An Exploration of Conflicting Styles: The Experiences of Australian Secondary Samoan Students Attending a Christian Secondary College

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been submitted previously for a degree or diploma at any higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my mother and father, Leusila and Aunoa Aiolupotea who taught me the value and importance of family and those things that have made Samoa distinctive and unique, and to Robyn, whose inspiration and encouragement helped me every step of the way from the beginning to the end of this thesis.

Abstract

Seven Australian Samoan secondary students participated in a study of cultural variation, learning style and pedagogy. The data were gathered through taped and transcribed interviews with the students and seven of their teachers. The study found that students identified themselves as both Samoans and Australians and prevailing circumstances determined their position on this Australian-Samoan dimension. The study further indicated several factors that enhanced or inhibited the students' learning. They saw themselves as citizens of the school community and were well integrated into the school culture and they generally valued their school experience and exhibited a positive attitude toward the school ethos. This was evident in the wide and various subjects they undertook and enjoyed. While they found some subjects difficult, they responded with effort. Teachers indicated that, along with other island students, the Samoan students had a level of English proficiency that was not strong enough to allow them to engage successfully with some upper secondary subjects. In addition, a number lacked the ability to be systematic and some expressed difficulty with those teaching styles that conflicted with their own learning styles. The study made a number of recommendations.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Samoa lies in the heart of the Polynesian Pacific. It incorporates a small group of islands of great beauty but is poor in resources. The major export from these islands over the past half century has been people. This migration has largely taken these people of Samoan heritage to three nations: the United States of America (US), New Zealand and Australia.

Here in Australia, these people of a culture shaped by isolation have had to find a place for themselves in a foreign land and among a people of a strong and occasionally abrasive culture. They have had to send their children to schools staffed by professionals who have limited knowledge of their culture and who teach in a different language. The question is: What is the experience of these children as they seek an education in Australian schools?

Research Question

In this study seven Samoan students attending West Sydney Christian College a K-12 school and a selection of their teachers participated in interviews about their educational experiences. The research questions were:

- What are the experiences of Samoan secondary students attending West Sydney Christian College?
- On the basis of the findings, what recommendations can be made to improve their education success?

Importance of the Study

Social issues are dynamic and ever changing. They need to be monitored continually to note patterns and trends. Although studies of this nature have taken place in the United States, New Zealand and Australia (Anae, Anderson, Benseman & Coxon, 2002; Singh, 2000; Tsutsumoto, 1998, Vaipae, 1999) a study like this has not been conducted before in *West Sydney Christian College*, even though it has a sizeable community of island students. This study has the potential to improve the future wellbeing of island students enrolled in *West Sydney Christian College*. Further, improving the educational success of minority students allows them to have choice in determining their future careers and lives. The improvement of their economic future is a benefit to the entire nation.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter Two reviews the literature related to traditional education in the islands and develops a view of a learning style among island students. Further, the second chapter also reviews the literature in relation to the education of immigrant Samoan students in the United States, New Zealand and Australia. Chapter Three outlines the method of the study and introduces the participants. Chapter Four presents the results of the study and Chapter Five discusses these results and draws them to a conclusion.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The Samoan people with their tradition and culture have been the subject of research over the past century but no studies were more prominent and arguably more controversial than Margaret Mead's anthropological investigation of Samoan culture (Freeman, 1983; Mead, 1928). Meads findings were later published in her book that has since become an anthropological benchmark called: *The Coming of Age in Samoa* in which Mead explored the social systems operative in the Samoan family or the *aiga*. Despite his criticism of her many findings, Freeman (1983) did not contradict her descriptions of the broad context of Samoan socio-centric culture (Vaipae, 1999).

From Mead's early work has emerged considerable research that has further explored other areas of Samoan society (Vaipae, 1999). For example: Torrance (1962, cited in Vaipae, 1999) examined creativity and memory as determinants of Samoan behaviour; while other contributors like Holmes (1967 also cited in Vaipae, 1999) observed the persistence of traditional traits in the Samoan personality when confronted with cultural change. That is, the propensity of Samoans to preserve traditional customs and practices in the face of changing global and economic environments (Vaipae, 1999).

However, the literature regarding the issues facing Samoan students culturally, socially and educationally creates a picture of struggle, conflict, failure and surprisingly resilience and adaptation. The current study examines the experience of young adolescents of Samoan heritage who are attending a fee-paying secondary school in Sydney Australia.

Background Information

Samoa is a cluster of small volcanic islands spread across the central Pacific. They comprise the two main islands of Samoa, namely Upolu and Savai'i, and the island groups of American Samoa, Tutu'ila and Manua. The 210,000 people living on these islands share a common culture and single language (Freeman, 1983; Mead, 1928; Yamamoto, n.d.).

Currently some 164,000 people claiming Samoan heritage live on the Pacific periphery (Samoan diaspora). Of these, 86,000 live in New Zealand, 63,000 live in the United States of America (Yamamoto, n.d.) and in excess of 15,000 live in Australia (DiversiCare, 2006). In the United States the populations are divided between Hawaii and spread along the Pacific Coast from California to Washington State. In New Zealand they tend to be concentrated in the North Island, while in Australia the Samoan communities tend to be concentrated in the large cities of the eastern coast, namely Brisbane, Newcastle, and Sydney.

Understanding the Fa'asamoa: A Social View

Author and sociologist Samuel P Huntington (1996) has argued that "the most important distinctions amongst peoples are not ideological, political, or economic ... [they] are cultural" (p. 21). People are attempting to find meaning about who they are by reference to those things that are meaningful to them. People use language, values, customs, history, institutions, religion and ancestry to define themselves on the broadest level (Huntington, 1996). Samoa has been a society in which the *fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way of life) has permeated every facet of its identity, language, culture and tradition and continues to bring meaning to Samoans in the current global context (Singh, 2000).

