et al. (2013) who also found that:

At secondary [schools], there is evidence that Pasifika students—more so than other cultural groups—report being more motivated when their teachers show they care about their learning (going beyond caring about them personally) (p.2).

While culturally responsive teaching practices need to be approached with caution (as outlined in Chapter 2), this research has found that there are opportunities to design classroom practices that align more closely with the cultures of Pacific students and their families. This can result in higher levels of engagement from Pacific students, and improved achievement outcomes (Bills & Hunter, 2015).

In my talanoa with teacher participants, we also discussed the professional role of teachers in relation to Pacific students and communities at SBHS. Like the students, they mentioned the role that humour can play in building effective teaching and learning relationships. This finding was unsurprising given my own personal experiences, and echoed the observations of Averill (2011) that “allowing for student and teacher initiated humour and laughter” can play a vital role in care-based pedagogical practices for Pacific students (p. 116). However, teachers also spoke about the difficulties that they experienced when engaging with Pacific students and families. At times they felt inadequate or intimidated, which they conceded, revealed a lack of confidence on their part. For example, several teachers expressed that they felt it difficult to contact Pacific families, for fear of getting it wrong, or breaking some unknown protocol. This anxiety can sometimes lead to a lack of action from teachers that only exacerbates the gap that might exist between Pacific families and the school (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b). In places like Christchurch, where Pacific communities in schools are small (and more likely to be isolated), there is an even greater risk of this gap. Hence, an implication of this research is the support needed for local (Christchurch) teachers to develop processes by which they can engage with Pacific students and their families.

All three participant groups (students, parents and teachers) recognised the special role that Pacific teachers played in their experience at SBHS. Students identified the presence of Pacific teachers as a significant contributor to Pacific students’ success and engagement at school. Parent participants, in turn, outlined the ways Pacific teachers had worked collaboratively with them and the wider Pacific community to support the academic progress of their children. They shared that these Pacific teachers gave them a sense of reassurance. For example, they explained how the presence of Pacific languages and specific cultural content in curricular/extra-curricular activities often depended on the presence of Pacific teachers. They

wanted this for their children. As Rio and Stephenson (2010) also observed, these parents believed that:

Pasifika teachers can play an important role in making schools successful for Pasifika students [...] In sharing cultural knowledge and understandings, they have created possibilities for cultural specificities to be appreciated and reinforced at the level of the school. [...] they hold the potential to create a shift in attitude, and thus to bring about wider transformation (p. 8).

It was clear from my conversations with the Pacific student and parent participants that teachers, both Pacific and non-Pacific, can collaborate to challenge the dominant culture in schools. As Bourdieu (2002) explains, the schooling system supports “the reproduction of the social structure by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital” (p. 17). A key finding of this study is that teachers at SBHS, through a process of conscientization (as described by Freire (2005)) have engaged in cycles of praxis that have disrupted aspects of this cultural reproduction. I am not the only researcher to have drawn this conclusion; in her experience as a senior leader in an Auckland school, Tui’mana (2022) also found that Pacific teachers are capable of “enacting quality practices that are responsive to the cultures of their students” and that “by advocating alternative methods, [they] challenge the dominant system” (p.4).

Teacher participants also spoke highly of the work done by Pacific teachers at SBHS. They described Pacific teachers as role models and an effective means for support for non-Pacific staff, which echoes recent research (Brown et al., 2008; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b). However, some of the teacher participant comments, alongside those of the students and parents, gave me pause for thought. Research has shown that teachers from minority communities, such as Pacific teachers in settings like Christchurch and the wider South Island, can often experience forms of cultural taxation (Padilla, 1994). This is a significant risk for schools to consider. My research shows that Pacific teachers are highly valued at SBHS. However, care needs to be taken that the needs of Pacific teachers are also considered in order

to avoid the cultural taxation of a vulnerable group within the teaching workforce. A limitation of this research is that only two Pacific teachers (myself and one participant) were part of the talanoa. Wider conversations and further research with Pacific teachers, in both North Island and South Island schools, would be beneficial to explore their needs and perspectives.

This research has significant implications for the teaching professions in Pacific diasporic settings with growing Pacific populations in some school communities in countries as New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. Similar research conducted in Australia has also found that “positive relational connections between [Pacific] learners and teachers” is a contributing factor for educational success (Pale et al., 2023, p. 8). Therefore, serious consideration must be given by policy decision-makers to the amount of support required to equip school leadership teams and teachers to engage more effectively with Pacific students and their families.

Theme three: Pacific values

Pacific student and parent participants in this research clearly stated that Pacific values play an important role in their familial and wider community contexts. They articulated a desire to see these values reflected in their experiences at school. For the students, their values systems were linked to senses of intergenerational connectedness (Cunningham et al., 2022; Fa‘avae, 2022). In this sense, service, humility, and respect emerged as three specific values that were prioritised by the Pacific students that I interviewed at SBHS. It was also clear in our talanoa that these students had a certain appreciation for some of the school values, which they had integrated into how they operated as a Pacific community of students.

This research has also revealed the need for increased effort to understand and integrate the values of Pacific communities at SBHS into curriculum design, delivery, and assessment procedures. As Hunter et al. (2016) argued:

By acknowledging and drawing on these values within educational settings, educators can enact culturally responsive pedagogical practices which engage Pāsifika learners and provide them with opportunities to achieve academically (p. 198).

