

**EXPERIENCES OF TONGAN IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN  
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND INFLUENCES  
ON THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING**

Submitted by

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## STATEMENT OF SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (see Appendices 5 and 6 for approval letters).



Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on my observation and understanding over a fifteen year period of the constant difficulties experienced by young Tongan immigrants in engaging with their learning in local Australian Catholic schools, this study responds to their needs. The study explored and recorded the stories of the experiences of four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students in two Australian secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney, and identified the issues influencing their engagement in learning. The study utilised a Biographic Narrative Interpretive Methodology (BNIM) to record, interpret and analyse the data of the participating students. As a technique in narrative interviewing, with a potential to illuminate their voices, the methodology was utilised to investigate their perspectives, while sitting on a Tongan mat setting. Three interviews were conducted with each participant over a period of time.

The study also explored the perspective of the Tongan immigrant parents, and administrators and teachers of the Catholic schools context, using *talatalaifale* (Tongan way of conversation within the Tongan family house), and focus group interviews. A field log was also kept by the researcher. These methods were used to investigate the views of the participants to amplify the researcher's interpretation, and to compare claims, arguments and recommendations regarding the experiences of the Tongan immigrant students on their engagement in learning. The data indicated many challenges and difficulties experienced by the students. Significantly, the findings indicated that Tongan language and culture have significant impact on the efforts of the Tongan immigrant students to engage in their learning in an Australian school context. The importance of culturally appropriate relationships between schools, families and Tongan communities was identified. Additionally, the data revealed the importance of the relatedness of the culture in the teaching strategies, used with these students, as well as issues related to leadership of the Tongan community and their Catholic school age children.

The study identified a number of issues that influenced the Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning in Australian Catholic secondary schools, and concluded with a set of recommendations and directions needed to improve their engagement. The findings and recommendations of the study could also have relevance to other immigrant students of South Pacific and non European descent and Indigenous Australians. Thus, this exploratory study contributes to the growing literature articulating indigenous and non-western frameworks for students' engagement in learning of Tongan and other indigenous, non-western voices.

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## TONGAN TERMS

<b>Ako</b>	Teaching, learning, education.
<b>Anga faka lotu</b>	Attitudes with religious values such as prayer, trust and belief in God, worship and participate in liturgies as a community.
<b>Fahu</b>	The rights a sister has over her brother and her brother's children are called <i>fahu</i> rights. The <i>fahu</i> is the family matriarch.
<b>Fala</b>	Tongan mat.
<b>‘Ilo</b>	To know; to recognise, knowledge.
<b>Fofola e fala kae fai ha alea</b>	A Tongan metaphor that literally means, roll out the mat so the family can sit on it to talk. This metaphor derives from Tongan people's natural ability to use Tongan mats as meeting place, recreational facility, and for doing school work, where they gather around for meeting, praying, singing, dancing, telling stories, and other activities such as, doing homework, drawing pictures and reading.
<b>Kava</b>	Tongan cultural drink made from aromatic roots of the <i>kava</i> shrub.
<b>Lotu</b>	Worship; prayer; religion.
<b>Lou'akau</b>	Pandanus leaves used for weaving Tongan mats.
<b>Mafana</b>	Inner warmth.
<b>Malie</b>	Enjoyment; very interesting, energetic.
<b>Malo 'aupito</b>	Thank you very much.
<b>Mehekitanga</b>	The paternal aunt, has a special term <i>Mehekitanga</i> .
<b>Muka 'o e louniu</b>	The young coconut leaves used to weave the <i>Takapau</i> .
<b>Palangi</b>	A Tongan term applied to people of European ancestry or white people of British derivation
<b>Poto</b>	Clever, could also translated as wisdom
<b>Takapau</b>	A Tongan mat weaved from the young coconut leaves. It is the most ordinary Tongan mat.
<b>Talanoa</b>	To talk (in an informal way), to tell stories.
<b>Talatalaifale</b>	A Tongan way of conversation within the house of a Tongan family, giving helpful comments, views, advice and information.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>ACT</b>	Australian Capital Territory
<b>ACU</b>	Australian Catholic University
<b>BDC</b>	Biographic Data Chronology
<b>BDA</b>	Biographic Data Analysis
<b>BNIM</b>	Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method
<b>AIMHI</b>	Achievement in Multicultural High School (NZ)
<b>CEO</b>	Catholic Education Office (Ballarat)
<b>CEO</b>	Catholic Education Office (Sydney)
<b>DARNE</b>	Description Argumentation Report Narrative Evaluation
<b>ERO</b>	Education Review Office (NZ)
<b>HREC</b>	Human Research Ethics Committee (ACU)
<b>HSC</b>	Higher School Certificates (Australia)
<b>MOE</b>	Ministry of Education (New Zealand)
<b>MOE</b>	Ministry of Education (Tonga)
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales
<b>NZ</b>	New Zealand
<b>OECD</b>	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PDC</b>	Professional Development Consultants
<b>PINS</b>	Particular Incident Narratives
<b>PISA</b>	Program for International Student Assessment (NZ)
<b>PISCL</b>	Pacific Islands School-Parent-Community Liaison (NZ)
<b>PSWPS</b>	Pacific Seasonal Workers Pilot Scheme
<b>SQUIN</b>	Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative
<b>TAFE</b>	Training and Further Education
<b>TFA</b>	Teller Flow Analysis
<b>TOPS</b>	Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (NZ)
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>TQUINS</b>	Topic Questions aimed at Inducing Narratives
<b>TSS</b>	Text structure sequentialisation

## RESEARCHER'S NOTE

For the benefit of the reader to understand the choice of the researcher to use the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) to record, interpret and analyse the data from the main participants of the research study, it is important to provide the following information:

1. Throughout the study the terms *Tongan immigrant students* refer to all the four Tongan students who took part in this research study, since this group of students are being referred to as Tongan immigrants in their schools.
2. All the four Tongan immigrant students come from staunch Christian families. To do justice to their narratives I include all their views from their stories on the research questions including their personal religious beliefs and values.
3. My unique journey with the Tongan immigrant students, their families, administrators, teachers and leaders in their schools and Tongan communities has brought us to a level of openness, trust and strong sense of interdependence. The personal nature of these relationships strongly influenced me in choosing to use the first person in chapters 1, 4 and 8 to demonstrate my personal investment in this research, and that I am not distanced from the research.
4. To ensure that use of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf, 2010) was appropriate throughout the whole study, consultation with the author has been encouraged by my supervisors (see Appendix 1 for one of the series of communications with Tom Wengraf, the author of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method).
5. As much as possible I wanted the study to accommodate the voices of the main participants in a context that would not compromise their worldviews (Kamara, 2009), therefore I have chosen to use the first person in chapter 4, to tell the stories of the Tongan immigrant students.
6. Using the first person to tell the stories (Wengraf, 2010) of the Tongan immigrant students in chapter 4 would also allow me as an observer: (i) To use my memos and notes effectively. (ii) To provide an explicit link to the 'sitting on Tongan mats' metaphor approach in the analysis of this research study. (iii) To strengthen the voices of the main participants (Andrews, 2009) and to be consistent with the concept of inclusiveness of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf, 2010) that this research study adopted.

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

*I am here with you in my journey, sheltering in the garden of your heart*  
(Sikimeti, 2010, Appendix 2)

### **1.1 AN EXPLORATION OF A JOURNEY**

In May, 2010, I began an exploration of a journey of engagement in learning in Australian schools by Tongan immigrant students of families who had migrated to Sydney between the late 1980's and 2001. The study began in two Catholic secondary schools. It was prompted by my observation over a fifteen year period of the constant difficulties experienced by young Tongan immigrant students in engaging in their learning in local Catholic schools. Having observed this since 1996, I was convinced that the issue was of serious concern and warranted research.

Based on a comprehensive review of critical readings of relevant literature this study will explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning in Australian Catholic secondary schools and identify the issues influencing these experiences. In particular the study focuses on the experiences, understandings, attitudes and needs of the Tongan immigrant students in Year 9. Further information will be sought from the Tongan immigrant parents, administrators and teachers on how they see the experience of Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning in school. This exploration, of how Tongan immigrant students engage in learning in Australia, may create a new ecology of engagement in learning for Tongan immigrant students in Year 9.

### **1.2 MY PERSONAL JOURNEY**

Looking back on my personal journey, I recognise that my experiences and interest in engagement in learning in Catholic schools commenced in Tonga when I was in Form III (Year 9). However, as a Tongan, I personally did not experience engagement in learning in an English-speaking country outside Tonga until Form VI (Year 12) when I attended Villa Maria College in Christchurch, New Zealand. There, because the Tongan language was my mother tongue, I struggled with English; despite this, I tried to engage with learning. As a young child, I was always playing the teacher with my young sister, young brother, cousins and the neighbours' children to engage them in learning about the beauty of life around them and in the various forms of dancing, drawing, singing and role plays.

This continued until I actually commenced teaching in 1974. I always found it exciting and enjoyable that I was able to impart knowledge that I possessed to someone in need, and enjoyed finding ways and means to engage that person in learning. Learning for me is the art of giving and receiving with joy, passion and commitment. My passion for learning is a most precious gift that I received from my father, my mother, my brothers and my teachers.

My father, who was an athlete and a rugby player; wanted me to engage in my learning at school. He taught me numerals and made sure that I knew my arithmetic well. My mother was a teacher and a herbalist and always devoted the evening to me, encouraging me to do my homework. My four brothers were also teachers and one in particular, taught me how to write and read and helped with my spelling. I attended Catholic primary and secondary schools where my teachers taught and helped me to engage in learning. These experiences would come to help me to empathize with the journey of the Tongan immigrant students and the challenges they face in engaging in their learning in the context of Australian schools.

My own professional background as teacher, musician, education consultant, school principal, director of education, counselor and social worker give special dimensions to this study. My teaching and social working careers have been spent in Tonga, New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa and Australia mainly in Secondary schools and in the University of the South Pacific in Tonga. I started to work as a school supporter for the South Pacific immigrant students and their families at some of the Catholic schools in Mildura and Robinvale, Victoria, in 1996-1997. I continued my role as a school supporter for the South Pacific immigrant students and their families in four Catholic secondary schools and four Catholic primary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney, New South Wales in 2005-2010.

My observations of professional interactions and practices through my role as a Tongan school supporter in Catholic secondary schools and Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Ballarat, Victoria and the Archdiocese of Sydney, New South Wales, have led me to question the Tongan immigrant students' school experiences. These experiences have led me to this point where curiosity and concern about the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their

engagement in learning inspired me to investigate the issue further. This part of Chapter 1 sets the scene for my work through my personal journey and the context of my research.

### **1.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT**

#### ***1.3.1 Tonga***

It is helpful to bear in mind some characteristics of the wider Tongan context in which the participating students and the participating parents have their origin:

Education in Tonga is compulsory from the age of 6 to 14 and is free for all children up to the age of 12, with nominal fees for secondary education, and foreign-funded scholarships for post-secondary education (MOE, Tonga, 2011). Tongan is the first language of the people and children in most Kindergartens and Primary schools use the vernacular in the classrooms. English is introduced when the child is in Year 3 of Primary school and is used throughout the later school levels (MOE, Tonga, 2010). Both Tongan and English are compulsory for all the students in Primary and Secondary schools. Consequently, Tongans are well-educated, with a 98% literacy rate. Women and men have equal access to education. Tonga is the smallest kingdom in the world and the last remaining monarchy in the South Pacific. While exposed to colonial forces, Tonga has never lost indigenous governance, a fact that makes Tonga unique in the Pacific and gives Tongans much pride. Latu (2010) reported that the total land area of Tonga is 748 square kilometers with over 700,000 square kilometers made up of territorial water and consists of 176 islands of which 36 are inhabited. Tonga's population in 2009 was 104,000 (UN, 2009). Over 90% of Tonga's population is Christian, and the economy is characterized by a large non monetary sector and a heavy dependence on remittances from the country's population that lives abroad, chiefly in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America (Latu, 2010).

#### ***1.3.2 Bilateral relationship between Tonga and Australia***

Australia has been, and continues to be, an important focus for Tongans seeking education. The Tongan Government established a permanent diplomatic mission to Australia in August 2008. The Tonga Jurisdiction Report in 2010 showed that Australia is Tonga's most important bilateral provider of development assistance. Tonga was the

first country to send workers to Australia under the Pacific Seasonal Workers Pilot Scheme (PSWPS) and signed a Pacific Partnership for Development with Australia in August 2009 at the Pacific Islands Forum leaders' meeting (Latu, 2010). This movement continues to strengthen Tongans' efforts to integrate into Australian society and to use the educational opportunities that Australia offer to all immigrants.

### ***1.3.3 Tongan migrants in Australia***

Tongan migrants have come to Australia to study, work or to join family members and, especially for educational and economic reasons, a pattern traced back to the 1970's. The latest census in 2006 recorded 7580 Tonga-born people in Australia. The distribution by state and territory showed New South Wales had the largest number with 4920 followed by Victoria with 1190, Queensland with 1090, Australian Capital Territory with 170, Western Australia with 90, South Australia with 60, Northern Territory with 40 and Tasmania with 20. Sydney has the biggest number of Tongan immigrant families (ABS, 2006). At the time of the 2006 census, the median individual weekly income for the Tonga-born in Australia aged 15 years and over was \$475. The census in 2006 also recorded that there were 18,426 people of Tongan ancestry living in Australia (ABS, 2006). Some Tongans have done well in education and in a variety of fields including medicine, law, teaching, accounting and music. Tongans have also achieved notable success in sport, with Tongan athletes contributing to the Australian Rugby Union, Rugby League, Australian Football League and Australian women basketball teams.

### ***1.3.4 Tongan communities in Australia***

Within the context of Tongan communities in Australia, the Tongan immigrants is an ethnic group comprising its own language and culture. Stanley (1999) notes that Tongans have distinct traditions, values, customs, norms and their own language that they have always proudly practised and maintained for centuries up until now. Many cultural and traditional relationships are fostered and maintained through spiritual beliefs, family rituals, church and community activities, need to link with relatives and friends in Australia and Tonga, and need for wellbeing. Compared to mainstream communities facilities such as social and financial institutions, housing, and employment in these Tongan communities are in short supply. It is important to note that the Tongan communities provide a wealth of organised and deep rooted knowledge, which builds

from countless interactions of various socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural attributes with the Australian school communities. This knowledge becomes the property of the Australian school communities and Tongan communities and plays an important role in shaping the identity structures of the participating students of this study.

### ***1.3.5 Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic Secondary schools***

There were 302 Tongan immigrant students in 25 Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney (CEO, 2010). More than half of the immigrant students in Catholic schools from the South Pacific are Tongans and over half of these students are non Catholics (CEO, 2010). The Bishops of NSW and ACT (2007, cited in Benjamin, 2008) also report that the largest recent increase in enrolments in Australian Catholic schools has been of students who are not Catholics. McLaughlin (2005, cited in Maroney, 2008) claim that the reasons why parents choose to send their children to Catholic schools appear to be based mainly on an overall perception of a higher quality education.

In the context of this study, the two Catholic secondary schools in this study are in the Archdiocese of Sydney. Both schools are co-educational and have the biggest number of Tongan immigrant students (CEO, 2010). The four participating students are from low income families and identify with their Tongan communities located in areas of Sydney's Western suburbs. Three were born in Australia and one in Tonga, while their parents were born in Tonga.

Having worked with Tongan immigrant students in local Australian Catholic schools in Robinvale and Mildura (1996-1997) and Sydney (2005-2010), the researcher is aware from the stories of the Tongan immigrant students the constant difficulties they experienced in engaging with their learning. This situation is reflected in the stories of the four participating students, as one participant commented, *I had difficulties to engage in learning ...since Primary school... I still find it difficult to engage with learning.* The Tongan students and their engagement in learning in Catholic Secondary schools is further elaborated and discussed in the following research problem section.

## 1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The experience of the researcher in schools in Mildura and Robinvale in Ballarat Diocese, in 1996 (CEO, 1996), and in Sydney in the Archdiocese of Sydney in 2005 (CEO, 2005) pointed to the difficulties experienced by Tongan immigrant students in engaging with learning. This was supported by anecdotal evidence of administrators and teachers.

While Tongan immigrant parents value quality education and send their children to Catholic schools because “Catholic Education in Australia is a popular commodity” (McLaughlin, 2005), the researcher has been constantly confronted with Tongan students who are experiencing difficulties in engaging with their learning. Literature also revealed that Tongan immigrant students are struggling in their efforts to engage in their learning in western school contexts (Fusitu’a & Coxon, 1998; Manu’atu, 2000). The issue has also become a serious concern for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney (Fensom, 2006; Malloy, 2006). These concerns form the base of this study. The research problem therefore, is *the disengagement in learning in school of Tongan immigrant students*. Thus, it was imperative to research the problem from the perspectives and views of Tongan immigrant students themselves. The following questions were designed to address the problem:

The general research question:

What factors have influenced Tongan immigrant students’ engagement in learning in Australian Catholic schools?

Arising from the general research question were the following subsidiary questions that emerged following a comprehensive review of the literature that underpinned the study:

1. What have been the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in an Australian school community?
2. How do Tongan immigrant families and community influence Tongan immigrant students’ engagement in learning at Australian Catholic schools?
3. How do the values and culture of Catholic schools influence the engagement with learning of Tongan immigrant students?

4. What teaching and learning experiences are more engaging for Tongan immigrant students?

The following section discusses the purpose of this investigation.

## **1.5 RESEARCH PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students' engagement with learning, in Year 9 in Catholic secondary schools in Australia and identify the issues influencing these experiences. In order to investigate this phenomenon the literature review focused in the following themes:

- Australian school community
- Tongan family and community
- Catholic school culture
- Teaching and learning

These four themes provided a framework that underpinned the research questions. The areas to be investigated will be the general teaching and learning experiences of the children (Burford & Gross, 2006) and other factors such as family relations, values, culture, Tongan community and the culture of a Catholic school that may influence the engagement of students with learning. As a technique in narrative interviewing, the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) was deemed suitable in gathering and analysing data from the four participating students. Drawing on gestalt theory BNIM focuses on "biography and its methodological and sociological elaboration to reconstruct a two-layered biographical structure of life history and life story" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 232). The study also investigated the beliefs and understandings of administrators, teachers and parents on issues influencing the engagement in learning of the Tongan students. The following section discusses the significance of the research.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

### ***Catholic Education and National level***

This study aims to make a substantial contribution to the challenges of Australian Catholic secondary schools in Sydney to meet the needs of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools. It does so by exploring the issue through the perceptions of Tongan immigrant students and the perceptions of parents, administrators and teachers. The

findings of the research could help to inform governments, churches, the communities and schools about the needs of Tongan immigrant students so their potential for growth can be addressed. The findings of this study will also be of value to the general secondary education sector in Australia, with regard to the sector's approach to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment of and for, the Tongan immigrant students and other immigrant students of non-European descent, South Pacific immigrants and Indigenous Australians.

### ***Tongan immigrant students***

The active involvement and contribution of the participating students in this investigation could contribute to their long and short term personal development, through developing their self esteem and understanding of their learning potential.

### ***Teacher***

Findings will have implication for the identification of successful teaching strategies to help with Tongan immigrant students and other South Pacific immigrant students.

### ***My role***

This study aspires to be a creative contribution to knowledge about the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in school and influences on their engagement with learning, and will inform my own work as a teacher and school supporter for Tongan immigrant students and their families. I wish to share the experiences that I have been constantly confronted with, for over fifteen years, of Tongan immigrant students who are experiencing difficulties in engaging with their learning.

## **1.7 SEARCHING THE LITERATURE**

The researcher has searched the international literature on the issues relevant to this study, in Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and elsewhere.

Four main themes that underpin the experiences of Tongan immigrant students and the influences on their engagement with learning in Catholic secondary schools have been identified from the literature. The influences are:

1. Australian school community
2. Tongan family and community
3. Catholic school culture

#### 4. Teaching and learning

### 1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There is a dearth of literature on experiences of engagement in learning of Tongan and other South Pacific immigrant students in Australian schools. As a result, this study relied predominantly on related work conducted in USA, Canada, South Pacific and mainly New Zealand. This study investigated only a small sample, of Year 9 Tongan immigrant students for the narrative interviews as the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) involves an intensive process and an exhaustive analytical procedure that tolerates only a small sample of participants.

All four Tongan immigrant students and their families have high regard for religion are church goers, and three of them were shy by nature. Due to their characteristics I was cautious in working with the students. I used song and prayer to start and include every session, and also given the option to them to use drawing with colours as stimulants to participate. It is possible that the researcher's position as a Tongan educator and leader could become a limiting factor in this study causing hesitation by the Tongan immigrant students to share hidden agendas that would be important for this study but sensitive to themselves and others. That they might share only what they thought the researcher wanted to hear was also a possibility. Being mindful of these, the researcher used the 'sitting on a Tongan mat metaphor' (The process is used as a tradition by Tongans for family communication that require the contributions of every member to be listened to, respected, and in equal importance) to overcome the collecting of the data from the participating students. I also used *talatalaifale* as a tool to collect the data from the parents of the participating students by sitting on the Tongan mats. *Talatalaifale* is a Tongan way of conversation within the house, giving helpful comments, views, advice and information. When the Tongan parents and their family sit down together on the Tongan mats for a session of *talatalaifale*, the parents are usually confident to share honestly their knowledge and ideas on issues that are real, constructive, authentic and familiar to them. Limitations of the study are further elaborated in Chapter 3.

### 1.9 A NOTE ON LANGUAGE, PSEUDONYMS AND CODES

As mentioned earlier, Tongan is the main language spoken in Tonga. The census in 2006

recorded that the main language spoken at home by Tonga-born people in Australia were Tongan with 80.2 percent, and English 16.3 percent with 1.6 percent not stated. All the families of the participating students in this study use Tongan language at home. All the parents, except one, speak limited English, therefore the interviews with the parents were conducted in Tongan. The scripts from the interviews were transcribed and later translated into English before the analysis process.

The identification of the participating students and their parents were protected through the using of pseudonyms. The study referred to the participating students as:

- Lia Kuki
- Vai Fono
- Sini Fika
- Hina Soni

The study referred to the participating parents as:

- Maile (mother) and Hone (father), parents of Lia Kuki
- Mapa (mother) and Paongo (father), parents of Vai Fono
- Longo (mother), and Niu (father), parents of Sini Fika
- Pua (mother), and Kali (father), parents of Hina Soni

The two schools, their administrators and teachers, and Tongan leaders were given codes to protect identity. The study referred to the two schools as School A and School B. The coding of the participants have numbers and a letter A or B to represent their schools. The administrators and teachers are therefore referred to as: Principal 1.A, Principal 2.B, Assistant P 1.A, Assistant P 2.B, PC Coordinator 1.A, PC Coordinator 2.B, Teacher 1.A, Teacher 2.A, Teacher 3.A, Teacher 4.B, Teacher 5.B and Teacher 6.B. The study referred to the panel members (Tongan leaders) as: Panel member 01 - 06.

## **1.10 METHODOLOGY OUTLINE**

The methodology used for this research was a case study approach utilising qualitative data to explore the understandings and experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Catholic secondary schools and influences on their engagement in learning. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participating parents, administrators, teachers and

participating students. Data was gathered in a number of ways. As a technique in narrative interviewing, the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Methodology (Wengraf, 2010) was used to conduct three sessions with each of the participating students over a period of time. Four sessions of *talatalaifale* (a Tongan way of conversation within the house) were conducted with the participating parents. Two focus group interviews were conducted with the administrators and teachers of the two schools. Keeping a researcher's field log (journal) has helped the researcher to record her own reflections and memos of the sessions that she observed, and also to record various conversations that she had with participants in the process of the research. Additionally a reference panel was used to help the researcher to analyse the data using the narrative approach. Multiple forms of data were collected to help increase the validity of the research and act as a type of cross-referencing (Gillham, 2000) or triangulation. This data was analysed from the perspectives of the parents, administrators and teachers, using thematic approaches. These methodologies will be elaborated further in Chapter 3.

### 1.11 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The study was organised into eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides the introduction to this study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature to form a framework to address the research questions. This study has developed a conceptual framework that represents the four main sections that underpin the experiences and influences on the engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in school emerged from a critical review of relevant literature. As a framework for the wider review of the literature, the four key concepts of *student engagement, culture, ethnicity and community* are defined.

Chapter 3 provides the research approach including methodology and research methods followed by a description of the research tools and data gathering procedures. It also includes information about the participants in the study and a justification for selecting them. Limitations and ethical considerations of the study are also discussed. Chapter 4 details the individual stories of the Tongan immigrant students divided into *lived life and telling of the told story* in keeping with the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method. It is through the understanding of the socio-cultural and historical life of the participating students that we come to appreciate their subjective views in the narratives. The stories are presented in the first person so as to use memos effectively and to strengthen the

student voices. The reference panel was used to assist with the analysis of the data of the participating students and as an advisory team for the study.

Chapter 5 presents the stories and experiences of the parents and Chapter 6 provides the perceptions of the administrators and teachers. The views and understandings of the participating parents, administrators and teachers were examined and the results were used to compare claims, arguments and recommendations relating to the experiences of the participating students

Chapter 7 covers the analysis and findings which are discussed according to themes that emerged from the study. Chapter 8, as a concluding chapter, outlines the main lines of the findings, suggests possible implications, draw conclusions and make recommendations. It also includes implication from my personal journey and final thoughts on the issues relating to the study.

## **1.12 SUMMARY**

This Chapter provides the researcher's personal journey and background regarding engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students in school. Furthermore, Chapter 1 establishes the context of the study and the problem under investigation. It also identifies the purpose and significance of the study and the four main areas that underpin the experiences of Tongan immigrant students of Catholic secondary schools and influences on their engagement in learning are identified. Limitations of the study are also described. A note on Tongan language, pseudonym and codes have been explained and a brief outline of the methodology is also provided. Finally, the structure of the thesis is identified.

The following chapter discusses the literature review.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*The quality of the reviews of the literature varies considerably...all reviews, irrespective of the topic, are written from a particular perspective or standpoint of the reviewer. This perspective often originates from the school of thought, location or ideological standpoint in which the reviewer implies a particular reader (Hart, 2005).*

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

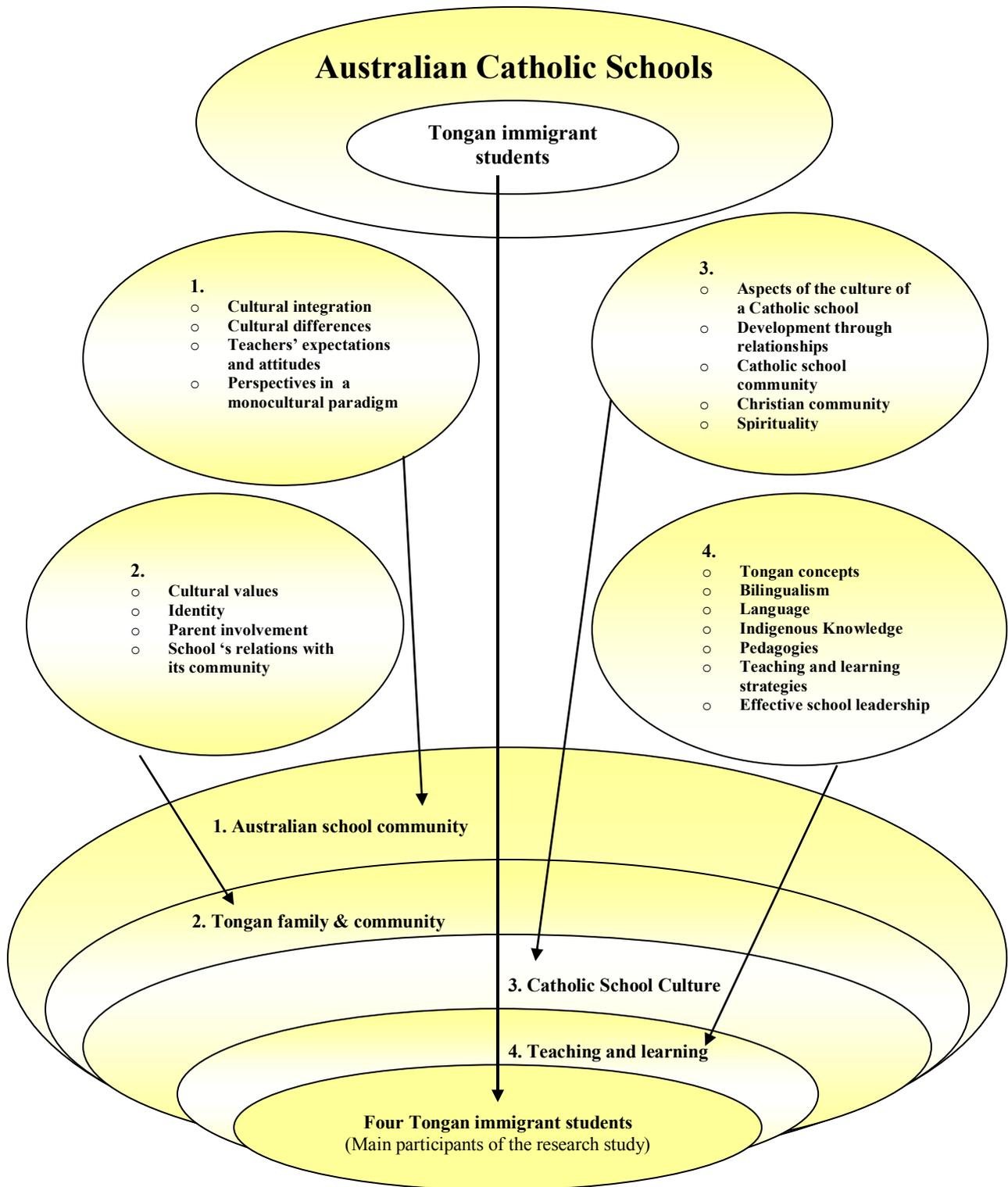
The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and identify the issues influencing these experiences. This chapter provides the review of the scholarly literature relative to this study, in order to address the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The review found that most related studies on Tongan immigrant students are found in New Zealand. The literature reviewed does not deal directly with the difficulties experienced by Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools, but it does have important implications for the proposed study. This chapter has four main sections consisting of the following themes:

1. Australian school community
2. Tongan family and community
3. Catholic school culture
4. Teaching and learning

Each theme contains a number of sub-themes that relate to the major areas of the research study. An overall discussion and a summary at the end of the chapter is included. Taken together, the four underlying themes of this research study can be represented by a conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) below, using a Tongan cultural and traditional symbol and concept. In an effort to form a framework relevant to the Tongan culture, an oval shape of the coconut fruit is used. This framework gives a visual mapping of the literature as it pertains to the research problem. The definitions of the key concepts of *student engagement*, *culture*, *ethnicity* and *community* within the context of student engagement with learning in school are also provided.

2.1.1 Conceptual framework

Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework



The conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) represents the elements found in the literature related to the research purpose. Experiences of Tongan immigrant students as explored

in this thesis is understood as representing a cultural-centred framework. The framework helps to give direction and cohesion to the review of the literature by ‘painting a big picture’ of the culture of Tongan immigrant students which gives meaning to their experiences in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

Within the context of this study, Tongan immigrants in Australia form an ethnic group comprising its own language and culture. Stanley (1999) notes that Tongans have distinct traditions, values, customs, norms and their own language that they have always practised and maintained for centuries. Based on this information it is argued that a Tongan socio-cultural lens is appropriate for this study. This challenges the western socio-cultural lens that has been assumed by many as the best model for all research.

The coconut fruit has cultural significance for the Tongan people and they refer to a coconut fruit as a source of life (Havea, 1985). Just as Tongans refer to a coconut fruit as a source of life within their culture, Tongan immigrant students and their families refer to education in Australia as a source of life. Figure 2.1 is an eclipse formed by the oval shape of the coconut fruit to represent how the participants are interdependent with one another as a source of life through education.

The ellipse at the top of the conceptual framework represents the Tongan immigrant students from the Tongan ethnic group comprising its own language and culture attending Australian Catholic schools. The ellipses below, represent the sub-themes within the four main themes, *Australian school community*, *Tongan family and community*, *Catholic school culture*, and *teaching and learning*. The *four Tongan immigrant students* are in the centre of the layers of the four main themes, emphasizing their interdependence on one another.

The themes are presented in a linear manner and are related, linked and integrated into one another. The literature in the exploration of this research study will utilise the structure of this conceptual framework (Figure 2.1).

### **2.1.2: Definition of terminology**

The following section provides some definition of the key concepts of *student*

*engagement, culture, ethnicity* and *community* as a framework for the wider review of the literature.

### **2.1.2.1 Student engagement**

Typically, writing on student engagement tends to conceptualise it in terms of three discrete dimensions: behavioural, emotional and cognitive (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010). Behavioural engagement includes “attendance” and “participation in school activities”, emotional engagement includes a student’s “sense of belonging and value” and cognitive engagement relates to beliefs about the importance of school, or that “school is for me” (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p. 39). Latterly, research in this field emphasizes that student engagement is a multidimensional and interconnected construct, and as such should be studied in a holistic manner that takes account of the complex interplay between students’ emotional states, their behavioural engagement, and the way they learn academically (Fredricks et al., 2004). Tadich et al. (2007) also support this view by claiming that

engagement should be understood as a multi-faceted construct. From this perspective, engagement can be characterised behaviourally (strong participation in academic, social and extra-curricular activities), emotionally affective ties with teachers, classmates and school), and cognitively (investment in effort to master complex problems and skills), with overlap across each area (p. 2).

This research study has sought to reflect this multidimensionality, such as the social and emotional environment of the classroom that provides the necessary preconditions for students to engage in academic tasks. Suarez-Orozco, et al. (2009, p. 157) defined engagement as “students’ participation and efforts around academic tasks of attending school, paying attention and behaving in class, completing homework, and turning in assignments on time”.

Literature also suggests that student engagement is fundamentally important in promoting learning and achievement outcomes (Akey, 2006; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Johnson, 2008) and in retaining students within the education system (Fredricks et al., 2004). Chapman (2003) refers to student engagement as student’s willingness to participate in routine school activities, such as attending class, submitting required work, and following teachers’ directions in class. Bomia, et al. (1997, p. 294) also refers to student engagement as “student’s willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process”. Fletcher (2005) describes the term as

meaningful student involvement throughout the learning environment. However, engagement is not static, it varies according to a young person's circumstances. Generally, the engagement of young people in their learning may be influenced by a young person's self esteem and their perception of their abilities, their life experiences and general health. Engagement also changes over time, the Brotherhood of St. Laurence's Life Chances Study found that 15 year old students were less engaged than they were at 11-12 years. Generally, those from "the low income group were less engaged than those from high-income families" (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p. 40).

An Australian study exploring teacher views of student engagement in the middle years identified the following factors: "lack of confidence, apathy, boredom, poor attitudes, absenteeism, disruptive behaviour and not comprehending the importance of developing goals for the future (Tadich, et al., 2007, p. 267). Chapman (2003) and Willms (2003) indicate that absence of student engagement include, unexcused absences from classes, unwillingness to participate in school reform activities and cheating on tests. Skinner & Belmont (1993, cited in Fletcher, 2007, p. 2) also indicate that students who are disengaged in learning are

passive, do not try hard, and give up easily in the face of challenges ... [they can] be bored, depressed, anxious, or even angry about their presence in the classroom; they can be withdrawn from learning opportunities or even rebellious towards teachers and classmates.

In Australia, student disengagement in the middle years is a "longstanding problem" (Tadich, et al., 2007, p. 258). Student disengagement has developed over a period of time as a result of cumulative challenges that individual students face in the "community, at school, and within the family" (Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2009, p. 157). Concerns about participation also extend to out of school activities which influence school engagement and academic achievement (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002). This lack of engagement is also particularly evident with students from small migrant ethnic groups including the Tongan immigrant students from the Tongan ethnic group and lower socio-economic groups.

#### **2.1.2.2: Culture**

Culture as defined by Dimmock & Walker (2005, p. 7) constitutes "a whole way of life of the members of a society or group of people". Keeping with this view James (1999) proposes that:

Culture consists of a dynamic and complex set of values, beliefs, norms, patterns of thinking, styles of communication, linguistic expressions and ways of interpreting and interacting with the world that a group of people has developed to assure its survival in a particular physical and human environment (p. 194).

The notion of culture as defined by Beare (1989, p. 173) include “manifestations of organisations such as buildings, and how they look, the people in them, their behaviour, what they say and do, their art, songs, language, and knowledge – all constitute their culture.” He further argues that a school culture is,

The way the school is run, its furnishings, its rewards and punishment, the way its members are honoured, which behaviours are remarked upon and so on. All these things create the climate in which children learn, and which is powerfully pervasive in those learning (Beare, 1989, p. 19).

Consistent with this analysis, culture is a critical ingredient in determining the Tongan immigrant students’ behaviours, attitudes, and activities in their schools and other learning environments where they work.

### **2.1.2.3: Ethnicity**

Fraser & Gorinski (2006) extend ethnicity to a further level from the notion of culture, focusing upon the collective beliefs and experiences within a given culture of one group that are different from the others. Gibson (1976, p. 12 cited in Fraser & Gorinski, 2006, p. 5) gives a concise description on this by explaining that

...ethnic groups are essentially social and political rather than cultural. Traditional customs are used as idioms and as mechanism for group alignment. They serve to form the boundary and to maintain the group’s exclusiveness. Ethnic groups call their cultural distinctiveness, not out of conservatism or traditionalism but rather as a tool for maximizing group interests. The degree to which a group emphasizes or deemphasizes cultural differences is determined by the degree of profit to be gained.

Within the context of this study, Tongan immigrants in Australia are part of an ethnic group comprising its own language and culture.

### **2.1.2.4: Community**

Community is a group of people within a society with a shared ethnic or cultural background (Macquarie Concise dictionary, Australia, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1998). McInnery (2002, p. 3) defines community as “a social group with similar interests, social structures, values and life styles”. Community therefore, consists of persons in social interaction

within a geographic area and it is a source of identity.

Within the context of schooling, scholars have used the concept of sense of community to explain or highlight social differences between schools (Boyd, 1997). From an educational perspective Tierney (1991, cited in McInnery, 2002), defines schools as social organisations embedded in communities of difference and learning as a profoundly social act. Every community has its distinct traditions, values and norms. In the context of this research study, the Tongan community consists of the Tongan immigrants in social interaction within the communities of two Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The Tongan community provides a wealth of organized and deep rooted knowledge, which builds from countless interactions of various socio-economic and socio-cultural attributes with the Australian school community. This knowledge becomes the property of the Australian school community and Tongan community and plays an important role in shaping the identity structures of the participating students of this study. In this study, the term will generally refer to a group of people who strive to live, work, and create meaning together in ways that are interdependent and mutually supportive, and particularly to the Tongan immigrant students in their efforts to engage in their learning in school.

## **2.2 AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

### **2.2.1 *Cultural integration***

Using the analogy of demonstrations on experiences of immigrant families in Australia by Hartley (1995) and Tannebaum (2000), aspects of cultural integration relating to the experiences of Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning in an Australian school can be further elaborated and understood. Hartley (1995) argues that the composition of families is subject to constant change through predictable events such as migration. Thus, the Tongan immigrant family is defined in many ways for different purposes, and is subject to change as a consequence of migration (Lee, 2003, 2007). It is therefore expected that the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in their engagement in learning in an Australian school community will be influenced by the circumstances of the structures of their families as immigrants. Tannebaum (2000) also argues that immigrant families in Australia are prone to face many problems, such as identity conflicts, alienation, change and cultural differences. These problems would cause the

Tongan immigrant students to disengage from their learning.

Tannebaum (2000) argues that immigrant families in Australia are in an ongoing process of finding the homeostatic point between the two cultures. This is a “complex matter that naturally is affected by specific personality traits, as well as family dynamics and values” (Tannebaum, 2000, p. 76). The efforts of the immigrant families to blend the two cultures have been difficult (Lee, 2003, 2004 & 2007; Tannebaum, 2000). This would cause difficulties to Tongan immigrant students and their families, in their efforts to integrate into the educational activities of Australian school community.

Lee (2003, 2007) argues that young Tongans in Australia are struggling to maintain identities, traditions and values. Tannebaum’s (2000) study identifies that:

In order for the immigrant families to maintain its identity they must preserve traditionally habits and values, but in order to adapt to the new culture, many habits and values have to be abandoned. Thus, while any family will try to maintain stability and seek homeostatis, the immigrant family may need to shift the previous homeostatic point to a new one, to enable them to cope with the new environment and the new experiences (Tannebaum, 2000, p. 74).

Tannebaum’s (2000) study further identifies that some immigrant families in Australia who have been confronted by new environmental conditions are having the capacity to adapt to their new environment. This would enable them to integrate into the educational and cultural activities of the Australian school community. However, many of the Tongan immigrant families have found it hard to cope with their new environment and have experienced difficulties in integrating into western society (Lee, 2003, 2004, 2007; Morgan, 2004; Small, 1997). This would affect the engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students in schools.

In order for the immigrant families to integrate well into their new communities, Franken, May & McComish (2005), Lahman & Park (2004), Ngo (2006) and Behnke (2009) identify English language as the main tool for communication. Lahman & Park (2004) found that Chinese and Korean immigrant parents in the United States of America have expressed that their lack of English have prevented them from helping their children’s education. Furthermore, Ngo (2006) and Behnke (2009) found that many first generation immigrants American parents were struggling to integrate into the school

community activities and to help their children's engagement in learning. This is because of communication breakdown between the homes and schools (Behnke, 2009). In New Zealand, Franken et al. (2005) identify that Tongan and South Pacific immigrant parents who speak little English have difficulties to support their children's education. This has caused problems such as identity conflicts, sense of isolation, fear, loss of status and breakdown in family communication (Franken et al., 2005). Breakdown in family communication has caused difficulties to Tongan and Pacific immigrant students (Bull et al., 2008; Franken et al., 2005) in their efforts to engage in their learning and to integrate into school community activities.

Often, a vicious circle develops between alienation, inability to learn English and increasing isolation especially among Tongan and Pacific parents and children (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). This would have become a burden for both Tongan parents and their children on their efforts to integrate into the Australian school community, causing difficulties to Tongan immigrant students to engage in their learning in school. The transition from Tonga, a developing and small island in the South Pacific, to Australia, a big and developed country, to which they have to become accustomed, has been difficult to many Tongan immigrants (Lee, 2003). This would have also contributed to their difficulties to integrate within their Australian school community.

Lee (2003) further argues that Tongan immigrant families often have many children and little money, and are constantly facing problems in encountering their new world and therefore facing difficulties to integrate. There are families in which any change in the relationships, or any move from one stage to another, would encounter difficulties (Tannebaum, 2000). These difficulties may be greater for families coming from a collectivist culture (like Tonga), to an individualistic one (like Australia). Schwartz (2006) explains the concept of collectivism in terms of group embeddedness and contrasted it with individualistic cultures that practiced individualistic autonomy. As collectivist cultures encourage close relationships and loyalty between family members, the individualistic culture may criticize extremely close-knit relationships (Tannebaum, 2000). This adds a burden to the already difficult task of adjustment for the Tongan immigrants into their new country. So Tongan immigrants would have to deal with the everyday, ordinary problems of functioning together as a family unit, as well as the added stresses resulting from migration. This would make it difficult for the Tongan immigrant

students and their families to integrate into the educational and cultural activities in the Australian school community.

However, while most Tongan immigrant families found it hard to integrate into their new country and the threat to traditional family roles, rules and all the other problems associated with migration, some Tongan immigrant families have managed to adjust and adapt to their new country (Kolo, 2001). Thus immigrant students and their families could also be able to adjust, adapt and integrate into the Australian school community. Families that managed to achieve and adjust smoothly in the new country were therefore expected to be highly integrated (Tannebaum, 2000). Conversely, families which were extreme in their family structure were expected to adapt less successfully and achieve only a low level of integration (Tannebaum, 2000). The children of these families would find it hard to engage in their learning in schools.

The experiences of immigrant families in their integration into Australian school community central to this thesis are drawn on because they provide a sound basis for analysing the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

### **2.2.2 *Cultural differences***

The discussion of the experiences of Tongan and Pacific immigrant families in western school communities in this section draws on the recent and burgeoning body of literature on conflicts in cultural values (for example: Bishop, 2003; Ferguson, Gorinski, Mara & Wendt-Samu, 2008; Fraser & Gorinski, 2006; Gorinski, 2005; Nakhid, 2003; Podmore & Sauvao, 2003; Weiss, Keider, Lopez & Chatman, 2005; Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu & Finau, 2002). Cultural differences are taken here to incorporate problems faced by Tongan immigrant students that could contribute to the difficulties in their engagement in learning in school.

One part of the explanation for the failure of the education system to perform well for Tongan and Pacific students relates to cultural differences. All children find that the culture of home is not the same as the culture of school, but for some children this difference is large and can make it difficult for them to understand what is expected and how to respond at school (Meade et al., 2003; Meade, 2005). In school contexts the

process of acculturation is causing problems to the engagement in learning of Tongan and ethnic minority students (Weiss et al., 2005). Bishop (2003), Gorinski (2005a), Nakhid (2003), Podmore & Sauvao (2003), Gorinski & Fraser (2006), note that acculturation has contributed to the low learning outcomes in school of the Tongan and Pacific immigrant students. Bishop (2003, p. 222) proposes that “Pakeha (European) knowledge codes and the monoculturalism and monolingualism [are] attendant upon a long history of assimilations education” dominate in school contexts. Bishop (2003) argues that this has caused many children from the Tongan and minority ethnic groups to disengage in their learning in the classroom. She further argues that their cultural theory, practice and beliefs, as an alternative approach could help them to eventually perform better at school. Bishop (2003) therefore suggests that the patterns of the interaction of the family and school must recognize and acknowledge the cultural knowledge of the Tongan and Pacific students bring to school in their efforts to compete in the culture of the mainstream schooling contexts.

Nakhid (2003) has supported Bishop’s (2003) work, by arguing that western schools are not succeeding in acknowledging, recognizing and valuing the cultural and creative approach of the Tongan and Pacific students. The teaching approach in the school context needs to be more meaningful and helpful for Tongan and Pacific immigrant students in order for them to engage in the classroom (Nakhid, 2003). She directs attention to the “identifying process” (Nakhid, 2003, p. 300), as a valuable process that the schools should consider as a necessary condition for motivation and self determination in the Tongan and Pacific students to engage in their learning. Nakhid (2003) argues further that the perceptions of the school on Tongan and Pacific students are causing them to have acculturating structures, processes and practices that are perpetuating their underachievement in the classroom. In dealing with this situation, Nakhid (2003) recommends that it is essential for the Tongan and Pacific immigrant students to “bring, form or connect with their own representations of who they wish to be ... these representations, instead of being defined by the dominant culture, must originate from the students’ own process of construction” (p. 301). She continues to argue that if the perceptions the students hold of themselves are not congruent with the perceptions held by the school, then the responses of the schools to those students would be unsuitable (Nakhid, 2003) for their efforts to engage in their learning in the school

context. This could also marginalize the Tongan and minority groups from the school context and would contribute to their struggles to participate appropriately and effectively in the classroom. Thus making it difficult for them to engage in their learning.

Additionally, Podmore and Sauvao (2003) conducted interviews with parents and teachers exploring inclusion issues around Tongan immigrants' and minority students' education. They found that ethnic language visibility was lacking in the Tongan and Pacific resources in schools. This proved that, despite the efforts of the schools to recognize and acknowledge the culture of the Tongan and Pacific students, learning and teaching resources represent the mainstream culture; they serve to acculturate other cultures, and in so doing, marginalise Tongan and minority groups (Podmore and Sauvao, 2003). Thus, making it very difficult for Tongan immigrant students to engage in learning in the school context.

Gorinski & Fraser (2006) further argue that in the school context, cultural mismatch also presents difficulties to the engagement in learning of the Tongan and Pacific immigrant students. According to Weiss et al. (2005), cultural mismatch occurs when the dominant cultural beliefs and values conflict with the cultural beliefs and values of the Tongan and Pacific ethnic groups. These conflicting beliefs and values are often causing the Tongan and Pacific students and their parents to show behaviors and attitudes that are culturally appropriate in their home/community environment, but are not congruous with the school's code of conduct (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 2000). This would have an impact on the involvement of the family in school and would also affect the efforts of the Tongan immigrant students in their engagement with learning at school. For instance, research found that the Cambodian immigrant families believe that teachers are experts in school matters and it is disrespectful and inappropriate to interfere with the teachers (Garcia Coll et al., 2002). The traditions of the Tongan immigrant families also have similar beliefs. While these beliefs are culturally appropriate in a Tongan context, they are inappropriate in western context. This would cause frustrations and difficulties to teachers in Australian schools who need the views of parents and their active participation in their children's education. Furthermore, such beliefs would have caused Tongan immigrant parents to become passive in their responsibilities for their children's education and this would have contributed to the disengagement in learning of their children in school.

The cultural expectations of many Tongan and Pacific parents may also differ significantly from the practices and thinking in most western schools. For example, the traditional Pacific expectation of unquestioning obedience and respect for authority figures can mean that parents encourage their children to ‘sit and listen to the teacher’ (Ferguson, et al., 2008). However, the expectation in Australian education is that students learn best through questioning, discussing different viewpoints, and increasing their independence. If teachers do not understand these differences in beliefs, school expectations can be an early barrier to learning for many Pacific students (Tiatia cited in Ferguson, et al., 2008). Gorinski and Fraser (2006) also note that literature has accounts of similar misconceptions, grounded in cultural understandings around students’ under achievement and parents’ interaction with schools. For example, Gorinski (2005) noted in the Parent Mentoring Evaluation in New Zealand, that Tongan and Pacific parents do not ask questions because of their respect and unquestioning obedience to those in authority. This has made it impossible for them to engage in inquiry dialogue with the school personnel (Gorinski, 2005) on issues regarding the difficulties in engagement in learning of their children.

### ***2.2.3 Teachers’ attitudes and expectations***

Henderson & Mapp (2002) identify that teachers’ attitudes and low expectations of children from low socio-economic and ethnic minority backgrounds, have an effect on students’ engagement in learning. There is also a prevailing belief within school communities with large numbers of Tongan and Pacific students, that European students will always achieve better in comparison to the Tongan and Pacific immigrant students (Alton-Lee, 2003; McNaughton, et al., 2000; McDowall, et al., 2005; Phillips, et al., 2002; Ringold, 2005; Rubie-Davies, et al., 2006; Timperley, 2002). Alton-Lee (2003) further claims that this is generally accepted amongst teachers. Ferguson, et al. (2008) also claim that there are still examples of teacher behaviour, attitudes and skills that impact negatively upon Pacific learners’ social, cultural and academic achievement outcomes. Evidence from the Ministry of Education’s schooling improvement initiatives and other projects in New Zealand suggests that teachers’ low expectations of Maori, Tongan and Pacific children can mean that they keep children inappropriately at a lower level of learning (Alton-Lee, 2003; McDowall et al., 2005; Ringold, 2005; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006; Timperley, 2002). For example, research on the Numeracy Project in New

Zealand has found that teachers limited the language they used in mathematics for Pacific children and Maori children, thereby restricting the children's engagement with complex ideas and limiting their learning (Alton-Lee, 2003). This could make it more difficult for the Tongan immigrant students to engage fully in their learning.

Research studies also found that teachers had very little idea of the role parents played in the educational lives of their children (Nakhid, 2003; Tumama Cowley et al., 2005). They found in fact, that teachers tend to stereotype Tongan and Pacific immigrant parents and believe they have little interest in their children's education (Coxon et al., 2002; Nakhid, 2003; Tumama Cowley et al., 2005). With disparate race, ethnicity, qualifications and socio-economic levels between teachers and parents, there are limited opportunities to listen and learn about each other (Nakhid, 2003; Tumama Cowley et al., 2005). Nakhid (2003), advocates therefore, that "teachers need to involve Tongan and Pacific immigrant parents more regularly and in more significant ways" (p. 210) in order to facilitate effective parent, family, community – school engagement. This could improve the efforts of the Tongan immigrant students to engage in their learning in school.

Nash (2004) argues that student achievement is affected by the degree to which a student's culture is respected by the school, and by the degree of similarity between the culture of the community and the values of the school. Ringold (2005) also claims that in trying to be culturally responsive, teachers can get caught in cultural stereotypes about Pacific learners which then limit the student's learning opportunities. For example, teachers need to avoid applying assumptions about Pacific peoples as group learners and shy participants (Coxon et al., 2002). Such attitudes affect teaching and can limit students' opportunities for learning. Professional development that challenges these assumptions is therefore very important.

Timperley and Phillips (2003) claim that professional development for teachers that focused on getting higher expectations of student performance, have helped to improve the Tongan and Pacific students' performances in the classroom. This claim has challenged the expectations, attitudes and teaching strategies that the teachers have used in their teaching and dealing with the Tongan immigrant students who are experiencing difficulties in their engagement in learning in the classroom. A longitudinal, cross-sectional study conducted by Phillips et al. (2004) has explored the impact of teachers'

professional development in instruction. This study has agreed with Timperley's (2003) research, concluding that "it is possible to raise [the] achievement [levels of] minority students in schools serving low socioeconomic communities to near national levels" (p. 2). Thus, there is a need for higher expectations from the teachers in order to improve the Tongan and Pacific immigrant students' low achievement (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; Davies, 2009).

#### ***2.2.4 Perspectives in monocultural paradigm***

Perspectives in monocultural paradigms are taken here to incorporate problems faced by Tongan immigrant students that could contribute to difficulties in their engagement in learning in school.

In the United States of America, many classroom teachers continue to promote learning and instructional practices that reveal an adherence to a mainstream ideology or worldview (Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006; Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006). Thus, cultural bias in teaching occurs when classroom instruction, learning activities, materials, and lessons largely reflect the contributions and/or cultural values and perspectives of majority race or culture (Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006). What results from these culturally biased beliefs is an in-school cultural socialization process in which ethnically and culturally diverse students from low income families are exposed to instructional practices and learning activities that do not reflect their cultural-laden modes of learning and knowing. Some evidence exists to support each of these claims (Tyler, Boykin, Miller & Hurley, 2006; Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006; Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006).

Bishop (2003) also notes that teachers and school personnel of Maori and South Pacific students in New Zealand take for granted that these students and their families "are simply not adequately prepared for the 'scholastic necessary' [sic] of the modern classroom" (p. 223). This perspective is premised in the position that family resources and their lack of skills are what create educational disadvantage, rather than the education system (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

Schoeffel & Melesia (cited in Gorinski & Fraser, 2006) in their study of Pacific Island families' attitudes to child training and discipline, also found that many related parenting

skills were in conflict with those of European families. These authors noted that such socialization practices contributed to difficulties that students have with interactive teaching techniques. They suggested that considerably more emphasis needs to be placed on developing the interactive learning abilities of Tongan and Pacific Island Polynesian students (Schoeffel & Meleisea, cited in Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Consistent with the discussion on teaching that recognizes and builds on students' prior experiences, clearly, a new perspective is needed for schools in western countries. This could help towards the difficulties that many Tongan immigrant students and students of other cultural groups are facing in their engagement in learning.

Tongan scholar, Helu-Thaman (2001) comments that schools in western countries continue to teach and learn about the knowledge, skills and values from the dominant western perspectives. Helu-Thaman (2001) continues to argue that Tongan immigrant students are taught with perspectives on knowledge, skills and values in a monocultural paradigm in a western context. She further comments that such knowledge, skills and values, "are almost exclusively associated with cultures other than their own, and often very alien to their lived realities, making schooling irrelevant and meaningless for many learners" (Helu-Thaman, 2001, p. 2). Gorinski & Fraser (2006) further argue that this perspective meets the needs of the causes and effects of colonialism and its legacy of cultural and linguistic dominance and subordination as a key contributor. This would contribute to the difficulties in engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students.

The issues considered in the discussion of the literature on 'Australian school community' and its related sub-themes have contributed to forming the first research question outlined in Chapter 1. The next section explores issues on 'Tongan family and community', which are concerned with the implications of their roles on the engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students, and which have relevance for an understanding of the engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students.

## **2.3 TONGAN FAMILY AND COMMUNITY**

### **2.3.1 *Cultural values***

Some cultures (such as Anglo, Scandinavian, German and Irish) tend to value individuality and autonomy (Tannenbaum, 2000). Such values are associated with more

self-reliance, less communication with extended family and more sensitivity to others' privacy. In contrast, other cultures (such as Pacific and Tongan cultural groups) tend to regard family closeness and over involvement as crucial to family life (Elliot & Gray, 2000). Indeed these differences between cultures can be understood in terms of differences in values. Tannenbaum (2000) further notes that it may well be that what is considered normative in one culture would be strange in another. These emphasise the need for teachers and school personnel of the western school context to have awareness, understanding and sensitivity to the differences in values and realities of the Tongan immigrant students in regards to family involvements. It would therefore be expected that the over involvement of Tongan immigrant students in activities of family, extended families and communities would contribute to their poor performances in school.

In recent years, there has been some debate about the extent to which the Tongan and Pacific immigrants have been able to maintain their culture (Barwick et al., 2002). Macpherson (2001, p. 67) outlines the circumstances and processes that have produced increasing diversity in Pacific societies and identities in Aotearoa New Zealand:

Early Pacific settlement resulted in the concentration of large numbers of like minded migrants with similar life histories in urban enclaves in Aotearoa in these communities, island-world views and lifestyles were widely supported and readily reproduced. By contrast, New Zealand-born generations world views, lifestyles and identities have been constructed in very different social and economic circumstances (Macpherson, 2001, p. 67)

These circumstances have allowed, and indeed encouraged them to question the values of the cultures and identities that served their parents' and grandparents' generations. Family members from a range of immigrant groups stressed that while their sense of ethnic identity and commitment to cultural values could and did change over time, they still defined family in the same way (Lee, 2003, 2007; Elliot & Gray, 2000; Tannebaum, 2000). They also made considerable effort to maintain ties between family members, either within or between countries in spite of living apart (Lee, 2003, 2007). For them, traditional patterns and obligations remained important (Lee, 2003; 2007). These often put a lot of pressure on families (Lee, 2003, 2007) and have affected the lives of their children in school, causing many of them to disengage in their learning.

On the other hand, core cultural values are particularly influential for Tongan immigrant

families. They can provide a sense of security, but also provide a source of stress (Lee, 2003, 2007). Most immigrants experience situations that affect the ways in which they maintain and transmit cultural values and share resources (Lee, 2007; Small, 1997). Phalet and Schonpflug (2001, p. 499) sum up the dilemmas they face:

The paradox of the migration condition is that the intergenerational transmission process in immigrant families seem at the same time more difficult and also more important. On the other hand, competing models and messages from the dominant culture in the host society complicate cultural transmission in immigrant families.

Consequently, some Tongan immigrant families could have faced these dilemmas of cultural values in the experiences and challenges that they have met in their work relationships with Australian school community. This would have both a negative and positive impact on their children's engagement in learning.

### **2.3.2 Cultural Identity**

Hall (1996) defines *cultural identity* in terms of “one, shared culture, a sort of collective one *true self*, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed *selves*, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (p. 222-223). Within the terms of this definition Hall (1996) claims that the cultural identities of small ethnic groups diaspora reflect their common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide them as ‘one people’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of references and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of their actual history. This *oneness*, underlying all the other more superficial differences, is the truth and the essence of the experiences of the culturally minority ethnic groups (Hall, 2003, 1996). It is this identity which Tongan ethnic group in Australia, must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through words and actions in their efforts to integrate their culture into the culture of their new homeland. Such a conception of cultural identity played a critical role in the struggles of disadvantaged and minority ethnic groups which have so profoundly reshaped our world. Pacific researchers whose works have provided insights to the personal, social and political issues that surround ‘identity’ include Anae (1998), Pasikale (1999), Tupuola (2000) and Macpherson (2001).

Identity is the condition or fact of being a specific person. Identity is taken here to incorporate problems faced by Tongan immigrant students in their engagement in

learning in school. Identity is a critical issue for Tongan learners. In New Zealand, Tiatia (1998, cited in Coxon et al., 2002) suggests that few opportunities are given to Tongan and Pacific students to create their own identities. Instead they either tend to conform to or rebel against the identities that have been constructed for them.

Some suggest that this may lead Tongan and Pacific learners to either sit passively in the classrooms or rebel strongly (Alton-Lee, 2003). Alton-Lee (2003) also suggests that schools, teachers, and other students need to support Tongan and Pacific learners to be themselves and to see themselves and their culture reflected in the classroom. Manu'atu (2000) supports Alton-Lee's (2003) suggestion by claiming that Tongan immigrant students engage enthusiastically with their school work when they identify with and are involved in cultural songs and dances in Tongan cultural festivals. She further argues that embracing cultural identity and cultural traditions are important elements to their education in western schools context (Manu'atu, 2000).

Research conducted by Pasikale (1999) clearly identifies the existence of different groups or 'types' of Tongan and Pacific immigrant students and youths in New Zealand. Pasikale (1999) called these identity profiles – and described them as: i) traditional, ii) New Zealand blend iii) New Zealand made. In other words, these profiles were made on the basis of the extent to which the individual Tongan and Pacific student or youth participants could relate to the cultural traditions and practices (including language) of their parents and grandparents. Pasikale (1999 cited in Coxon et al., 2002) describes the 'interests and issues' of New Zealand born Tongan and Pacific people as being of 'critical' importance because of the high proportion of Tongan and Pacific communities in Aotearoa who are 'New Zealand born'. The problem then, as she states it, is:

... the images, information and stereotypes about Pacific Island people are rooted in assumptions based on the images of 'recent island migrants' ...[consequently] ... the displacement of the majority Pacific learners, especially in the formal educational establishments. By this I mean the assumptions (mostly bad) educators make about New Zealand born Pacific Island learners, who either fail to meet expectations or worse still, float by without any expectations or demands on them because of some misguided liberal attitude (otherwise known as the 'soft option'). Either way, human potential is not recognised or developed (Pasikale, 1999, p. 5).

She goes on

... suffice to say that 'identity' is a critical issue for many Pacific Islands learners,

and understanding the issues can mean the difference to our positive cultural continuity and the alienation of a generation more comfortable with other forms of sub-culture. It can also mean the difference to continue academic failure and educational success based on the realities of future Pacific Islands generations. I have come to appreciate that 'identity' is not a static product but a process of constant navigation, based on a core of convictions that provide a foundation for self-acceptance (Pasikale, 1999, p. 6).

Furthermore, Fetui and Malakai-Williams (1996) argue that it is vital to have maintenance of Pacific languages for the self-esteem, confidence and identity of Samoan youngsters. Davis's (2001) study of the Pacific languages in the Manukau region in New Zealand found that the majority of the interviewees expressed that their language is important to them and their own identity and their sense of belonging to their own ethnic groups.

Educators who are dealing with Tongan and Pacific immigrant students in western school communities therefore, 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 the western education system (Pasikale, 1999). 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 (Coxon et al., 2002). Manu'atu (2000) argues that *katoanga faiva* (a Tongan cultural festival) has helped the Tongan immigrant parents and their children to engage better with their schools. She further argues that failure to provide such opportunities would cause the marginalization of Tongan immigrant parents in the school system (Manu'atu, 2000), and thus could cause many Tongan immigrant students to disengage in their learning. Moreover, Rapport and Rapport Dawson (1998) argue that the students of any culture learn better when teachers use stories about the places of their students' origin. They further argue that the students would feel safe, comfortable and belonged because the sentiment of the teachers stories is often expressed in terms of connection to a place like home (Rapport and Rapport Dawson, 1998). Rapport and Rapport Dawson's (1998, cited in Watkin-Lui, 2008) working definition of 'home' as the place, "where one best knows oneself – where 'best' means 'most', even if not always the happiest" (p. 9). Watkin-Lui (2009) declares that the expressions of home provide a sense of grounding, of having some roots that define our identity and who we are as individuals and our place in the world. Stories that acknowledge the students' identities

and could connect them to their origins, like home, would be an effective learning technique to use.

### ***2.3.3 Parents' involvement***

Most Pacific parents often see themselves as their children's first teachers, providing their children with strong foundation that includes their first language, religion, and values (Coxon et al., 2002). Families support children's success when they encourage positive relationships and provide a range of quality experiences and activities within and beyond the home (Biddulph et al., 2003). While Pacific parents want to help their children and their schools, they sometimes don't know how to (McDowall et al., 2005; Madjar et al., 2009). Similarly, many teachers and schools do not know how to engage effectively with Pacific parents (ERO, 2008).

Madjar et al. (2009) claim that while Tongan and Pacific parents want to help their children with their school work, they don't know how to. Gorinski & Fraser (2006) emphasise the importance for the schools to understand the cultural challenges and barriers that Tongan and Pacific ethnic minority families and communities are facing. These are cultural framework, language and proficiency, lack of confidence, lack of experience among the teachers and administrators, communication issues, limited economic resources and ignorance (Gorinski, & Fraser, 2006). They further argue the importance for the schools to work towards the development of strategies to address these cultural challenges and barriers, in their efforts to help improve the achievement in schools of the Tongan and Pacific immigrant students (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

Simich-Dudgeon (1986) offers a critique on beliefs of many Pacific parents, stating that there is a cultural framework recommending that a lot of Tongan and Pacific ethnic groups, who speak little English, believe that teachers have the duty to educate their children for they have the ability and knowledge. These parents would hardly be involved in their responsibilities to their children's education and would contribute to their disengagement in learning in school. Paratore (1999) further argues that many parents with language difficulties are finding it hard to participate in the activities in school and to help their children in doing their homework and their studies. Hyslop (2000), also claims that parents with low self esteem and lack of confidence also have caused them to disengage in their children's educational need. Paratore (1999) further

claims that because of limited economic income, Tongan and Pacific parents are not available to support their children's learning. Hyslop (2000) further supports these claims by saying that Pacific parents are unaware of knowledge, abilities, essential core skills and practices that require them to help their children in their studies. Thus, student engagement for their children is a problem.

On the other hand, many school teachers and administrators do not have the skills and knowledge to engage effectively with Pacific parents and to help establish the involvement of parents in education and in school activities (Brewerton, 2010). Hyslop (2000) argues that school personnel do not have the confidence and abilities to involve parents in the programs of their children at school. For example, ineffective communication between school and home, particularly when this is either impersonal or alienating, creates barriers to effective parent-school involvement (Epstein, 1992). They suggest that communication between school and home that is not effective, could cause difficulties for parents to be involved in the activities at school. Tongan and Pacific family-community involvement at other levels has also been considered to be problematic (Coxon et al., 2002). These findings clearly make family-community-school relationships critical in Tongan students' success and engaging in their learning, and an area for school management attention. Allen (2008) therefore, suggests that schools should work with parents, students and staff to brainstorm a list of everything the school does to involve parents to help their children to engage in their learning.

Pacific parents want to know how well their children are doing at school and what they can do to help their child. In the recent consultation on the National Standards in literacy and mathematics in New Zealand, Pacific parents were the group most interested in having timely information about their children's progress, and ideas or resources they could use at home (Brewerton, 2010). Pacific parents were also the most likely to say that it was very important to help their children learn, and that they were very involved in helping their children's learning (Wylie et al., 2009b). Effective partnerships between parents and schools can improve the well-being, behaviour, achievement, and engagement in learning of children (Biddulph et al., 2003). In a study by Hammond et al. (cited in Coxon et al., 2002) in the context of both elementary (primary) and secondary education, outlines the important components in parent- involvement which they claim can 'work toward academic success'. They outline in detail an empowerment model that provides

for an organizational structure for both parents and community involvement, where there is real participation in decision-making to improve the engagement in learning of their children (Hammond et al. cited in Coxon et al., 2002). This has proved to be helpful to the children's education.

In an examination of 51 studies on parental involvement from pre-school to Year 12 throughout the United States, Henderson and Mapp (2002) concluded that parental involvement was likely to increase student achievement when that involvement was connected to academic learning. When involvement was connected to other school activities such as signing behaviour reports, there was no effect on student achievement (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). However, taking the research overall, Henderson and Mapp (2002) conclude that where parents and the community are involved in schools, students have higher grade and engage better in learning. These findings clearly make parent-school relationships critical in student academic success and engaging in their learning and an area for school management attention. Joint interventions involving parents and teachers together have the biggest impact on outcomes and the best homework practices also have a large effect (Robinson et al., 2009).

The findings from the literature revealed that parent involvement in schools that is focused on learning activities improves children's achievement more than other types of involvement (Robinson et al., 2009). Some key barriers for Tongan and Pacific families engaging with schools include: (i) lack of English fluency, (ii) respect for authority that prevents parents questioning the school and (iii) lack of Tongan and Pacific parent involvement in school administration and governance (Coxon et al., 2002).

#### **2.3.4 *School's Relations with its community***

One of the visions of schools with many Tongan immigrant students was the greater involvement of parents with their schools, and schools being more directly accountable to the communities they are meant to serve (Coxon et al., 2002). Some Tongan educators drew hope from this vision and were keen to help Tongan immigrant students in their difficulties to engage in learning in school (Coxon et al., 2002). However, according to Foliaki, this vision was a disappointment for some Tongan educators:

I was really supportive about these schools who were giving greater power to communities in terms of their schools. I was very much involved in going around

to school meetings to explain what that meant to Tongan parents. But I came across a problem which is perhaps specific to Tongans as the most recent migrants. Parents saw the importance of being involved but they didn't have the language skills to take part. It was simply unrealistic to expect Tongan parents to turn up to board meetings. So it was actually a bit sad, because the parents wanted to be involved, but they often didn't have the skills to (Foliaki, 1993, p. 107, cited in Coxon et al., 2002).

The barriers to effective participation were not confined to Tongan communities. This was all too clearly a problem for those schools with predominantly Pacific students in their school communities. The lack of fluency in English was not the only barrier to the effective participation of Tongan and Pacific parents in schools' activities (Coxon et al., 2002). Such school communities invariably had severe limitations in terms of the professional skills and expertise that parents had to contribute. It was difficult for principals in these schools to be in the position where they were required to explain processes and procedures to parents, for many of whom English was a second language (Coxon et al., 2002). These difficulties would contribute to the poor performances of the Tongan immigrant students in schools.

There are also problems of Tongan and Pacific parental involvement in other levels of school administration and management (Coxon et al., 2002). According to the report in the Education Review Office in New Zealand, only 6 % of the Tongan and Pacific immigrant parents were dissatisfied and questioned the quality of education of their children's schools (Coxon et al., 2002). However, the education department in New Zealand was concerned because the overall achievement rates of the Tongan and Pacific students was showing no improvement (Coxon et al., 2002). Aitken (1996) asserts the importance of the Tongan and Pacific parents to ask questions regarding the education of their children until they understand what is expected of their children. She further argues that parents are accountable for some of the reasons of the lack of academic achievement of their children and their disengagement in their learning (Aitken, 1996). She also suggests that these parents are causing problems to the education of their children in school and therefore are responsible of the lack of interest and disengaging in learning of their children (Aitken, 1996). Tongan scholar, Mafi (1998) agrees by stating that some cultural values of home and community of Tongan families are contributing to the lack of interest of their children in engaging in learning in school.

On the other hand, Tongan families and communities would find the cultural values of western education different and difficult and therefore could hinder them in relating more effectively to the schools and to help their children's studies. Coxon et al. (2002, p. 93) provide the following concrete examples that schools have attempted to provide pathways for Tongan and Pacific parents and community members to participate better in the activities in schools: "A liaison officer, of Pacific background is selected and works with a cluster of schools, from early-childhood in some instances, through to secondary. Links are made with parents of students and a number of activities established-homework centres, teacher aides, and so on..." (p. 93). In spite of the fact that schools have attempted to provide these pathways for Tongan and Pacific parents and community members to address the low performances of their children, the establishment of self-sustaining parent support groups has been a challenge (Coxon et. al., 2002).

The issues considered in the discussion of the literature in this section on the theme of Tongan family and community and its related sub-themes have contributed in forming the second research question outlined in Chapter 1. The next section, explores issues on 'Catholic school culture' which have relevance to the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in their engagement in learning.

## 2.4 CATHOLIC SCHOOL CULTURE

There are so many debates in current affairs on the reasons why many Tongan immigrant parents in Australia send their children to Catholic schools. In relation to this study, the 'culture of a Catholic school' is a concern which has relevance for experiences in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students. Flynn (1993, p. 39) defines *culture of a Catholic school* in the following form of a metaphor based on the specific understanding of culture from his research involving students, parents and teachers in 50 Catholic secondary schools in N.S.W. and A.C.T., Australia:

The culture of a Catholic school expresses the core beliefs, values, traditions, symbols and patterns of behavior which provide meaning to the school community and which help to shape the lives of students, teachers and parents (Flynn, 1993, p. 39).

This research study focuses its investigation on the culture of a Catholic school on the

aspects of: (i) the development of the whole person through relationships, (ii) Catholic school community, (iii) Christian community and (iv) spirituality. These are beliefs, values, traditions, symbols and patterns of behaviour of a culture of a Catholic school (Flynn, 1993) and these have relevance for the experiences in engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students.

#### 2.4.1 *Aspects of the culture of a Catholic school*

A simple model of the culture of a Catholic school, Figure 2.2 below, adapted from Flynn (1993) will guide this exploration.