The *fa'asamoa* or the Samoan way of life forms most if not all of Samoan identity. Even though the *fa'asamoa* has adjusted somewhat in Samoan communities in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, what remains constant are the *aiga* (family), tradition, and values (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2007). Melanie Anae (1998 cited in Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2007) in her study of Samoan identity found that those of Samoan heritage born in New Zealand consistently described aspects of the *fa'asamoa*. To them, the *fa'asamoa* meant: broad family cohesion; providing for the family needs (both immediate and extended and particularly the elderly), and rich social activity surrounding the church and communal activities.

In order to understand the Samoan idea of socialization one must come to terms with the similarities and differences between the Samoan *aiga* and the typical picture of

Western families. In her analysis (see Table 2.1), Vaipae (1999) contrasts the traditional Samoan *aiga* with a Western family in terms of structure and relationships. While, the Western type family has typically been seen as nuclear and generally composed of two generations, the typical Samoan family included a multi-generational structure extending laterally to the far relatives - the whole structure being remarkably all-inclusive (Vaipae, 1999).

Table 2.1 Comparison of Western and Samoan Family Structure (Adapted from Vaipae, 1999, pp. 17-22)

Family Structure and Relationships	
Middle Class European (American)	**Traditional Samoan**
• Composed of a nuclear family	• Composed of an extended family: all inclusive
• Composed of two generations of the immediate family	• Composed of multi-generational and lateral relatives
• Independence is measured by the expectation that children will leave home to set up their own family unit.	• Samoan families are interdependent where children and their spouses are expected to integrate into the extended family
• Youthfulness is affirmed as being ideal while senior adulthood is seen as a liability	• Those of advanced age are assigned the greatest respect and honour
• Children are taught the responsibility of work through chores therefore learning the valued responsibility using the reward of monetary allowances	• Children contribute to work and the maintenance of home through errands, cooking, cleaning and looking after the young with no thought of remuneration
• There reluctant support of elderly parents is seen in how they are treated by older children who are hesitant to provide total care	• The culture ensures that children are committed to the life-long care of parents
• There is an individual and self reliance that compels one to have a sense of control over one's destiny and future	• The individual shares in the common objectives and goals of the family; therefore relationships are dependent on and within the group

Independence has been a hallmark of Western families where the children are expected to leave when old enough; by contrast, Samoan families are interdependent. Integration into the extended family is not only the accepted tradition, it is also expected. Children of Western families have been seen to be reluctant to support elderly parents with total care. In affirming youthfulness, Western families have treated the elderly and those of senior years as somewhat a liability. By contrast, Samoans not only demonstrate respect for the elderly, but those of advanced years are treated with the highest dignity and honour. In the *fa'asamoa*, the individual is a part of a larger structure (the *aiga*) with all the rights and responsibilities of that membership. The individual is meant to assume the goals and objectives of the family and relationships between members of the *aiga* become pre-eminent. This is in marked contrast to the self reliance taught in the Western family unit that compel individuals to have a sense of control over their own future and destiny (Vaipae, 1999).

But it is vital to understand that within Samoan society titled persons hold a much higher rank than those who are untitled. This makes Samoan society "highly stratified" in which positions of rank and religious title in the socio-political structure of the community are considered important (Singh, 2000, p. 6). These religious and political titles include: *Matai* (Chief), *Tufale* (Orator), *Fai'feau* (Minister of Religion) and Deacons. It also takes into consideration generation and age where the younger submits to those who are older (Singh, 2000).

Literacy in Samoa

The introduction of literacy had its beginnings in the Samoan culture with the arrival of the English missionaries who promptly established training schools for *faifeau's* or local pastors. By 1855, they had created a phonetic script and translated hymnals and the bible into the local language, thus facilitating the development of literacy amongst the indigenous population (Nune, 2006). By the turn of the 20th century, nearly all of the adult population were literate in the Samoan language (Nune, 2006). By the mid-20th century, Samoa established its own literature and literary traditions. Not only was Samoa one of the first Pacific regions to become literate in its own language, but the Samoan script became the communication language on other Polynesian atolls such as Nukulaelae, located on the chain of the Tuvalu islands (Nune, 2006). But with colonization, the impending shift towards English literacy not only was inevitable, but also had consequences that encroached on the strong and powerful oral traditions that permeated Samoan culture and society (Nune, 2006).

Traditional Education in a Structured Environment

The combination of Western education and literacy impacted the traditional Samoan manner of knowledge transmission (Ritchie, 1979). With its emphasis upon manual skill development, navigation and oral history, traditional education depended upon modelling and orality (Lewis, 1994; Masterton, 1980). Those who had skills explained and demonstrated them, and then watched and corrected as the novices made their attempts. Allied with this manner of education was respect assigned to

those of rank or who were skilled. This meant that the novice watched and listened but did not question. However, discussion and questioning took place among and within the peer group where those of greater skill could be questioned and could also guide attempts. By contrast, from the earliest periods of colonial settlement in the pacific and throughout New Zealand, education had essentially catered to the European child and its way of learning (Ritchie, 1979). The use of books and classrooms according to Ritchie (1979), opposed the way in which Polynesians have traditionally learned.

With the dominance of Western education, the educational emphasis in Samoa shifted from performance in actual skills to examinations. Success in exams required a different type of learning from the traditional modes of Samoan education. Many young Samoans found little reason to participate in such foreign activity and simply withdrew from the task (Ritchie, 1979). Dropout rates of Samoan students have been documented by Gallimore (1976) and Bobillier 1974 (cited in Ritchie, 1979). This is also supported by Tsutsumoto (1998).