A nuanced approach to incorporating values, and the epistemological/ontological roles they play in the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogies, is needed to understand how Pacific values might be expressed and embedded more effectively within the case-study school environment (SBHS). The parent participants felt that dialogue between SBHS and the Pacific community – including families, Pacific churches, and agencies – could play an important role in assisting school leaders, teachers, and other staff to develop a deeper understanding of Pacific values. This echoes insights from Paulo Freire (2005), regarding the importance of dialogue:

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them (Freire 2005, p. 88).

Freire emphasised that, “This dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one persons ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants” (p. 89). Hence, I can better appreciate the imperative for schools to critically examine their own lenses for appraising and incorporating Pacific cultural values. There is a real need for schools – like SBHS – to work with Pacific students and communities to support an expression of these identity-related values.

Because Pacific cultural values might seem too abstract to be useful, building effective relationships across cultural boundaries – from one school community to another – demands the creation of shared language around values at each site (Lovat et al., 2010). As Rimoni et al. (2022) have emphasised, it is important to develop deeper understandings of Pacific values across the education sector:

Understanding Pacific values and integrating these into teaching and learning environments is critically important for Pacific learners’ learning and wellbeing. Pacific values are fundamental to our education policy which demands improvement in

educational opportunities for Pacific heritage learners; however, there are varied interpretations of the values amongst Pacific and non-Pacific heritage people (p. 2).

A key implication of this research, therefore, is the finding that curriculum design, delivery, assessment, and evaluation procedures should be structured to encourage teacher creativity and innovation (i.e., in ways that enable them to also proactively engage with Pacific societies, cultures, and values). To support this degree of transformation (Freire, 2005), curriculum design processes should be inclusive of Pacific epistemologies and ontologies. This, in turn, would necessitate the valuing of Pacific languages and knowledges as suggested by Siteine (2018). However, it should be noted that this will require increased resourcing for communities to lead this work alongside schools (Malatest International, 2022). It will also require shared accountability, inclusive of all stakeholders.

Parent participants in this study expressed a desire to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ Pacific values whenever Pacific students engage with the school, such as in the classroom or with the school’s pastoral care system, for example, counselling. They consequently believed that a more multi-sensory approach to the incorporation of culture would better support their students to maintain higher levels of wellbeing. Other researchers have also concluded that the pastoral care of Pacific students within a school should be closely aligned with Pacific values (Barber, 2016; Filipino, 2022). This alignment could contribute to improved communication between home and school. For example, a method like talanoa could be constructed alongside Pacific families at the school and employed as a tool to enhance dialogue between students, parents, and teachers (Oldehaver, 2021). There would need to be careful consideration around the process of incorporating Pacific values, to protect against rigid or stereotypical expressions of values that lead to negative outcomes (Fuka-Lino, 2015). While there has been success with this approach in some New Zealand schools (Rimoni et al., 2022; Surtees et al., 2021), my perspective is that more work needs to be done in Christchurch and other South Island schools, particularly by teachers who have limited experience with the concepts (values) concerned.

Various iterations of Pacific education policies produced by the Ministry of Education have articulated the importance of incorporating collective Pacific values (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2012, 2018, 2022c). However, we must continue to reflect on the effectiveness and legitimacy of this approach. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 7, though these collective Pacific values can provide a beginning or a point of reference, there is a significant risk that their use will encourage a homogenous or generic approach to understanding Pacific experiences. There is also the risk that cultural essentialism will be unwittingly reinforced. Here it becomes important to avoid “the assumption that all members of a category of people share one or several identifiable, defining cultural features” (Alvaré, 2017, p. 34).

As discussed throughout this thesis, Pacific communities in Christchurch and elsewhere are diverse and heterogenous. While there has been a significant amount of research to support the viability of collective values (Hunter et al., 2016; Rimoni et al., 2022; Spiller, 2012), a critical approach needs to be taken.

National policy documents which urge schools to engage with collective Pacific values, for example, *Tapasā: cultural competency framework for teachers of Pacific learners* (Ministry of Education, 2018), have the potential to be a catalyst for positive change. However, they could be misused or even disingenuously weaponised against Pacific communities and/or teachers. This can occur if these values are co-opted by schools to maintain hegemonic practices (Gramsci, 1992), or given mere “tokenistic, compliance, checklist tick-off attention”, as Siope (2013, p. 40) explained in relation to the misuse of culturally responsive practice. My research suggests that more nuanced, community-specific, and proactive attention must be given to Pacific values in schools. The Pacific parents and student participants in this study were able to clearly articulate how the values of their families and communities could be ethically related to their schooling experience. They also repeatedly emphasised the pivotal role of family in enabling Pacific students to enjoy success.

Theme four: The primacy of family

The prominence of family was repeatedly expressed by the Pacific students and parents in ways that affirmed the sentiments of Rimoni et al. (2022),² who similarly found that “family and family experiences are key sources of security, identity, and achievement for Pacific people” (p. 36). For the student participants, this idea of family was intergenerational, related to many of their aspirations, and is still very much a source of values, language, and knowledge. However, parent participants expressed the challenges that they had experienced growing up. In some cases, their experience had involved language loss and a sense of disconnect from the cultural practices of previous generations. This is not dissimilar to the experience of many first-generation Pacific peoples in diasporic community settings elsewhere (Amituanai-Toloa, 2010; Matika et al., 2021; Samu et al., 2019).