**Figure 2.2** A model of the ‘Culture of a Catholic school: (Adapted from Flynn, 1993)

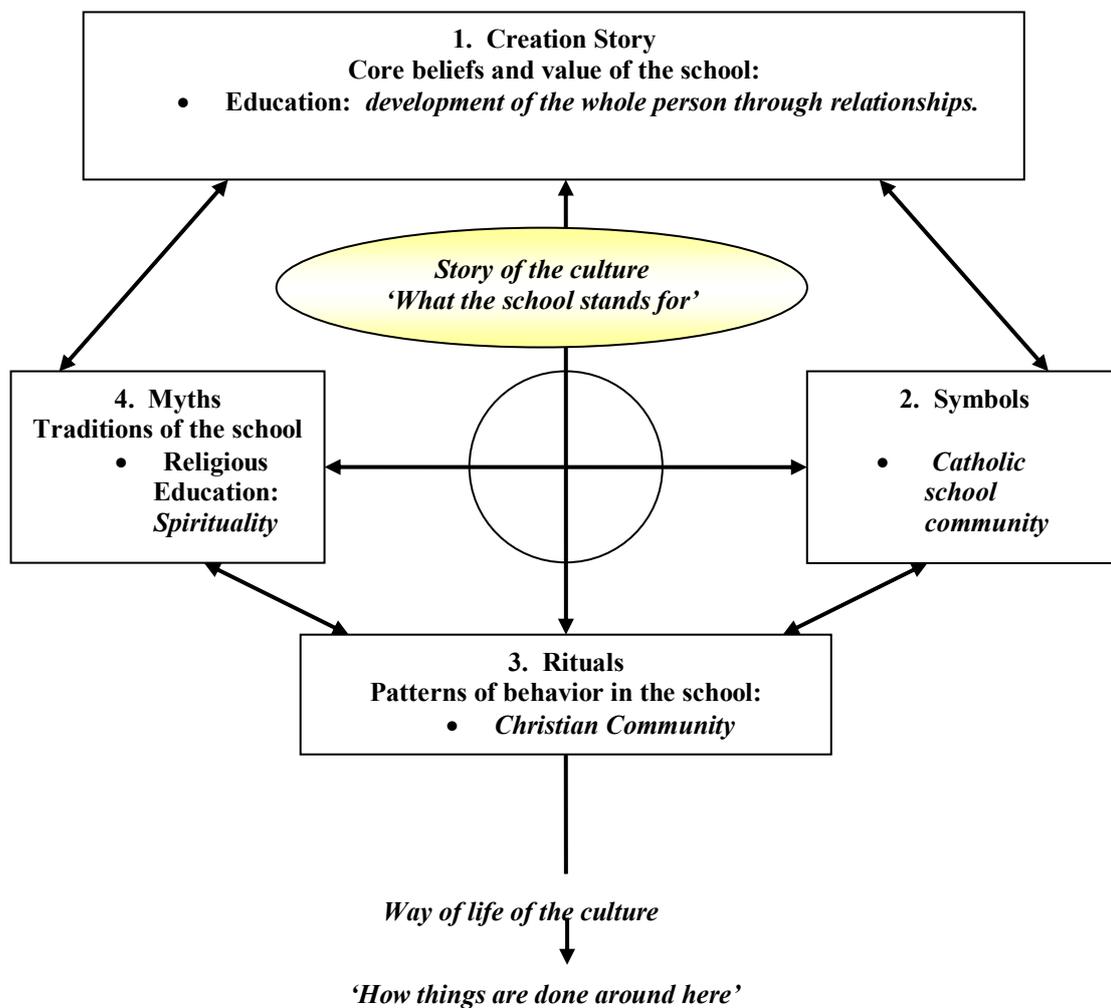


Figure 2.2 conceives a culture of a Catholic school, providing the aspects that give meaning to the engagement in learnings of its students, as existing at four levels (Flynn,

1993). Level 1 is the creation story (core beliefs and values of the school), focusing on the development of the whole person through right relationships. This is the soul of the culture and therefore is what the school stands for. Level 2 is dramatized in symbols, focusing on Catholic school community. It is the model of the culture that is visible for what school is about. Level 3 is reflected in rituals (patterns of behavior in school), focusing on Christian community. It is the way of life of the culture that provides values to assist in understanding how things are done in the school. Level 4 is myths (traditions of the school), focusing on spirituality. It is the story of the culture, that is, what the school is aiming at.

#### ***2.4.2 Development of the whole person through relationships***

The fundamental purpose of a Catholic school is described by the Congregation for Catholic Education (1988, para. 33) as having:

A clear identity, not only a presence of the Church in society, but also as a genuine and proper instrument of the Church. It is a place of evangelization, of authentic apostolate and of pastoral action – not through complementary or parallel or extra-curricular activity, but of its very nature; its work of educating the whole person.

In his examination of the Vatican's teaching on Catholic schools, Miller (2006a) identifies a number of tenets that embody its work directed towards the integral formation of the human person:

1. It undertakes to educate the whole child, addressing the requirements of his or her natural or supernatural perfection;
2. It provides an education in the intellectual and moral virtues;
3. It prepares for a fully human life at the service of others through right relationships.

As the goal of Catholic education, the path to full human personhood requires an unconditional commitment to right relationships. The Catholic school therefore, sets out to be a school to develop the whole person in its teaching of the subjects (Degenhardt, 2006; Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Mellor, 2006; Nosedá, 2006). The Congregation for Catholic Education (1998) also describes that in the Catholic school, each student, a human person, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching. This is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic

school. For this reason, the teaching approach of the Catholic school is appealing to Tongan immigrant students in their learning, as it promotes purpose and action inherent in all students, despite their cultural background and religious beliefs.

For the Catholic school, the commitment demanded of the social relationships of every student may consequently be “more pertinent for how people are taught and for the politics of the school environment than for the content of the teaching” (Groome, 1996, p. 111). Further, in standing as a challenge to so many students who are suffering from being deprived of receiving education, “the promotion of the dignity of the human person thereby offers a compelling alternative by which the Catholic school may be distinguished” (O’Keefe, 1999, p. 24). Thus the culture of a Catholic school aims to develop every student fully (spiritually, physically, academically, socially and psychologically). The development of the whole person through relationship is found in all the subjects taught in the Catholic school and the interactions between the teachers and students in the classroom is also a process of their relationships with one another (Flynn & Mok, 2002). When Tongan students are taught to develop fully their relationships with their inner selves and with other students and their relationships with people are strengthened. This could help to motivate them to engage better in their learning in school. However, many students in Catholic schools have experienced difficulties in developing fully and in building good relationships to improve their engagement in learning, due to family situations, peer group influences, attitudes and cultural differences (Sikimeti, 2008).

Tongan people are very religious (Latu, 2010) and respect for the human person is a priority in their lives and therefore, Tongan immigrant students would naturally be able to relate well to the students, teachers and the members of the school community. On the other hand there are some cultures of the Tongan communities that are not Gospel values. For example, Tongans are still giving a higher priority in their relationships to religious leaders and people in authority than to their children. These have often become hindrances for the efforts of the Tongan immigrant students to engage in their learning in school.

### ***2.4.3 Catholic school community***

The spirituality of communion must be expressed within Catholic schools; it must become “the living breath of the educational community, the criterion for the full ecclesial

development of its members and the fundamental point of reference for the implementation of a truly shared mission” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007, para. 16). The experience of the researcher, both as teacher and as administrator, a sense of community would be one of the first nominated by staff working in Catholic schools if they were asked – which characteristic best defines an authentic Catholic school? Furthermore, Starratt (2003) argues that the community dimension of the Catholic school retains special significance through expression in right relationships. This expression is highlighted by the Congregation for Catholic Education (1998, para. 18).

The community dimension should be fostered, since it is one of the most enriching developments for the contemporary school... (it) is not a merely sociological category; it has a theological foundation as well. The educating community, taken as a whole, is thus called to further the objective of a school as a place of complete formation through interpersonal relations.

The commitment to, and importance of, community within Catholic schools stands in contrast to the contemporary pursuit of individualism and self. Starratt (2007, p. 174) argues that this “pursuit and the subsequent emergence of the autonomous individual” gave rise to the secular ideal of individualism free from relationships with family, community, God or the environment. But with the unquestioned right to individual freedom and success came the dangers by greed, selfishness and narrow-minded perspectives on issues. A fundamental commitment to community and right relationships with self, one another, God and environment is an essential step in path towards full human personhood. Reinforcing the insights of Starratt (2007) nominates community built on right relationships as the basis for life within Catholic schools – religious, academic and social with students formed through development of their hearts, minds and souls. Critical to this description is his/her understanding of Catholic school culture as a network of relationships.

Moreover, in keeping with its positive perspective on life and creation is “Catholicism’s emphasis upon relationship and community” (O’Keefe, 1999, p. 23). “Catholicism promotes the affinity of the human person for right relationship with others” (Groome, 1996, p. 114). This communal dynamic, “deepened and amplified to a more clearly communal understanding of the nature and mission of Church” (Groome, 1996, p. 115). This “distinguishes the Catholic school” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 99) in its communal emphasis based on the concepts of personalism and subsidiarity. The concepts of

personalism and subsidiarity are to shape the life of the Catholic school and are called for as communal norms (Bryk, 1996): “Personalism calls for humaneness in the hundreds of mundane social interactions that comprise daily life ... Similarly, subsidiarity means that the school rejects a purely bureaucratic conception of an organization” (p. 30).

Whilst the communitarian characteristics should “permeate the content and process of the school’s pedagogy, it is clearly most significant for the life of the school itself” (Groome, 1996, p. 115). In view of its capacity to socialize through its “whole way of being together as school” (Groome, 1996, p. 115), the “environment of a Catholic school needs to reflect community, not simply as an ideal taught but as a value realized” (Groome, 1996, p. 115). Additionally, an important component of the culture of Catholic schools is the sense of community and belonging which they nurture in students, parents and teachers (Flynn, 1993). This is appealing to the Tongan immigrant students in their efforts to engage in learning, for community is an important component of the Tongan culture.

Catholic, Wesleyan, Anglican and other Christian churches have become embedded in Tongan communities, in the Pacific, Australia, New Zealand and USA. Tongan immigrant families in Australia identify themselves with their communities and have developed well established techniques for the preservation of their identity based on the establishment of Tongan church communities. However, the expectations Tongan and Pacific churches place on families are great demands on their resources (Taule’ale’ausumai, 2001). These great demands have caused a shift in church membership as more New Zealand-born and Australian-born Tongan and Pacific immigrants, who have seen their island-born parents struggle to meet the demands of the Pacific churches. Taule’ale’ausumai (2001) further claims that they have opted to worship in churches that do not exert the same demands on their resources. This has clearly shown the demands that Tongan church communities in Australia could have on their children’s efforts to engage in their learning. While both Tongan culture and the culture of a Catholic school have ‘community’ as an important component of their lives, the complexities of the interactions among its members would also contribute to the difficulties in the engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students.

#### 2.4.4 *Christian Community*

The Catholic school as a ministry of the Catholic Church is not just an organization, it is a community of the ‘People of God’. This is made absolutely clear in the *Declaration on Christian Education* (1965, para. 8): “What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love”. The importance of the witness of the proclamation of the Gospel offered by teachers and leaders in Catholic schools is articulated by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1982a, para. 24). “The lay Catholic educator is a person who exercises a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communion structure of the school”. This description recognises that teachers in Catholic schools are not simply transmitters of a body of knowledge, rather, teachers are educators, whose responsibilities include helping to form human person in a Christian community. The value of witness of teachers with Catholic schools is also clearly recognised by Simmonds (2008) positing the importance of the prophetic witness offered by teachers and leaders within Catholic education. It is a prophetic witness of teachers that allows students, parents, other staff and members of the communities to see, touch and feel the living presence of the incarnate God in the school community.

Leadership in Catholic schools requires a relational and collective framework and the use of the talents of all members. The Catholic school is a Christian community in another sense as well. Ranson (2006) suggests that the Catholic school “has become the primary manifestation of the local ecclesial community, the parish, and the principal means of that community to religiously enculturate its young members” (Ranson, 2006, p. 417) to help them to engage with their learning.

The concept of *communitas* is also a useful way of understanding a Catholic school as a Christian community. It can be interpreted as an unstructured human community based on principles of unity (beyond the needs of individuals or groups), possessing a common purpose and experience as well as an intense unity and community spirit (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Mellor, 2005; Nosedá, 2006). The community members associate to achieve purposes and objectives that exceed students’ capacities to engage better in their learning.

Additionally, climate of the Christian community and role of the educating community in the Catholic school to participate in its promotion is crucial. It is constituted by the

interaction and collaboration of its students, parents, teachers, administrators and non-teaching staff (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Mellor, 2002). Attention is rightly given to the importance of the relations existing between all those who make up the educating community as a Christian community (Nosedo, 2006). Teaching is also creating the unique Christian community climate of a big family. Professor L.F. Neal (1972, cited in Flynn & Mok, 2002) affirms this from his own experience “whenever I am invited to a Catholic school, I feel that I have been invited as a friend into the bosom of a warm and intimate family”. Tongan immigrant students would naturally feel at home and enjoy the Christian community climate of a big family. This could be an advantage for them in their engagement in learning. On the other hand, this could also be a disadvantage for them for they could focus mainly on hospitality and lack the concentration to engage in their learning in the classroom.

#### 2.4.5 *Spirituality*

In Christianity, there has been a long association between the concepts ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’. Spirituality was the expression, and the living out of one’s religious faith, usually involving a range of religious practices like prayer, reflection and spiritual reading, together with communal worship and liturgies (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). For many people, their spirituality remained, and still remains today, ‘religious’ in a traditional sense. But social and cultural changes, particularly in the twenty first century, affected the way spirituality was understood and practiced (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

In Tonga one of the keys to an alternative approach to classroom pedagogy in most of the schools is the recognition of the spiritual dimension. Most Tongan parents have high regards to teachers who are *anga faka lotu* (have spiritual values such as prayer, trust in God, reflection and spiritual reading, together with communal worship and liturgies), to teach the Religious education subject and all the subjects in the classroom. In general, Tongan people believe that when the teachers who are *anga fakalotu* to teach the Religion Education lesson and other subjects in the classroom, they help the students to learn better. In the Tongan culture, when the teacher is *anga faka lotu*, her/his teaching has a moral and spiritual significance for the individual and the group. A teacher who is *anga faka lotu*, her/his presence in the classroom is understood to be a pre-requisite for good teaching. It ensures a safe learning environment, a sense of belonging through the teacher

and students.

Furthermore, because of the spiritual understanding of *anga faka lotu*, a positive regard will nourish the child, class and learning environment physically, emotionally, spiritually, academically and socially. This is a key component to the building of effective teacher-student relationships.

Catholic schools are committed to pass on the spirituality and religious tradition (Maroney, 2008) to all students from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Groome (1998) also claims that the Catholic school

calls for a curriculum directed towards the intention of forming in the human person a sacramental and cultural consciousness whereby the spiritual and religious dimension of life comes to be perceived in the ordinary of the individual's everyday existence (p. 59).

The Catholic school is, therefore, fundamentally called to “educate students within a cultural environment which is essentially spiritual and religious” (Treston, 1997, p. 15).

Tongans are religious people and the aspect of spiritual development of their children in school is a value that they want their children to acquire as a priority. Latu (2010) claims that over 90 % of the Tongan people are Christians and most of them are church goers. Generally, the Tongan children are brought up in a cultural environment which is essentially spiritual and religious. From this information, it is likely that Tongan immigrant students generally fit into the spirituality and religious practice of the Catholic school culture. Consequently, this is appealing to the Tongan immigrant students in their efforts to engage in their learning.

Catholicism is the largest single denomination in Australia (Hughes, 2007), approximately 1,700 Catholic schools, in which 57,000 teachers educate 665,000 students (McLaughlin, 2005). Less than 50% of Catholic children attend Catholic schools (Dixon, 2003; Hill, 2004; McLaughlin, 2005; Benjamin, 2008). In the context of this study, there were 302 Tongan immigrant students in the Australian secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney in 2010 (CEO, 2010). More than half of these students are non Catholics. With those statistics in mind, it appears there are more non Catholic Tongan families who are sending their children to Catholic schools. Literature also reveals that in

New Zealand, a significant proportion of Tongan and Pacific parents choose to send their children to integrated (usually Catholic) or private schools (Brewerton, 2010).

Tongan parents want the best education for their children. More than half of the Pacific immigrant students in the Australian secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney are Tongans (CEO, 2010). From Sikimeti's (2005) survey with parents of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools, most of these parents have claimed the following four as the main reasons for their choices to send their children to Catholic schools:

- They value the inclusiveness of the spirituality of the culture of the Catholic school and the teaching of Religious Education.
- They value the teachers who are *anga faka lotu* (having religious values such as trusting in God, valuing prayer, passion to make a difference to the students) to teach Religious Education lessons and all the other subjects.
- Their own private denominational schools are too expensive and have not catered for low income families.
- Their children value the promotion of Religion and values of the Gospel, because this gives them an inner strength and helps their education.

Maroney (2008) argues that Religious Education and its effect on students in Catholic schools has become less meaningful than the beliefs and values that their parents at home have hoped for. He continues to argue that students may have shown interest in engaging in Religious Education but they also have found that they do not find solutions to the difficulties that they are going through (Maroney, 2008). On the other hand, most Tongan immigrant students have found the influence of the Religion and values of the Gospel on their lives as the inner strength towards their education (Sikimeti, 2005).

McLaughlin (2005, cited in Maroney, 2008) also argues that some educators in Catholic schools are apprehensive about the Catholic church and are inconsistent in attending church. The students also have similar attitudes and therefore they have become distanced and disinterested in religious doctrines and spirituality (McLaughlin, 2005, cited in Maroney, 2008). However, literature did not indicate the views of Tongan immigrant students on this issue. This is a gap that this study hopes to find out in its investigation and its impact on the engagement in learning in school of the Tongan

immigrant students.

The issues considered in the discussion of the literature in this section on the theme ‘Catholic school culture’ and its related sub-themes have contributed in forming the third research question outlined in Chapter 1. The next section, explores issues on ‘teaching and learning’ which have relevance to the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in their engagement in learning.

## 2.5 TEACHING AND LEARNING

### 2.5.1 *Tongan concepts*

Tongan concepts and language have been used for teaching and learning strategies to Tongan students. For example, Kavaliku (1966), Helu-Thaman (2003, 1998) and Manu’atu (2000) explore indigenous Tongan concepts for education. Kavaliku (1966) and Helu-Thaman (2003) argue that *ako* is a Tongan term, which means learning not only from the formal educational environment, but also the ongoing learning from other social settings as *kainga*, church and the wider community. *Ako* is therefore, a collaborative effort where there are supportive networks (Kavaliku, 1966; Helu-Thaman, 2003), by the *kainga* (consisting of one’s parents, sisters, brothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins). Furthermore, in Tonga, things are done in the interest of the collective rather than the individual (Kavaliku, 1966; Helu-Thaman, 2003). Helu-Thaman (2006, cited in Latu, 2011) also argues that *ako* stands for learning and as well as searching, and *‘ilo* stands for knowing, knowledge and information. Closely related to the concept of *ako* is the Tongan notion of *poto*. “*Poto* may be translated as wisdom and experience and has intellectual, emotional and spiritual connotations” (Helu-Thaman, 2006, p. 3, cited in Latu, 2011). Helu-Thaman (2006, cited in Latu, 2011) argues that a Tongan who is *poto* is one who nurtures relationships with others through fulfillment of her/his social responsibilities. Helu-Thaman (2006, cited in Latu, 2011) further argue that being wise is a highly valued quality within Tongan and Pacific cultures. Wisdom in this sense is about applying *‘ilo* (knowledge) wisely to life and for the benefit of the group and wider community (Kavaliku, 1966; Helu-Thaman, 2006, cited in Latu, 2011). Helu-Thaman (2000) further argues that in Tonga “a person is *poto* if she/he uses *‘ilo* gained through *ako* for the benefit of one’s group” (p. 3). Helu-Thaman (2003) demonstrates how *ako* (learning) and *‘ilo* (knowledge), as traditional Tongan concepts of education, provide a

frame of reference for Tongan education today. These Tongan scholars have argued about the importance of the inclusion of the Tongan culture, language and concept in teaching in western school contexts. To address these arguments, Manu'atu (2000) explored indigenous Tongan concepts for education in her doctoral research study. She examined Tongan pedagogy for Tongan students in secondary schools in New Zealand and she found that the Tongan worldview concepts of *malie* (enjoyment) and *mafana* (inner warmth) are essential relational aspects between teachers and students for Tongan student's learning and success (Manu'atu, 2000).

### **2.5.2 Bilingualism**

International research shows clear advantages for bilingual students over speakers of only one language (Franken et al., 2005). Where one of these languages is an ancestral language, learners also gain a stronger sense of self and cultural identity (Frank et al., 2005). This reduces identity conflicts for Pacific students and motivates them to learn both languages and succeed at school (Frank et al., 2005). Brewerton (2010) also claims that the best educational outcomes for students come about when they are able to use both their home language and English in their schooling, in a context where they are both valued. In demonstrating the uneasiness caused from differences of two different cultures in the western schooling, the research of Fusitu'a and Coxon (1998, cited in Coxon et al., 2002), conducted in an Auckland school has examined the Tongan cultural ways in establishing a weekly homework centre with Tongan parents and tutors, to help Tongan students in their studies. The study found that the Tongan parents and tutors who used bilingual language and Tongan concepts in their teaching, had motivated the children to enjoy their learning, perform better in the western school, achieve better outcomes in their learning and they engaged better in learning (Fusitu'a and Coxon, 1998, cited in Coxon et al., 2002).

Davies et al. (2001) suggest that educators have become more interested in having the Pacific languages at secondary school level and the main emphasis is language maintenance. In a report on a pilot study carried out in the second half of 1999 of languages in the Manukau region with a big number of Pacific immigrants. Davis et al. (2001, p. 12) report that:

The different Polynesian languages spoken in this region are in different states of

health...Although Samoan and Tongan remain very robust at this time, the census data shows these language loss that Maori and Niuean have been taken for two generations.

Pacific language is used as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values, understandings and beliefs that are unique to the culture concerned (Davis, 2001). Hunkin-Tuiletufuga (2001) endorses this by stating that the Pacific language is a way for them to share their cultural values, beliefs and understandings within themselves and with others. However, Hunkin-Tuiletufuga (2001) points out that the general curriculum in New Zealand is westernized, therefore that role of the Pacific language in providing connections between the culture of the Pacific students and the western culture could help to improve the achievements of the Pacific students. Hunkin-Tuiletufuga (2001) also argues that the disengagement in learning and poor achievement rates of the Tongan and Pacific students are a consequence of the ways western schools are operating without considering the culture and language of the students.

Because language is the 'key value' of culture and language used in the western school is English, the students with Pacific languages are in a disadvantaged position. Hunkin-Tuiletufuga (2001, p. 66) therefore advocated the importance of "the provision of bilingual classes, more Pacific teachers, education programs for parents, the inclusion of more Pacific languages within school management". Taufe'ulungaki (2004) also argues that if the school cannot provide the bilingual classes to help the Tongans to engage in their learning, the Tongan community could be able to help through other initiatives such as Tongan homework centres. She further emphasises that Tongans will have to make realistic choices to keep their language alive or otherwise allow it to die with its associated culture (Taufe'ulungaki, 2004). Taumoefolau et al. (2002) also emphasize the need to maintain Tongan language and culture. Taufe'ulungaki (2004) further argues that the maintenance of language and culture is the responsibility of Tongan parents and Tongan leaders of Tongan communities.

### ***2.5.3 Indigenous knowledge***

Hughes (2000) claims that Indigenous perspectives and knowledge can contribute specifically to all children's understanding about the history and nature of Australian society, to both indigenous and non-indigenous, as the opportunity comes up in daily

lessons. He further argues that including indigenous perspectives and knowledge in a classroom curriculum, teachers will be able to enhance indigenous students' self-esteem (Hughes, 2000). Nakata (2007, p. 9) argues that "it is important for those wanting to bring Indigenous knowledge into teaching and learning contexts to understand...the importance of incorporating understandings of indigenous knowledge into curriculum areas..." Helu-Thaman (2003, p. 77) further argues that "we need to continue the process of reclaiming indigenous discourses by placing greater emphasis on our cultures and their languages in teaching". Nakata (2007, p. 10) claims that:

Indigenous epistemological basis of knowledge are embedded, ...in ways of story-telling, of memory-making, in narrative, art and performance; in cultural and social practices, of relating to kin, of socialising children; in ways of thinking, of transmitting knowledge, even in creolized languages....But we are all also grounded in Western epistemology, through historical experience, through Christianisation, through the English language, through interventions of and interactions with colonial and contemporary institutions, through formal education, ...through popular culture, and so on.

Nakata (2007) further argues that Indigenous students often feel the contradictions and tensions within having to align to the Indigenous knowledge or the Western knowledge. Helu-Thaman (1996) also describes the tensions between Tongan and Pacific cultural students who have brought their own worldview to the European formal schooling. She continues to argue that these tensions have caused difficulties for these students to engage in their learning (Helu-Thaman, 1996). She therefore suggests that it is a priority for schools within a multi-ethnic society in western society to consider dual learning settings for students, that is, the home cultures of the students, and the culture of the western school (Helu-Thaman, 1996b). This could encourage the teachers to consider the importance of the cultural values of the Tongan and Pacific students. Cooper (2002) and Waxman & Tellez (2002) agree by stating that education programs which are not considering the cultural values of the students will have negative effects and problems with teaching and learning. Thus this would contribute to the difficulties in engagement in learning in school of the Tongan immigrant students. Helu-Thaman (1996b) further clarifies the cultural values that are more effective for the Tongan and Pacific students for their performances in the systems of the western formal education. She emphasises that Tongan and Pacific concepts of education have to link to their cultural values (Helu-Thaman, 1996b). She also challenges the educators in western schooling to acknowledge

and understand a variety of ways of the knowledge of the Tongan and Pacific students in order to enable them to develop ways that could relate directly and make it easier for the Tongan and Pacific students to have better outcomes in their achievement in school.

#### **2.5.4 Pedagogies**

In developing complex accounts of the conditions that affect student engagement in learning, researchers have shifted focus from the needs of individual learners to a broader view of affective and contextual factors that contribute to developing learner perspectives, capacities and scope for independence. These include not just students' beliefs about their capabilities, and their views about what is worth learning (Corno, 2001, cited in Harrison & Prain, 2009), but also a focus beyond the individual learner to pedagogical, classroom and other contextual dimensions. These include the role of domain-specific knowledge (Perry, 2002, cited in Harrison & Prain, 2009), peer pressure influence on motivation and effort (Sullivan et al., 2005, cited in Harrison & Prain, 2009), possible co-regulatory strategies modelled by teachers to support learning (Hadwin Wozney & Pontin, 2005), and the broader classroom organisation of learning experiences (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006), including appropriate "material resources" (Prosser, et al, 2008, p. 21). There is also far greater acknowledgement of the key role of the teacher-student relationship and the identities student form from this relationship as crucial factors in effective learning (MacBeath, 2006; Prosser et al., 2008), where low teacher expectation of student capacities have strong negative effects on student effort (Prosser, et al., 2008; Tadich, et al., 2007). Researchers have also focused on students' aspirations and beliefs about their own capacities, noting that students' positive views are not always shared by their teachers (Prosser et al., 2008; Sullivan et al., 2009).

While noting that diverse factors influence student effort at school, Grinsven & Tillema (2006) and Zimmermann (2001) claim that a key element in engaging junior secondary students is promoting their capacity to self-regulate their own learning. At the same time, Boekaerts & Cascallar (2006) and Hadwin et al., (2005) have recognised the key role of learning environments in this mix of academic learning and the development of a sense of wellbeing, where teachers are crucial in determining what kind of self-regulatory possibilities learners are offered. However, despite this strong advocacy of the value of developing self-reliance in learners, many teachers have struggled to provide learning

experiences that enable this learning capacity in students.

#### **2.5.4.1 *Culturally relevant pedagogy***

One method of enhancing engagement in learning, is to cultivate a culture of achievement in the classroom where instruction is challenging, students feel comfortable asking questions, and students are expected to do their best. For instance, teachers need to select a goal that is challenging but attainable and find creative ways for students to work toward achieving the goal. Monitoring student progress throughout the school year also will keep student focused academically and invested in their learning. When students feel challenged, they are less likely to be bored and disengaged (Akey, 2006). Teachers should aim to create a culture in the classroom where learning is interesting and asking questions is not only okay but expected (Weiss & Pasley, 2004). To address these challenges, Ladson-Billings (1990) argues that culturally relevant pedagogy rests on the following three criteria:

1. Students must experience academic success
2. Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and
3. Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billing, 1990; 1994; 1995a).

Ladson-Billing (1995a) further argues the importance for teachers to find ways to value the skills and abilities of the students and channel them in academically important ways. Ladson-Billing (1995a, p. 160) defends her arguments by outlining the following example from her studies:

Lewis, a White woman, recognized that the African American boys possessed social power. Rather than allow that power to influence their peers in negative ways, Lewis challenged the boys to demonstrate academic power by drawing on issues and ideas they found meaningful. As the boys began to take on academic leadership, other students found this as a positive trait and developed similar behaviors (p. 160).

Furthermore, culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1994, 1995a). Ladson-Billings (1995a, p. 161) endorses her argument by the following example from her study:

Hilliard is an African American woman who had taught in a variety of schools and a

mother of a teenaged son, Hilliard was familiar with the music that permeates African American youth culture. Instead of railing against the supposed evils of rap music, Hilliard allowed her second grade students to bring in samples of lyrics from what both she and the students determined to be non-offensive rap songs. Students were encouraged to perform the songs and the teacher reproduced them on an overhead so that they could discuss literal and figurative meanings as well as technical aspects of poetry such as rhyme scheme, alliteration, and onomatopoeia. Thus, while the students were comfortable using the music, they loved the teacher used it as a bridge to school learning (p. 161).

Moreover, culturally relevant teaching does not imply that it is enough for students to choose academic excellence and remain culturally grounded if those skills and abilities represent only an individual achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1990; 1994; 1995a; 1995b). Ladson-Billings (1995a) further argues that beyond those individual characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, students must develop a broader socio political consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities. She also claims that if school is about preparing students for active citizenship, what better citizenship tool than the ability to critically analyse the society? (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). To address her argument, Ladson-Billings (1995a, p. 162) gives the following example from her study:

In the classrooms of culturally relevant teachers, students are expected to "engage the world and others critically." Rather than merely bemoan the fact that their textbooks were out of date, several of the teachers in the study, in conjunction with their students, critiqued the knowledge represented in the textbooks, and the system of inequitable funding that allowed middle-class students to have newer texts. They wrote letters to the editor of the local newspaper to inform the community of the situation. The teachers also brought in articles and papers that represented counter knowledge to help the students develop multiple perspectives on a variety of social and historical phenomena (p. 162).

Ladson-Billings (1999, 1995, 1994, 1990) and Gay (2000) also note that teacher education programs continue to prepare teachers as if they will be teaching in homogeneous, western, middle-income schools. Ladson-Billings (1999) has also critiqued the prevailing conception of teacher knowledge in teacher preparation programs, characterizing knowledge as lacking inherent and fundamental ties to social and cultural characteristics. Manu'atu (2000) has also explored the operations of a Tongan homework centre, as well as providing a fascinating account of the pedagogical implications and value of Tongan parents, teachers and students involved in a Cultural Schools Polynesian festival. In her exploration, Manu'atu (2000) found that both the homework centre and

cultural festival are places where substantial members of Tongan immigrant students actively and enthusiastically engage in their learning and these help them to engage in their learning in school. Failure to make these connections will reproduce the marginalization of Tongan immigrant students in the western school system (Manu'atu, 2000).

To address the challenges claimed by Ladson-Billings (1995a) and Manu'atu (2000), the uniquely developed homework and study group for Tongan students (Fusitu'a & Coxon, 1998), while not classroom based or directly school based, is of interest in terms of culturally relevant pedagogy because of how it details the nature of teaching/learning interactions in a homework centre in which all students with Tongan tutors were observed. Students were motivated to engage in their learning because tutors were caring. The tutors also used Tongan cultural methods for their interactions that were effective. Administrators, parents, teachers and Tongan leaders were happy that the Tongan students were able to identify the learning benefits for themselves that also motivating them to engage better in their learning in school (Coxon et al., 2002).

Jones's (1991) study with 19 Pacific students and 12 western students in a secondary school, also provided fascinating insights into, and theorised explanations of the interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. She was able to demonstrate how teaching and learning processes in the classroom advantage some students and disadvantage others, and that this occurs along class/ethnicity lines. Clear connections were also made between the nature of these interactions, their pedagogical implications and student achievement levels. An important part of her analysis is to show, that both schools and students are active participants in these processes. The following are several of the study's key findings:

- students have an effect on the forms of teaching and learning that occur in the classrooms;
- teaching is implicitly a cultural and political process, where the interactions between teacher and students do not necessarily benefit all students. In this study, these particular forms actively disadvantaged Tongan and Pacific students;
- the qualifications or credentials that students seek to gain from their schooling

- experiences are not necessarily earned on the basis of ‘ability’ – rather (and this is significant in terms of the overall ‘cultural difference’ argument of this section of the Review), success in school is dependent on familiarity with the dominant culture (Jones, 1991).

### ***2.5.5 Teaching and learning strategies***

In recent years researchers on student engagement in learning of junior students in Secondary schools have identified a range of strategies teachers can use, and classrooms environments they need to create, to promote this learning. There is a broad agreement that students should have a sense of autonomy and responsibility for how and what they learn (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Butler & Winne, 2005; Grinsven & Tillema, 2006; Tadich, Deed, Campbell & Prain, 2007), as well as self-efficacy in using and monitoring effective strategies for this learning (Perry, Phillips & Hutchinson, 2006). For Boekaerts and Corno (2005) such strategies include motivational engagements, direct teaching of metacognitive skills, mentoring and apprenticeship-oriented work. Teachers should be less directive, and provide students with multiple opportunities for self-evaluation as a basis for developing self-regulatory learning strategies (Zimmermann, 2001). Tillema, Kessels and Meijers (2000) note that such an approach shifts the teacher’s role fundamentally from monitor and regulator of student learning to activator of learning opportunities. However, Perry (2002) claims that self-regulation is closely tied to domain-specific competencies, and therefore teachers needed to focus on fundamental concepts and structures in particular subjects if they were to provide appropriate guidance and feedback for students..

There is a broad consensual literature around effective schooling in the middle years. This has focused on: (a) the value of large-scale curricular re-conceptualisation to make learning tasks more motivating, meaningful, and attuned to students’ interests and needs, (b) an emphasis on teaching strategies that focus explicitly on how students can succeed as learners, and (c) programs that redress negative student attitudes, beliefs, understandings and values that impede engagement with learning (Martin & Marsh, 2006; Munns & Martin, 2005). As noted by Main & Bryer (2007, p. 101), teachers in the middle years “have been challenged to create a curriculum that is relevant, integrative, and exploratory”. Varying degrees of success have been claimed, locally and broadly, for

these diverse initiatives (Hunter, 2007; Pendergast et al., 2005). Akey (2006) and Garcia-Reid et al. (2005), claim that teachers are key players in fostering student engagement. They work directly with the students and typically are the most influential in a student's educational experience. Creating a culture of achievement in their classroom, developing interactive and relevant lessons and activities, and being encouraging and supportive to students are all ways in which teachers can foster student engagement in the classroom.

#### ***2.5.5.1: Instructional strategies***

Instructional strategies such as collaborative learning and experiential learning as well as designing an accessible and relevant curriculum have been shown to greatly increase student engagement in learning (Akey, 2006; Heller et al., 2003). Examples of these instructional strategies that might support student engagement include the following:

- Group activities and assignments
- Long-term projects
- Hands-on activities
- Differentiated instruction
- Lessons and activities that draw from students' background, interests, and academic needs

Students learn more and retain more information when they actively participate in the learning process and when they can relate to what is being taught (Akey, 2006). Drawing connections between information taught and real life – such as everyday life, social issues, and personal concerns of the age group of students – is highly effective in engaging students in the lesson (Heller et al., 2003). For instance, a middle school English teacher might select persuasive writing topics that her students can easily relate to or a high school physics teacher might use roller coasters to reinforce Newton's Law of Motion. Research states that “the extent to which students interests are incorporated is significantly related to their academic achievement” (Heller et al., 2003, p. 12). Research also has shown that the inclusion of students' interests in the learning process increases student engagement in learning (Akey, 2006; Heller et al., 2003).

Phillips et al. (2004) claim that students get into a pattern of learning progress when they

can engage actively with school activities and teachers from the start of school. Students also engage better with school activities and teachers when they have had prior experience of such activities and relationships (Phillips et al., 2002, 2004). In order for Tongan and Pacific immigrant students to engage better in their learning, Brewerton (2010) further suggests the importance of developing key knowledge and skills, and the need to develop the abilities to use and develop them independently, and such abilities, include an inquiring and critical mind, and an ability to question and speak out.

#### ***2.5.5.2: Teacher support, teacher caring and good teaching***

Student engagement is positively correlated to teacher support (Akey, 2006; Garcia-Reid et al., 2005). Several studies have found that students who noted that their teachers were supportive and cared about their success were more likely to be engaged in the classroom and perform well academically (Heller et al., 2003; Akey, 2006). Akey (2006) further argues that students who do not feel confident in their ability to succeed are not likely to attempt to do the work. Additionally, acknowledging student academic growth and improvement is another way to build student confidence. It is crucial for teachers to “create collaborative, supportive environments with high but achievable standards” because it greatly effects students’ engagement in school and learning (Akey, 2006, p. 32).

Researchers have tried to find pedagogical styles that could be effective to ethnically and culturally diverse immigrant students, some researchers have suggested more interactive practices that can help teachers respond more appropriately. One such practice is teacher caring, a term that refers to a set of teacher-initiated practices that promote strong interpersonal bonds between teachers and their students (Rogers & Webb, cited in Tyler, 2009). Research has shown that students’ reports of teacher caring contribute to perceptions of teacher effectiveness, academic effort, and academic success (Perez, 2000; Ware, 2006). Furthermore, in a study of classroom management strategies and culturally responsive teaching, Brown (2004) identifies a caring attitude as a major teacher-centered characteristic that facilitated the interaction with ethnically and culturally diverse students. For many, a teacher who cares about students will not display biases against the students’ distinct cultural values. Instead, the teacher finds ways to use these cultural values throughout classroom practice (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2001; Rogoff, 2003).

Balfanz (2007) indicates that students in Philadelphia and Chicago who fail to succeed in school and attend schools that fail to provide them with the skills, patience, resources, environments and supports they need to succeed are often the immigrant students from low income and minority ethnic groups. These immigrant students are too often ignored until it is too late because educational systems are not organized to recognize and respond to early indicators of their poor attendance, behavioural problems and disengagement in their learning (Balfanz, 2007). Many Tongan immigrant students from the Tongan ethnic group in Australia are from a similar situation and therefore the issue of the teacher who cares is crucial in the interaction between the teacher and the student in the classroom.

Moreover, the engagement in learning in Australian schools needs a good relationship between the teachers and all students including Tongan immigrant students. Between 1999 and 2000, three independent research studies of students from the South Pacific from schools in low socio-economic areas in New Zealand have identified as a primary theme, the critical importance of the relationship between teachers and students – in fact, it was a prerequisite for learning to occur (Hawk et al., 2005). Barker et al. (2004) also note that to facilitate communication, classrooms need to be non-threatening with teachers respecting and valuing students' contributions. They also identify that to foster the teacher/student relationship, behaviours need to include recognition of student perspectives, affirmation, responsiveness to unusual situations and a general attitude of non defensiveness. Failure to have the right relationship and good communication between the teachers and students in schools have led inevitably to difficulties for Tongan immigrant students to engage in their learning.

Within schools, teaching is the most important factor in students' achievement. Good teaching can ensure Tongan and Pacific students' achievement is at the same level as that of other students. Effective teaching requires teachers to take responsibility for every student's achievement to value diversity, have high expectation and build on student's experiences (Alton-Lee, 2003). Pacific student's achievement is affected by the degree to which her or his culture is respected by the school, and by the degree of similarity between the culture of the community and the values of the school (Brewerton, 2010).

In trying to be culturally responsive, teachers can get caught in cultural stereotypes about Tongan and Pacific learners which then limit the students' learning opportunities

(Ringold, 2005). For example, teachers need to avoid applying assumptions about Pacific peoples as group learners and shy participants (Coxon et al., 2002). Such attitudes affect teaching and can limit students' opportunities for learning. Professional development that challenges these assumptions is therefore very important. Indigenous scholars including Maori peoples (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Bishop, 2005); Canadian First Nations People (Wilson, 2001; Youngblood Henderson, 2002); Indigenous Australians (Yunkaporta, 2010; Watkin-Lui, 2009; Martin, 2007; Nakata, 2007); and Indigenous Tongans (Helu-Thaman, 2003; Hau'ofa, 2000) claim the importance of using teaching methods that are meaningful and helpful to the indigenous students to engage in their learning and to have high achievement in their education.

### **2.5.5.3 *Strengths-based approach***

Tyson Yunkaporta (2010) argues that sharing stories is a powerful way of learning for all people, including the Indigenous people. Yunkaporta (2010) and Martin (2007) claim that in the Aboriginal world, stories are in places (land, home, sea, trees, etc.). Learning is therefore connected to places. When teaching is based on meaningful stories of the students, they would learn better because the meaningful stories were stored in their hearts, and this would make it easier for them to connect to the lessons. Furthermore, the students would develop familiar strategies as a way to discover and learn about new knowledge relevant to the lessons. Knowledge is therefore comes from a 'place' that needs to be acknowledged so that learners can situate new knowledge (Yunkaporta, 2010) to be used by their heads, hearts and hands. Yunkaporta (2010) and Martin (2007) argue that all learners need to see the way learning is situated in the physical world around them (Yunkaporta, 2010; Martin, 2007), in order to engage in the process of learning. To address this challenge, Yunkaporta's (2010) research findings suggest the eight ways of learning (shown below), the building blocks of pedagogy found at the interface of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learning systems, to use by teachers in their teaching. The following eight ways of learning (Yunkaporta, 2010) could also be relevant to Tongan immigrant students, and all students, in their efforts to engage in their learning at schools.

1. Story sharing: This is about teaching and learning through narrative.
2. Learning maps: This is about making learning pathways and processes explicit

visually.

3. Non-verbal learning: This is about hands-on learning, critical reflection and least-intrusive management strategies. Ancestral/spiritual knowledge also comes through this way of learning.
4. Symbols and images: This is about exploring content through imagery and using visual cues and signals.
5. The fifth way is land links: This is about place-based pedagogy, linking content to local land and environment.
6. The non-linear concepts: This is about indirect management strategies, lateral thinking, comparing and synthesizing diverse cultural viewpoints, innovating, adapting, working with cycles and working with holistic knowledge.
7. The seventh way is deconstruct/reconstruct: This is about modeling and scaffolding, balancing teacher instruction with independent learning and working from wholes to parts.
8. The eighth way is community links: This is about grounding learning content and values in community knowledge, working on community projects and using or displaying knowledge products publicly for local benefit.

Based on a qualitative study of 81 Pacific learners on Tuition Opportunity Programme for Students (TOPS) programmes, many of them were teenagers who had not achieved well at school in terms of formal academic qualifications, a study by Pasikale (1999) concludes that Pacific learners have a range of preference when it comes to learning and teaching processes. As is standard good practice, regardless of the ethnic background of the students, individual contexts should be taken into account when determining the teaching and learning processes that teachers will adopt. Teachers need to be cautious in generalizing the Tongan and Pacific students as ‘group learners’, ‘shy participants’ and ‘non-performers’. As for the relative effectiveness of Pacific teachers, Pasikale (1999) is of the view that what is of greater importance for students to be more interested in their studies and for academic success is teacher empathy not ethnicity. Pasikale (1999) identifies that students in her study valued educators with empathy, who ‘cared’ about the overall need of every student. Thus this would help them to be more successful in their effort to engage in their learning in the classroom.

### **2.5.6: *Effective school leadership***

Effective teaching also needs effective school leadership focused on achievement (Brewerton, 2010). Enhanced student achievement outcomes only occurred once school leadership and management moved their focus from operational matters to student achievement. Curriculum goals, requisite resources and appropriate pedagogical and assessment practices needed to become the focus before enhanced student achievement outcomes were realised (Gorinski & Fraser, 2007). For example, in New Zealand, the Education Review Office (2009) found that schools that were highly effective at engaging Tongan and Pacific students usually had a senior management team that was committed to improving Tongan and Pacific students' achievement. In addition, strong communities of professional practice are very important in promoting and sustaining effective classroom practice (Timperley et al., 2003). This research found that higher students' achievement is linked with existence of an effective community of professional practice within a school leadership team that focused consistently on student outcomes, analysed student achievement data and worked collaboratively as a team effort to improve teaching practice (Timperley et al., 2003). Moreover, school leadership would be crucial to the education of all the students who do not engage in their learning in school, including the Tongan immigrant students.

#### **2.5.6.1: *Integrating the Elements of Effective Leadership***

Wahlstrom et al. (2010) argue that educational leadership have strong positive effects on student learning. They have found in their research studies that effective leadership depends on expectations, efficacy, and engagement (Wahlstrom et. al (2010). They continue to argue that “the three concepts do not denote isolated dimensions of leadership. Rather, they imply complementary relationships that sustain effective leadership at all levels” (Wahlstrom et. al (2010, p. 30), shown on Figure 2.3 below.

**Figure 2.3:** Elements of Effective Educational Leadership (adapted from Wahlstrom et. al, 2010).

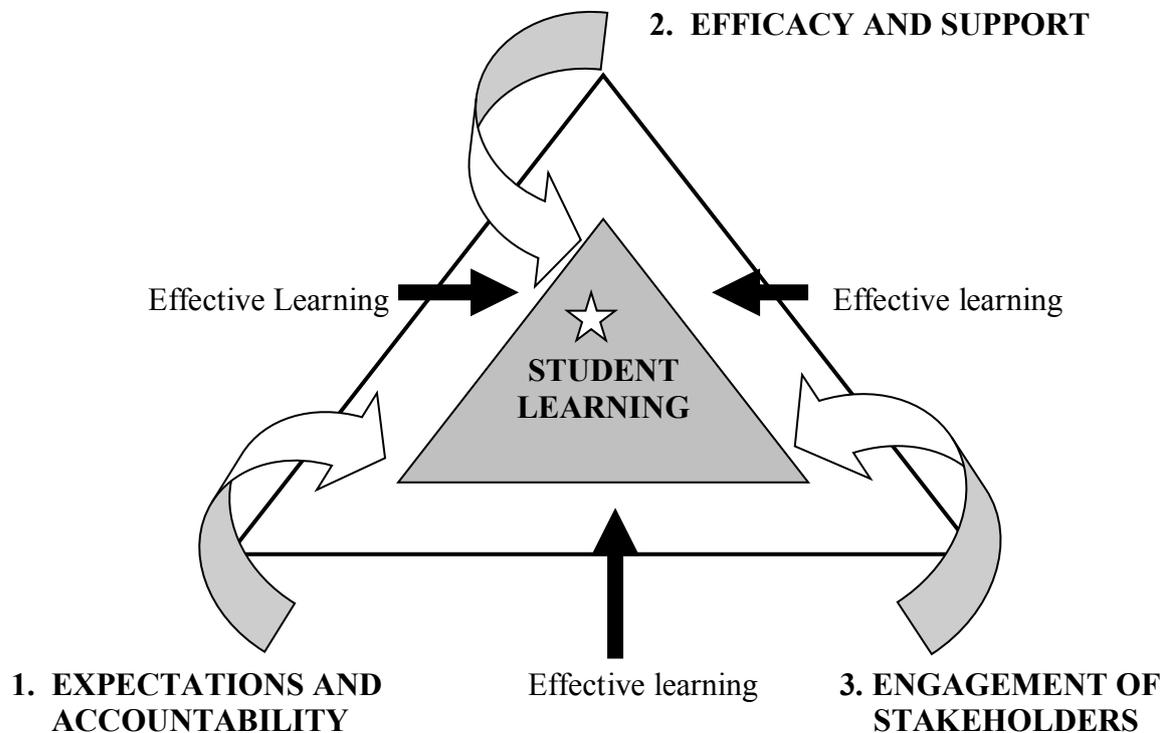


Figure 2.3 above outlines that effective leadership have strong positive effects on student learning is the integration of:

1. Expectations and Accountability: Represents a key element of effective leadership enacted at all levels – the state, district, school and classroom.
2. Efficacy and Support: Emerges as a descriptor for a second key element of effective leadership.
3. Engagement of stakeholders Influences: The broader descriptor, it acknowledges that, in their efforts to improve student learning, successful leaders make real connections with people inside and outside their professional world (Wahlstrom et. al, 2010).

The challenge, then, is to discover useful interpretations of that general point – what kinds of leadership in schools, families and communities are needed to improve Tongan immigrant students learning? In their research findings, Wahlstrom et. al (2010) emphasize that principals' sense of collective efficacy as a key to leadership influence on teaching and learning.

Finally, in general, good engagement with learning in school is necessary for good achievement (Wylie et al., 2009). Although some Tongan and Pacific students generally report good engagement with schools, this is not reflected in their achievement. In its pilot evaluation of a sample of Auckland schools, the Education Review Office (2009) identifies a need for teachers to understand that students being 'on task' in the classroom does not necessarily mean that they are actually engaged effectively in learning. However, concern over lack of student engagement is an international problem (OECD 2003 cited in Burford, & Gross, 2006; Jones & Perkins, 2004; Mitra, 2008; Waxman & Tellez, 2002). Data collected from the United States of America and Australian high school students also show that both nations are experiencing problems of the students' engagement in learning of students in general (Burford & Gross, 2006).

The issues considered in the discussion of the literature on this section on the theme 'Teaching and learning' and its related sub-themes have contributed to forming the forth research question outlined in Chapter 1.

## **2.6 SUMMARY**

The studies discussed in this chapter, on engagement in learning of students in middle years, immigrant students and small ethnic groups, represent a voice for Tongan immigrant students who are experiencing similar plights. With limited studies in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students, building on the studies discussed in this chapter will generate literature for further research and scholarship and, add their minority voices with the intention to provide information for policy direction and implementation.

The presentation and discussion of the international body of literature in this chapter was aimed at answering the following subsidiary research questions:

1. What have been the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools?
2. How do Tongan immigrant families and community influence Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning at Australian Catholic schools?
3. How do the values and culture of Catholic schools influence the engagement in

learning of Tongan immigrant students?

4. What teaching and learning experiences are more engaging for Tongan immigrant students?

The scope of the literature review adopted in this study has endeavored to integrate a broad set of topics, ranging from Australian school community, Tongan family and community, and Catholic school culture to teaching and learning. This was meant to incorporate the views and theories of various scholars and researchers in the field of experiences on engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in western schools, as well as placing the study in the context of the conventional norms of research. The aim was to identify, analyse, and synthesize the central issues and ideas in the literature that were pertinent to the study and its specific focus – which is, to understand the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and the issues and factors affecting these experiences. The review focused on the four main themes and their sub-themes shown in the conceptual framework (Figure 2.1).

The literature review showed the following gaps that need addressing. Firstly, the voices of Tongan immigrant students on their experiences in engagement in learning, with particular reference to a minority group in a western school need further exploration.

Secondly concepts of student engagement in learning are still too narrowly focused on western worldviews with marginalization of culture and ethnicity. Such concepts continue to dominate and promote western worldviews that are irrelevant to the worldviews of the Tongan immigrants. Literature on experiences on engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools is scanty. Factors such as culture, ethnicity, families and communities affecting the engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students need to address and explore.

Jones (2005) claims that schools in Australia are often preoccupied with what is in the curriculum and, consequently, other aspects affecting the students' learning, and what puts them in a position to best learn, are often ignored and overlooked. Significant policy changes in the educational, social and cultural discourses of Australian Catholic schools lie in not only policy and curriculum development but also negotiating effective partnership frameworks between schools, families and communities to support their

students in their engagement in learning. There continues to be a gap in successful experiences in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools. Hence the objective of ensuring successful experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools in their engagement in learning appears to have no obvious solution with challenges at the system, school and community levels. It is therefore imperative to research the problem from the perspectives of the Tongan immigrant students. Essentially, the study will make an unique contribution to the body of knowledge and literature on experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning within cultural contexts.

While there are a number of schools in Australia with Tongan immigrant students experiencing success in their engagement in learning, the number of Tongan immigrant students who are going through difficulties in their experiences in engagement in learning in such schools is considerably high. Hence, it is significant that a conscious effort is made to give Tongan immigrant students an opportunity to voice their perspectives on issues pertaining to their experiences in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning. As a way of capturing their voices, narratives as a research methodology, is the appropriate methodology adopted in this study, to capture their voices and to find answers to the research questions. The research framework is discussed in Chapter 3.

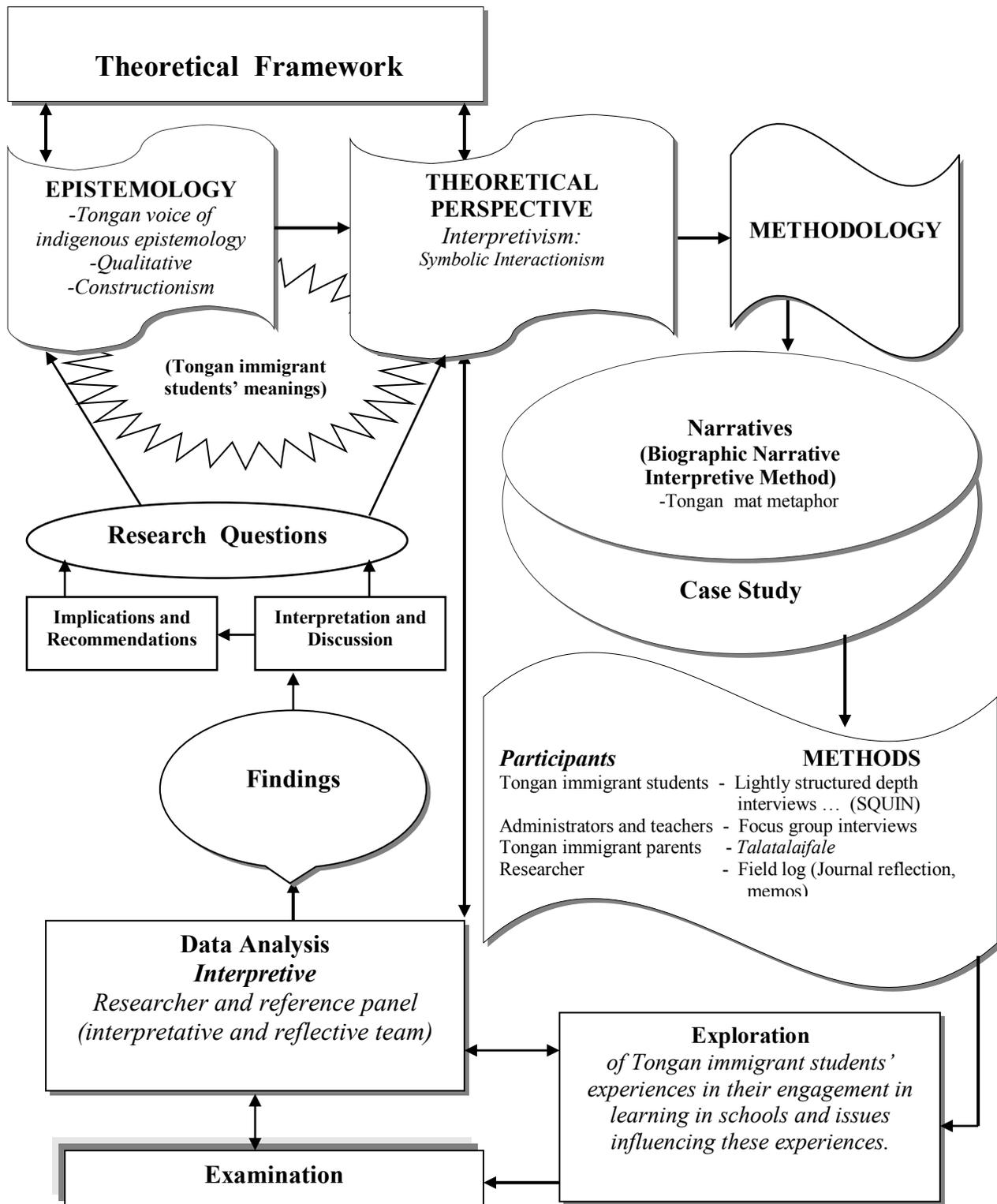
## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

*Research is diverse and pluralistic. This diversity is associated with a number of criteria such as its focus, its methods, its purpose and its underlying paradigm. Research may focus on people and the physical and social environments, or on hidden structures and meanings. It can aim to increase scientific knowledge or to emancipate people and change their life-world (Sarakantos, 2005)*

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the methodological approach and the research process to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning in two Australian Catholic secondary schools and identify the issues influencing these experiences. In the effort to carry this out, it was important to consider a research framework that would address the phenomenon in its real context. As a Tongan, the researcher is aware that this study involves Tongan immigrant students from a Tongan ethnic group who commit and live their unique social, educational and cultural values in a predominantly western society. Being mindful of this, this study is making sure to provide opportunities in its process to accommodate the voices of the Tongan immigrant students in a context that considers their worldviews. A theoretical framework to guide the research process and to answer the research questions is presented in Figure 3.1 below. The chapter also outlines ethical issues and how they were dealt with.

**Figure 3.1 A Theoretical Framework to guide the research process**



(This diagrammatic representation of the theoretical framework is explained below).

### 3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework (Figure 3.1) above is structured around the four basic

elements of any research process that inform each other, as proposed by Crotty, (1998):

1. What *epistemology* informs the theoretical perspectives?
2. What *theoretical perspective* lies behind the methodology in question?
3. What *methodology* governs our choice and use of methods?
4. What *methods* do we propose to use? (Crotty, 1998, p. 2).

Crotty (1998) observes that researchers must justify the choice and use of methodologies and methods to suit their particular research purposes. To substantiate the choice, the researcher brings a number of assumptions to the research about how reality is constructed (Crotty, 1998). These suppositions contribute to the choice of methodology and methods adopted. A discussion and justification of each critical element follows.

### **3.3 EPISTEMOLOGY**

Epistemology is defined as a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, methods and limits of human knowledge (Cresswell, 2002). In defining the epistemology for this study, the researcher endeavoured to bring to the fore influences such as personal, social, cultural and historical contexts. These influences, when applied to the known by the knower, depend on the interaction of the subject and object (Crotty, 1998). In this particular research study, the subject is *Tongan immigrant students*, and the interactive construct is *their experiences in school and influences on their engagement in learning*. The conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) has given a visual mapping of the literature and has shown that Tongan immigrant students are from a Tongan ethnic group comprising its own language and culture attending western Australian Catholic schools. It is essential therefore to provide views on the importance of the voice of a Tongan indigenous epistemology that could make contrasts and comparisons with the western epistemology, regarding this particular study.

#### **3.3.1 Voice of a Tongan Indigenous Epistemology**

Tongan scholars such as Hau'ofa (2000), Helu-Thaman (2003) and Manu'atu (2000) claim that Tongan indigenous people have a worldview that is dissimilar to the worldview of the Anglo-American (western) people. Quanchi (2004, p. 8) further claims that "indigenous epistemology is situated in its own community. Each language group, each community – possibly a thousand entities – has its own or organizing and applying

knowledge”. Mindful of these claims this study acknowledges the use of Tongan traditions and knowledge, as well as utilising what is useful to its research process. The participation of Tongan indigenous parents and leaders in the *talatalaifale* and the reference panel have utilised Tongan indigenous knowledge into the process of this research.

In acknowledging the challenge of using a voice of a Tongan indigenous epistemology for this study, the researcher is conscious of the dilemma caused in her attempt to articulate and explore indigenous Tongan knowledge within the Western context of an Australian university. Mutua & Swadener (2004) and Nakata (2007) argue that research has been a tool of the imperialist West that marginalises and dominates indigenous peoples. They further emphasize the importance of embracing and integrating the indigenous knowledge into the research academic environment. Consequently, Qalo (2004, p. 2) claims that “Pacific people, cease to appreciate ...the science or knowledge put together to manage long distance travel, build houses, canoes, marae, koro, plait mats, make tapa, etc. ...our history is also inundated with people from another culture who imposed theirs on ours”.

Tongan scholar, Helu-Thaman (2003) calls for the process of freeing education from colonial status and to oppose “the global spread of Anglo-American knowledge, values, and practices, rather than indigenous knowledge and wisdom” (p. 7). She continues to claim the need to embrace indigenous epistemologies (Helu-Thaman, 2003). Tongan scholar, Hau’ofa (2000, p. 454) also argues that “in order for us to gain greater autonomy than we have today and maintain it within the global system we must be able to define and construct our pasts and present in our own ways”. The arguments given indicate that knowledge is rooted in a cultural context. Tongan cultural ways of knowing and being are not the predominant mode of operation within the Australian academic environment and so researching Tongan matters is filtered through a non-Tongan system of knowledge legitimation. This raises the issue of the extent to which Tongan knowledge can be known from the viewpoint of quite a different culture, and whether in the process the potentiality of Tongan knowledge will be undermined.

While the researcher perceives this as problematic, the potential advantages of cultural triangulation are also noted. That is, there may be gains from interpreting data both from

a western knowledge point of view and from a Tongan cultural point of view. Interestingly, Bartunek and Louis (1996, p. 14) note that “an approach to inquiry that embraces only one perspective is potentially ethnocentric”. Within this research, the researcher acknowledges that as a consequence of using her two viewpoints she experiences the needs of dual accountability, to the *Tongan* world and to the *western* world, as to the outcomes of the research. Qalo (2004) and Nakata (2007) argue that there needs to be a careful interface between indigenous knowledge and global knowledge within *Indigenous* academies. Similarly, Durie (2005, p. 144) highlights the crucial role indigenous researchers have in “straddling the divide between science and indigenous knowledge”.

Durie (2005, p. 145) further notes the potential of the criticism of the two fronts by stating that “the challenge has been to afford each belief system its own integrity, while developing approaches that can incorporate aspects of both and lead to innovation, greater relevance and additional opportunities for the creation of new knowledge”. It is therefore, perhaps what may occur as a ‘crisis of vocality’ is also an opportunity for new voices to offer solutions to various problems associated with qualitative research (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). If it be the case that Tongan knowledge will be misinterpreted by way of western processes of knowledge acquisition or whether there are cultural triangulation advantages to be realised, this is however a significant challenge that needs to be acknowledged.

### **3.3.2 *Qualitative Approach***

One of the features underpinning a research framework is to declare the position taken about how knowledge is specifically re-searched and constructed (Crotty, 1998). Research is presented as a way of ‘re-searching’ or looking again at the world and making sense of it (Carter, 2005). Being a Tongan native speaker and prompted by a primary education in Tonga and background as a Tongan language teacher, the researcher would add that in Tongan etymology, ‘komiuniti’ the Tongan word for ‘community’, is derived from the sounds of the syllables of the word ‘community’. The Tongan word ‘komiuniti’ therefore suggests that the Tongan word is built on the sounds of the syllables of the English word ‘community’. Research, as such, is a process, described as a “systematic investigation to find answers to a problem” (Burns, 1997, p. 1). Gough (2002) goes further, proposing a more open view of research by including “any means by which a

discipline or art develops, tests and renews itself” (p. 2). This perspective informs this research process and, in particular, leads the researcher to adopt a qualitative approach to answer the research questions.

Qualitative researchers are considered as philosophers based on the premise that human beings are guided by abstract principles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). These principles combine beliefs about ontology, epistemology and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), epistemology asks “How do I know the world? What is the relationship between the inquirer and the knower” (p. 157). Sarakantos (2005) describes epistemology as the nature of knowledge and the kind of knowledge which research is looking for. It is the theoretical or “thinking” side of doing research as opposed to the “practical” side of research methods (Gough, 2002). Crotty (1998) distinguishes a range of epistemologies: *objectivism*, *subjectivism*, and *constructionism*. This study therefore adopts the epistemology of *constructionism* (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism has a range of values and ideology that best describes the approach to give voice to the meanings of engagement in the learning embedded in the language of the Tongan immigrant students as they respond to the research questions.

### 3.3.3 *Constructionist Approach*

Constructionism is “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality, as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Truth or meaning is constructed by the participants in the research study as they engage with the context they are interpreting since,

Our constructions of the world, our values, and our ideas about how to enquire into those constructions, are mutually self-reinforcing. We conduct inquiry via a particular paradigm because it embodies assumptions about the world that we believe and values that we hold, and because we hold those assumptions and values we conduct inquiry according to the precepts of that paradigm (Schwandt, 2000, p. 399).

Such an epistemology supports the researcher as concepts, models and schemes, which are constructed to make sense of experience, are continually tested and modified in the light of new experience (Schwandt, 2000). Knowledge will be created as the researcher

constructs versions, develops and articulates findings that are mainly dependent on experience and social interactions with participants as the investigation is in process. Arguments based on epistemology indicate that knowledge is rooted in a cultural context, it is critical therefore that the knowledge of Tongan immigrant students is considered and acknowledged in this study. Thus, a constructionist epistemology creates meaning through the engagement and interaction with all the Tongan immigrant students who share their social and cultural lived experiences and interpret those experiences.

### **3.4 THEOREICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The theoretical perspective is “the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding the logic and criteria” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). From a philosophical stance, the purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students’ engagement in learning in Catholic secondary schools and to identify the issues influencing these experiences. The theoretical perspective informs the research design and the methods applied by this study to generate data for analysis. For the purpose of this study, the appropriate theoretical perspective grounded in a constructionist epistemology is *interpretivism*.

#### **3.4.1 Interpretivism**

Neuman (2006) differentiates the interpretive approach from the positivist approach as it is based on the uniqueness of humans and captures human social life. Human social life is more sensitive to the ideas, beliefs, and perceptions that people hold about the world than objective and factual reality (Neuman, 2006). As Sarakantos (2005) puts it, the researcher “explores the processes of constructing social situations and everyday structures that guide and explain personal views and opinions” (p. 40). The main interests of interpretivism are “factors and conditions, cultural prescriptions and the social order in general that generate certain situations and social structures” (Sarakantos, 2005, p. 40). An interpretive research is privileged in this study because of its strengths. Interpretive research:

- Sets the researcher close to reality;
- Studies reality from the inside;
- Uses open methods of data collection;

- Employs a flexible research design;
- Captures the world in action (Sarakantos, 2005, p. 46).

Neuman (2006) highlighted a number of postulates shared by researchers who favour the interpretive approach:

- Social reality is very fluid as human beings understand they are constantly constructing, testing, reinforcing or changing;
- An idiographic form of reasoning will give a detailed picture of a specific social setting;
- Empathy, instead of replication, is the best way to grasp social knowledge.

Considering the benefits of the interpretative approach, the researcher recognises its ability to generate appropriate data that will lead to understanding the Tongan immigrant students' experiences and their perceptions on the purpose of the study. In search of a suitable interpretive approach, *symbolic interactionism* was considered.

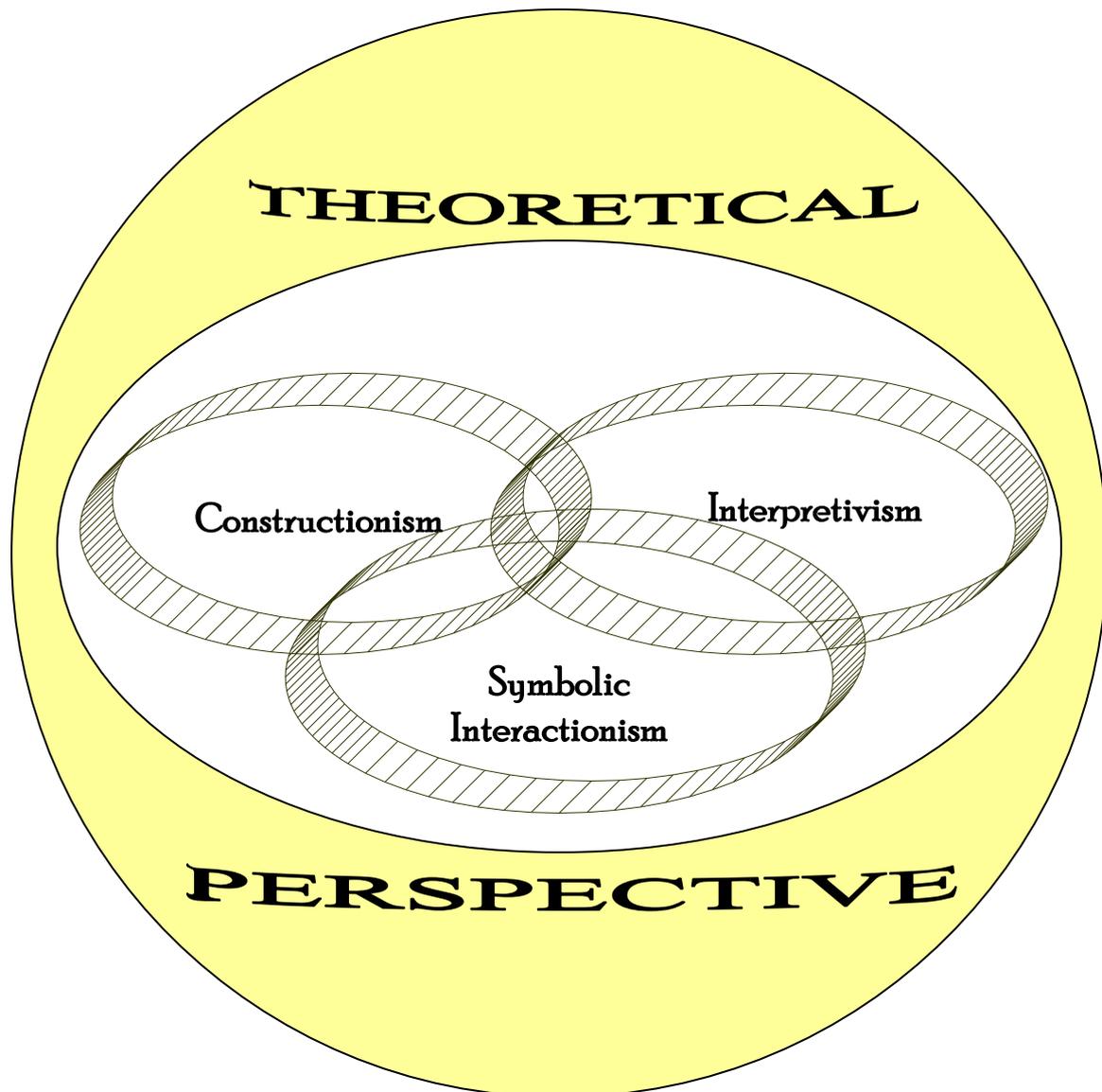
#### **3.4.1.1 *Symbolic Interactionism***

As a theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism “deals directly with issues such as language, communication, interrelationships and community” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). These key elements were essential to this investigation, to which particular attention was paid to ensure the language of communication and relationship with participants provided the opportunity to the Tongan immigrant students to narrate their stories in the manner they choose to express themselves. Blumer (1969) claims that there are three key symbolic interactionist aspects. Firstly, human beings are influenced by culture and social processes such as values, norms and beliefs. Secondly, human beings act towards situations based on the interpretations they have for them, and thirdly, human beings derive meanings from interaction with others and are modified through an interpretive process. Thus, culture symbols such as language play a significant role. Language as a symbol is significant because “a sensitive understanding of people’s lives requires shared symbols, meanings and vocabularies” (Madriz, 2000, p. 840). For these reasons, symbolic interactionism was highly considered as a perspective that addresses such shared values of participants in this study.

Within the broader Australian society, Tongan immigrants in Australia have a distinctive culture based on relationship that regard family closeness and constant communication with their community and extended family as crucial. This is antithetical to the dominant western culture which is based on relationship that is associated with more self-reliance, less communication with extended family and more sensitive to others' privacy. Tongan scholars such as Hau'ofa (2000), Manu'atu (2000) and Helu-Thaman (2003) argue for a research paradigm inclusive of Tongan worldviews and the socio-cultural context of their lives. Symbolic interactionist perspective enables this study to use a design that includes a Tongan approach that has the potential for including the Tongan immigrant students' own worldviews and the socio-cultural context of their lives. In the context of telling stories on sitting on the Tongan mat, the Tongan immigrant students in this study brought their individual perspectives as well as collective ones as representative of their shared cultural identities and experiences. Thus, providing an understanding of their experiences that were contextual to their circumstances and the socio-cultural context of their lives.

Symbolic interactionism “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). “Through the filter of socially constructed perceptions” (Neuman, 2003, p. 42), the Tongan immigrant students can reflect on how they create and include culturally appropriate ways that work productively for their engagement in learning in school, thus seeking “understanding of the complex world in which they live” (Creswell, 2002, p. 56). Hence, the use of symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective offers an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how the Tongan immigrant students construct their roles in their engagement in learning in school. Figure 3.2 below (adapted from Crotty, 1998) outlines the specific theoretical perspective nestled within the overall research of this study.

**Figure 3.2** The Theoretical Perspective nestled within the overall research of this study (adapted from Crotty, 1998; Maroney, 2008)



### **3.5 METHODOLOGY: INTRODUCTION**

The researcher has made an attempt to consider a methodology that would explore the views of the four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students with an element of emancipatory potential. Furthermore, a conscious effort was made to provide them the opportunity to voice their perspectives on issues investigated in this study. As a research methodology with the potential to illuminate the voices of the Tongan immigrant students from their perspectives, *narratives within a case study* was adopted to find answers to the research questions.

### **3.5.1 *Narratives within a case study***

A biographical narrative approach located within a case study was adopted as the methodological approach. For a richer data gathering strategy case study complemented the choice of narratives. The application of ‘case study’ as a research tradition for this study filters down to the nature of case studies as an ‘analytic focus’ on a specific phenomenon that is able to provide a generalization of an in-depth exploration. One of the distinguishing characteristics of case studies is “the ability to adapt to a wide range of disciplinary associations such as a biographical” [narrative] (Schram, 2003, p. 106) which is the methodology that guided this study. The investigation located the “cases within their larger context of geographical, political and social settings” (Creswell, 2005, p. 440). The particular phenomenon under investigation was topical from both a systems perspective and a community perspective. Moreover, the researcher wanted to use the opportunity to have an in depth understanding of a particular situation. As a way of investigating an individual, group, or phenomena (Sturman, 1997) and as “a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27), a case study approach was adopted to guide the research.

### **3.5.2 *Narratives***

Wengraf (2010) argues that ‘narrative turn’ has provided a medium to generate literature situated within the social sciences, with a great deal of research into the study of narratives. The practice of this inquiry “provides a voice for seldom heard individuals” (Creswell, 2005, p. 477) locating such research as a democratising process. Furthermore, narrative advocates were interested in grasping human conduct via the notion of such inquiry. Atkinson and Delamont, (2007, p. 195) suggest “narratives as social phenomena are among the many forms through which social life is enacted where the focus must be on the social and cultural context in which such tales are told”.

Creswell (2005), Czarniawaska (2004), Hendry (2007) and Wengraf (2001, 2010) note that there is a surge of growth in narratives and storytelling into many disciplines including education. Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2) also note that “the main claim for the use of narratives in education research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially lead storied lives”. Humans also experience the world through ways revealed from the study of narratives. Creswell (2005, p. 476) supports

this claim by noting that as “a popular form of narrative in education, researchers report educational stories to capture lives of teachers, professors, administrators, school board members, and other educational personnel”. Creswell (2005, p. 490) also notes that narrative has also “emerged as a popular form of qualitative research and a viable way of studying educational settings”.