A Conflict of Styles

The preceding section suggests that traditional Samoan learning involved a preference in which information was provided orally and skills were modelled. Further, Samoan tradition confers a rank upon the teacher that demands respect. A number of commentators concur with these propositions and further suggest that these preferences amount to a general learning style (Graves, 1973; Horsley, 2002; Ritchie, 1979). This style requires lessons to be highly structured and delivered in a

teacher-centred classroom in which there is a highly social environment. In these teacher-centred environments, Samoan students prefer to watch and listen and tend not to ask questions (Horsley, 2002). Teacher modelling of skills and activities is important. The commentators also suggest that Samoan students both enjoy and function well in group activities where tasks are clearly structured and students understand the procedures before commencement (Finau, 1993; Horsley, 2002; Ritchie, 1979, Yorsten, 1999). Here discussion and questioning can become quite animated. However, these same commentators indicate that Samoan students find difficulty with loosely structured problem solving sessions.

There are additional problems faced by Samoan students who are educated in developed nations. In places like New Zealand and Australia, students have greater autonomy and are taught to question and to seek information and if possible to become independent problem-solvers (Ritchie, 1979). This environment is initially foreign to young expatriate Samoans. Further, in the new nation, they can lose fluency in their first language, but not develop adequate compensating language skills in English (Nune, 2006). This has the potential to leave them without an effective language for thought, reading and writing. As such their educational experience may well be compromised.

Expatriate Samoan Education: The United States Experience

Tsutsumoto (1998) studied Samoan students in three communities in the United States as widely separated as Hawai'i, California and Seattle, Washington State. He found that the Samoan communities that supplied the students tended to have low

socio-economic status and exhibit high unemployment and inadequate heathcare. On average, the Samoan students tended to be educationally marginalised and disadvantaged. As a group they achieved among the lowest average scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and, in California, more that 80 per cent failed to complete tertiary courses. In Hawai'i Tsutsumoto found that a part of the reason for this failure was a combination of factors that amounted to poor support. Firstly, the orienting programs to tertiary study did not adequately prepare Samoan students. Secondly, adequate advice was not available. Thirdly, where counsellors were provided they tended to be unqualified to deal with Samoan students. In addition where there were support programs, organisations representing Asian students dominated and as a result special issues important to Samoan students tended to be overlooked. Hence, Samoan students felt that they were invisible (Tsutsumoto, 1998).

Expatriate Samoan Education: The New Zealand Experience

Samoan students in New Zealand had very similar experiences to those in the United States. A study of low ranking schools in Auckland, Gwenneth, MacDonald & McNaughton (2003), found that Pacific island students, among whom there were significant numbers of Samoan students, received test scores significantly lower than the national benchmark. While some attempts were made to improve the situation of island students, a report by the University of Auckland and the New Zealand Ministry of Education indicated that education was not improving the general circumstances and conditions of Pacific islanders (Anae etal, 2002). However, while Pacific islanders appear to have placed great value and importance on education as

opposed to the idea of working in a factory, there were also social issues within the *aiga* that made success difficult. Those issues included: their obligation to home duties that involved taking care of aged grandparents; church related duties and family emergencies or *fa'alavelave* (Anae etal, 2002). In addition, financial problems of the family were made the responsibility of the adult children. That is, young Samoan students would if necessary be pressured into leaving school to financially support their family (Anae, 1998; Anae etal, 2002). The situation was further complicated by a number of important aspects. Firstly, it would appear that tutoring and pedagogical styles employed at tertiary level were not culturally sympathetic to Pacific Islander students'. That is, they did not take into account the cultural home pressures the students face, nor did they consider the background educational needs of the students. Secondly, tertiary institutions did not supply adequate let alone appropriate learning support services (Anae etal, 2002; Ministry of Education, 1995).

Education in the Australian Experience

Research into educational issues facing Samoan students in Australia was undertaken by Parlo Singh (1999) and Karen Dooley, Paul Herschell and Parlo Singh (n.d.). Their work with the Samoan students at *Saunder High School*[1] in Queensland revealed similar traits to those conditions facing Samoan students in New Zealand and the United States.

Singh's research into disadvantaged minority groups indicated that the Samoan diaspora was mainly concentrated in low socio-economic areas like Saunder, located

[1] Saunder High School is a pseudonym.

in Brisbane's western suburbs. She noted the high unemployment levels in the area and the lack of community resources as compared with other more moderate socio-economic areas. This seemed to be reflected in the educational resources available at those schools attended by Samoan students. While there were initiatives in introducing more relevant methods of teaching into the classrooms, Samoan students along with Indigenous students ranked amongst the low achievers (Singh, 1999). Singh recommended that efforts be made to bridge the cultural divide between the school and the Samoan students. Paraprofessionals were brought in to assist High Schools in forging a better understanding of Samoan culture. Despite this, the problems and issues with Samoan students have remained. One of the issues at Saunder high school lay in the predominantly Caucasian and English speaking staff. Teachers were not familiar with the culture and learning styles of Samoan children.

Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory and Modelling

Lev Vygotsky lived and died in pre-Second World War Russia in which psychological thought was dominated by behaviourism. Despite this, his views anticipated the social and cognitive thinking of a later period. To Lev Vygotsky, every child had a social history and was embedded in a socio-cultural context (Krause, Bochner & Duchesne, 2007). Within this setting the meaning of new experiences was socially negotiated.

Vygotsky noted that often in the presence of older or more skilled persons young persons may well perform at levels beyond their normal competence. This gap between aided and unaided efforts he labelled the Zone of Proximal Development

(ZPD). He also noted that often the more skilled individual would prompt or assist the lesser skilled individual at critical points in the performance. He termed such specific help 'scaffolding' and argued that, for the individual, it often made the difference between success and failure (Allen, 2005; Ormrod, 2006).