The teacher participants also identified the central role of family structures within Pacific communities they had worked with or observed. One teacher referred to the actions of parents or grandparents who have migrated from a Pacific country, and the courage this must have taken. Another expressed admiration for the way some Pacific families had been able to retain their cultures and languages. Another teacher mentioned the way they had observed the centrality of family in the considerations of Pacific students in their classrooms. As Dyck (2021) suggests, the places from which ideas around success emerge amongst many Pacific peoples are significant. They relate directly to the knowledges and values of families and communities. She states:

In New Zealand, notions of success can be narrow and frequently fail to include relational, linguistic, and cultural funds of knowledge. From a Pasifika perspective, funds of knowledge, [...], are enacted in our communities through cross-disciplinary and relational experiences, with Indigenous creative knowledge holders being nested in our own family or community (Dyck, 2021, p. 6).

The participants in my study similarly agreed that strength-based success for Pacific students emerged from family involvement and connectedness in their lives, as well as the aspirations

they have for their family. My research findings affirm Dyck's (2021) proposition that the relationship between school and family is particularly vital for Pacific communities in New Zealand settings. Moreover, this research finding from a Christchurch school also has international implications, because similar findings have arisen from research with Pacific communities in Australia. For example, Paulsen (2018) found that parents in Melbourne Pacific communities often expressed concern about the gap sitting between their own experiences and understandings of school, and what was expected of them as parents.

In my research, and in other research conducted in New Zealand settings, Pacific parents have indicated the need for improved support in understanding curriculum and assessment. This is needed to better support their children on their future study pathways, and to enhance their access to Pacific language programmes (Riwai-Couch et al., 2020). Parent participants also highlighted that they often found it challenging to engage with the school in a formal sense. Key forums, such as school boards and other decision-making bodies are important ways in which families can contribute to how a school is run. In an Auckland study, Poumale (2016) found that Samoan board members in Auckland schools faced "particular barriers that [...] challenged them in their role". They "experienced resistance or even felt that they were not heard and felt frustrated" (p. 51). Reflecting on the experiences of Pacific school board representatives, Poumale (2016) added that:

Pasifika communities must not leave the responsibility of educating their children solely to the school but have voice to ensure social justice and to transform practice and outcomes for their students (p. 55).

While this might be interpreted as an aspirational perspective, significant challenges exist for Pacific parents and families in school governance settings. As long as Pacific voices are systematically marginalised, the importance of the role of families emphasised by all participant groups will continue to be disregarded.

Parent participants in this research called for entrenched or institutional activities in schools to be redesigned for the benefit of Pacific families. They called for meaningful dialogue about their child's progress, as opposed to traditional schools' formulaic modes of engaging with parents (i.e., 'meet the teacher' evenings). Research elsewhere has also found that these methods fail to engage Pacific communities within the school (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). A growing body of research also indicates that questions around Pacific parents' preferences and aspirations for their children are often treated as irrelevant, because many school leaders and teachers continue to engage primarily with the parental preferences of the dominant culture (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021b; Thaman, 2008b) .

My research, however, suggests that collaboration with Pacific families to create spaces for intergenerational engagement could support improved engagement and dialogue between home and school. Reflecting on my own experience as a teacher, I can see that embedded traditional engagement systems in schools not only hold back Pacific families from engaging with their child's education, but also prevent teachers (non-Pacific and Pacific) from being able to respectfully and reciprocally engage in dialogue that may transform the educational outcomes of many Pacific students. As a result, I can see many opportunities for future research to explore.

Future research possibilities

There are several outstanding research possibilities that could be explored in South Island school settings, where there are growing and emerging Pacific populations. Christchurch is the second largest city in New Zealand, and as such, it represents a significant proportion of the Pacific population in the South Island. However, it cannot be assumed that the experiences of Pacific communities in large, urban centres like Christchurch align with those in smaller, more isolated towns and cities. Populations, such as the growing Tongan community in Ōamaru, or the Cook Island community in Ashburton, have emerged relatively recently and will experience

unique opportunities and challenges. Hence, more research needs to be undertaken, preferably by or alongside these communities.

Future research could also explore the relationship between Pacific peoples and New Zealand Māori in Christchurch and South Island schools. Currently, there is a dearth of literature in this area. Further research could yield fruitful information for schools and their affiliated Māori and Pacific communities. Many Pacific students have New Zealand Māori whakapapa (genealogical connections). There is often confusion or ignorance among school leaders about how to engage the specific, relational space or *vā* that exists between Māori and Pacific students and families. Research into the dynamics between these heterogenous groups within a range of South Island schoolings context could serve to improve curriculum design, delivery, assessment, and course evaluation processes for the benefit of the students, schools, hapū, iwi, hāpori Māori (i.e., non-local Māori communities) and Pacific communities. This in turn could support positive relationships between Māori and Pacific groups within schools, in ways that improve academic achievement and social outcomes for both intersecting communities. In many Christchurch schools, students may have already begun to explore these relationships, and future research should look to prioritise recording student and familial voices. I would also recommend that research be undertaken in consultation with Māori and Pacific academics alongside leaders from their respective communities. In a Christchurch/Canterbury context, this could include collaboration with the Ngāi Tahu iwi, principal tribe of the South Island (except Te Tau Ihu – the top of the South Island), associated local hapū rūnanga (tribal councils), and whānau (extended family) networks. In terms of Pacific communities, a variety of groups, for example, community, education, and church-based, have been identified and discussed throughout this thesis.