Within the Tongan society, families and communities, narratives and storytelling have a great deal of value, and hold significance in their cultural lives. They tell personal stories, gospel stories, family stories, educational stories and community stories. Furthermore, Tongan ancestors passed on orally, from one generation to the other, history and culture through story telling. Tongans have a long traditional history, and many can name up to 39 generations by heart (Stanley, 1999). Published narratives, recently collected oral accounts of the Tongan history and culture can be traced back to 450 AD (Burtley, 1995). Oral account through storytelling is practised and respected as part of the culture of the Tongan people. In the Tongan tradition, the Tongan people are gathering around, sitting on Tongan mats, telling stories and using stories as an approach to educate their children. When children grow into young adults, they, then, take responsibility for passing on the stories to the following generations. In this way, the stories of the people of Tonga have been handed down over thousands of years (Burtley, 1995; Stanley, 1999). Gergen and Gergen (2007, p. 135) suggest that this activity of storytelling is “politically relevant and important as a liberating process” and has become “an integral part of all indigenous research” (Smith, 1999, p. 144). Smith (1999, p. 145) further notes that storytelling is a culturally appropriate way to represent the “diversities of truth, within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control”.

The arguments and discussions given, suggest that storytelling is a powerful means of capturing stories from Tongan people. This study has therefore used storytelling to capture the voices of the four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students. By telling their stories from their perspective, the participating students provide insights into their experiences in their engagement in learning, within a social context that structures understanding of their personal and students’ lives. The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf, 2001, 2010) is utilised in this study, as the most suitable technique in narrative to investigate the perspectives of the participating students. A discussion of this method is provided in the following section.

### ***3.5.3 Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM)***

In this section, the researcher discusses the applicability of Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) as a qualitative research involving minority ethnic groups such as the Tongan immigrants. Wengraf (2010) finds that some research supervisors who are not familiar with the BNIM are still hesitating to encourage researchers to use the BNIM as a tool for collecting data for their research studies. However, researchers who have encouraged by their supervisors to use the BNIM have found the methodology a powerful research tool and have done well in their research studies (Wengraf, 2010).

Wengraf (2001, 2010) claims that the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method is a powerful research tool. Davis (2003), Miller (2000), Roberts (2002), Rosenthal (2004) and Wengraf (2007), further claim that Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) is a powerful tool used in research to cover the investigation of the issues of human and social sciences. The tool has also been used for other issues such as gender and culture inquiry (Pratt & Yeoh, 2003), migration inquiry (Meares, 2007) and argumentation and lived texture (Rosenthal, 2004). Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) has become a major qualitative approach to research in different research studies in human and social sciences (Wengraf, 2007; Chamberlayne, 2005a, 2005b).

Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Schutze (1977) influenced Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal (1995) to develop the traditions of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM). Wengraf (2001) claims that Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal have drawn on: “gestalt theory focus on biography and its methodological and sociological elaboration to reconstruct a two-layered biographical structure of life history and life story” (p.232). Chamberlayne et al. (2000) further claim that the tool has also been used in research to investigate the issues of disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, the participating students are from a disadvantaged Tongan ethnic group in Sydney.

Based on claims given, the methodology confirms its use for investigating engagement in learning within a socially bound context of the Tongan immigrant students in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. It also provides a foundation for a way of understanding the worldview from which the Tongan immigrant students locate their

experiences in their engagement in learning in school. In using narratives as a methodology, the researcher has produced techniques and methods of triangulation Appendix 3 (adapted from Wengraf, 2007, p. 237) in order to construct case histories and their typologies with respect to lived experiences and narrated life. Biographical construction is aimed at sociological understanding of the Tongan immigrant students, as well as understanding their society in its historical and social structures.

The method of the interview is a lightly structured depth interview which uses a single initial narrative-inducing question SQUIN, Appendix 4 (adapted from Wengraf, 2010) to illicit and provoke an extensive and uninterrupted narration. A minimal passive interview technique is maintained by a method of non-interruption, in order to maintain the participant's gestalt. This is central to the theoretical principles of this method. The technique also has the potential to reveal everyday subjective reality. It is also defined as "a whole which is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda informing each person's life" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 34). The interview process allows the participant to take control and the researcher to take up the position of active listener. However, there is a need to establish a balance of power to keep the dialogue focused on the purpose of the study. In order to maintain this, Barr-On (2006, p. 12) notes the need for "an inter-subjective activity that engages interviewer and the interviewee, comprising of both asymmetrical and symmetric elements" during the interview process.

#### **3.5.4 *Fofola e fala kae fai ha alea (Tongan mats metaphor)***

*'Fofola e fala kae fai ha alea'* is a Tongan metaphor that literally means, roll out the mat so the family can sit on it to talk. One underlying meaning of this metaphor is the invitation of a member of the family to the rest of the family to come together, and be seated on the mats, to talk on important issues. The views of each member are respected and their contributions are on equal importance. It is a metaphor whose meanings and symbolism are understood by most Tongan people and its practice is specific to their beliefs and practices. This metaphor derives from Tongan people's natural ability to use the Tongan mats as meeting place, recreational facility, and activities on teaching and learning, and education, where they gather around for meeting, praying, singing, dancing and telling stories, as well as for activities on teaching and learning, such as doing homework, drawing pictures, reading and doing other activities on education. The study adopts the metaphor of storytelling around sitting on Tongan mats, to collect the data

from the participating students and parents.

Tongan families use this practice to pass on knowledge, the proper Tongan manners, cultural traditions, values and norms to younger generations within the family. As a child, growing up in Tonga, sitting on a Tongan mat, listening to elders telling stories was a discipline one had to practise and master. It was a learning process and children were expected to learn from the stories. That way children learnt to listen attentively. Sitting down of Tongan families on Tongan mats for families' meetings enables parents and their children to share their stories. The environment is safe and it encourages participation by every member and morale is built up in each individual who feels she/he has had a direct share in the proceedings.

As a Tongan woman and being mindful of the matriarchical status of Tongan women in Tongan families (Stanley, 1999), the choice of using the 'Tongan mats' metaphor as a method to describe the processes and practices of such a distinctive culture is both symbolic and significant in a number of ways. The Tongan mat is one of the valuable pieces of artwork weaved by Tongan women from young coconut leaves called 'muka 'o e louniu' or special pandanus leaves called 'lou'akau' (Kirch & Green, 2001; Hiroa, 2008). The strands that are weaved to make the mat represent love, respect, humility, forging relationships and perseverance. The Tongan mat has a significant place in Tongan cultural activities. When sitting on a Tongan mat for sharing stories, the story teller has the responsibility to make sure that everyone is feeling free to share their stories. In doing so, knowledge about their ways of life and their interpretation of the world is acquired.

The researcher grew up in this tradition where storytelling was not just for socialising activity, but it is also about educating Tongans through Tongan structures to equip them to interact with the world around them. The practice of sitting on Tongan mats to share their stories is also significant in the culture of most Tongan families who are living in Australia and overseas.

### ***3.5.5 Justification for the methodology***

The nature of storytelling in Tongan cultures was a consideration during the process of writing a proposal for the study. During the first few months before the defense of the

research proposal, a primary concern was identifying an appropriate methodological framework compatible with the concept of sitting on Tongan mats setting. Tongan and Pacific scholars (Latu, 2009; Otsuko, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006; Maka et al., 2006) argue that *talanoa* is considered to be an appropriate approach for collecting data for researching educational and social issues of the people of the Pacific nations. *Talanoa* is defined by many Tongans as ‘to talk on and on’ in an informal way. *Talanoa* can also refer to a conversation and exchange of ideas or thinking (Vaioleti, 2006). In Tongan, *talanoa* is literally means ‘talking about nothing in particular, and interacting without a rigid framework’ (Vaioleti, 2006; Latu, 2011). Latu (2011) further argues that *talanoa* also means a ‘free association of some knowledge’. *Talanoa* has used as a Tongan approach based in Tongan language and culture, as its method for data collection (Vaioleti, 2006; Manu’atu, 2000). Furthermore, as a Tongan indigenous woman, the researcher is aware that it is not a normal practice in the Tongan culture to do drawing, colouring and writing when sitting on Tongan mats while having a *talanoa*. On the other hand, SQUIN (Appendix 4), is an appropriate approach for collecting data for researching educational and social issues of people from different cultural background (Wengraf, 2010). Moreover, it also has the potential to enable the participating students to have a conversation using Tongan or English language and as well as using colours, drawings and writing to help them to tell their stories. SQUIN also has the potential to allow the researcher to have the opportunity to search for original and new ways that are meaningful, interesting and enjoyable for both the researcher and the participating students, sitting on Tongan mats. These have helped to reveal the truth of the realities of both their *lived life* and the *told story*. As a trial, the researcher conducted sessions of both *talanoa* and SQUIN (Appendix 4) to four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students (selected for trial only), sitting on Tongan mats, to get data based on the research questions and the purpose of the study. These four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students did not engage well to the *talanoa* sessions and they gave very little insights to the research questions. On the other hand, the students engaged well to the SQUIN and produced rich data to the research questions. The researcher was therefore convinced that the use of *talanoa* as opposed to SQUIN would not have engaged the participating students of this study, in the same manner. Based on the arguments given, the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method, using SQUIN as an approach to collect the data from the participating students, was decided as one that has the potential for sitting on Tongan mats setting and therefore most suitable in answering the research questions for this study.

This study investigates Year 9 Tongan immigrant students. It was therefore crucial to have a research design that could accommodate the context of their worldview (Kamara, 2009). In order to understand the meaning of their engagement in learning in school, the study needed to be located within their social and cultural context. Bornat and Walmsley (2004, p. 42) observe that the “value of using a biographical approach lies in the opportunity it provides to take both the whole life and wider socio-economic and historical contexts into account in the analysis of data”. The recruitment of a reference panel during the analysis process of contextualising the part to whole mode of analysis is a key aim of Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method [BNIM] (Wengraf, 2010). This is an attempt to structure the gestalt of their narratives in the analysis of their lives within a complex context.

Chamberlayne & Ruskin (1999, p. 75.) note that the “methodology lends itself to some amount of flexibility for specific research purposes, which could be modified in the research process”. Aspects of such modification in the flexibility of the BNIM methodology made it possible for this study to incorporate the perceptions of the participating parents, principals, pastoral care coordinators, and teachers on the research purpose. Drawings and singing used as stimulants, were also incorporated in the data collection.

Given that the researcher’s interest was investigating the experiences of Tongan immigrant students’ engagement in learning in schools and identifying the issues influencing these experiences, it was significant to locate these experiences within their lived texture of their individual lives. Chamberlayne and Ruskin, (1999, p. 20) suggest, “in order to comprehend the significance of broad social phenomena ... it is imperative firstly to have an appreciation of their meaning in the context of individual lives.” When the individual lived life is situated within a broader context an understanding and meaning of the whole context can be arrived at . This is a claim that is firmly located in biographic narratives.

The interview procedure that commences with a ‘single question aimed at inducing narrative’ SQUIN (Appendix 4) focuses on eliciting narratives in part or whole of an individual’s life story or around a particular issue under investigation. The advantage of the SQUIN (Appendix 4), unlike other traditional qualitative interviews lies in the democratising process that allows the researcher to relinquish power and come into light

as a willing participant in a “dialogical process”, (Jones, 2001, p. 1) with the teller and listener sharing the goal of participating in an experience that reveals shared “sameness” (Jones, 2001, p. 1). This kind of free flowing in and out of the storytelling that gives power to the interviewee was particularly relevant to this research.

The above reasons justified that the narratives methodological approach located within case study offered opportunities to build individual cases and attempt to theorize the participating students’ engagement in learning in schools.

### **3.5.6 Researcher context**

The researcher positions herself as a Tongan woman from the ancient Kingdom of Tonga for this investigation. One of the significant cultures in Tonga is, women have traditionally enjoyed a high social status due to the ‘fahu’ system (rights offer women an important source of influence and power in Tonga) which is the heart of the culture of the Tongan indigenous people (Stanley, 1999). The principle of the Tongan ‘fahu’ system provides particular examples of gender-specific cultural relationships (Samu & Suaalii-Sauni, 2009) that are unique to Tongan indigenous people. As a Tongan indigenous woman the researcher has faced the reality and challenge of the struggle with decolonizing principles within a dominant western academic discourse such as research. Such challenges involve the researcher as an *outsider* (not westerner) and *insider* (an academic with structures constructed for academics through *western eyes*) and an *outsider-insider* (being a Tongan indigenous woman in Australia). Having this variety of identity, including gender, is an advantage in bringing a worldview that is unique to this research. The researcher does not intend to propose a replacement of western principles with Tongan ones. What the researcher argues in favor of, is an integration of the different worldviews that will bring liberation and self-determination to the participants in this study.

Tongan scholars such as Hau’ofa (2000), Helu-Thaman (2003) and Manu’atu (2000) argue for a Tongan indigenous research paradigm which is inclusive of Tongan worldviews and cultural practices. The broad agreement among them is the inclusion of Tongan indigenous research paradigms that answer questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology from their perspectives (Hau’ofa, 2000; Helu-Thaman, 2003; Manu’atu, 2000). In this view an agency has to exist that accepts the legitimisation of Tongan indigenous ways of being, knowing, and relating to the world. One cannot therefore

impose their own realities on Tongan people. As such, research for and on Tongan immigrant students must allow them to engage collaboratively in the process of the investigation.

This investigation is an attempt to give a voice to Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. Based on the arguments given in section 3.3.1 on *voice of a Tongan indigenous epistemology* and this section, a Tongan indigenous research paradigm is well placed and supported in this study.

Four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students in 2 Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney are the main participants of this research. The researcher justifies her position in her involvement in this research, firstly as a Tongan and secondly as a researcher. In this position, it is declared that neither is she speaking on behalf of the Tongan immigrant students nor interpreting their worldviews specifically from her perspective, though they may share similar experiences through a Tongan immigrant history. She locates herself therefore as part of the struggles of Tongan immigrants and brings the 'Tongan perspective' that is central to her identity.

Thirty five years ago the researcher was in Year 12 in a Catholic secondary school in New Zealand as an international Tongan student. This research is partly a continuation of this journey. She continued to work for Tongan immigrant students in three Catholic schools in Mildura and Robinvale, Victoria, in 1996 to 1997. She also worked in eight Catholic schools in Sydney, New South Wales, in 2005-2010, as the Tongan school supporter for Tongan families and their children. She therefore, identifies with the Year 9 Tongan immigrant students in Australia, who collaborated with her in this study.

While working for Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools the researcher has commenced using storytelling sitting on Tongan mats as a method to engage dialogue that endeavoured in deconstructing and shaping Western and Tongan paradigms of engagement in learning in school. These find a common ground and level playing field that allowed an integration of the differences of both worldviews. The researcher had a vantage position in that she could have rapport between the Tongan immigrant students and herself. Given the Tongan identity and already established relationships, the researcher acknowledges a subjective view while adhering at the same time to research protocols.

In telling stories around ‘sitting on Tongan mats’ in collaboration with the four Tongan immigrant students adopting biographical narratives the researcher attempted to “capture the particularity and lived texture of the individuals’ lives, at the same time as defining aspects [of them] which can be seen as typical within a particular social context and history” (Chamberlayne & Rustin, 1999, p. 75). Schram (2003) also claims that one of the basic assumptions of narratives is people’s ability to frame events in stories that provide a context for interpreting the meaning of these parts.

### **3.6 PARTICIPANTS**

Over fifteen years through personal and professional interactions with Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools the researcher was drawn to the research topic because it was an ‘instance’ of some concern (Creswell, 1998, p. 28). The researcher was keen to explore more deeply their experiences and to shed light on their perceptions on the research topic as an ‘in depth exploration of a bounded system’ (Creswell, 1998, cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 438). In the situation of this research study it was the perceptions of four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students in their experiences in engagement in learning in two Australian Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

#### ***3.6.1 Selection of Participants***

The research study was bounded to include two Australian Catholic secondary schools in the Western suburbs of Sydney. To select the participants, a “purposive sampling” (Silverman, 2005, p. 129) was used, therefore the selection was careful, rather than random. Silverman (2005, p. 129) argues that it is important to think “critically about the parameters of the population we are studying and choose our sample case carefully on this basis”. The nature of Biographic Narrative Interpretive Methodology utilised by the study to record, interpret analyse the data from the main participants, require the selection of small sample sizes, therefore only four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students were selected from the two schools to participate in the narrative interviews.. They are the primary participants of the research study. The reason for choosing this cohort as a “unit of analysis”(Creswell, 2005, p. 145), was an attempt to have a diversity of views and “perceive holistically” (Schram, 2003, p. 96), through individual experiences, (Hollingsworth, 1999) on the research problem. All of the four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students had had three years in the secondary schools and therefore had a considerable

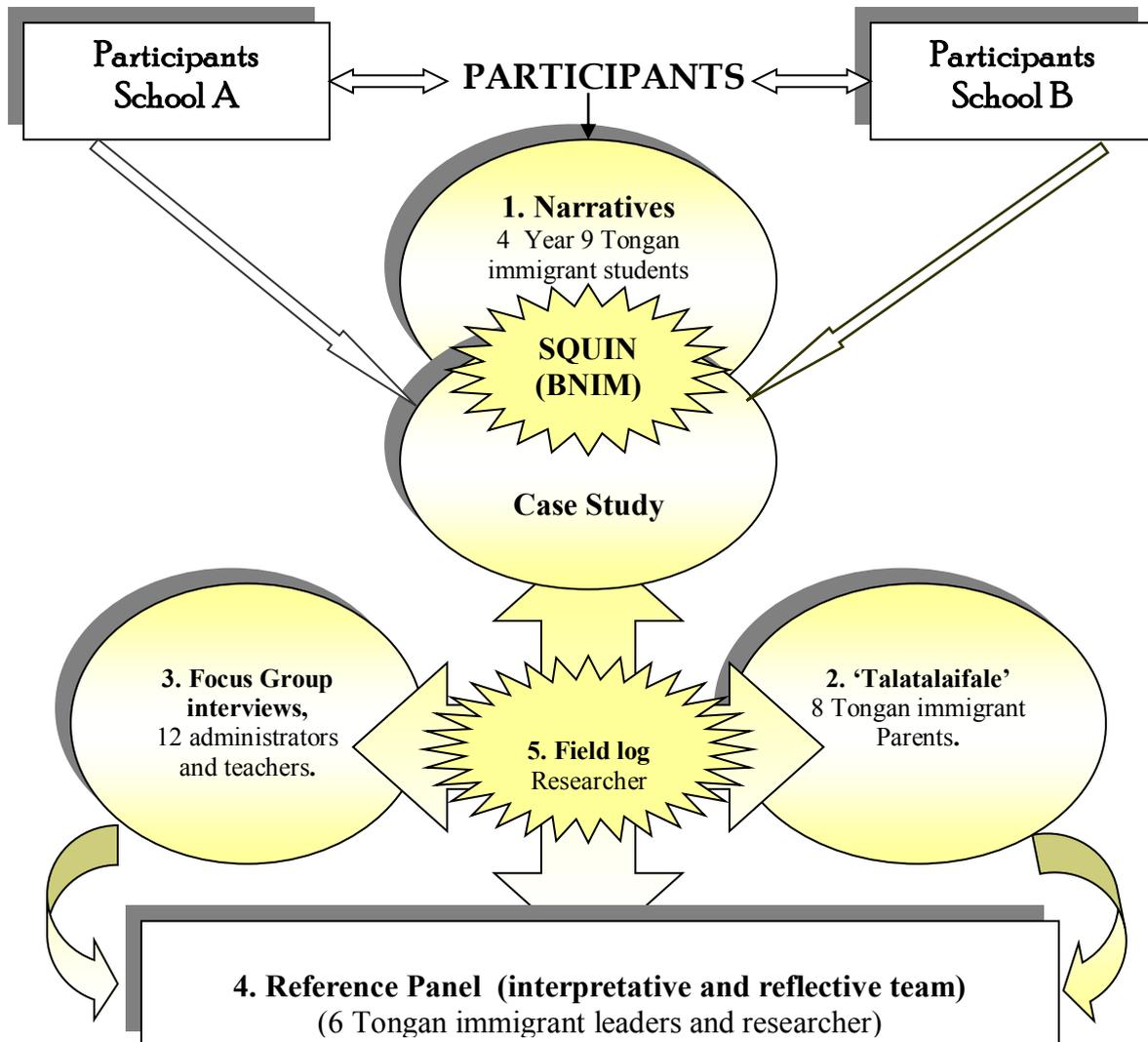
amount of knowledge on issues that related to their experiences and influences on their engagement in learning, and hence the rich data they provided to answer the research questions make the research meaningful.

Eight parents of the participating students, two principals, two assistant principals, two pastoral care coordinators and six Year 9 teachers were selected to provide their views and understandings on issues regarding the research questions. The selection was based on their status and active involvement in the engagement in learning of the participating students. The parents were involved in the *talatalaifale* sessions and the administrators and teachers were involved in focus group interviews. The outcomes from the analysis of the *talatalaifale* and the focus group interviews integrated into the final stage of the analysis of the case history of the Tongan immigrant students. A reference panel of six Tongan immigrant leaders were selected to assist the researcher with the data analysis process for the participating students, and to play the role of advisory and reflective team for the study.

The researcher in this qualitative study is the primary instrument of the data collection and analysis. As the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the qualitative researcher must be responsive to the context; must adapt techniques to the circumstances; consider the total context; expand what is known about the situation through sensitivity to non-verbal aspects; process data immediately, clarify and summarize as the study evolves and explore anomalous responses (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The literature also describes the qualitative researcher as being interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed about their world through their experiences (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The researcher also kept field notes in the form of a field log that contained the summary of the key issues arising during encounters as well as her personal reflections (Smith, 2002) and memos. These were an additional component of the data collection.

Figure 3.3 below shows the participants selected in each of the data gathering strategies.

**Figure 3.3** The number of participants selected and the data gathering strategies used for this study



(This diagrammatic representation (Figure 3.3 is explained below).

1. 4 Tongan immigrant students took part in the narrative interviews.
2. 8 Tongan parents took part in the '*talatalaifale*' sessions.
3. 12 administrators and teachers took part in focus group interviews .
4. Tongan immigrant leaders helped to analyse the data from the narratives.
5. The researcher kept a field log, also contained her notes, theoretical memos and personal reflections.

### 3.6.2 Recruitment of Participants

Firstly the principal supervisor and the researcher submitted applications to the Catholic Education Office (CEO) Sydney, and the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Australian Catholic University (ACU), to conduct the research study in two Australian Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. Approvals were granted

(Appendices 5 and 6) after six months.

In order to recruit the participants for this study, the principal supervisor and the researcher sent an information and request letter (Appendix 7) to the principals of each of the two schools nominated by the Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Sydney. Upon confirmation, invitations were sent to parents of Year 9 Tongan immigrant students via the principals of the participating schools. A letter to Catholic school principals was sent from the principal supervisor and the researcher requesting their cooperation with the distribution of the letters (Appendix 8) and empty forms of consent (Appendix 9) for parents seeking their consent to be involved and for that of their child to participate in the research. Upon written permission, received from parents for their potential involvement and that of their children, letters of invitation (Appendix 10) and empty forms of consent (Appendix 11) were sent to the students to voluntarily participate in the study. The Tongan immigrant parents, principals, assistant principals, pastoral care coordinators and Year 9 teachers and Tongan immigrant leaders were recruited by an individual information and request letter with similar procedures (Appendices 12, 14 and 16), with empty forms of consent (Appendices 13, 15 and 17).

The participating students had a male:female ratio of 1:3 because one of the boys chose not to continue in participating in the study and there was no other boys who were willing to participate in the study. The researcher consulted her supervisor and it was agreed that the researcher would get sufficient data for the analysis from 3 girls and 1 boy. This sample matched the respondent population. The school personnel had a male:female ratio of 7:5 and the participating parents had a male-female ratio of 4:4. The overall gender balance was therefore even, with a male:female ratio of 12:12. The Tongan immigrant leaders in the reference panel also had a male-female ratio of 3:3.

### **3.7 DATA GATHERING METHODS**

Data were collected using narratives from the participating students. *Talatalaifale* was used to collect the data from the Tongan immigrant parents, and focus group interviews were used to collect the data from administrators and teachers. The main themes that were identified from the literature search were used to frame the questions for sub-session 3 for the students, and for the participants of the *talatalaifale* and focus group interviews. The researcher also kept a field log containing the summary of the key issues arising

during encounters with the participants and as well as her personal reflections and memos. Detailed information about the data gathering methods used are provided below.

### ***3.7.1 The interview process for the narrative interviews***

Incorporation of an interview procedure that requires the interviewee at the initial stage to tell a story is a flexibility allowed by the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Kamara, 2009). Initially, the participants are contacted to decide on a day and time of their own choosing. There are three stages of the interview (Appendix 4). The interviews are audiotaped with prior consent obtained from each participant. The first interview referred to as subsession one is the main interview designed to elicit a full narrative by adopting a single carefully designed question (Appendix 4). This session gives the interviewee the freedom to narrate her/his story as she/he chooses, with minimal interruption from the researcher. The researcher keeps notes on topics for session one, and also memos for the analysis. Two subsequent sessions are followed from this initial interview. Normally, this session lasts for a maximum of one hour depending on the interviewee. The researcher, has chosen to use music, prayer and drawing using colours as stimulants to help the participants to share their stories.

At the end of the first interview, a second interview follows to extract more stories from the initial narrative of the interviewee. The researcher takes notes from the initial story to assist in following up on subsequent sessions. After seven days at the end of the first session, a second session follows to extract more stories from the interviewee's initial narrative. The second session focuses on topics that emerge from the initial interview. This session would ask questions of clarification on topics as they appear in sequence from the initial interviews. These questions formulated by the researcher seek to generate further narratives. The third interview is variable and gives the flexibility to structure questions that need further clarification from subsequent interviews or issues that relate to the research question that are not addressed in the two former sessions. Wengraf (20001; 2010) suggests a time lapse of at least one week between the two subsessions and the final subsession.

### ***3.7.2 Single narrative seeking question***

The researcher conducted the narrative interviews at the participants' homes. All

participating students and their parents were exceptionally responsive and cooperative in the process. During the interviews, in order to approach the study with ‘fresh eyes’, a constant effort was made to minimise the knowledge that the researcher already had on experiences in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools.

Single question aimed at inducing narrative SQUIN, Appendix 4 (adapted from Wengraf, 2007) was used as the interview procedure to commence the first interview. This single narrative question focuses on eliciting narratives on part or whole of an individual’s life story. The “SQUIN is a democratising minimalist interviewer intervention” (Wengraf, 2010, p. 96) that allows the researcher to relinquish power and come into light as a willing participant in a “dialogical process” (Jones, 2001, p. 1), with the “teller and listener sharing the goal of participating in an experience that reveals shared sameness” (Denzin, cited in Jones, 2001, p. 1). Essentially, the researcher assumes a ‘facilitative’ role and “interventions are effectively limited to facilitative voices and non-verbal support” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 113) such as *yeah*, *ah*, *hummm* which indicate that you are listening. Hollway and Jefferson (1997, p. 5) note “that the art of the skill of the exercise is to assist narrators to say more about their lives without offering at the same time, interpretations, judgments, or otherwise imposing the interviewer’s own relevancies”. This strategy of relinquishing power is quite unlike the standard semi-structured probes often used in social science interviews where the researcher comes prepared with predetermined assumptions that are already built into research questions. This shift Jones (2001, p. 1) claims turns the researcher from “knowledge-privileged investigator” to a reflective audience in the process. Wengraf (2001, p. 113) notes, “the philosophy behind this is to maintain the gestalt principle [that is central to the methodology] in allowing the spontaneous pattern of the storyteller to complete itself without the interviewer’s intervention”.

The wording of the single question inducing narrative (SQUIN) for the first session would depend on particular research purposes. In this study the construction of the narrative seeking question focused on the research purpose with “minimal refinement, carefully designed, written out in full, and delivered without modification” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 112). Wengraf (2001, p. 112) refers to “classic SQUIN”. The researcher used this to frame the following single question inducing narrative (SQUIN) for this study:

*As you know I am researching the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools.*

*So, can you tell me the story of your journey in your engagement in learning in school.*

*All the experiences and the events which were important for you personally from the time you entered your present school up to now.*

*Start wherever you like. Please take the time you need. We have got about one hour. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes in case I have any further questions after you've finished telling me your story.*

This way of framing interview questions would be difficult for researchers if they are not used to participating at interviews of this particular approach. Wengraf (2001, p. 43) notes that there are “reasons for these complex formulations”. Essentially, there are two parts; a core which is the actual question, and a carefully worded weak first part ‘*As you know*’. Essentially, the researcher creates the environment where the interviewee focuses on things that are personally important to them. There is an important reason for asking both the objective *events* and subjective *experiences*. In building up the *lived life* and the *telling of the told story*, the researcher is interested in both the objective and subjective. It is important to allow the interviewee to create their own ‘spontaneous gestalt’ that is central to the method. The ‘*start wherever you like*’ creates a “free associative” situation (Wengraf, 2007, p. 125) that invites the interviewee to start with their “system of relevance”. The promise ‘*not to interrupt*’ assures the interviewee that the researcher is listening and that non intervention is not translated into disapproval.

This particular interview technique has been proved to have possible impacts on both the interviewer and interviewee, depending on personalities and possibly the relationship between the two people involved. For the interviewee, there is an impossible task of telling all events on one hand and experiences on the other which eventually emerges as a unified account. For the interviewer, during the story telling of the interviewee there is difficulty in “bearing your central research question and theory questions in mind which is your system of relevance” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 121). Wengraf (2001) further notes the difficulty of the interviewer in “making enough notes on key phrases and cue words in preparation for the next session soon after the interview, supporting interviewee through non intrusive participative active listening, and needing to be equally attentive to anything and everything” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 121).

The next section is a discussion of the process of all the three sub-session interviews.

### **3.7.2.1 *First Interview***

The researcher found the first interview challenging. Three of the participating students were sixteen years old and one was fifteen years old and therefore they were generally self-conscious of themselves. The researcher was aware of the importance of creating stimulants and environment to maintain the interest of the participating students in telling their stories. Manu'atu (2004) argues that if the experience of the participants are interested in telling their stories, this could draw upon the passion, knowledge and moves their heart, mind and soul to a realm of deeper understanding beyond what is experienced. In an approach to maintain the interest of the four Tongan immigrant students, the researcher has chosen to use prayer and music to start the sessions. Drawing and colours were also offered as an option to use as stimulants. These were offered to help the participants to engage fully and to provide rich and relevant data.

The researcher was aware that the BNIM strictly forbids the idea of distributing to the participants, the initial question in advance because it leads [participants] to getting very anxious and doing a lot of preparation that could lose the improvised quality of narration (Wengraf, 2010). For each of the participating students the researcher said the single question very slowly to allow them to internalize. Each of them had taken their time and had focused with complete silence. In dealing with this silence, the researcher attempted to “relaunch” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 122) by repeating it fractionally and slowly. Given the established relationship of the researcher with Tongan students, she was accustomed to long periods of silence when they were asked to give answers to questions. Wengraf's (2001, p. 128) suggestion of not “rushing to rescue” as an active listening skill and a technique of the methodology eventually brought success.

Breckner and Rupp (2002, p. 294), also note that “the significance of a single event or part of a life can only be understood in relation to the whole, and the whole in relation to parts”. Quietly listening, yet actively involved provided the opportunity to experience intensely the gestalt of their personal lives.

The sessions with the participating students were led by a prayer using music led by the participating students. Each session took about forty five minutes and was recorded on

audiotape. They have also chosen to use colours and drawings as a stimulant, to maintain interest and to be able to give their stories honestly and freely. Each participant has provided rich data on their experiences in schools and influences on their engagement in learning. The richness of their stories would have been compromised had “my system of relevance” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 49) taken precedence.

### ***3.7.2.2 Second Interview***

In this session, the researcher is also asking narrative questions but of a different sort referred to as topic questions aimed at inducing narratives [TQUINS] (Wengraf 2001, 2010). The procedure for this session is strictly prescribed and its success would generally depend on how well the researcher has recorded important topics during the first session. It is significant that the researcher adheres to some key points in this session. The questions must be asked in the sequence that the interviewee narrated the story starting from the first topic in session one and finishing with the last topic of session one. In this second interview only topics that are of significance or interest to the researcher that may need some elaboration should be asked. The idea here is to ask for more narratives about “particular happenings, incidents, occasions, and examples” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 141).

The interviewee may have discussed eleven topics in session one, and only six are significant for the researcher’s purpose. The questions will be asked in the order in which they appeared in the interview without combining topics or repeating earlier ones. The questioning technique is significant in that it enables the researcher to get more narratives which Wengraf (2001, p. 141) refers to as “Particular Incident Narratives (PINS)”. A rule of thumb is to ask questions using the exact words of the interviewee. For example, the interviewee may have referred to ‘family monthly meeting’ in subsession one, the researcher uses the same word instead of substituting it in formulating her question. There is a skill to formulating questions in order to generate narratives. If the interviewee has referred to non-narrative material in the first session, the skill is to ask narrative seeking questions for example, ‘can you give me more examples of family problems at home that distracted you from your studies?’ In this question the researcher is trying to push for a particular incident narrative (PIN) in the effort to surface what needed to be revealed in details (Wengraf, 2010) and was relevant to the research questions. In this

process the researcher pushed for particular incident narratives (PINs) to get ‘deep detail’ (Wengraf, 2010) from the interviewee. Appendix 18 is an extract from a participant’s transcript of sub-session 2.

In order to prepare for this second interview the researcher organised a break for twenty minutes to allow time for her to interact with the data and formulate questions for the second interview. This was also to give the participants a break and to maintain their interest on the session. During this break, the researcher also provided the participant a form to fill out and provide biographical information as part of the data gathering process. The second session of sub-session 2 commenced soon after about 20 minutes break and was recorded on audiotape in a similar fashion. This session lasted a minimum of thirty five minutes for each of the participants.

### **3.7.2.3 *Third Interview***

On the Biographic Interpretive Narrative Method (BNIM), the third session is not compulsory (Wengraf, 2003). The researcher may or may not conduct this session based on information already acquired. This session is the researcher’s prerogative in the design and structure of questions. It could be used as an opportunity to further questions on the researcher’s ‘system of relevance’, which is, the overall research question and theory questions if these have not been fully articulated in previous sessions, or need further clarification. For this study, the third session was needed, so further questions (Appendix 19) relevant to the research purpose of the study (Wengraf, 2010) were structured for the participating students. This was a flexibility introduced which BNIM permits in session three. All the participating students were individually interviewed for this session at different times. Each interview took about forty minutes and was also recorded on audiotape. Appendix 20 is an example of an extract taken from a participant’s scripts on sub-session 3.

### **3.7.3 *Talatalaifale***

*Talatalaifale* is a Tongan way of conversation within the house, giving helpful comments, views, advice and information. In Tonga, the practice of *talatalaifale* offers the parents a teaching and learning pedagogy which is valued as the best approach in teaching their children. Latu (2009) also claims that the parents use *talatalaifale* as a method to teach and to discipline their children, and their children to learn from them. The Tongan parents

are usually confident and keen to use *talatalaifale* as a tool to share their knowledge and ideas on issues familiar to them. When parents and their children sit down together on the Tongan mats for a session of *talatalaifale*, the parents are usually confident to share their knowledge and ideas on issues that are real, constructive, authentic and familiar to them. Often the session starts and ends with a prayer. Most Tongans believe prayer helps to give peace, love and respect to all who participate in the *talatalaifale* and this could help everyone to respond with genuine openness. *Talatalaifale* can be extended beyond the homes and into school and community environments (Latu, 2009). *Talatalaifale* is therefore can be adopted by village officers, church ministers, administrators, teachers and other leaders as a tool to give information and advice in their village meeting, church meeting, school meeting and meetings with parents to help their children's education.

Based on the arguments given the researcher has chosen *talatalaifale* as the best tool to utilize the perceptions of the participating parents on the research questions. In the context of this study, in four separate sessions of *talatalaifale*, one parent shared her/his views and understandings on issues regarding the research questions, sitting on Tongan mats, while the other parent was there as a moral supporter and was also free to add comments or more information. The main themes that were identified from the literature search were used to frame the questions. An appointment was made for each session. The sessions were conducted with the participating parents at their homes. Each session lasted between forty minutes to fifty minutes. These sessions were conducted in Tongan and an example of questions on the *talatalaifale* (in Tongan and English) and an extract of the answers from a participant are annexed in Appendix 21. The sessions for the *talatalaifale* were audio-taped for transcription. The scripts were transcribed and later translated into English. The English translation was used for the discussion of the data analysis and the writing of this thesis. Table 3.1 below set out the set of questions for the *talatalaifale*.

**Table 3.1: Questions for the *talatalaifale*, for participating parents**

Focus question	Research question	Underpinning key concepts
<p><b>1. ‘Omai mu’a ha’o fale’i ki he ngaahi me’a ‘oku fehanga hangai mo ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i ‘i he’ene ako, ‘i ‘apiako, pea ‘oku ke pehe ‘oku tokoni pe ‘ikai ke tokoni ki he’ene tokanga ki he ako/?</b> <i>In your opinion, what are some of the experiences that your child faces at school that help/do not help her/him, to engage in her/his learning?</i></p>	<p>What have been the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools?</p>	<p><b><u>Australian school community:</u></b> Cultural integration, Acculturation, Cultural mismatch; Institutional practice; Socio-cultural deprivation.</p>
<p><b>2. ‘Omai mu’a ha’o fale’i mo e ngaahi fakakaukau ‘o fekau’aki mo e ngaahi tokoni ‘oku fakahoko ‘i ‘api pea mo e komiuniti, ke tokoni ki he ako ‘a ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i, pea pehe foki mo e ngaahi faingata’a ‘oku ke fehanga hangai moia ‘i ho’o feinga ke tokoni ki ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i, ke tokanga ki ‘ene ako/?</b> <i>In your opinion, please give your views and advice on the things that your family and Tongan community do and it/they help/not help to support your child in her/his education in school?</i></p>	<p>How do Tongan immigrant families and community influence the Tongan immigrant students at Australian Catholic schools?</p>	<p><b><u>Tongan family and community:</u></b> Family; Cultural values; Identity; Family-community involvement; School relations with its community.</p>
<p><b>3. ‘Omai mu’a ha’o fale’i mo e ngaahi fakakaukau ‘o fekau’aki mo e ngaahi tokateline mo e tui faka Katolika ‘a e ako Katolika/, ‘oku lava/’ikai lava ke toe lelei ange ai e ako ‘a ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i? In your opinion, what are some of the values and culture of the Catholic school that could help/not help your child to engage in her/his learning?</b></p>	<p>How do the values and culture of Catholic schools influence the engagement of immigrant Tongan students?</p>	<p><b><u>Catholic school culture:</u></b> Catholic schools in Australia; Cultural values of a Catholic school; Catholic for the disadvantage.</p>
<p><b>4. ‘Omai mu’a ha’o fale’i mo e ngaahi fakakaukau ki he ngaahi founga fakafaiako ‘i ‘apiako pea pehe foki ki ‘api, ‘aia ‘oku lava ke tokoni/’ikai ke tokoni ki ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i, ke toe fakalakalaka ange ai ‘a ‘ene tokanga ki he ako/?</b> <i>In your opinion, what are some of the teaching strategies, in school or at home, that are helpful/not helpful for your child, in her/his effort to engage in her/his school work?</i></p>	<p>What teaching and learning experiences are more engaging for Tongan immigrant students?</p>	<p><b><u>Teaching and learning:</u></b> Culture and education: Dynamic Conceptualisation; Pedagogy; Language; Curriculum; Engagement in learning.</p>

### **3.7.4 Focus Group interviews**

Face-to-face focus group interviews have the highest response rates and permit the longest questionnaires (Neuman, 2003). Thus, the interview is an integral function of the research in obtaining meaningful data. Furthermore, focus group interview is a distinct method because it allows for listening to people and learning from what they are saying.

With focus groups, “participants communicate among themselves, share ideas, beliefs and attitudes” (Madriz, 2000, p. 835). The interactive processes “include spontaneous responses from the members of the group that ease their involvement and participation in the discussion” (Madriz, 2000, p. 835). Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2005, p. 903) also emphasise that “focus groups often produce data that are seldomly produced through individual interviewing and observations and that results in especially powerful interpretive insights because of their synergistic potential”.

Use of focus group strategy was appropriate to this study because it aided the gathering of important contextual information for the research. The focus group interviews were conducted with the principals, assistant principals, pastoral care coordinators and teachers to utilise their views on the experiences of the Tongan students on their engagement with learning in school. Focus groups were set up in School A and School B. We met at the respective schools for the interviews and the interviews were audio-taped (Yin, 1994, p. 86) for transcription. The main themes that were identified from the literature search were used to frame the questions. All participants received the same set of questions before the meetings with the focus groups. Each meeting lasted about one and a half hours and was recorded on audiotape for transcription.

Table 3.2 set out the set of questions for the participating administrators and teachers.

**Table 3.2: Questions for the interviews with administrators and teachers**

Question for Focus group	Research Question	Underpinning Key Concepts
1. From your experiences, what are some of the experiences that Tongan immigrant students face in your school that could affect their engagement with learning?	What have been the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in an Australian school community?	Australian school community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural integration</li> <li>- Cultural differences</li> <li>- Teachers' attitudes and expectations;</li> <li>- Perspectives in a monocultural paradigm.</li> </ul>
2. From your experience what are some of the things that Tongan immigrant families and community do to support the Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning?	How do Tongan immigrant families and community influence Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning at Australian Catholic schools?	Tongan family and community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural values</li> <li>- Identity</li> <li>- Family-community involvement</li> <li>- School's relations with its community.</li> </ul>
3. How do the aspects of development of the whole person through relationship and community, Christian community, and spirituality of a Catholic school help Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning?	How do the values and culture of Catholic schools influence the engagement in learning of immigrant Tongan students?	Catholic school culture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aspects of the culture of a Catholic school</li> <li>- Development through relationships</li> <li>- Catholic school community</li> <li>- Christian community</li> <li>- Spirituality</li> </ul>
4. What are some of the teaching and learning approaches at your school that are effective or not effective to the engagement with learning of the Tongan immigrant students?	What teaching and learning experiences are more engaging for Tongan immigrant students?	Teaching and learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tongan concepts for education</li> <li>- Language and bilingualism</li> <li>- Pedagogy</li> <li>- Teaching and learning strategies</li> </ul>

### 3.7.5 *Field Log Strategy*

The field log (Appendix 22) was used to record the study's operational information such as the name, date, time and location of interactions with participants. It also contained a summary of the key issues arising during encounters as well as the researcher's personal recount of the research process. It included notes and memos on interactive experienced

and researcher perceptions and reactions as well as charting the evolution of the study. It provided a word-picture of people, actions and reactions. Importantly in this study, “post-interview notes and memos allow the investigator to monitor the process of data collection as well as begin to analyse the information itself” (Merriam, 1998, p. 82).

Use of field log strategy was appropriate to this study because the researcher’s role was a significant element of the research given the constructionist paradigm that underpinned the study. An interpretivist epistemology posits that participants and researcher jointly construct knowledge as they interact during the life of the study and representation of researcher reactions was legitimate element of this research. The field log provided a reflective tool for the researcher in which ideas were mulled over to crystallize meaning. For example, early in the study such reflection was used to examine the participant-researcher relationships. Initially, it had been a concern that participant’s involvements in the study might be compromised in some way because they were known to the researcher. This disquiet was identified and analysed in the log. The analysis of personal reflections and memos provided a measure of reflexivity (Smith, 2002) that acknowledged the presence of the researcher as a participant in the study.

### **3.8 THE ANALYSIS**

Merriam (1998, p. 178) suggests that “data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation”. In this study data analysis is an intensive process that requires careful planning since the involvement of other people is required as part of a triangulation procedure. Additionally interaction with data is extensive and can be quite complicating. The process also requires the development of *lived life* and *telling of the told story* from the initial stage of transcription.

### **3.9 THE TRANSCRIPTION PROCESS FOR DATA FROM THE NARRATIVES**

Soon after each interview the researcher commenced the transcription process. The nature of the analysis process for this study has persuaded the researcher to transcribe the data manually. “Researcher participation in the transcription process is useful for a degree of intimacy with interview data” (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000, p. 69, cited in

Mearns, 2007, p. 90). All the transcripts were transcribed verbatim “as complete and unedited as possible” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 213), with page and reference numbers in preparation for further analysis. This exercise proved to be challenging and this gave the researcher some considerable insight into her data and memos. Notably, Glaser (1978 cited in Wengraf, 2001, p. 210) points out the importance of memoing:

Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationship as they strike the analyst while coding. Memoing is a constant process that begins when first coding data, and continues through reading memos or literature, sorting and writing papers or monograph to the end. Memo-writing constantly captures the frontier of the analyst’s thinking as he goes through his data, codes, sorts or writes (p. 210).

Memoing proved to be one of the most valuable activities in the analysis process. As part of the analysis processes it is an attempt to link parts to whole and whole to parts. The “memos become the researcher’s foundation to build on later in the analysis process” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 209). These theoretical memos are useful in assisting to arrive at answers to research questions. The researcher had an incredible amount of intimacy with the transcripts. This has gone to the point that during her interaction with the data she had vivid memories of her interview experience, of all the participants as if they were present with all the non-linguistic narratives captured in the data.

The development of a matrix template kept on the researcher’s computer was prepared to record the participants’ transcripts. The researcher inserted side columns to insert annotations, commentaries and for any other appropriate purpose. Table 3.3 below is an example of a matrix for a participant’s transcript on sub-session 1. The symbols (Appendix, 23) that were used with the transcript were adapted from Silverman’s simplified transcription symbol (Wengraf, 2001, p. 217).

**Table 3.3: An extract taken from a participant's transcript of sub-session 1.**

Line No.	Transcript Subsession One (First interview – SQUIN	Notes
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15  16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32	<p>R: Can you please tell me the story of your journey in your engagement with learning in school. All the experiences and the events which were important for you personally from the time you entered your present school up to now. Start wherever you like. Please take the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes in case I have any further questions after you've finished telling me about it all. When you finish we take a break. When we start again I will ask a few more questions based on my notes of what you have told me. Please correct me then if I have misunderstood your story. If you wish, you can use the colours and papers to help you to talk, and to share your story without me interrupting.</p> <p>P. <i>[pause 1 minute],</i>  <i>~choosing the colours and papers [2 minutes]~</i>  <i>{drawing the picture of her story 20 minutes}</i>  <i>[pause for 3 minutes admiring her picture]</i>  <i>[10 seconds hesitant] This is about me. [.] I started in the secondary school in 2008. [.] I was an average student and I had difficulties in Maths since primary school and things didn't start well in my studies. [2] I sort of gained knowledge in my subject but I still found it difficult to learn in the classroom, in most of my subjects. [.] I tried to study in the classroom but there were a lot of distractions. I was shy to ask questions in the classroom [2] and I was distracted with noisy students. [nervousness] I was conscious that some of them might laugh at me...[2] and my teachers tried to help me to speak out but ... I still kept things to myself.</i></p>	<p>This session took place on Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2010, at 4.30 p.m. to 5.50 p.m. at Lia's home, at a space at their garage prepared by her mother.</p> <p>I prepared a prayer space for the interview session with some few symbols (a lighted candle, a bible, a dictionary, a Tongan mat, a book on Australian Catholic schools and a guitar).</p> <p>I welcomed Lia to the session and made her feel at ease by starting with a song using a reading from psalm 24:5 and a prayer. Lia played the guitar. .</p> <p>After the prayer, I explained the procedure for the session. As part of the data gathering process, I provided a form for Lia to fill out and provide biographical information</p> <p>After launching the SQUIN she was quiet for one minute. From her facial expression she was thinking. She took about one minute without doing anything. I tried to remain silent and not to worry. She could not look at me on the eyes. She stared at the colours and the blank piece of papers. After further two minutes she reached out quietly to the colours and a blank piece of paper. She drew her picture using colours. The song, prayer and drawing were used as stimulants.</p> <p>I switched off the audio tape while she was drawing and colouring her picture. She seemed to enjoy drawing. She drew for about fifteen minutes. I remained quiet and tried not to disturb her.</p> <p>After drawing, she looked at me and I gave a sign that she could continue to tell her story by talking whenever she was ready. She was a bit hesitant and took about ten seconds before she immediately launched into her story. I felt so relieved and switched on the audiotape.</p>

The side columns on the matrices were used to insert annotations, commentaries, to record the physical environment, cultural and religious rituals and other activities used

during the interviews. To make sure that this was done correctly and appropriately according to the Biographic Interpretive Narrative Method (BNIM) the researcher sent an email with an attachment of Table 3.3 to Tom Wengraf, the author of BNIM. The response was positive and Tom Wengraf especially liked the notes on the side columns.

### 3.10 GENERATING BIOGRAPHIC DATA CHRONOLOGY (BDC) AND TEXT STRUCTURE SEQUENTIALISATION (TSS)

This step requires developing the lived life, the biographical data chronology (BDC) that addresses the chronology of lived life composed of the uncontroversial hard biographical data. This is abstracted from the interview material, other demographic sources and views and understandings of the parents, administrators and teachers. This objective data is about the person's life that is extracted from all three phases of the interview and other sources. The text structure sequentialisation (TSS) from the transcript requires a lot of work to be understood and operationalised. This is unlike the biographical chronology specific to BNIM. In a biographical account the TSS explains a sequentialisation of structural changes. Wengraf (2001, p. 239) explains that:

When we come to analyse a person's *told story* we address not so much the events and actions, the happenings, that occurred in a person's life (the BDC), but rather the way in which those events and actions were experienced and are now understood from the perspective of the person giving the interview.

Table 3.4 illustrated below is an explanation of the D-A-R-N-E

**Table 3.4: The D-A-R-N-E textsorts**

<b>Description:</b> The assertion that certain entities have certain properties, but in a timeless and non-historical way. Often provides the structural 'background' to a story
<b>Argumentation:</b> Namely the development of argument and theorizing and position-taking, usually from a present-time perspective
<b>Report:</b> The recounting of a sequence of events, actions or experiences from with little detail.
<b>Narrative:</b> The recounting of a sequence of events, actions or experiences in full detail. (Since report is also a narrative, this category has changed from N for 'Narrative' as in the 2001 textbook, to PIN for <b>Particular Incident Narrative</b> (Wengraf, 2010).
<b>Evaluation:</b> The interviewee's opinion of a particular aspect of their story given before, during or after a narrative or a report.

The transcribed texts proved demanding and complicated to grasp in the analysis process. The five textsorts derived from literary theory. They are the results of instrumentation theory underlying the BNIM – DARNE school of interpretation which holds that a “change in the way that somebody talks about an old or new topic is held to be significant” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 243). Rosenthal (1998, p. 4-5, cited in Wengraf, 2001, p. 243) also notes:

I assume that it is by no means coincidental and insignificant when biographers argue about one phase of their lives, but narrate another at great length, and then give only a brief report of yet another part of their lives or describe the circumstances of their lives in detail (pp. 4-5).

This pattern was symbolic of all interview texts. The researcher transcribed texts which eventually assisted in analysing the case histories of the Tongan immigrant students. Sequentialising evolved as participants moved very quickly from one textsort to the other within episodes. The technique in sequentialising is to use a “broad brush” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 244), and not pay too much attention to minute details.

The generation of both the ‘biographic data chronology’ (BDC) and ‘text structure sequentialisation’ (TSS) is critical in the analysis process as it can lead the researcher to deeper meanings of the transcript (Wengraf, 2010). These new intermediate documents are then at the next stage of analysis where a reference panel is recruited to assist further in interpreting the texts in order to generate hypotheses. This stage of recruiting a reference panel in the process was to generate a ‘biographic data analysis’ (BDA) and a ‘teller flow analysis’ (TFA) where the researcher has chosen chunks of data and presented to the reference panel for analysis.

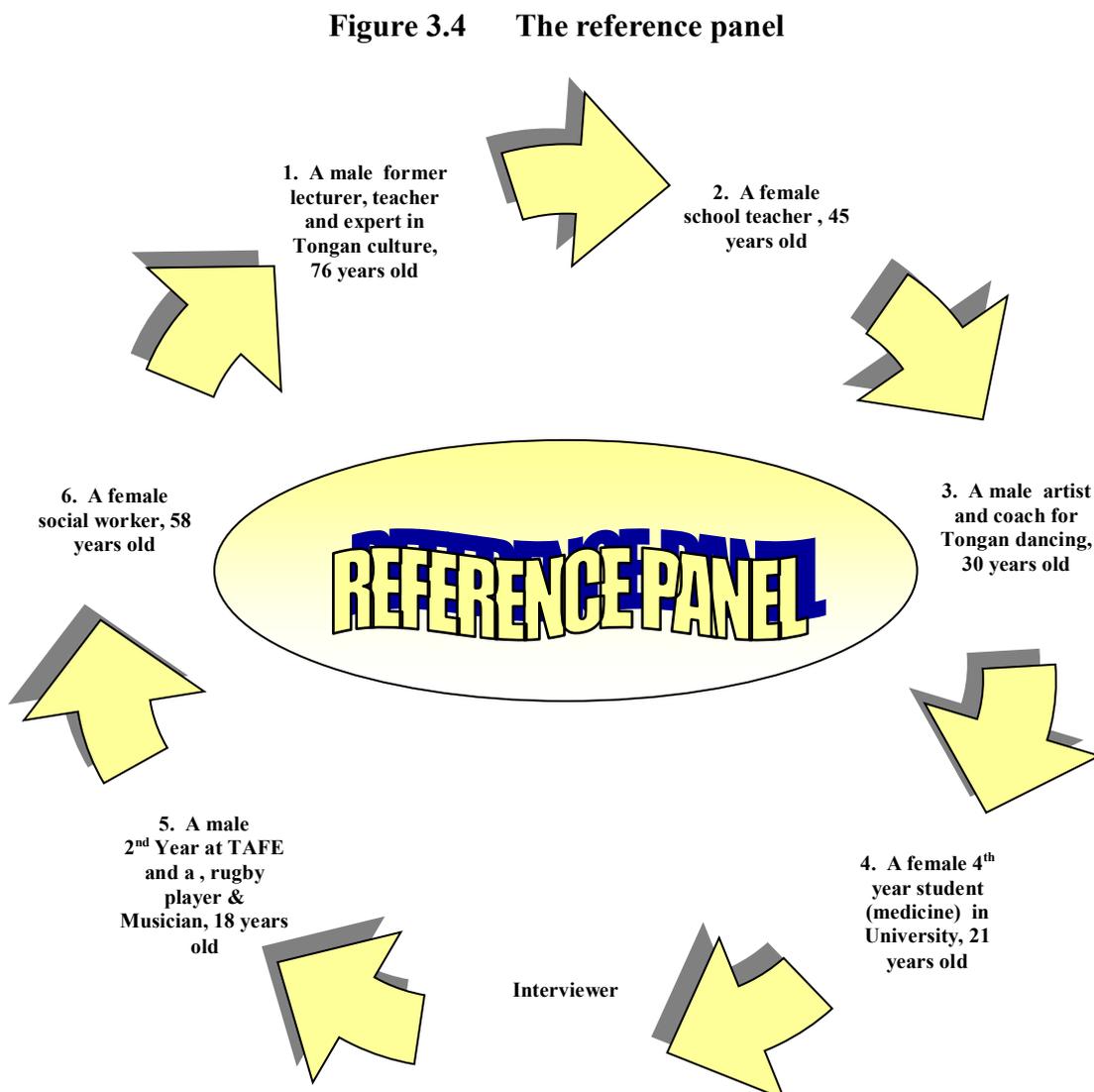
### **3.11 REFERENCE PANEL**

The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) produced techniques and methods of triangulation, Appendix 3 (adapted from Wengraf, 2007) to conduct the interpretation of the data. Part of the process of analysing data is the recruitment of a reference panel that “facilitate the introduction of multiple voices” (Jones, 2001, p. 7). This study recruited a reference panel consisted of six Tongan immigrant leaders from various background and professional, with a demographic diversity to help the researcher to interpret the data collected from the participating students. This reference panel assisted the researcher in the BNIM analytical processes, where each story of the participating

students is divided into the *lived life* and the *telling of the told story*. The reference panel was also act as an advisory team on cultural issues relevant to the study.

### 3.11.1 The criteria for recruiting the participants for the reference panel

In order to recruit the participants for the reference panel, the principal supervisor and the researcher sent an information and request letter and a consent form (Appendices 16 and 17) to eighteen Tongan immigrant leaders with a diversity in age, experiences and professions who live in the western suburbs of Sydney. Their selection was based on their status and active involvement in the lives of the participating students and their families and communities. Thirteen Tongan leaders accepted the invitation and expressed interest to be in the reference panel. Upon confirmation of acceptance of the invitation, six participants, with a demographic diversity (Figure 3.4) below were selected.



Prior to organizing the reference panel, a letter of acknowledgement and confirmation of their acceptance of the invitation (Appendix 24) was sent to all the six Tongan immigrant leaders with a copy of the agenda and questions (Appendix 25). The researcher organised three sessions (Appendix 25). Both *lived life* and *telling of the told story* were analysed in separate sessions over a period of meetings lasting over three hours each. The three sessions were held at the Lakemba local senior citizens' hall. Prior to commencing each meeting, the process was fully explained with particular attention to the ethical considerations of the research process. The researcher also organized every session to include a party and therefore, Tongan food was cooked and home made banana cakes and Tongan desserts were baked for the meals, with cups of coffee. Prayer, Music and dancing were part of the gatherings. Culturally, Tongans love this type of gathering. Anecdotal feedback from the Tongan leaders indicated that they enjoyed the sessions.

### ***3.11.2 Reference panel discussion***

The role of the reference panel is to interpret the new intermediate documents derived from the verbatim transcript and other materials (Biographic Data Chronology). The reference panel also interpreted separately the documents derived from text sequentialisation of speech-acts events, text-events, changing segmental structure (Text structure sequentialisation). Two principles which underlie this interpretation developed by Wengraf (2001, p. 256) he refers to as “emergent theorizing”. The principles involve, “datum-by-datum analysis by which predictive hypotheses are multiplied before being refuted or supported by a later datum or by later data, and the multiplication of counter-hypotheses and tangential hypotheses in relation to the first hypotheses you think of” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 255).

At each session, the researcher selected portions of data from the sequentialised material and presented each portion of data on the white board with copies given to each one of the members of the reference panel. They were then asked to consider the data and then attempt individually to develop hypotheses. Each hypothesis was written on butchers' paper and then they moved on to another portion of data until a hypothesis by each panel member is exhausted. The researcher was the facilitator at this exercise and she did not give any clues of previous knowledge of any material to panel members. The technique here was to generate as many hypotheses as possible. It proved to be quite a laborious

activity but which panel members found productive. This activity gave the opportunity to panel members to add value to the project by contributing different perspectives and interpretations about the lives of the Tongan students and their perspectives. The reference panel also brought a wealth of knowledge and experience from historical sources that were very useful in data interpretation.

The microanalysis was the last part of the group analysis where small segments of the verbatim texts were selected from the biographic data analysis (BDA) and teller flow analysis (TFA). For this activity the researcher chose several pieces of text from each interview. The reason for choosing them was their ability to shed light on some aspect of cultural interpretation that might enhance or confirm initial hypothesis. The justification for such attempts was to use the “smallest things” to illuminate the “largest issues” Wengraf (2001, p. 293). For example, a small text such as “family problems” was chosen and panel members endeavour to interpret this segment. This activity allowed the researcher to reflect more deeply for the meaning of each participant’s data; something that she found profoundly useful in building the structure of the case. On finalization of panel meetings, work generated at each meeting was used by the researcher to generate final themes. The researcher chose to integrate the final themes that emerged from the panel meetings into the final groupings of the themes used for the study.

### **3.12 ANALYSIS OF THE *TALATALAIFALE* AND FOCUS GROUPS**

During the research process, data was examined from the participating parents, administrators and teachers. The researcher thoroughly explored the resources from the *talatalaifale* and the focus groups, with the intention to compare claims, arguments, and recommendations relating to the experiences in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students.

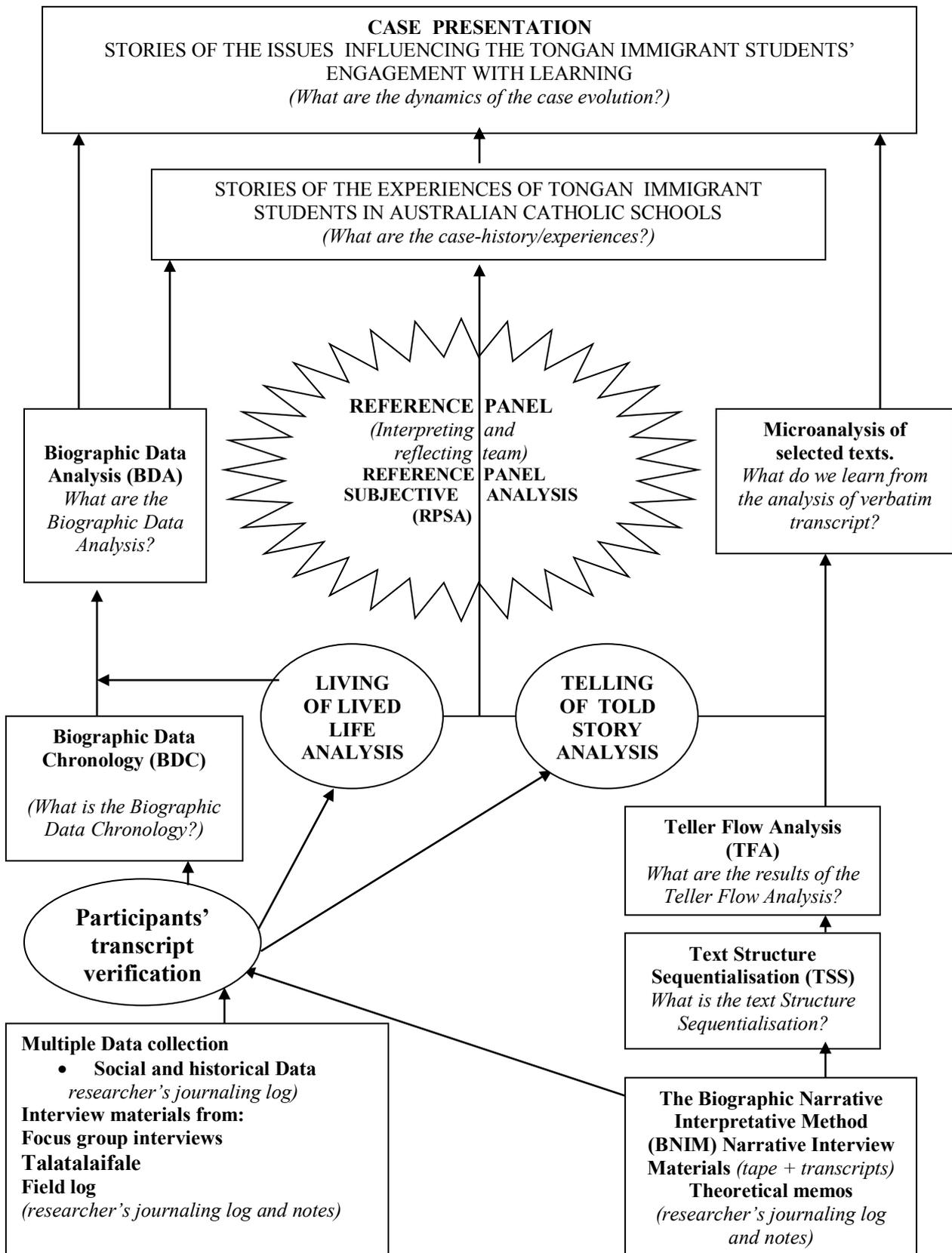
Thematic analysis was undertaken of the transcripts subsequent to the data collected from the *talatalaifale* and the focus groups. Van Manen (1990, p. 78) describes theme analysis as “the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work”. Additionally, Sarakantos (2005, p. 347) explains that “qualitative analysis deals primarily with written records and deals with transcripts which the researcher must read and analyse” The tapes and notes from the *talatalaifale* and focus group interviews produced expressive qualitative data. The

transcripts were read, relevant text highlighted and noted on a separate transcript summary sheet. The summary sheets were then transcribed, analysed, and reviewed into a list of varied responses. A sorting and sifting framework allowed for distinctions in language, relationships, phrases, patterns, and themes that were identified on an individual and collective level (Hollway & Jefferson, 2002; Glesne, 2006). The process of memoing was also utilized to develop a set of generalisations that cover the uniformities contained within the findings. Reflective notes were written in order to cover the common themes and identify the major and minor ideas permeating the data (Kamberelis, & Dimitriadis, 2005; Neuman, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2002). The results collated from the *talatalaifale* and the focus group interviews developed into the basis of the final stage analysis and the discussion of the results in Chapter 7.

### 3.13 THE FINAL STAGE ANALYSIS

The final stage analysis was to form a structure of the case history (Wengraf, 2001, p. 284) comprising a description of the evolving relationship between the *lived life* and the *telling of the told story*. This stage of analysis involved the construction of a diagram of the structured phases of the *lived life* alongside the structure of the initial narrative. At this stage of analysis the researcher had the flexibility to selectively use or modify the presentation according to the particular requirements of the research. Wengraf and Chamberlayne (2006, p. 55) refer to this stage as moving from “craft” to “art” where a shift in thinking away from previous formalized tasks is required to a more holistic conceptualization of the whole case. In this stage the researcher draws on theoretical memos, inconsistencies between the *lived life* and *telling of the told story*, which is the narrative as a case construction. Chamberlayne (2005) notes in order to think of the whole we need to understand the working of its parts. Based on the arguments given, the focus on the relationship between the *lived life* and the *telling of the told story* was therefore the best way of furthering sociological and historical understanding of the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in their learning in an Australian Catholic school context. In this study, the researcher uncovers the relationship between the *lived life* of the participants and the *telling of the told story*, which is the narrative as a case construction. Figure 3.5 below is a scheme of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) process that illustrates the various stages of constructing a case history.

**Figure 3.5 Stages of Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM) 2-track interpretation procedure (Adapted from Wengraf, 2007, p. 237)**



### **3.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study has been approved by the department of research project of the Catholic Education Office Sydney (Appendix 5) and Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Australian Catholic University (Appendix 6). Permission for collection of data was sought from the two Australian Catholic secondary schools involved in the investigation. According to Wiersma (2005), ethical and legal considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, dignity and welfare of participants must be ensured by the researcher. The importance of ethics in research therefore, cannot be overemphasized, particularly that involving young Tongan immigrant students under eighteen years old. The participants' willingness to participate or not has been respected and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time. They were also advised that they would be informed of the results of the study.

Prior to data collection, each participant was informed of the nature and purpose of the project and reassured about privacy and confidentiality. They received an informed consent form in plain English. They were given time to think about their involvement before responding. Each individual signed the consent form and kept a copy for their files. Participants and names of the two schools who are participating in this study are not identified.

### **3.15 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) involves quite an intensive process and an exhaustive analytical procedure that required only a very small sample. This study therefore investigated only four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students, from two Catholic secondary schools in Sydney who have the biggest number of Tongan immigrants students. The researcher has made a conscious choice to focus on the experiences in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in schools in order to generate literature in this much needed field of study. As the focus is on secondary schools with the biggest number of Tongan immigrant students from Tongan families in the Archdiocese of Sydney, the results cannot be generalized beyond them, as each Tongan community is unique in its history, demography, and composition. The data however provided ample diversity for enhancing our understanding of the experiences in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in school.

These ethical issues alerted the researcher to be aware of the necessary research protocols she must observe and uphold to maintain her research and professional integrity, as well as the moral, spiritual and academic reputation of the institution through which this study is undertaken. Recommendations based on the data are produced but no significance beyond the boundaries of the cases are claimed.

### **3.16 VERIFICATION**

Merriam (1998) claims that it is imperative in the process of data collection and analysis to ensure that findings and interpretations are accurate. In order to ensure this, validity and reliability involve checks such as triangulation and member checks as a process of qualitative cross-validation. Denzin (1978, p. 308) points out this “can take many forms” such as comparison of data that has been obtained from individual interviews, theoretical memos, recruitment of reference panel involving an exhaustive data analysis process, and member checking interpreted data with participants.

Additionally, Creswell & Miller (2000) note merits of research (qualitative or quantitative) situated largely in its degree of validity. This makes it imperative for qualitative research in particular, to possess not only theoretical validity but also the use of reliable practical method for data collection and instruments to assess data sources effectively and efficiently.

Verification of data in qualitative research is a primary concern, especially where the main participants are under eighteen years old, as it is the case in this study. It is noted that information has to be given ‘honestly’ or ‘sincerely’ by participants or they would render the study inconsequential. Moreover, the research methodology requires participants to own partial responsibility for this study. Based on the arguments given, it is imperative that the written scripts were given to every participant to check for accuracy before the analysis process. The scripts from the participating parents that were in Tongan language were translated into English and verified by a Tongan professional interpreter (Appendix 26).

### **3.17 SUMMARY**

The researcher has used the extensive data generated during the different phases of

analysis to make a sociological sense of biographical meaning for all participating students. In keeping with BNIM's dual focus on *lived life* and *telling of the told story* each case is presented in two parts (Wengraf, 2010). The first part called the *lived life* comprises an analysis of each participant's biographical events examined against the social and historical context of their lives as Tongan immigrant students.

The '*telling of the told story*' is the second part of the case presentation. This contains the complex analysis of the Tongan immigrants' stories. The themes (Appendix 27) emerged from Tongan immigrant students in their interacting with their school, family and community were complex. On the level of analysis, Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM) produced techniques and methods of triangulation that assisted in constructing case histories and their typologies with respect to *lived experiences* and *narrated life*. In keeping with the process of generating the themes in BNIM's methodology, the researcher has chosen to generate the themes manually assisted by the reference panel.

On finalization of reference panel meetings material generated at each meeting was used by the researcher to generate the final groupings of the themes of the participating students. The themes were then grouped into simple details. While these themes have been categorized under the separate research questions, there is an overlap and relationship across themes. Appendix 28 is an example of the themes of a participant illustrated in simple detail. Sources from the views and understandings emerged from the stories of the participating parents, administrators and teachers were analysed to use for the verification of data from the participating students in Chapter 7.

In presenting the individual cases, the relationship between the *lived life* and the *telling of the told story* is discussed in chapter 4.

*Listen to every fibre of my roots, hear my dreams and my memories, and taste the flavour of my fruits, they are energies of my life (Appendix 1).*

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents individual stories of the four Tongan immigrant students. They all come from staunch Christian families who are church goers. To do justice to their narratives, all their views including their personal religious beliefs on the research questions are included. The stories arise directly from the biographic narrative approach utilising the three stages of the interview process (Wengraf, 2010). This generates a plethora of sustained rich stories that brings to this research a unique piece of work.

As an aim of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method analysis (Meares, 2007), the *lived life* is composed of the biographical data. This is the “chronology of objective facts extracted from the interview and any other relevant sources” (Wengraf, 2007, p. 111), locating the research material within its social and historical context. This contextualizing is relevant in this study as it establishes how “specific fragments, elements, or moments of a social [or historical] process can be made sense of by location within their relevant context” (Chamberlayne & Ruskin, 1999, p. 27); in this case, the context of negotiating the experiences in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in school.

In the second part, the *telling of the told story* that underscores the “thematic ordering” (Jones, 2001, p. 56) of the narration, is discussed. This process involved the reconstruction and interpretation of the participants’ stories taking into account every detail such as pauses, hesitancy, repetition, and theoretical memos (Wengraf, 2010). This became a source of data on which my interpretation and analysis was based. Through a process of hypothesising using the reference panel how the *lived life* informed the *telling of the told story*, a case was constructed. A summary of the themes are presented in table form at the end of each story. The *lived life* of the participating students is composed of the biological data using the first person. An initial signature quote that emphasises a compelling theme emerging from each of the *telling of the told story* commences with each presentation. In the following paragraphs, both *lived life* and the *telling of the told story* are presented and the understanding of how the *lived life* informs the *telling of the told story* is clarified.

## 4.2 STORY 1 LIA KUKI

### 4.2.1 *Lia's Lived life*

*I tried to engage in learning but there were a lot of distractions*

I was born on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, 1995 in a small room at my grand uncle's unit in Sydney. My parents were born in Tonga. They came to Australia in 1990 under visitors' visas and both became over stayers. Like many other Tongans my parents came to Australia to look for better life. They got married in Sydney, in 1991. I have three sisters and three brothers. The eldest is eighteen years old and I am the third child. Mum had a miscarriage with the last child in 2009.

Throughout my early childhood my parents were struggling. We lived in fear when our family were living illegally in Australia. From the age of one to nine I lived with my family in a two bedroom unit with mum's uncle. Dad did not have a proper job and mum did not work. Dad used to work for a cousin who gave him a very low salary. We linked to our local parish and we were loyal to the parish priest and the parish activities. They also have helped our family in many ways.

My life was very difficult and this affected me badly, including my studies at school. I did not have the opportunity to attend kindergarten, so I had very limited contact with other children from the age of two to seven. My engagement in learning in this stage was therefore largely influenced by what I learnt from my mum and my younger siblings.

In 2002, at the age of 8, I entered Year 1 in a public primary school. I was older than all the children in my class. I was very shy and I found the work in school very hard. However, at this point I developed a keen interest in music and this has helped me in my journey in learning in the classroom. My keen interest in music and the commitment of the family to our prayer life and educating us in our own cultural music and dances have helped me to cope at school.

My family had very little money and I would go without many things. Life was very difficult for my family because our basic needs were often at risk. My experience at the public primary school was hard and my engagement in learning from Year 1 to Year 3 was difficult when compared to other children. Our family are very religious and very

committed to church activities. We link to our extended families and our Tongan community frequently. It has been our trust in God and our close link to our extended families, Tongan community and our local parish that have kept our family going.

In the beginning of 2004 our family got our permanent visa. My family was no longer living in fear and this was an opportunity for my family to have a better life. Dad was able to get a proper job and we also started to receive benefits from Centrelink. We were no longer dependent on our extended families and we were able to rent our own unit. My family quickly linked to our new parish and parish priest. The shift from living in fear to freedom was a transition to another level for my family. This transition made me feel more peaceful and hopeful in my effort to engage in learning at school. However, I found the move a big challenge because I had to face a few readjustments to a different environment.

In the beginning of 2005 my parents sent four of my siblings and I to Catholic schools. I was eleven years old in Year 4 and attended a Catholic primary school. I missed my friends in my previous school but the vision of the family to get a better education was something that has become part of my life. Although I missed my previous school I settled in quickly to my new school. The Catholic primary school was fundamental to my aspirations for the improvement of my engagement in learning. My family determined that we would follow our programme towards getting good education and quality time with the family. We continue to have our family morning and evening prayers every day.

One of my favourite family gatherings is our monthly family meeting. I like this meeting because all of us sit around on the Tongan mats to pray, sing and feel free to share our stories with one another.