Vygotsky's socio-cultural thinking has particular relevance for Samoan students attempting to study in settings in which the prevailing culture is different from their own. Schools are powerful places and when student feel alienated from the culture of fellow students and the culture of the classroom then it is not surprising that they will opt out. However, their chances of success may be increased if: they can be made to feel comfortable; they are given a mentor whom they trust; their efforts can be scaffolded at critical points in their learning, and the teacher understands their educational needs and attempts to meet those needs.

Within the last decade, there has been renewed emphasis on modelling as an educational process. Modelling has a basis in cognitive activity (Rizzolatti, Figassi & Gallese, 2006). Mere observation of an activity is ceasing to be seen as a passive act. It is now known that when behaviour is closely observed, the circuits in the brain that would normally control that behaviour in the observer's body become active (Rizzolatti etal, 2006). This silent neural activity has been called 'mirroring' and the circuits involved have been called 'mirror neurones'. This process has implications in many areas. Athletes can prepare themselves for a particular skill by imaging the performance of the skill. An observer who witnesses an emotional reaction in another can feel for them in empathy (Rizzolatti etal, 2006). Watching a teacher model an activity in the classroom also ceases to be passive. Close observation can begin the

process of building the neural control network needed in order to carry out the activity.

It appears that modelling and scaffolding have been traditional teaching and learning processes for Samoans (Yorsten, 1999). Yorsten described her experience with a Samoan family in which an instance of the result of modelling occurred. Dinner was usually prepared by the family children - namely the eldest brother and sister. However, Yorsten was asked to prepare the meal. She made an effort to cut the meat in the traditional manner but failed to do so neatly. She then asked the assistance of the younger brother who had never cut meat before. The lad performed the task proficiently and neatly. Yorsten concluded that the young boy had learnt to do this by observation.

Modelling and scaffolding are common in the Polynesian pattern of child development (Ritchie, 1979). At the beginning stages, children are nurtured and connect warmly to adults. Here they learn by watching and their efforts to perform tasks are scaffolded by more experienced peers and, in the village school, a continuity of the same person-centered process continues. In this way, the young learn the social conventions, skills, social manners, and language of the society to which they belong (Ritchie, 1979).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided a view of Samoan family life as being considerably different from the average Australian setting. The Samoan family is multi-generational, extended and close. Members have responsibilities and rights that they learn by observing and by being guided (scaffolded). When Samoan families are transplanted into a new setting, the young face an array of problems associated with education. These difficulties appear to have common characteristics irrespective of whether the host country is the United States, New Zealand or Australia. In this setting, learning styles are not well suited to the teaching process, the culture of the classroom is foreign and the Samoan students face language difficulties.

The following study examines the situation of seven Samoan secondary students in a fee-paying Sydney secondary school and the next chapter details the method of the study.

Chapter Three

The Research Method

Introduction

This study broadly explores the learning experiences of Samoan students by identifying those issues that engage and/or impede their learning in West Sydney Christian College. The study is essentially ethnographic in nature and employs a semi-structured interview technique that involved taped conversations.

Research Structure and Process

The nature of the question being researched determines the method employed in the study (Stake, 1995). This study explores the experiences of Samoan students in an Australian secondary school. These experiences are highly individual and are best investigated through the interview process as it involves "entering the student's life-world" (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 296). In this study data were generated through the use of a core of prepared questions but flexibility was introduced through the use of secondary questions that explored the responses to the core questions. Appendix A and Appendix B respectively show the core questions asked of the students and their teachers.

This study has the clearance of the Human Ethics Research Committee of Avondale College. Permission to approach the Principal of the school was obtained from the

Director of the school system in which the school was found. An approach to the Principal of West Sydney Christian College laid down the criteria under which the study was conducted. Letters on Avondale College letterhead and accompanied by a letter from the Principal was sent to the parents of potential participants in the study. These letters sought signed permission from the parents. These letters included a space for students to sign if they wished to participate in the study. Seven responses were received and seven students participated in the study and as a result a student focus group was formed. Of these, two students were male and in Year 10, one was female and in Year 10, two were female and in Year 9, and the remaining two were female and in Year 12 (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Student Interviews

Code Names	Gender	Year Level
00	F	9
01	F	9
02	M	10
03	M	10
04	F	10
05	F	12
06	F	12

Table 3.2 Teachers' Interview

Code Names	Gender
AB	M
BC	F
DE	M
FG	M
HI	F
JK	M
LM	F

In all seven teachers took part in a separate interview session and were part of a teacher focus group. Of these four were male. The subjects taught by these teachers included: English, Mathematics, Bible and Information Technology. In addition, the Deputy Principal was an observer and present during the interview session.

Interviews were taped and took place in an allocated classroom within the school. In all there were five meetings: the first being an introductory session explaining the nature of the study and answering any questions that the students had of the study. The following four sessions were devoted to group interviews. Students could withdraw without penalty at any stage in the study.

The interviews were transcribed and subject to thematic analysis (van Manen, 1990). The following chapter describes the results to the study.

Chapter Four

Results of the Research

Introduction

This chapter reports on the analysis of data derived from interviews conducted with Samoan students and teachers from West Sydney Christian College. The research used semi-structured interviews that provided an informative look into the experiences and learning style of the Samoan secondary students. The data accordingly have been compiled into four areas. These are: cultural issues, relationship with teachers; language abilities, and motivation. Although the Samoan students faced academic difficulties, the results reveal a view of bi-cultural students who were secure in their own identity and who made efforts to fit within the school community.