My research has also revealed the need to examine the experiences and needs of school leaders and teachers beyond Christchurch, in a range of other (urban and rural) South Island

schools. In my study, the teacher participants repeatedly expressed their desire to develop more effective ways of engaging with Pacific students and families (see discussion in Chapter 8). However, we cannot assume that all other South Island schools have the same needs. Further place-based research is therefore needed to explore how teachers can position themselves, as professionals, in relation to Pacific students and families from one school community to another. It could also look for ways that teachers and school leaders can develop localised curriculum design and delivery models to improve their understanding of Pacific communities in and around the wide range of South Island (rural and urban) schools. Writing from an American diasporic perspective, Lei (2006) explores this idea:

Educators need to be aware that immigration experiences can affect [Pacific] students differently, that students and their families may have different types of relationships with their native countries, and that these experiences and relationships shape the students' views toward their position in [...] schools and society (p. 93).

Pacific communities continue to evolve and change. Research into Pacific cultural and knowledge systems could offer practical (i.e., localised, place-conscious) insights into supporting Pacific student success from school to school. As a result, establishing or building on existing relationships in Pacific nations holds the potential to form a rich avenue for future research and collaboration initiatives.

Contribution to knowledge

Over the last three decades, a growing body of literature has explored the schooling experiences of Pacific communities (Chu-Fuluifaga et al., 2021; Chu et al., 2013). Research has explored: (i) Pacific values systems (Hunter, 2021; Rimoni et al., 2022); (ii) the impact of systemic racism (Chu-Fuluifaga et al., 2021); (iii) the role of the teaching profession (Brown et al., 2008; Reynolds, 2019; Rio, 2017) and, (iv) Pacific parent and community engagement (Cunningham et al., 2022; Riwai-Couch et al., 2020). This has resulted in the development of policies and strategic plans on a national scale, as well as school-led initiatives and community efforts at the local level.

My research, involving the Pacific community affiliated to SBHS in Christchurch, New Zealand, has contributed to the international literature discourse by addressing Christchurch as a diasporic context of Pacific education research. This research was co-designed and engaged Pacific students, parents, and their teachers. I have demonstrated that the findings of this study are similar and dissimilar to those found elsewhere in New Zealand and the wider world.

This research has highlighted that schools and Pacific communities across New Zealand still struggle to establish respectful and reciprocal relationships (Tuifagalele et al., 2024). These relationships “require a level of power sharing and include challenging educational hierarchies” (Tuifagalele et al., 2024, p. 12). Systemic racism, ineffective pedagogical practices and a variety of socio-economic factors are still leading to poor outcomes, both academic and social, for Pacific students in New Zealand and elsewhere (Daniell, 2018; New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2024).

My research suggests that actively listening to Pacific student and parent voices in a focused and prioritised way could help address the injustices many Pacific students experience in education. Additionally, engaging in meaningful dialogue with teachers about education in a deliberate manner may further contribute to resolving these issues. Pacific student and parent participants in this research identified and analysed issues confronting their Pacific community, and they proposed solutions. The teacher participants, in turn, wrestled with similar issues and were prepared to ask hard questions of themselves and their colleagues.

If Pacific communities are to experience educational success in Christchurch, New Zealand, and other schooling systems that host Pacific diaspora communities, it is vital that hegemonic systems are questioned. Otherwise, schooling systems may continue to automatically reproduce the dominant cultural capital and class structures already entrenched, (as suggested by the works of Bourdieu (1974), Freire (2005), Siteine (2010), Hunter et al. (2016) and Nakhid (2009)). This suggests that there need to be structured and embedded ways

for a critical, more transformative approach to be embedded to enhance of Pacific educational outcomes – locally, nationally, and internationally. My research found that encouraging Pacific identities and values within the SBHS school context can strengthen Pacific student achievement, engagement, and overall wellbeing. These constructs of identity and interpretations of values are, however, specific to that context (SBHS). Hence, it is vital that further research is conducted in ways that are place conscious – to allow for the exploration of differing school communities’ constructs of identity and their interpretations of rich cultural concepts or values. This is preferable to a one-size-fits-all (standardised) or tokenistic approach to Pacific education. My study contributes a localised approach by exploring how recent research elsewhere in New Zealand and abroad can contribute to a local school’s understanding of power-sharing with its Pacific students and communities. Ultimately, I have found that, at the very least, this will require SBHS (and other Christchurch schools) to be receptive to hearing the voices of their Pacific students and families. This, in turn would require ongoing, proactive initiatives that are fully committed to building the sorts of relationships from which transformation can arise (Chu-Fuluifaga & Reynolds 2023; Pasese, 2024).

Conclusion

This research aimed to amplify Pacific voices alongside the voices of their teachers in a Christchurch secondary school setting. I set out to explore what the voices of Pacific students and their families articulated around desired areas of growth and development at SBHS with regards to Pacific success. My research design offers an adaptable model for Pacific teachers and researchers, as well as the diverse range of school leaders, to explore Pacific education and community engagement with schools. Moreover, this research design supports each school to understand their Pacific communities to encourage the success of their students. The process by which I worked with participants was underpinned by Pacific methodology dialogical

principles, including respect, reciprocity, and relationality (E Tualaulelei & J McFall-McCaffery, 2019).