Through the advice of my parents I have tried to approach education seriously and saw it as hugely important for future advancement not only for my own benefit but also for my family, my community, my society and my church. The support from my parents and the close network with our parish priests and the parishioners was creating a love and passion in all my religious activities at school. My parents also continue to link to the Tongan communities in Australia and Tonga. Prayer is the top priority and education is the second priority for our family. It is then important for me to pray every day for God's

grace, to help me in my studies. This is not always easy because I have many distractions in school and at home.

My life has been molded with the culture of my Tongan born parents. The beliefs and practice of our Tongan culture have been part of our everyday lives. Tongan language has been the language that we always use at home. My life is therefore permeated in every aspect with the Tongan cultural values. It is very hard at school because the culture is different. I need to find ways to be able to live a more balanced life and to be able to integrate better into the school. I continue to live up to the expectations of my parents and at this stage I am trying to concentrate in my study but still have found it hard. My parents give advice to try always to have God as the number one in my life. This well-intended forceful approach, has contributed to my effort to engage better in my Religious Education classes. I have succeeded in gaining good marks in this subject. The love that I have for Religious Education is partly due to my upbringing from my family. Mathematics is my weakest subject and I often failed and had low marks in this subject.

Life is difficult for my family because we have little income and our basic needs were often at risk. The strong religious background of my parents has continued to influence me and the rest of the family. It also has helped the family to continue to trust in God's providence. My parents believe if we get a good education we will bring prosperity to our family in the future. This often encourages me to study harder.

In December, 2005 I went with my whole family to Tonga. This was the first time for me to leave Australia. I had a cultural shock when I went to Tonga. However, I experienced a close link to where my ancestors were. I met for the first time, most of my extended family while I was in Tonga. My time in Tonga was a good cultural experience but I was very happy to come back to Australia.

In the beginning of January, 2006 I arrived back from Tonga to get ready to go to Year 5. I continued to carry out the family routine. Even though my parents did not have enough time to read to me I was encouraged to read at school. I found my commitment to prayer as a comforting feeling towards my study because my family continued to struggle in our everyday living.

In 2008 I joined my two older sisters in the Catholic secondary school. I was quite excited for I realised the benefits that would accompany such a move that was strongly supported by my family. I felt at home straight away in the environment of the Catholic school and it was just like being in the midst of a big family for me. I found my first year at College a new adventure that was not easy. The transition from Primary school to the Secondary school was also daunting and I had to go through a few readjustments that were difficult. I also faced another adjustment for my family. We had to move from our two bedroom unit to a three bedroom house that my family rented next door to the Catholic church. This was the nicest accommodation that I have ever experienced. On my first year at the Secondary school, I was scared and shy in the classroom and outside the classroom. I was nervous to ask questions of the teachers and I continued to find it very hard to engage in learning in all my subjects.

In 2009 things slowly moved forward and things appeared to change for the better. My study was improving and my grades were progressing. I continued to do well in Religious Education. I still struggled in Mathematics and I felt I needed to try hard in my other subjects too. I was often annoyed by the noisy and misbehaved students in the class. My teachers wanted me to speak out and ask questions but I still was not able to do this. My English teacher often told me that I had improved in my writing. This has encouraged me to start trying my best to work harder and to speak up in the classroom. I started to achieve better marks in my English and this gave me confidence in myself. I started to believe in myself and I believed that I could make a difference for myself, my family and for those around me. I also started to look at my school and my teachers from a different perspective and to be more involved in what was happening at my school. I believed that I needed to listen more to the teachers and to ask questions in the classroom. I tried to learn from the homework and the project that I had to do.

In the beginning of 2010 I began to realise that I needed to set out new goals and aims for my future. To be able to fulfill my goals and aims I needed to study hard in all my subjects in the classroom and to put my trust in God. I started to give more effort to my study and to gain more knowledge to build up my confidence in all my subjects including Mathematics. I tried to find ways that I could be able to have fun when solving number problems or getting the right answer to a Maths problem. I found the help of the Mathematics tutor in our weekly homework session with the Tongan teacher very helpful.

Through the help and advice given by our Mathematics tutor in our homework session I determined to make an effort to work hard in Mathematics and all my other subjects. This has not been easy because of many distractions that I have experienced at home and in my community.

This year every Year 9 student in our school was given a laptop. This is a great help for me because we have no computer at home. I believe I need to use the internet for research to have better marks, and technology has helped my learning experiences. I continue to find the support of my family, Tongan community and teachers a great help in my efforts in my education. However, the distractions of the family problems, community and church activities have also caused difficulties in my efforts to do well in my studies.

The pattern of the *lived life* of Lia Kuki has shown that she has grown up in a humble life style and has experienced many difficulties in her family situation. Issues affecting her engagement in her learning at an Australian Catholic school have revealed that she has struggled throughout most of her life in school. The pattern of her *'lived life'* contextualises the *'telling of the told story'* that follows.

#### **4.2.2 Lia's Telling Of The Told Story**

The patterns suggested by the events of Lia's *lived life* are a fundamental aspect of *'the telling of her told story'*. Sitting across the Tongan mat from me Lia was quiet and her eyes were on the symbols that were on the table for the opening prayer of our first session. She looked relaxed and at home with the space prepared for our session. She was confident to play the guitar to lead the song. There was a sense of privilege in me to be in the midst of a courageous Tongan immigrant student, who has gone through hardships and has tried to live in hope. Lia believed a good education would transform her and her family to have a better life. Her narrative focused on a vision to engage better in her learning. In the midst of her difficulties, Lia has tried to look for ways to solve the problems that contribute to her poor performance in school.

Lia narrated her involvement in engagement with learning from as early as her time in the primary school. However, very quickly in this narrative Lia acknowledged her involvement in engagement in learning focusing on 2008 when she started in secondary

school. *This is about me. I started in the school in 2008.* But it is also apparent that Lia was seeking better knowledge for better ways to engage in learning for she has difficulties to engage in her learning, *I had difficulties to engage in learning... since Primary school and things didn't start well in my studies.* In Lia's entire narrative the difficulties in engagement in learning is a prominent theme which she viewed as a collective effort as she proceeded to find it difficult to engage in her learning in the classroom, *I sort of gained knowledge in my subjects... but I still find it difficult to engage with learning in the classroom.*

Lia's vision was to get better grades in her subjects. Essentially, Lia realised earlier that she had a lot of distractions that she had to overcome in order to engage better in learning. *I tried to study in the classroom but there were a lot of distractions.* Lia also realised her engagement in learning was affected because she was shy to ask questions, self conscious and distracted by other students. *I was shy to ask questions in the classrooms and I was distracted with noisy students... I was conscious that some of them might laugh at me.* But it is apparent that Lia was seeking knowledge for reasons beyond her own abilities to be able to communicate better in the classroom by saying, *and my teachers tried to help me to speak out...but I still kept things to myself.* In Lia's entire narrative the many distractions throughout her life that have affected her engagement in learning at school is a prominent theme which she viewed as a collective barrier as she proceeded to evaluate; *Some of the students were too distracted [pause] they played and talked loudly...I have six others in the family... They always distracted me [deep breath] and it's hard to do my homework.*

Lia's vision was to try her best to get better marks and to engage better in learning at school. Essentially, Lia realised very early that if she had to succeed in her study she would need to develop ways to be able to engage better in her learning. But the challenges of being shy, having a low self esteem extended far beyond the difficulties of being able to communicate properly with the teachers. Lia felt miserable to speak out in the classroom so she explained: *I am quiet... I do not communicate well with the teachers. I felt so shy to speak out [deep breath] I did not feel confident to ask questions in the classroom.* Lia was aware that most of the students in the class are speaking better English than her so she had a feeling of inferiority and had difficulty in being accepted by her classmates as *it was sometimes I felt... that some of my classmates were laughing when I started to speak out.* In transcending cultural boundaries Lia described the internal

conflicts of being in an Australian classroom: *Being in an Australian classroom ... I often felt conscious of myself. [a sigh with fatigue] I was not confident to express myself ... like my classmates.*

But then, Lia gave some credit to her English teacher who assisted her during those difficult times, *it's good my English teacher helped me... by saying that my English is good ... I have shown great improvement.* She then quickly switched to a more internal conflict about minor issues such as her background. She gave a concerned look in this argumentation, *and it was often a concern for me... and that of my Tongan friends at school to that even now [pause] it was really hard because it meant... that what are the other students at school think of me? Am I going to be picked on because of being a Tongan [deep breath] or because of the way I'm learning?*

Lia was perceptive in realising that transforming her performance in her studies requires working collectively with her teachers and the whole class. This was a way of challenging the teachers to explain the lessons clearly and to treat every student fairly and according to their abilities. Lia also recognised her own background and how it could affect her engagement in learning in a western classroom. Realising the importance of working collectively with her teachers and the whole class, Lia introduced a new kind of attitude towards her engagement in learning at school that would nurture interdependence and a self motivation that will help her to move forward in her studies. Lia realised that she often made no effort to initiate a way of asking questions and sharing views with the teacher and her classmates, *so I waited to get the answers from the teachers... and my classmates during class... and group discussions.* Lia believed that she needed to work harder in involving herself in the group discussions and to change her attitudes and to be self-motivated by saying *I need to change my attitudes, [with assertiveness] to believe in me...to study hard to get better marks.* This theme is central in Lia's narrative. In her story Lia clearly stated that *it's important to get good education... to get a good future.*

In order to negotiate a way to help her to engage better in her learning at school Lia is quick to point out that she cannot engage well without the help of her family: *My family sacrifice a lot to give me good education. [gentle smile] I also need their support to help me... in my studies in school and at home.*

There were challenges at another level in the involvement of Lia's family on her

engagement in learning at school. Lia made a serious point about the distractions that she has had at home that made it hard for her to engage in her learning. On the matter of responsibilities and family activities, *I am the middle girl in the family. My role to play in the family... are often more than my two older sisters. [sigh with fatigue] I often felt very tired ... to do my homework and reading. [pause] We often have visitors from our friends [deep breath] and it's hard for me to concentrate in my study.* Lia repeatedly revisited this theme of distractions, which gives an indication that it is central in causing her to disengage in her learning at school. Lia was aware of the school activities that also involve responsibilities and commitments when she stated that *students are expected to attend choir practices, sports and other activities after school. [pause] These activities distracted me from my studies.*

When asked about her beliefs and views on engagement in learning at school, this question provoked a description of Lia's own preference which she considered more appropriate, for herself and made her more comfortable in her participation in all the activities at school:

*I can have more time to do reading and to do my homework in the library [pause] ...it is quiet there because when I go home there are so many distractions from my family. [deep breath] I prefer to have time to myself ...and to have a break from all the noisy kids at school. It is more comfortable for me... to spend time by myself in the library than to take part in sports and activities at school.*

Using strategies to suit her beliefs and views on engagement in learning is a demonstration of Lia's ability to transcend family situations that are a constant struggle and difficulty on her efforts to engage in her learning at school.

Part of Lia's vision for better engagement in her learning at school was to be able to have the right relationship with her teachers and friends in school, her family at home, elders and leaders of her Tongan community. In order to achieve this and get her family, school and community involved in her efforts to engage better in learning Lia needed to change her attitudes in how she used the teaching and learning strategies that were available for her. The strategy included contextualising the extra curriculum within a pedagogy that involved Tongan immigrant parents, elders and Tongan community in integrating their cultural values into the activities in school and at home. The impact of history is vivid and relevant when Lia said:

*We are taught at home... to relate well to our teachers ...and other children at school. To live our Christian life... and respect ourselves and others. We learn our Tongan dances, Music, stories, use our own language ...and own histories about our families. [pause] It is important ... because we have to feel about who we are... and be proud of it [pause]we have got to learn about our ways... not just the western ways.*

Accordingly, this could only be achieved through active involvement of her family and community who possessed the cultural knowledge that was needed to give Lia good self esteem and to know who she is in order to do better in her engagement in learning at school. Lia's biographical trajectory significantly contributed to speeding up this process when policies of self-determination and self motivation were supported by the Tongan school supporter, few Tongan families and Tongan tutors. This paved the way for establishment of a homework centre to help Tongan immigrant students in their school work and to learn Tongan music, dances and Tongan culture. As a result, Tongan immigrant parents, leaders, educators and community started to play a significant role in the engagement in learning of their children at home and at schools. Lia recognised the importance of this involvement as an *exciting thing for me, mainly because... it makes me feel proud of my Tongan culture, it's a cultural thing to have the families and community to help our education. [smile] It's a Christian school... It's good for Tongan families and community to teach us... our Tongan Music and dances.*

All parents are welcomed by the school to support the school's cultural activities and be involved in school meetings and their children's school work. These challenges are difficult for the Tongan immigrant parents as many of them are still struggling in cultural integration. Lia pointed out, *my school needs to continue to encourage my parents in the Tongan way... and work on it* by organizing activities that would involve them for example, *every year our school involve in..., cultural festival of Catholic schools in Sydney...[pause] Our parents, ... and some members of our Tongan community come in and teach us our cultural dances and music.*

Encouraging parents and members of the Tongan community to participate in school activities is vital but also giving the partnership process time and flexibility of the school is equally important. When Lia commented on the negotiating with parents and members of her community to help with the Tongan cultural items at school, she mentioned the importance of doing things in the Tongan way. When asked what the Tongan way is that she referred to, Lia described the community strategy; *to make things happen in our*

*Tongan community ...the principal ...and the teachers have to invite them through the Tongan school supporter. [pause] ...She can talk to our families and our community, and getting their ideas ... asking them to help with the items in school.* This was the point in Lia's narratives that she evaluated the relationship between the school, the community and the family:

*If the teachers are talking about wanting to work more closely with our families and community... to help us in our studies. [pause] It's important to work ...with the school Tongan supporter... to talk to our parents ...and the leaders in our Tongan community.*

Sharing responsibility in engagement in learning of the children is not limited to families. Lia saw this shared responsibility as one that involved the extended families and the community. It is a collective welfare that involves the whole community such as *the school, the family, ... and our community, [pause] should be working together to support each other.*

When asked about school relationship with her family and community, Lia was quick in pointing out that she visualizes *the school is always welcome our family... and community to the school. [pause] But they only come in when there is a school cultural activity is on.* The selection of responsibilities including parents, educators and leaders of the Tongan community in the Canterbury and Auburn areas in a Tongan homework centre brings hope and *making it better for the school... and the Tongan families and community; giving opportunities for us to find ways that we could do better... in our learning.* At this point in Lia's narrative, there is a clear indication of her apprehension about the hopes she had and then said, *I don't really want to talk about it [deep breath] I don't know... what's going to happen* but then very suddenly Lia was optimistic about the future and recounted that, *there is good work coming from our parents... and leaders of our Tongan community. [pause] We are interested in making a difference to our lives...to work ... to work harder in our studies,* and Lia looked away in the distance as she pondered on a few more years to engage in her learning at school towards her HSC public exams. In ending her narrative, Lia reflected and evaluated her standpoint on her experiences in her school and influences on her engagement in learning, emphasizing the importance of encouraging school, family and community involvement in the Tongan immigrant students' schooling:

*The school, Tongan families ... Tongan community should still continue to work together. [pause] Parents, leaders, ... yourself and others should help us, [pause] to teach us our Music, dances, language and culture. It's good we come on Wednesday evenings... to teach us all these things. [smile] It is encouraging me to do better... in my studies.*

Once more, Lia looked relax with eyes fixed on the symbols used for the opening prayer until my interactive remark 'malo 'aupito' and our interview ended. Table 4.1 below summarizes Lia's key themes and context.

**Table 4.1 Lia's Key Themes And Context**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>CONTEXT</b>
Unquestioning obedience	A traditional Tongan expectation, to obey whatever the authority figures say without questioning, to show respect
Low income factors	Effects of low income and poverty that hinder opportunities to engage with learning in school
Cultural and social demands	Cultural values, and activities of church, communities and extended families that cause poverty and distractions to families that hinder children to engage in their learning, and parents to support their children's education
Cultural sensitivity	To be in a position where one has to be sensitive and respect the differences of one another's culture
Parents' capabilities and limitations	Parents' gifts and skills that could help the education of their children, and as well as their lack of skills that hinder them to be useful to their children's school work
Collective efforts	Shared responsibility and collaborating with parents, families, communities and school to support students' education
Right relationships	Good communication, gaining trust and respect and among members in school, family and community
Christian school community	The community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love, and making all in the school community to feel at home, belonged and included
Bicultural concepts and bilingualism	Tongan and English concepts and languages use for teaching and learning strategies

Lia's story presented her as a catalyst who, through hardships and resilience, transformed her life to reflect on her engagement in learning at school. Lia's role as a Year 9 Tongan immigrant student was crucial in the transformation process of her efforts to improve in her engagement in learning. In order to achieve this Lia expressed the importance of the involvement of her family, teachers, and her Tongan community in this formation of her journey. Lia also is keen to learn the Tongan language, culture, music, dances and cultural communication protocols. Culture has had both a negative and positive impact and influence on her effort to engage in her learning in school.

### 4.3 STORY 2 VAI FONO

#### 4.3.1 *Vai's Lived Life*

*There have been family arguments and I have not been able to concentrate on my study*

I am a Tongan descendant. My parents were born in Tonga. I was born in Canterbury hospital in Campsie, on the 8<sup>th</sup> July, 1995. I am the seventh child of a family of four boys and four girls.

Dad migrated from Tonga to New Zealand with his family in the late 1970's. My dad's father was a lawyer when they migrated to live permanently in New Zealand. In 1981 dad moved with his family from New Zealand to live in Australia. In the same year he met my mother who came to Australia on a visitor's visa and became an overstayer. My parents married in October 1981 in Sydney. Mum's permanent visa to live in Australia was granted in 1983.

My family are staunch Seventh Day Adventist. Mum was a staunch Catholic but she became a Seventh Day Adventist when she married dad in 1981. When I was one year old there were a lot of arguments in the family which led to a separation between my dad and mum. Dad kept the three older children and mum kept the three younger children and myself. However, prior to the time I entered the pre school dad approached mum for a reconciliation. My family reunited and my parents rented a home in Sydney for our whole family to live. We have lived in this home up until now. Dad and mum agreed to send both my older siblings to a Catholic secondary school, and the rest of my siblings to a Catholic primary school. Dad's parents moved to Sydney and lived next door to us. I was very fond of my grandfather. Being a lawyer and a religious minister himself he used to read to me the bible stories for children. This has helped to develop in me a love of reading. Dad is also a leader of the Seventh Day Adventist community in Sydney. This strong Seventh Day Adventist influence in my family did not deter them from practising our Tongan culture in Australia.

I started Kindergarten at the age of six with some of my siblings in a Catholic Primary school, and were all influenced by the teachings of the Catholic faith under the auspices of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Most of the children in my class were younger than me.

My childhood upbringing was during a time when my family went through lots of problems and difficulties. I was not able to do well in my study in my first year in Kindergarten so I had to repeat the class in the following year. Both of my parents were working and my parents did not have time to help me with my reading as a young child. My parents have strict rules for the family's religious programme and our school's programme. This has helped me to start to discipline myself to pray and to do my homework in an early stage of my life.

When I was promoted to Year 1, I was already eight years old. This early stage of my education made no allowance for the teaching of Tongan language and culture in school but I had the opportunity to learn my Tongan language and culture at home. Even though we were all taught Christian western education at school, my family has always used the Tongan language and Christian Tongan education at home.

I was very sad when my grandfather died suddenly in 2003. I was only nine years old and had taken a keen interest in education. The Tongans have valued education as an asset to empowerment and living a better and happier life. My grandfather, a retired lawyer and a religious man was also keen and determined to see his children including his grandchildren through good education and future. I missed my grandfather and there was no one who could replace him to hear my reading at home. While still in Year 3, in 2004 my parents were arguing once again. Mum was seven months pregnant. She packed her belongings and left dad and all of us. I missed mum when she left us and this affected my interest in learning and reading. After three weeks dad found mum and there was a reconciliation and mum came back home. Mum was eight months pregnant and the baby was due the following month. On the 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2004 mum gave birth to a baby girl. This was one of the most exciting events in my life because this was the first time for me to experience having a baby in my family. I was spending a lot of time with my baby sister. When mum asked me to look after my baby sister I used to read to her even though she was still not yet able to talk. I wanted to read to her like what my grandfather used to do to me.

While in Year 4, in 2005 I was eleven years old, and it was a joy to have a baby sister. However, the size of our house was becoming too small for a family of ten. Continual arguments among the siblings and between my parents were part of the life of our family.

I was still struggling to do my studies.

In the beginning of 2006, significant changes started in our family. I was in Year 5 and I was twelve years old. My parents had a loan to enable all of us to visit Tonga, the birth place of our parents. This timing coincided with the seventieth birthday of mum's mother who lived in Tonga. The whole family left Australia for Tonga in the third week of December, 2006. This was the first time ever for me to leave Australia and to travel by plane. When we arrived at the airport, mum's uncle and some of the cousins of both mum and dad were welcoming us to Tonga. This trip has helped me to work towards self determination and self motivation to learn more about the Tongan language and culture.

After three days in the main island we travelled to the island of Ha'apai, where mum's mother lived. We were all excited to face the challenge of the trip by boat to be with our grandmother. Most of the members of the family were sea sick. Besides being sea sick I was also vomiting, felt miserable and thought I would not last the trip. There were only about three thousand people living in Ha'apai. Despite the isolation and the poverty of the island, mum's mother, sister, two brothers and their families appeared contented and happy.

This shift was significant in my life. Even though I already had a strong western education influence I started to realise the absence of language and culture in the formation of my education in school. This was also a start in bringing change to the efforts of my family to learn more about our Tongan language and culture. With the introduction of having everything in Tongan language and culture during our three weeks with mum's mother and her family, my life was introduced to a very significant cultural experience. It was an opportunity for mum's mother and family to be directly involved in teaching us the Tongan language and culture. It was also a cause of evaluation and reflection in my effort to engage better in my learning at school.

When we got ready to leave Tonga for Australia I realised that I missed Australia and especially the space to relax and to read an interesting book. When we left Tonga I had mixed feelings. I was happy to come back to Australia but I was also sad to say good bye to Tonga, the birth place of my parents, our loved ones who remained in Tonga and the rich language and culture that overwhelmed my life.

When we arrived in Australia in 2007 there was only one week before school started. I was looking forward to going to school and I knew it was my last year at the primary school.

While in Year 6 I developed an interest in doing law one day, like my dad's father. To be able to achieve my goal, I had to work hard and engage in my learning at school. My determination to make an effort to engage better in my learning at school was not easy.

In 2008 I was in Year 7. Moving from the primary school to the secondary school was a new chapter for my life. Four of my brothers and my older sisters were at the College already. Year 7 was a really nervous year for me. In the beginning of the year I was shy and really scared. I was not able to concentrate on my study. I was laying back and relaxing and I was not really committed to my studies. My marks for all my subjects on my term one report dropped. I continued to be unsettled at school and the problems and distractions at home were also a barrier to my effort to do my studies. It took the whole year for me to settle in this transition from the primary school to the secondary school.

There were a lot of things happened in Year 8. I had developed a few relationships with some good friends in school. I was very good in sports and also good in dancing and singing. I took part in many activities in the classroom and outside the classroom. I was in the school athletic teams, netball team, volleyball team, school choir and the cultural dancing group. I felt at home with all the school's activities including the celebration of the school's feast days and the cultural activities that took place in our school. This experience was encouraging and I had a good hope for Year 9.

In Year 9 my family once again have had a more serious problem. My parents were involved in an argument with dad's eldest sister and mum was also taken to hospital. This has affected the whole family and more distractions have struck my life. Despite these distractions my family were still attending a lot of funerals and fund raising of the extended families and the Tongan community in Sydney. These experiences were not helping me with my studies. My belief in God has given me hope and strength to try to overcome the distractions and difficulties that I have faced. Although I kept many aspects of my Tongan culture and Seventh Day of Adventist beliefs I had a strong devotion to the religious beliefs of the Catholic school culture. I found the special devotion to Our Lady

as evidenced in my story because I often asked God through Mary and her son Jesus and husband Joseph to look after my family and studies.

I continue to try harder in my studies despite the family problems I am facing. I realise that I need to use the opportunities offered at school to the best of my ability. I find this quite confronting and challenging. However, I am still determining and having great hope that one day my goal to get good marks in all my subjects will be a reality.

Still believing in getting better marks, I continue to establish a program for myself to learn my Tongan language and culture, to listen to my teachers, to do my homework and to try my best in school. Such determination, I believe will bring self-motivation to me and establish a discipline to help me to be consistent in my efforts to get better marks.

While trying to work hard in my studies in June this year quite tragically my mother had a break down. My mum's break down brought a personal sadness that was very devastating. Mum had been trying to do her best to all of us despite the difficulties that she had faced. It was sad to see mum almost giving up living life with dad, and eight of us children with the youngest child who just turned six. This sad turning point in my life did not deter me from the courage and determination to try to get better marks in all my subjects.

The pattern of the *lived life* of Vai Fono has shown that she has experienced hardships and many challenges in her life. Issues affecting her engagement in her learning at an Australian Catholic school have revealed that she has determined to work hard to be successful in her studies despite the difficulties that she was going through at home.

#### ***4.3.2 Vai's Telling Of The Told Story***

Vai's story affirms the notion of the problems and difficulties that she was facing and have become barriers for her efforts to engage in her learning in school. Besides the problems and difficulties Vai faced, she also had a poor self esteem. Vai was convinced that *I was shy... and did not able to ask questions in the classroom*. Yet, she was also aware that to achieve success in school and to get better grades there needed to be a degree of mutual effort in the part of the school, family and community and herself where opportunities, common understanding and shared responsibility are offered. Vai also told a story of struggles in her efforts to establish such collaboration with her family and

school and from her perspective that will give empowerment and self-motivation to her in engaging better with learning in school. There is also a sense of determination in Vai's hope to succeed despite the cultural social barriers and difficulties of her day to day operations as a student. Vai came across as a confident interviewee compared to the other three Tongan immigrant students. Somehow I was surprised by the way Vai started her narrative. She was very open and detailed in telling her story chronologically from childhood up to her current situation in Year 9. Vai appeared to take a more nervous approach when she tried to share her experiences in her first year in the secondary school. For example, I was aware that Vai spoke much better English and was much clearer in expressing herself. I wondered why Vai was nervous and took a long pause before starting her narrative when she talked about her first year at College. Was Vai trying to establish the expressions of her English and her body language that is normally associated with the position in western terms? Or was Vai trying to establish the importance of an interview that she would tell a careful account of her life story? Vai began her account by responding to my initial question by following a chronological account, but unlike Lia's account she started to talk repeatedly of how nervous she was when she started in Year 7. Against this background, Vai canvassed a great deal of information and elaborated on the importance of having her family and her teachers to support her in her engagement in learning as a way of having mutual responsibility that was a necessary ingredient in her achievement to have better marks in her subjects.

Vai's initial narrative was quite a lengthy one that addressed every aspect of problems, difficulties that she has faced at home, school, extended families, Tongan community and her own personal attitudes and attributes. When Vai commenced by saying repeatedly that she had a nervous year in Year 7 there is a clear indication that she positioned herself both as a fearful student and has had low self esteem in a western classroom. *Year 7 was a nervous year... Year 7 was really a nervous year. Oh [a big sigh] really a nervous year...I felt lost and was really scared and I was very nervous... not sure what to say in front of the teachers and my classmates.* It was also an indication of a key theme in Vai's narrative, a theme of struggle to transcend boundaries where school, family and community expectations are constantly in contestation. It is interesting that Vai next switches from a personal orientation to focus on her efforts to engage in her learning in school. I expected Vai would continue to tell me more about herself, her attitudes and attributes towards education and being in a western classroom but instead shifts the

discussion to answering the narrative question on her experiences in school and her engagement in learning. Vai's definition of such engagement in learning seemed to be presented in the context of a process - Her role as a Tongan immigrant student, a daughter in a Tongan cultural family, family responsibility, Tongan extended family responsibility and Tongan community responsibility. After Vai's initial introduction she continued her narrative about establishing strategies to help her to engage better in learning and to do her homework at home. Within this initial account, Vai's primary aim seemed to be more on focusing on the strategies and to work harder in making her aim a reality. *I guess once I realise how to focus on my study ...I will start to learn better, do my homework and will get good marks in my subjects.* Vai continued to report on her main goal and the family and community involvement in her study and cultural activities at school. Vai also asserted the need for a common understanding between the family, community and school which she confirmed by saying. *Before I expect to do well in my studies, I need the support of my family... and community. The school ... also help me with my studies.*

This is indicative of Vai's biographical trajectory of advocating an ideological shift that would involve not only her family and school in her education but also the Tongan community. Vai also indicated that this would ultimately bring empowerment and motivation to her to engage better in her learning at school. Within this narrative Vai located significance of the Tongan children's roles in Tongan culture. *Dad works with the boys... with outdoor activities ...and football trainings... Mum works with us girls ...and to cook the food for the family...and to tidy up the house... for doing our homework and reading.* It seemed from the recounting that dad and the boys in the family had played a minimal role in children's learning and this seemed to be changing in a positive direction as she said *and I found our dad now showing interest in reading to my baby sister... like my grandfather to me [pause] and my eldest brother also read a funny story... to make her laugh.*

Next Vai switched to the new relationship that she developed through making new friends at school but only engaged in a brief discussion and never really expanded on what it is or its significance. It is interesting that Vai personalized her role as a leader and, with minimal explanation mentioned the leadership quality that she had when she was with her friends. The underlying reasons might be twofold; first is the fact that Vai situated her role within a western worldview where a Tongan student from a minority ethnic group is

central to a leadership role in the whole school as in *my older sister is the school captain this year ...and my brother was the school sports captain in 2006*. Secondly, the role of Vai in Year 9 is perceived as a class captain in her class as she recounted *I am the class captain this year* and goes further to indicate that she extended her role as a class captain to help and share with every student in the class especially those who are in need. This brief recount evoked a memory about a particular incident where Vai was involved in talking to her Tongan friend who had gone through a difficulty in relating to the Sudanese students in her class. This was indicative of Vai's inclusive approach in establishing relationships and finding ways of helping the students in her class to respect one another. At this point it would seem that there were problems with relationships and communication with some of the Sudanese friends and Vai's Tongan friend. One way of dealing with this was to provide a game during school break *and invite my Sudanese friends ...and my Tongan friend ...and we play together*.

There is also an indication that the level of family problems was apparent in Vai's family. Vai confirmed during prompt questions that *the most problem is... the family problems at home [pause] because of things happen at home ...I have not yet able to get good marks in my subjects*. Essentially, such an environment may not be an easy one to work in and, establishing a family support group to help with Vai's family situation would be fraught with difficulties. There is a perceived notion that family support on this issue can only work where a fair amount of trust on both parties (family and the family support person/group). At this point in Vai's story she discussed the role of her own dad who is a pastor in their own church and who has the responsibility of resolving their own family problems. Vai's older siblings would also support her parents in dealing with family problems and encourage the involvement of Vai in the family's constant efforts to reconcile and to have a stable life. There is also a constant negotiation of two competing worlds in which Vai constantly operated in her day to day life as a student. This is a key theme in Vai's narrative that is central to her effort to engage in her learning at school and one that remained a constant struggle in her effort to overcome the problems and difficulties that she is facing at home. Vai's told story at this point is indicative of her biographical trajectory where she was socialized in both worlds and as such affirms her experiences from both worldviews. Vai's constant negotiation of these worlds is evident in the way she located herself in being a class captain of her class. *I am the class captain of my class and I've been working hard to follow the school rules and to study hard in the*

*classroom ...and outside activities. When something comes up... in the class ...and the teacher is not present I deal with it ... and switched on to we and them and us which suggests a struggle to locate herself in leadership of the class and her identity as a Tongan who has tried to work alongside a western classroom with students of different cultural background. It would seem there is a vacuum that needed to be addressed and a failure to fill this vacuum will impoverish Vai culturally.*

Vai decided at this point to discuss the role with her teacher and yet again her use of language dictated a clear polarization of the Tongan and non Tongan worlds, a “them” and “us” situation as evidenced in the narrative *for our class and our teacher ...are working towards respecting everyone in our classroom. They respect us, ...the Tongans, ...and we respect them too.* There is an indication of a disconnection between the class and the teacher. Much later in the interview Vai recounted more of this disconnection and gave an evaluation of the reasons for the constant struggle in building a ‘culture of respect’ in the classroom so that everyone in the class feels safe and free to engage in her/his learning. This would help all cultural groups, including the Tongan group, to perform and to feel free to be themselves and at home with their own worldviews, and western worldviews of which the school is a part.

Even though Vai has family problems and distractions from cultural expectations of extended families and Tongan community she still determined to try her best by saying, *the family problems... and distractions that came my way ...in different directions did not stop my desire... to continue to try to work hard in my studies in the classroom.*

Vai accepted the trust of the school in her older siblings and herself and devised her strategy of coping by working collaboratively with the teachers and the students in school. She continued to support her parents and her older siblings and constantly praying for God’s help whom she believed to be the greatest help for her life at home and at school. *Yeah, I help my family at home ...and my family have problems ..and struggles to pay the school fees and our everyday needs, [pause] and God whom I put all my trust on, [gentle smile] have given me peace ...and courage not to give up in my education.* In continuing to recount this incident there was a sense of sadness and grief. *It was really frustrating ...and I was really, really down... when I arrived home and hear my parents*

*argue. [deep breath] I felt the sadness... in my heart at times, but I was at peace... again when I prayed and talked to God to help me.*

In the beginning of 2010, in Year 9 Vai evaluated the flaw in the process of her efforts to engage in learning in school and doing her studies and homework at home as one that neglected the support of her family who have had many problems and difficulties. She said *and the teachers ...and the students at school were not aware of what was happening at home. [with deep breath] My family have little income ...and go without many things... to send us to a good school... and we have to put up... with our problems and difficulties.* From Vai's present perspective, particularly where she mentioned the problems and difficulties of her family, it might be assumed that in referring to her family situation she meant her difficulties to reach her goal to engage in learning to the highest level in order to get better grades as she went on to explain *I wanted to study hard ...and to gain good grades for my projects... to get top marks [pause] but my family situation... was still on the way.* Consequently, the announcement of the top class was made at the beginning of the year and Vai was not in the top class. Vai was disappointed for it was her dream to be in the top class as she commented,

*you know I was a little bit sad... because I wanted to be in the top class. My older siblings have never got to the top class. [pause] The Tongan students were often good in sports... but not in the academic subjects. [smile] It would be lovely ...to see someone from us the Tongans to be in the top class.*

Within this episode Vai revealed the central role family plays in her engagement in learning and her hope to be in the top class. Vai believed in giving empowerment to Tongan families and communities in supporting them and their efforts to do well in their studies. This pattern is suggested in Vai's lived life. When Vai mentioned her family and community as strong support for her effort to engage in her learning at school she stated *I could not able to reach my goal to get good marks... without the support from my family ...and community.* By way of closing this episode Vai revisited her underlying theme of empowerment to Tongan immigrant students as a strategic tool and reaffirmed the responsibility of her family, Tongan community and the school in being involved in her efforts to engage in her learning at school. *The responsibilities of my family, ...community and school are to help me in my studies.*

The theme of the responsibilities of the family, community and school dominates part of

Vai's narrative. This is reinforced when she discussed the roles of her family, community and school in her initial narrative. Vai was keen to work with the members of her family and community, and the teachers at school but *there were family problems, ...activities in the community and other distractions at school... that still block the way for me to move on ...and to focus in my studies*. In expressing her efforts to engage in her learning in school the phrases *there are a lot of distractions and... I have tried to overcome them and... to move on* is repeated in the episode several times. This gives the indication Vai acknowledged and appreciated her courage not to give in to her determination to engage better in her learning in school. It is also paradoxical that Vai spoke about inclusivity and recognition of the Tongan immigrant students in a western school yet returned to the dividing *them* and *us* situation that is a fundamental aspect of her *lived life* in the relationship with non Tongan students in school. Vai believed that with self-determination and self-motivation as a Tongan immigrant student she was trying to assert her ability with great courage to do well in her engagement in learning and to get better grades. Similar to other Tongan immigrant students, it is a reinforcement of the ideological shift in education and the struggle to transcend boundaries of two contested worlds that constantly haunted her.

Vai's narrative also revealed a struggle and tension between her family and Tongan community and the school, as well as the struggle in forging links with the strategy she established to engage in her learning in school. In an attempt to forge links between Vai's strategy and her determination to engage better in her learning in school and to get better marks, it seemed part of this struggle is revealed in the episode she recounted in establishing a good relationship with family, Tongan community and school. The establishment of a good relationship with her family, Tongan community and school seemed to be a good tool for her to be able to engage better in her learning in school. *Trying to make a good relationship... with my family... and Tongan community, [pause] and teachers and students ... helped me to be more determined ... to achieve my goal to work harder in my studies at school*. She recounted the time when her parents and older siblings held a meeting regarding the matter where

*we sat down on the Tongan mats, prayed as a family, talked and shared ways we could help one another in our family problems. [pause] We also talked about our needs for our studies in school... and a space for us at home to do our homework. I*

*also expressed the need for me to use the local library... and attend homework club at school... My home is crowded...and people at home...can't help my homework.*

Her choice of the phrases 'use the local library... to do my homework' are indicative of the distractions that she faced and not having people at home to have time to be involved, 'my home is crowded ...and people at home ...can't help my homework. Later on when prompted to discuss the distractions at home and no one was available to help her school work, Vai canvassed a key issue that might be related to these distractions. Vai made a clear distinction between the cultures of a Catholic school and her family which brought challenges in her efforts to do well in her studies. The following excerpt reveals the reasons for a lack of skills: *The culture of the Catholic school is completely different... to the culture at home. [pause] Tongan families don't often have... the skills to cope with the rules at school. [pause] It is challenging for me ...as a Tongan student to be in the setting of a Catholic school... in Australia.*

This evoked a memory of an incident involving a Tongan immigrant student the principal disciplined for leaving the school without permission *because of family problems*. It seemed that a Tongan immigrant student tended to let family culture and involvement affect her involvement in school activities and her effort to engage in her learning in school. As in other episodes, Vai relied on the support of her teachers in school to support her in her study and to get better marks. It was interesting yet again that Vai resorted to the rules and help she received from her teachers in school in matters relating to self determination and discipline in order for her to follow strategies to improve her engagement in learning in school. As Vai's *lived life* dictates, she embarked on bringing into her efforts to do well in her studies a Tongan cultural approach from her family and Tongan community in an effort to operate her engagement in learning from a both ways perspective. In this same episode Vai revealed the theme of her disconnectedness and disempowerment in the educational world of which she is justifiably an equal student.

*As a Tongan student ...I have to follow rules and have to study hard... and to take part in the activities in school... in the western way. If I don't study hard, I won't achieve good marks.* This begs the questions, who has the power to make decisions for her to engage in her learning? There seemed to be little consultation that Vai espoused in the rhetoric in parts of her story. There is an indication that teaching and learning strategies at school

are offered for her benefit and it is up to her to make the choice to engage or not to engage in her learning at school. Vai endeavoured to transcend cultural boundaries, yet she is constantly caught in a web of struggle between two polarized cultures where the dominant culture prevails. The perception of herself as a Tongan immigrant student with Tongan values that she projected seemed to be in dissonance with her role as a student in a western school.

It would seem that as her *lived life* dictated, Christian devoutness is nested within her cultural and spiritual beliefs and seemed to have little difficulty with both values co-existing in harmony. When Vai ended her initial narrative she was almost drawn to tears. Part of her argumentation was finding answers to *work harder in school... and to have a quality time ...to do my homework at home ... to achieve good marks*. The pattern of her *lived life* is reflected in the way she ended the initial narrative – a determination to succeed at all costs, prayer as a source of strength, and a vision to engage better in learning in school. This would also reflect Tongan culture and identity alongside the competitive world of the western structure that would have an integrating experience. In closing, her initial narrative revealed the burden that accompanied her role as a Year 9 Tongan immigrant student:

*Most of the time... I struggle to do better in school. [sadness] I also cry inside me ...because I know that I have not done my best in school .... I often sit in front of my mum's picture of the cross and the mother of Jesus and pray to God to give me strength, to show me the way ...to do better in my studies... and to deal with the problems and distractions at home.*

As I was curious to know about the barriers that caused her to disengage in her learning at home, and at school, in response to my probe she was quick in pointing out language and cultural values as the main barriers in communicating her needs to both the Tongan cultural values and the Australian Catholic school culture. There is an indication that communication is not only a problem for Vai's family and school but also for her and the Tongan immigrant students. Vai is convinced that *the language and cultural values ... of the non Tongan people is hard for me, a Tongan, to understand*. As a Tongan immigrant student, Vai recounted: *I talk in my own Tongan language ...and also in English*.

Additionally, the clash of cultures in communicating was a constant challenge in Vai's efforts to engage in her learning in school. Vai described that *Tongan students... have*

*different ways of communication [pause] we don't say no to give answers... but we often don't know the answers... and don't know what we are going to say.* This cultural behaviour seemed to be in conflict with the western school context where teachers may be expected to make decisions based on their perceptions regarding the communication.

Finally, in reflecting on Vai's journey in her engagement in learning since she started in Year 7 she advocated a both ways approach in her efforts to achieve good marks in all her subjects.

Emergent themes from Vai's narrative closely reiterated themes found in the narratives of the other Tongan immigrant students. These are illustrated in Table 4.2 below.

**Table 4.2 Vai's Key Themes And Context**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>CONTEXT</b>
Low income factors	Effects of low income and poverty that hinder opportunities for students to engage with their learning in school
English language	English language is a necessity for Tongan parents to be able to support their children's education
Cultural mismatch	When the dominant cultural beliefs and values conflict with the cultural beliefs and values of Tongan and small ethnic groups
Christian school community	The community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love, and making all in the school community to feel at home, belonged and included
Cultural sensitivity	To be in a position where one has to be sensitive and respect the differences of one another's culture
Collective efforts	Shared responsibility and collaborating with parents, families, communities and school to support the students' education
Bicultural concepts and bilingualism	Tongan and English concepts and languages use for teaching and learning strategies
Pedagogies	Teaching methods used for teaching in the classroom

In summary, the focus of Vai's story is about her efforts to have self motivation and self determination to engage in her learning. In order to bring about this, there is a central focus on language, culture and communication in school and also at home and in the Tongan community. Vai continues to struggle to maintain her efforts to strike a balance between the Tongan and Australian worlds. There are successes and some failures in resolving these issues. Although Vai was determined to engage in her learning in a western classroom she still lacked the support from her family and community situations.

#### 4.4 STORY 3 SINI FIKA

##### 4.4.1 *Sini's Lived Life*

*I switched off from studying in the classroom and hoping to hear the bell....so that I could go out to play football*

Some of dad's uncles and cousins were great football and rugby players in Tonga and Australia. Both mum and dad were born in Tonga. In 1984 dad's parents sent him to Australia to study at TAFE in Sydney. Dad won a scholarship and went on to do a degree in Commerce and Accounting in Sydney University. After he completed his degree in 1988, he returned to Tonga to work as an accountant in the Tonga Electric Power Board. Dad met mum in 1991 and they married in 1992 at the Wesleyan church in Tongatapu, Tonga.

I was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November, 1995 in Vaiola hospital, in Tonga. My home was far from Nuku'alofa, the capital. We were not exposed to western culture and the environment was surrounded with Tongan and Christian tradition and culture. My life was therefore dominated by Christian and Tongan cultures. I did not grasp any English language before we left Tonga, however I knew how to say A B C up to Z and 1 2 3 up to 20 in English from my parents.

My family was granted a permanent visa to migrate to Australia in 2001. I was six years old when we arrived in Sydney in September, 2001. The pattern of my education journey is different because I did not start formal schooling in Australia until 2002 at the age of 7. I was not able to speak and read in English and I also had no opportunity to attend the pre school and Kindergarten stage. I have an older brother, a young sister and a young brother. My older brother and sister were also born in Tonga. My young brother who is eight years old now was born in Sydney.

My dad's brother, who had already migrated to Australia and sponsored our family, gave my family accommodation until my parents had enough money to rent our own unit. My father got a part time permanent job as an accountant. Mum spoke very little English and could not have a job. It was not easy for my family to settle in Australia. I missed my friends in our village and the simplicity of Tonga's life style. Living with dad's brother and his family was very crowded. I did not start school until 2002 so my brother and I

used to play the children's football game at the back of our uncle's place nearly everyday for the rest of 2001.

In the beginning of 2002 my parents rented a home in Sydney and sent my brother and I to a Catholic primary school. I was in Year 1 and I was seven years old. I was older than all the children in the class and yet I did not know what was going on in the classroom. I had a culture shock to be in an Australian classroom. I did not understand most of the things they talked about. I remember having an elderly nun who used to come and help the remedial reading sessions. I was introduced to her and she was introduced to me. I never learn her full name so I only remember her as 'Sister'. From then on the elderly nun was known to me as Sister and I always called her Sister. I was in her one to one remedial reading sessions. I was scared when we had our first session but after few sessions with her I started to like her.

There was one Tongan boy in the class so I always wanted to sit next to him to talk to him in Tongan. I hardly learned anything in the classroom for the whole of 2002 and I always felt miserable to be in the classroom. When in the classroom I always looked forward to the time when my teacher called out my name to go to my remedial reading session with Sister. This was the only session in the classroom that I enjoyed because Sister always used the children's books that the pre-school teachers used for two and three years old children. Sister spoke very slowly and tried to explain to me the pictures and the English words and sentences. She also took a special interest in the progress of my reading and my study. At the end of the year Sister gave me a Christmas card and she wished me a happy Christmas and few words of encouragement to try my best in my studies and my reading. She also mentioned that she would pray for me. This was the first time anybody gave me a Christmas card.

I was promoted to Year 2 in 2003 and I was still in the remedial reading session. I was hoping to have Sister taking me but I had another lady. I never saw Sister again and I often wondered where she was. I did not have the courage to ask where Sister was because I had no confidence in myself and I was also very conscious of my poor English. Sister's kindness to help me with my English has always stayed in my mind. I continued to take a special interest in athletics and playing football at school and I won the award for the sportsperson of my level.

In 2004 at the age of nine I represented New South Wales State for the national athletics sports and I did very well. Mum also gave birth to my baby brother and this has given me great joy. My parents also brought my mum's parents to come for the birth of my baby brother. They came on a visitor's visa but after their three months they both stayed on as overstayers. Our house became very crowded. My teachers acknowledged that I was very good in sports and very cooperative in the school's activities but my effort to do my studies in the classroom and reading could be better.

In 2005, sports and outside activities in school continued to give me happiness and at that age I had developed a stronger desire to aim for the top in athletics and rugby league. Top players with Tongan ancestry, like Willie Mason and Willie Tonga who played for the Bulldog rugby league team were influential to me. Like many young Tongan boys I have developed a determination that one day I would be among the top rugby or football players in Australia. Although I was encouraged to study hard in the classroom, I still could not improve my learning in the classroom and in my reading.

At the age of eleven I was in Year 5. The school work and my reading continued to be quite challenging. I did well only in sports and rugby. My parents continued to struggle in their efforts to help me to do my homework and to develop an interest in reading. 2007 was my last year in primary school. I continued to enjoy sports and outdoor activities and still struggled with my engagement in learning and doing my homework. I have won a few friends among my schoolmates, Canterbury young rugby league teams and children of the families of our Tongan Wesleyan community. This had put more pressure on me in my studies.

In 2008 I was excited to enter the secondary school. I was looking forward to wearing the new uniforms and to be in the secondary school. I was also happy because my older brother was already in Year 9 in the same school. After a few weeks in the secondary school I found out that the work was much harder than I imagined. I was in the recovery reading group with two other Tongan boys. I found the reading sessions not challenging and I liked taking part in these. The opportunities that I had in school to do well in my studies were given but I did not use them properly. I did not look forward to being in the classroom and I often felt miserable sitting and listening to the teacher. I was longing to be outside playing football and often spent time, imagining myself on a football field

running fast with the football, passing the ball to my friends in the team and scoring a few goals for my team. As a consequence, I did not learn anything from the lessons in the classroom. As a result I was behind with my studies. My parents tried to remind me that I needed to read, do my homework and listen to my teachers in the classroom. I just could not live up to this expectation.

Mum's parents were still with us and they helped to look after us. They could only speak in Tongan and they spent a lot of time with us in the evenings. I often played up and did not do my homework and my reading. My parents were involved in many community fund raisings and the annual contributions to our Wesleyan minister and our church. There was the understanding and expectation among many Tongans that, as worshipers, they had to give as much money as they could to the church leaders to please their God.

There have been ceremonies including choir practices, cultural dancing and singing and religious activities that demand money and time from my family. My family has become very involved in all these church activities and ceremonies and this has affected my studies.

In Year 8, I was selected to play the Under 14's New South Wales team for the second time. This led me to do more training and discipline to make sure that I was fit and healthy to play with older opponents. The desire to follow the footsteps of Tongan immigrants high profile rugby league players in Australia like Isileli Folau has encouraged me to keep trying my best in my football training programme. I felt more miserable in the classroom because I just could not cope with the lessons. Apart from not concentrating in my studies, I started to be influenced by some of my friends who were members of a Tongan gangster group who hung around the Canterbury area.

My parents tried their best to look after us but they also left us in the care of our grandparents most of the time during the evenings. I took advantage of this opportunity to be with my friends who were on the street. Some of my friends were also involved in some juvenile court cases and my parents did not know that I was hanging around with them. My parents eventually found out and they were very disappointed.

At the beginning of this year I was challenged to keep working towards a positive attitude about my studies, to keep up with the efforts that I put into my sports and to try to have

the right friends. At this time I developed a special interest in playing the guitar and one of my friends at school was also interested in playing guitar.

I was very sad when my grandfather died after spending only a few days in hospital. I missed my grandfather because he used to look after us and used to enjoy coming with my parents to watch my football games and matches. The tragedy of the death of my grandfather has challenged our family to continue to work with courage to transform our lives and especially our education in school. Currently apart from working on my sports, I am trying to hang around with the right friends and to attend our religious and cultural activities. I also try to make an effort to improve in my studies in the classroom. The vision of my parents was also to make sure that we have good manners, to have better education and better life.

I was fascinated to have been part of the journey of this remarkable lived life of a young boy who has gone through many challenges and difficulties since he left Tonga. This honest and amazing story of Sini contextualises the telling of his story that follows.

#### ***4.4.2 Sini's Telling Of The Told Story***

At the commencement of the interview Sini presented an impression of someone who was eager to share his experiences in school and influences on his engagement in learning. At the outset Sini made it clear that his parents were Tongans, he was born in Tonga and he was happy to share his experiences and his cultural background. Sini presented an interview in a narrative that was focused mainly on his commitment for sports and its effect on his engagement in learning at school. He was determined and keen on introducing the lives of his parents who were very religious and living a very cultural Tongan life style. Within his story several key themes emerged that are grounded in the context of his engagement in learning in school and the activities that he was involved in. Aspects of his *lived life* are also features of the telling of his story. His love for sports, football and outdoor activities became the focal point in his engagement in school. In expressing his views on being the youngest football player in the New South Wales under 14 team he positioned himself as a good football player who has brought pride to his school, family and community. Sini has also expressed that, even though he was not engaged well in the classroom, he saw his engagement in training and playing football as

a success that he claimed to be worthwhile.

Sini has experienced great difficulty to engage in learning in the classroom and this experience has been a challenge that he has revealed throughout the presentation of his interview. Sini has hoped to bring a balance between his engagement in learning in the classroom and in the outdoor activities whenever he was challenged by his parents and teachers. Sini is confronted by two polarized cultures (Tongan and Australian) that are laden with values, that are entrenched in the beliefs and traditions that they are founded on. Sini recounted his experiences with profound anxiety and sometimes sadness with expectations of being able to bring a balance into both his performances in academic subjects and non academic subjects. Sini's parents and teachers also were hoping that he could bring a balance between his academic performance and performance in sports where good outcomes symbolise the essence of a hard working spirit towards all the school programmes. In spite of these ambitions of Sini's parents, Sini is aware of his laid back personality and his negative attitudes towards the academic subjects in school. He is constantly challenged with the arduous task of walking between two contested worlds as he strives to bring himself to have a determination to give the same energy and time to both his lessons in the classroom and the outdoor activities. In his opening narrative he expressed: *Well, ... I was excited to enter the secondary school and to be in Year 7, it's been difficult to me to cope with the lessons in the classroom. [pause] It's harder than I imagined so I was only ...able to do well in my football training.* The pattern suggested by the events in Sini's *lived life*, that as a Tongan boy, the importance of relationships in interpersonal interactions, respect for cultural beliefs and values and spirituality are fundamental features of his *telling of his story*. It is implied that a Tongan immigrant student who was born in Tonga engages differently, to an Australian student who has less pressure because he can only look at learning in school through a sole cultural lens. Within the context of this new experience in school, Sini is trying to bring himself to an environment where he has to try to cope with language and cultural differences, a task that is not easy. Throughout his narrative the repetition of phrases such as *it's been very miserable, it's so difficult... it's not easy to be in the classroom ...because I kept dreaming to be in the football field* are indicators of the multiple pressures that challenge Sini on his engagement in learning in the classroom.

When Sini spoke about dreaming to be in the football field, he quickly recounted an

incident and his style of engaging in learning in school. He believed in going to the football field to use up his time and energy in an engagement that he would enjoy. Sini also expressed that he felt better in the football field because he understood the language used by his coach and players. The theme of language barrier became a major theme that engulfed Sini's story pattern and one that challenged his efforts to engage in his learning in the classroom. One reason he gave for this challenge related to his identity as a Tongan boy, a challenge linked to a larger extent with having to balance two polarized worlds - Tongan immigrant student and Australian student. He said, *being in an Australian school classroom ...I try to have time in the classroom... and my football trainings to please my parents and teachers.* Sini further explained that he wanted to have a shared understanding that both values are important and,

*when I came from Tonga, I only could talk in Tongan and I tried to learn English to understand what's going on in the classroom. [pause] The things that I love and learnt in Tonga ...was playing with the ball outside the classroom. I suppose my parents and teachers should continue to help me both in my studies and my football.*

Rather than continuing on his experiences in a western classroom and the structure of western classroom Sini spoke about his upbringing in his Tongan and religious cultural values. He saw similarities of religious values in both his family and community culture and school culture as a help for him. This also helped Sini to understand that his school and his family have mutual respect of one another's religious cultural values in an equal level. Such mutuality will give him a strong foundation in his education and identity and would empower him to do better in his engagement in learning in school. In his entire initial narrative, the struggle to balance both worlds and establish a relationship with both cultures was at the heart of his efforts to engage in his outdoor activities and his engagement in learning in the classroom.

Sini next discussed a multitude of reasons for the difficulty in his engagement in learning in the classroom. Firstly, he realised that in order to work in collaboration with the school towards a better engagement in learning, required gaining the respect and trust of his teachers and friends at school. Sini aimed to continue to make them aware of his family situation and cultural values and the importance of being understood and respected. *I want to live up to my family's values...and my Tongan culture. [pause] I tried to live up to my own Tongan culture in school, but it is hard... for my teachers and friends to understand.*

Secondly, Sini talked about the difficulty of both his family and Tongan community to engage in the cultural activities in school. *It's hard for our parents and Tongan community... to come to school for cultural things [sign of hesitation] It's not easy when teachers do not understand our culture...and teachers teach everything in western way.*

Next he went on to recount a lengthy narrative about a particular time he went out on his own way to engage in outdoor activities from his perspective as a Tongan boy in dealing with the problems he was facing. He was relentless in his efforts and situated himself as an engaging student in what he enjoyed. As a consequence, he went out of his way to communicate better with friends, aiming especially for their understanding of what he was going through. In this episode he went out into the young boys of the Tongan families for friendship but he admitted: *It's very hard [sign of hesitation] because when I started to have the company ...of few young boys as my friends ...I had more problems because most of these kids... were on the streets.*

Clearly, his problems to get the support of his friends are compounded by socio-economic problems in an environment fraught with the seeds planted in the struggles of his family who are poor. He narrated this episode with lots of argumentations and evaluations and his frustration is visible in the way he narrates it as he says

*I think I need to do something... [deep breath] I am stuck with friends who are gangsters and not going to school...and they are poor too... I continued to hang around with them. My parents found out that I hang around with these street kids. [deep breath] ...they kept reminding me to have the right friends. They continued to remind, remind and ...remind me... well I am getting sick and tired.*

His repetition and emphasis of “remind” is a clear indication of his frustration with his parents but also indicated that having good friends to help him in his engagement in learning in school takes time. This is also caused by socioeconomic problems that his family and community are facing and therefore he is in the midst of a disadvantaged situation to engage in his learning in the classroom.

Within the context of engaging his family and community he endeavored to have real dialogue and understanding from the part of the teachers. Engaging dialogue and the involvement of the Tongan family and community involved more than mere talk and reminding from both the Tongan family and the school. It is about having the

understanding that the other has something to say and to contribute and such a process involves finding common ground. He was not sure how his family and community would help him to engage in the academic subjects:

*My family do not have the time ... to give me the full support on my study. There are also a lot of community and church activities ... where they spend the money on [pause] that's does not help me to live up to their expectations. [deep breath] I have little support from them.*

As a consequence of the heavy involvement of Sini's parents on church and community activities, his disengagement in his learning in the classroom went

*to a stage that I could no longer cope ...with keeping up with my homework [deep breath]... and I became more miserable to be in the classroom... [look of despair] I could not be able to listen to the advice of my parents ... it's hard too because some of the kids on the street ...are children of the Tongan church leaders.*

Sini's determination to demonstrate school as integral to the Tongan family and community as one that complements and enhances learning continued to suffer major setbacks. These were challenges that have been perpetuated during the process of being an immigrant from a different cultural background. This is partly because Tongan and community involvement have often amounted to little more than tokenism and they seemed to struggle with accepting a democratic form of involvement in decision making that was too much for them. Experiences of his *lived life* continue to be a pattern of his *telling of his told story* as he evaluated the reasons for dysfunctionality in families and Tongan communities. There is an indication he was making reference to the support system within the church introduced in Tongan communities in Tonga and continued to be in Tongan communities in Australia.

Clearly he was saddened by the continued lack of support mentality of his own people and partly blamed the church leaders for this predicament. *Our church leaders ...are not coping with disciplining us kids in our Tongan community. [pause] A lot of us young ones get bored [deep breath] with some of church activities...and like to be with our friends who don't go to school.*

Envisaging school as integral to the Tongan family and community Sini believed that a school should complement and enhance the effort of the Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning in all the subjects in school. He was convinced that

learning of many Tongan immigrant students is compromised by self image and social problems.

In dealing with behaviour management and discipline of the young ones Sini spoke about the involvement of leaders among the youths of the community *to talk to one of my friends... whose older brother was killed with a knife ...at Campsie in the train in 2008, and with a Tongan gang who lack discipline.* Part of Sini's school programme involved taking *this boy who is affected... from his brother's death* and assisting him in developing a better self esteem. The school also offered him counseling sessions to help his grieving and to proceed towards recovery and courage to make responsible choices for his life. This was a significant programme in the school that has influenced Sini's life in school with gratitude and admiration for his school. Another programme in the school is the school pastoral care programme whose support is critical to the Tongan families.

In drawing his opening narrative to a close he revealed that full involvement in engagement in learning in the classroom starts at home.

*I am a Tongan student ...and I find it hard to understand the role of my parents in my study. [pause] My parents are busy with many things... in our family and community... and have no time for my school work. It's hard for me to do my study at home. It's hard too... to concentrate in my study at school.*

The remaining narratives are in response to my questions and I first asked him about the difficulties he encountered as a Tongan immigrant student when he constantly referred to, *it hasn't been easy, and it's very difficult* in his initial narrative. Sini is quick to recount an incident involving a teacher in the classroom *actually fighting, fighting for my right...trying to explain my side of story, just trying to speak out... but feeling so frustrated because I felt... I was not listened to, it hasn't been easy...it's very difficult.* This incident was particularly new to him in dealing with a conflict involving a teacher. Sini admitted that he was frustrated but very ashamed of himself too because his parents would be so angry if they had found out that he had spoken back to a teacher.

Nonetheless, he dealt with the matter in the proper way by saying sorry to the teacher. However, at the same time he was also able to say that when he looked at the incident from his perspective it was part of his struggle to cope with the demand of the expectations of the teacher on his engagement in learning in the classroom. But these are

problems he would rather not deal with;

*and for that to have me, talk back to the teacher... to try to get her to understand me, [deep breath] it's so hard to deal with... because the teacher didn't understand; it's so difficult, so frustrating for a Tongan boy like myself, to try to explain my side of story to an Australian teacher.*

The interview then moved to discuss Sini's efforts in engagement in learning in the classroom, his reading and doing his homework. Sini recounted a scenario where he talked with his parents who wanted him to improve his effort to engage in learning in the classroom, his reading and doing his homework since they received his term report. The main theme of the comments from his teachers in his term report was *I could have done better... if I tried to do my best*. His intention to change this is *not an easy thing to do because through that... I can find different situation at home*. From his perspective, it was an onerous task for him to have the initiative to engage in his learning in the classroom.

It seems that Sini's commitment to creating meaningful change in his engagement in learning in school involved weaving the social fabric of his own family and community into school culture and working towards a common goal towards his engagement in learning in school. This theme of creating a balance in both cultures pervades his entire narrative. His telling of his story suggests that it is not only an important aspect of building interdependence but also building the identity of Tongan immigrant students in engagement in learning in school. To Sini, the commitment of the school in creating an atmosphere for all cultures that are visible, is something that is important for integrating his cultural values into the school. In the following extract from the interview he showed the involvement of parents, leaders and elders in contributing to the extra curriculum was very important to him.

*The school encourage the cultures of all students... to include in our school cultural days. It is good because our families, community... and all of us Tongans get together... to practise and learn our own music and dances. [pause] In this way we enjoy sharing our cultural values with the school (Sini)*

Sini is happy to be part of this school's programme where the school provides a cultural context that enabled all the students to bring their cultures to be reinforced.

Issues relating to absenteeism and inability to engage fully in his learning in school were

socioeconomic. When Sini was asked the question why he was missing school and not engaging in the classroom, he gave various answers such as, *my parents were in Tonga...I had to stay home to help my grandmother, [pause] my clothes were dirty, we don't have money... because my parents put them in the church collection.*

Despite the difficulties in dealing with such sensitive issues, Sini outlined strategies such as the family do not have any budget for spending the income they have. He also drew attention to the hunger excuse by saying that *my parents spent money on fund raising for church and sending to their relatives back in Tonga and gambling problem...and sometimes I get hungry at home.* In this context Sini becomes a victim of a family situation that he could not avoid because of the complex nature of his family. These are some of the *too hard, too difficult* he refers to in engaging in learning in the classroom.

Towards the end of the interview Sini was asked to elaborate on the difficulties he has faced particularly in the western culture. In the following argumentation he revealed,

*you're looking at my understanding... of learning as a Tongan student, born in Tonga with strong Tongan cultural values. [pause] I'm a Tongan boy... and most of my life as a student I spent in a western classroom. [deep breath] I find it hard,... to live up to both ... the western values and my Tongan values.*

This constant struggle of trying to balance both worlds is evident in his effort to attempt to cope with two worldviews. The pattern of divisions in Sini's biographical trajectory is reflected in the way he tried to represent Tonga and at the same time continued to portray his loyalty to his school. It seems that identity is as important to him as being a student in his Australian school. He puts forward a justification in his narrative for bringing a new approach to his effort to engage better in his learning in the classroom. The issue of building good relationships and sharing cultural values are important and yet, at the same time, difficult to find mutual ground.

In closing the interview I was interested to know what has been most difficult for him in being a Tongan immigrant student and his effort to engage in his learning in school. It is here he reveals a theme that is prominent in other narratives. It is evident that low self esteem emerges as another challenge in his identity as a Tongan immigrant student. When asked towards the end of the interview the most challenging part of his effort to engage in learning in the western classroom, he refers to, *just my poor self-image and*

*thinking that I could not learn properly in the classroom.*

As evident in his biographical trajectory marginalization his poor self image continues to haunt him and creates a problem in his relentless efforts to engage in his learning in a western classroom and to close the division between two cultures. As he recounted his final perceptions, there is a hint of emphatic sadness but also a sense of self-affirming position of strength and determination that are features of his *lived life*. Despite these experiences he finally ended the interview by revealing that the part of his engagement in learning in school has been: *I am in a Christian school and we respect each other. [smile] I enjoyed football trainings and games...But my life as a student... is not always easy in the classroom.*

The prevailing theme of constantly walking between two worlds defines his world as a Tongan immigrant student. Table 4.3 below illustrates key themes as findings from Sini's narrative.

**Table 4.3 Sini's Key Themes And Context**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>CONTEXT</b>
Teachers' actions and reactions	Teacher's attitudes and low expectations of children from low socio-economic and ethnic minority backgrounds, that have effects on student's engagement in learning
Cultural conflicts	The clashes of the values of the western culture and the Tongan culture
Identity	Reinforcing Tongan immigrant students' identity
Cultural and social demands	Cultural values, and activities of church, communities and extended families that hinder children to engage in their learning, and parents to support their children's education
Inclusiveness	The spirit of including and embracing the rights and freedom of humanity of all people and the rights of all children despites their cultural values and beliefs
Spirituality	Living out of one's religious faith involving religious practices such as prayer, and also all life is connected; a holistic view of relating to life
Bicultural concepts and bilingualism	Tongan and English concepts and languages use for teaching and learning strategies
Effective teaching approaches	Teaching strategies and qualities for successful learning

Sini had a determination to transform his life by negotiating his own attitudes with the support of his family and community to participate in the school programme that integrated Tongan music and culture in the school activities. These activities are necessary in preparing the path for his engagement in learning in the classroom and the outdoor activities. While he succeeded in engaging in football, sports and outdoor activities, genuine commitment to his engagement in learning in the classroom, reading and doing his homework was a struggle.

## 4.5 STORY 4 HINA SONI

### 4.5.1 *Hina's Lived Life*

*I come from a huge family and have gone through many difficulties*

I am the seventh child of ten children. I have six brothers and three sisters. I was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1996 in a small room at the back of my uncle's house in Sydney when my parents were still overstayers. My parents were born in Tonga. They got married in Tonga in March, 1984 and both came to Australia in the same year to attend the first birthday celebration of dad's niece. They did not go back to Tonga. They continued to live in a small room at the back of the house of dad's brother and his wife in Sydney. Dad did not have a proper job but he worked illegally for his cousin who had a security business.

In February, 1985 mum gave birth to a baby boy and the eldest child in my family. All of us were born at a time when mum and dad were still overstayers. My huge family have gone through many difficulties. However, our family have put our trust in God's providence and in the support of the parish priest, parishioners, dad's brother and my parents' relatives.

My older brothers and sisters were in public schools. Our family have lived near to the church and mum walked nearly every day to attend the daily Masses. The whole family attended Mass every Sunday. The parish priest and the parishioners were impressed with our family. One of the members of parliament who was in our parish took a special interest in our family. She found out about our situation and she helped to apply for our permanent visas to live in Australia.

Our parish priest found out from mum that my parents would love to send us to a Catholic school. He approached the principals of the parish Catholic primary and secondary schools to get the application forms for us. In the following year my two brothers and two sisters attended a Catholic secondary school and my two sisters and myself attended a Catholic primary school. I started school in 2003. All the children seemed to be confident and talked very good English. I could not understand most of the things the teachers taught us.

I lived with my family at the back of the house of dad's brother for most of my primary

schooling. We had to go without many things that many Australian children would have. I determined to have my formal education so I have tried to do whatever I could in school in spite of the difficulties that I have gone through. This was a common practice for Tongan children who were eager to pursue secondary education in order to have a brighter future than what they have gone through. My family still lived in a very poor situation but our will was still very strong and hopeful for a better life once my family would receive our permanent visas.

In 2006 my family were awarded our permanent visas. It was indeed the happiest news to my whole family. We were able to live without fear anymore. Dad was able to get a proper job and my parents decided to rent a house for the family. Mum was still staying home to look after the domestic needs of the family. We were very grateful to our dad's family for looking after us for many years. They have been so good to our family and never once had they given up their responsibilities to look after us.

2006 and 2007 were periods of great change for our family when our family had opportunities to be free to plan for our future and opportunities to have a bit of luxury after living in a very poor situation. At the end of 2006 it was an exciting time for our family. We had the freedom to plan to go to Tonga to attend the family reunion of dad's family held in December, 2007. The family started to save for our trip to Tonga. I was still struggling at school but things were much easier.

At the end of 2007 I was very excited to help with the preparation for our trip to Tonga. When we arrived in Tonga I was very surprised to discover that Tonga is smaller than what I imagined. Both mum and dad have come from very big families. We were welcomed at the airport with garlands of flowers and I felt very privileged. We were able to stay at dad's former home. They have a big brick house and a lot of trees around the house. I mingled well with all our cousins. Some of them travelled from the United States of America and New Zealand for the reunion. I was able to learn from their own stories about their own situations.

The programme of the reunion took a whole week. The organizers planned different activities including trips around the main island of Tonga. This was a very good cultural experience for me. Our elders and leaders who were present were happy to share the

cultural activities with all of us especially those of us who were born outside Tonga. I determined to value my Tongan culture and to be proud of my identity as a Tongan. Our four weeks in Tonga went so quickly. When we left for Australia I was very sad to say good bye to my cousins and relatives. We arrived back in Australia just a week before having my first year in the secondary school in 2008. In Year 7 I suddenly realised that I was in a new environment. The people and the environment were different from the primary school. The teachers were new and the knowledge of the western culture once again confronted me with demands. Schooling continued to be a challenge for me and I could not settle in my learning in school.

My family has become so involved in the activities of the extended families, Tongan community and our parish. These have also become a distraction to my engagement in learning in school. The situation of the family was still difficult but both of my parents were trying their best to commit to all of us. I continued to struggle in my work at school. I started to miss school a lot. My parents also gave in to me whenever I told them that I was not feeling well to go to school. This had become a habit and it went on for awhile. I received a lot of demerits and I felt more depressed at school. My teachers were very concerned with my performance and the number of days I missed school. When my parents received my progress at school they realised that my performances at school were deteriorating. They did not want to put any pressure on me because they had the understanding that I was not a healthy person. However, I was challenged by the principal to attend school unless I received confirmation from the doctor that I had been sick. I was also told that my performances at school had to improve in order for me to be promoted to the next class in the following year. I made a promise in front of the principal and his assistant and my mum that I would try to perform better in my school work.

By the beginning of the last term in 2008 I made up my mind to perform better in school. I was also thinking beyond the classroom with my eyes set on cultural activities and being actively involved in the liturgy running in the school for school feast days. My determination to have a better performance at school had led me to stop making excuses about being sick and other unnecessary reasons. My new vision has also led me to be more motivated towards my engagement in my learning in the classroom including other

activities at school especially the cultural activities. I took part in the Tongan cultural group to perform an item for our school cultural festival at the end of the year. At the end of the year, my principal, teachers and parents were happy with the progress of my work and I was promoted to Year 8 in 2009.

I had a new teacher in Year 8 when I started in 2009. I was keen to continue to progress well in my engagement in learning in the classroom and all the activities at school. Being promoted to Year 8 and being interested in the cultural and religious activities at school was a turning point in my life history. At the beginning of the year I started to have an inquiring mind about being a teacher one day. I determined to make the most of my time at school and to attend the homework sessions run at school. I wanted to have more education in the western context and, more importantly, to understand my own Tongan culture in order to appreciate both cultures.

In the last week of October a tragedy struck my family with the death of our granddad. I found this very hard and I was grieving throughout the rest of the year. I lost concentration at school and once again I missed school a lot. Fortunately I was able to share with my teacher and I was directed to see the school counsellor. Even though I went through a lot of difficulties I was very grateful that I was in a good school and my teachers and school counsellor were helping me to overcome what I went through.

I have gone through another transition this year. I moved from the Junior Campus in the beginning of the year to the Senior Campus. It has been another change that I had to face. I found myself in a new place and everything was new again. I found this very hard and I had to settle to a new environment and a new way in coping in my engagement in learning in the classroom and all the activities at school.

Sadly, I have met with another family tragedy when my dad was diagnosed to have cancer in the liver. Dad has been the bread winner for the family and he has worked hard through many hardships since he arrived in Australia in 1984. Dad's illness has affected me and especially my studies. I have felt the pain of the sad news but I also have been inspired to move on and to believe that I could engage better in my learning. This could help me to reach my goal and desire to be a teacher one day.

The pattern of the *lived life* of Hina Soni has shown that she has experienced hardships

and many challenges throughout her life. Issues affecting her engagement in her learning at an Australian Catholic school have revealed that she has struggled to cope with the pressure of being a student. The pattern of her *'lived life'* contextualises the *'telling of her told story'* that follows.

#### **4.5.2 Hina's Telling Of The Told Story**

Of the four participants, Hina's interview was difficult to initiate as she had difficulty responding to the initial question. Incidentally, she took a long time before she spoke out to tell her story. She continued to expect a probing technique that was the norm in previous research interviews and reverted to longer silence than the other three interviewees. Wengraf (2001, p. 126) suggests that the interviewee "resists this unconscious or conscious pressure to actively direct questioning role".

In dealing with this silence, I attempted to "relaunch" the SQUIN (Wengraf, 2001, p. 122) by repeating it fractionally and slowly. In an attempt to take notes on this non-linguistic episode, she waited in silence hoping to get a serious question that would direct the interview process. This situation proved challenging. I stopped the interview for a few minutes and got her a drink and attempted to relaunch. Given my established relationship with the Tongan immigrant students, I was accustomed to long periods of silence in the classroom and in group discussions when they were asked to share their views and to ask questions. They would need to build up their confidence to feel at ease before saying anything. I had already given Hina a choice to take her time and to use pencils, colours and papers to draw quietly in order to stimulate her to speak out. Hina still took a long time to respond to the SQUIN. Wengraf's (2001, p. 128) suggestion of not "rushing to rescue" as an active listening skill and a technique of the methodology eventually brought success.

Eventually Hina drew a picture of her journey in engagement in learning and once she started the narrative, her story was unfolded.

Hina started her reconstruction with a chronological account of her whole life, from the time when she was born up to her time in Year 9 in the secondary school. *I was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1996 in a small room at ...my uncle's house in Sydney when my parents were still overstayers.* From her present perspective Hina describes her experiences as a

continual struggle, endured with pain in her efforts to engage in her learning in the classroom and other activities in school. While a great deal of her story revolves around her struggles to engage in her learning in school, it also contains 'thick descriptions' of her opinions, values and her experiences in the situation of her family, Tongan community and the church activities. Hina's story as a whole is set within the context of what is known as Tongan immigrant students' struggles in trying to have a good education and a good life.