Cultural Issues

During transcription, several issues faced by Samoan students became apparent that in one way or another, involved the *fa'asamoa.* The *fa'asamoa* or the "the Samoan way of life" in the broadest sense permeates every aspect of Samoan social life and activities.[1] These issues were placed into the following two categories: identity and home culture. Together these subsections provided a picture of bi-cultural students in operation within their homes and as members of their school. They provided a view

[1] The *fa'asamoa* in this sense is used to explain the Samoan way of life which encompasses all aspects of Samoan life. culturally and socially.

of potential cultural conflicts that existed in the students' cultural mix and situations that impeded or improved their position.

Samoan Identity

While the respondents studied in an Australian secondary school and while they had many Palagi (Caucasian non-Samoan Australian) friends, they nevertheless maintained a strong sense of "Samoaness".

Int:	How do you see Samoan culture? Is there relevancy?
05	Yeah!
Int:	How relevant is it?
00:	It's who we are.
Int:	... Are you becoming more westernised?
00	I've been raised that way [because] my dad is white and so my mum didn't really talk to me in Samoan. Like now it's becoming important to me ...
02:	My dad only speaks it to my sister.
00:	Like I don't want it to die, I want it to still ...
02:	Like I can't speak Samoan, but I don't want to show it.

This extract suggests that while the students may be losing their ability to speak the Samoan language fluently, they nevertheless demonstrated a strong sense of Samoaness that is tinged with an element of pride - "It is who we are".

The Culture of the Home

The culture of the home is the first culture of the Samoan students and provides the basis of their identity. Traditionally the Samoan home or more appropriately the *aiga* (broadly translated 'family') has been central in the Samoan child's life and activity. Home is not a structure, but a family community. Obligation to fulfil the needs and

duties of the family take priority. This obligation to the *aiga* also extends to relatives who according to Mead (1928) have demands and claims that have to be met. For example, food, shelter and clothing are provided without refusal. This is an act of virtue, and any denial of those services is looked upon with disdain (Mead, 1928). Although Freeman (1983) disagreed with many of Meads interpretations of Samoan culture, he did not disagree with these observations.

With their over-riding sense of Samoaness, the respondents' home activities generally fitted into the traditional view in terms of home life and its responsibilities. The *fe 'au 's* (errands, responsibilities, and food preparation) were the single most important home duties that were performed by many of the respondents on a daily basis. *Fe 'au 's* also included *fa 'alavelave* (unforeseen events that absorb family time and resources) consisting of family related issues such as weddings and funerals. However, the respondents spoke of *fe 'au 's* without resentment.

Int:	Ok. What are the obstacles at home?
Group:	Feau's (house work). Fai le mea ai (Make tea or dinner)!
Int:	So when you go home, do you do the feau's?
Group:	Yeah we have to!
01:	Even with funerals and stuff ... you have to do all their feau's.
06:	You have to cook, take food and clean up.
Int:	So do parents pressure you into doing the feau's?
Group:	Hell yeah!

While *feau 's* were seen as part of the contribution made by family members during occasions like funerals and weddings; preparation for religious days were also demanding as *feau 's* contributed to most of the day's activities from church to home. This included the preparation of food for the church community meal known as the *toana 'i* (the formal meal). 00 described her experience in relation to this.

00: Have to do things for church. They come over every day to play pese's (songs) and they eat … "Fai le ipu tea" (make some tea or supper).

Church responsibilities even threw personal plans out of shape. For example, 00 went on to say:

00: Yeah it does. Church especially. Like on weekends I think I'm gonna do this, then all of a sudden you got a lot of people turning up. You got church things to do; you already have a plan … it's just stuffed up.

The responses fit with the conventional picture of the Samoan household and reveal the high priority the typical Samoan household places on these tasks and family contingencies. However, not all respondents were required to do household tasks. Two of the respondents indicated that they were not to engage in doing any household work because of certain reasons. The data suggested that these reasons were based on underlying parental expectations for the child's academic success, which ultimately, would have positive repercussions for the *aiga*. This was because parents did not want to repeat the failures of the past whereby family members failed at school owing to conflicting elements of the home culture. Consider the following extract.

Int: So when you go home do you do the feau's (Chores) first?
01: … Mine is not so much feau's anymore because I got two older sisters … I think mum and dad have learnt their lesson due to my oldest sisters finishing school and now mums soft on me now… like I don't really do feau's at home now but dad gets angry because I don't know how to do the feau's… but my mum tells him to leave me alone because just look at what happened to the older girls …
05: … but I don't do any feau's. I've been told not to do any feau's … Since I don't do feau's; all I do is study … I'm not allowed to change the plan.

While church responsibilities played an important part in the home life, there were changes. The dominance of church responsibilities was diminishing. For example, 05 commented that the declining responsibilities of church duties permitted her to shift emphasis to school work.

Int:	On a scale of one to ten ... how would you rate church [as] being the main obstacle in [your] study?
Group:	Five now.
05:	No I pulled myself out of everything. No pathfinders, no Youth, that's why it doesn't really affect me any more.
05:	I think a lot of things revolve around church... not now but in past years, church and Sabbath.

These transcripts provide an insight into student attitudes towards their own culture. Even though the responses were varied, the students were reticent to give up their traditional values as they identified valuable aspects of their culture and saw them as positive.

00:	I like that it has respect and everything. Like if you see some Palagi's like my cousins, they are so disrespectful ... I think they have some good lessons for us, but some things like what they do and think ...
Int:	How do you see Samoan culture? Is there relevancy?
00:	It's who we are.
Int:	Ok is it relevant to you?
01:	It's everything.

Some students remarked about the duality of languages spoken at home, where one parent spoke English and the other the native language. While in the cultural sense parents have recognised the importance of maintaining cultural traditions, the use of the traditional language has waned as none of these students spoke the language confidently or fluently.