The findings from this research has practical applications to SBHS and the Christchurch Pacific community. While not necessarily unique in its scope, this study has broken new ground in New Zealand's second largest city. Yet, the smaller Pacific populations of the South, as well as those in diasporic communities in places like Australia and the United States, also need their voices to be amplified. Internationally, this research relates the experiences of my research participants to those in other Pacific diasporic communities in Pacific Rim countries. As several student participants emphatically stated in the initial stages of our talanoa, there is strength in unity and in the collective. This research has sought to contribute to this unity, and the wider collective of Pacific peoples who have left their homelands in search of a more secure future.

Afterword

Like a metaphorical *tīvaevae*, serving as a gift and a legacy, I have stitched together the layers of this thesis alongside the voices of the participants. It now enters the ‘*akairianga* phase, to be viewed and evaluated. I repeat the words of Mama Teremoana, who called for the *tīvaevae* research model to be used to “manifest new knowledge, using the wisdom of others” (Maua-Hodges, 2019). Throughout this research, I was guided by the values of *tīvaevae* creation and the values of my own family and faith. I opened this thesis with a poem by Cook Island poet Kauraka Kauraka, which reflected the excitement of embarking on the journey and the action I was about to undertake. I close it with a second poem, a twin to the first. *E Rere* (Fly) speaks of the completion of the work and the flight of the *tavake* (tropic bird). A beautiful image, laden with satisfaction and hope for the future. I now complete this research with this poem to express my hope that the voices of Pacific communities, and those in the teaching profession, will be taken seriously and valued for the treasures they are:

E Rere

*E rere e taku tavake
Kua anga tā'au moe, e rere
E 'apai atu koe ki Havaiki
Te kōrero o tēia kāinga
Te rongō o taku tīvaevae
Me kura te rangi i te 'ai ai
Ka mā'ara au iā koe*

Fly my tropical bird
Your sleeping is done so fly
Take with you to Havaiki
the stories of our home
the fame of my *tīvaevae*
when the sky turns red
I will remember you

(Kauraka Kauraka from *Rongokea*, 2001)

Poem reprinted with the permission of Joy Tereora & Bridget Kauraka

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics approval letter, University of Canterbury



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: 2020/09/ERHEC

18 May 2020

Joseph Houghton
School of Teacher Education
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Joseph

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal “Empowering Pasifika Voice in Christchurch Secondary Education” has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your emails of 13th and 17th May 2020.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

pp. *R. Robinson*

Dr Patrick Shepherd
Chair
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee

Please note that ethical approval relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research.

F E S

Appendix B: Information sheet and assent form for student participants



College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
January 30, 2020
ERHEC Ref: 2020/09/ERHEC

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Information Sheet for Student Participants

My name is Joseph Houghton and I am a PhD student at the University of Canterbury currently undertaking research for my doctoral studies. The purpose of this research is collecting and examining Pasifika voice in a Christchurch secondary school and its community. The research will consist of a series of focus groups and individual interviews with students, teachers, parents/caregivers and members of Shirley Boys' High School Pasifika community.

You have been approached to take part in this study because you are a Pasifika student at Shirley Boys' High School.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will be involvement in one focus group session, which will range from 1-2 hours, as well as the possibility of an individual interview if appropriate. The focus groups will consist of the researcher and 6-8 students. Data will be recorded by an audio recording device and by my own notes.

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures there are risks of a social and cultural nature. This research will rely on a strong relationship between the researcher and the school, students and the parents/caregivers of the students involved. Issues can arise when conducting research with colleagues, children, and community members and these risks will be minimized by creating a safe, inclusive environment where some expectations will be co-created by the researcher and the students involved. An open talanoa method will be used as part of the focus groups and interviews. Time will be spent at the start of these processes so you feel comfortable to be part of them.

Other considerations to lessen risks include,

- The location of interviews for students – they will not occur in formal settings at school, but either informal settings or offsite where students are safe and comfortable.
- The establishment of a respectful relationship between the researcher and the students, where any questions or worries from the students are listened to and resolved.
- Communication of the research and initial contact with students, where full detail is given to you.
- Communication of the research and initial contact with Pasifika academics and determining an appropriate interview process.
- The possible use of a neutral third party as part of the interview/focus group process.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts in September 2020, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results.

The researcher has intentions of publishing the results in this study in academic journals and conference presentations, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public without your prior consent. Anonymity is not possible for this research because students will be part of focus groups which will delve into who they are and will be

Joseph Houghton

conducted in a group setting. In order to protect their identity, students will be given a false name in the research findings section. Data with identifying and non-identifying information from the research will be securely stored on the password protected UC secure server for 10 years following the study. It will then be destroyed. Only the researcher, transcriber (yet to be determined) and supervisors will have access to the data. Hard copy data will be secured in a locked storage unit onsite at UC until it is digitized and no longer required.

The thesis that will be produced is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

Please indicate to the researcher on the assent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for my doctoral studies under the supervision of Dr Richard Manning, who can be contacted at Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz. He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and students should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the assent form and return it to Joseph Houghton.

College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Assent Form for Student Participants

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- I understand that participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable. However, I understand that after September 2020 it will become difficult to remove my influence on the data collected.
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and transcriber and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library
- I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Joseph Houghton (0274217743 joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor, Dr Richard Manning Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- I understand that for additional support, I am able to approach the school counsellor Mr Steve Shaw sps@shirley.school.nz (for students) and the UC Kaiarahi Pasifika Tufulasi Taleni Tufulasi.taleni@canterbury.ac.nz (for community members).
- I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Which cultural/ethnic background(s) do you identify with _____

Email address : _____

Please make sure this form is returned to Joseph Houghton either by scanning and emailing it to him at jbh@shirley.school.nz or dropping it at the school office.