As the seventh child of a family with ten children, Hina's interest in engaging well in learning in the classroom and other activities in school was very difficult.

However, her true motivations for being a Tongan immigrant student was born out of her deep commitment to the desire to have a good education and a better life. For instance, she said *I had to work hard in my studies in the classroom ... to have a better life. [pause] I developed a desire to be a school teacher one day.* At the heart of Hina's aspirations, as later revealed in her narrative, is her long held desire to have a better life than what her parents and family have gone through. Although Hina had a personal motivation and vision in a career to be a teacher the foundation for the career of teaching was already established by her first cousin who has taught in a primary school in Sydney.

At the beginning of her narrative, she briefly introduced her life as a Tongan immigrant student starting from her school days in the primary school, but abruptly refocused her attention on her prolonged time to start at school, saying, *It took me a long time ...to join the other children in my own age at school. [pause] I did not able to attend the pre-school and Kindergarten because my parents were poor.* Hina has a strong will to keep on trying to engage in her learning in school despite the difficulties that she has faced throughout her life because she believed that education is important. She affirmed her belief in the importance of engaging in her learning in school, reading, doing her homework, taking part in the school cultural activities and other activities by saying, *I was struggling to cope with the difficult situation of my family. [pause] I was learning that if I wanted to improve my school work... I need to focus in my study.* Although it could be argued that Hina's parents, siblings and leaders in her Tongan community frequently learn from their counterparts, what stands out in Hina's story is her own determination to commit to her study and to make efforts to engage in her engagement in

learning in the classroom, the cultural activities and the other activities at school. She was also aware of the need to commit to her Tongan cultural values and religious values and saw these as a reflection of living a balanced life. It is therefore a responsibility for her, a Tongan immigrant student, to learn from both the Tongan and Australian worldviews.

Hina's entire initial narrative is represented by reports, argumentations and evaluations about her struggles to engage in learning in the classroom, school cultural activities and other school activities. Hina pointed to the prolonged tussle that transpired among the Tongan immigrant students of the Tongan community who were in her school, challenged with the responsibility to engage in their learning in school. Considering Hina's family situation, it was perceived she would be facing difficulties in her efforts to engage in her learning in the classroom.

Yet, as she acknowledged, the difficulties were challenging her to engage better on her engagement in learning in school. There were myriad issues, problems and even tensions among the members of her huge family and extended families. Hina needed to overcome these in order to improve her performances at school but it was a very difficult task *with the many problems in my family.... My family was finding it hard to provide our daily needs and this was hard for me.* The hardships that Hina was facing were compounded by the fact that *my family and extended families are like one big family.* Thus, requiring a sense of strict discipline, self determination and self motivation on Hina's part to act prudently in her efforts to achieve better results from her performance in school, and not subscribe to beliefs whereby Tongan immigrant students have lost interest in their studies and have become disengaged in their learning in school.

Hina's experiences at home, her community and church were critical factors in her effort to achieve better results from her performances in school because of the distractions caused from family, community and church. Without doubt however, all criteria for good results in her performance in school surrounded a notion of a student who was capable of standing between the different cultures of her Tongan family, Tongan community and the culture of the school.

Hina revealed this commitment by saying, *I had to try to do my study in the classroom*

*[pause] the challenges were hard to put up with... but if I wanted to get a good future... I needed to keep trying to look at ways to help me... to work hard in all my subjects.* This statement, in part, expressed Hina's devotion to the values of education to her life. Her desire to work hard in all her subjects reflected her deep commitment to her effort to be a better student in school. She saw this as critical to achieving meaningful and better results in her performances in school.

Recounting the major challenges that confronted her as a Tongan immigrant student, Hina pointed to the following ordeals:

*Yeah it was hard... because I was learning from both sides ... Being a Tongan [pause] it was hard trying to study in my home in a huge family with many distractions. I need to follow the rules of the Australian school and the teachers were Australians, [pause] they often did not understand my background and my culture. [.] The teachers teach everything in English...and all in western ways.*

When these challenges began to unravel, Hina was deeply troubled, but soon realized she had to fulfill her plans to achieve better results from her performances in school if she was to confront these challenges. A key plan she adopted was making sure to attend school every day and doing her homework, *I need to attend school every day, attend the homework sessions in school.* Hina's experience would suggest that she was in good stead to understand the major challenges that were involved in her studies in school. But a close analysis of her total story seems to suggest she was fully aware of the magnitude and complexity of those challenges. For example she said, *it took me a long time to really learn how to cope ... with difficulties and problems at home, my community and my church.* In a more revealing recount she says:

*it was difficult to grow up in a huge family... twelve of us plus our parents [pause] in our family. We also involved in so many things...in our Tongan community and our church... I was confused and helpless and it was so hard for me to do my studies.*

In this regard it is fair to suggest that Hina's desire to be a better student literally placed her between opposing worldviews: the Tongan worldview (which has shaped her identity) and the western worldview (which has shaped her academic life as a student). And since her major responsibility was to consolidate these contested worldviews to the satisfaction of her family/community and the school, Hina found her efforts to be a good student very challenging and frightening. Her fears seemed justified. In more specific

terms however, her greatest fear was alienation. She was unsure of her acceptance as a Tongan immigrant student by her teachers and students in school. As well, she was unsure of gaining the opportunity to engage better in her learning in the classroom, to do more reading, to do her homework and to be involved in the cultural activities in school. Hina reflected on the hurdles she might experience on her path in her engagement in learning in school and the conflicts that might arise in her effort to achieve good results in her performance at school. Hina's fears noted above became realised when she finally made up her mind to be a good student so that her dream to be a teacher one day may become a reality. What stood out as most worrying in her entire narrative is her efforts to have the strength to cope with the problems and circumstances of her family. Reflecting on this concern she said,

*I tried to do my studies under many problems... in my huge family. [sign of hesitation] I was also struck by the death of my grandfather... My dad got the bad news from the doctor ...he has cancer in the liver. [deep breath] It's difficult for me to accept... but it helped me to determine to work harder at school.*

It is obvious in Hina's story that she had a vision not to give up in her effort to engage in her learning in the classroom and the activities at school. Yet, she found herself constrained by her introvert characteristic and the distractions of the poverty that surrounded her. The recount below provides evidence of the enormous power and control Hina had to contend with as a Tongan immigrant student. She said with her demeanour exposing this fear:

*'I had to study in a western classroom', ... 'I was very shy and could not ask questions', ... 'My teachers did not understand my background and the poverty that I had to put up with', ... 'I had to do a lot of work at home to help my mum'.... 'I had to do my homework in a small space'... 'There was no books and computer at home'... 'My parents did not have the time and knowledge to help my homework'.*

Although Hina appeared calm during the entire interview, it is clear she was disturbed, in explaining this aspect of her story. She appeared mortified and disappointed that she has had to face many problems, distractions and challenges that contributed to her disengagement in her learning in school. Her remorse is evident in the repetitive use of demeaning phrases such as *'I had to do my homework in a small space', ... 'There were no books and computer at home to help my study'* and so forth. Alternatively the use of these condescending phrases is also an expression of the powerlessness Hina felt as student

studying in a western school with all its complexities. By the same token, these phrases also unveil the inequities inherent in a school that catered for children from different cultural backgrounds and different socioeconomic status. The complexities of the school culture have become a difficult task for Hina to cope and found it hard to be creative in finding ways that were effective in her effort to achieve better results in her performance in school.

On the other hand, these expressions could be interpreted as a reflection of Hina's personal appeal to get a good education from the western school, ensure a shift from her low performance in school to a level that could lead her to engage better in her learning in a western classroom. But more importantly, as a means of closing the gap between the Tongan family and Tongan community and the Australian school and ways that could help her to be successful in her studies.

There were additional problems in capturing the interest of Hina's family to be involved in school matters and Hina had to find a solution in the school programme. *The problem was my parents didn't come to school... because they spoke little English, [pause] it's hard to talk to teachers and parents who spoke better English.*

Hina has developed a great interest in what the teachers, parents and elders of the community have provided to facilitate cultural activities such as dancing and singing as approaches to strengthen her identity as a Tongan. This approach, in brief, is designed to allow for diverse learning styles and expressions of individual and group differences. Another significant value of this approach is that it can be used as a vehicle through which Tongan immigrant students and students of different cultural backgrounds, could gain a sense of identity and empowerment, ingredients that are necessary for self-determination and self-motivation. Additionally, Hina could incorporate into her engagement in learning in school working with her family in trying to resolve issues that were linked with her plans to achieve better results in her performances in school such as, *I need space and time to do my homework... without the distractions. My parents need to look after the needs of our family [deep breath]. They spend a lot of time with church and community activities.*

In closing her initial narrative Hina outlined the small success she has accomplished in

her effort to do her reading and homework at home *with the support of my parents... to have a quiet space at home for my studies, things were working better. My teachers were happy too... because my performance at school was improving.*

The interview then turned to some probes on some issues Hina had highlighted which I wanted her to clarify. These issues related to her difficulties in keeping a constant effort to her engagement in her learning in school and her perception of the teaching and learning strategies used in school. There were constant difficulties in the financial situation of the family and the community commitments. However, she viewed the teaching and learning strategies at school as opportunities to help her to engage better in her learning in school. Essentially, her aim was to make sure that she made the most of the opportunities offered in school to help her to achieve better in her academic performances: *There were many problems and distractions at home ... and our Tongan community and church. I wanted to use the opportunities that were offering for me at school... These were not always easy.*

From another perspective, Hina is anything but persistent in facing up to the challenges of involving in Tongan community and church activities that were hindering her from engaging in her learning. As she had mentioned earlier about the difficulty of doing her homework and school work at home and her family, I probed further for some explanations or incidents. Here she recounted:

*It was difficult ...because I was facing all sort of problems at home. [pause] There were a lot of demands on me ... to go to Tongan happenings... in the community and the church. [deep breath] I went along with my family to attend these... and so little time was given to my reading and my study.*

Hina is a struggler. In her story, she recounted problems she has experienced in her family, community and at school. She made distinctions between her position as a student in school and as a Tongan teen age girl belonging to a huge family. She argued that the latter was more stressful and less flexible than the former. The requirements of the latter were also far more conventional and restrictive than the requirements of the former. As well there were more unnecessary rules of compliance in the latter than the former. As a consequence, she declared that she was far more comfortable as a student than as a Tongan teen age girl belonging to a huge family. Notably she recounted:

*My parents expected all of us... to follow the Tongan culture. It is not easy to*

*practise some of the Tongan cultures in Australian society. [deep breath] There are things in our own Tongan way... that are not fit to the Australian lifestyle. [pause] On the other hand it is easier ... to follow the school rules as a student. I learn better at school...to perform better with my school work, than at home...[.] some Tongan cultural values do not contribute towards my studies.*

As a Tongan immigrant educator I was keen to know further whether Hina would continue to fight for ways to overcome her family and Tongan community situation in order to engage better in her learning in school. Hina revealed that having the support of her teachers has made things easier for her. But more importantly, she commanded the support of her family and, as such, working collaboratively was easier. She said,

*I was struggling... as a Tongan student in school. [deep breath] I wanted to work hard with my study, [assertiveness] I wanted my family to see how I was continuing to fight ... to do better in school. It was good for my family to see how strong I was ... because I wanted to believe in me and my family to support me.*

Despite her firm stands on family support, Hina always had in her mind that her family also had many other difficult issues to deal with. Hina's story revealed that there is a need for the education of Tongan parents to know better about the importance of their responsibilities to support their children's education. She further revealed that,

*the greatest challenge came from the demands of the Tongan Catholic community ... [deep breath] In my family it is very hard for my parents to use the money first for... the children's need. [pause] They often use the money for the Tongan Catholic community. [deep breath] I wanted to go to field trips ...and to be in the school netball team... but I couldn't because my parents could not provide the money.*

Succumbing to that pressure she did not continue to progress well in her effort to engage in her learning in school, school cultural activities and other activities in school. Nonetheless, she revealed that the best part of her struggle to engage better in her learning was learning about the support and programme that the school provided and further *it has given me an understanding ...about the importance of the support from my family. [pause] It has given me ways... to help me to keep on fighting for a way to study harder despite the problems and difficulties that I am facing at home.*

Prior to ending the interview, I was keen to know her views on the engagement in learning in school of the other Tongan immigrant students. Hina was quick to point out that it required a programme that would involve both the Tongan immigrant parents and

their children and the school teachers to give it a both ways perspective (both from the family and the school). Hina emphasized: *We would learn with our parents together with our teachers in school. We need to learn... both the western way of learning and the Tongan way of learning.* In closing she revealed that as a Tongan student she would like to see more Tongan students who were in the same situation as her to have the determination to fight for ways to engage better in school. Below is a table of themes and context that emerged from her story.

**Table 4.4 Hina's Key Themes And Context**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>CONTEXT</b>
Cultural conflicts	The clashes of the values of the western culture and the Tongan culture in an Australian Catholic school
Low income factors	Effects of low income and poverty that hinder opportunities for students to engage with their learning
Cultural and social demands	Cultural values, and activities of church, communities and extended families that hinder children to engage in their learning, and parents to support their children's education
Identity	Reinforcing Tongan immigrant students' identity
Right relationships	Good communication, gaining trust and respect among members in school, community and family
Christian school community	The community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel and spirit of freedom and love to all people, and making all in the school community to feel at home, belonged and included
Spirituality	Living out of one's religious faith involving religious practices such as prayer, and also life is connected; a holistic view of relating to life
Bicultural concepts and bilingualism	Tongan and English concepts and languages use for teaching and learning strategies
Pedagogies	Teaching methods used for teaching in the classroom

Consistent with other participants in the study, Hina struggled to engage in her learning in

school because of family problems. Hina had a desire to move on to a brighter future in spite of the difficulties that she has experienced in her engagement in learning in school. Since schooling is also a cultural activity Hina had foresight in recognising the importance of her family and community to participate in the school activities. This, she believed would help her to be a better student.

#### **4.6 REFERENCE PANEL**

Through a process of hypothesising, using the reference panel how the *lived life* informed *the telling of the told story*, a case was constructed. The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) produced techniques and methods of triangulation shown in Appendix 3 (adapted from Wengraf, 2007). This process was assisted by the reference panel to allow the researcher to reflect more deeply for the meaning of each participant's data. For example, a small text such as "family problems" was chosen from a participant's interview shown in Table 4.5, and members of the reference panel endeavoured to interpret this segment, shown in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.5** *An extract from a participant's interpretation to 'family problems'*

	<b>Participating student (Vai)</b>	
<b>No. of Line</b>	<b>Transcript sub-session 2</b>	<b>Notes</b>
14 15	<b>Participant:</b> <i>Yeah...[hesitant]a lot of <u>family problems</u> at home that distracted me.</i>	
16 17 18	<b>Researcher:</b> Can you give me more examples of <u>family problems</u> at home that distracted you from your studies?	Again pushed for a particular incident narrative (PIN) to get into 'deep detail' (Dig out into surface what needed to be revealed into details.
19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33	<b>Participant:</b> <i>The things that distracted me at home were, there were arguments. [.] My parents involving in too many church and community activities. [2] We have too many meetings with extended families and spending money unnecessary on relatives and church activities. My family spent a lot of time going to church and choir practices. [hesitant] Our house is very small for a very big family... I am the second youngest of a family of eight and there is not enough space to do my study. [3] My parents spent too much money on church and community, but no computer and books at home to help my studies. These affected my studies at home.</i>	Particular incident narratives (PINS), that was successful, Vai was able to dig out the practical problems that she was facing at home that distracted her from doing her school work at home.

Table 4.5 above illustrates the process whereby the narrative-seeking interviewer in the interview pushes for more details from the participant on “family problems”. The researcher did not give any clues of the participant’s meanings to the panel members before they endeavoured to generate the hypotheses for “family problems” shown on Table 4.6 below.

**Table 4.6: A sample of an extract generated by the reference panel**

Members of the reference panel	Text taken from a participant's interview	Hypotheses developed by the reference panel
<b>Panel Member 01:</b> A male former lecturer, teacher and an expert in Tongan culture, 76 years old	F	1. <i>Family's over involvement in Tongan cultural functions and activities causing them poorer results</i>
<b>Panel Member 02:</b> A female school teacher, 45 years old	A M I L Y	2. <i>Low income family and parents do not spend time with their children when they do their school work</i>
<b>Panel Member 03:</b> A male artist and dancer, 30 years old		3. <i>Many children, poor accommodation and financial difficulties</i>
<b>Panel Member 04:</b> A female 4 <sup>th</sup> year student in medicine in the University, 21 years old	P R O	4. <i>Give their little money to the church commitments but not enough money for their children's needs</i>
<b>Panel Member 05:</b> A male rugby player and musician, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year at TAFE, 18 years old	B L E	5. <i>The father spends too much time drinking 'kava' and sometimes is aggressive with his wife and his children</i>
<b>Panel Member 06:</b> A female social worker, 58 years old	M S	6. <i>Parents have problems with gambling and alcohol.</i>

The hypotheses generated by the six members of the reference panel, on “family problems” shown on Table 4.6 were used to verify the participant’s meaning to “family problems” shown in Table 4.5. Table 4.6 demonstrates that the hypotheses generated by Panel member 01, Panel member 02, Panel member 03 and Panel member 04 are consistent with the participant’s interpretation shown, in Table 4.5. On the other hand, hypotheses generated by Panel member 05 and Panel member 06 have shown

inconsistency with the participant's interpretation. The researcher has used the themes emerged from the reference panel meetings to constantly reflect on data collected from the participating students. This has also served as confirmation or corroboration of the data. The researcher found this activity useful in building the structure of the case. As exemplified in the issue of *Family Problems* the activity continued to help constructing the case histories and the typologies of the Tongan immigrant students with respect to *lived experiences* and *narrated life*.

#### 4.7 SUMMARY

I have presented the stories of all four participating students. It reflected their views and experiences as Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning. Their views and experiences revealed some of the enduring tensions and difficulties that they faced in their efforts to engage in their learning in school. While all four participating students have narrated their unique stories revealing difficulties and problems in their family, community situations and in school, they demonstrated, with courage, to face the difficulties and challenges with determination not to give up. These stories will be significant to their desire to help others in similar situations to move forward in spite of difficulties and problems that they may face. Realising a dissonance between school culture and Tongan culture, they shared the importance of having school cultural activities that would provide some amount of cultural consistency where the school culture aligns with the Tongan culture. This vision is complex, and could be impractical to be negotiated by the schools. Nonetheless, they succeeded in integrating Tongan immigrant students' perspectives in the experiences in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning that involved active participation of the schools, Tongan families and communities. Projecting this collective vision empowered Tongan immigrants to have a place in the Australian Catholic schools.

As Tongan immigrant students who were committing to the practices of Australian Catholic schools, the stories of their journey reflect the service and commitments of the Catholic Education system to the educational needs of all children. Through personal experiences such as family problems; relationships; peer group pressures; families'

financial difficulties; identity conflicts; church and Tongan community demands; and cultural conflicts they defined their struggles to engage in their learning in school. As Tongan immigrant students who were experiencing difficulties in engaging in their learning they demonstrated that their families and communities can work together with their schools to support them to engage better in their learning.

The reference panel helped the cultural interpretation of the data of the participating students, and as well as generating the hypotheses on chunks of data, such as 'family problems' emerged from their stories. The themes emerged from the panel meetings were also used to verify, repute, confirm or corroborate the data before the presentation of the individual cases, and the relationship between their *lived life* and the *telling of the told story* was discussed.

The views of the participating parents on the engagement in learning of their children are presented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5 THE TONGAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS' STORIES

*My daughter hangs around with the wrong friends among her peer group, and it has made it hard for her to concentrate in her studies at school  
(A participant's comment, 2010)*

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the views of the parents of the four Tongan immigrant students, emerged from the *talatalaifale* sessions. Table 5.1 below illustrates the general characteristics of the parents.

**Table 5.1: General characteristics of the participating parents**

Names of parents of the 4 Tongan students (pseudonyms)	Place of birth and country of origin	Ages and gender Male/Female (M/F)	Number of years in Australia	Names of their child (pseudonyms) who took part in the study
Mother: Maile Father: Hone	Tonga Tonga	45 (F) 49 (M)	21 21	Lia Kuki
Mother: Mapa Father: Paongo	Tonga Tonga	51 (F) 55 (M)	28 30	Vai Fono
Mother: Longo Father: Niu	Tonga Tonga	44 (F) 48 (M)	10 14	Sini Fika
Mother: Pua Father: Kali	Tonga Tonga	47 (F) 56 (M)	27 27	Hina Soni

The participating parents were given the choice to lead the session in ways that they were familiar with. They all chose to start and conclude the sessions with a prayer and a hymn. Parents of Lia, Vai and Sini chose to lead two questions each for their sessions. Due to health reason, Hina's father was willing to be present as a moral supporter, to lead the prayers and hymns and to only add comments when needed, therefore the mother led all the four questions for their session. Four separate sessions were conducted with the parents at their homes and they were asked the same set of questions. The main themes that were identified from the literature search were used to frame the following questions:

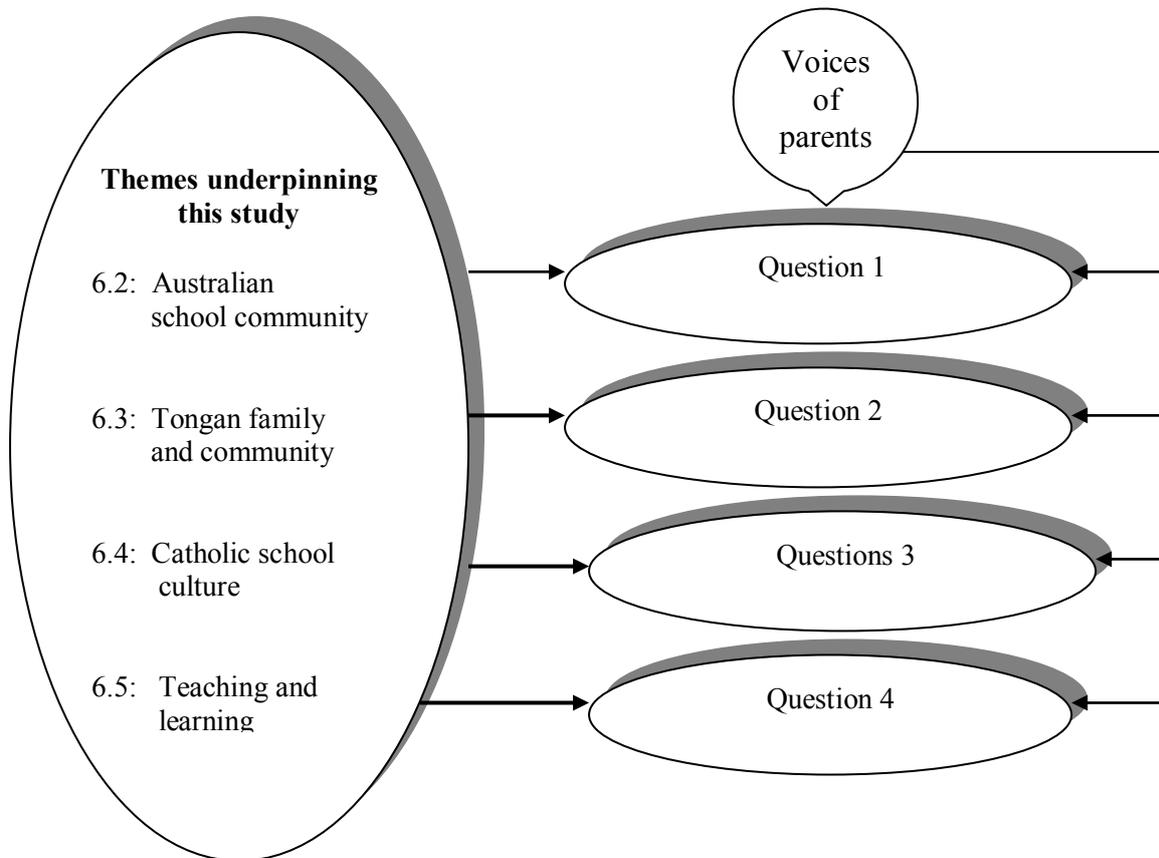
1. In your opinion, what are some of the experiences that your child faces at school that help/do not help her/him to engage in learning?
2. In your opinion, please give me your views and advice on the things that your

- family and Tongan community do and it/they help/do not help to support your child in her/his education in school?
3. In your opinion, what are some of the values and culture of the Catholic school that could help/not help your child to engage in her/his learning?
  4. In your opinion, what are some of the teaching strategies that are helpful/not helpful for your child in her/his effort to engage in her/his school work?

The responses of the participating parents from the four sessions were tagged to the particular respondents with each identified by the parent's name (pseudonym), and are outlined in a theme by theme sequence.

The presentation of the data is summarised in Figure 5.1 below:

**Figure 5.1: Summary of the presentation of the data**



Each *talatalaifale* session, started with an introduction: *Please, tell me the story of your journey in your involvement in the engagement with learning of your child. Feel free to share anything that is important for you on the questions.*

## 5.2. Australian school community

With respect to question 1, In your opinion, what are some of the experiences that your child faces at school that help/do not help her/him to engage in learning?

Realising the importance of their children's education all the parents were keen to observe and follow up the experiences that their children were facing at schools. They commented on experiences in schools that could provide successful learning outcomes to help their children's efforts to engage in their learning and as well as their intentions of giving a good education to their children, as Mapa proceeded to evaluate;

*it was the whole purpose of our daughter going to school to get a good education...and a better life, to help our poor family and serve the community. Vai is quiet, but she is determined to work hard and to compete with other bright students...I am happy that she is enjoying being at school...and taking part in activities at school...I hope that she tries to work hard in her studies too.*

Paongo further commented that *it's good Vai likes sharing her gifts in sports and also Tongan cultural music and dances.* Pua stated, *even though Hina is shy, she enjoys the activities at school where they reach out to those who are in need. I like her to make the most of the school's programme.* Kali also stated that *Hina likes the school.*

On the issues of sports and leadership, three of the parents discussed their views on their children's performances, as Niu claimed, *Sini is a smart football player. He loves sports and his friends in school like to follow him... He is not fearful in tackling... and he is a good leader in his football team.* Longo further commented that *Sini likes the school and has many friends among the boys who are playing football.* Mapa asserted Niu's view by saying that *Vai takes part in school volleyball, netball and athletics ...she loves these...she is the class captain in her class.* The parents' vision was to give a better life to their children and their family and to serve their community. Essentially, they realised that if schooling was to succeed in helping their children to be successful in their engagement in learning in both the outdoor activities and in the classroom, their children needed to enjoy learning their own cultural dances and music. Maile commented that *Lia enjoys taking part in the school choir, and activities where she could dance and use our own language and music.* Niu also commented that *Sini loves music and loves playing the guitar with the school choir.*

Two of the parents were concerned of the distracted students at schools who made it hard for their children to engage in the classroom so they were keen to share the difficulties that their children went through as Maile claimed: *Lia said that she often felt annoyed with other students who do not pay attention...and made too much noises in the classroom.* Pua also pointed out that *Hina often felt annoyed in the classroom with noisy students.. this made it hard for her to understand what the teacher taught the class.*

There were challenges at another level in communication and relationships with the teachers. On the matter of trust, which leads to good communication and relationships between their children and teachers, the parents commented on the importance of the teachers' willingness to listen to the needs expressed by their children. As Maile put it:

*Lia is shy and afraid to complain...but when she had the courage to complain to the teacher about naughty kids the teacher did not listen and showed no interest...This discouraged her to speak up again...This is hard for her...to communicate and relate to her teacher in a proper way...I could not able to speak to Lia's teacher to explain her problem because of my English.*

Similarly, Pua expressed that *Hina sometimes felt that the teacher was not caring enough for her...because she was slow to learn* Niu also expressed that *some teachers do not understand Sini when he tried to speak up for his rights. Sini also has problem with communication because of his English.* The participating parents revisited this theme of communication and relationship throughout the interview, which gives an indication that it is central in developing relationships between Tongan immigrant students and their teachers. This could be a way to help the Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning.

Four parents shared their children's relationships with other students. They pointed out that their children experienced difficulties in peer groups pressures, as Pua put it: *Hina is hanging around with kids at school who are Pacific islanders and they are too rough for her...She is afraid to stand up for her rights because of peer group pressure.* Niu was also concerned that *Sini is easily led by his friends and sometimes he hanged around with the wrong friends....I am concerned that he hangs around with peers who are not at school.* Mapa expressed her concern on her daughter's social life with her friends in sports by saying that *Vai involves in many sports ...at school... Sometimes she missed the classes and she has too much social life with her peers in sports...this distracted her*

*from her studies. Maile also expressed that Lia hangs around with the wrong friends among her peer group, and it has made it hard for her to concentrate in her studies.*

Three parents also discussed the issue of their children's attitudes to learning as Niu put it:

*Sini does not like reading. There is a good programme for reading at school but he does not use the opportunity well. Perhaps, if he tries hard to engage in his learning, as much as he does to his footy, he could do better in his studies... It's good the school has computers and other resources to help him but he does not use the opportunity well...he does not motivate to do his studies at home.*

Similarly, Mapa claimed that *Vai does not concentrate in her studies. She seemed to waste a lot of time at home doing things that do not relate to her school work. If she tries hard enough in her study she could get better marks.* Maile also commented that *Lia does not make the effort to give a good time to do her homework...She often say she has no homework...or she already finish with her homework.* On the other hand Pua indicated that *our family is poor, my husband is sick...and both of us are not working...we could not afford to pay for Hina's field trips and other needs at school.*

Two parents also discussed the attitudes of the teachers that making it hard for their children to integrate into the school and to engage in their learning as Pua put it: *Hina felt that sometimes the South Pacific students are labeled by teachers as the naughty and rough ones ... and not doing their school work...when teachers think like that, its' hard for her to trust them.* Teachers who do not listen to their children's voice was also expressed as Niu put it: *Sini found it hard when some of his teachers did not listen to him when he tried to speak up for his rights...especially when he had the courage to speak up...it's discouraging when teachers do not listen.* However, three parents claimed that generally their children found the teachers helpful and kind as Maile put it: *Lia finds the school a happy place... her teachers are kind.* Hone commented, *in general the school community...and teachers are helpful ...they cater for the needs of different students.* Longo also commented that *Sini likes the school and has many friends among the boys who are playing football...his coach is very helpful and understanding.*

The parents' stories affirm the notion of schools as places for their children to achieve good learning outcomes. However, their views reveal difficulties that their children experienced in schools. They reported issues on low income factors, importance of

language for communication, sports, peer group pressures, cultural differences, cultural mismatch, teacher's expectations and cultural bias in teaching. Three key themes emerged from the first question were: *Factors affecting the achievement in learning; cultural conflicts; and teachers' actions and reactions.* The next question asked the parents on their opinions, on the responsibilities of Tongan family and community to their children's efforts to engage in their learning.

### **5.3: Tongan family and community**

The next question asked the parents, In your opinion, please give me your views and advice on the things that your family and Tongan community do and it/they help/do not help to support your child in her/his education in school?

The parents' stories affirm the notion of schools as places for their children to achieve good learning outcomes. Yet, they were also aware that in order for their children to achieve success in their studies in school there needed to be a degree of common understanding and shared responsibility between the school and parents. They also told stories of struggles in their efforts to establish collaboration which, from their perspectives, will give empowerment to support the education of their children. Their struggles were particularly on cultural and social barriers of the day to day operational between the schools and their families.

In an effort to find out the strategies that work well for Mapa in her responsibility for her children's education, she pointed out the importance of working together with the Tongan school supporter who could liaise between the school and Tongan families. From her perspective, the Tongan school supporter made efforts to look at issues from both perspectives, Mapa pointed out:

*In the community, I seek advice from an elder or a Tongan leader or a group of parents, or the Tongan supporter in school...that's how I did it, to help me you know... that's how I built my confidence to do my work and to help in my children's education... It is hard for me because of difference in culture. If I talk to the Tongan supporter in school, it's help with my responsibility to support Vai in her school work...Our community with our elders and leaders also help her and the Tongan students to teach our own cultural songs and dances for school feast days and other activities in school.*

Niu shared other difficulties as a Tongan parent. He pointed to the following issues:

*The hardest part of my responsibility is firstly to pay school fees and needs of my children at school... There is also too much pressures for my commitment to the Tongan community, well there is always something going on with the community... There are responsibilities for fund raising and others... this is affecting me in my responsibility to my own family... There are other pressures too...from the church...and extended families.*

Nonetheless, on a positive note, Maile commented on things that worked best. Firstly, establishing a way,

*I could work closely with my husband...to support Lia by giving her the love she needs...Also to teach her how to pray and to love her family, school, and to serve the community and others... To help her to be honest and obedient...listen to teachers and not to answer back...To teach her to speak well both in Tongan and English and to have good manners... Another thing is to check that she is doing her homework and to use the computer wisely...To remind her to read her scripture and say her prayer...Also to try to have our monthly meeting... We try to use the support from the Tongan tutors, at the Tongan homework center...We work with other parents and one teacher from school. This help her with her homework and she learns about our language and culture...Her marks in Maths. is improving...We try to pay the school fees and their educational needs, and make sure our home is quiet for her studies...We try to listen to her voice and make sure there is harmony in the family.*

Similarly, Mapa shared that

*it is important to remind Vai to do her homework...To help her needs at school and at home...To make sure that school fees are paid, and to have her uniforms clean, have good food to eat and the family to be united...To make sure she has a plan for her study at home, and to make sure that our home is reasonably quiet for her study...The time that she uses the computer...to use only for the need of her study...To remind always to do her reading and to follow the other activities at school...And most of all to remind her to read her scripture and to say her prayer...It is good to remind her to pray and ask God for the strength to do her study...it is also important to teach her to have good manners... and to speak with honesty.*

Whilst parents' responsibilities were acknowledged as important, the parent's views also indicated the constant struggles that they were facing in their efforts to fulfill their responsibilities in their children's learning. One of the parents recounted the family problems and financial difficulties that have become barriers to her daughter's efforts to engage in her learning. Pua expresses this with a deep concern:

*Right now the responsibility to support our daughter's education is not complete...My husband just came out of hospital after diagnosed to have cancer in the liver...This is a heavy burden and a tragedgy for my family...It is so hard to try to*

*look after a very big family ...I have ten children...Our home is very small for our big family...Sometimes we do not have enough money to fulfill our responsibility to our daughter and this could affect her engagement in learning...It is also very hard for me to give my best and to make sure that our daughter is doing her study for there is always something to do for church, community and extended families.*

Two of the parents raised their concerns regarding their non involvement with the activities at school. There is a perceived indication that, in reconstructing their stories, this excerpt is an evaluation of the difficult journey in their responsibilities to their children's education as parents. Niu stated:

*My wife and I are both working and we try to work in different time so that one of us has time to be home to see that Sini does his reading and homework...He is lazy to do his homework and to read...He does not like reading and this could be one thing we could help him at home. We seemed to help him more with his football trainings...The big problem for me is, Sini does not value studying hard and reading and to do his homework...Sometimes I wanted to force him, but I have decided to look at a better way that could be able to help him to motivate in his study just as he has done to the playing footy.*

Longo further stated that *Sini is self motivated towards his football games but find it hard to be motivated to do his school work.* One parent also stressed the importance of having time at home to help their children's basic needs. In her perception, this could enable her children to engage better in their learning, she stated: *It is important for me to stay home and have time to cook the right food for my children... and to have their uniforms and everything ready...Also to make sure that we have our family prayer and meeting, This will help Lia and the other children to do better in their studies (Maile).*

As Tongan parents, the participating parents had difficulties working within the western school structure. From their perspectives Tongan ethnic communities are different to western schools for a number of reasons:

Firstly, the Australian children are different, secondly, the concept of time for the Tongan people is different and, as such, their orientation to work and completing work at school is also different, thirdly, they give priority to commitments of Tongan community and church irrespective of any urgency regarding their responsibilities to the school and their children. Two parents commented on the difficulties they experienced in attending school meetings. From their perspectives school meetings are a western concept which are in English and, as such, they could not attend. As Pua put it: *I don't often attend school*

*meetings because they are in English. Longo also commented that it is difficult for me to attend meetings in school because I do not understand most of the things they talk about... for my English is limited.*

Incidentally these meetings were also held to encourage the parents to have an active involvement in teaching language and culture and to help their children's education. From three parents' points of view they had to only attend the school if they were asked to help with the dancing and cultural activities of the schools. Pua stated:

*I only go to school if they need us to help to teach Tongan dances and songs in our own language and music for a school cultural activity...I enjoy helping because my family and community like singing and dancing... and it's in Tongan...I don't help with school work because I have no knowledge of the lessons.*

Hone commented that *I sometimes go to school, ...but only to work together with the parents of the Tongan community at school to help with some cultural activities... this is helpful to our children's education.* Paongo also commented that *our family are working closely with our Tongan Seven Day of Adventist community in Sydney to teach our children in our Tongan songs, hymns and dances...and only to help teaching Tongan dances at school if the principal ask us.*

Four parents discussed the importance of role of prayer and good manners in the efforts of their children to engage better in their learning in school. Niu commented that *it is important for us to make sure that Sini has good manners to the teachers and everyone...also to pray and trust God...this will help him to do better in his school work and sports.* Maile also commented that *it is good to remind Lia to pray and ask God for the strength to do her study...It is also important to teach her to have good manners...and to speak with honesty.* Kali further indicated that *our family's commitment to the family prayer meetings has helped Hina to have the courage to keep trying to do her best in school.* Mapa also indicated that *it is good to remind Vai to pray and ask God for the strength to do her study...It is important that she is respecting everyone at home and at school.*

The participating parents raised concerns regarding responsibilities of Tongan families and communities in their children's education and importance of relationships between school and Tongan families and communities. Their views also indicated the constant

struggles that they were facing in their efforts to support their children's education. Their struggles were particularly on their financial difficulties, cultural and social barriers of the day to day operations between the schools and their families. The key issues raised were: Cultural and social demands, cultural sensitivity, parents' capabilities and limitations and collective effort. The themes emerged from the second question, emphasised *family's values; reinforcing Tongan identity; and engaging families and communities in school activities*. The next question looked at the opinions of parents on the values of the culture of the Catholic school to the education of their children.

#### 5.4 Catholic school culture

In your opinion, what are some of the values and culture of the Catholic schools that could help/not help your child to engage in her/his learning?

The question seemed to prompt all of the parents to recount in detail their opinions on the values and culture of the Catholic school and the events that led them to send their children to a Catholic school. From their stories, it is apparent that they wanted the best education for their children. From their perspectives, Catholic schools are among the best secondary schools in Australia, and there is a high desire for Tongan families to send their children to Catholic schools.

Four parents expressed positively in favour of the aspects of the culture of a Catholic school that provides opportunities to contribute to the development of their children, not only academically but also spiritually, physically, socially and psychologically. As Longo put it:

*The main reason we sent Sini and the rest of our children to the Catholic school because they do not discriminate students from other cultures and denominations. We are not Catholics... but like our children to be brought up in a religious environment. In the Catholic school they educate every child to learn about respect and other things... They teach our children the stories from the bible... and they educate them to the full development... the spiritual, academic, physical, social and others... They also have good discipline... they make sure that the uniforms of the children are neat and they always look after the school to look neat.*

Similarly Paongo stated: *I am a minister in our Seven Day of Adventist, but I send my children to a Catholic school because the culture of a Catholic school accept and treat all children the same...They also have programme to help Vai to develop in all aspects of*

*life. Hone also stated that the beliefs and culture of the Catholic schools has helped Lia to value relationships and the dignity of every person...It is a community for all students despite their cultural values and beliefs... They give the opportunity to develop her academic growth and also her spiritual and social life. Pua also indicated that the beliefs and doctrine of the Catholic faith, has helped our daughter to engage better in her learning...We also pray at home that they respect everyone.*

The participating parents were aware that Catholic schools have the commitment to community and right relationships with self, one another, God and environment. Five parents discussed the value of Christian community that help their children to be successful in their education, Hone commented:

*In her school Lia learns about right relationship ...love all people and our God...and treat people fairly and respect their rights. It is a Christian school and it has a Christian community...that welcome all children, from different backgrounds, faiths and cultures. It provides a culture of respect and happiness to my daughter.*

Paongo stated:

*The Catholic school has a Christian community spirit that enable every student to feel at home and to feel that they belonged...Students feel that they are in a one big family...My daughter in Year 12 is the school captain and I am amazed because she is not Catholic...yeah, the culture of a Catholic school does not discriminate her goodness just because she is a Seven Day of Adventist...Vai is happy in the school and also the religious programme is inclusive to all students.*

Longo also commented that *it is a Christian school and it has a Christian community that welcome everyone from different faiths and cultures...It provides a culture of respect and Sini likes it when the school celebrates feast days with a community liturgy. Niu further commented that we like their prayer programme too...because they include everyone, ...everyone is encouraged to be proud of her/his identity and felt belonged in living in a Christian community, not only for Catholics but for non-Catholics too. Maile claimed that Lia feels at home at school...the school has a special passion to the living of Christian community...This helps her to learn about love, and faith in God to enable her to love others and to be strong in her outlooks to her study. Mapa also claimed that Vai loves the programme on their Religious studies and having liturgies...Her prayer life and trust in God ... helps her in her studies.*

Tongan are religious people and the aspect of spiritual development of their children in school is a value that they want their children to acquire as a priority. Five parents discussed the values of the spirituality of a Catholic school to the education of their children. Hone stated that *Lia is brought up in a Religious environment...and the school respect the spiritual values of everyone...and the school also create a safe environment for my daughter*. Mapa commented that *Vai loves the school and she participates in all the activities because the curriculum cater for everyone from different cultures and beliefs*. Longo also commented that *in the Catholic school they give opportunities to every child of all backgrounds and faiths to share their cultures*. Niu added that *in the Catholic school, teachers educate every child to learn about respect and spiritual aspects of life*. Pua also gave her views by saying:

*The school programme has activities to help all students to appreciate their own cultures...This helps my daughter to believe in herself...This also help her to get ready for her future involvement in the family, community and society...These should help her to do better in her school work... That is why, even though we are poor we still try to send our children including Hina to a Catholic school.*

The parents expressed positively in favour of the aspects of the culture of a Catholic school and indicated that it provides opportunities to contribute to the full development of their children, not only academically but also spiritually, socially, physically and psychologically. From their perspectives they believe that the aspects of the culture of a Catholic school, have the potential to give the best education to their children. The themes that emerged from the third question included, *full development of the child through right relationships; Christian school community; and spirituality*. The last question asked, dealt with the teaching and learning strategies used in schools.

### **5.5. Teaching and learning**

In your opinion, what are some of the teaching strategies that are helpful/not helpful for your child in her/his effort to engage in her school work?

The researcher was keen to get the views of the participating parents on the teaching and learning strategies used in school and also some of their own strategies that they used at home. One parent shared his perspective, that is, that in his son's school the teaching and learning strategies are provided to cater for the children's needs in school. As Niu declared:

*From my understandings the school has good teaching and learning methods...they have good teachers, and the classroom environment is positive...they have programmes for academic subjects...and sports too...I am happy with the opportunities that Sini receives at school...including the help with his reading, and homework. There are also people like yourself and other extra supports to help him to engage better in learning...but I believe my son does not use these opportunities properly...I like the discipline that given to him...it helps him to learn to do the right things ...and to improve his engagement in learning...I also know that Sini's teachers have love and care for children in school... I think it is more effective for Sini.*

Hone also commented that *Lia said they use the smart board in the classroom....but we don't have the internet at home... This is hard for Lia to catch up with the others in the classroom... It's important for children in this modern time... It's good the teachers are kind, caring and firm too.*

From the parents' perspectives teaching and learning strategies at schools were not only limited to academic subjects, but also for the needs of the children to grow spiritually and to integrate their cultural values into their development. The holistic approach was described as an impressive strategy that yields success to the education of their children: Maile explained how the approach at school was holistic:

*The teaching and learning methods at school...cater for the educational needs of our children... They have good teachers to teach them not only academic subjects but they help them too in other aspects like their spiritual and social developments...It's good that they have programmes for celebrations, like the school feast days... and other celebrations...They call on us to help with teaching our children...in our own songs and dances.*

Niu commented on the holistic approach by stating that

*the teachers help the students to do well in their studies...and also in their other talents, like sports and their social lives and how to help others... The school has good teaching and learning methods, they have good teachers, programmes for academic and non academic subjects..*

Paongo also commented that *the school use good strategy... to help the children to develop in their academic subjects and other aspects like the spiritual and social aspects...and they are using modern technology...like the computers...and methods that could help the slow students.*

There was a broad agreement in the views of three of the parents that the teachers should

explain the lessons slowly, to give extra help to explain the lesson, to have sessions for homework after school and use effective methods to help the students to engage in their learning. Paongo commented: *The homework clubs to help the students...This is very good for Vai to have the extra help and time in school because our place is often too noisy for doing homework...and the teachers to give extra help to explain the lesson slowly to those who are not so clever.* Pua also commented that *it is important for teachers to explain the lessons clearly and give examples that are relevant to the lives of the children...the homework sessions after school are also very helpful for Hina.* Hone indicated that *it is important for the teachers to explain carefully the lesson and use examples that are familiar to the students and from the current happenings.*

Two parents went further to discuss the importance of a homework and study group developed for their children and other Tongan students. Mapa commented:

*Vai was happy when the Tongan tutor used both Tongan and English languages and examples to explain the lesson at the Tongan homework session... She was happy because she was motivated to engage better in her learning...I am also happy because my husband and I are able to attend parenting session in Tongan languages and it's help us to help Vai.*

Longo also commented that *Sini was more motivated to learn when he attended the homework session for the Tongan students... because the Tongan tutors used Tongan concepts...and both English and Tongan languages in their teaching...the Tongan cultural methods for the interactions in the teaching were effective.* Niu further commented that *it's also good to have a Tongan supporter to help our own Tongan children, with communication and to help teaching Sini the language and the culture..* Longo affirmed Niu's view by saying that *effective teaching strategies are provided to help Sini to engage in his learning...but I also like Sini to speak in English to help his study.*

Two parents also discussed the importance of having the opportunities in school for parents and students to engage in cultural festivals and activities. Hone stated:

*I think the school needs to improve on strategies that could strengthen the cultural values and identities of the students...like having cultural festivals for Tongans and those from small migrant groups...sometimes that they could call on us...to help*

*with teaching our children learn our own songs and dances to perform at their feast days and other celebrations in school...they should do this more.*

Pua also commented:

*It is important to give enough time for students to have the opportunities to value their own identities and culture, like having cultural festivals for Tongans and students from the Pacific...I like the programme at school when they ask us to teach our children to sing and dance in our own language and it's good the teachers and other students like it too.*

However, Kali noted that *the school does not have enough time for students from small group like Tongans... to learn their culture and language.*

Two parents commented on the importance of the teachers to be supportive, cared about the success of the students, to listen to their needs and to be kind but firm. Hone commented that *it is important that the teachers discipline Lia,... but also listen to her voice, and be kind but firm...and to show love, and care for her success in the classroom.* Paongo stated: *It is important for the teacher to listen to Vai's voice so that she would not be afraid to ask questions...Because she is afraid to tell what is inside her...it is important for the teachers to also have love and care in their teaching.*

One parent shared that she incorporated into the teaching and learning strategies at school, scheduled plans to help their children's studies at home in trying to resolve issues that were linked with the school, such as the suggestion given below.

*I see the most important strategy that both of us, the parents...to help Hina... is to make sure that she is doing her homework, and to have a quiet place for her to do her studies... To make sure that she has love, respect, and good prayer life...It's important for her to obey us and her teachers...If she has these it will be easy to focus in her studies (Pua).*

The perspective of participating parents indicated that holistic approach used in school is an impressive strategy that yields success to the education of their children. They also raised issues on the importance of teachers to teach with love and care, students to understand the lessons, using of Tongan cultural concepts and bilingual language in the Tongan homework centre, importance of having cultural festivals and cultural activities, and parents' plans and strategies to help their children's school work. The main themes emerged from the forth question included, *bicultural concepts and bilingualism;*

*pedagogies; and effective teaching and learning strategies.*

## **5.6 REFERENCE PANEL**

The analysis of the data from the perspectives of the participating parents did not require the reference panel to support the researcher. Furthermore, the role of the reference panel, on the process of the analysis of this thesis was only for the data produced by the participating students (Appendix 3). However, the researcher used the reference panel as an advisory team for this study, therefore, Panel member 01, a former teacher and an expert in Tongan culture was given the responsibility to check and give comments on the cultural issues on data from the participating parents. Panel member 02, Panel member 03, Panel member 04, Panel member 05 and Panel member 06 were also asked to review the data and to give their comments.

The reference panel affirmed the views of the participating parents on the research questions. There was no insights from the members of the reference panel on the analysis of the data from the participating parents because the reference panel was not required to involve in the process of the analysis of the parents' data.

## **5.7: SUMMARY**

The Tongan immigrant parents' account is about giving empowerment to their children in their efforts to engage in their learning in school. It is evident from their views that their desires were to give the best education to their children. Furthermore, the parents' stories affirm the notion of schools as places for their children to achieve good learning outcomes. Yet, they were also aware that in order for their children to achieve success in their studies in school there needed to be a degree of common understanding and shared responsibility between the school and parents. The parents' views also revealed their concerns on their lack of involvement in the schools' activities and the struggles to fulfill their responsibilities to their children's education. Difficulties in working within the western structured timeframes, attending school meetings, giving priorities to family commitments, communication and relationships between the teachers and their children were also apparent in their views.

There was a high value placed in the culture on the views of the parents and they also

expressed concerns about their responsibilities particularly on cultural and social barriers of the day to day operations between the schools and the families. Apparently, the parents expressed positively in favour of the aspects of the culture of a Catholic school that provides opportunities to help their children to develop fully, not only academically, but also spiritually, socially, physically and psychologically.

Despite their firm stand on their children to get a good education, the parents also tried to keep in mind that the success of the teaching and learning strategies in school, and indeed the general education of their children, were somehow linked and dependent on genuine supports from the parents, the families and the community. They therefore believed that this would require a team effort from the school, the Tongan families and communities. From their perspectives this approach would also acknowledge a Tongan worldview framework. The reference panel was used as an advisory team on cultural issues on the data from the participating parents. The reference panel affirmed the views of the participating parents on the research questions. There was no insights from the members of the reference panel on the analysis of the data from the participating parents because the reference panel was not required to involve in the process of the analysis of the parents' data.

Taking into account the cognizance of the reality of Tongan diaspora, and the importance of culture in Australian Catholic secondary schools, the next chapter seeks to draw on the views of the administrators and teachers of the two participating schools.

## CHAPTER 6: THE STORIES OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

*Parents of Tongan immigrant students are making great efforts to send their children to school, ...but they seem to lack the skills to help them to carry out their responsibilities  
(A participant's comment, 2010)*

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and discusses the combined and general views of the administrators and teachers in the focus groups of School A and School B. The main themes that were identified from the literature search were used to frame the following questions:

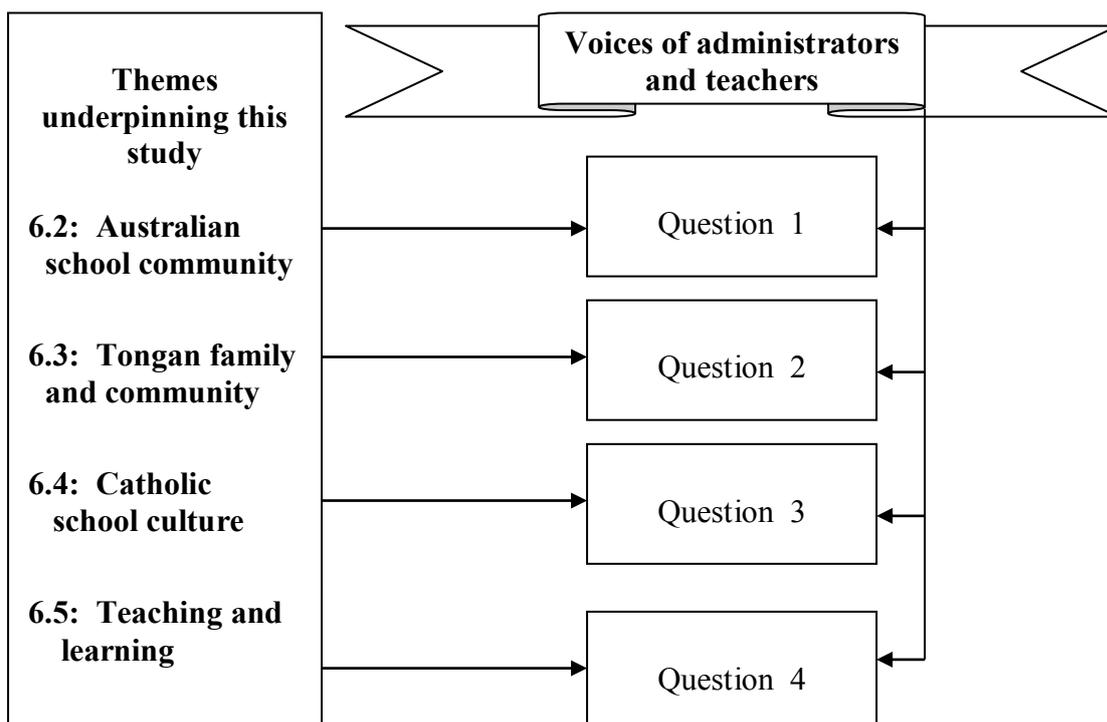
1. What are some of the experiences that Tongan immigrant students face in your school that could affect their engagement with learning?
2. What are some of the things that Tongan immigrant families and community do to support the Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning?
3. How do the aspects of development of the whole person through relationship and community, Christian community, and spirituality of a Catholic school help Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning?
4. What are some of the teaching and learning approaches at your school that are effective to the engagement with learning of the Tongan immigrant students?

All participants received the same set of questions before the meetings. Each meeting lasted about one and a half hour and was recorded on audiotape for transcription. The participating staff with their schools, assigned codes, current roles and gender are shown in Table 6.1 below.

**Table 6.1: Positions and identifying codes of participating staff and their schools**

<b>Identifying codes for administrators and teachers</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Gender Male/Female (M/F)</b>	<b>School</b>
Principal 1.A	Principal	M	School A
Principal 2.B	Principal	M	School B
Assistant P 1.A	Assistant principal	F	School A
Assistant P 2.B	Assistant principal	F	School B
PC Coordinator 1.A	Pastoral care coordinator	M	School A
PC Coordinator 2.B	Pastoral care coordinator	M	School B
Teacher 1.A	Year 9 teacher	M	School A
Teacher 2.A	Year 9 teacher	F	School A
Teacher 3.A	Year 9 teacher	F	School A
Teacher 4.B	Year 9 teacher	M	School B
Teacher 5.B	Year 9 teacher	M	School B
Teacher 6.B	Year 9 teacher	F	School B

The presentation and discussion of the data is summarised in Figure 6.1 below.

**Figure 6.1: The summary of the presentation and discussion of the data.**

In the following section, the administrators and teachers shared their views and understandings on the questions relating to the four themes underpinning this study. The responses were tagged to the particular respondents with each identified by the participant's code number, and are outlined in a theme by theme sequence.

## **6.2: Australian school community**

With respect to question 1, What are some of the experiences that Tongan immigrant students face in your school that could affect their engagement with learning?

The participating administrators and teachers expressed their views on working with the Tongan families and communities and difficulties that they encountered. In recounting those issues it was interesting to note how they legitimized their reasons and decisions for taking a particular action. Although their stories recounted their experiences, views and understanding of these issues, transforming the schools from a western oriented one to a community school is one of the themes that emerged from their stories. As such the strategic move that one of the principals took is directed toward this goal. As a consequence of this, he defined his leadership on a transformative path of creating community. Principal 1.A stated, *I have always had the feeling that the school should be a community school.* The pattern suggested by his belief revealed a school in Australia is for the community, *consists of students from different nationalities, including the Tongan ethnic group.* In that way Principal 1.A was in a privileged position to study the western structure and prepare him to transform Australian schooling. Part of his strategy included creating a transformative path, through leadership, to create a management structure that accommodate involvement of the whole community.

There was an indication from the views of Principal 1.A that he was searching for appropriate cultural premises to locate his role in the engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students; one that is abounding in cultural values that would empower the Tongan families and communities to support their children in their education. This was his foundation for exercising his role as a leader and ultimately building school, family and community partnerships. This view is consistent with Principal 1.A when he shared the steps that he took to make sure that Tongan and South Pacific students are included in the entire life of the school. He put it:

*From time to time our school makes a huge effort to build a school community that our Tongan and Pacific students feel as being an equal to everyone else...One of the challenges would be... sometimes we have faced the problem when the boys getting too rough physically... When these do not happen we promote community...and this would help them to do better in their studies (Principal 1.A).*

PC Cordinator 1.A indicated a detailed views on the issue:

*We sometimes have faced the problem when the boys are getting too rough... we would have taken a few steps backward, but when we see them in multicultural activities, sports and football... doing so well we feel that we are a few steps forward again...When they help and contribute to the school activities we promote community...But then I hear from the teachers, ...'but they don't come to practice.' ...Some girls of course are doing well and as our school captain is a Tongan...She is a good role model. The challenge is, to have a few boys be some similar role model...Yeah, they are very much part of this community, but a community that it has to be continual in its working towards success...and to help them to achieve better in their performances and engage better in their learning.*

Principal 2.B also commented that *a school in Australia is for the community consists of students from different nationalities including the Tongan and South Pacific ethnic groups...Our school is making a big effort to help all our children from different cultures and denominations to share their cultures... and to engage in their learning.* Assistant P 2.B further commented that *our school is also committed to our vision to involve the families and communities of our students in our school meetings and other activities.*

Five administrators and two teachers shared their concerns on the struggles of the Tongan parents to integrate into the school community activities and to be consistent in their efforts to help their children's engagement in learning. They were also concerned on the lack of motivation of Tongan students to work on their studies as Assistant P 1.A put it: *Tongan parents had the great intention to send their children to schools to work hard, and in the beginning of their time at school they were enthusiastic but along the way this enthusiastic took over with other distractions.* PC Cordinator 1.A added that *parents think that it is our responsibility to do almost everything for their children... and they do not help them to do their homework. .and this make it difficult for their children to catch up with their work in school.* Teacher 1.A reinforced the difficulties for Tongan students to achieve better in their studies by saying that *some parents are working in the evening and are not able to be at home to see that their children are doing their homework.* Assistant P 2.B also commented that *parents of Tongan students are making great efforts to send their children to school but they seemed to lack the skills to carry out their*

*responsibilities to help their children to do their homework. Teacher 5.B agreed by saying: Some of the Tongan parents are not able to help their children's homework...it is difficult because they know very little English. PC Coordinator 2.B commented that some of the parents find it hard to find time ...to make sure that their children are coming ready for school...they are very slow to keep up with their responsibilities to pay school fees and other payment for their children's needs in school. Principal 2.B also commented that it seems that there is a lack of a culture of education at home... their children do not have the support for their school work. It is important for parents to create a culture of education at home to support their children's education.*

One principal shared his concern on difficulties that Tongan families have to deal with on their everyday and ordinary problems of functioning together as a family unit. Principal 2.B stated:

*In general they have huge families and are poor, and this could make things harder for them to fulfill their responsibilities...the girls seemed to have a lot of responsibilities at home to help looking after the younger siblings and other responsibilities ...and the boys seemed to get away with the responsibilities at home, and normally parents find it hard to discipline them to do their homework.*

Principal 2.B commented that *Tongan families seemed to be great in sharing with one another and with their extended families. There seemed to be a lot of activities within families, their church and Tongan communities. PC Coordinator 2.B further commented that this could be one of the things that make the families suffer and especially in fulfilling their responsibilities for their own children in school.*

Concerns were also expressed on the issue of sports and academic subjects. Teacher 5.B stated that *the values of the Tongan students seemed to be on sports...the boys would give more time to rugby than their academic subjects... they think rugby would give them a bright future... the girls seemed to be more capable in learning in the classroom. Teacher 4.B agreed by emphasizing that on the whole they just don't seem to be able to motivate themselves for their studies and they don't cope in taking part in their academic development. Teacher 3.A commented that most of the boys support one another in playing football and outside activities but not their school work in the classroom. Principal 1.A also commented by saying that Tongan boys seemed to believe that they are only good in playing rugby and sports... They do not seem to be good in their readings*

*and the academic subjects... they just could not able to balance the sports and their academic subjects.*

Two teachers discussed the importance of using the strengths of the Tongan students as a way to motivate them to engage better in their learning. Teacher 6.B commented that *they have strengths, in sports and they are community minded...this could be used for a base to help them in their studies.* Teacher 5.B also commented:

*A lot of the Tongan boys and girls, are very creative. They are writing with complex thinking too... They write beautiful poetry and also good speech makers in their own language...May be that is a window through which we could enable them to use their gifts... to help them to do something they enjoy... and could motivate them to enjoy doing their studies.*

However, Teacher 6.B was arguing that the school was not given enough opportunities to recognise and value the cultural and creative approach of the Tongan students, and to express their own language and culture at school. He stated:

*But the Tongan students do not have the opportunity at school to express themselves in their own language... and to do some of the work in ways that could relate to their own language and culture...also the Tongan concepts are not exposed to them at school...I think it is important that sometimes they should have the opportunity to use their own language and be encouraged to do this in school...It must be hard for them to live up to all the expectations of western teachers... and their language and culture are not practised in the classroom (Teacher 6.B).*

Assistant P 1.A shared that their school has made an effort to recognise and acknowledge the culture of the Tongan students. He indicated:

*We have cultural activities at school. The families and their communities are always invited to these activities...They are happy to share their cultural music and dances... Families and members of their communities are teaching them to learn their own cultural songs and dances for their performances.*

The difficulties for the Tongan students to ask questions was also discussed as Assistant P 1.A put it: *Tongan students do not ask questions when they do not understand the lessons...they are not enthusiastic to ask questions about their school work.* PC Cordinator 1.A also emphasised that

*we expect the students to listen when we explain the lessons...but we also want them to ask questions and to let us know what they want...It is very important to ask*

*questions and to understand what is going on in the classroom, and for them to share their views and their ideas.*

Issue of the aggressiveness and attitudes of the fathers of the Tongan students were also expressed. PC Coordinator 2.B put it: *The fathers seemed not to have enough time with their children in their studies at school...the mothers are always the ones who would come to see us when we asked them to see us.* Principal 2. B also commented:

*The fathers are not often on the scene to play their roles and whenever there is trouble with their children, the mothers seemed to be the ones who would turn up...It must be very hard for poor families and mothers to play their roles properly... when some of their husbands are not so responsible.*

PC Coordinator 2.B also added that *it is always a worry for me in my job...whenever we reported to families their children's behaviours and other problems... it's only the mother who would turn up...and whenever the father involved, they were aggressive... and seemed to be the only way.*

There is an indication from the views of the participating administrators and teachers that there is a cultural divide: Tongan and western. In their views and understanding, there was an indication that Tongan immigrant students were struggling with western school structure. The participating administrators and teachers expressed their views regarding community school, students' attitudes towards sports and academic subjects, parents' lack of skills, culture of education within families, families' situations and financial difficulties, and parents attitudes and cultural differences. In the first question, three key themes emerged and included categories. The themes captured *factors affecting the achievement in learning; students' attitudes; and parents' attitudes and expectations.* The next question asked the administrators and teachers on their opinions on the responsibilities of Tongan family and community to their children's efforts to engage in their learning.

### **6.3: Tongan family and community**

Question 2: What are some of the things that Tongan immigrant families and community do to support the Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning?

The participating administrators and teachers were laying their foundation for building

school, family and community partnerships. Schooling from their perspective involves the whole community, by incorporating values, beliefs and traditions of the students in the school. PC Coordinator 1.A described in detail the support that cultural values that Tongan families and communities have and could support their children in school. He recounted:

*I think that they are very respectful and they always willing to help. They are always apologetic for the students' behaviours...for missing school or for taking a day off without letting us know...They always very supportive of our discipline and ready to listen to us and very supportive of our discussion to lift them up again to the next stage... and I am very much appreciative of that ... they are always very helpful with our school activities...Their contribution to the school life is very strong...sharing their culture and supporting the school activities are strong too, and the general engagement in the school life is very strong...The Tongan students are very good in sports...The boys are great football players...They are easy people to talk to...but their engagement with their learning in the classroom is a struggle.*

Principal 1.A also commented on the problems in disciplining the Tongan students to focus and engage in their learning in the classroom. He recounted:

*Tongan students do not like reading and writing... they engage well in sports and dancing and music but could not engage in their academic subjects...and they just found it hard to motivate to engage in their lessons in the classroom...we need the support of the parents at home to help them to do their reading and homework...but they also struggle at home because Tongan students do not have the support of their parents... There isn't the support of a structure at home that might be available in other Australian families...they seem to lack skills to help their children in their homework and studies...The demands of the extended families, communities and church is a concern...and is contributing to the disengagement in learning of their children in school.*

Four administrators and three teachers provided their opinions and some strategies that they adopted through culturally appropriate ways that involved members of the community. As Assistant P 1.A indicated: *Families and communities are always welcome to the school. Their children are happy to share their cultural songs and dances...and they are helping them to learn their own cultural songs and dances for their performances.*

Teacher 1.A also indicated that *Tongan parents are very much supportive of cultural events at school and whenever we have got some kind of show or open days... They always want to share their gifts and they are very proud to show their culture...but they seem to lack the knowledge and skills to help their children's homework and their*

*academic subjects.* PC Coordinator 1.A also stated:

*We like the Tongan families and communities to come to school and feel at home. They are part of our school community. We have cultural activities, school feast days...Their children are always performing well and their gifts in music and dances are always appreciated and enjoyed by all...but parents seem to come only when there is a school cultural activities.*

Assistant P 2.B commented that *it's good we have cultural activities at school and families and communities are always welcome to school. They are helping their children to learn their own cultural songs and dances for their performances...they love performing to the whole school.* Teacher 4.B also commented that *they always enjoy working together towards something to do with dancing and sports. There could be a way of extending this towards their learning in the classroom...towards a better integration to the culture of learning.*

Principal 2.B has also seen the gifts of the Tongan immigrant students and their families as elements that they could build on to solve the problems they are facing in their efforts to engage in their learning in school. He stated:

*Tongan students and their families are community minded people...The boys are great football players and they are very good in sports...They also love and enjoy their own Tongan cultural Music and dances in their own language. They could use these gifts to help them in their efforts to support one another to motivate the children to do better in their school work.*

Teacher 3.A also stated:

*The cultural activities that they are involving in, could be ways of expressing their own satisfaction for their lives in an Australian society where they are a minority...They also come from a very strong cultural background of their own and they would like to carry on keeping their culture here in their new country...But what seemed to happen, some of these beliefs are not appropriate here in their new country and would be contributing to the poverty that they are experiencing.*

On the other hand Principal 1.A commented: *It's difficult to have someone from the parents of our Tongan students to be a member of our school board because they do not have the experts and experiences.*

Issues of family problems and financial difficulties were discussed. Teacher 1.A commented: *Some Tongan students come from broken families, and some of them are bringing up by their grandparents. Some also come from very big families and have little*

*discipline...They also have pressures from extended families, Tongan church and community activities.* Teacher 3.A further expressed that from an investigation, it has been revealed that *sometimes some Tongan students miss school...to avoid the embarrassment from the difficulty of the family to pay for the extra money for the educational trips.* Her demeanour suggesting some sadness and concern. In order to rectify the responsibilities of the Tongan parents to their children's educational needs, the schools have supported students from low income families. Finding a way to solve this problem Assistant P 2.B further recounted: *The school is always willing to help students who may have difficulties in any way...the parents are always welcomed to see us so that we could together sit down and look at ways that we could support their children's needs.*

Problems of families to help their children's work were also discussed. Teacher 2.A commented: *Some parents have night shifts and some children would be left alone at home...and parents do not help them with their reading and homework.* Assistant P 2.B stated: *Tongan parents seemed to think that it is our responsibility to help all their children's school work.* Teacher 6.B commented: *But deep down in them they wish and hope that their children are doing well in their studies...The parents need to be educated towards their responsibilities. Parenting is one programme that could be helpful to both parents of families and leaders of Tongan communities.*

The views of the administrators and teachers also gave a lengthy account regarding the difficulties that they encountered with demands from Tongan community and church to Tongan families. Assistant P 1.A expressed her concern by saying:

*I know that kids spend awful time in church and that take up a lot of their time...Church takes precedent of everything else including their studies. I was told that some of their church services and other community activities would go on for hours... and parents are strongly involved.*

Similarly Principal 2.B expressed his concern:

*It seems... there are so much expectations from the church ministers and priests for their people to give money to them... Their interpretation of their great beliefs in God seem to be the reason they are still having to serve and give priests, ministers and hierarchy... and often leave their children's education a second priority.*

Teacher 5.B also expressed :

*Yes, it is quite a strong beliefs that they have as part of their beliefs ...it is similar to*

*my experience in where I used to work in the Pacific...the people believe and feel they had to give the best they have to priests and leaders in the church...Their values are different...They look from a different angle and most of them are not materialistic and have large families...there are more of them in the poverty level in our society.*

On the other hand, two pastoral care coordinators acknowledged the importance of Tongan cultural issues regarding Tongan community and church but they also expressed the importance of integrating these values into the education of their children to help them to engage better in their learning. PC Coordinator 1.A indicated: *It's great that Tongans love to involve in choir practice for church and community...it seemed that going to church on Sunday is part of their culture, but it is also good to be able to be balance and also able to have time for their children to do their studies.* PC Coordinator 2.B also indicated:

*There are some values that Tongan families and community could integrate into the learning of their children, but most time this seem not to be possible...They need to prioritize their roles...towards their own children, but there are so many things happen to their lives and the pressure to follow their cultural values... this often hinder their children from engaging in their learning.*

Principal 2.B described the importance of Tongan families to work out a way to adopt the cultural values that are life giving and supportive towards the education of their children. He also raised a question on the importance for Tongan families to identify their cultural values that are causing their children to disengage in their learning. He stated:

*I am sure few Tongan families have tried to do away from cultural values and beliefs that are not appropriate in this society, and I suppose these ones have been able to help their children to engage better in learning and have done well... How could we able to help the majority of the families to understand these? It is a struggle to be able to meet the needs of the families and the members of the Tongan communities who are not able to see these and continue to live in a poor situation and their children are often behind in their studies and disengaging in learning (Principal 2.B).*

The underlying theme of empowering the Tongan families through their involvement in the education of their children became a problem to administrators and teachers so further concerns on cultural expectations from Tongan families were expressed as Assistant P 1.A put it: *Some of our Tongan kids are expected by their parents to miss school to go to funerals and other family, church and community activities.* Teacher 1.A commented that *Tongan children and most of the kids at school come from different cultural values ...and*

*also the discipline they have at home would be different from the discipline at school.*

Teacher 5.B also gave a positive note towards the cultural values of Tongan families and community. He commented:

*There are some values and culture of Tongan families, community and church that we in our affluence society could learn from... I believe there could be other ways of looking at the programme in our schools to see if there could be ways that we could help to make it easier for Tongan students to engage better in their learning.*

The views of the participating administrators and teachers indicated that Tongan families and community have shown support and respect to schools, by using their cultural skills and knowledge to help their children to engage better in their learning in school. They also expressed their views on issues regarding the responsibilities and collective efforts to support the schools and their children's education. Parents' limitations, financial difficulties and demands of Tongan community and church, and cultural differences that have become barriers to their efforts to help their children's education were also indicated by the administrators and teachers. Three main themes emerged from the second question included, *family's values; reinforcing Tongan identity; and engaging families and communities in school activities*. The next question looked at the opinions of administrators and teachers on values of Catholic schools that could enhance student's engagement in learning.

#### **6.4: Catholic school culture**

Question 3: How do the aspects of development of the whole person through relationship and community, Christian community and spirituality of a Catholic school help the Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning?

Tongan people are religious people and the Tongan immigrant students fit in well with the activities of the culture of the Catholic school as Principal 2.B put it:

*I found the Tongan students with their cultural values on the aspect of relationship ... fit in well to our school...whether they are Catholics or not...They have strong beliefs in God and good relationships to their families and communities...and fit in well to the structure of the culture of a Catholic school.*

The promotion of the dignity of the human person is important, thus the culture of a Catholic school aims to develop every student fully. Assistant P 2.B indicated: *We try to make sure that every student is respected and given the opportunity to grow fully...The*

*school provides programmes and activities to help every student to develop to their full potential in their academic, spiritual, social, physical and emotional needs.* Assistant P 1.A commented: *The mission of the culture of a Catholic school... is to foster a holistic development...this would give the opportunity to the Tongan immigrant students to develop not only academically but also spiritually and socially.* PC Coordinator 1.A indicated a detailed views on the issue:

*To some degree, the Tongan immigrant students need to be fully influenced in their engagement in learning, into the values of the Catholic school, that is, to fit in to the holistic development...Holistic learning is about learning in their spiritual, social academic, physical and emotional development... Also to be able to be proud of themselves... and to make sure that everything they do in school is about engaging in learning ... The boys, especially have a lot of work to do on trying to balance their engagement in learning, not only in sports, and spiritual and social aspects... but also the academic aspect.*

Assistant P 1.A also indicated that *the Tongan students need to be able to work on some of their cultural values that are hindering them from doing their best in their school work.*

The community dimension of the Catholic school retains special significance through expression in right relationships. Community and right relationships with self, one another, God and environment is an essential step in path towards full development of every student in a Catholic school. In Tongan culture people work in a group and working together works well for them. The participating administrators and teachers expressed their views on this as indicated by Teacher 4.B:

*A Catholic school is a community with a network of relationships... Some of the Tongan boys who are not doing well with their studies are working well together when they are in the football field...They are willing to work as a group to help one another... They are always proud to share publicly their beliefs in God...They are also happy to work together on performing their own dances... so giving responsibilities that they enjoy... they can work together to help others with their gifts... and may eventually motivate them towards their work in the classroom.*

Teacher 5.B also added: *Look, boys, are often happier to engage in sports and rugby, and they also engage well in helping others and community services and it is obvious that the last thing in their agenda at school would be to engage in their learning in the classroom.* Teacher 6.B also commented that *Tongans are community minded people and because of this they fit in well to the culture of a Catholic school...especially the school as a community.*

The Catholic school is a Christian community. Teachers are therefore educators to help all students to develop fully, as well as helping to form human person in a Christian community. Teaching is also creating the unique community climate of a big family. Principal 1.A commented: *The aspect of the culture of a Catholic school as a Christian community is very important... We provide opportunities for all students to take part in our cultural events, liturgies and school feast days... The students and their families are happy and feel at home at school.* Teacher 3.A also commented that *the aspect of the culture of a Catholic school as a Christian community is very important...our Tongan students are very much part of the community and they enjoy taking part in every school liturgy.* Assistant P 1.A added: *They fit in very well to the Catholic school and they are respectful and cooperative of the culture of the Catholic school community, whether they are Catholic or not...*Principal 1.A gave a lengthy comment on the issue:

*I think from time to time the school struggle with the word Catholic school... I think many of our families coming to our school, are looking for a good Christian school... A school that believe in God and where they see the way the values might have in the day to day life of Jesus' value is in action... But whatever symbol of whatever denomination, it may be Catholic, Wesleyan or Seven Day of Adventist...a lot of the families see our school, and not only the Pacific islanders, in general a Christian school for all children... I think they don't see the Catholic school as a division of the Catholic church only... the Tongan students and their families integrate well into all the activities and they feel included to a Christian community.*

Some of the participating administrators and teachers translated their roles at school, realizing they needed to build on sustaining the collaborative efforts of everyone in the school including the Tongan immigrant students and their families, using their gifts and what they enjoy doing. Teacher 2.A commented: *Yeah, they are very much of the community in school ...they love taking part in liturgies...and the girls especially are doing well... The boys are better in sports and rugby but they could apply that to their reading and writing too.*

There is a thematic link here to the dominant theme of transforming education to empower the Tongan students and their families, and more importantly laying the foundation for a stronger Tongan identity and culture within the culture of a Catholic school, that could enable them to engage better in their learning. Teacher 3.B declared: *Yeah, both girls and boys are comfortable and at home with the community life of Catholic schools...However, we are aware that their academic performance is an issue.*

Teacher 4.B added: *Yeah, often when we look at their profile they are often better in sports and their social relationship, ... but the academic performance would still be the lowest... we have problems to find the best ways that could help us to encourage them to integrate fully into the values and cultures of a Catholic school.* Principal 2.B endorsed these views by saying: *They are community minded and very religious. Quite often they would be in the top in these aspects, but they have not worked towards the whole development of education.* Teacher 6.B added: *Hina is in my class ...whenever I see her mother for interview –she was often more interested in asking about Hina’s behaviours, prayer life, listening and respecting the teachers, attending the school liturgies...she emphasised on these values more than her academic progress..*

Furthermore, Tongan parents value the spiritual development aspect and the recognition of the spiritual dimension in Catholic schools. Most Tongan parents have high regards to teachers in the Catholic schools who teach the Religious education subject and all the subjects in the classroom emphasizing spiritual values, such as prayer and trust in God.