00:	We are becoming more westernised!
Int:	Are you becoming more westernised?
00:	I've been raised that way [because] my dad is white and so my mum didn't really talk to me in Samoan. Like now it's becoming important to me.
01:	Like its good ... westernised right. But it's also good to have your culture reflect on you. It's who you are ... My mum speaks to me in English, but my dad speaks Samoan. He teaches me.
05	... I get spoken to in palagi.
Int:	Ok
05:	By both parents.
Int:	So at home does everyone speak Samoan or English?
05:	Just my mum, but not my dad. He doesn't really communicate...like my dad he's fully Samoan.

Undoubtedly parental authority has always been seen in the Samoan culture and tradition as being considerable and significant. Respect or *fa'aaloalo* shown to those who are the elders or *Matua* is the obligation of those of the younger generation. Challenging authority or questioning orders and directives is not only seen as socially and culturally unacceptable, and is regarded as a mark of disrespect. According to data the parents of some of the students associated the act of "questioning" as having an attitude of non-compliance.

Int:	Do you do that at home?
Group:	(Laughing)
Int:	Do you question ... voice your opinion?
05:	I do but I get into trouble for it and they think I have an attitude problem.
06:	Yeah.
Int:	Why do you think our parents do that?
06:	Because it's the way we talk in our expression.
02	(Laughing). Because the Samoan way is the right way and there's no such thing as the palagi way.

The laughter here is implying a certain irony in the words "Because the Samoan way is the right way ... there's no such thing as the palagi way". The implication is that to the parents the *fa'asamoa* takes precedence, both socially and otherwise, over Australian practices. However, for the respondents, while there is a relaxation of the

fa'asamoa in some less important areas, their sense of identity remains. Their respect for one who has authority, position and eldership remains. But the use of language has gone and certain activities - particularly those involving other young people have been adopted.

But, since most of the students agreed as to the importance of their heritage and traditional culture, the data suggested that the students equally identified or at least were familiar with the Australian cultural milieu in which they resided. For example, despite the fact that 05 would get into trouble for it, she nevertheless would voice an opinion. It appears that the students are caught between two cultures and that prevailing circumstances determined the position of the respondents on this Australian - Samoan cultural dimension. It is likely that this lateral movement between the two poles has both resulted from and been the cause of the loss and weakening of the Samoan language as noted earlier. While the participants believed that most parental expectations contributed to well-rounded productive development, they considered some expectations to be unrealistic.

Int:	So when you finish from West Sydney Christian College, what do your parents expect?
Group:	Avondale!
Int:	Why would that be?
05:	My mum says it would be life changing.
00:	I think it's a FOB thing ... they always have high expectations of their kids ... like I told my mum like I don't want to go straight to uni ... I like want to travel the world ... and then she say's why do I want to do that for. No you stay and work hard for us.[5]

[5] The term FOB or 'fresh of the boat' is a colloquial acronym used commonly to describe all Samoans in general terms, but in particular, it refers to those Samoans who have recently emigrated from Samoa to other countries—for example, New Zealand or Australia.

Here 00 indicates that she wishes to participate in the young Australian ideal of travelling before considering any career options. However, 01's parents wished her to fulfil the Samoan cultural expectation of 'family first'.

According to the data some students identified parental approval as being the result of doing well at school. If students did not do well academically, according to one respondent, they would experience strong expressions of disappointment, and more often than not they would be subject to comparison with other successful students, thus experiencing some form of humiliation.

Int:	You would understand that parents like to …
01:	Put you down.
Int:	Why is that?
01:	My mum, if she sees other kids do well, then she'll put me down. It's really hurtful. She doesn't know that it hurts.
Int:	So there are parental factors?
05:	Yeah. They always like to compare.

In some cases the failure to attain to parental expectation resulted in the infliction of guilt on the student. The respondents generally felt that parental standards were set too high.

Int:	… do you get sucked into their guilt trips?
06:	Yep.
05:	Guilt trip!
Group:	Yeah.
Int:	Is it frequent those guilt trips…or is it expectations from parents?
Group:	Set high standards.
Int:	Are they too high?
06:	Yes!
Int:	Or they're not realistic expectations?
Group:	Yeah (unanimous).
Int:	Could I say that the expectations of your parents are not really high but unrealistic.
Group:	Yeah (unanimous).

In summary, this section reinforces the perception that the respondents not only identified as Samoan, but did so with pride. They generally and willingly submitted to the *aiga* work ethic (not to be confused with school homework). Despite this, there were cultural differences between their generation and the generation of their parents. They were losing their Samoan language skills. They could slide into the 'Australian way' if the circumstances demanded it. They may not have been bi-lingual (having lost their Samoan language) but they were bi-cultural and the position taken on the Australian-Samoan cultural dimension was determined by the circumstance.

Home Distractions to Study

Home distractions experienced by the students came in the form of TV and computer Internet and online chat-room sites. With the advent of the Internet and the provision of online chat-room activities utilising the World Wide Web, the Internet has changed the way Samoan students interface with their responsibilities at home and potentially their success at school. While household tasks were an obstacle as mentioned before, the respondents stated that participation in online activities using the interactive web and chat-room site called "Bebo" were potentially other major distractions. However, the group stated that "Bebo [was] the reward" after doing their assigned household tasks. The respondent 05 describes her experience.

Int: So basically, everyone here, when you go home, the biggest obstacle at home is feau's (housework).

05: I reckon it's also Bebo. We have limitations on the Internet, but I won't do my work until I have had my time on Bebo. I'm not satisfied (group laughing)

Int: Do you study in front of the TV?
Group: Also the Internet and the Xbox
Int: So we all have some form of distraction?
06: A lot.

Despite these distractions, the respondents indicated that they had attempted to be more accountable in their studies. This included personal efforts in developing some kind of study system that enabled them to better prepare themselves for school assessments. However, this didn't necessarily mean they were successful as the following extract indicates.