Appendix C: Information sheet and consent form for parents/caregivers of student participants



College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
January 30, 2020
ERHEC Ref: 2020/09/ERHEC

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Information Sheet for Parents/Caregivers

My name is Joseph Houghton and I am a PhD student at the University of Canterbury currently undertaking research for my doctoral studies. The purpose of this research is collecting and examining Pasifika voice in a Christchurch secondary school and its community. The research will consist of a series of focus groups and individual interviews with students, teachers, parents/caregivers and members of Shirley Boys' High School Pasifika community.

Your son has been selected as a student participant for this research.

If you allow your son to take part in this study, his involvement in this project will be as a participant in one focus group session, which will range from 1-2 hours, as well as the possibility of an individual interview if appropriate. The focus groups will consist of the researcher and 6-8 participants. Data will be recorded by an audio recording device and by my own notes.

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures there are risks of a social and cultural nature. This research will rely on a strong relationship between the researcher and the school, participants and the parents/caregivers of the children involved. Issues can arise when conducting research with colleagues, children, and community members and these risks will be minimized by creating a safe, inclusive environment where some expectations will be co-created by the researcher and the participants. An open talanoa method will be used as part of the focus groups and interviews. Time will be spent at the start of these processes so your son is comfortable to be part of them.

Other considerations to lessen risks include,

- The location of interviews for students, parents/caregivers and community members – they will not occur in formal settings at school, but either informal settings or offsite where students are safe and comfortable.
- The establishment of a respectful relationship between the researcher and the participants, where any questions or worries from the participants are listened to and resolved.
- Communication of the research and initial contact with parents/caregivers, where full detail is given to you.
- Communication of the research and initial contact with Pasifika academics and determining an appropriate interview process.
- The possible use of a neutral third party as part of the interview/focus group process.

Participation is completely voluntary and he has the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. He may ask for his raw data to be returned or destroyed at any point. If he withdraws, I will remove information relating to him. However, once analysis of raw data starts in September 2020, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of his data on the results.

The researcher has intentions of publishing the results in this study in academic journals and conference presentations, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation:

securely stored on the password protected UC secure server for 10 years following the study. It will then be destroyed. Only the researcher, transcriber (yet to be determined) and supervisors will have access to the data. Hard copy data will be secured in a locked storage unit onsite at UC until it is digitized and no longer required.

The thesis that will be produced is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for my doctoral studies under the supervision of Dr Richard Manning, who can be contacted at Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz. He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return it to Joseph Houghton.

College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Consent Form for Parents/caregivers

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of my son if I agree to him taking part in the research.
- I understand that participation is voluntary, and that my son may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information he has provided should this remain practically achievable. However, I understand that after September 2020 it will become difficult to remove his influence on the data collected.
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and transcriber and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library
- I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- I understand the risks associated with my son taking part and how they will be managed.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Joseph Houghton (0274217743 joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor, Dr Richard Manning Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Which cultural/ethnic background(s) do you identify with _____

Email address : _____

Please make sure this form is returned to Joseph Houghton either by scanning and emailing it to him at jbh@shirley.school.nz or dropping it at the school office.

Appendix D: Information sheet and consent form for Shirley Boys' High

School teacher participants



College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
January 30, 2020
ERHEC Ref: 2020/09/ERHEC

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Information Sheet for Teacher Participants

My name is Joseph Houghton and I am a PhD student at the University of Canterbury currently undertaking research for my doctoral studies. The purpose of this research is collecting and examining Pasifika voice in a Christchurch secondary school and its community. The research will consist of a series of focus groups and individual interviews with students, teachers, parents/caregivers and members of Shirley Boys' High School Pasifika community.

You have been approached to take part in this study because you are a teacher at Shirley Boys' High School and I wish to include teacher voice as part of this study.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will be involvement in one focus group session, which will range from 1-2 hours, as well as the possibility of an individual interview if appropriate. The focus groups will consist of the researcher and 6-8 participants. Data will be recorded by an audio recording device and by my own notes.

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures there are risks of a social and cultural nature. This research will rely on a strong relationship between the researcher and the school, participants and the parents/caregivers of the children involved. Issues can arise when conducting research with colleagues, children, and community members and these risks will be minimized by creating a safe, inclusive environment where some expectations will be co-created by the researcher and the participants. An open talanoa/open dialogue method will be used as part of the focus groups and interviews. Time will be spent explaining this at the start of these processes, so you feel comfortable to be part of them.

Other considerations to lessen risks include,

- The establishment of a respectful relationship between the researcher and the participants, where any questions or worries from the participants are listened to and resolved.
- Communication of the research and initial contact with teachers, where full detail is given to you.
- Communication of the research and initial contact with Pasifika academics and determining an appropriate interview process.
- The possible use of a neutral third party as part of the interview/focus group process.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts in September 2020, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results.

The researcher has intentions of publishing the results in this study in academic journals and conference presentations, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public without your prior consent. Anonymity is not possible for this research because participants will be part of focus groups which will delve into who they are and will be conducted in a group setting. In order to protect their identity, participants will be given a false name in the research findings section. Data with identifying and non-identifying information from the research will be

securely stored on the password protected UC secure server for 10 years following the study. It will then be destroyed. Only the researcher, transcriber (yet to be determined) and supervisors will have access to the data. Hard copy data will be secured in a locked storage unit onsite at UC until it is digitized and no longer required.