Teacher 3.A commented:

*Well, our Tongan students like the Religious Education lessons... Most of the choir is composed of the South Pacific students and more than half are Tongans. They are always participating in the spiritual life of the school... Some of them seem to be very competent... We have our school captain, a Tongan and she is a good model to our Tongan students... She got that piety and dignity. She is a Seven Day of Adventist...More than half of our Tongan students are not Catholics...and they are very religious and they expressed their spiritual values openly.*

Assistant P 2.B also stated:

*It’s amazing to see their great faith in God and this fit in very well with the belief and culture of the Catholic school. We often see the parents whenever there is something to do with school liturgies... It’s great to see big guys, strong and powerful in playing footy and publicly proclaim their love and belief in God...They do not feel embarrass to admit their belief in God. They are comfortable with letting others know of their belief in God...therefore, the values and culture of a Catholic school should influence them in their engagement in learning.*

Principal 2.B added: *Oh, yes, that is great, because quite often we see tough guys who are great football players among the Australians react in other ways. They look at their strengths and achievements ...and they don’t often identified themselves to religion.* PC Cordinator 1.A also commented that *they work together as a group...and they also respect the school environment...they fit in well especially the aspect of the spirituality of*

*the Catholic school. Teacher 2.A further commented: Yeah, they are very much of the school community and they like taking part in school liturgies. Teacher 3.A added: We provide opportunities for students to take part in our cultural events, liturgies and school feast days. The Tongan families fit in well to this aspect of the Catholic school. Assistant P 1.A also indicated: Their culture fits in well to the mission of the culture of a Catholic school...to foster a holistic development...Tongan students also need to work on some of their cultural values that are hindering them from doing their best in their school work.*

The participating administrators and teachers have discussed issues regarding right relationships and community, holistic learning, Christian community and inclusiveness, spiritual development, faith in God and school community. The main themes emerged from the third question emphasised *right relationships; Christian school community; and spirituality*. The last question asked, the opinions of administrators and teachers on teaching and learning strategies used in schools.

### **6.5: Teaching and learning**

Question 4: What are some of the teaching and learning approaches at your school that are effective to the engagement with learning of the Tongan immigrant students?

The views of the participating administrators and teachers on teaching and learning strategies used to support the Tongan immigrant students' revealed unanimity. They saw that the teaching and learning strategies are provided to cater for the needs of the students who have different cultural values and different competencies which are significant qualities that have to be developed. They also saw the importance of relating the teaching approaches to the experiences of the students and acknowledging and integrating their knowledge and gifts into the process of teaching. As Assistant P 2.B put it:

*Generally, Tongan students excel in sports and teachers...It is important to invite them to share their own stories and meanings that are important to them and relevant to their experiences and relating to the lessons... Very often when the teachers prepare well and have good probing questions to encourage the students to share their own ideas to contribute to the learning...these are more effective.*

Teacher 4.B added:

*When we invited them to share their stories and to share something about their culture relating to the lessons they are always so keen...They like to be asked to do*

*what they can do and they like to be acknowledged... Once they are getting into things in a positive way they seem to be more motivated towards their engagement in learning.*

Assistant P 1.A also commented:

*I think our programme with the one to one session with our learning supporting teacher has also proved to be a success in our efforts to help Tongan students. I have talked to the teachers and they said they have been very good and very respectful. This could probably our best approach to help them with their reading and writing. They do not play and they are paying attention and very respectful. When they are out in the classroom environment they play with each other and do not concentrate.*

Two teachers also discussed the importance of having high expectations and keeping positive attitudes towards the Tongan students. Teacher 3.A commented that *often when we invited them to share their stories and something about their own culture relating to the lessons they engage better... Having high expectations and keeping positive attitudes toward them, are also effective.* Teacher 2.A also commented that *it is important to accept them as they are...and keep looking at positive things about them and about what they have done...to help them to engage in their learning.* However, views of two teachers revealed that this was not always easy, especially on the issue of helping them to engage in their academic subjects.

Furthermore, views of two principals and two teachers illustrate that there were strong beliefs that teaching and learning strategies were not only limited to academic subjects, but also for the needs of the children to grow spiritually and to integrate their cultural values into their development. The holistic approach was also described as an impressive strategy that yields success to children's education. Teacher 1.A indicated: *We use teaching and learning strategies that could help the students to develop to their full potential not only academically, but also spiritually, socially, emotionally and physically.*

Teacher 2.B also indicated that *the three Tongan immigrant students in my class wrote very interesting essays whenever they were given topics that were persuasive and they could easily relate to.* Principal 2.B declared:

*We try to use teaching and learning strategies that could help to develop skills and abilities that help the Tongan students to work independently in their school work, and to be able to develop an inquiring and critical mind...and the ability to ask question, to help them to engage better in their learning.*

The participating administrators and teachers continue to reveal great concerns about the

high rate of disengagement in learning in the academic subjects. The Tongan immigrant often excel in sports and struggle in their academic subjects especially the boys as Principal 1.A put it:

*I guess when they come to secondary school they believe and hope to do well in their studies, but after awhile that belief seems to be taken over by the belief that “I am good only for football and for sports and I am not smart enough for academic subjects. I am not sure how to break down this belief... We hope that findings from your project will help this problem.*

PC Coordinator 1.A commented on an effort to look at a positive way to integrate the interest of Tongan students in sports and physical exercises into their studies: He commented: *Yeah, they love physical exercise and playing with their muscles. And of course it is good also for the brain. But they need to make sure to compliment their physical exercise with their learning in the classroom... it is good that they love physical education,... but this could also integrate into their engagement in learning in the classroom.* Principal 1.A added that *they are so energetic and always playing out at the field but they need to balance with their studies and try to achieve higher in their academic subjects.* Teacher 2.A further added:

*Yeah, I saw it work when I was at Kingsgrove High and also at James Cook, where sports and physical exercises have to work together with their study and to make sure it is balance... and to make sure that they can have the “mental shift” especially the boys... I am sure there could be a way to balance their physical growth and their academic growth..*

Assistant P 1.A added to the diversity of answers by saying, *they are also having pressures from their own peer groups, they have been pulled by these pressures. Their friends could have influenced them by saying, ‘study is not cool, why do you have to study, and so on.’* Teacher 1.A also added, *I think they suffer from inferiority complex...If they are constantly failing from the academic subjects they will for sure would enjoy engaging in sports... We have to get to break that circuit and see where we can help in that aspect.*

The views of some of the participating administrators and teachers also revealed that technology has become an effective approach used in schools. Most Tongan families have financial difficulties and therefore have no computers and internet at home. Assistant P 2.B commented:

*Yes, so much in our teaching approaches, it is becoming more and more dependent on technology...Most of the Tongan students do not have internet at home...If they don't, their engagement in learning would suffer...It is important to have computers and internet, it is a necessity for the learning of the students...It would be very demanding for them to learn when their knowledge in technology is limited compared to other students.*

Principal 2.B also commented:

*There are also problems with the ones who have given computers in Year 9, because culturally they can give and share whatever they have, and some of them have not used their own computers effectively...While we are trying to help to use this as one of the approaches at our school, the culture of giving away in the Tongan culture hinder them from benefiting from this approach.*

Teacher 5.B added: *It would be very demanding for them to go to the classroom and try to learn when their knowledge in technology is limited comparing to other students.*

Teacher 6.B also indicated:

*It is the reality of life of learning for the students in the classroom. That's how we learn now... It is the language of our time,... and students need to be efficient in using the computer in order to engage better in learning...Some of our Tongan students would have no computers at home and this does not help them with their learning.*

The administrators and teachers saw the importance of relating the teaching and learning strategies to the experiences of the students and acknowledging and integrating their knowledge and gifts into the process of teaching. They also raised their concerns on issues regarding holistic approach, students to take some responsibility for their own learning, attitudes of students to engagement in learning in academic and non academic subjects, opportunities to engage with real world issues and variety in activities learning approaches including technology. The main themes emerged from the forth question included, *bicultural concepts and bilingualism; pedagogies; and effective teaching and learning strategies.*

## **6.6 REFERENCE PANEL**

The analysis of the data from the perspectives of the participating administrators and teachers did not require the reference panel to support the researcher. Furthermore, the role of the reference panel, on the process of the analysis of this thesis was only for

the data produced by the participating students (Appendix 3). However, the researcher used the reference panel as an advisory team for this study, therefore, Panel member 02, a school teacher in an Australian school was given the responsibility to check and give comments on the educational issues discussed by the participating administrators and teachers. Panel member 01, Panel member 03, Panel member 04, Panel member 05 and Panel member 06 were also asked to review the data produced by the administrators and teachers, and give their comments.

The reference panel affirmed the views of the administrators and teachers on the research questions. There was no insights from the members of the reference panel on the analysis of the data from the participating administrators and teachers because the reference panel was not required to involve in the process of the analysis of the data produced by the administrators and teachers.

## **6.7 SUMMARY**

The participants focused on their journey as administrators and teachers on issues such as culture as a foundation in school, the importance of the culture of the school, the benefits of working collectively, issues relating to the engagement in learning and behaviour of the Tongan immigrant students. They also expressed their views on working with the Tongan families and communities and difficulties that they encountered. Their views also revealed their concerns about the lack of involvement of the Tongan immigrant parents in the schools' activities and in their children's studies. Difficulties in communication, lack of professional skills and financial difficulties were also apparent in their views. There was also a high value placed on effective teaching and learning approaches, as well as culture in the views of the administrators. They also expressed their concerns about the responsibilities of the families in their children's studies and the high rate of disengagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students. On the other hand, the views of the administrators revealed that Tongan immigrant students and their families fit in well to the aspects of the culture of a Catholic school, especially the aspect of community and spirituality and their love for sports and their culture.

The struggles in working out ways with families and communities that could help to motivate the Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning were raised as

concerns both by the administrators and teachers. The importance of considering the opportunities for improvement in building a cohesive partnership with the families and the school communities were also apparent from the views of the administrators. Their transformative path also involved bringing a perspective to be sensitive to the needs of the Tongan immigrant students and their families and communities into their roles. This approach would involve relationships, working as a group sharing experiences and practising this in the school structure in an environment where the Tongan students could also be represented.

The role of the Reference Panel in the analysis of the data, was only for the data of the participating students (Appendix 3). However, the reference panel was used as an advisory team on educational issues on the data from the participating administrators and teachers. Panel member 02, a school teacher in an Australian school was given the responsibility to check and give suggestions to the educational issues discussed by the participating administrators and teachers. Panel member 01, Panel member 03, Panel member 04, Panel member 05 and Panel member 06 were also asked to review the data. The reference panel affirmed the views of the administrators and teachers on the research questions. There was no insights from the members of the reference panel on the analysis of the data from the participating administrators and teachers because the reference panel was not required to involve in the process of the analysis of the data produced by the administrators and teachers.

The next chapter presents the combined analysis and findings of the narratives. Results from the participating parents, administrators and teachers were also integrated into the final analysis and findings, to compare claims, arguments and recommendations relating to the experiences of the Tongan immigrant students on their engagement in learning in school.

## CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

*When our family sit on the Tongan mat in our Tongan way, it's passing on proper Tongan manners and values from our parents to us (A participating student, 2010).*

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of the research in the context of the literature developed and organized in relation to the literature review are presented in this chapter. The data was analysed using concepts directed by the conceptual framework (Figure 2.1)

The design of the conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) focuses the analysis on key aspects that include personal characteristics of individual Tongan immigrant students such as values, beliefs, influences, experiences and especially culture that helped instill these values. The framework recognises knowledge as a socially constructed meaning which enables multiple viewpoints of the Tongan immigrant students to be expressed and recognised.

In this study the participating students, their parents and the researcher have brought Tongan worldviews from distinct historical and socio-cultural contexts. They have some mutual understanding because of a shared history of oppression and marginalization as belonging to a Tongan immigrant minority ethnic group in Australian society, producing a shared language of migration. Furthermore, they share the same struggle looking for a better education and a better life from Australian education and wealth.

As a theoretical perspective, the interpretist approach “looks for culturally derived and historically stated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67) and it provides the “filter of socially constructed perceptions” (Neuman, 2003, p. 42) of the participants in this study.

As an overarching conceptual model the researcher used the ‘Tongan mat’ metaphor to symbolise the various dimensions of engagement in learning. In this study, the researcher gathered around the metaphorical ‘sitting on Tongan mats’ with the participating students, parents and reference panel to “share about the past, talk about the present and find hope and solution to the dilemma” (Appendix 29). This was to explore the ways that Tongan immigrant students deliver their engagement in learning that fosters closer links between schools and their respective families and communities.

As pointed out by Lia, one of the participants, in the Tongan context, *our family sat around on Tongan mats ...and our parents taught us the knowledge and proper Tongan manners... to help us in our study in school...and doing what is good for us.* This concept is also endorsed by Hina who grew up in a family of ten and whose family are very committed to the living out of the Tongan and religious cultural activities in their daily lives. Hina described the *getting together of our family, sitting on Tongan mats to pray and to study, ...and our parents and all of us children sit around, singing and telling stories...[pause] I find this time together with my family very enjoyable.* Likewise Vai from a family of eight children, explained that the elders, leaders, youths, children and members in their church would *sit around on Tongan mats to pray, sing, share and discuss our welfare.* Vai's church also used this setting to forge partnerships among Tongan families and church communities when they needed to discuss important matters. This is a more convenient and non-threatening environment than sitting on the chairs. Furthermore, Sini pointed out that *I feel free to speak and express myself openly and honestly... when we have our meeting sitting around on Tongan mats. [smile] It's good to have these meetings because we can talk about anything... plus our needs for our studies.*

The study, attempted to understand the experiences of the Tongan immigrant students in their journey in engagement with learning utilising the 'sitting on Tongan mats' metaphor as the symbol of the researcher's interpretation of the Year 9 Tongan immigrant students' profound and enriching narratives. This revealed strength of character, determination, resilience, and commitment to engage better in their learning at school to get a better education and life in the spirit of relatedness. In reflecting on learning knowledge for better education and life through sitting on Tongan mats metaphor, both the participants and the researcher are afforded a deeper understanding of the practice of engagement in learning from an enriching perspective marginalised by western epistemologies. Similarly, as a method to process the dialogue, sharing through telling stories by talking, writing, drawing and singing among the participating students and the researcher, there was a feeling of the interconnectedness among themselves.

In analysing the data from the main participants, an intensive BNIM process of triangulation in Appendix 3 (adapted from Wengraf, 2007), was used with a close attention to the relevant literature and the research questions that guided the study.

Themes emerged that provided answers to each research question. While these themes have been categorized under the separate research questions, there is an overlap and relationship across themes.

The themes were checked by the theoretical memos and the recruitment of the reference panel consisting of six Tongan immigrant leaders, and involving an exhaustive data analysis process (Appendix 3). The themes emerged from the perspective of the participating parents, administrators and teachers were also used to verify the themes emerged from the stories of the participating students.

In the first question, three key themes emerged and included categories. The themes captured *factors affecting the achievement in learning; cultural conflicts; and teachers' actions and reactions*. The themes that emerged from the second research question, emphasised *family's values; reinforcing Tongan identity; and engaging families and communities in school activities*. The themes that emerged from the third question included, *right relationships; Christian school community and spirituality*. Four themes emerged from the fourth research questions included, *bicultural concepts and bilingualism; pedagogies; effective teaching and learning strategies and effective school leadership*.

The table below illustrates the themes that emerged from the research questions.

**Table 7.1 Themes emerged from the four research questions**

<p><b><i>Research question 1: What have been the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools?</i></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Factors affecting the achievement in learning</b> <i>Unquestioning obedience</i> <i>English Language</i> <i>Low income factors</i></li> <li><b>2. Cultural Conflicts</b> <i>Tongan language and perspective</i> <i>Cultural mismatch</i></li> <li><b>3. Teachers' actions and reactions</b> <i>Teachers' expectations and beliefs</i> <i>Cultural bias in teaching</i></li> </ol>
<p><b><i>Research question 2: How do Tongan immigrant families and community influence Tongan immigrant students engagement at Australian schools?</i></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Family's values</b> <i>Cultural and social demands</i> <i>Cultural sensitivity</i></li> <li><b>2. Reinforcing Tongan identity</b></li> <li><b>3. Engaging families and communities in school activities</b> <i>Parents' capabilities and limitations</i> <i>Collective effort</i></li> </ol>
<p><b><i>Research question 3: How do the values and culture of Catholic schools influence the engagement of immigrant Tongan students?</i></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Right relationships</b> <i>Human person</i></li> <li><b>2. Christian school community</b> <i>Inclusion of all students</i></li> <li><b>3. Spirituality</b></li> </ol>
<p><b><i>Research question 4: What teaching and learning experiences are more engaging for Tongan immigrant students?</i></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Bicultural concepts and bilingualism</b> <i>Tongan and English concepts</i> <i>Tongan and English language</i></li> <li><b>2. Pedagogies</b> <i>Culturally relevant pedagogy</i></li> <li><b>3. Effective teaching and learning strategies</b> <i>Teacher caring, teacher support</i> <i>Good teaching</i> <i>Strengths-based approach</i></li> <li><b>4. Effective school leadership</b></li> </ol>

## 7.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

### **What have been the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools?**

The first question was a guide to inductively gain an understanding of the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools. The interview technique, a lightly structured in-depth interview using a single question inducing narrative [SQUIN] (Wengraf, 2010) provided the opportunity to address the first research question. The technique yielded rich diverse stories that explored the meanings of experiences of Tongan immigrant students' engagement with learning in Australian schools and issues influencing these experiences from their perspectives. Participants' responses give a profound understanding of experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and issues influencing their experiences within their contexts. This may inform current practice in the Catholic school system and other school systems in Australia and additionally contribute to knowledge in this field.

In discussing each theme excerpts from various participants are presented and related to the literature on experiences of Tongan immigrant students in western school community.

### **7.2.1 Factors affecting the achievement in learning**

#### **7.2.1.1 *Unquestioning obedience***

The four Tongan immigrant students were faced with problems in their efforts to integrate into the culture of the Australian school community as confirmed by Lia in the following narrative:

*In the classroom... the teachers expect me to ask questions and give my views but it's hard for me to change... in my culture we young ones have to listen to our parents, leaders and elders. [pause] It's rude to answer back and to challenge their ideas (Lia).*

Similarly, Vai in reinforcing Lia's view recounted her experience in the classroom, *when my teacher asked the class to ask questions... I just kept quiet...it's hard to ask question, yeah [pause] I am taught at home to listen and not to question my parents ... It's hard to change.* Hina also indicated: *I had to listen to my parents at home...for I had to obey them and the older ones...I can't talk back to them...My parents want me not to talk back*

*to the teachers.* In an incident involving a teacher in the classroom, Sini shared his feeling of shame when he spoke up and explained his side of the story to his teacher by admitting that *I was very ashamed of myself because my parents would be so angry if they had found out that I had spoken back to a teacher.*

These views are consistent with some of the participating parents, as Niu put it, *we teach our children at home to listen to us and not to answer back...also to listen to the teachers at school, and not to answer back to them.* Ferguson et al (2008) affirmed these views by claiming that the traditional Pacific expectation of unquestioning obedience and respect for authority figures can mean that parents encourage their children to listen to everything their teachers say and not to challenge them. On the other hand these views are in conflict with the views of some of the participating administrators. PC Coordinator 1.A outlined the general views of the administrators: *We expect the students to listen when we explain the lessons... but we also want them to ask questions and to let us know what they want. It is very important to ask questions and to understand what is going on in the classroom.* Similarly, Teacher 2.A in reinforcing PC Coordinator 1.A's view indicated that *we like the students to listen to us in the classroom...but it is very important for them to ask questions if they do not understand the lessons...this will help them to engage better in their learning.*

This Tongan cultural behaviour revealed in the findings, seemed to be in conflict with the western school context where teachers may be expected to make decisions based on their perceptions regarding the communication. These events required shifts in understanding that would teach the Tongan immigrant students about western worldviews and convince them of the benefits of having students to ask questions in order to engage better in their learning and to achieve better marks.

### **7.2.1.2 English language**

The experiences of the participating students in their engagement in Australian Catholic schools are strongly influenced by English language. With Vai's selection as the class captain she realised the difficulty of practising leadership within the existing structure of the class that imposed a western ideology. As a consequence she negotiated ways she could be able to integrate into the western classroom and to engage better in her learning in the classroom. She recounted:

*It's difficult working as a class captain...It's hard because everything is in English. [pause] There is only two other Tongan students in the class, and they often talk to me in Tongan... I tried to talk back to them in English because it's rude to talk in our Tongan language, [pause]I also want to concentrate in my study because the lessons are in English (Vai).*

By following ways that involved and were accepted by everyone in the class Vai has been successful in her role as a class captain as she put it: *My classmates like me...it's good everyone speaks English and I could communicate well to them...I enjoy being a class captain.* However, Vai still struggled with working with the issue of language and communicating with her parents and to get her parents to help her school work. She indicated: *My parents speak little English and it's hard for them to understand what is going on in school...and to help my school work (Vai).* Similarly, with Hina's efforts to engage in her learning in school she realised the difficulty of getting the support of her parents (who speak very little English) in her school work, within the Australian school context imposed by the English language and western ideology. Hina's agenda required working within the Australian school context to engage in her learning in school and to inform all information from school to her parents. As a consequence she negotiated a plan to read a lot of books and to inform her parents the information from her school. She recounted:

*It's difficult working in my plan to read lots of books at home... because my parents do not understand. [pause]They think I am lazy when I sit and read quietly a book that I enjoy. [deep breath] It's hard too, to give them the newsletters from school... When I tried to interpret the meanings ... It was hard because most times they seem not to listen to me (Hina).*

Hina's operational plan existed within a context of cultural conflicts between her school and her Tongan family. Notably, having the determination to have her parents involved in the school feast days, school activities and decision making about educational programmes was very difficult. It was hard for Hina because her parents could not integrate into the Australian school culture because of the language barrier. There were feeling of frustrations, loss of status and sense of isolation in Hina and therefore she found it hard to integrate into all the activities at school. Moreover, Hina was not able to engage well in her learning at school.

Lia also pointed out in her narrative that there was a breakdown in the family communication:

*When I gave the newsletter to my parents I offered to translate to them...but my mum asked me to leave the newsletter on the table and go and do what I should do. [deep breath] The letter was to invite them to our school feast day... I asked my parents later if they could attend the feast day, ... but they said they did not know about it. I told them it was on the newsletter I gave them... Instead of saying yes or no to my question they told me to mind my own business (Lia).*

The findings revealed that English language is not understood by parents of Vai, Hina and Lia. It was therefore very hard for Vai, Hina and Lia to be able to work with their parents in their efforts to engage in their learning in school. This view is confirmed what Pua indicated: *Most time Hina talked about her homework but I do not understand, it's all in English...I also do not understand the messages from school...it's all in English. It's hard to help her with her study because I do not speak English.* This view has affirmed by the views of some of the teachers as implied in Teacher 5.B's comment, *yeah, some of the Tongan parents are not able to help their children's homework...it is difficult because they know very little English.* The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding immigrant parents with lack of English and have prevented them from helping their children's studies (Lahman & Park, 2004, Ngo, 2006 and Behnke, 2009).

Sini and Hina also indicated that their schools are using only English language in all their communication to the Tongan parents and this has caused breakdown between family and school communication. The effects of the lack of English among their parents had widened the gap between the schools and families resulting in difficulties for them to engage in their learning. Sini indicated. *My mum could not attend school meetings...and things at school...she finds it hard for she does not speak English...this does not help my efforts to improve my school work.* Hina also claimed that *both of my parents do not speak English...my parents only go to school to get my reports and sometimes to school Mass...they do not know what is happening in school most time...and they spend more time to attend community and church meetings and others.* On the other hand, Vai's effort to engage in her learning was not affected when her parents were not able to attend the school activities in this recount:

*My parents do not attend most meetings in school... They speak very little English. My mum often say that she would love to attend the meetings at school [pause] but everything conduct in English. [smile] But my mum is good... She tries to help us with our studies at home. [pause] She reminds us too, to obey our teachers and follow the school rules (Vai).*

Vai expressed that her mum was finding it hard to attend the meeting at school because of language difficulty. However, Vai revealed in her narrative that mum's involvement with her children's studies at home and making sure that the children were getting what they needed for school was her way of involving herself in the activities at school. Vai's mum has affirmed this view by indicating that *I find it hard to attend school meetings because it's in English...but I try to make sure that Vai does her homework...and to make sure to pay her school fees...and to provide her with what she needs for her education (Mapa)*. This view is in conflict with the views of some of the administrators as PC Coordinator 2.B indicated: *Some of the parents find it hard to find time to make sure that their children are doing their homework and coming ready for school...they are very slow to keep up with their responsibilities to pay school fees and other payment for their children's needs in school*. Principal 2.B also affirmed PC Coordinator 2.B's view by indicating that *it seems that there is a lack of a culture of education in Tongan families...Some parents are lacking the skills to fulfill their responsibility properly...their children do not have the support for their work at school*. However, as English is the language used in school, most of the participating parents have found it hard to help their children's school work.

The findings revealed that the participating students were unanimous in their belief about the importance of English language to their education, and Tongan parents with lack of English has caused difficulties in their efforts to support them in their education. Franken et al. (2005) also affirmed these views by acknowledging that the South Pacific immigrant parents who speak little English have found it hard to support their children's education. The views revealed in the findings regarding difficulties for Tongan parents to support their children's education because of lack of English, were also seemed to be in conflict with the school context where some of the administrators expected the Tongan parents to create a culture of education within the home context as Principal B put it: *It is important for parents to create a culture of education at home to support their children's education*.

### **7.2.1.3 Low income factors**

The study revealed that the participating students have come from families who lack good income, meaningful employment and adequate housing. Lia shared in her narrative:

*My father has a part time job and my mother does not work... There are nine of us altogether and we live in a three bed room house. [deep breath] and we go without many things... And my Australian friends talking about going to the swimming pool...My family cannot afford to do these because we do not have the money (Lia)*.

Similarly in reinforcing Lia's views, Hina recounted:

*I come from a family of ten children... my father was the only one working, but now he is very ill and no longer able to work. My mother never works. [pause] We live in a small house... and it's very crowded. I don't go to some of the school's field trips because my parents can't afford to give that extra money. I like to take part in sports... but I can't afford to have the sports uniforms.*

Pua affirmed Hina's view by indicating that *our family is poor, my husband and I are not working ...we could not afford to pay for her school field trips and other needs at school.* Some of the teachers affirmed these views as Teacher 4.B put it: *Sometimes some Tongan students miss school, to avoid the embarrassment from the difficulties of the families to pay the extra money for the educational trips.*

Both School A and School B involved catered for the needs of all children especially the children from low income families. Through negotiating with the schools' principals and pastoral care coordinators, all the children of the families of the participants have received support from their welfare department to help with their school fees and other educational needs. These have helped the families in their struggles to educate their children. Vai was grateful for what her school has offered to her family by sharing in her narrative: *I am happy to be in a good school and to have the support of the school to me and my family.* Similarly, Sini expressed his gratitude to be able to be in a Catholic school: *I am in a good school. The school gives a lot of help to many children like me who come from a poor family.* The parents affirmed these views as Niu put it: *Sini is in a good school... The school helps to pay the school fees for one of our children.* These views are consistent with the views of the administrators in school as Assistant P 2.B put it: *The school is always willing to help students who may have difficulties in any way, ... the parents are always welcomed to see us so that we could together sit down and look at ways that we could support their children's needs.* Principal 1.A also commented: *We cater for the needs of the children from low income families...and including those who could not afford to pay the full payment for their school fees.* Lee (2003, 2007) affirms these views by claiming that Tongan immigrant families in Australia often have big families, have little money and find it hard to fulfill their responsibilities for the financial needs of their children.

Hina and Sini also indicated the challenges of the involvement of their families in

activities of Tongan communities, extended families and church. Hina indicated: *I was facing all sort of problems at home. [pause] There were a lot of demands from Tongan communities, ...extended families and church on our families...Our family spent our little money in these and we become poorer...and little time was given to my reading and study.* Sini also claimed: *My parents spent money on fund raising for church and sending to their relatives back in Tonga...and they have gambling problem...and sometimes I get hungry at home...and could not focus in my study.* Some of the parents affirmed these views as Niu put it: *Well there is always something going on with the community ...There are responsibilities for fund raising and others...this is affecting me in my responsibility to my own family...There are other pressures too...from the church...and extended families.* Some of the administrators have also affirmed the views from Hina, Sini and Niu as Principal 2.B put it: *Tongan families seem to be great in sharing with one another and with their extended families. There seem to be a lot of activities within families, their church and Tongan communities.* PC Coordinator 2.B also indicated that *Tongan families spend a lot of their time with their communities and extended families...this could be one of the things that make the Tongan families suffer and make it hard for them to fulfill their responsibilities for their own children in school.* These findings revealed that the participating students have gone through difficulties to engage with their learning in school because of their families' financial difficulties, and families were suffering more from the demands of Tongan communities and church. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the expectations Tongan and Pacific churches place on families are great demands on their resources (Taule'ale'ausumai, 2001), thus making it very difficult for the Tongan and Pacific parents to fulfill their responsibilities for their children's education.

On the other hand, despite the financial difficulties that the participating students were facing, their love for sport has shown that they could also demonstrate initiative to adapt to the culture of the school. Sini, for example was involved actively in the sports' programmes that were very much part of the school curriculum.

*I've been in the schools' athletes and football teams since I started in Year 7...I am good in sports...and I enjoy being in the team for the school's athletes. I represent the school football in my level every year. This year I am in the under 16 for both State and National competitions...I hope to get a good life from this in future (Sini).*

On the other hand Sini's view is not consistent with the views of some of the

participating administrators and teachers as Teacher 5.B put it: *The values of the Tongan students seemed to be on sports...the boys would give more time to rugby than their academic subjects...they think rugby would give them a bright future...but they need to engage both in sports and their academic subjects.* Principal 1.A also indicated that *Tongan boys seemed to believe that they are only good in playing rugby and sports...but they need to give more time to their work in the classroom.* Sini's dad has affirmed these views by indicating that *Sini does not like reading. There is a good programme for reading at school but he does not use the opportunity well. Perhaps, if he tries hard to engage in his learning, as much as he does to his footy, he could do better in his studies (Niu).* These views revealed the importance for Tongan boys to balance their efforts to engage in their sports and academic subjects.

The findings revealed that financial problems of Tongan families have contributed to the difficulties of their children's efforts to integrate into the Australian school community and to maintain their interest in engaging in their learning in school. The findings confirm what is suggested in literature regarding students from small migrant ethnic groups and lower socio-economic groups who have great difficulties to engage in their learning in school (Tadich, et al., 2007). However, the schools of the participating students have supported the education of children from low income families. The findings further revealed that the Tongan practice of sharing and giving to extended families, communities and church has caused further financial difficulties to families. This has perpetuated poverty within families, and disengagement with learning in school of some of their children. This study also revealed that Niu and some of the teachers emphasised the importance for the Tongan boys to engage both in sports and academic subjects. However, the findings revealed that Sini believed that his engagement in sports would give him more hope in his future. This issue was a particular concern for administrators and teachers in both schools and further discussed in other sections of this study.

## **7.2.2 Cultural conflicts**

### **7.2.2.1 Tongan language and perspective**

This study revealed that the perceptions of the teachers (from an individualistic culture) are perpetuating the disengaging in learning of the participating students (from a collectivist culture) who speak both English and Tongan languages. Hina for example has

found herself sensitive to her teachers' comments: *When I discussed with my Tongan friend the Maths exercises using our own language ...[deep breath] my teacher was not happy...and asked us not to use Tongan language during class...this discourages me to try to work out the Maths problems (Hina)*. Similarly, Sini in reinforcing Hina's view indicated: *I sometimes asked my friend to explain to me the Maths problems in Tongan ... and my teacher told me off when I talked in Tongan to my friend... [deep breath]. I switched off and did not do my work*. Pua affirmed these views by claiming that *teachers in school are not encouraging Hina to use her own language in the classroom...and this does not help Hina to get good marks in her Maths..* On the other hand these views are in conflict with some of the teachers' views as Teacher 5.B put it: *Hina is not focusing in the classroom...She is easily led by her Tongan friend and does not ask for help...It's important to use her own language to help one another with their lessons but not to distract the whole class...Her homework is often incomplete*. Teacher 3.A also indicated that *Sini does not concentrate in his lessons in the classroom...and often talk in Tongan to his Tongan friend...and it's nothing to do with the lesson. He often have demerits for not doing his homework*. The findings found that views of the teachers are in conflict with the views given by Hina and Sini. The students' views emphasised the importance of using Tongan language to help them to work out the Maths problems. The teachers' view emphasised the importance for Hina and Sini to focus on the teacher's instruction, not to distract the lesson and to do the homework. These views would help them the students to achieve better learning outcomes.

On the issue of absenteeism, Hina, Lia and Sini gave their views to defend their families' values and their own values. Hina for example has found herself sensitive to her teachers' comments. She recounted:

*When I missed school to attend my cousin's funeral...[deep breath] my teacher was not happy and said I should have missed school only for member of an immediate family...she does not understand my culture...this cousin is like my own mother...[.] This does not encourage me to pay attention in her class.*

Similarly Lia indicated that *my teacher does not take the excuse of attending my cousin's wedding as a good reason for staying away from school...he did not realise that my cousin is like my own family*. In his role to his grandparents Sini was responsible to take care of them when they were sick. He expressed in his narrative: *My parents rely on me when my grandparents are sick. [pause] I like staying home to look after them. I love them...my grandfather used to come and watch me playing football (Sini)*

Pua affirmed this view by stating that *Hina sometimes missed school to attend funerals of cousins and other happenings in our family...it's important for her to attend these*. These views are in conflict with Principal 1.A's view. He stated that *some Tongan students in school missed school a lot to attend funerals and other activities of extended families...they found it very hard to engage with their learning in school*.

As an effort to improve the Tongan students' absenteeism and to improve their efforts to engage in their learning in school the two schools have dealt with the issues. For example, Sini's principal, pastoral care coordinator and Year 9 teacher negotiated with his parents for understanding and support regarding the many days Sini missed school. Sini indicated: *So my parents were not happy with the meeting with the principal and his assistant ...because they think they do not understand our culture, and our duties to our family*. With the Australian school community, private family matters are dealt with outside the school domain and the principal and the leadership team often call a meeting with parents on any issue regarding the students in their schools. Within the Tongan cultural context Sini's parents did not look at it from the same perspective as the principal and his assistant. However, they still agreed and gave in to the values and culture of the school.

From their perspectives, it was to show respect to the authorities even though it had caused difficulty because deep down in their hearts they did not agree with the principal and his assistant. This Tongan cultural behaviour revealed in the findings, seemed to be in conflict with the western school context where administrators may be expected the students to take priority to their studies and to engage in their learning in school. These findings are consistent with research carried out by Weiss (2005) who notes that internalizing the dominant's culture's values, can cause acute difficulties in school context. However, in an effort to use their cultural values to help Tongan students to engage better in their learning, this study also revealed that Tongan immigrant parents, leaders and elders have worked on a programme to empower them and their children to be confident in integrating their cultural experiences into the mainstream schooling context. Vai recounted:

*The Tongan homework centre for Tongan families plays a special role in my family... The Tongan school supporter and some Tongan leaders help us with our reading and encourage us in our studies. [pause] We also have Tongan music and*

*dances...in our own Tongan language.*

Similarly Lia indicated: *It's good to have our Tongan homework centre...it's good to have Tongan tutors to help the school... and the Tongan families and community giving opportunities, for us to find ways that we could learn better, and learn our language and culture.* Paongo affirmed these views by indicating that *our children are learning our culture and language in our sessions at the Tongan homework centre...they also enjoy talking in Tongan to their other Tongan friends and they help one another in their studies.* Some of the teachers affirmed these views as Teacher 5.B put it: *Sometimes I attended the homework sessions for the Tongan students and it is good to see the students learning their culture and using their own language for communicating one another...Lia's performance at school is also improving.*

The views of the teachers also revealed that they encourage the students to share their cultural values and experiences and relate them to their learning, as Teacher 3.A indicated:

*Often when we invited them to share their stories and to share something about their culture relating to the lessons they are always so keen..... [pause] They also like to be acknowledged. Once they are getting into things in a positive way they seem to be more motivated towards their learning.*

Some of the students confirm these views as Hina indicated:

*When my teacher asked us to do a project on our cultural costumes and to present to the class using our own music I was enthusiastic and I got a good grade...I felt happy and proud of our own music in my own language...my teacher and the class enjoyed it too*

The findings revealed that cultural differences have contributed to the disengagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students. Thus it is critical for the Tongan immigrant students to be able to be proud of their language, and to encourage them to share their cultural values and experiences and relate them to their learning in school. These findings are consistent with that of Nakhid (2003) who suggests that western schools should recognise and value South Pacific students' perspectives and where they are coming from.

### **7.2.2.2 Cultural mismatch**

According to Weiss et al. (2005), cultural mismatch occurs when the dominant cultural

beliefs and values conflict with the cultural beliefs and values of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, there are conflicting beliefs and values frequently resulting in Tongan and Pacific parents showing behaviours and attitudes that are culturally appropriate in their home/community environment, but are inconsistent with the school's code of conduct (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 2000). This study affirms these views. Sini for example, shared in his narrative:

*My parents believe that the teachers know what is best for us. [pause] When they received my reports they only wanted to know if I behaved and obeyed the teachers... They did not question the reason I did poorly in my subjects... They like me to be polite to the teachers... and they always thanked them for looking after my education (Sini).*

Similarly, Hina had a similar experience:

*My parents believe that the school should look after everything in my education at school... They believe the school gives the best direction to everything goes on in school. [pause] When we went with my mum to get my reports from my teacher, it was hard for my teacher to have a conversation on my progress ... My mum kept thanking my teacher for his support for my work at school and she was only interested in my behaviour to the teachers and the other students (Hina).*

Vai also indicated that *my parents respect the school and they said the teachers at school know better on educational stuff and it is their responsibility to teach me the lessons and things at school.* Lia further claimed that *my parents do their own things at home and the community and our relatives ...and my school matters...they leave them to the teachers to deal with.* The administrators of the schools affirmed these views as implied in Assistant P 2.B's comment: *I think they think it is our responsibility to educate their children.* Assistant P 1.A also commented that *Tongan parents send their children to schools and think that the schools have the experts to look after all the needs of their children.* The participating parents also affirmed these views as Longo put it: *My husband and I are happy that Sini is in a good school... and we believe the teachers know better about the school things...and experts in what they teach...Yeah, I tried to teach Sini not to challenge the teachers for they know what is the best things for him at school.* The findings in this study found that the Tongan immigrant parents believe that the schools are the domain of teachers as experts. To interfere in school life is regarded as both inappropriate and disrespectful. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding immigrant families from small ethnic groups who believe that teachers are experts in school matters and it is disrespectful and inappropriate to challenge and interfere with the

teachers (Garcia Coll et al., 2002). This cultural behaviour revealed in the findings, seemed to make it impossible for the Tongan parents to engage in inquiry dialogue with the school personnel on issues regarding the difficulties in engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students. Furthermore, the parents could also become passive and rely on teachers to do more work for their children at school. This could make the job of the teachers more difficult and thus could affect the efforts of Tongan students to engage in their learning in school.

### 7.2.3 Teachers' actions and reactions

#### 7.2.3.1 Teachers' expectations and beliefs

Literature revealed that teachers' expectations and beliefs of children from low socio-economic communities and Tongan and ethnic minority backgrounds, that there will always be disparities in the achievement of Tongan and Pacific students in comparison to European students, is a historically held belief amongst teachers (Pascoe, 2005). This study affirms these views, for example, in her narratives, Lia reported: *My teacher did not think that I could have a good mark in Maths... She said that two of my older sisters have done well in sports...and found Maths hard...Yeah...I think my teacher thought that as a Tongan...I can't get good marks in Maths.* Similarly, Hina reported:

*My principal praised my older brother who did well in sports in front of the school assembly... When my teacher found out that he was my brother he told me that all my four brothers... who went through the school... did well in sports but found the school work hard...and the boys are more interested in playing football...and could not do their school work.*

Vai also indicated: *I wanted to be in the top class. My older siblings have never got to the top class. [pause] I tried hard but I guess my teachers still think that as a Tongan I am still a slow learner compared to others.* Pua affirmed this view by claiming that *Hina sometimes felt that the teacher was not caring enough for her... because she was slow to learn...but only good in sports.* These views are consistent with some of the views of the administrators and teachers as AssistantP 1.A put it: *They do not seem to be good in their readings and the academic subjects.* Teacher 4.B also declared that *on the whole they just don't seem to be able to motivate themselves for their studies and they don't cope in taking part in their academic development.*

The findings revealed that teachers have fixed expectation and belief that Tongan students are more capable in sports than their academic subjects. This belief among teachers would restrict some of Tongan students who would like to engage in their learning and to achieve good learning outcomes. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the teachers who believed that European students will always achieve better in comparison to the Pacific students, and therefore limited the languages they used in mathematics for Pacific children, thereby restricting the children's engagement with complex ideas and limiting their learning (Irwin & Woodward, 2005).

Some of the Tongan immigrant students also shared their thoughts on their capabilities in their school work. For example, Hina in her narrative was saying that *the teachers should understand that not all Tongan students are only good in sports... They need to know that we Tongans are also good in writing and can get good marks in our academic subjects*. Vai also indicated: *My English teacher was surprised that I got good marks in my English. She said that my writing is improving a lot*. The teachers affirmed this view as Teacher 2.A put it: *A lot of the Tongan students, are very creative. They are writing with complex thinking too, not simple. [pause] They write beautiful poetry and they are also good speech makers*. Vai's mother, Mapa also affirmed this view by saying that *Vai is happy with her English now, she showed me her marks and she said that her teacher was happy with her last test*.

The findings revealed that it is possible for the Tongan immigrant students from low socio-economic Tongan communities to do well in academic subjects. This view is consistent with Timperley's (2003) research, concluding that "it is possible to raise achievement levels of minority students in schools serving low socio-economic communities" (p. 2).

In an effort to help the teachers to understand the Tongan families, the schools have established the idea of having Tongan school supporter to support the Tongan families. The participating students identified the position of the school supporter who has volunteered to liaise between schools and their parents as an important influence. For example Sini recounted

*The culture at the Australian school is hard for my parents to follow. It is good when we have our Tongan supporter... because she knows my parents and she*

*understands both the Tongan culture and the culture of the school... She could be able to help the teachers to understand the situation of my family...and also could help the teachers to have higher expectations of us in our school work. (Sini).*

In a similar situation Vai, recounted her experiences:

*It's hard for my teachers to get to know my parents because my parents know very little English...The only time I remember that one of my teachers met with my mum was when I received my report... [pause] We spent a short time with the teacher... my mum just sat there, smiling, nodding her head, saying yes or no and kept thanking my teacher... [pause]The Tongan school supporter is good because she could help the teachers to understand my family. She speaks our language and know our culture ...My teachers at school could also have better attitudes towards us Tongans in our work at school (Vai).*

Some of the participating students also pointed out that it is good if the Tongan school supporter is someone known to the Tongan families and well respected by the families and the community as Lia put it: *The Tongan school supporter is helping the teachers to know more about my situations at home...Yeah it's also good to have someone who knows Tongan families and our Tongan community respected.* Mapa affirmed this view by indicating that *my husband and I are happy to have a school supporter we can trust... and who could work between the school and our Tongan families.* Principal 1.A also affirmed these views by saying that *it's good to have a Tongan school supporter who could be a liaison for the Tongan families...It's good she is someone who is also one of their leaders.* These views emphasise the importance to understand that, to enter the Tongan culture it is important to get the support of their respected leaders. Tongan traditional education and process for the education of their children are usually through their educated leaders, where they support Tongan families in their responsibilities to educate their children. Tongans also believe they hold the knowledge about life, therefore their role in the education of their children could improve the performances of their children in school.

The findings revealed the importance of the role of the Tongan school supporter to liaise between schools and families. Furthermore, this study found that the role of the Tongan school supporter have created better understanding between the school and families that impact positively upon the effective engagement of Tongan immigrant students with their learning in school. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding Tongan educators who were liaising between schools and families and creating better understanding between the school and Tongan immigrant parents in their difficulties to

engage in the education of their children (Coxon et al., 2002). Moreover, the findings reinforce the need to consider the cultural procedures that can effectively deliver the information on the issue of the performance of Tongan students between Tongan families, Tongan community and schools. This finding is unique in that it confirms the importance of adhering to cultural protocols when getting the support of Tongan elders and leaders for the education of Tongan immigrant families.

### 7.2.3.2 *Cultural bias in teaching*

Literature revealed that many classroom teachers continue to promote learning and instructional practices that reveal an adherence to a mainstream ideology (Boykin et al., 2006; Tyler, Boykin & Walton, 2006). Thus, cultural bias in teaching occurs when classroom instruction, learning activities, materials, and lessons largely reflect the contributions, cultural values and perspectives of majority race or culture (Tyler, Boykin & Walton, 2006). These views are consistent with the participants' views, as Sini reported: *Our school programme is in the Australian style... except when we have our school cultural activities... Everything is in English and when the teachers try to explain the lessons they don't use examples from our Tongan and Pacific ideas.* Some of the participating parents affirmed these views as Hone put it: *I think the school needs to improve on strategies that could strengthen the cultural values and identities of the students...and to give them the opportunity to express themselves in their Tongan language, and relating to their own cultural music and art.* Some of the teachers also affirmed these view as Teacher 6.B put it: *But Tongan students do not have the opportunity at school to express themselves in their own language and to do some of the work in ways they could relate to their own culture.* The findings revealed that the school programmes and the teaching strategies are not catering to the needs of the individual students and their cultural values. Helu-Thaman (2001) endorses these findings by claiming that schools in western countries continue to teach and learn about the knowledge, skills and values from the dominant western perspectives.

The study also revealed that Tongan students found the teaching instruction and learning activities in the classroom hard as implied in Sini's view in his narratives, *it's been very miserable... it's not easy to be in the classroom...because teachers talk about things I don't understand...I always fail my test and exams.... when I explained the pictures...in my Tongan understanding the teacher do not understand.* Hina indicated: *When we*

*were asked to interpret a picture in our class...I gave my explanation and I thought I gave a good one...yeah it was my understanding as a Tongan...I had to explain again to give a western understanding.* Lia also indicated that *I think in Tongan and try to write in English because we talk in Tongan and do things in the Tongan way at home...it's hard when everything in the classroom is in the western way.* Vai declared that *it's hard to switch my mind to the instruction in the classroom when I go away from my home environment where my parents give me instructions in Tongan.* Mapa affirmed these views by stating that *we have our family monthly meeting and we explain in our Tongan language to our children...but at school they talk in English and sometimes they bring home the 'palangi' way and it's clash with our Tongan culture.* Teacher 6.B affirmed these views by indicating that *I think it is important that sometimes they should have the opportunity to use their own language and be encouraged to do this in school...It must be hard for them to live up to all the expectations of western teachers...and their language and culture are not practised in the classroom.* The findings revealed that often Tongan students' own knowledge and perception on school instruction are replaced by knowledge and perception rooted in a western or mainstream cultural value system. The findings also show bias against knowledge that could emerge from Tongan cultural value system. The findings therefore reinforce the need for a classroom instruction, learning activities, materials and lessons that could also include the contributions, cultural values and perspectives of Tongan and other ethnic groups in schools. This could help to improve the efforts of the Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning in school. The findings are consistent with Ladson-Billings's (1995a) research, concluding that culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for students to engage better their learning.

The findings in this study also revealed that some teachers believe that the Tongan families' lack of resources and skills are what create the disengagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students, as implied in Hina's comment:

*Some teachers think that all the Tongans cannot do what the Australian students could do. [pause] They think that we Tongans could not do well in our studies like the others...We have our own culture and our own language...Our parents do not have the skills, language and money to help us like the Australian parents.*

Similarly Vai indicated:

*My teachers don't realize that not all Tongans are the same...I can also compete with the other students but my family don't have the resources...and the*

*teachers...and the students at school were not aware of what was happening at home. [with deep breath] My family have little income...and go without many things...to send us to a good school.*

Lia also indicated that *my family is poor and sacrifice a lot to give me good education...but they don't have the skills...my teachers don't understand...and still think we South Pacific students are not performing well in the classrooms.* Some of the parents shared their views on the issue as Pua put it: *Sometimes the South Pacific students are labeled by teachers as the naughty and rough ones...and not doing their school work.* Principal 2.B also gave his view on this issue: *In general they have huge families and are poor, and this could make things harder for them to fulfill their responsibilities...normally parents find it hard to discipline them to do their reading and homework.* These views also reinforce the attitude that the western school has of the Tongan families and the low achievement performances of their children, rather than making an effort to understand the families' situations. These findings reinforce the need for a more appropriate training of parenting skills for the Tongan immigrant parents, as well as professional development for teachers. This could support both the Tongan families and the school to realise their mutual responsibilities for the academic achievement of the Tongan immigrant students.

The themes discussed in this section presented the difficulties that the Tongan immigrant students have gone through in trying to settle, adjust and integrate into the Australian school community. The findings revealed that it was difficult to change from the Tongan cultural values into the culture of the Australian school community. It was also not easy for them to find the right balance between the two cultures and this has affected their efforts to engage in their engagement in learning in school. While they demonstrated resilience and determination to look at ways to improve their efforts to engage in learning in school, the problems they were facing at home and in their communities have caused difficulties to their performances in school.

### **7.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

**How do Tongan immigrant families and community influence Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning at Australian schools?**

Engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools requires an effective school-family-community partnership that would appeal not only to

the school system but the school community including Tongan families and their communities which in many circumstances are diverse in their requirements.

This study adopted a setting and structure to empower the Tongan immigrant students in their efforts to engage in their learning in school, through consulting with their parents, families, leaders, elders and teachers about their studies and educational needs. This would also involve a collaborative effort in key decision making, and being committed in working out the best ways to help the Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning in school.

### **7.3.1 Family's values**

#### ***7.3.1.1 Cultural and social demands***

Literature revealed that Tongan and Pacific culture regards family closeness as crucial to family (Elliott and Gray, 2000; Lee, 2003; 2007). This study revealed that the participating students are close to their families and communities. Family is one area they reported as having important responsibilities to help them in their engagement in learning in school. However, they pointed out their families have cultural and social issues that cause these important responsibilities often to be neglected. For example Lia pointed out in her narratives: *I struggle in doing my homework because my parents involve heavily with helping our extended families in Australia and Tonga.* Sini also indicated: *We always have our cousins staying with us and our parents have lots of responsibilities for our extended families.* Being involved in the decision making and welfare of the extended families and Tongan communities are important to the culture of Tongan families and often take priority over the responsibilities to the immediate families. For example, Hina recounted:

*My parents both come from big families. Most of their brothers and sisters in Australia go to one another a lot... These go on all the time and my parents have spent a lot of their time and energies in all these. [deep breath] There are a lot of fund raising and meetings in our Tongan community...My parents attended these meetings...and do not have enough time to help our school work.*

Building such a network with extended families and Tongan communities and being involved in their activities and decision making is part of the responsibilities of the Tongan families (Lee, 2003; 2007). When it comes to their responsibilities in playing their role in looking after the education of their children they have almost no energy and

they tend to rely on the schools to fill the gap for them, as Lia pointed out: *My parents are busy dealing with the needs of our extended families and communities...they could not able to help us with our school work after school. They think the school will do it for us.* Vai also expressed *that my sisters and I, had to do the work at home for our mother because she attended the choir practices... and she involves a lot with children of her brother and sisters...she could not help our school work.* These views are consistent with the parents' views as implied in Niu's comment, *my commitment to the Tongan community ...well there is always something going on with the community. There are responsibilities for fund raising and others...this is affecting me in my responsibility to my own family and the education of my children.* Teacher 1.A also affirm these views by indicating that *some Tongan students come from very big families and have little discipline...They also have pressures from extended families, Tongan church and community activities...it is very important for Tongan families to give priority to the needs of their children's education.*

The findings revealed that families of the participating students have had met up with demands on their responsibilities to fulfill for their extended families and communities, apart from the responsibilities that they were supposed to give their immediate families. This cultural value seems to be in conflict with the western context where teachers may be expected the parents to build a culture of education at home and to help their children's education. This is consistent with the research carried out by Lee (2003) regarding the Tongan immigrant families in Australia who spent a lot of their time helping their extended families both in Australia and in Tonga and often neglected the needs of their children's education. These have affected the efforts of the Tongan immigrant students to engage in their learning. The findings also revealed that it is critical to parents to give priority to their children's education.

The participating students also indicated that creating a homely environment and for the parents to be at home in the evenings was important to their efforts to do their studies. Sini commented:

*Yeah, there were times when my parents sat down and talked to my two brothers, my sister and I. We also sat on the Tongan mat and prayed and my parents asked us to share with them what we wanted. [pause] My mum would pray and cry to ask God to bless our family. My dad would say to me to do a lot of reading and to do my best at school. My brothers, sister and I had the opportunity to say what we wanted. My parents also reminded us to try to respect others in school...and to have*

*good behaviour is very important. I felt good from the warmth and love of one another in the family. But this type of meeting did not happen often. I wish my parents would have more time spent with us like that.*

Similarly Hina indicated:

*With the support of my parents....I have a quiet space at home for my studies, we also come together as a family to pray and to share our needs...things were working better. My teachers were happy too...because my performance at school was improving.*

Lia also indicated that *we also have our family monthly meeting and this is good because I could share what I want for my study and other needs...this is helpful for my study.* The administrators and teachers indicated their views on this issue as Teacher B put it: *Tongan families are community minded and also love their children...there are some values and culture of Tongan families and community that we in our affluence society could learn from.* Some of the participating parents also shared their views on the issue as Maile put it: *It is important for me to stay home and have time to cook the right food for my children... and also to make sure that we have our family prayer and meeting...Lia is able to share her needs for her study.* The findings revealed that parents have tried to fulfill their responsibilities in the family cultural setting that help their children to engage better in their learning in school. This revelation from the findings has shown that parents could be able to improve their efforts to engage more in their children's education. This requires the parents to be flexible, consistent and give their children's education and needs a priority.

### **7.3.1.2 Cultural sensitivity**

The Australian school culture is different to the culture of the Tongan family and community in the sense that schools are established on western principles. Literature revealed that differences between cultures can be understood in terms of differences in values and it may well be that what is considered normative in one culture would be strange in another (Tannebaum, 2000). This view is consistent with the findings in this study. The participating students reported that they found themselves in positions where they had to be culturally sensitive in their dealings and connections to their teachers and other students in their schools. They also reported that being well grounded and connected to their Tongan culture with the support of their family and community have

helped them to connect to their school. Engaging in their learning in school required involvement of the community and demonstrating cultural sensitivity that is agreeable, empowering, and enriching. Vai recounted:

*The culture of the school is different to the culture of my family...the setting of the school is different... [pause] The rules in school are different from the ones at home. It's hard too for my family to follow the culture in the school... I had to learn most of the things in the western way...and try to respect the school culture and cultures of other cultural groups.*

As a result of this polarization in culture, and the difficulty of communicating of the western rules and culture, Vai's approach was to talk about the importance that she had from opportunities to perform the Tongan dances to the whole school on a few occasions.

*Yeah, it's good we had time to sing and dance our own Tongan way in school... students from other cultures were also entertaining their own too ...The principal, teachers, and students of the whole school were attending. In this way everyone was able to respect one another's culture and to appreciate our own cultures. It's good too to have our parents and other Tongans come and help us with our items (Vai).*

This has given everyone the opportunity to be sensitive to one another's culture which is a symbol of their unique lives. The parents affirm these views as Pua put it: *I like the programme at school when they ask us to teach our children to sing and dance in our own language...and it's good the teachers and others like it too... the other cultural groups are performing too and it's good to respect and enjoy their songs and dances.* The administrators affirmed these views, as implied in PC Coordinator 2.B's comment: *We like the Tongan families and communities to come to school and feel at home...We have cultural activities and school feast days...Their children are always performing well ...and their gifts in music and dances are always appreciated and enjoyed by all...it's a good opportunity for the school community to appreciate one another's cultures.* The findings revealed that when the school got together to share and enjoy one another's cultural items it has helped them to feel comfortable in the school setting and as well as having the opportunity to appreciate one another's culture. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the importance of appreciating and being sensitive to one another's culture that has also enriched and broadened the knowledge of all involved (Madriz, 2000).

Another area of sensitivity has been the issue of appreciation of the interests of elders and community leaders. Tongan communities interact within an understanding of cultural protocols. Such protocols involve elders and community leaders, where they normally act as mediators between the Tongan families and the schools. The study reveals the importance of their role in supporting the education of their children and the issue of cultural sensitivity in communication and feedback applying the right protocols as Lia put it: *To make things happen in our Tongan community...the principal and the teachers have to invite them through the community leader...She can talk to our families and our community, and getting their ideas...asking them to help with the items in school.* One of the parents affirmed this view by stating that *in the community, I seek advice from an elder or a Tongan leader...Our community with our leaders and elders also help my daughter and the Tongan students to teach our own cultural songs and dances for the school feasts and other activities in school (Mapa).* Principal 1.A also affirmed this view by indicating that *it's great to have the support of the families and their community elders and leaders...They help with the children's Tongan items and also at their Tongan homework centre.* The findings revealed that it is important for Tongan families to share their cultural values by participating in activities that supported the enhancement of relationships and inclusiveness of their culture in their schools. The findings also reveal that when Tongan community elders and leaders come together with Tongan families their children's school work, this has helped the Tongan students in the difficulties that they are facing in their engagement in learning.

### 7.3.2 Reinforcing Tongan identity

The Tongan immigrant students in this study have identified as Tongans who belong to the Tongan ethnic group in Sydney. Some of the participating students have experienced difficulties and feelings of sadness because other negative cultural values associated with Tongan culture that are not relevant to the school culture. These are barriers to their engagement in learning in school and caused embarrassment to their Tongan identities. For example, Hina recounted that:

*There were times that I felt embarrass as a Tongan because of the negative comments often associated with the Tongan students in our schools. Some Tongan cultures are not helping us in our work in school. [pause] The Tongan students are often causing troubles to the teachers ... and the society too.*

Similarly Lia commented: *I felt ashamed of some of my Tongan friends when they played up in school...and some negative things have associated to them...and they want to stand out in doing the wrong things to annoy the teachers.* Some of the parents shared their views on this issue as Pua put it: *Hina is hanging around with kids at school who are Pacific islanders and they are too rough for her...She is afraid to stand up for her rights because of peer group pressure. This does not help her in her studies.* Teacher 3.A affirmed this view by indicating that *some Tongan students seem to always go around together and they are often in trouble...They are also do not do well in their studies.* The findings revealed that some of the Tongan students have experienced difficulties and feelings of sadness because of other negative comments associated to other Tongan students and cultural values that are not relevant to the culture of the school.

On the other hand Tongan immigrant students also have come to appreciate their Tongan identities as a process of constant direction, based on a core of conviction that provided a foundation for self-acceptance. For example, Vai recounted that:

*It's not easy for me as a Tongan to be in a big western school with over thousand students and only nineteen Tongan students. Yeah, we follow the culture of the western school. I enjoy sharing our Tongan cultural songs and dances with everyone in school. [pause] I become more confident and feel happy to be very proud of my Tongan identity...My big sister is the school captain for this year and I am very proud of her. [smile] She is a good role model for us Tongans and it helps us to be proud of our Tongan identities...and to try to have better learning outcomes.*

PC Coordinator 1.A endorsed Vai's views by indicating: *Some girls of course are doing well and as our school captain is a Tongan...She is a good role model.* Sini in his narrative reinforced the importance of having good role models among the Tongans in school and in the community because *I try hard in my football training and games to be like 'Isileli Folau who is a Tongan and well known in Australia for being one of the top players in rugby league... I am not good with my lessons in the classroom but I am good in football.* Sini has shown that being good in football and identifying with another Tongan who has been successful has helped him to be proud of his Tongan identity. On the other hand, Lia emphasised the need for promoting the beauty of the Tongan songs, dances and also the good role model of the Tongans in the school by saying:

*In entertaining in front of the school with our school captain as a Tongan... and our Tongan beautiful costumes made up of Tongan fine mats I felt so good and happy. [smile] It's really making me proud to be a Tongan ...I also feel stronger as a student and it gives me courage to try harder in my studies (Lia).*

Maile affirmed Lia's view by saying *Lia loves entertaining with her Tongan costumes at school and at other school festivals...her school work is also improving.* Assistant P 1.A endorsed Lia's view by indicating: *it's good our Tongan students love their cultural dancing and songs...they enjoy entertaining to our school. They always put on a spectacular item... this helps some of them to do well in their studies too.* Manu'atu (2000) affirmed these views by claiming that Tongan immigrant students engage enthusiastically with their school work when they identify and involved in cultural songs and dances (Manu'atu, 2000).

The findings revealed that it is important for the Tongan immigrant students to learn who they are in an Australian school. It is therefore important for them not just to learn the culture of the mainstream but to learn both the culture of the mainstream and their Tongan culture. This would help them to have a strong sense of their own identities and to be proud of the contribution of their own culture to their learning. This would also give them the confidence to motivate themselves to engage better in their learning. The findings also reinforce the importance of teachers to reduce cultural bias in the classrooms by constructing classroom lessons and activities that build upon the cultural values of ethnically and culturally diverse students. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the importance of administrators and teachers to support Pacific learners to 'be themselves' and see themselves and their culture reflected in school (Ferguson et al., 2008).

### **7.3.3 Engaging families and communities in school activities**

#### **7.3.3.1 Parents' capabilities and limitations**

The study reveals that both School A and School B have tried to create a school environment where Tongan families and communities feel a sense of belonging and a desire to contribute to teaching and learning of their children by using their knowledge and skills, as Assistant P 1.A put it:

*We have cultural activities at school. The families and their communities are*

*always invited to these activities...Their children are happy to share their cultural music and dances...The families and members of their communities are teaching them to learn their own cultural songs and dances for their performances.*

Principal 1.A also indicated: *Families and communities are always welcome to the school. Their children are happy to share their cultural songs and dances...Their families and communities are helping them to learn their own cultural songs and dances for their performances.* The participating students endorsed these views as Lia put it: *It's good school, Tongan families...Tongan community are working together... to teach us our music, dances, language and culture...and our school work.* Some of the participating parents also affirmed these views as Maile put it *we sometimes work together with the parents of the Tongan community at school to help with some cultural activities...this is also helpful to our children's education.*

On the other hand the participating students revealed that their families and communities were not confident to contribute to the academic activities and their efforts to engage in their learning in the classroom because they do not have the knowledge and skills. For example, Hina recounted:

*My parents believe my teachers are the best people to help me with my studies ...because they are well qualified and English is their language. [pause] My parents also do not want to interfere with my teachers because it is disrespectful. They also believe that the teachers are there to teach us and to help us in our needs in school.*

Similarly Vai referred to the involvement of their parents in the school activities as crucial but her parents are not confident and view teachers as the experts in all the educational needs of their children. She confirmed this by saying:

*I need the support of my family for my homework at home and activities at school ...but they do not have the confidence because they were born in Tonga and they know nothing about the schools in Australia... [pause] They also said that the teachers are the ones who know everything. My mum sometimes come to school but my dad hardly come to any school thing. (Vai)*

Pua affirmed these views by stating: *I only go to school if they need us to help to teach Tongan dances and songs...I don't go to school meetings because I don't know about school stuff...I don't help with her school work because I have no knowledge about her lessons.* Teacher 1.A endorsed these views by indicating that *Tongan parents are very*

*much supportive of cultural events at school ...but they seem to lack the knowledge and skills to help their children's homework and the academic subjects.*

The study reveals the critical importance of the involvement of the parents in the activities at school to enhance the efforts of the Tongan immigrant students to engage with their learning in school. However, the parents often lack the skills and experiences to help their children in school. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding Pacific parents who want to help their children and their schools but sometimes lack the knowledge and skills (McDowall et al., 2005; Madjar et al., 2009).

Furthermore the participating students reported some of the practice of Tongan cultures that have hindered their parents to give their full support to their school work as Lia put it:

*It is important for my parents to help my homework and to attend the school activities, but the Tongan cultural beliefs on giving to church ministers, royal people and people who have money already...often take up their time and our money...so they cannot carry out all the things that they need to do to us...and this affect our school work.*

The administrators affirm these views as implied in PC Coordinator 1.A's comment:

*It seems that there is a lack of value in the culture of education. Both parents do not have the background of education and they involve in many activities within their Tongan church communities and extended families. They don't seem to have enough time for their children's education...They rarely come to school meetings... Tongan students do not have that support for their work at school...and most of them do not do well in their academic subjects.*

Principal 1.A also endorsed these views:

*Tongan students do not have the support of their parents...There isn't the support of a structure at home that might be available in other Australian families....the demands of the extended families, communities and church is a concern...yeah, it is part of their culture but it is contributing to the difficulties that their children are facing in their work at school.*

The participating students reported that whenever their families and communities showed their full support to their schools' activities and their studies they found they engaged better in their learning in school. This belief is connected to the importance of their families and communities to have the knowledge and skills to have the confidence to empower them to engage in activities and with learning in school.

The findings in this study revealed that the engagement of the family and community in their children education is critical in student success and in engaging in their learning, and therefore it is critical for the parents to have the knowledge and skills to help them to involve in school activities and the education of their children. However, Tongan parents are unaware of the knowledge, abilities, essential core skills and practices that require them to help their children in their studies. The study also found that some of the demands of the extended families, communities and church on Tongan families are factors that hinder the genuine efforts of the parents to support their children's education. Schools and teachers are therefore experienced difficulties in trying to motivate the Tongan students to engage in their learning and could absolve from responsibility for learning outcomes of Tongan students. These findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding a claim from Tongan scholar, Mafi (1998) who claims that family and community play a key role in obstructing Tongan students' educational achievement and academic progress, and therefore proposes collective community responses in dealing with 'cultural deficits'. Literature also suggested that 'cultural deficits' within Tongan cultural values are contributing to the disengagement of their children in western school context and therefore schools and teachers are almost totally absolved from responsibility for learning outcomes (Mafi, 1998).

### 7.3.3.2 *Collective effort*

Principal 2.B revealed that one of their school's visions was the greater involvement of families and their communities in the school's activities and their children's education. He indicated:

*Our school is committed to our vision to involve the families and communities of our students in our school meetings and other school activities... We give this vision a priority in our service to all the families and communities of our students... I could see great improvements in the school work of students whose families make the efforts to participate in activities at school (Principal 2.B).*

These views are consistent with views of the participating students as indicated by Lia: *The school, the family...and our community, [pause] should be working together to support each other,...and to help us in our school work...like our parents and leaders who help us with our Tongan items to perform to the school...and our Tongan homework class...this helps me to do better at school* Furthermore, Vai declared that the

*responsibilities of my family, ...community and school are to work together to help me in my studies...like coming together at our Tongan homework centre...to help our lessons...it helps to improve my studies.* Some of the participating parents affirmed these views as Maile stated: *We try to use the support from the Tongan tutors, at the Tongan homework center...We work together with other parents and one teacher from school. This help Lia with her homework and she learns about our language and culture...Her marks in her Maths and other subjects are improving.* The findings revealed that the involvement of parents, teachers and their leaders in a collective effort have proved to have positive impact on their children's learning outcomes. These views confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the collective effort that create effective partnerships between parents communities and schools and can improve the engagement in learning and successful learning outcomes of children in school (Biddulph et al., 2003; Robin et al., 2009).

Some of the participating students have also expressed that their families found hope from the vision of their schools to have greater parents' involvement with school board meetings. However, they were disappointed because their parents did not have the knowledge, skills and language to have the confidence to fully participate in the vision. Lia recounted:

*My parents received the letter from my principal to invite them to a meeting at school. My mum decided to go. [...] I was happy that my mum went but when she came back from the meeting she told us that everything was in English and she did not understand most of the things that they discussed... She was discouraged to attend again.*

Similarly Hina referred to the experience of her mum:

*My mum went once to the school board meeting but never wanted to go again ... She found the school board meeting boring [...] because she did not understand what they were talking about and she could not talk to the other parents because of her English...she said that she did not have much knowledge about what they talk about.*

The lack of fluency in English was not the only barrier to the effective participation of the Tongan parents in the board meetings. The findings from this study have also shown that both School A and School B have made the efforts to involve Tongan parents in the governing bodies of trustees. However, both schools' communities had severe limitations

in terms of the professional skills and expertise that Tongan parents had to contribute as Principal 1.A indicated: *It's difficult to have someone from the parents of our Tongan students to be a member of our school board because they do not have the experts needed.* Some of the participating parents endorsed this view as Paongo indicated: *I was approached to consider being a member in a committee in Vai's school but I did not accept it because I know I do not have the experiences and knowledge.* The findings revealed that both schools have limitations in terms of professional skills and expertise that Tongan parents had to contribute to school board, therefore the involvement of the parents in attending meetings has been considered to be problematic. The findings confirm the suggestion proposed in the literature regarding the unrealistic expectations on Tongan parents who do not have the experts, knowledge and English to involve in board meetings (Foliaki, 1993, cited in Coxon et al., 2002).

The study also found that the involvement of the parents at other levels of school such as getting reports and other important information has also been considered to be problematic. Sini recounted that:

*I went with my mum to attend the meeting with the principal and some of his assistants and teachers, parents and students of Year 7 to Year 9... At the end of the meeting ...we went to see our teachers in our classrooms for our reports. [pause] I went with my mum to get my report... My report was not good and the teacher asked my mum for comments, but my mum was just smiling and said that everything was alright and she was happy... She was very polite to my teacher, ...and only interested in my behaviours...but my teacher was not happy because my mum needed to ask questions so that they could see together for a way to help me.*

Pua, one of the participating parents affirmed this view by indicating that *when I go... to get Hina's report...Hina translated what the teacher tried to say to me... I did not understand much and I was not able to answer his questions properly...I was happy when the meeting finished.* Teacher 5.B also endorsed this view by stating that *it's hard to have a dialogue with Hina's mum because when she collected her report...she would not ask a question about Hina's progress. She also did not answer my questions and did not able to carry out a conversation regarding Hina's progress.*

The finding revealed the importance for the Tongan parents to have the skills to help them to be confidence in addressing and setting higher standards for themselves, and to be able to ask questions, challenge the system and expect more from the schools if their children's studies are not showing good results. This finding confirms what is suggested

in literature regarding the importance of the Tongan and Pacific parents, to have the confidence to ask questions about the education of their children until they understand what is expected of their children (Aitken, 1996).

Thus the findings in this section create a challenge for Australian educators in schools, about some of the culturally-based views and expectations of schooling and the role of students and their parents that are not effective in the education of their students.

## 7.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 3

### **How do the values and culture of Catholic schools influence the engagement in learning of immigrant Tongan students?**

The third research question was developed to grasp a deeper understanding of the impact and influence of the culture of the Catholic school on engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students. In responding to the single question initial narrative (SQUIN) and other probes later in the interviews the Tongan immigrant students spoke at length about the significance of culture of the Catholic school in their efforts to engage in their learning in school. The review transcripts provided three themes that are recurrent throughout their stories. These three compelling themes that shed light on the impact and influence of the culture of the Catholic school on their engagement with learning in school are identified, and the findings are discussed below.

#### 7.4.1 Right relationships

##### 7.4.1.1 *Human person*

Literature revealed that building a right relationship with every person is an important cultural value in the Catholic school (Groome, 1998; McLaughlin, 2000; O’Keefe, 1999), and the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998). In the Tongan culture, life is also governed by right relationships. Right relationship is therefore an important aspect in both the Catholic school culture and the Tongan culture. The understanding of what *relationship* means to the Tongan people, is their right relationships to everyone in their families, schools and communities and goes beyond social relationships with the human person to include relationships to the land, ancestors and their God. The participating students recounted

their experiences where their families sit around to say their prayers and to be involved in kinship relationships in their families, extended families, communities, praying for their ancestors and land, sea and asking God's protection. For example, Lia knew the importance of relationships in dealing with her behaviour to the teachers and other students from her parents in their family prayer session and family monthly meeting for example:

*Yeah, we pray as a family... my parents and each one pray for our needs and we often remember to pray for one another, our loved ones who died, our land and those who get their lives from the sea, and the way we relate and treat one another and the people we meet every day. [pause] Our parents also ask us to share what's going on in school and they often remind us to be good to one another, ..and to obey our teachers and respect all the children and people at school. Sometimes we sit down with the elders and leaders of the community, and they also talk a lot about our relationships with our families, communities, schools and God. (Lia).*

Vai reported that developing good relationship with the teachers, students and others is a key feature of the culture of a Catholic school.