05: No, I'm starting not to do the night before. But I used to do [that] only because that's the way I thought I could study... now I get stressed out if I don't study. I thought if I study the night before I'll remember more than if I studied a month before hand.
Int: Ok ... I assume everyone does parts of their homework ...
05: During other classes.
Group: [Laughing]

As a part of the teacher focus group, Teacher BC made the following observation.

BC: Most of them pass ... [unclear] Most of them don't do their homework but when they come to school, they really want to catch up ... and get that stamp and signature ... and that works for me in that area.

Teacher BC indicated that homework was not completed by most of the participants and in fact only done during school time suggesting that most learning did not take place at home. In the extract above, there is the sense of not knowing how to develop an effective study system and on the part of 05 the implication that memorising was more important than developing skills.

School Citizenship

From the analysis of the participants' transcripts positive school citizenship was one of many themes to emerge. The students had a strong sense of belonging to their school. This was evident in the social network of class friends and teachers to which the students belonged. For example, the students generally had a positive view of their teachers, as indicated by the following extract.

Int: One more question. What is it about your teacher that switches you on?
00: Friendliness.
06: Energy.
05: Approachable
Int: What switches you on 03?
03: Their attitude.

While there were exceptions, the students exhibited a general sense of trust in and respect for their teachers and a sense of belonging to the school. There was also the sense that the school community was able to sort out or solve issues or problems.

00: ... There are problems here, but knowing everyone is good because if any bad thing comes up they [the teachers] sort it out here.

This sense of citizenship is broadly akin to the idiosyncrasies of the traditions and culture of Samoa where social integration and community respect serve as tools for the wellbeing of the group. This is known in the Samoan tradition as *fa'aaloalo* or the respect given to others: to guests, to those who are elders, to those in positions of authority and to family members as well as to community members.

The study also indicated that the students had a strong sense of obligation to fulfil the ideals and expectations of their parent's through school achievements. They remarked about these obligations and indicated that they felt compelled to make an effort because their parent's were providing them with the opportunity and financial support to be schooled at a private college. The following extract provides a glimpse of this compulsion.

Int: So do you have personal standards?

00: Well, if you come to this school, you have to do your best ... Your parents send you to this school and they don't want you to get Fs. They want for you to actually get some where.

01: My mum wants me to do well. I'm paying a lot for school fees. Like I asked to come here, but now since I've been here and I told her and she like gets into me... I'm paying the school fees and it's better than all the other [schools].

While the data did not provide a direct indication of the students' attitudes to and preconceptions about the school as such, the data do imply that these Samoan students valued their school experience and felt a part of the culture of the school while at the same time embracing the philosophy and beliefs of the school. The students gave evidence of this by enjoying, participating and internalising their studies of religion. Consider the following two extracts.

Int: So any other things besides business studies?

05 Studies of religion

Int: What interests you in that area?

05: It gives me a clear knowledge of the other people out there that are not Adventists... more tolerance towards them.

01: Umm ... I like Bible and History.

Int: What do you find interesting in those subjects?

01: Bible, well ... I've very much been brought up as a Christian. I never knew much about God and stuff. It's actually interesting ...

Int: How does the teacher articulate ... how does he/she present the bible?

01: Umm ... like she gives us verses. In the first term Ms [L] taught us how to read a bible ... like she [showed] us where the numbers were ... like the book, chapter, and the verse ... she taught us the order.

The special character of the school involved the religious education and the respondents in the extracts above provided evidence not just of involvement - but of enjoyment. There was also evidence that these students enjoyed the general subjects they undertook. For example, 02 enjoyed the technical subjects.

Int: Oh so you do have tech here ... so what are you doing in tech?
02: Build stuff.
Int: What are you building at the moment?
02: Coffee tables.
Int: How is your coffee table coming on at the moment?
02: Yeah man it's the bomb.
Int: Is it straight, clean?
02: Yeah.
Int: What else do you do?
02: CD racks ... we doing our free choice next term
Int: What's your free choice on?
02: Beside table cross TV ... um.

Even among students who had difficulties with subjects, there was evidence of effort and persistence. For example, consider the following interaction with 01.

Int: Ok. How do you find exams or when you are doing a test?
01: It's funny because sometimes I don't worry about it, but when we do it, it's like, I 'm all right but once I see the paper and questions, I like freak... [Interruption] I struggle through everything. I struggle through everything. I struggle through maths. Tuesday we had a test and my maths teacher had to put me in the highest maths group there is ... and I can't do that but she has this thing and believes I can do it, but I can't so it and the latest test I did I got 34 per cent and this test I got 50 per cent and she was quite happy because it was a big improvement but I really don't want to do it cause I know that I'm always going to have a low mark and umm ... yeah.
Int: Because having a low mark, does it make it a bad assessment?
01: Assessments I'm all right at. Just tests ... we have friends and students in our class and they know that we're in that mid-spot and they will come to us and say I got 80 or 90 percent, what did you get. You know what I got so why do you want to ask?

Here there is the sense that 01 believes she is no star in mathematics and she knows that she has considerable difficulty. But she struggles, she struggles, she struggles. What she does not do is give up. It is important to her that she remains a member of the school community even though there was an instance of snide behaviour on the part of another student. 01 also indicated that disruption to the class community also affected her. In the following extract, 01 also indicated disapproval of this disruptive behaviour. Such disapproval is an attitude of support for the school system.

G: The girls in our class always have issues... they bring it to the classroom and it affects the way... of our learning. Like we'll be learning right [and] in the middle, one person walks [in] and wacks the door then wacks the table and slams their books and it affects us.

According to one respondent, some of the anti-social behaviours of other students were aggravating. When asked how the school culture affected their learning, the students collectively responded by saying, "Yeah, everyone knows everyone's business ... yeah, it affects our learning". According to 04, however, such things were not perceived as significant because those issues were seen as minor compared with more important matters like friends and education.