The thesis that will be produced is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for my doctoral studies under the supervision of Dr Richard Manning, who can be contacted at Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz. He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return it to Joseph Houghton.

College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Consent Form for Teacher Participants

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- I understand that participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable. However, I understand that after September 2020 it will become difficult to remove my influence on the data collected. .
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and transcriber and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library
- I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Joseph Houghton (0274217743 joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor, Dr Richard Manning Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- I understand that for additional support, I am able to approach the school counsellor Mr Steve Shaw sps@shirlev.school.nz (for students) and the UC Kaiarahi Pasifika Tufulasi Taleni Tufulasi.taleni@canterbury.ac.nz (for community members).
- I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Which cultural/ethnic background(s) do you identify with _____

Email address : _____

Please make sure this form is returned to Joseph Houghton either by scanning and emailing it to him at jbh@shirlev.school.nz or putting it in his pigeonhole.

Appendix E: Information sheet and consent form for Shirley Boys' High School Pacific Parent/Community Member Participants



College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
January 30, 2020
ERHEC Ref: 2020/09/ERHEC

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Information Sheet for Pasifika Community Member Participants

My name is Joseph Houghton and I am a PhD student at the University of Canterbury currently undertaking research for my doctoral studies. The purpose of this research is collecting and examining Pasifika voice in a Christchurch secondary school and its community. The research will consist of a series of focus groups and individual interviews with students, teachers, parents/caregivers and members of Shirley Boys' High School Pasifika community.

You have been approached to take part in this study because you are a member of the Shirley Pasifika community (for example, parent/caregiver or family member of a Pasifika student at Shirley Boys' High School) and I wish to include our community voice as part of this study.

If you wish to take part in this project you will be a participant in one focus group session, which will range from 1-2 hours, as well as the possibility of an individual interview if appropriate. The focus groups will consist of the researcher and 6-8 participants. Data will be recorded by an audio recording device and by my own notes.

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures there are risks of a social and cultural nature. This research will rely on a strong relationship between the researcher and the school, participants and the parents/caregivers of the children involved. Issues can arise when conducting research with colleagues, children, and community members and these risks will be minimized by creating a safe, inclusive environment where some expectations will be co-created by the researcher and the participants. An open talanoa method will be used as part of the focus groups and interviews. Time will be spent at the start of these processes so your son is comfortable to be part of them.

Other considerations to lessen risks include,

- The location of interviews for students, parents/caregivers and community members – they will not occur in formal settings at school, but either informal settings or offsite where students are safe and comfortable.
- The establishment of a respectful relationship between the researcher and the participants, where any questions or worries from the participants are listened to and resolved.
- Communication of the research and initial contact with parents/caregivers, where full detail is given to you.
- Communication of the research and initial contact with Pasifika academics and determining an appropriate interview process.
- The possible use of a neutral third party as part of the interview/focus group process.

Participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for his raw data to be returned or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts in September 2020, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of his data on the results.

The researcher has intentions of publishing the results in this study in academic journals and conference presentations, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public without your prior consent. Anonymity is not possible for this research because participants will be part of focus groups which will delve into who they are and will be conducted in a group setting. In order to protect their identity, participants will be given a false name in the research findings section. Data with identifying and non-identifying information from the research will be securely stored on the password protected UC secure server for 10 years following the study. It will then be destroyed. Only the researcher, transcriber (yet to be determined) and supervisors will have access to the data. Hard copy data will be secured in a locked storage unit onsite at UC until it is digitized and no longer required.

The thesis that will be produced is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for my doctoral studies under the supervision of Dr Richard Manning, who can be contacted at Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz. He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participating in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return it to Joseph Houghton.

College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Consent Form for Parent/Pacific Community Member Participants

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- I understand that participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable. However, I understand that after September 2020 it will become difficult to remove my influence on the data collected. .
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and transcriber and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library
- I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Joseph Houghton (0274217743 joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor, Dr Richard Manning Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- I understand that for additional support, I am able to approach the school counsellor Mr Steve Shaw sps@shirley.school.nz (for students) and the UC Kaiarahi Pasifika Tufulasi Taleni Tufulasi.taleni@canterbury.ac.nz (for community members).
- I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Which cultural/ethnic background(s) do you identify with _____

Email address : _____

Please make sure this form is returned to Joseph Houghton either by scanning and emailing it to him at jbh@shirley.school.nz or dropping it at the school office.

Appendix F: Information sheet for staff at Shirley Boys' High School



College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
January 30, 2020
ERHEC Ref: 2020/09/ERHEC

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Information Sheet for Staff at Shirley Boys' High School

Since April 2018, I have been engaged in doctoral studies at the University of Canterbury, where I have been conducting research into Pasifika voice in education, and how schools are able to strengthen Pasifika identity, language and culture.

John Laurenson, was very supportive of my study and encouraged me to undertake my master's study in 2014. I have also appreciated the support given to me by Tim Grocott since his arrival.

The purpose of this information sheet is to give you some key points about the research since it will be conducted at our school.

Purpose of the research

This study is expected to be a source of information and drive for schools to:

- Deepen school staff, for example, teachers, principals, and Board of Trustees', understanding of the complexities that exist within Pasifika communities;
- Challenge their assumptions and overcome perceived barriers that prevent them from connecting with Pasifika communities;
- And, to better position themselves to engage and act on Pasifika student and community voice.
- Additionally, this research might also serve to upskill the Pasifika communities connected to schools, by allowing them to engage with and connect with the voice of teachers recorded in the study.