*Yeah, my family is strong in their discipline and trust in God... my school too, is strong in their discipline and their trust in God. We have programmes at school that we able to take turn in giving our views on right relationships. [pause] Our principal and our teachers also remind us at school assembly ...and in the classrooms to respect others and to relate to them in the right way (Vai).*

Sini, also reported that:

*My family has a quality time when we come together for a meeting. We are able to pray and build up our relationships. I always feel good about one another whenever we have a meeting like this with my family. [pause] It is the same at school whenever we have our Religious education class and a prayer together with the class where we share and pray for one another. I feel good because we build up our relationships with one another and I fit in well to the Catholic school... they have the same value as my family.*

Hina also recounted that: *The discipline of the school is very strong in respecting every child, the teachers and everyone in school. We are reminded to have right relationships with one another...In our Tongan homework centre we always pray with our parents, elders and leaders for our needs and to remind us to respect everyone. Some of the administrators affirmed these views as Principal 2.B put it: I found the Tongan students with their cultural values on the aspect of relationship...fit in well to our school culture... whether they are Catholics or not...They have strong beliefs in God and good*

*relationships to their families, communities and others...They respect their elders and they are generally respectful to other students and teachers in school.* Assistant P 2.B also indicated: *We try to make sure that every student is respected and given the opportunity to grow fully...The school provides programmes and activities to help every student to develop to their full potential in their academic, spiritual, social, physical and emotional needs.* The Tongan parents affirmed these views as Longo put it: *In the Catholic school they educate every child to learn about respect, and to develop fully ...not only academic but also spiritual... It is good for Sini to be influenced by this good culture. I am happy that he learns to respect the teachers and all the children at school.* Pua also indicated: *Beliefs and doctrine of the Catholic faith has helped our daughter to engage better in the learning. We also pray at home that they respect everyone...We come together with other parents, elders of our community in the Tongan homework class and we pray for our needs and to respect others.*

The findings revealed the importance of right relationships with everyone (human person) in the school, family and community. The views given also revealed that when elders and leaders are participating in the prayers and meetings on the matter of the relationships within the Tongan community, the members of families feel the strength of their support and often this is a good influence on the Tongan immigrant students' effort to engage in their learning in school. The participants reported that they have linked the idea of working in a group and recognising relationships and interdependence which are crucial among the Tongans as people. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the emphasis that each student, a human person, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of teaching in a Catholic school (The Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998; Groome, 1996).

Thus the findings revealed that the role of the Catholic school in promoting of the human person to every student has strengthened strong personalities in the lives of the Tongan immigrant students.

## **7.4.2 Christian school community**

### **7.4.2.1 Inclusion of all students**

The participating students come from families who have had a great commitment to a

Christian community demonstrated through energy, tenacity and resilience. They reported that their families were supported by Christian schools and they have received a good education in a good school through the service and outreach programme of their Catholic schools with their Christian values. As such it was the collective good of the Christian community aspect of their schools that has helped to give them hope in the difficulties they face in their engagement in learning. One of these aspects is its efforts to be inclusive in its activities and making everyone to feel at home and to be included. Lia recounted: *My family value the opportunity for me to be in a Catholic school where I can be free to share with everyone ...and live out the Christian community way of life and the living of the Gospel... and respect the culture of everyone.* Similarly, Hina indicated that *my parents are happy that we are in a Catholic school because it is a Christian school and it make us to feel at home and accepted as who we are.* The parents affirmed these views as Paongo put it:

*The Catholic school has a Christian community spirit that enable every student to feel at home and to feel that they belonged...Students feel that they are in a one big family...My daughter in Year 12 is the school captain and I am amazed because she is not Catholic...Yeah the culture of a Catholic school does not discriminate her goodness just because she is a Seven Day of Adventist...Vai is also the class captain...she is happy in the school and also the religious programme is inclusive to all students.*

Longo also commented that *it is a Christian school and it has a Christian community that welcome and include everyone from different faiths and cultures...It provides a culture of respect and Sini likes it when the school celebrates feast days with a community liturgy.* Niu further commented: *We like their prayer programme too...because they include everyone ...everyone is encouraged to be proud of her identity and felt belonged in living in a Christian community.* The administrators affirmed these views as Principal 1.A put it: *The aspect of the culture of a Catholic school as a Christian community is important...We provide opportunities for all students to take part in our liturgies and school feast days... The students and their families are happy and feel at home at school.* Teacher 3.A also endorsed these views by indicating that *the aspect of the culture of a Catholic school as a Christian community is like a home for everyone...our Tongan students are very much part of the community and they feel at home.* The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the Christian community climate and the family spirit that the Catholic school create as a community that makes everyone

feel included and belonged (Neal, 1972, cited in Flynn & Mok, 2002).

Some of the participating students also reported that they are safe in their school as a Christian community. For example, Sini recounted that:

*My family are not Catholics but my parents send me to a Catholic school because they treat everyone the same, they have good discipline, I feel safe in my school, they run good programme for sports... I am enjoying being part of our football team for my level. My school is like a home to me.*

Similarly Vai referred to the Catholic school as a place where she enjoyed most of its Religious and cultural activities and experienced the joy of being in a Christian community environment that is safe for everyone:

*I take part in sports, the school choir and am the class captain. I am not a Catholic... but I enjoy the Religious activities at school and especially the school liturgies and our school feast days. Our school live a Christian community life. [pause] I never feel different. The school helps me to be free to study and to be myself. It is also a safe place (Vai).*

The parents affirmed these views as indicated by Maile: *It is a Christian school and it has a Christian community that welcome everyone, from different faiths and cultures. It provides a culture of respect and happiness to all the children and they feel safe at school. This provides a safe environment for their studies.* The administrators also affirmed these views as Principal 1.A indicated: *The aspect of the culture of a Catholic school as a Christian community is very important. We provide opportunities for all students to take part in all activities at school and to feel safe for their studies.* Teacher 6.B affirmed these views by indicating that *Tongans are community minded people because of this they fit in well to the culture of a Catholic school... especially the school as a Christian community. It is also a safe environment for their children to be able to concentrate in their studies and to be happy.*

The findings revealed that the sense of community and belonging that the Catholic schools nurture in the students, teachers, families and communities has a pervasive effect on their education and spiritual lives. However, while both Tongan culture and the culture of a Catholic school have 'community' as an important component of their lives, the complexities of the interactions among its members would also contribute to the difficulties in the engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students.

Notably, Tongan immigrant families in Australia identify themselves with their communities and have developed well established techniques for the preservation of their identity based on the establishment of Tongan church communities. However, the expectations Tongan and Pacific churches place on families are great demands on their resources. For example, Sini recounted that *my parents always give money to pay for our Wesleyan church community [...] to help the ministers and church stuff...this is not good for the family for we do not have much money...and I often do not have what I need for my studies. My school as a Christian community helps my family when we suffer from the demands of our church.* Hina also expressed that *our church community is putting too much pressure in our poor family...there is always something on for collecting money for our Tongan church community and this does not help me in my learning in school.. We are lucky to be in a Christian school...They help us a lot when we suffer from the overspending of our poor family to church community.* The administrators and teachers affirmed these views as Assistant P 1.A put it: *The Tongan students often do not able to pay their school fees and the money for other educational needs...but their families seem to have the money to spend on their Tongan Catholic community.* The teachers also affirmed these views as Teacher 3.A put it: *I was surprised when I was invited by a Tongan student to a celebration of their Tongan Catholic community...her family gave more than two thousand dollars to their yearly collection...the children of this family is struggling to meet the needs of their children in school and their achievement in their performances is low.* The findings revealed that the demands of extended families, communities and church could have negative effect on their children's efforts to engage in their learning. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the expectations Tongan and Pacific churches place on families that are great demands on their resources (Taule'ale'ausumai, 2001).

### 7.4.3 Spirituality

Literature revealed that spirituality is the expression, and the living out of one's religious faith, usually involving a range of religious practices like prayer, reflection and spiritual reading, together with communal worship and liturgies (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). Literature also revealed that more than 90% Tongans are Christians (Latu, 2010), they are very religious and their spirituality is expressed and lived out their religious faith by

involving in prayer, reading the bible, together with worship in church and liturgies. In general, Tongan people believe that when the teachers are teaching the Religious Education lesson and other subjects in the classroom with spiritual values they help the students to learn better. These views are consistent with the findings in this study as Vai put it: *I often sit in front of my mum's picture of the cross and the mother of Jesus and pray to God to give me strength, to show me the way...to do better in my studies...and deal with the problems and distractions at home...this is always helpful...and it does help me in my efforts to do better in my studies.* Vai's mother, Pua endorsed this view by indicating that *Vai loves the programme on their Religious studies and having liturgies...Her prayer life and trust in God helps her in her studies.* Teacher 5.B also affirmed this view by stating that *Tongan students like taking part in our school liturgies...they are also very prayerful...Hina is achieving better marks in her religious education than her other subjects.* The findings revealed that the participating students turn to God for strength and grace to empower them to be confident in their school work and to engage in their learning in school, and they also engage better in their learning when the teachers are teaching the Religious Education lesson and other subjects with spiritual values.

The participating students also reported that the spirituality of the Catholic school is inclusive, despite their cultural values and religious beliefs. They identified themselves as coming from families who are lacking the material resources but are well resourced with a strong spirituality of their beliefs as Christians. For example, Vai recounted that *my family is poor but we have a strong faith in God...this helps me with my struggle with school work.* Sini also commented, *my parents often remind me that my faith in God is more important than money, so I pray at home and always pray before I play footy...this helps me to concentrate in my wish to do well in playing footy...and my difficulty in the classroom.* The teachers affirmed this view as implied in Teacher 4.B's comment, *some of the Tongan boys who are not doing well with their studies are working well together when they are in the football field...They always proud to share publicly their beliefs in God.* Assistant P 2.B also indicated:

*It's amazing to see their great faith in God ...and the belief and culture of the Catholic school... We often see the parents whenever there is something to do with school liturgies...It's great too to see big guys, strong and powerful in playing football, and publicly proclaim their love and belief in God...They do not feel embarrass to admit their belief in God.*

They also identified as being part of the journey in the mission of the Catholic schools for those who are disadvantaged materially. For example, Lia recounted that:

*I come from a family of seven and four of us are now in the same school... my two brothers are in a Catholic Primary school in our area. We all able to attend the Catholic school because they have a special school fees for the low income families. [sign of hesitation]. The strong doctrine of the Catholic school help me to survive in my life. ...when I have difficulty with my study I always turn to God to help me.*

Similarly Sini referred to the spirituality of his school as important to him and his family:

*My family do not have a good income. Both of my parents are working but they have low income. We also have other cousins who are living with us ...and depend on us. The school supported our family with our school fees. [smile] The spirit of the Catholic school are for all people...My parents are happy too because the spirit of a Catholic school gives us the opportunity to learn about respect and love to all people. I always pray to God when I need something and when I am in trouble.*

Hina also recounted that,

*My family is huge and we also have our cousins staying with us. There are ten of us, I have three other sisters and six brothers and two other cousins. My mum never work and my father was just told by the doctor to have cancer in the liver...We are lucky to be in a Catholic school that has a strong spirit in living up the Gospel values. The school is helping our needs.*

When Vai shared the issue in her interview she commented on the fact that her parents chose to send her, her brothers and sisters to the Catholic school because their own private school was too expensive and the Catholic school has a strong spirituality that respects all students.

*My parents wanted us to be in a private school ... to help us to continue to grow in our spiritual life. [smile] We are very lucky that we are all able to be in this school because the fees are much cheaper comparing to our own private school. The school also give us a special fees because of our family situations.*

Thus, the findings revealed that the spirituality of the Catholic schools is inclusive, despite the cultural values and beliefs of their students. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the inclusiveness of the spirituality of the culture of the Catholic schools (Sikimeti, 2005).

Additionally, the study finds that the Tongan immigrant students have found the influence of Jesus on their lives as the inner strengths towards their education. For them,

Jesus is their best friend and the one who journeys with them in their lives especially in difficult times. Hina for example pointed out that *Jesus is my best friend. I pray to Jesus to help me in my difficult times especially in my studies.* On the other hand literature revealed that young people considered teachers had relatively little influence on their spiritual/religious development (Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2006). The findings of this study did not affirm these views. Lia for example pointed out that: *My Religious Education teacher inspires me to love this subject. She has a very strong faith in her Christian faith and she lives up to her Christian life...She treats every student the same and she has a good relationship with all of us.* Some of the participating parents affirmed this view as Niu put it: *In the Catholic school, teachers educate every child to learn about respect and spiritual aspects of life.* These views are consistent with some of the teachers' views as indicated by Teacher 3.A: *Well, our Tongan students like the Religious Education lesson...Most of the choir composed of more than half who are Tongans...They always participating in the spiritual life of the school...Some of them seem to be very competent...and get good marks from the religious instructions that we pass on to them.* Thus findings revealed that Tongan immigrant students considered teachers as good influence on their spiritual/religious development.

The findings in this section found that Tongan immigrant students fit in well to the aspects of relationship, Christian community and spirituality of the culture of a Catholic school. The study also found that the spirituality of the Catholic schools nurtured by the teachers have helped the students and their families to: a) Have a sense of community and belonging. b) Feel safe and respected and c) Feel free to grow spiritually, academically, socially, physically and psychologically to their full potential. The findings also revealed that the four Tongan immigrant students found the demands of their religious beliefs on communities and cultural values, a hindrance to their efforts to engage in their learning in school.

## 7.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 4

### **What teaching and learning experiences are more engaging for Tongan immigrant students?**

The fourth research question was developed to grasp a deeper understanding of the impact and influence of teaching and learning strategies used in the schools, in the efforts of the

Tongan immigrant students to engage in their learning in school. In responding to the single question initial narrative (SQUIN) and other probes later in the interviews, the Tongan immigrant students spoke at length about their experiences on the significance of the teaching and learning strategies used in schools. The interview transcripts provided four themes that recurred throughout their stories and the findings are discussed in this section.

### **7.5.1 Bicultural concepts and bilingualism**

#### ***7.5.1.1 Tongan and English concepts***

Literature revealed the importance of the inclusion of the Tongan culture, language and concepts in teaching in western school context (Manu'atu, 2000; Helu-Thaman, 1996, 1998, 2003). The participating students and their families in this study are taking part in a Tongan homework centre, initiated by the Tongan school supporter of some of the schools with big numbers of Tongans. They got together with some of their community leaders and Tongan tutors for cultural sharing, music and dancing and for homework sessions using both Tongan and English concepts for teaching. Realising that success in doing Maths was heavily reliant on working hard to understand the concepts used, Lia was happy and made up her mind to engage in her Maths. She recounted:

*My Maths marks was always low and most times I failed. My teacher tried to explain the problems but I did not able to follow. She used some examples that I did not understand. [pause] I attended the homework sessions and the Tongan tutor explained the Maths problems slowly... She also gave examples...using Tongan concepts that I understand. It was good that the Tongan Maths tutor was using examples that I was familiar with. She also made it more meaningful and enjoyable to me (Vai).*

Similarly Hina referred to the Maths homework class with a Tongan Maths tutor as a help to solve her difficulty to engage better in her Maths, as she reported in this episode:

*I always failed my Maths test. Whenever we had Maths in school I found it so boring. The teacher talked and tried to explain but I just could not understand what he was talking about... He talked about some examples that I could not understand. I started to go to the Maths sessions every fortnight. I remember when my Tongan Maths tutor asked me if I like Maths. My answer was 'no, I hate it'. Her reply was 'if you hate Maths, Maths will hate you', but if you start to work hard to get to know Maths, slowly... you will know Maths and you will like to have Maths as your friend, and Maths will like you too. [pause] She explained the problems in Maths clearly using Tongan examples that I know.*

Sini also shared that he found the Maths homework session helpful, *I used to get 10 % only for my Maths. It is a great help that the Tongan Maths tutor used both western and Tongan examples... My Maths is a bit better now.* In her attempt to narrate her experience, Vai recounted: *I like the way our Tongan Maths tutor explained the problem and also using both Australian and Tongan examples. She also present Maths in an interesting way.* The participating administrators and teachers did not give their views on this issue however Mapa affirmed these views by indicating: *Vai said that she was happy when the Tongan tutor used both Tongan and English examples... to explain the lesson at the Tongan homework session...this helps her to get better marks for her Maths.* The findings revealed that the participating students identified the learning benefits for themselves and have better learning outcomes because the Tongan tutors used both Tongan and English concepts in their teaching, in a context where they are both valued. The findings of this study are similar to that of Fusitu'a and Coxon (1998) and Manu'atu (2000), regarding the importance of Tongan worldview's concepts to Tongan students' learning and success.

#### **7.5.1.2 Tongan and English language**

The study revealed the importance of using both English and Tongan languages for teaching as Sini put it: *I feel better to attend the Maths session in our Tongan homework because my Tongan tutor used both Tongan and English language to explain the problems.* Vai indicated that *my Maths tutor teach us Maths and other subjects in both English and Tongan languages...It's good because it's makes things easier for me...My marks are improving.* Some of the administrators and teachers gave their views on the issue, as Teacher 6.B indicated: *It is important that sometimes the Tongan students should have the opportunity to use their own language and be encouraged to do this in school.* Some of the participating parents affirmed these views as Mapa put it: *Vai was happy when the Tongan tutor used both English and Tongan languages...to explain the lesson at the Tongan homework session...and she was motivated to engage better in her learning.* The findings revealed that using both English and Tongan languages in the teaching of Tongan students who speak both of the languages can help them to engage better in their learning. The findings of this study are similar to that of Fusitu'a and Coxon (1998) who found that Tongan tutors who used both English and Tongan languages in their teaching, had motivated the Tongan students to enjoy learning, perform better in the western school, achieve better learning outcomes and engaged better in

learning.

While Tongan and Pacific communities have expressed their desire to retain and foster their languages in western context, their languages are sometimes seen as obstacles to learning rather than a resource for learning (Franken, May & McComish, 2005). The participating students in this study affirmed this view. For example, Lia in her narratives pointed out: *My parents want us to talk to them in Tongan at home and the rest of the family in our own language... But they also want us not to hang around with our Tongan friends because we talk in Tongan...for Tongan language is not helping us in our work at school.* The administrators and teachers did not give their views on this issue, however Longo affirmed this view by indicating: *I also like Sini not to go around with his Tongan friends who talk in Tongan to him in school...because I want him to have good friends from the Australian students...to speak in English while in school... to help his study.*

This study also revealed that the participating students found the using of Tongan language also benefits them and their parents in attending the Tongan homework. This helps to solve some of the difficulties that they have experienced in doing their homework. For example,

Vai recounted in the interview:

*We have some Tongan tutors and our educators in our community who help us in our homework sessions at the senior citizens' hall...[pause] Our parents also come along... they were able to learn from Tongan educators who were able to have their own sessions using Tongan language on parenting skills and sharing stories that are helpful for our education...my parents are able to learn skills to be more responsible for our school work...We also have a session where our parents, Tongan educators and us share our stories using Tongan language and relating to our school work. This is very helpful to my studies.*

Hina also pointed out:

*I attend the homework sessions with our Tongan tutor. Our parents also come along...This is good for my studies... it makes me happy to have my parents helping towards our homework...and they also have other Tongan leaders who help them and us ...using Tongan language... to learn from one another in making things easier for us children to do our homework...my parents are helpful now and it is making me happier at school...and my teacher is happy because I do not have demerits for not doing my homework.*

The administrators and teachers did not give their views on the issue, however some of

the parents endorsed these views as Mapa indicated:

*I am also happy because my husband and I are able to attend the parenting session conducted in Tongan language...this is helpful to us...we have better methods in supporting Vai and our children to focus in their studies...Vai also said she is enjoying her studies more.*

The findings revealed the importance of initiating Tongan homework centres where Tongan tutors, leaders, and parents come together to help their children in their homework and as well as helping parents with parenting using Tongan and English languages. These findings are consistent with what is suggested in the literature regarding the importance of using of bilingual languages to help Tongan immigrant students through other initiatives such as Tongan homework centres (Taufe'ulungaki, 2004).

Thus the findings in this section have revealed the importance of teaching and facilitating cultural activities and incorporating a both ways approach (western and Tongan). These findings are also consistent with what is suggested in the literature regarding the importance of integrating the home language, indigenous knowledge and cultural concepts into the teaching and learning strategies (Nakata, 2007).

### **7.5.2 Pedagogies**

Teaching strategies used by teachers in their interactions with their students in the western classroom context are to assist their students to engage in their learning. However, the study revealed that the family situations and culture of the participating students have caused difficulties to them to use these strategies effectively.

Lack of skill in using technology is one area where the Tongan students in this study reported to hinder them from using the teaching and learning strategies effectively. For example all the four Tongan immigrant students are from low income families and they do not have the internet at home. Lia indicated: *I do not participate fully at school because we do not have a computer...and it's hard to do my homework to get my information from the internet.* Sini also indicated that *when my teacher gave us homework to do in the computer...I don't usually do my homework...for we have no computer...and the internet at home.* Hone, one of the participating parents, endorsed these views by indicating that *the school use the modern technology equipment in the classroom...for example, Lia said they use the smart board ...It's important for children*

*in this modern time...but we don't have the internet at home... This is hard for Lia to catch up with the others in the classroom...* These views are consistent with the views of some of the administrators and teachers as Principal 2.B put it: *Yes, so much in our teaching approaches, it is becoming more and more depending on technology...Most of the Tongan immigrant students do not have internet at home...If they don't, their engagement in learning would suffer...It is important to have computers and the internet... It is a necessity for the learning of the students.* Principal 1.A also indicated: *Most of the Tongan students do not have internet at home...it must be hard for them to try to engage in their learning in the classroom when they use the computer.* Teacher 5.B supported these views by saying that it is *very demanding for some of the Tongan students to go to the classroom and try to learn when their knowledge in technology is limited comparing to other students.* The findings revealed that good knowledge in using technology is a necessity for students to be able to engage with their learning in the Australian western classroom context. Therefore, their successful learning outcomes in the classroom could be dependent on their familiarity to using of the computer and internet. Thus, the findings in this section revealed that technology is a necessity for the education of the Tongan immigrant students.

#### **7.5.2.1 Culturally relevant pedagogy**

The findings of this study have suggested that students' achievement is affected by the degree to which a student's culture is respected by the school, and by the degree of similarity between the culture of the community and the values of the school. However, the participating students reported the difficulties that they faced in the classroom, for example Lia recounted: *I was really shy when I started at the secondary school... It's really hard for me in the classroom because they did thing differently from what I used to. This affect my efforts to engage in my learning.* Vai also indicated:

*I find it hard to do things in the classroom in my Tongan way...I am scared of what the teachers and other students think...because the Australian way is different...I went for extra help from my Tongan tutor [...] ...this was helpful because she explained the lessons and gave examples that were familiar and more meaningful for me... This enables me to develop ways to help me to do the more difficult problems.*

Teacher 1.A affirmed these views by indicating that *Tongan students find it hard to catch up with the culture of the classroom because the culture at home is different...and they*

*find it hard to catch up with the lessons.* One of the participating parents, Paongo affirmed these views by indicating that *it is important for the teachers to explain carefully the lesson in the classroom...and use examples that are familiar to the students.* The findings revealed the importance for teachers to have teaching methods that give the opportunity for Tongan students to engage with their learning and to be motivated from using examples that are familiar to them. The findings are similar to that of Bishop (2003) in his claim that teachers support learning best when they seek to understand where learners come from and build on their experiences to make learning meaningful. Furthermore, the findings are also similar to that of Ladson-Billings's (1990) research findings, claiming that in order for African American students to engage in their learning in school, they must experience academic success, and develop and maintain cultural competence.

The study also found that the participating students were experiencing difficulties such as cultural values that are inappropriate for successful learning outcomes in school. These experiences have prohibited them from being self motivated and using the fundamental concepts and structures provided by the teachers in their teaching in the classroom as Hina put it:

*My parents expected all of us... to follow the Tongan culture. It is not easy to practise some of the Tongan cultures... in an Australian society. [deep breath] There are things in our own Tongan way... that are not fit to the Australian lifestyle. [pause] On the other hand it is easier ... to follow the school rules as a student. I learn better at school than at home...[,] some Tongan cultural values stop me from using opportunities in the classroom to help me to be self motivated.*

The participating parents did not give their views on the issue however Hina's views are consistent with the views given by Principal 2.B:

*I am sure few Tongan families have tried to do away from cultural values and beliefs that are not appropriate in this society, and I suppose these ones have been able to help their children to engage better in learning and have done well... How could we able to help the majority of the families to understand these? It is a struggle to be able to meet the needs of the families and the members of the Tongan communities who are not able to see these and continue to live in a poor situation ...their children are often behind in their studies, and disengage in their learning.*

The study found that Tongan immigrant students are struggling to engage in their learning in the classroom because of the effects of the demands of Tongan cultural values and beliefs that are irrelevant to the culture of education.

Curriculum also contains knowledge that has to be delivered to students, however this study revealed that the curricula prescribed by the two schools did not create enough space for Tongan and Pacific world views to emerge. Sini for example indicated that *it's hard for our parents and Tongan community... to come to the school for cultural things...because they are shy. [sign of hesitation] It's not easy when teachers... do not understand our culture...and the teachers teach everything in English and Australian ways.*

Similarly, Hina indicated:

*Yeah it was hard... because I was learning from both sides ... Being a Tongan [pause] it was hard trying to study in my home in... a huge family with many distractions. I need to follow the rules of the Australian school... and the teachers were Australians, [pause] they often did not understand my background and my culture. [.] The teachers teach everything in English...and all in western ways.*

One of the participating parents, Paongo affirmed these views by stating: *It's hard for Hina to follow the teachers' teaching in the classroom and to get good marks because we have a big family and she has to work in an Australian school...the teachers also don't understand our culture and everything in school are in the Australian way.* The findings revealed the importance of having a curriculum that cater for the world views of the Tongan students to be developed positively and to enhance their efforts to engage in their learning. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the need of designing an accessible and relevant curriculum that could increase the engagement in learning of students from different cultural background ((Akey, 2006; Heller et al., 2003; Main & Bryer, 2007).

### **7.5.3 Effective teaching and learning strategies**

#### **7.5.3.1 Teacher caring and teacher support**

The participating students reported that teacher caring and building good relationships in the teaching of the teachers are important to their efforts to engage in their learning. For example, Vai explained: *I was keen to work harder [.] ...and look forward to attend my class because my teacher is caring and treat us all the same.* Similarly Hina referred to her teacher as caring as a key feature of her engagement in learning in the classroom: *My Religious education teacher is caring and understanding I am keen to learn and I look*

*forward to go to the classroom...[.] I also try to do my homework and I get good marks in my lesson...She is also very understanding...she relates well to us in the classroom.* Similarly, Sini indicated that *this year I always try harder to learn in my English lesson because my teacher relates well to me and he acknowledges my gifts in sports...* Lia also indicated: *I did not like Maths and often got low marks... but my teacher this year relates better to each person in the class...and I try harder to learn from his teaching...my marks is improving.* Vai further indicated: *I try to build a good relationship with my Maths teacher and I have better marks in my Maths.* Paongo endorsed these views by stating that *since the beginning of this year...Vai receives better marks in her subjects because she has a good relationship with her teachers...and her teachers are caring.* These views are consistent with some of the teachers' views as Teacher 2.A put it: *It is important for me to build a good relationships with my students in the classroom...one of the Tongan boys in my class is relating well to the teachers and is doing well in his school work.* The findings revealed that teacher caring and good teacher-relationship are crucial in effective learning in the classroom. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the acknowledgement of building good teacher-student relationship as crucial for effective learning (MacBeath, 2006; Prosser et al., 2008; Pasikale, 1999; Rogers & Webb, cited in Tyler, 2009). The findings are also consistent with Brown's (2004) findings in a study of classroom management strategies and culturally responsive teaching, identifying a caring attitude as a major teacher-centered characteristic that facilitated the interaction with ethnically and culturally diverse students.

Furthermore, several studies have also found that students who noted that their teachers had good communication, were supportive and cared about their success, were more likely to be engaged in the classroom and perform well academically (Heller et al., 2003; Akey, 2006; Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; ). These views are consistent with the findings of this study for example, Sini recounted:

*Yeah, ... my classmates think I am confident because when I play football I run fast and score a try easily. But it's because I don't have to talk to the ball. [deep breath] I am conscious of my English accent, ... besides at home I don't talk much... and I fail all my subjects...but it's good my physical education teacher is caring and supportive and I always enjoy his class...I also work hard in his lesson...He communicates well to me...and listen to my need...[.] This is good to me...My Maths teacher is also caring and often acknowledge my success in sports, this encourages me to try harder in my Maths...there is an improvement in my marks and I am engaging better in his lesson this year.*

Vai also indicated: *It's good my English teacher is communicating well... I was very shy, but she was caring and supportive and now I am able to ask question and my English is improving.* Similarly Lia indicated: *My Maths teacher is kind and caring. She communicates well to all in the class...and she makes me feel at home and to be able to speak up in the class now. My Maths mark is better now.* Hina also recounted:

*I used to be afraid to speak in the classroom... and nervous when my teacher asked me anything. One day my teacher asked me to set the table for class's prayer. [smile] I like doing this. I started to relate better to my teacher... Yeah, she communicates well to me and she is caring and supportive...and I learn better in her lesson in the classroom.*

Niu affirmed these views by indicating that *Sini is happy in his school work when his teacher is acknowledging his gifts in sports...and also able to communicate to him about his needs...and consistent in being caring and supportive...because Sini needs patience especially with his academic subjects.* Some of the teachers affirmed these views as Teacher 2.A put it:

*Sini is a brilliant football player and he is capable of doing well in his academic subjects too...he is a very good leader in his team and he is happy when he is communicated to do any job...He needs caring, understanding, patience and support to be motivated to improve his academic subjects...There is a slight improvement in his Maths since he attended the Tongan homework session.*

The findings revealed that the participating students engaged better in the classroom and performed better in their academic subjects when their teachers had good communication, were supportive and caring. The findings challenge teachers to facilitate relationship and communication, classrooms to be non-threatening with teachers respecting and valuing students' contributions. Teachers are also challenged that to foster the teacher/student relationship and communication, their behaviors need to include recognition of student perspectives, affirmation, responsiveness to unusual situations and a general attitude of non-defensiveness. Literature also pointed out that failure to have the right relationship and good communication between the teachers and students in schools have let inevitably to difficulties for immigrant students to engage in their learning (Barker et al., 2004).

Moreover, low teacher expectation on students has negative effect on the efforts of the Tongan students to engage in their learning. For example, *Hina indicated that some teachers label the Tongan students as low achievements in their academic subjects... and*

*they don't have much confidence in our ability in the academic subjects. This discourage me in my efforts to work hard in the classroom.* Lia also indicated that *my teacher thinks that I am only good in sports...and expects me to be like my older sister...this is not helpful towards my achievement in academic subjects.* Maile affirmed these views by stating: *The teachers should have a higher expectations on Lia's performances in her school work in the classroom...but not to expect her to be good in sports only like her sister...this does not help her work in the classroom.* These views are consistent with the views of some of the administrators and teachers as Assistant P 1.A put it:

*When they are in the classroom environment they play with each other and do not concentrate in what the teachers are trying to teach...based on their performances in their academic subjects...we often do not have high expectation on their learning outcomes...we need to find a way that we could help us to solve this issue in order to help them to engage better in their learning.*

Teacher 3.A also pointed out:

*The Tongan students are constantly failing from the academic subjects...And we don't have high expectation on their achievements... especially in their academic subjects. We have to get to break that circuit and see where we can help in that aspect.*

The findings revealed that teachers' low expectation on Tongan students to do well in their academic subjects in the classroom has become a hindrance for better efforts in their engagement with their learning. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding low teacher expectation of student capacities that have strong negative effects on student effort (Prosser, et al., 2008; Tadich, et al., 2007). Furthermore, the findings of this study are challenged by Alton-Lee's (2003), emphasizing that effective teaching requires teachers to take responsibility for every student's achievement to value diversity, have high expectation and build on student's experiences.

Peer group pressures is another area that distracts the Tongan students from focusing in the teaching in the classroom and causing them to disengage with their learning. For example, Sini recounted: *I think I need to do something...[deep breath] I am stuck with friends who are gangsters and not going to school...and this affect my concentration in the teaching in the classroom.* Some of the parents affirmed these views as Maile pointed out: *My daughter hangs around with the wrong friends among her peer group, and it has made it hard for her to concentrate in her studies in the classroom.* Niu also reported:

*Sini is easily led by his friends, and sometimes hanged around with the wrong friends...I am very concerned because he does not concentrate in the teaching from the teachers in the classroom.* Some of the administrators affirmed these views as Assistant P 1.A put it:

*The Tongan students are having pressures from their own peer groups...their friends could have influenced them by saying ...'study is not cool, why do you have to study, and so on...the teachers said that some of them play with each other and do not concentrate and listen to the teaching in the classroom...and they don't engage in their learning.*

The findings revealed that peer group pressures is affecting the concentration of the Tongan students in the classroom and therefore hinder them from motivating to engage in their learning. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding peer pressure influencing on motivation and effort that teachers try to provide in their teaching to support the learning of the students (Sullivan et al., 2005; Harrison & Prain, 2009; Hadwin et al., 2005).

### **7.5.3.2 Good teaching**

The participating students are from a Tongan minority group who get formal education in environments predicated on western values and are initiated into a new culture that is very different to their primary socialization. They make this leap from home to school culture that is a much wider leap for them than for western middle class students. In their narratives they indicated the difficulties they went through in their interactions with the teaching in the classrooms at different levels. In her narratives, Vai evaluated her role as a student in noting *as a student like me, and a Tongan... I don't often understand the teaching of my teacher because she just give us the introduction...and often sit on her chair and just ask us to do the work from the text books. Sometimes I go to another smart student to explain to me later what the teacher meant.* Sini also shared in his narratives, the difficulty of being in a western classroom when he recounted:

*Yeah...I found it difficult to follow the teachings in the classroom... and I was bored because sometimes my teacher just gave us the textbooks to do the exercises and he did not show us how to do the problems. He asked us to correct our work from the answers on the back of the book. [pause] He did not know that I just pretended to do my exercises... I only copied the answers from the back of the book. I was so bored and I could not wait for the bell to go.*

Sini explained that he was bored because he was only given the text book to work out

how to do the exercise. This increased his negative attitude towards the teaching in the classroom. In this incident there was no demonstrating of teaching technique from the teacher and this has perpetuated Sini's disengagement with his learning in the classroom.

On the other hand, Hina indicated in her story, the experience she faced in trying to understand the teaching of an enthusiastic teacher. Hina recounted: *My English teacher was always coming ready to teach us. She talked a lot. She showed us some pictures but they were all about 'palangi' people. I wish that she talked less and give more meaningful examples.* The participating parents gave their views on the issues as Pua put it: *It is important for teachers to explain the lessons clearly and give examples that are relevant to the lives of the children.* Some of the administrators affirmed these views as Assistant P 2.B put it: *Very often when the teachers prepare well and have good probing questions to encourage the students to share their own ideas to contribute to the learning...these are more effective..* The findings revealed the importance of teachers to use effective teaching strategies. The findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the importance of teachers to use effective teaching strategies to help the students to participate actively in the learning process so that they can relate to what is being taught (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006; Hadwin et al., 2005; Prosser et al., 2008; Sullivan et al., 2009; Grinsven & Tillema, 2006; Akey, 2006).

The participating students also reported that teaching is implicitly a cultural process, where the interactions between teachers and students do not necessarily benefit the Tongan and Pacific students, and success in school is dependent on familiarity with the dominant culture. For example, Sini pointed out that *it's really hard at school because everything is in the Australia way... I can't do my work in the Tongan way and the teachers can't use some Tongan examples in the classroom.* Similarly Hina referred to learning in the classroom as a struggle because of the way the lessons and strategies used in the classroom were in the English language and the Australian way and centred in the western cultural strategies. She declared: *I do everything in the Tongan way at home ...and when I go to the classroom at school everything is in the Australian way... so I had to switch my mind into doing everything in the western way (Hina).* The parents did not give their views on the issue however, the administrators and teachers affirmed these views as implied in Assistant P 2.B's comment: *It must be hard for them to come to school and try to do things according to our Australian way...It is important to invite*

*them to share their own stories and meanings that are important and relevant to their experiences and relating to the lessons. Teacher 3.A also indicated: Yeah, some of them are struggling in the classroom because they are not familiar with some of the examples we use in our teaching...often when we invited them to share their stories and to share something about their culture relating to the lessons they are always so keen to learn.*

The findings found that some Tongan concepts and cultural values are not built into effective ways in relating to the Australian schools, and therefore the teaching and learning processes in the classroom advantage some students and disadvantage some of the Tongan students. The findings are similar to Jone's (1991) study that demonstrated how teaching and learning processes in the classroom advantage students who are familiar with the culture in the western classroom context, and disadvantage those who are from small ethnic groups.

This study also revealed that both School A and School B have negotiated instructional strategies such as collaborative learning, and have designed relevant curriculum to include activities to increase student engagement in learning. Lia indicated: *We have a programme in school where some of the school supporters and volunteers help us with our reading and special needs...This is to help towards students who are disengaging in their learning...This helps me to engage better in my learning.* Hina also indicated: *Our school has a programme to help those who have special needs in their reading and other needs...and to help their writing too...I attend this programme and I find that I do better in my writing.* Niu endorsed these views by stating: *I am happy with the opportunities that Sini receives at school...including the help with his reading and homework. There are also people like yourself who help him... to engage better in his learning.* Some of the administrators endorsed these views as Principal 2.B put it: *Our learning supporting teachers in our school have been working with school supporters, volunteers and community people in developing our reading recovery programmes to help all the students including the Tongan immigrant students who need special help in their reading and writing.* Assistant P 1.A also indicated that *our reading recovery programme with the one to one session with our learning supporting teacher is a success. I have talked to teachers and they said they have been very good and very respectful. This could probably our best approach to help them with their reading and writing.* The findings revealed that the students found the reading recovery programme with one to one interaction helpful to

both their reading and writing. The findings revealed that the two participating schools have created relevant curriculum that could help to enhance the engagement in learning of those who struggle to engage in their learning. These findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding instructional strategies views such as collaborative learning, and the designing of the relevant curriculum, that have shown to increase student engagement in learning (Akey, 2006; Heller et al., 2003). However, Weiss & Pasley (2004) challenged the findings of this study by claiming that teachers should also aim to create a culture in the classroom so that the whole class could find learning interesting and asking questions is not only okay, but also expected.

### 7.5.3.3 *Strengths-based approach*

Literature revealed that drawing connections between information taught and real life such as everyday life, social issues and using the cultural context, is highly effective in engaging students in the lesson (Akey, 2006; Heller et al., 2003). These views are consistent with the findings in this study. For instance, Vai indicated: *When my teacher gave us an essay to write on my favourite cultural food...I wrote a very good essay [...]... my teacher was very happy with my writing and I got a very good grade...because it's relevant to my culture.* The participating parents did not give their views on the issue, however Teacher 2.B affirmed this view by indicating that *the three Tongan immigrant students in my class wrote very interesting essays whenever they were given topics that were persuasive and they could easily relate to.* Similarly, Teacher 3.A also recounted:

*We find a lot of the Tongan students, are very creative. They are writing with complex thinking too, not simple, they write beautiful poetry and they are also good speech makers in Tongan language. May be that is a window through that we could enable their culture to help them to be able to do something meaningful and enjoyable for themselves...Often when we invited them to share their stories and to share something about their culture relating to the lessons they always so keen to learn...They also like to be acknowledged. Once they are getting into things in a positive way they seem to be more motivated towards their learning.*

The findings revealed that Tongan students are gifted, creative in their writing and could do well in their academic subjects, therefore Yunkaporta (2010) and Martin (2007) challenge the teachers to learn to know and recognise the values and the gifts of the students and to create methods of teaching to challenge the indigenous students to demonstrate academic power by drawing issues and ideas that they find meaningful. In

addressing this challenge, they emphasise the importance to teach and base on meaningful stories of the students (Yunkaporta, 2010; Martin, 2007).

Literature also revealed that in trying to be culturally responsive, teachers can get caught in cultural stereotypes about Tongan and Pacific learners which then limit the students' learning opportunities (Ringold, 2005). These views are consistent with the findings of this study. Vai for example indicated that:

*My Maths teacher took a special group of students from our class...[,] most of the group are from Tonga and the South Pacific...and she tried to teach us only the easy problems...I wish that she taught us the hard problems too...She thinks that all the Tongan and Pacific students are not good in Maths.*

Similarly, Lia indicated that:

*When my teacher helped us the Tongans in our homework sessions... he tried to limit the language he used... because he thought that we could not able to understand the complex language. This limit our learning...and made it more difficult for us the Tongan students... to engage fully in our learning.*

Teacher 4.A affirmed these views by indicating that *we hesitate to give work that are challenging to the Tongan students because we are mindful of their capabilities...most of them are better in sports.*

Literature also revealed that students get into a pattern of learning progress that were independent, when they can engage actively with school activities and teachers from the start of school, and students also engage better with school activities and teachers when they have had prior experience of such activities and relationships (Phillips et al., 2002, 2004; Wylie et al., 2009). These views are consistent with the findings of this study. For example, Vai recounted: *Yeah, I was happy that I got to know the teachers at the very beginning...[,] This helped me to engage in our school cultural activities, the school work ... and I was able to engage actively in the classroom, sports and school choir...This has helped me to motivate and work independently in my studies.* The parents did not give their views on the issue, however, Principal 2.B indicated that

*we try to use teaching and learning strategies that enable the students to develop inquiring and critical mind and the ability to ask question in the classroom and to challenge the attitudes and values in the school communities that are unfair, and as well as critiquing the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities. This will help them to work independently in their school work, to engage in their learning and to achieve good learning outcomes.*

The findings in this section also have revealed the importance for teachers to use teaching methods that enable the students to develop inquiring and critical mind, the ability to ask questions in the classrooms and to challenge the attitudes and values in the school communities that are unfair. The findings are consistent with Ladson-Billings' (1990) findings, claiming that teachers must develop in the students, not only characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, but students must also develop a broader socio political consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities.

#### **7.5.4 *Effective school leadership***

Effective teaching needs effective school leadership focused on achievement. Literature revealed that enhanced student achievement outcomes only occurred once school leadership and management moved their focus from operational matters to student achievement (Brewerton, 2010). In this study the participating students revealed that their school leadership team and teachers have made the efforts to make the Tongan immigrant students equal with everyone else in the school and this has influenced their performance in schools. For example, Hina recounted:

*I was happy when our school selected my brother to be the assistant school captain in our school... I was proud of him and my teacher said that he was the first Pacific islander to be in that position... I felt proud to be a Tongan and this is good for my study.*

Similarly, Vai recounted:

*My sister is the school captain of our school this year. She is the first Tongan to have this position in our school. I am proud of her. The other Tongan students are also happy for my sister. [determination] This helps me to do my best in my work at school...and my marks are improving*

The administrators and teachers have affirmed these views as implied in Teacher 3.A's comment: *Our school captain is a Tongan and she is a good model to our Tongan students...and this could help them to work hard in their studies and to achieve better learning outcomes.* Assistant P 2.B also indicated: *We have a very good role model among the Tongan boys...he is the captain in the school senior football team and also one of our school leaders. He is doing well with his studies too...He is a good influence*

*among the Tongan students...to help them to engage in their learning in the classroom and as well in the outside activities.* Pua affirmed Assistant P 2.B's view by indicating: *Hina is keen to improve her attitudes towards her studies...and her brother is a good influence to her because he is among the leaders in their school...He is good in sports and also good in his studies.* The findings revealed that the Tongan students engaged better in their learning and have achieved better learning outcomes because the school leadership teams have made the efforts to make the Tongan immigrant students equal with everyone else in the school and as well as recognizing their potential to be good leaders in their schools.

The strategic move that one of the principals of the participating schools took is directed toward the goal to transform the school from a western oriented one to a community school, as a consequence he defined his leadership on a transformative path of creating community. He stated, *I have always had the feeling that the school should be a community school (Principal 1.A).* The pattern suggested by his belief revealed a school in Australia is for the community, *consists of students from different nationalities and ethnic groups (Principal 1.A).* In that way Principal 1.A was in a privileged position to study the western structure and prepare him to transform Australian schooling. Part of his strategy included creating a transformative path, through leadership, to create a management structure that accommodate involvement of the whole community. The findings in this study also revealed that some of the administrators of the schools have made the efforts to create a management structure that accommodate involvement of the whole school community as Principal 1.A commented: *I have always had the feeling that the school should be a community school.* Assistant P. 2.B also commented. *our school is also committed to our vision to involve the families and communities of our students in our school meetings and decision making, and helping the parents and the leaders of their communities to realize that they are co-leaders in the education of their children in school.* Principal 2.B also commented that *there is a Tongan boy in school who is doing very well, not only in sports but also in his academic subjects. His parents are very supportive in all the activities in school... His parents are playing their roles as leaders very well, both at home and in school... He is also a good leader to the South Pacific students and all the other students.* The parents in this study also believed that the success of the teaching and learning strategies in school and the general education of their

children would require a team effort from the school, the Tongan families and communities. The parents' stories also affirm the notion of schools as communities of people including the staff, students, parents and their local communities. In order for their children to achieve good learning outcome some of the parents were aware that there needed to be a degree of common understanding and shared responsibility between the school and parents as leaders to support their children's education. For example, Mapa, one of the participating parents pointed out:

*I seek advice from a Tongan leader...that's how I built my confidence to do my work and to help in my children's education...I help my daughter and the Tongan students to teach our own cultural songs and dances for the school feast days and other activities in school...I believe that when I do my best in what I can, to support my daughter's education, I am playing my role as a leader effectively...When I help her to pay her school fees and to do her homework, I also help to support the leaders and teachers in school in their efforts, as leaders, to provide opportunities for our children to engage in their learning.*

The stories of the participating students also affirm the importance of the school, families and communities to work as a team as leaders to support them in their education as Lia put it:

*The leaders in school, our parents...and Tongan leaders work together, ...they work together as our leaders to help us to engage better and to have better learning outcome... they all support us in the Tongan homework sessions...Our parents, some Tongan leaders and a teacher at school are working together to help us in our homework...and this is very helpful to me and my school work is improving.*

The findings of the study revealed that team efforts in leading the school, including leaders of the school, parents and the community leaders are crucial to effective teaching and learning to the Tongan immigrant students. The findings also revealed that the students engaged better in their learning and have achieved better learning outcomes because the leadership teams of their schools have made the efforts to create a management structure that accommodate involvement of the families and the whole community. This management structure also cater for a school leadership team that create teaching and learning strategies that provide strong positive effects on student learning. The management structure also accommodates for effective leadership that could integrate expectations and accountability, efficacy and support and elements of effective leadership. The findings are consistent with the findings revealed in the research

conducted by Wahlstrom et. al (2010), emphasizing that principals' sense of collective efficacy as a key to leadership influence on teaching and learning, educational leadership have strong positive effects on student learning, and effective leadership depends on expectations, efficacy, and engagement. Furthermore, the findings confirm what is suggested in the literature regarding the need to have effective school leadership focused on higher students' achievement linking with existence of an effective community of professional practice within a school leadership that focused consistently on every student's learning outcomes and worked collaboratively to improve teaching practice (Timperley et al., 2003).

Thus the findings in this section have revealed the importance of teachers' attitudes in teaching, teachers to have love and care in their teaching, students to engage actively with school activities, students to have a sense of autonomy and responsibility for how and what they learn, the inclusion of the students' interests in the learning process and teaching and facilitating cultural activities and incorporating a both ways approach (western and Tongan), 'teachers' are the most important elements in students' learning at school, and effective teaching needs effective school leadership.

## **7.6 SUMMARY**

In concluding this chapter and addressing the research questions the findings can be understood as interrelated components. Engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students in schools involve the interrelating of administrators, teachers, Tongan parents, leaders and students. This interrelationship through social interaction, collaborative efforts and interdependent of one another has caused consequences all involved in their families, schools and Tongan communities. These consequences involve language, family financial difficulties and some aspects of Tongan culture that have contributed to the poor performance of the Tongan students in school. Right protocols regarding the welfare of the Tongan immigrant students, the importance to trust and respect the views of the Tongan immigrant students and the importance of professional development for the teachers regarding issues such as the cultures of the Tongan families are also part of this interrelationship.

Furthermore, relationships and sense of Christian community have positive effects on the

efforts of the Tongan immigrant students to engage in their learning and spirituality and religion are crucial in the lives of Tongan immigrant students and they are central in guiding them in their efforts to engage in their learning in school. The homework sessions after school and at Tongan homework centres can be helpful and as well as using Tongan concepts and bilingualism in teaching are effective when used by Tongan tutors.

Moreover Tongan worldviews reflected in teaching and learning are important to incorporate at school as a way of reinforcing identity and learning in school and it is important to teach and facilitate cultural activities and incorporate a both ways approach (Western and Tongan). The importance of using pedagogical styles that could be effective to ethnically and culturally diverse immigrant students. These pedagogical styles are complex and evolve in a cultural context and rely on collaborative effort of the school, family, community and as well as the students. The findings also revealed that 'teachers' are the most important elements in students' learning at school and effective teaching needs effective school leadership.

Finally, the findings revealed the difficulties and challenges that the Tongan immigrant students faced in their engagement in learning in school. These have included their unsuccessful and negative school and home experiences, cultural differences, poor self-image and anxieties created from their family and community situations. The study also revealed that culture has a significant impact and influence in their efforts to engage in their learning in school. This centrality of culture is noteworthy in this study since it is the core of their schools, families and communities relationships. The summary of this research with recommendations for further research, policy and practice will be discussed in the next chapter.

*I hear the birds on my tree of love, singing love song to make me smile, they satisfy my deep longing, and with you, my dear heart I live (Appendix 2).*

## 8.1 THE JOURNEY ENDS

### 8.1.1 Introduction

This thesis is about the journey of four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students and the involvement of their parents, administrators and teachers in their experiences in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning. This chapter provides a summary of the research and addresses a number of significant outcomes and recommendations from this journey. In this light, the chapter will address four things: firstly, the purpose of the research, the chosen framework and research questions; secondly, summary of the findings; thirdly, conclusions of the research; and, lastly, recommendations for policy and practice in education; and concluding reflection on the researcher's personal journey on the engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in Australian school contexts.

## 8.2 THE RESEARCH PURPOSE AND FRAMEWORK

In chapter 1, the purpose of this qualitative biographic narrative interpretive case study approach was stated as follows:

“To explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students’ engagement with learning in Australian Catholic schools and identify the issues influencing these experiences.”

In order to investigate this phenomenon the literature review focused on four major bodies of literature that were relevant to this study. Namely, Australian school community; Tongan family and community; Catholic school culture; teaching and learning. These four identified bodies of literature provided a framework that underpinned the research questions. The general research question was:

What factors have influenced Tongan immigrant students’ engagement in learning in Australian Catholic schools?

Arising from this general question were subsidiary research questions designed to give shape and direction to the research process. These were:

1. What have been the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in an Australian school community?
2. How do Tongan immigrant families and community influence Tongan immigrant students' engagement in learning at Australian Catholic schools?
3. How do the values and culture of Catholic schools influence the engagement with learning of immigrant Tongan students?
4. What teaching and learning experiences are more engaging for Tongan immigrant students?

In searching for a range of values and ideology that would answer the research questions, great consideration was given to *constructionism* as the most appropriate in accordance with claims that Tongan people have a worldview, that is dissimilar to the dominant European people in western societies (Hau'ofa, 2000; Helu-Thaman, 2003; Manu'atu, 2000). Consequently, in defining the epistemology for this study, consideration was given to influences such as social, cultural, and historical contexts that are important factors that could be considered in the discussion of knowledge claims. Thus, this study claims a voice of a Tongan indigenous epistemology in acknowledging the use of Tongan traditions and knowledge, and as well as utilising what is useful to its research process.

Through a Tongan mat metaphor and narrative inquiry as a culturally appropriate way of representing the Tongan immigrant students' voices, the Tongan immigrant students provided valuable insights into their journeys in their experiences in Australian Catholic schools and issues influencing these experiences. As a technique in narrative interviewing the Biography Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) was adopted in this study, and considered most suitable for investigating the perspectives of the Tongan immigrant students. The Tongan immigrant students, in this study, brought to their experiences in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning, their varied social and cultural experiences that are critical to understanding why they did things the way they chose to do them. *Talatalaifale* was adopted and considered most suitable for investigating the perspectives of the parents, and the focus group interview was adopted to investigate the perspectives of the administrators and teachers

on the research questions. A reference panel was also used as a way of “facilitating the introduction of multiple voices” (Jones, 2001, p. 7) to help with the analysis and verification of the data of the Tongan immigrant students.

### **8.3 THE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

With the careful formation of the research framework and research questions, the Tongan students spoke freely about their experiences in their engagement with learning in school. The choice of biographical approach particularly suited to explore the experience of interaction between individual subjectivities and purposes and roles as Tongan immigrant students was helpful in addressing the research questions that ultimately generated significant findings. The results from the views and understandings of the parents, administrators and teachers on the research questions revealed a significant level of commonality and interrelatedness in addressing the general research question. These results were used to compare claims, arguments and recommendations relating to the experiences of the Tongan immigrant students in their engagement with learning in school.

The main participants in the study were Tongan immigrant students from two Catholic secondary schools in the western suburbs of Sydney (CEO, 2010), which had the highest number of Tongan immigrant students in the Archdiocese of Sydney. They were from low income families and belonged to three Christian denominations. The study revealed that as Tongan immigrant students they were quick to realise engagement in learning in school as a quality at the core of successful learning outcomes. However, they have experienced immense difficulties and challenges in their efforts to engage in their learning in school.

These difficulties and challenges included constantly walking between two worlds that are polarized, family financial difficulties and the hanging on of their families to cultural values that are irrelevant to their educational needs. Hence in an effort to cope in their situations in a western school context, the four Tongan immigrant students created ways to help them in their efforts to engage in their learning. This was an attempt to solve the difficulties that had widened the gap between their families and schools. Essentially, they described their efforts to engage with their learning in school, as students who connected

to their families, schools and communities. In creating structures that were in harmony with their world views they gave a voice to the difficulties and challenges that ultimately led to their disengagement with their learning in school.

For all the participating students, the difficulties and challenges they were facing from their families' situations were considerable but their desires to get a good education to have a better life were greater. They revealed a determination to remain loyal to the values and cultures of their families and schools. The study also revealed that their effort to integrate into the Australian school community was difficult because their culture and the culture of the school clashed. For example, they were taught at home to listen to the views of their parents, elders and leaders and not to challenge these views. Thus, it was difficult for them to ask questions and to give their views in the classroom. Similarly, their parents have reported that they have taught their children to always listen to their teachers in the classroom, and to respect their teachers' views. On the other hand, the administrators and teachers reported that they expected the students to ask questions and to express their views in the classroom. This Tongan cultural behavior in the finding is in conflict with the western school context where teachers are expected to make decisions based on the perceptions of the Tongan immigrant students regarding the communication.

The study revealed that the inability of the parents to integrate into the school activities, to help with their children's school work and to attend school meetings conducted in English, have contributed to the difficulty of the Tongan immigrant students to engage in their learning. Hence, the Tongan immigrant students, their parents, administrators and teachers believed that the Tongan school supporter's role is important in liaising between school and the Tongan families. The study also revealed that the families' problems and financial difficulties have contributed to the students' struggles to adapt to the culture of the Australian school community, to contribute to school activities and to engage in their learning. The school principals and pastoral care coordinators revealed that the schools' welfare department have helped with school fees and other educational needs of the Tongan immigrant students. The parents affirmed that the schools helped to ease their responsibilities to educate their children by catering for their needs and financial situations.

The students were encouraged to be proud of their culture, to share their cultural values

and as well as relating their own experiences and cultural concepts to their efforts to engage in their learning in school. However, the study revealed that the Tongan immigrants traditionally believe that the teachers are the experts in all academic and religious subjects and knew better than they and therefore they could not challenge them. The administrators and teachers also reported that the Tongan parents believed that it was the school's responsibility to educate their children. Finally, on the section on Australian school community, one of the four students revealed that his great love for football and sports had made it difficult for him to engage in his academic subjects. It was therefore no surprise that there had been a tendency for administrators and teachers to assume that the Tongan students are simply not capable of facing the challenge to engage in the learning of the academic subjects.

Tongan immigrant students regarded themselves as belonging to Tongan families and communities who have different culture from the Australian (western) families. The study also revealed that home environment and parental involvement in the students' education are major factors. Ethnic Tongan culture encourages children to become good members of their Tongan and church communities. For this purpose, one's total commitment to communal activities and requirements is vital. Typical ethnic Tongan immigrant parents spend a large amount of time and money in contributing to ceremonies, extended families and church activities, sometimes at the expense of their children's education. The administrators and teachers also pointed out that the Tongan families had difficulties in supporting their children in school because they spent a lot of their time and resources with their Tongan church communities and extended families. Building such a network with extended families and Tongan communities involved in their activities and decision making is regarded by Tongans as a cultural value. This has left the parents' responsibilities to their children's education as a second priority, with the parents often relying on the schools to fill the gap for them. This has caused a negative impact on the children's performances in school.

All four Tongan immigrant students were struggling in doing their homework at home. It was difficult for them to study at home with too many distractions from their families living in small houses. The parents also reported that their children found it hard to study at home because they have large families with limited space and resources for their children's school work. There was also a sentiment expressed by some of the

administrators and teachers about the difficulties of the Tongan families in supporting their children on their educational journeys, and the need for the Tongan immigrant students to do their homework. The study revealed that, in order for the Tongan immigrant students to perform better in school, they need space at home and their families' full understanding and support.

In the school context, the study revealed that it is important for the Tongan immigrant students to learn about both the culture of the school and their Tongan culture through the integration of activities. Some of the administrators reported that their schools provided opportunities for cultural activities that supported the enhancement of relationships and inclusiveness of the cultures of their students. Some of the Tongan parents also emphasised the importance of their children being well grounded and connected to their Tongan culture. The Tongan immigrant students also reported that being well grounded in their Tongan culture has helped them to engage better in their learning. They found that when the school got together to share and enjoy one another's culture it had helped them to feel comfortable in a very special way in the school context.

Tongan communities interact with an understanding of strict cultural protocols. Such protocols involve the elders, grandparents and community leaders acting as mediators between the Tongan families and the schools. This was important to the Tongan families. As such, the study revealed that the issue of cultural sensitivity in communication and feedback is significant to the Tongan culture. Applying wrong protocols, even with well-intended reasons, can stall partnership activities with families in supporting the Tongan immigrant students in their engagement in learning. It is therefore important for school personnel to communicate and give feedback to families in the right protocols. Another area of sensitivity had been the issue of appreciation of the interests of elders, grandparents and community leaders.

The study found that 'identity' is a crucial issue for the Tongan immigrant students and their families for it is critical to their positive cultural continuity. They have come to appreciate their Tongan identity as a source of constant direction, based on a core conviction that it provided a foundation for self-acceptance. All four participating students reported that they were proud of their Tongan identity. However, they have also experienced difficulties and feelings of sadness because of other negative cultural values

associated with Tongan culture that are not relevant to the culture of the school. These are barriers to their engagement in learning in school and caused embarrassment to their Tongan identity.

Some of the administrators at School A and School B reported that they have tried to involve the Tongan parents in cultural activities at school and in school meetings. In addition the Tongan immigrant students expressed their beliefs in the importance of the involvement of their parents in the activities at school, which they believed would enhance their efforts to engage with their learning in school.

It could be expected that, having made the sacrifice to send their children to Catholic schools, Tongan parents would give their full support to their children in their education and would show better cooperation, understanding and promote shared responsibility with the schools. However, the day-to-day activities of these families were a constant uphill battle and caused difficulties for all the participating students.

Religion is the top priority in the culture of all the families of the participants. This culture also coincides with the culture of the Catholic school. Although some of the Christian faith followers are not in line with Catholicism, the research showed the Tongan families have a spirituality based on strong faith, love, hope and sharing through their relationship with one another, other people, their God and all God's creation in their world. As such the study revealed that all four participating students turn to God for strength when they face difficulties in their studies. They also identified with those who are disadvantaged materially and have benefited from the mission of the Catholic schools, especially those who are from low income families. Similarly, the Tongan parents expressed that they would like their children to pray and have their faith in God as the first priority in their lives, and to turn to God for help in their studies. Some of the administrators and teachers also reported that Tongan students and their families have shown that their prayers and faith in God have been a priority in their lives.

The Catholic schools establish a good foundation in the relationships of the schools' communities by embracing the cultures of all their students. The Tongan immigrant students and their parents reported that they valued the aspect of relationship at their school. These included their social relationships, cultural music and dances, and celebrating the spirits of their ancestors and God. All four Tongan immigrant students

and their parents also revealed that, as families, they sat around on the Tongan mats to say their prayers and were involved in kinship relationships. These relationships also helped them to support one another and support the Tongan immigrant students in doing their school work. The study revealed that when elders and leaders have participated in the prayers and meetings on the matter of relationships, they have felt the strength of their support. This study also found that this view has linked the Tongan immigrant students to the idea of working in a group and recognizing the joy of interdependence, which is crucial among the Tongans as people. Some of the administrators and teachers also expressed that the Tongan immigrant students and their families are committed to the prayer life of the school and this has been a strong influence on their efforts to engage with their learning in school.

A Catholic school expects every child to be aware of their relationship to their family, community, school, friends, their God and the world around them. The study found that the Tongan immigrant students, their parents, administrators and teachers were aware of the message of Christ's teaching in their experiences of the Catholic school. The study also revealed that the Catholic school as a Christian community, provided them with a strong mind and values education through their Christian values in their services and outreach programmes. As such, it was the collective good of the Christian community aspect of their schools that energized them to face the difficulties that they have faced in their studies.

The study also found that the Tongan immigrant students experienced in their school the spirit of a Christian community which bonds together leaders, teachers, students and parents which was a life giving experience. These experiences were often expressed in the celebrations of their school feast days, cultural activities, school liturgies and sports. These made them feel at home at school and also seemed to have an important moral impact on their education. The Tongan parents also expressed the importance of the school's cultural and religious activities for their children's education. Some of the administrators and teachers also stressed the importance of the cultural and the religious values of the Tongan immigrant students in considering the issue of their educational engagement.

The study revealed that the students saw the influence of Jesus and the teachers on their lives as being the inner strength of their education, especially in difficult times. Some of

the administrators and teachers also reported that the Tongan families have fitted well into the spirituality and religious practice of the Catholic school culture. The Tongan immigrant students, their parents, administrators and teachers have expressed that the spirituality of the Catholic school had been inclusive and embraced the rights and freedom of all students to have a good education, irrespective of their cultural background and denominations. As such, the study revealed that the role of the Catholic school in promoting the human person in every student has developed a strong sense of self in the lives of the Tongan immigrant students. Thus the findings in the section on Catholic school culture found that, although Tongan immigrant students have met with difficulties and challenges in their studies, they have also fitted in well with the aspects of relationship, community and spirituality of the culture of a Catholic school. This has become a strength in their struggles to engage in their learning in school.

While the schools are established on western teaching and learning strategies, the role of the culture and experiences of the Tongan immigrant students in the interactions in the classroom were critical to their engagement in learning. The students reported that they got into a pattern of learning progress when they could engage actively with school activities and when they have had prior experiences of such activities and relationships. The administrators and teachers also indicated that the students have learned better when their cultural values and experiences have been included in the teaching techniques.

All the Tongan immigrant students and their parents revealed that they have taken part in a Tongan homework centre, initiated by the Tongan school supporter and supported by the Tongan families and some Tongan leaders and educators. The study also revealed that the Tongan tutors have taught the students using both English and Tongan concepts in their teaching. The Tongan students were also taught to develop their abilities to learn independently and to have the confidence to ask questions and to speak out to extend their learning. This has helped them to be self-motivated and eager to learn independently. As such, the study revealed the importance of using Tongan cultural concepts and language for teaching the Tongan immigrant students because they identified the learning benefits for themselves from the tutor's explanations of key concepts using bilingualism (English and Tongan languages). The culturally based style of their interactions have made it easier for the students to understand the concepts used.

The Tongan immigrant students and their parents reported the importance of the Tongan

language as a vehicle for transmitting their cultural values, understanding and beliefs that are unique to their Tongan culture. The Tongan language has also been crucial to their academic learning and engagement in their learning. The students reported that while their parents have valued their Tongan language they also have viewed proficiency in the English language as the key to academic success. Thus, the Tongan language could also be a serious disadvantage to the education of their children as all the lessons are conducted in English in the Catholic secondary school.

The Tongan immigrant students in this study are from a Tongan minority group who get formal education in Australian schools with western values and are initiated into a new culture that is different to their primary socialization. They have to bridge this gap from home culture to school culture with a much wider gap than the western middle class students have. As such, the study revealed the difficulties that the Tongan immigrant students went through in their interactions with the teaching in the classrooms at different levels. In contrast to the importance of dual learning using both English and Tongan concepts in the teaching techniques, one of the Tongan immigrant students reported that there were some incidents that demonstrated a lack of teaching technique from the teachers who sometimes would give only the textbooks to them to work from. This was with no explanation or introduction to the exercises and this limited their opportunities for learning. They also revealed that teachers' support learning best when they explained and introduced the lessons carefully. The administrators and teachers also discussed the importance of the teachers preparing their lessons well and to seek to understand where their students have come from and to build on the experiences of the students to make learning meaningful for them.

The study also found that the teaching of knowledge in the classrooms has a western monocultural perspective and this was the core of the concerns for all the four Tongan immigrant students. This finding therefore, advocated an approach where schools, in collaboration with the Tongan communities, institute network and support system allow access to the support provided by Tongan educators, leaders and parents. This would give the opportunity by the Tongan immigrant students to learn from a more Tongan-centric paradigm. Hence the study revealed the importance of teaching and facilitating cultural activities and incorporating a both ways approach (western and Tongan) as early as

possible in the education of the migrant child. Students get into a pattern of learning progress that enables them to engage actively with the school activities and teachers from the start of school.

The study revealed that good knowledge in using technology is a necessity for Tongan immigrant students to be able to engage with their learning in the Australian western classroom context. The study also revealed that Tongan immigrant students are struggling to engage in their learning in the classroom because of the effects of the demands of Tongan cultural values and beliefs that are irrelevant to the culture of education.

The study revealed the importance of having a curriculum that cater for the world views of Tongan immigrant students and students from small ethnic groups to be developed positively and to enhance their efforts to engage in their learning. The study also revealed that teacher caring and good teacher-relationship are crucial in effective learning and 'teachers' is the most important issue in the students' learning. All four Tongan immigrant students reported that they saw the teacher as the most important person in their learning in the classroom. As a consequence they have tried to establish good relationship with their teachers. The administrators also suggested that in order to foster the teacher/student relationship, behavior of teachers needs to include recognition of their students' perspectives, affirmation, responsiveness to unusual situations and a general attitude of non-defensiveness.

The study revealed that Tongan students are gifted, creative in their writing and could do well in their academic subjects and therefore, it is important for teachers to use teaching methods that enable the students to develop inquiring and critical mind and the ability to ask questions in the classroom and to challenge the attitudes and values in the school communities that are unfair, and as well as critiquing the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities.

The study revealed that school leadership also greatly influences students' academic achievements. If a school exhibits strong leadership, students feel encouraged to excel academically, regardless of ethnic and gender differences. The administrators of the two schools reported that their school leadership has made efforts to make the Tongan immigrant students equal with everyone else in their schools. The Tongan students

expressed that this had developed a positive influence to their performance in schools. For example, School B has selected one of the participants' brothers to be their assistant school captain in 2011, and School A has selected one of the participants' sisters to be the school captain in 2010. This has helped the Tongan immigrant students to be proud of their cultural identities and develop self-esteem that they could do as well as other students in their school work. It was clearly evident that low self-esteem has emerged as another challenge in the identities of all four participating students. This study found that low self-esteem of the Tongan immigrant students arising from their own unsuccessful and negative school and home experiences, cultural differences and poor self-images have created barriers for good performances in their school work. The study also revealed that school leadership that create a management structure that accommodate involvement of the families and the whole community also greatly influences effective teaching and students' academic achievements.

#### **8.4 CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The study used constructs of the conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) that engagement in learning in school is strongly influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts; that interdependence is a significant element in viewing engagement in learning in school and its practice in education; and that engagement in learning in school involves activities that engage and empower the immigrant students in a collaborative effort. Significantly, the findings of this study recognize and endorse these constructs and further draws the following conclusions. These conclusions are significant as they represent the perspectives of all four Tongan immigrant students who have experienced difficulties in their engagement with learning in school.

Thus the results of the study revealed that the experiences of the Tongan immigrant students provided increased understandings of the importance of the support of their families and communities within the western school context. Essentially with determination and resilience and often amidst enormous struggles, they succeeded in remaining loyal to the school structures that were predominantly constructed with western culture. It was also significant that the Tongan families and communities were different in the way they operated which points to the fact that Tongan families and communities are often in conflicts with the schools' activities. Essentially they

demonstrated that their families and communities can be supported in order to fulfill their responsibilities towards their education. They were all concerned about the over involvement of their parents in the Tongan community activities and the extended families particularly activities that affected their efforts to engage in their learning in school. As one of the participants pointed out in the interview, *our family always involve in community activities and the weddings and funerals of our cousins*. The students approached their efforts to engage better with their learning in school with a support from their families and communities in a collaborative style that worked towards shared responsibility and vision with the schools. They defined collaborative effort where parents, elders, and wider Tongan community actively participate in school matters. This suggests that there is a need to further understand Tongan ways of operating that could assist schools in enhancing the cooperation and support of Tongan families and communities.

Furthermore, the students were concerned about western school context that did not allocate enough time for cultural activities for diverse immigrant students. An extensive search of the literature revealed that cultural schools Polynesian festival are places where substantial members of Tongan immigrant students actively and enthusiastically engage in their learning in school (Manu'atu, 2000). The students expressed that the responsibilities of their parents to support the cultural activities and to involve in school meetings are not easily negotiated. Given that Tongan communities are interdependent in nature as expressed by the students in this study, a significant finding is the importance of consulting with the Tongan school supporters and elders. Consequently there is a need for understanding from administrators and teachers in schools, the contextual nature of Tongan families and communities and the importance of consulting with Tongan supporters or elders before they help with school cultural activities. Failure to do so might stall school-family-community partnership processes.

The study findings revealed that Tongan immigrant students are constantly under great difficulty in trying to balance school work, socializing with peer groups, family and community commitments. Additionally, they are being disadvantaged because they were from low income families and some of their cultural values are not helping towards a successful learning outcomes. They expressed that it is impossible for them to achieve better marks when their family's problems are so great. While they demonstrated efforts

to improve in their engagement in learning, there was the lack of adequate support from their families, that they required to do their studies. Thus, the schools need to establish ways to encourage families and communities to involve more in their children's education. Such an effort should be a collaborative effort with all involved.

The research findings also conclude that using the proper channels and protocols in communication is important in negotiating with Tongan families and communities to participate effectively in the education of their children. As such, elements such as language, right environment, time, and gaining trust and respect are not to be underestimated. Negotiating a collective view as expressed by the participants takes time and enormous effort, in order to garner the support of parents and wider community. This suggests that for school-family-community to be sustainable there needs to be an understanding from the administrators about the importance of giving schools enough time to communicate through the right protocols with their families and communities involving Tongan school supporter, elders and parents understood by all members. This also suggests that the understanding of the culturally appropriate ways of doing things would help the families to support their children's education more effectively.

Through collaborative efforts between schools, Tongan families and communities to help the Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning, new knowledge is created and reinforced. The active involvement of Tongan community members as tutors and supporters for doing homework and cultural activities, teachers work collaboratively in Tongan homework centres to create knowledge from a both ways perspective where knowledge of both cultures – Tongans and non-Tongans, are valued and respected. This is an effective way of getting family and community involved in school, something of value to offer and in turn feel empowered to make a contribution. Given the importance of creating individual and collective identities in school the Tongan immigrant students demonstrated the importance of reinforcing Tongan identity through teaching and learning by encouraging classroom teachers to work in partnership with Tongan families and communities.

Essentially, the collaborative nature of schools, families and communities require working as a team to help the Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning. The students demonstrated that amid the challenges of their families' difficult situations they have the desire of working with and through the school to establish

relationships that are culturally responsive and sustainable. While the students were constrained by some Tongan cultural values that are not helpful to their efforts to engage in their learning in school, they were skillful in negotiating relationships that could support them to remain hopeful. The study findings revealed that cultural difference is a critical factor in the efforts of the Tongan immigrant to engage in their learning in school.

While it is acknowledged that the inclusion of the Tongan culture and concept in teaching in western school contexts is important (Helu-Thaman, 2003) the review of literature on cultural differences shows that some Tongan and Pacific values are conflicting with the dominant cultural beliefs (Garcia Coll et al., 2002).

The study findings indicated that all four students were supportive of the homework sessions conducted by the Tongan educators and tutors supported by their families. They were happy that they were able to identify the learning benefits for themselves that also motivating them to engage better in their learning in school. Although they gained from participating in these homework sessions, these opportunities are not offered in the school classroom levels.

Perhaps the most disturbing comment from the Tongan students is that in spite of their resilience and determination, they suffered difficulties to engage fully in their studies from families' financial difficulties and lack of skills to fulfill their responsibilities. From their perspective teachers and administrators in schools felt they lack the capability to do the school work and furthermore the teachers had the attitudes that Tongan students were coping more in nonacademic subjects. The findings suggest that there is still some expectations from teachers in western school contexts that Tongan students do better in nonacademic subjects. This confirms the findings of other research carried out involving Tongan and Pacific participants that there is a need to promote cultural awareness and mutual understandings of the cultural values of all parties involved. Hence consideration should be given to promoting and resourcing parenting, Tongan and Pacific language and culture programs in schools with big numbers of Tongan and Pacific immigrant students. This would enhance school-family-community relationships and additionally develop family and community capacity skills to help their children in their efforts to engage in their learning.

Finally, the findings indicated the importance of having teaching and learning strategies

that can help the Tongan and Pacific immigrant students in secondary schools to engage better in their learning. Teaching requires teachers to take responsibility for every student's achievement to value diversity, have high expectations, and build on student's experiences (Alton-Lee, 2003). The findings of this study have suggested that students' achievement is affected by the degree to which a student's culture is respected by the school, and by the degree of similarity between the culture of the community and the values of the school. This requires constant efforts from school education leadership to evaluate their curriculum regularly and include the Tongan and Pacific educators, elders, families and communities in the decision-making on cultural issues regarding effective teaching and learning strategies. This collective vision was to support the school-family-community relationships to be more effective in providing the teaching and learning strategies to help the Tongan immigrant students to improve in their efforts to engage in their learning in school.

## 8.5 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is an in-depth first hand narrative of four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students and the involvement of their parents, administrators and teachers in their experiences in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning. The findings revealed that the study is of particular significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on the experiences in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in selected Australian Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. Secondly, a search of the literature revealed a considerable gap on studies involving experiences of Tongan immigrant students in western school context and influences on their engagement in learning. Thirdly, it informs policy and practice on opportunities for improvement at a local, State and National levels on matters involving difficulties in engagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students and other immigrant students of non European descent and Indigenous Australians in Australian school contexts. Lastly, it is the first study focusing on Tongan immigrant students narrating stories utilising two separate threads of *lived life* and the *telling of a told story* thus giving a parallel view of the relationship between two biographical elements. This technique provided a richer holistic understanding and justification for the reasons for the behaviors of the Tongan immigrant students regarding their experiences in an Australian school and influences on their engagement in learning. Furthermore, the study provides an increased understanding and

respect for Tongan and Pacific cultures hopefully providing resources that may be useful in defining policy and programmes for immigrant students in schools.

Empirical studies have been generated over the last five years on the subject of the students' engagement in learning in Australian Catholic schools, conducted by Burford & Gross (2006), but were not focused particularly on Tongan immigrant students. These have shown a gap in the literature on studies involving Tongan immigrant students' experiences in Australian schools and influences on their engagement in learning. This study provided an opportunity for four Year 9 Tongan immigrant students from two Australian Catholic schools, to tell their stories on their experiences and influences on their engagement in learning, and the involvement of their parents, administrators and teachers. Arguably, as a pioneering study, it provides an understanding of the experiences of Tongan immigrant students and influences on their engagement in learning in western school contexts that is perceptible and commendable. Following are recommendations based on the findings in the study.

### ***8.5.1 Recommendations for further research***

The study has provided insights into Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and issues that involve the influences on engagement in their learning in school. It emphasizes the need for further research into Tongan immigrant engagement in learning in the following areas:

- Further research is required on: The nature of teaching and learning strategies that integrate and challenge Tongan and Pacific island children into Australian schools.
- Further research is required on articulating the links between the findings and the conclusions of this study, upon the teaching strategies that are effective and helpful to the engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students.
- Further research is required on: How bilingualism can be provided and developed to enhance the school performances of Tongan and Pacific island children.
- Further research is required on: The characteristics of successful community and

parent engagement by Australian schools for the purpose of strengthening the engagement of Tongan and Pacific island children in learning.

- Further research on engagement in learning in school, involving Tongan and other Pacific immigrant students at other Australian public and private schools. Such investigation would give a more holistic view of experiences of Tongan and Pacific immigrant students in Australian schools and the influences on their engagement in learning.

### ***8.5.2 Recommendations for policy***

It is recommended that :

- Central offices such as Catholic Education Office (CEO) and the Department of Education and Training NSW, in consultation with principals of secondary schools with significant numbers of Tongan and Pacific immigrant students: (1) To explore, develop, and support scholarships that train Tongan and Pacific qualified teachers to teach in their schools. (2) To recruit Tongan and Pacific school liaison to support the family and community to involve better in school activities and engage more with issues regarding the education of their children.
- Catholic Education Office (CEO) in the Archdiocese of Sydney to work collaboratively with Catholic schools with large number of Tongan and Pacific immigrant students, in consultation with Tongan and Pacific island educators, introduce Tongan and other Pacific island languages as School Certificate subjects. The students will be able to learn their language and culture in an Australian educational level. This will also provide opportunities to families and communities to be involved in an ongoing support for bilingual programs for Tongan and Pacific island immigrant students and youths.
- Schools commit to on-going professional development for administrators and teachers of Pacific and Tongan immigrant students, on issues regarding the Pacific and Tongan families to be conducted by Pacific and Tongan educators in the local areas. This could provide an understanding of the culture and issues that the Pacific and Tongan families are facing, and help them in their roles and

responsibilities regarding the engagement in learning in school of Pacific and Tongan immigrant students.

- Schools work collaboratively with educators and leaders of Pacific island and Tongan communities and local Community Colleges and TAFE, in initiating and establishing adult education programs for parents. Such programs should be tailored to promote capacity building individually and collectively as a community and to support students who are disengaged in their learning at school. This will require shared responsibilities between the leaders of the communities and local councils in establishing well resourced facilities and strategies for various cultural and language services.
- The schools work collaboratively with Tongan educators and leaders in the Tongan church communities to explore, develop, and support parenting workshops conduct by Tongan educators.

### ***8.5.3 Recommendations for practice***

It is recommended that:

- The Sydney Catholic Education Office (CEO) consider adjustment within the roles of existing staff with appropriate experience to fulfill the leadership roles of a curriculum adviser to advise the CEO on related curriculum, assessment and reporting on the progress in the performances of Tongan and Pacific immigrant students in Catholic secondary schools.
- Have an on-going support at Catholic education system level for Tongan and Pacific families, communities and schools in partnership developments that addresses appropriate cultural protocols, emphasizing community strengths and resources, to support the Tongan and Pacific immigrant students' efforts to engage in their learning.
- The Catholic Education Offices commit to funding support for on-going professional development of principals, administrators, teachers and parents of schools with a large number of Tongan and South Pacific immigrant students.

- Schools have professional development for teachers of Tongan and Pacific immigrant students, to focus on setting higher expectations of Tongan and Pacific island students' performances.
- Schools support structures to help with homework sessions, and to support the Tongan homework centres that are already existing in some of the Tongan communities.
- Schools run workshops to provide specific opportunities for parenting, to help Tongan and Pacific island parents to learn new skills and knowledge that enables them to become active participants in their children's education.
- Schools provide cultural activities and programs such as Tongan and Pacific island festivals to enhance cultural identity and relationships with the schools.
- Schools have bilingual community liaisons that helps bridge language and cultural differences between home and school.

The recommendations offered here for policy and practice are broad and deep. They provide a broad framework of actions that can be taken so that education systems and schools can individually develop a strategic action plan that is practical and relevant to their own situation, for implementation over time. In many cases it must be acknowledged that these will not be easy to readily implement. Nonetheless, the researcher believes the recommendations provide a useful and firm foundation for the future of Tongan immigrant students, and as well as other South Pacific students and students of non-European descent and Indigenous Australians.

## **8.6 MY PERSONAL JOURNEY**

This is the end of the journey for this research which was born out of a desire to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students' engagement with learning in Australian Catholic schools, and to identify the issues influencing these experiences. I have been engaged in this exploration for almost six years. I have learned that I was capable of risk-taking and living up to the challenge of writing this thesis in English when Tongan is my

first language. My learning journey has been rich with discovery and a constant challenge. I have learned about new concepts in education to use as teaching techniques to help the Tongan immigrant students to engage in learning in a western school context.

I have encountered comparative education in a journey of discovery from the distinctive stories of the Tongan immigrant students, their parents, administrators and teachers and I gained knowledge of qualitative research. As a teacher, the voices of the Tongan immigrant students have challenged me to discern the importance of the integration of their perspectives and cultural experiences into the teaching process. I also learned that as a teacher it is important to have a listening ear and a willingness to create a culture of respect and student focus as part of my teaching strategy. These will help to create a learning environment that could enthuse the Tongan immigrant students to engage better in their learning.

These six years have provided a tremendous opportunity for me to cling to my dream of being a good listener to the Tongan immigrant students. Through my study I have been able to partly fulfill my dream of journeying with the Tongan immigrant students in their experiences in engagement in learning in Australian Catholic schools. I now hope to fulfill the other part of my dream by having the chance during my career as an educator to continue to be part of the lives of the Tongan immigrant students in their engagement in learning in the real world of the schools. I would like to become a co-learner with Tongan immigrant students, to learn and relearn, engage and re-engage in learning, search and research in a life-long and life-broad learning journey.

The power of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) tool using narratives in the setting of sitting on the Tongan mats has empowered the Tongan immigrant students and myself to feel for ourselves what it meant to be human in our cultural context. So this powerful tool has provided an opportunity for us to listen from our hearts and learn from one another. We can keep our dreams alive with the culture of our families, elders, communities and the spirits of our ancestors, in our efforts to integrate into the culture of the Australian schools. I am confident that with perseverance, passion and imagination in human-centred and cultural-centred education, Australian secondary schools will eventually lead the way for 'real' and 'rich' learning for Tongan immigrant students.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: One of the series of communications with the author of the Biographic Interpretive Narrative Method (BINM)

Message body

Page 1 of 1

Dear Tom,

Thank you so much for your e-mail and also for the substantive points from Thursday's email. This is a very important e-mail for my study and I am very grateful.

All the best.  
Regards,  
Kalo.

---

From: ascy82@dsl.pipex.com  
To: sikimeti@hotmail.com  
Subject: RE: Biography  
Date: Fri, 15 Oct 2010 10:11:09 +0100

Dear Kalo,

Thanks for your informative email. Please find below the substantive points from yesterday's email. I hope this is what you want.

ONE. One thing that I think you might think about is that, in the *BNIM Short Guide and Detailed Manual*, I now talk not of analysing the 'told story', but of analysing 'the telling of the told story'. Indeed, in my most recent revision (yesterday) I also refer to the 'TFA' and recommend that, for most purposes, users of BNIM understand the 'T' to stand not for 'thematic' (as in the 2001 textbook) but for the 'Teller' as in the 'telling of the told story'. Why? The notion of 'theme' comes from a literary or other focus on what is said, and develops a list or account 'themes' in what was said. The BNIM 'TFA' focus is on the subjectivity behind the text of what is said, how the 'situated subjectivity' came to say the things that they said when they said them. 'Themes' refer to what is said; the 'telling by the interviewee teller' leads to a reference to the situated subjectivity of the 'teller' as primary focus.

So. Think not of analysing the 'told story' but think instead of analysing the situated subjectivity 'telling the told story'. Let 'TFA' stand more for 'Teller Flow' than 'thematic field'.

Note. This is not a change in what you *do*. This is unchanged. It is just a change in terminology, in the 'best name' for what you do. If you are comfortable with the words 'thematic flow' and 'thematic field', then stay with them.

TWO. The second thing is also a question of naming. The description of the DARNE typology developed for 2001 is correct. Since then, I have changed the terminology of this. Instead of 'N' for narrative, I refer to the category in a different way. I now call this category not 'Narrative' as in the 2001 textbook (since a Report is also a narrative) but instead I call it a 'PIN' – a Particular Incident Narrative. I also distinguish two types of PIN, an 'about-PIN' and an 'in-PIN'. For details of this, see the discussion in the *BNIM Short Guide and Detailed Manual*, especially the appendix on PINs, and the section on 'pushing for PINs' in majorsection 2.

Note. This is not a change in what you *do*. This is unchanged. It is just a change in terminology, in the 'best name' for what you do. However, the recommendation that you push for 'in-PINs' rather than be satisfied with 'about-PINs' can change what you do, and I strongly recommend that you look at the discussion of 'pushing for PINs and especially towards in-PINs' that you will find in the Detailed Manual and in the appropriate appendix.

I will look at the material that you sent me in more detail later.

Best wishes

Tom

APPENDIX 2: 'My Journey In The Garden Of Your Heart' [An Exploration Of A Journey] (Sikimeti, 2010).

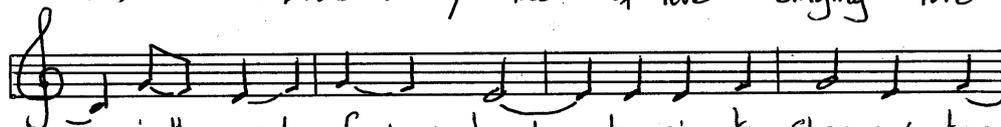
My Journey In The Garden Of Your Heart  
(An exploration of a journey)

VERSES

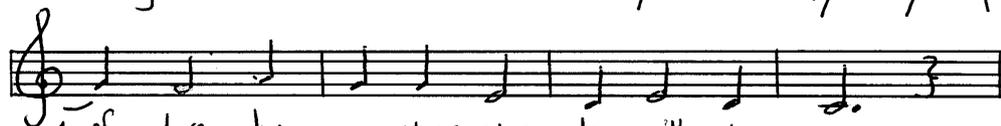
Kabo L.L. Sikimeti



1. I am here with you - in my jour ney - shel te - ring -
2. I am with you heart - of - all hearts - I am feeling -
3. Listen to every fi - bre of - my roots - hear my dreams -
4. I hear the birds on my tree - of love - singing love

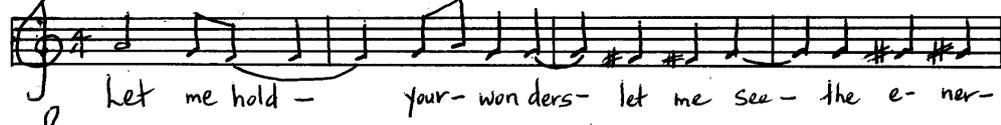


1. in the gar den of your heart - lon - ging to share my tree
2. the - joy of your - warmth - you smell the sweet fra - grance
3. and - my me - mo - ries - and taste the flavour of my -
4. song to - make - me - smile - they sa - tis - fy my deep



1. of love hu - man year - ning deep with - in me .
2. of my flowers my tongue speaks sweet - ly of your love .
3. - fruits they are e - ner - gies of my life .
4. lon - ging and with you my - dear heart I live .

CHORUS



Let me hold - your - won - ders - let me see - the e - ner -



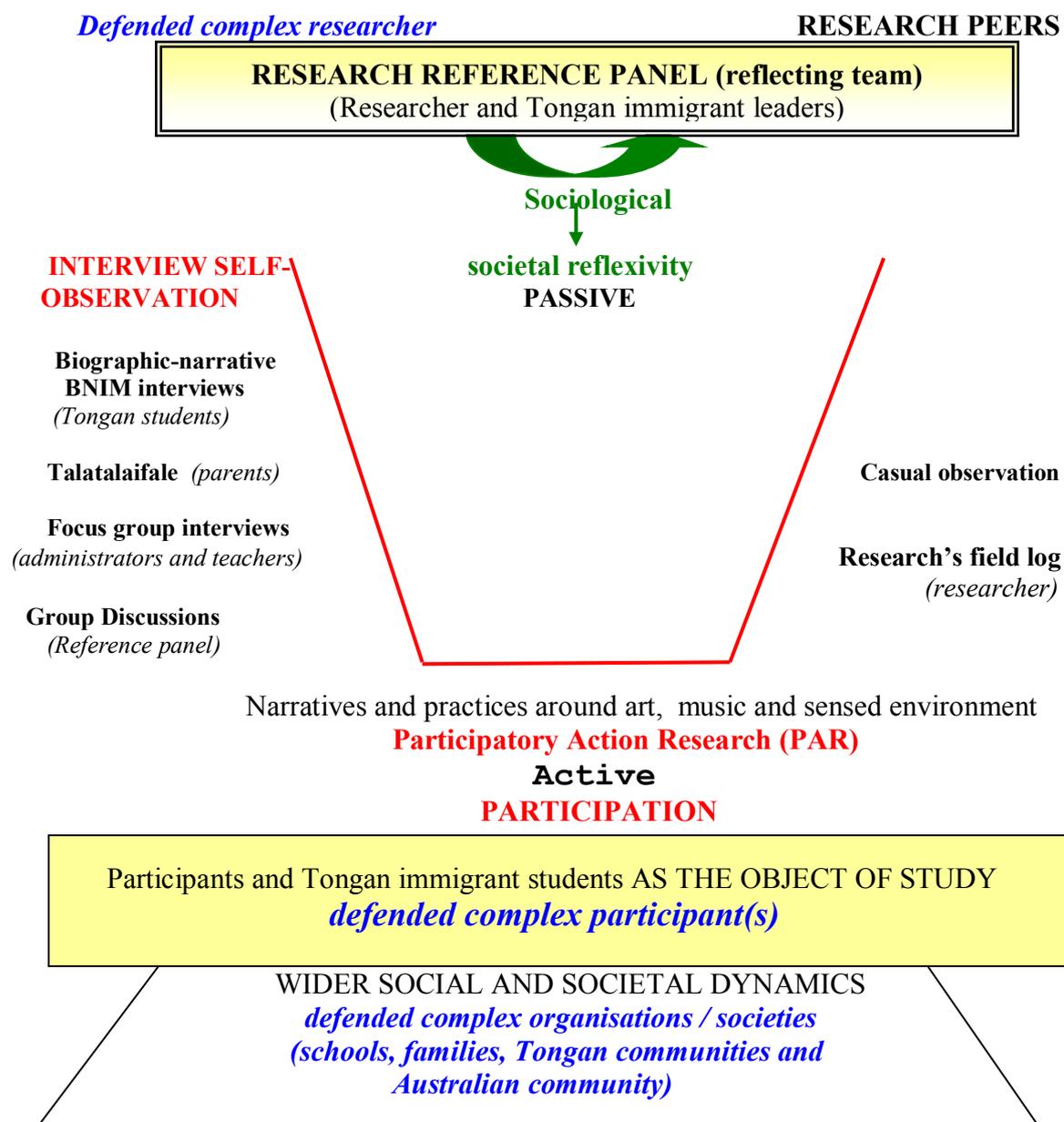
gies of your bran ches let me touch your leaves of



hea - ling let my bo dy - feels the warmth of your love - .

**APPENDIX 3: BNIM + Triangulated methodology (adapted from, Wengraf, 2007)**

*(For the research reference panel's reflection on the second stage of interpretation of the interviews with the participating students. The reference panel is required only for the process of the analysis of the data produced by the participating students of this study, however the reference panel was used as an advisory team for this study)*



Based on the experiences of Tongan immigrant students, parents and leaders, school administrators and teachers re- 'Experiences of Tongan Immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning'. *The diagram above illustrates the three points of a multi-method self-triangulating and complementary methodology using BNIM method, adapted from Tom Wengraf's model on BNIM + triangulated methodology, 2007, for both the researcher and the reference panel (group discussion).*

**APPENDIX 4: Single Question aimed at inducing narratives (SQUIN) & 3 sub-sessions structures, adapted from Wengraf, 2007)**

**SQUIN: Single Question aimed at inducing Narrative(s)**

Please tell me the story of your journey in your engagement with learning at your school. All the experiences and the events which were important for you personally from the time you entered your present school up to now.

Start wherever you like

Please take the time you need

I'll listen first, I won't interrupt

I'll just take some notes in case I have any further questions after you've finished telling me about it all" When you finish we take a break for about fifteen minutes. When we resume I will ask a few more questions based on my notes of what you have told me. Please correct me then if I have misunderstood your story. If you wish to draw your story to help you to share more about it, please use the colours and the papers.

**Three Sub-Session Structure**

**ONE. Initial SQUIN - and initial response/account**

1. Non-interrupted initial narrative

- facilitation but no direction or interruption
- unspecified narrative questions if necessary
- note taking on topics for Sub-session 2

\* Express by talking, drawing or singing

**TWO. Narrative Questions on Mentioned Topics only**

2. Internal questioning of points raised in the initial narrative

- only topics raised in sub-session ONE
- only in the order of their raising
- only using the words used by the narrator

*after analysis of material from ONE / TWO*

3. Third session **THREE. All further questions relevant to the interests re: the research purpose of the Researcher**

- Some topics may arise from Session ONE or Session TWO.

## APPENDIX 5: Ethics Approval Document from Catholic Education Office (CEO) Archdiocese of Sydney



### Catholic Education Office, Sydney

Telephone (02) 9568 8201  
Fax (02) 9568 3030

38-40 RENWICK STREET, LEICHHARDT NSW  
PO Box 217, Leichhardt 2040

17 March 2010

Ref: Research Application 695

Ms Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti  
Australian Catholic University  
Strathfield Campus  
25A Barker Road  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135

Dear Ms Sikimeti,

#### RE: RESEARCH APPLICATION REF: 695 – LETTER OF APPROVAL

Thank you for the submission of your application to conduct research in Archdiocesan Catholic Schools under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Education Office (CEO), Sydney. Approval is given by CEO, Sydney to conduct this study. **This approval is granted subject to full compliance with NSW Child Protection and Commonwealth Privacy Act legislation:** It is the prerogative of any Principal or staff member whom you might approach to decline your invitation to be involved in this study or to withdraw from involvement at any time. Also, as you have outlined, **written parental permission** is required for any student to participate in the study.

Permission is given for you to approach the Principals of the schools nominated, requesting participants for your study:

*“Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools, and influences on their engagement in learning”;*

#### COMMONWEALTH PRIVACY ACT

The privacy of the school and that of any school personnel or students involved in your study must, of course, be preserved at all times and comply with requirements under the Commonwealth Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000. In complying with this legislation, the CEO, Sydney has decided that, for the purposes of research applications, students are not to be identified by anything other than age and/or gender.

#### NSW CHILD PROTECTION REQUIREMENTS

It is noted that your proposed study methodology **involves direct unsupervised contact with students.** Approval to conduct this research study in Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools under the jurisdiction of the CEO, Sydney is granted subject to the researcher's **full compliance** with the ‘**Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998**’.

As a student at the National Australian Catholic University (PhD) you are required to complete the *Prohibited Employment Declaration* only, the original of which I hold with your application package. Enclosed with this letter is a photocopy of the form; provided for sighting by the Principal at each participating school.



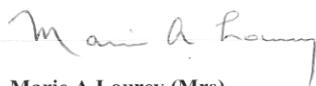
When you have established your participating schools, please **complete the attached form and return it** to this office.

It is a condition of approval that when your research has been completed you will forward a **summary report of the findings and/or recommendations** to this office as soon as practicable after results are to hand.

**All correspondence relating to this Research should note 'Ref: Research Application 695':**

Please contact me at this office if there is any further information you require. I wish you well in this undertaking and look forward to learning about your findings.

Yours sincerely,



**Marie A Lourey (Mrs)**  
**PROFESSIONAL OFFICER**  
**Policy and Corporate Services**

Email: [marie.lourey@ceosyd.catholic.edu.au](mailto:marie.lourey@ceosyd.catholic.edu.au)

Enclosures.

**APPENDIX 6: Ethics Approval Document from Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Australian Catholic University (ACU)**



Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** Associate Professor Charles Burford Sydney Campus

**Co-Investigators:**

**Student Researcher:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti Sydney Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning. (Disengagement in learning of Tongan immigrant students in Catholic schools)

**for the period:** 12 April 2010 to 31 August 2010

**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** N2009 59

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (2007) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

*K. Pashley*

Signed: ..... Date: 12 April 2010  
(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)

## **APPENDIX 7: Letter: Seeking the permission of principals of Catholic secondary schools.**

**Australian Catholic University**  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



**Australian Catholic University Limited**  
ABN 15 050 192 660  
Strathfield Campus (Mount St. Mary's)  
25A Barker Road,  
Locked Bag 2002,  
Strathfield, NSW, 2135.  
Telephone (02) 9701 4000  
Facsimile (02) 9701 4281

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Education.

### **Re: Seeking the permission of principals of Catholic Secondary Schools**

This is a formal request to seek your permission for the student researcher, Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti to conduct a study at your school, in May to September, 2010.

The study is a requirement for the award of Doctor of Education, a study currently undertaken by the researcher. The purpose of the research is an exploration of the experiences of Tongan immigrant students' engagement with learning. The goal is to identify the issues influencing these experiences, particularly in Year 9 in Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

The conduct of the research will be predominantly qualitative. Data from the school personnel (principal, assistant principal, pastoral care coordinator, and 3 of Year 9 teachers) will be collected through one session of a focus group interviews with a duration of approximately one hour and a half, at school, after prior arrangements with the principal, at a time convenient to all the participants and the researcher. Data from the Tongan immigrant students and their parents will be collected through three sessions of one to one narrative interviews with a duration of approximately thirty minutes to one hour for each session, at their homes, after prior arrangements with the parents and their children, at a time convenient to all the participants and the researcher.

Six Tongan immigrant leaders consisting of two educators, one social worker, one artist, one musician and one expert in Tongan culture, will be in a reference panel to help the interpretation of the data collected from the narrative interviews. They will also act as an advisory team for the research study. The reference panel discussion will have three sessions. The duration of each session will be approximately one hour and a half, at the senior citizens' hall in the library at Lakemba, after prior arrangements with the representative from the local council and the Tongan leaders, at a time convenient to all the participants and the researcher.

The interviews and panel group discussions will be audio-recorded and the participants will have code names. The participants will not be required to declare their personal details such as their names and addresses. While the identity of participants will be known to the researcher, privacy and confidentiality will be protected, according to the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Ethics Committee Guidelines. There are no possible foreseeable risks or discomforts. In addition, it is hoped that the interviews should not cause any inconvenience.

The study will be published as a thesis for assessment. Results from the study may be summarized and appear in publications or may be provided to other researchers in a form that the participants will not be identified. The potential benefit to participants is that the participants will have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the significance of engagement with learning of the Tongan immigrant students in an Australian Catholic school. The participants will also be able to give valuable information about their own views and experiences on the research topic. This study aims to highlight areas of significance for the Tongan immigrant students.

The participants' responses are very important for this research as we hope that findings from the research will provide further directions, some alternative strategies and structure to schools and Tongan immigrant families in Australia, to support them in their efforts towards the needs of Tongan immigrant students' engagement with learning. It is also hoped that the findings from the research study will be transferable cross-culturally to other immigrant families especially of South Pacific immigrant families.

Response from the participants are very important for the success of this research and participants will receive feedback of the results of the research. Participants are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the research at any time without giving a reason. You are advised that Ethical clearances had been obtained from the Australian Catholic University (ACU), Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and the Catholic Education Office, Sydney. The researcher understands and has agreed to the policy of the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, "that it is the prerogative of you the Principal whether or not to participate in, continue, or terminate participation in the research project". Any withdrawal from the research will not prejudice in any way the principals' and participants' future care and involvement with the researcher.

Any questions regarding the study can be directed to:

The Principal Supervisor,  
Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000.

OR The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000.



On request, appropriate feedback on the results of the study will be made available to the participants.

In the event the participants have any complaint or concern about the way they have been treated during this study, or if they have any question that the principal supervisor or student researcher have not been able to satisfy, they may write to the chair of the Human Research Committee, care of the nearest branch of the Researcher Services Unit:

Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Strathfield Campus  
Locked Bag 2002  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: (02) 9701 4093  
Fax: (02) 9701 4350

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participants will be informed of the outcome. If you agree for your school to participate in the study, please contact the Principal Supervisor or the Student Researcher.

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
Principal Supervisor.

Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
Student Researcher.

**APPENDIX 8: Letter: Seeking the parents' consent for their child's participation in the research study.**

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



**Australian Catholic University Limited**  
ABN 15 050 192 660  
Strathfield Campus (Mount St. Mary's)  
25A Barker Road,  
Locked Bag 2002,  
Strathfield, NSW, 2135.  
Telephone (02) 9701 4000  
Facsimile (02) 9701 4281

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Education.

**Re: INFORMATION LETTER SEEKING THE PARENTS' CONSENT FOR THEIR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH STUDY**

Dear Parent,

This is a formal request inviting you to participate in a research study and seeking the consent for your child to participate in the research study.

The study is a requirement for the award of Doctor of Education, a study currently undertaken by the researcher. The purpose of the research is to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in their engagement with learning, particularly in Year 9 in Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The goal is to attempt to identify the issues influencing these experiences. This letter is designed to provide you with some information to help you decide whether you want your child to participate in the research study. There are no possible foreseeable risks or discomforts. In addition, it is hoped that the interviews should not cause any inconvenience.

Your child will be asked to participate in one to one narrative interviews where your child will share her/his own experiences and views in engagement with learning in school by telling her/his story through talking, drawing or singing. There will be three sessions and the duration of each session will be approximately thirty minutes to one hour. At the end of the first session, a second interviews will follow after one week to get more stories from your child's initial narrative. A third session may not be required depending on the amount of information already gathered from your child in the first two sessions. All sessions will be held after school, at your home during the week or during the weekends,



following prior arrangements made with you and your child at a time convenient to your child and the researcher. The narrative interviews will be audio-taped and your child will have a code name. Your child will not be required to declare her/his personal details such as her/his name and address. While the identity of your child will be known to the researcher, privacy and confidentiality will be protected according to the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Ethics Committee Guidelines. Confidentiality will be protected throughout the conduct of the study and in any report or publication.

Response of your child is very important for the success of this research as we hope that findings from the research will provide further directions, some alternative strategies and structure for educators in schools and Tongan immigrant families in Australia, to support them in their efforts towards the needs of Tongan students' engagement with learning. It is hoped that the findings will be transferable cross-culturally to other immigrant families especially of South Pacific immigrant families. On request, appropriate feedback on the results of the study will be made available to you and your child. The study will be published as a thesis for assessment. Results from the study may be summarised and appear in publications or may be provided to other researchers in a form that your child will not be identified.

Participation is voluntary and you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue at any time without giving a reason. Any withdrawal from the research will not affect the future studies of your child and his/her relationship with the researcher.

Any questions regarding the study can be directed to:

The Principal supervisor,  
Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000.

OR

The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the Australian Catholic University.

In the event you have any complaint or concern about the way your child has been treated during this study, or if you have any question that the principal supervisor or student researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the chair of the Human Research Committee, care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit:



Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Strathfield Campus  
Locked Bag 2002  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: (02) 9701 4093  
Fax: (02) 9701 4350

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree for your child to participate in this project, please sign copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the principal supervisor or the student researcher.

Yours faithfully,

Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
Principal Supervisor.

Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
Student Researcher.

**APPENDIX 9: Consent Form: Parent/Guardian**

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



*Copy for participant*

**PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM****Written Parental Permission**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

I ..... (the parent/guardian) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the letter to the participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may take part in three sessions of the narrative interviews, at home, at a time convenient to both my child and the researcher, realising that the duration of each session will take thirty minutes to one hour. I realise that the interviews will be audio-taped and be signed by both the supervisor and student researcher. I also realise that I can withdraw any consent at any time without affecting my child's future studies and my relationship with the researcher. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

I understand that any urgent questions regarding the study can be directed to:

The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000.

If you agree for your child to participate in this project, please sign both copies of this consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy by using the enclosed self-addressed envelope.



NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN: .....  
(block letters)

SIGNATURE .....DATE: .....

NAME OF CHILD .....  
(block letters)

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: .....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER;.....

DATE:.....



## ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I ..... (*the participant aged under 18 years*) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the research project, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision. Please sign both copies, retain one for your records and return the other copy by using the enclosed self addressed envelope.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18: .....  
(block letters)

SIGNATURE:..... Date.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:.....Date.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:.....Date.....

## APPENDIX 10: Information letter: Tongan immigrant students

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



**Australian Catholic University Limited**  
ABN 15 050 192 660  
Strathfield Campus (Mount St. Mary)  
25A Barker Road,  
Locked Bag 2002,  
Strathfield, NSW, 2135,  
Telephone (02) 97014000  
Facsimile (02) 9701 4281

### INFORMATION LETTER TO TONGAN IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Education.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted in Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. This letter is designed to provide you with some information to help you decide whether you want to contribute to this research. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in their engagement with learning, particularly in Year 9, in Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The goal is to attempt to identify the issues influencing these experiences. Your involvement in this research would entail participating in narrative interviews. There are no possible foreseeable risks or discomforts for participants. In addition, it is hoped that the interviews should not cause any inconvenience.

You will have to tell your story on your own experiences and views in engagement with learning in school. You are free to use drawing and singing to help expressing your story. There will be three sessions. The duration of each session will be a minimum of thirty minutes to a maximum of one hour. At the end of the first session, a second interview will follow after one week to get more stories from your initial narrative. A third session may not be required depending on the amount of information already gathered in the first two sessions.

All sessions of the narrative interviews will take place following prior arrangements made with your parents and you, at your home and at a time convenient to you and the researcher. The narrative interviews will be audio-taped and you will be given a code name. You will not be required to declare your personalities such as your name and address. While your identity will



be known to the researcher, privacy and confidentiality will be protected according to the Australian Catholic University (ACU Ethics Committee Guidelines). Confidentiality will be protected throughout the conduct of the study and in any report or publication.

The potential benefit to you is that you will have the opportunity to reflect on the discuss of the significance of your engagement with learning in an Australian Catholic school. You will also be able to give valuable information about your own views and experiences on the research topic. This study aims to highlight areas of significance for you.

Your response is very important for this research as we hope that findings from the research will provide further directions, some alternative strategies and structure for educators in schools and Tongan immigrant families in Australia, to support them in their efforts towards the needs of Tongan immigrant students' engagement with learning. It is hoped that the findings will be transferable cross-culturally to other immigrant families especially of South Pacific immigrant families. The study will be published as a thesis assessment. Results from the study may be summarised and appear in publication or may be provided to other researchers in a form that no participant, family or school will be identified.

Participation is voluntary and you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the research at any time without giving a reason, including after the narrative interviews has begun. Any withdrawal from the research will not affect your future studies.

Any questions regarding this research can be directed to:

The Principal Supervisor,  
Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000.

OR The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000

Your response is very important for the success of this research. On request, appropriate feedback on the results of the study will be made available to the participant. You are advised that the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved this study.

In the event you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any question that the principal supervisor or student researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee, care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit:



Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Strathfield Campus  
Locked Bay 2002  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: (02) 9701 4093  
Fax: (02) 9701 4350

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate in this research please sign both copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Principal Supervisor or Student Researcher.

Yours faithfully,

Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
Principal Supervisor.

Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
Student Researcher.

**APPENDIX 11: Consent Form: Tongan immigrant students**

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

**CONSENT FORM TO TONGAN IMMIGRANT STUDENTS**

*Copy for participant*

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

I .....(the participant) have read (or have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this:

- Focus group interviews
- Narrative interviews
- ‘Talatalaifale’
- Reference panel discussion (please tick relevant activity)

I agree to participate in the narrative interviews, at my home, at a time convenient to me and the researcher, realising that the duration of the session will take approximately half an hour to one hour. I also realise that the narrative interviews will be audio-taped and be signed by both the supervisor and student researcher.

I realise that I can withdraw at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher. I agree that research data collected for the purpose of the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.



I understand that any urgent questions regarding the study can be directed to:

The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135,  
(02) 9701 4000.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign both copies of this consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy by using the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....  
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE: .....DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: .....DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:.....DATE: .....

**APPENDIX 12: Information letter: Tongan immigrant parents.**

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



**Australian Catholic University Limited**  
ABN 15 050 192 660  
Strathfield Campus (Mount St. Mary)  
25A Barker Road,  
Locked Bag 2002,  
Strathfield, NSW, 2135.  
Telephone (02) 9701 4000.  
Facsimile (02) 9701 4281.

**INFORMATION LETTER TO TONGAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted in Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. This letter is designed to provide you with some information to help you decide whether you want to contribute to this research. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in their engagement with learning, particularly in Year 9 in Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The goal is to attempt to identify the issues influencing these experiences. Your involvement in this research would entail participating in narrative interviews. There are no possible foreseeable risks or discomforts for participants. In addition, it is hoped that the interview should not cause any inconvenience.

You will have to tell your story on your own experiences and views in engagement with learning of your child in school. You are free to use drawing and singing to help you to express your story. There will be three sessions. The duration of each session will be a minimum of thirty minutes to a maximum of one hour. At the end of the first session, a second interview will follow after one week to get more stories from your initial narrative. A third interview may not be required depending on the amount of information already gathered in the first two sessions.

All session of the narrative interviews will take place following prior arrangements made with you, at your home at a time convenient to you and the researcher. The narrative interviews will



be audio-taped and you will be given a code name. You will not be required to declare your personalities such as your name and address. While your identity will be known to the researcher, privacy and confidentiality will be protected according to the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Ethics Committee Guidelines. Confidentiality will be protected throughout the conduct of the study and in any report or publication.

The potential benefit to you is that you will have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the significance of engagement with learning of your child in an Australian Catholic school. You will also be able to give valuable information about your own views and experiences on the research topic. This study aims to highlight areas of significance for the Tongan immigrant students.

Your response is very important for this research as we hope that findings from this research will provide further directions, some alternative strategies and structure for educators in schools and Tongan immigrant families in Australia, to support them in their efforts towards the needs of Tongan immigrant students' engagement with learning. It is hoped that the findings will be transferable cross-culturally to other immigrant families especially of South Pacific immigrant families. The study will be published as a thesis for assessment. Results from the study may be summarised and appear in publications or may be provided to other researchers in a form that the participant, family or school will not be identified.

Participation is voluntary and you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the research at any time without giving a reason, including after the narrative interviews has begun. Any withdrawal from the research will not affect your future care and involvement with the researcher.

Any questions regarding this research can be directed to:

The Principal Supervisor  
Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000.

OR The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000

Your response is very important for the success of this research. On request, appropriate feedback on the results of the study will be made available to the participant. You are advised that the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University has approved this study.



In the event you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during this study, or if you have any question that the principal supervisor or student researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee, care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Strathfield Campus  
Locked Bay 2002  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: (02) 9701 4093  
Fax: (02) 9701 4350

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign both copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the principal supervisor or student researcher.

Yours faithfully,

Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
Principal Supervisor.

Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
Student Researcher.

**APPENDIX 13: Consent Form: Tongan immigrant parents**

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

**CONSENT FORM TO TONGAN IMMIGRANTS PARENTS**

*Copy for participant*

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan Immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalephi Sikimeti.

I..... (the participant) have read (or have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this:

Focus group interviews

Narrative interviews

‘Talatalaifale’

Reference panel discussion (Please tick relevant activity)

I agree to participate in this activity, at home, at a time convenient to me and the researcher, realising that the duration of the session will take thirty minutes to an hour. I also realise that my interview will be audio-taped and be signed by both the supervisor and the student researcher. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher.

I agree that research data collected for the purpose of the study may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.



I understand that any urgent questions regarding the study can be directed to:

The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign both copies of this consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy by using the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT .....  
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE..... DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR                      DATE  
.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER                      DATE  
.....

**APPENDIX 14: Information letter: School personnel**

**Australian Catholic University**  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



**Australian Catholic University Limited**  
Strathfield Campus (Mount St. Mary;s)  
25A Barker Road,  
Locked Bag 2002  
Strathfield NSW, 2135  
Telephone (02) 9701 4000  
Facsimile (02) 9701 4281

**INFORMATION LETTER TO SCHOOL PERSONNEL**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Education.

Dear Principal/Assistant Principal/Pastoral Care Coordinator//Year 9 teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted in Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. This letter is designed to provide you with some information to help you decide whether you want to contribute to this research. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in their engagement with learning, particularly in Year 9 in Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The goal is to attempt to identify the issues influencing these experiences. Your involvement in this research would entail participating in a focus group interviews. There are no possible foreseeable risks or discomforts for participants. In addition, it is hoped that the interview should not cause any inconvenience.

You are asked to talk and share your experience and views on the questions focusing on the research purpose. There will be one session. The duration of the session will be approximately one hour and a half.

The session for the focus group interviews will be held during school hours, following prior arrangements made with the principal and on the school's premises at a time convenient to you, the other participants from the school personnel and the researcher. The focus group discussion will be audio-taped and you will be given a code name. You will not be required to declare your personalities such as your name and address. While your identity will be known



to the researcher and the other participants in the focus group, privacy and confidentiality will be protected according to the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Ethics Committee Guidelines. Confidentiality will be protected throughout the conduct of the study and in any report or publication.

The potential benefit to you is that you will have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the significance of engagement with learning of the Tongan immigrant students in an Australian Catholic school. You will also be able to give valuable information about your own views and experience on the research topic. This study aims to highlight areas of significance for the Tongan immigrant students.

Your response is very important for the success of this research as we hope that findings from the research will provide further directions, some alternative strategies and structure for educators in Catholic schools and Tongan immigrant families in Australia, to support their efforts to help the needs of Tonga immigrant students' engagement with learning. It is also hoped that the findings will be transferable cross-culturally to other immigrant families especially of South Pacific immigrant families. The study will be published as a thesis for assessment. Results from the study may be summarised and appear in publications or may be provided to other researchers in a form that no participant or school will be identified.

Participation is voluntary and you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the research at any time without giving a reason, including after the focus group interviews has begun. Any withdrawal from the research will not prejudice in any way the participants' future care and involvement with the researcher.

Any questions regarding this research can be directed to:

The Principal Supervisor  
Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135  
(02) 9701 4000.

OR The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135.  
(02) 9701 4000.

On request appropriate feedback on the results of the study will be available to the participant. This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian Catholic University.



In the event you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during this study, or if you have any question that the principal supervisor or student researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee, care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Strathfield Campus  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: (02) 9701 4093  
Fax: (02) 9701 4350

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign both copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the principal supervisor or student researcher.

Yours faithfully,

Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
Principal Supervisor.

Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
Student Researcher.

**APPENDIX 15: Consent Form: School personnel**

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

**CONSENT FORM TO SCHOOL PERSONNEL**

*Copy for participant*

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan Immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

I.....(the participant) have read (or have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this:

Focus group interviews

Narrative-interviews

'Talatalaifale'

Reference panel discussion (please tick relevant activity)

I agree to participate in the focus group interviews, at school, at a time convenient to me, the other participants from the school personnel and the researcher, realizing that the duration of the session will take approximately one hour and a half. I also realise that the focus group discussions will be audio-taped and be signed by both the supervisor and student researcher.



I realise that I can withdraw at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher. I agree that research data collected for the purpose of the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

I understand that any urgent questions regarding the study can be directed to:

The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National,  
Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135,  
(02) 9701 4000.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign both copies of this consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy by using the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....  
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE.....DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR .....DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER.....DATE.....

## APPENDIX 16: Information letter: Tongan immigrant leaders

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



**Australian Catholic University Limited**  
 ABN 15 050 192 660  
 Strathfield Campus (Mount St. Mary's)  
 25A Barker Road  
 Locked Bag 2002  
 Strathfield, NSW, 2135  
 Telephone (02) 9701 4000  
 Facsimile (02) 9701 4281

### INFORMATION LETTER TO TONGAN IMMIGRANT LEADERS

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Education.

Dear Leader,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted in Catholic Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. This letter is designed to provide you with some information to help you decide whether you want to contribute to this research. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in their engagement with learning, particularly in Year 9 in Australian Secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The goal is to attempt to identify the issues influencing these experiences. Your involvement in this research would entail participating in a reference panel discussion group to help the interpretation of the data collected from the narrative interviews regarding the research topic. There are no possible foreseeable risks or discomforts for the participants. In addition, it is hoped that the reference panel discussions should not cause any inconvenience.

The researcher will have a session with you to familiarise with the soundness and theoretical framework of the process used, the process for the interpreting and analyzing the data gathering from the interviews of the Tongan immigrant students. There will be three sessions. The duration of each session will be approximately one hour and a half.

All sessions of the panel discussions will take place following prior arrangements with the person in charge of Canterbury City Council and you, at the Senior Citizens' hall, at the Library, Lakemba, at a time convenient to you, the other participants in the reference panel and



the researcher. The panel discussions will be audio-taped and you will be given a code name. You will not be required to declare your personalities such as your name and address. While your identity will be known to the researcher and the other participants in the panel discussion, privacy and confidentiality will be protected according to the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Ethics Committee Guidelines. Confidentiality will be protected throughout the conduct of the study and in any report or publication.

The potential benefit to you is that you will have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the significance of engagement with learning of Tongan immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools. You will also be able to give valuable information about your own views and experiences on the research topic. This study aims to highlight areas of significance for the Tongan immigrant students

Through your participation, you will be given us valuable information about your views and experiences on the interpretation of the data collected from the narrative interviews of the Tongan immigrant students and their parents. Your experiences and knowledge on Tongan immigrant students and their families are very important for the success of this research as we hope that findings from the research will provide further directions, some alternative strategies and structure for educators in schools and Tongan immigrant families in Australia, to support their efforts towards the needs of engagement with learning in schools, of Tongan immigrant students. It is hoped that the findings will be transferable cross-culturally to other immigrant families especially of South Pacific immigrant families. The study will be published as a thesis assessment. Results from the study may be summarised and appear in publications or may be provided to other researchers in a form that you will not be identified.

Participation is voluntary and you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the research at any time without giving a reason, including after the panel discussion has begun. Any withdrawal from the research will not prejudice in any way your future care and involvement with the researcher.

Any question regarding this research can be directed to:

The Principal Supervisor  
Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135,  
(02) 9701 4000.

OR The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National, Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135,  
(02) 97014000.



On request, appropriate feedback on the results of the study will be made available to the participant. You are advised that the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of Australian Catholic University (ACU) has approved this study.

In the event you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during this study, or if you have any question that the principal supervisor or student researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee, care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Strathfield Campus  
Locked Bay 2002  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: (02) 9701 4093  
Fax: (02) 9701 4350

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign both copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the principal supervisor or student researcher.

Yours faithfully,

Associate Professor Charles Burford,  
Principal Supervisor.

Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
Student Research.

**APPENDIX 17: Consent Form: Tongan immigrant leaders**

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

**CONSENT FORM TO TONGAN IMMIGRANT LEADERS**

*Copy for participant*

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Experiences of Tongan Immigrant students in Australian Catholic schools and influences on their engagement in learning.

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** Associate Professor Charles Burford.

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Kalolaine Lataifalefahi Sikimeti.

I.....(the participant) have read (or have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this:

- Focus group interviews
- Narrative-interviews
- ‘Talatalaifale’
- Reference panel discussion (please tick relevant activity)

I realise that the panel discussions will have three sessions, at the senior citizens’ hall in the library, Lakemba, at a time convenient to me, the other participants in the panel team and the researcher and the duration of each session will take approximately one hour and a half. I realise that the discussions will be audio-taped and be signed by both the supervisor and the student researcher.

I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher. I agree that research data collected for the purpose of the study may be published



or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way I understand that any urgent questions regarding the study can be directed to:

The Student Researcher,  
Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti,  
The School of Educational Leadership,  
ACU National,  
Mount St. Mary's,  
Strathfield Campus, NSW, 2135,  
(02) 9701 4000.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign both copies of this consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy by using the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT.....  
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE..... DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR .....DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER .....DATE .....

**APPENDIX 18: An extract taken from a participant's transcript sub-session 2**

	Student (Hina)	
No. of line	Transcript sub-session 2 (Narrative Questions on mentioned topics only from sub-session 1.	Notes
25 26 27	<u>Researcher</u> : Can you give me more examples of similar incidents, where you could not able to do your studies at home?	Again pushed for a particular incident narrative (PIN) to get into 'deep detail' (Dig out into surface what needed to be revealed into details, that is, to dig out more stories
28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48	<u>Participant</u> : <i>Yeah, it is very hard to study at home...there were always people around...there are ten of us in the family, [...] we have cousins stay with us... but we have a small place.. My parents often go in to community choir and church fund raisings...[3] Yeah, ...there is always something going on with our extended families...funerals, weddings...[...] and we have to give them money and to make lots of food...And most time the money are spent for these ..but our family is poor...Yeah...sometimes I can't attend our field trip because I could not par for the money needed...[2]...and I stayed home to help my mum...and just sleep... When everyone is home it's very crowded and very noisy... My parents are not working... [...] dad used to work but he got sick and do not work now...[2] Mum never work and she is a carer for dad and we only get money from Centrelink...These things affect my studies.</i>	Particular incident narratives (PINS), that was successful, Vai was able to dig out the practical problems that she was facing at home that distracted her from doing her school work at home.

**APPENDIX 19: Questions structured for sub-session 3**

<b>QUESTIONS FOR SUB-SESSION 3</b>		
<b>General Question: What factors have contributed to Tongan immigrant students' engagement with learning in Australian Catholic secondary schools?</b>		
<b>Questions for sub-session 3</b>	<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Underpinning themes and sub-themes</b>
1. What are some of the experiences at school that have not helped you in your engagement in learning?	What have been the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools?	Australian community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural integration</li> <li>- Cultural differences</li> <li>- Teachers' expectations and attitudes</li> <li>- Perspectives in a monocultural paradigm</li> </ul>
2. What are some of the experiences at home that have not helped you in your engagement in learning?  3. What are some of the experiences at your Tongan community that have not helped you in your engagement in learning?	How do Tongan immigrant families and community influence the engagement in learning of the Tongan immigrant students at Australian Catholic schools?	Tongan family and community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural values</li> <li>- Identity</li> <li>- Family-community involvement</li> <li>- School's relations with its community</li> </ul>
4. What are some of the values and culture of the Catholic schools that are not helpful to your effort to engage in your learning?	How do the values and culture of Catholic schools influence the engagement in learning of immigrant Tongan students?	Catholic school culture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aspects of the culture of a Catholic school</li> <li>- Development through relationships</li> <li>- Catholic school community</li> <li>- Christian community</li> <li>- Spirituality</li> </ul>
5. What are some of the teaching and learning experiences that are more engaging for you?	What teaching and learning experiences are more engaging for Tongan immigrant students?	Teaching and learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Culture and learning</li> <li>- Pedagogy</li> <li>- Language</li> <li>- Engagement in learning</li> </ul>

**APPENDIX 20: An extract taken from a participant's transcript on sub-session 3**

No. of line	Transcript Sub-Session 3 (SQUIN)	Notes
13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42	<p><u>Researcher:</u> What are some of the experiences at school that have not helped you in your engagement in learning?</p> <p><u>Participant:</u> [2] <i>The experiences at school that have not helped me in my engagement in learning are when I don't take what the teacher says. The teacher always try to say things to help me in my learning but it was me who switch off from engaging in learning. [.] When I don't pay attention to the teacher I don't learn much in the classroom. [.] Yeah, some teachers also do not understand me, [12] I think sometimes they interpret me wrongly, when I tried to speak in the classroom. I think they don't listen. [.] and I switch off from trying to learn in the classroom....</i></p> <p><i>I was dreaming and hoping to hear the bell ringing so that I could go out to play footy because I was very miserable in the classroom.</i></p> <p><u>Researcher:</u> What are some of the experiences at home that do not help you in your engagement in learning?</p> <p><u>Participant:</u> [.] <i>My parents are both working and often are not at home in the evening. There are so many relatives who always come to our place but we have a small house. [2] We always have to go to choir practices and church activities. [3] No one has any time to help me with my homework..</i></p> <p><u>Researcher:</u> What are some of the experiences at your Tongan community that have not helped you in your engagement in learning?</p> <p><u>Participant:</u> [2] <i>I have boys who are my friends and they involve in gangsters and violence. There are some Tongan kids in the Tongan community who are with gangsters and ended up in jail and on the streets doing nothing. [.] School is not cool for them, and I try to follow them. The Tongan community also always having meetings for fund raising to give to church leaders who asked for money to help to build churches, [.] this often do not help me. These affect my family and my work at school...</i></p>	<p>This third session with Sini took place in his home, on Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2010, at 3.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.</p> <p>I have structured some questions (Appendix 19) for sub-session three. I wanted to dig out more narratives that are relevant to the research questions.</p> <p>Expressed that the classroom was not 'cool'. Felt miserable in the classroom and preferred to play footy.</p> <p>Parents were both working and often were not at home in the evening.</p> <p>Church activities and choir practices were also a concern because it took up a lot of the family's time.</p> <p>He expressed his concern with some of his friends who are not at school, become gangsters and ended up in jail.</p> <p>Giving money to church leaders have expressed as a concern. This has affected his family and his studies.</p>

## Appendix 21: Questions (in Tongan and English) for the *talatalaifale*, for participating parents

**Talateu (Introduction):** Fakamalo atu hono talitali lelei au ki homo ‘api/. ‘Oku ou hounga’ia mo fiefia ‘i ho’omo tali lelei ke u lele mai ke u ako mei ha’amo ‘omai ha *talatalaifale* kia au ‘o fekau’aki mo e kaveinga ‘oku ou lele mai ai/... ‘Oku ou ongo’i fakatokilalo mo ‘apasia ‘i ho’omo fofola mai e fala/ ke tau tangutu ‘iai ke fakahoko mai ‘aki ‘a e *talatalaifale* temo fakahoko ‘o fekau’aki mo e kaveinga ‘oku ou lele mai moia/, ... he’e tokoni lahi ‘aupito kia au pea u to e ako mei he ngaahi me’a te mo faka’inasi mai ‘i ho’omo *talatalaifale*’, ‘o fekau’aki ki he kaveinga mei he fekumi ‘oku ou fakahoko/, ...ke ma’u ha ngaahi founga ‘oku lelei ange ki hono tokoni’i ke toe fakalalakaka mo tokanga ange ‘a ‘etau fanau/, ki he’enua ako/...*Thank you for welcoming me to your home. I am grateful and happy that you accepted my invitation to come to you to get your views, advice and information on the issues regarding my research...I am humbled that you “roll out your mats” for us to sit on, and for you to give me your advice, views and information regarding the issues on my research...looking for ways to help our children to engage better in their learning...Whatever you will share will help me in my research, but I will also learn from your views, advice and information...*

**Ko e fakaafe ke fai ha fale’i pea ‘e lava pe ke ne tali ‘a e fehu’i ‘e 4 ‘oku ‘i he tepile ‘i lalo/:** Katakaki fakamolemole ka ke ‘omai ha’o ngaahi fale’i mo e ngaahi fakakaukau ki he ngaahi me’a ‘oku ke fehengahangai mo ia ‘i he ako ‘a ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i/, ‘i he’ene feinga ke fai ‘aki ‘a ‘ene lelei taha/, ‘i he’ene ako/. Faka’inasi ha me’a pe ‘oku ke fie faka’inasi/, ‘o fekau’aki mo e ngaahi polokalama ‘i he ako/, ‘a ‘enua kau faiako/ pea mo ha fa’ahinga me’a pe ‘oku ke faka’amu ke ke ‘omai ‘i ho’o talatalaifale/ talu ‘a ‘ene kamata ‘i he kalasi 7/ ‘o a’u mai ki he taimi ni. An invitation to give advice, views and information that could answer any of the four research questions, below: Please, give me your advice, views and information on anything you know that your child experiences/d in school, that help/do not help her/him to engage in learning. Feel free to share anything about the programme at school, the teachers and others, that are important for you personally, since your child entered her/his school, when she/he was in Year 7.

Focus question	Research question	Underpinning key concepts
1. ‘Omai mu’a ha’o fale’i ki he ngaahi me’a ‘oku fehengahangai mo ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i ‘i he’ene ako, ‘i ‘apiako, pea ‘oku ke pehe ‘oku tokoni/’ikai ke tokoni ki he’ene tokanga ki he ako/? <i>In your opinion, what are some of the experiences that your child faces at school that help/do not help her/him, to engage in learning?</i>	What have been the experiences of Tongan immigrant students in Australian schools?	<b>Australian school community:</b> Cultural integration, Acculturation, Cultural mismatch; Institutional practice; Socio-cultural deprivation.
2. ‘Omai mu’a ha’o fale’i mo e ngaahi fakakaukau ‘o fekau’aki mo e ngaahi tokoni ‘oku fakahoko ‘i ‘api pea mo e komiuniti, ke tokoni ki he ako ‘a ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i, pea pehe foki mo e ngaahi faingata’a ‘oku ke fehengahangai moia ‘i ho’o feinga ke tokoni ki ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i/, ke tokanga ki ‘ene ako/. <i>In your opinion, please give your views and advice on the things that your family and Tongan community do and they/it help/not help to support your child in her/hi education in school?</i>	How do Tongan immigrant families and community influence the Tongan immigrant students at Australian Catholic schools?	<b>Tongan family and community:</b> Family; Cultural values; Identity; Family-community involvement; School relations with its community.
3. ‘Omai mu’a ha’o fale’i mo e ngaahi fakakaukau ‘o fekau’aki mo e ngaahi tokateline mo e tui faka Katolika ‘a e ako Katolika/, ‘oku lava/’ikai lava ke toe lelei ange ai e ako ‘a ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i/? <i>In your opinion, what are some of the values and culture of the Catholic school that could help/not help your child to engage in her/his learning?</i>	How do the values and culture of Catholic schools influence the engagement of immigrant Tongan students?	<b>Catholic school culture:</b> Catholic schools in Australia; Cultural values of a Catholic school; Catholic for the disadvantage.
4. ‘Omai mu’a ha’o fale’i mo e ngaahi fakakaukau ki he ngaahi founga fakafaiako ‘i ‘apiako pea pehe foki ki ‘api, ‘aia ‘oku lava ke tokoni/’ikai ke tokoni ki ho’o ta’ahine/tamasi’i, ke toe fakalalakaka ange ai ‘a ‘ene tokanga ki he ako/. <i>(In your opinion, what are some of the teaching strategies, in school or at home, that are helpful/not helpful for your child, in her/his effort to engage in her/his learning?</i>	What teaching and learning experiences are more engaging for Tongan immigrant students?	<b>Teaching and learning:</b> Culture and education: Dynamic Conceptualisation; Pedagogy; Language; Curriculum; Engagement in learning.

**Continue Appendix 21: An extract taken from a parent's *talatalaifale***

<p>625 626 627 628 629 630 631 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689</p>	<p>‘Omai mu’a ha’o fale’i mo e ngaahi fakakaukau ki he ngaahi founa fakafaiako ‘i ‘apiako, ‘e lava ke tokoni kia Sini ke tokanga ange ki he ako/. (Please give your views on the strategies that the school use to support Sini to engage better in learning? <i>Parent 6 (Niu): ‘Oku ‘ikai ha ‘aku fu’u ‘ilo lahi ki he ngaahi founa fakafaiako ‘i he kuonga ko’eni ‘i he ‘apiako, pea ‘oku ou fiefia ‘aupito au ‘i he ngaahi me’a mo e ngaahi faingamalie ‘oku ou sio ‘oku ma’u ‘e Sini mei he ‘api ako. [2] ‘Oku ou sai’ia ‘aupito he ‘oku ‘iai e ngaahi tokoni makehe he ‘apiako ‘o tokoni’i e “reading” mo e ngaahi tokoni ki he “homework” Pea mo e kau faiako mo e kau “volunteer” makehe ‘o hange ko koe, pea ‘oku lahi mo e ngaahi “extra” Polokalama ‘oku fakahoko ke tokoni kia Sini, ka ‘oku ou tui au ‘oku ‘ikai ke faka’aonga’i lelei ia ‘e Sini. [3] ‘Oku ‘ilonga eni ‘i he ngaahi taimi ‘oku tomui mai ai ‘a Sini mei he tuku ‘a e ako, pea talamai ‘oku nofo ki he ‘detention’ pea na’e ma’u ‘a ‘ene ‘demerits’. ‘Oku sai ‘aupito ‘a e fakahoko ‘a e fanga ki’i tautea ko’eni he ‘ilo’i ‘e Sini ‘oku totonu ke fai ‘a e me’a ke lava ke toe saiange ai ‘a ‘ene tokanga ki he ako.</i> (I do not know much of the strategies that the school use nowadays in the classroom, and I am very happy in all the opportunities that Sini received at school. [2] I like the different help that Sini received at school, including the help with his reading, and homework. There are also volunteers including yourself and many other extra supports in school the school programme to help Sini, but I believe Sini do not use these opportunities properly. This has shown because Sini sometimes came home late from school, and the others said that Sini was staying in school for detention, because he had demerits. I like the discipline that given to Sini very much because it is right and good for Sini to learn to do the right things in order to improve his engagement in learning.</p>	<p>Sini’s father expressed his concern on Sini’s disengagement in learning in the classroom and had advised Sini to develop a love for reading and to do his homework. He continued to say that Sini engaged very well in sports and especially playing football. He wish Sini would give the same energy he put into his footy to his engagement in learning in the classroom and his reading.</p> <p>He expressed on behalf of them (both) parents the following:</p> <p>The full development, that is, spiritual growth, academic growth, physical growth, emotional growth and social growth that the school give Sini.</p> <p>Concerns on teachers who do not understand Sini’s personalities and therefore could spoil their relationship with Sini.</p> <p>Their pride on Sini’s knowledge on spiritual values, culture and doctrine of the Catholic school.</p> <p>Their priority would be always prayer, good manners and respect to all people. The session was concluded by a song and a prayer led by Sema (mother). Sema thanked God for the opportunity given us for a wonderful meeting to share issues that could help their son in his studies and engagement in learning in the classroom. She prayed for their family and all families especially those who have gone through difficulties.</p>
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**APPENDIX 22: The diagrammatic representation of the field log strategy**



**The field log was used to:**

- Provide a word-picture of people, places, actions and reactions.
- Record the study's operational information such as the name, date, time and location of interactions with participants.
- Record the summary of the key issues arising during encounters.
- Provide notes on interactive experienced and researcher perceptions and reactions as well as charting the evolution of the study.
- Record memos that theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships

**APPENDIX 23: Silverman's Simplified Transcription Symbol (adapted from Wengraf, 2001), were developed to use for the transcripts of the narrative interviews with the participating students.**

R.	Represents the Researcher (Interviewer)
P.	Represents the student (Interviewee)
<i>Italics</i>	Represents participants' transcripts and quotes
<b>Bold</b>	Emphasised words to convey meaning – intensity, forcefulness, passion
-	Words that were not clear enough for the transcriber
[.]	A dot in parentheses represents a deep breath or sigh of hesitant
[3]	Numbers in parentheses represent the length of pauses in seconds
[nervousness]	Represents nervousness
{.....}	Represents time taken to draw the picture of the story and writing the meanings of the picture.
~ ~	Represents time taken to decide whether to draw the picture of the story or not

**APPENDIX 24: Letter to the 6 members of the reference panel**

**Australian Catholic University**  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

**Australian Catholic University Limited**

ABN 15 050 192 660

Strathfield Campus (Mount St. Mary's)

25A Barker Road

Locked Bag 2002

Strathfield, NSW, 2135

Telephone (02) 9701 4000

Facsimile (02) 9701 4281

Dear Leader,

Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in three panel sessions, of interviews I have conducted with Year 9 Tongan immigrant students, transcribed and in the process of analysing. In my research I have adopted 'The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method' as an analytical tool and part of the process of analysing data is the recruitment of a reference panel that facilitate the introduction of multiple voices as a collective means of deliberation.

I have recruited five other Tongan immigrant leaders from various backgrounds, professional as well as demographic to be immersed in chunks of data to open up possibilities in interpretation rather than relying solely on my primary interpretation of the interview. This activity will not require you to have a research specific or academic background. This allows a diversity and unique contribution to the process. I hope to commence the first panel session in the next fortnight. Each session will meet for a maximum of three sessions with each session lasting approximately three hours. I will be facilitating all sessions.

You will be advised about your session dates and times, after everyone in the reference panel finalises with me the dates and times on a Saturday starting at 9.00 a.m. or a Wednesday starting at 5.00 p.m. Food and a time for relaxation and fun will be provided at all sessions. If you have any special preference for special Tongan food please let me know and I will do my best to cater for your needs.

Enclosed are the tentative agenda and central questions for the panel sessions.

Thank you for your assistance and I look forward to a productive session.

Yours sincerely,

Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti.

## APPENDIX 25: Agenda and Central questions for the reference panel sessions

Welcome

### Why are we here?

To generate ideas and consider a range of possibilities in the interpretation of interviews.

### What role will you play?

Your role is to add value to the project by contributing different perspectives and interpretations about the life of an individual and her/his perspectives.

### What role will I play?

Facilitate the analysis, keep a written record about contributions, and say very little about my interpretations of the individual's life.

### *Reference panel sessions on Saturday*

9.00 a.m. - Welcome and Introduction Prayer  
Information about the process  
Process commences

10.45 a.m. Coffee/tea break

11.00 a.m. Process continues

12.30 p.m. Finish – lunch, enjoy a variety  
of Tongan dishes, music and dancings

### *Reference panel session on Wednesday*

5.00 p.m. - Welcome and Introduction, Prayer  
Information about the process  
Process commences

6.45 p.m. Coffee/tea break

7.00 p.m. Process continues

8.30 p.m. Finish –evening meal, enjoy a  
variety of Tongan dishes, music and dancings.

### Central questions the panel needs to ask themselves about each datum in turn (BDA)

1. How could the event be experienced – in relation to the context of age, personal development, family, generation and milieu?
2. How could it contribute to the shaping of her/his life?
3. What events and actions might be expected to follow next or later in life if those experiential and /or shaping hypotheses were correct?

### Central questions about each datum of TFA

1. In which thematic field is the single sequence embedded?
2. What might be the hidden agenda?
3. Why is the interviewee talking about the topic using this specific kind of text?
4. What might come next in the interview if the hypotheses about 1-3 turned out to be true?
5. What, if any hypotheses about the thematic field of the whole story suggest themselves at this stage?

**Appendix 26: Declaration of the translation of the script from the Tongan immigrant parents, from Tongan language into English language.**

30 Chapel Street,  
Belmore,  
NSW, 2192,  
Sydney.

12<sup>th</sup> January, 2011.

**DECLARATION ... TRANSLATING TONGAN INTO  
ENGLISH**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that

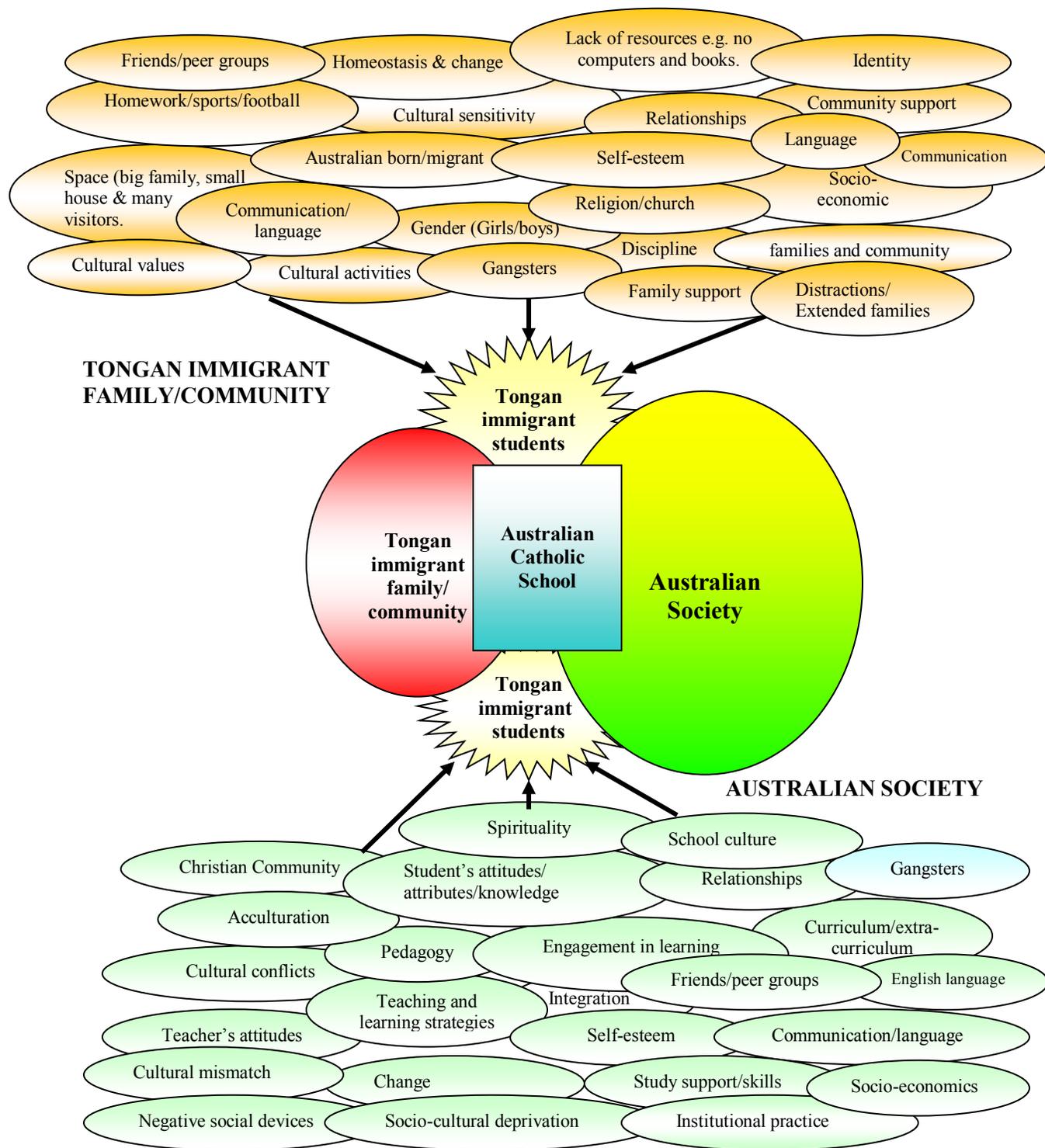
- (i) I am a professional interpreter in, translating Tongan into English.
- (i) The researcher (Kalolaine Lataifalefehi Sikimeti) of this thesis conducted the interviews with the Tongan immigrant parents in Tongan.
- (ii) The scripts of the interviews with the Tongan immigrant parents were translated into English by the researcher.
- (iii) I have checked all the transcripts of the interviews from Tongan into English and I have found the translation complete and correct.

I therefore give my approval on all the transcripts of the interviews conducted by the researcher with the Tongan immigrant parents to use for this thesis as complete and correct.

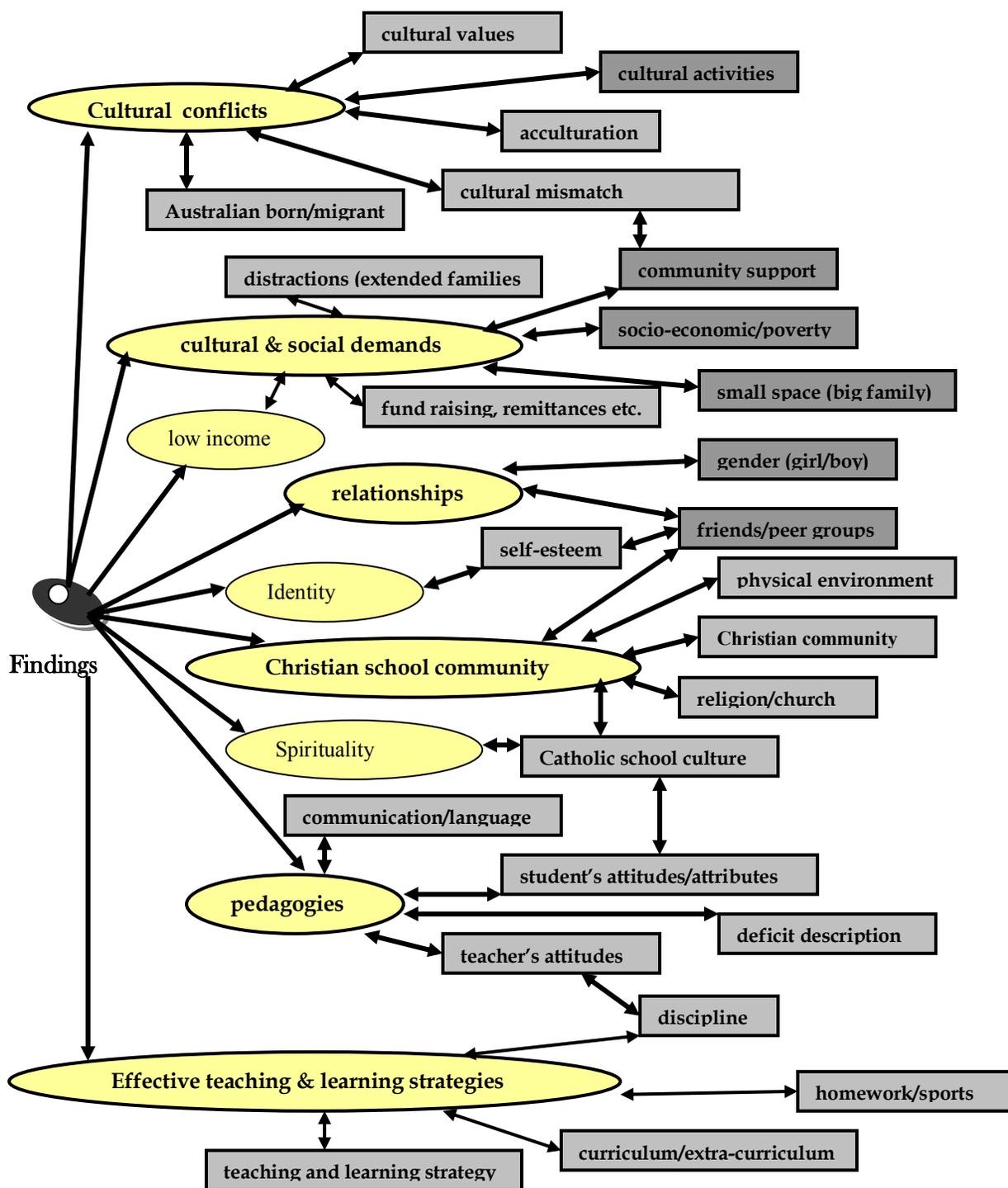


Anisasio Latu.

**APPENDIX 27: A complex model showing common themes emerged from the Tongan immigrant students' stories**



APPENDIX 28: An example of the themes of a participant illustrated in simple detail



**APPENDIX 29: Reflection on the time spent with Tongan immigrant students and their parents and members of the reference panel around the setting of ‘sitting on Tongan mats’ (Sikimeti, 2010)**

“Sitting on Tongan mats with the Tongan immigrant students, their families and their community I felt the wonders of their honest and hearty stories, there were longings and hopes expressed with energies to unite their world of beauty to their school learning communities.

Sharing their past, looking for better life and education, they found hope, joy and love in Australian education. Searching to integrate their culture to the Catholic school culture as they struggle with human yearnings, there were difficulties and questions in their longings to engage in learning.

I felt the energies of excitements around the Tongan mat setting, as they connected to me their longings towards the process of getting answers to the difficulties that they faced. They were hardships they experienced that hindered them from relating and interacting to their learning.

Watching the faces of the Tongan students sitting on the Tongan mat reminded me of my own childhood and how the lives of Tongan people are connected with each other through family and community. It is an important sense of belongings, interdependent and connectedness.

I remember those precious moments of sitting around on the Tongan mat with my family. They are my personal knowledge and hope on the journey, working towards a future where the Tongan immigrant students might gather around the sitting on the Tongan mat in the companionship of family and community.

The setting of sitting on the Tongan mat has helped them to receive knowledge and skills of the spirits of their God and their ancestors. This empower them to share about the past, talk about the present and find hope and solution to the dilemma on their engagement with learning.”