The research objectives are:

1. To explore what the research participants believe to be the role of Pasifika values in the school environment and the extent to which they believe these values are/are not enacted in curriculum design, delivery, assessment and evaluation procedures.
2. To examine the impact of significant relationships, (i.e. amongst students; between students/teachers'; students/families; families/school; school/church; family/church) and how they impact positively and negatively upon the educational aspirations of Pasifika students at Shirley Boys' High School.
3. To consider the extent to which the physical learning environs of Shirley Boys High School create senses of 'place' and 'belonging' for Pasifika students, families and communities affiliated to Shirley Boys' High school.
4. To consider the implications of this research in relation to local, national and international literature

Participants

24 students will participate in this study:

- Two or four focus groups of 6-8 (either by year level 10,11,12,13 or a senior and junior one)
- Select 2 most articulate from each cohort and have 4-8 individual interviews

6-8 Members of the Shirley Boys High School Pasifika community will participate in this study:

- One focus group of 6-8
- 2-4 individual interviews

6-8 teachers will participate in this study:

- One focus group of 6-8
- 2-4 individual interviews

An in-depth analysis of risks has been conducted and the research project has been reviewed by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. An information sheet is attached for you to consider.

My senior supervisor, Dr Richard Manning (Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz) can be contacted for further information. If you have any complaints, you can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

I am available to discuss this project with you if you have any questions or queries.

Regards,

Joseph Houghton

Appendix G: Letter to Shirley Boys' High School Board of Trustees



College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
January 30, 2020
ERHEC Ref: 2020/09/ERHEC

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Letter to Shirley Boys' High School Board of Trustees

Tēnā koutou

My name is Joseph Houghton and I have been a staff member at Shirley Boys' High School since 2010. In that time, I have taught classical studies and English, been Dean of House, Director of Maori and Pasifika Development and worked in an Across School role for our Kāhui Ako.

Since April 2018, I have been engaged in doctoral studies at the University of Canterbury, where I have been conducting research into Pasifika voice in education, and how schools are able to strengthen Pasifika identity, language and culture. The former Headmaster, John Laurenson, was very supportive of my study and encouraged me to undertake my master's study in 2014. I have also greatly appreciated the support given to me by Tim Grocott over the last five years since his arrival, and now as headmaster.

The purpose of this letter is to formally request permission from the board of trustees to undertake research and data collection with the Pasifika community at Shirley Boys' High School, as well as with some of the staff. The research would involve a series of focus groups and individual interviews with staff, students and parents/caregivers.

An in-depth analysis of risks has been conducted and the research project has been reviewed by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. An information sheet is attached for you to consider.

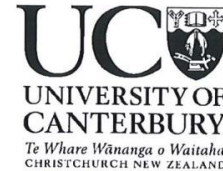
My senior supervisor, Dr Richard Manning (Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz) can be contacted for further information. If you have any complaints, you can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

I am available to give a presentation of my research project, as well as my submission to the aforementioned ethics committee, to the board if requested.

Regards,

Joseph Houghton

Appendix H: Completed consent form for Shirley Boys' High School Principal



College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Consent Form Shirley Boys' High School Principal

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of participants if I agree to the research going ahead.
- I understand that participation is voluntary, and students may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information they have provided should this remain practically achievable. However, I understand that after September 2020 it will become difficult to remove my influence on the data collected.
- I understand that any information or opinions participants provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and transcriber, and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library
- I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- I understand the risks associated with participants taking part and how they will be managed.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Joseph Houghton (0274217743 joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor, Dr Richard Manning Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- By signing below, I agree to members of the Shirley Boys' High School community participating in this research project.

Name: Tim Grogan Signed: Tim Grogan Date: 9/6/2020
Email address: tmg@shirley.school.nz

Please make sure this form is returned to Joseph Houghton

Appendix I: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement



College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Empowering Pasifika Voice in Education Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____, agree to ensure that the audiotapes I transcribe will remain confidential to Joseph Houghton, and myself.

I agree to take the following precautions:

- I will ensure that no person, other than Joseph Houghton hears the recording.
- I will ensure that no other person has access to my PC.
- I will delete the files from my pc once the transcription has been completed.
- I will not discuss any aspect of the recording with anyone except Joseph Houghton
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Joseph Houghton (0274217743 joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor, Dr Richard Manning Richard.manning@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints or concerns, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- By signing below, I agree to the confidentiality agreement for this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Email address : _____

Please make sure this form is returned to Joseph Houghton by scanning and emailing it to him at jbh@shirley.school.nz

Appendix J: Email/letter to parents/caregivers/community members asking for volunteers



College of Education
School of Teacher Education
Telephone: +64 274217743
Email: joseph.houghton@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Email/letter to parents/caregivers/community members asking for volunteers

Participate in research to empower Pasifika voice in Education

Talofa lava, malo e lelei, kia orana,

I am currently engaged in doctoral research looking at Pasifika voice in education and for part of the project I need parents/caregivers and members of the Shirley Boys' High School Pasifika community to participate in focus groups and interviews discussing Pasifika voice in education. These are part of my data collection and will form the basis of my evidence as I look at this important issue.

An information sheet is attached for you to consider the project and whether you might be interested in being involved.

If you are interested, there will be an opportunity for you to meet to discuss any queries before the focus groups and interviews begin.

Regards,

Joseph Houghton

Sub Mariae Nomine