Int: Ok, J, does this affect your learning?
04: No.
Int: Why?
04: I don't care... I [just] come to learn and to talk with my friends, but I really don't care ... [about the behaviour of others].

This section has provided a view of students who identify with their school and imply that it is effective even though it is occasionally troubled by some student behaviour. Although there are academic difficulties they wanted to persist and belong.

Relationships with Teachers

According to the data, the respondents exhibited a positive attitude towards the school ethos. Their prevailing attitudes toward the teaching staff were largely positive; however, there were some teachers they disliked. Those teachers whom they saw as positive influences, they described as being "good". Good teachers, from their perspective were not just competent but also exhibited an attitude that was fittingly acceptable within their cultural milieu.

To the respondents, developing a relationship and building a rapport with them were seen to be critical in an effective teaching process. This was also recognised by the teachers. For example, teacher HI made the following comment.

> HI: ... I find especially with those kids that you've mentioned particularly ... you need to have a relationship with them. It has to be something besides "you're the teacher" and this is what you have to do. They have to see a human side to you, that outside the classroom you're just a normal person. I find that one of the most important things is relationships with them that [aren't] just based around learning but actually a friendship that you build with them, not just in the classroom but outside the classroom ...

Indeed, a similar remark was made by teacher AB, who also stated that a "relationship" in the context of the students' social community was important. The data suggested that the students felt positively toward some teachers because of their genuineness and authentic initiative to understand them. Some students saw their teachers' as being "cool" and "funny" because of their efforts not only to understand but also in trying to explain a problem. But the data further suggested, that the students perceived only a few teachers as possessing qualities that they identified as being worthy of their respect or *fa'aaloalo*.

Since the establishment of schools in Samoa the *fai'aoga* or the teacher was an important person in the wider community. Over the past two centuries, the *faifeau* (religious minister) has almost always been recognised as being one of the highest positions of respect and distinction within the Samoan village (Masterman, 1980). Part of this respect came because during the second half of the 19th century the *faifeau* organised and ran *faifeau's* schools that made Samoans literate in their own language (Nune, 2007). When the mantle of educator passed from the *faifeau* to the *fai'aoga* in the 20th century, the *fai'aoga* not only became important socially but also became a person of note (*le susuga ole a'oa'o*) and respect within the Samoan villages.

There is evidence in the transcripts of existing relationships between these Samoan students and their teachers. They saw their teachers generally as being friendly and approachable, having pleasant attitudes and exhibiting energy. When there were problems, these teachers could sort it out. Furthermore, the students generally enjoyed their classes

However, only one teacher in particular was considered by students to possess what is known in the Samoan tradition and culture as *mamalu*, the highest accolade afforded to one who serves graciously with respect and eldership. In the words of 06, AB is "the only teacher we trust". This did not mean that other teachers were not trustworthy or held in regard. It was rather an affirmation of a teacher with whom they felt safe. Consider the following extract.

Int: So as a whole, is there any program that exists here for you guys - for example a co-curricular program that would help you guys?

Group: No ... [AB] helps out a whole lot ...
06: He's like if we need extensions on our assessment we just go to him.
Int: What would be your type of teacher that you would like to have here?
06: Group: The only teacher we trust is AB.

A second teacher, SP demonstrated an interest in how these students performed academically. She spent time going through work and exams with them and gave these students cause to affirm her as a caring and concerned teacher.

05: ... [SP] makes us understand ... She actually took 3 classes to go over the exam. Some teachers just give your mark back. She actually went through [it] with [us].

Among the teachers there were those who were aware of the students' needs. For example, teacher FG spoke of the need to make work interesting and relevant.

FG: Myself ... what I usually do with all my kids is use relevant examples that they can actually relate to, and I found that the majority of kids get motivated in that sense because they're understanding the content in regards to what they know.
Being a young teacher I guess it's a lot easier in that sense to relate to them a bit more ... But it helped a lot not only in umm with the kids that you mentioned, but also some of the younger kids of my younger classes ... Year 7s. It's just relevance ...

While the student respondents generally viewed their teachers positively, there were some teachers for whom they had less regard. Reasons for this varied, but those teachers often employed a teaching style that conflicted with the students' learning style. The students found it difficult to engage in the learning experiences when this happened, or when the teachers used unfamiliar terms that were not explained ("big words"). For example, consider the extract concerning teacher WT below.

Int: So who's your English Teacher?
06: [WT] ... [Unclear]

Int: What's wrong with her?
06: Her teaching techniques ...
05/06: The way she teaches is advanced ... she doesn't put her level down
Int: In what ways does she teach?
06: The language she uses.
05: You should see the big words she uses.

Another teacher tended to talk over them and have them perform to many mindless and repetitive duties. Consider the following extract.

06: That's the problem with this school, is you have to get out your highlighter.
00: Geography is highlight, highlight, and highlight fig 1.

02: Ah ... [teacher] [SR]
06/05: She's a lecturer in theology... she use to teach at Fulton
Group: She dictates man ...
Int: What do you mean she dictates?
02: She has sheets of notes and you highlight.
Int: So when you say she dictates what ...
01: She sits at the table and tells us what to write and to highlight. She doesn't give examples.

This extract suggests that the teacher's style and teaching strategies conflict with the students' needs. The dictation of notes throws a lot of responsibility to students. It assumes that they will employ a knowledge of spelling and sentence structure. If the students lack these skills, this strategy fails. What is more, teacher SR employs frequent highlighting - a strategy the students dislike.

But more alarming has been the students' perception of segregated learning through streamlined classes. Island students felt they were being separated into one group while more adept and proficient students were put in another.

05: Yeah, she separated us once ... she chose. Yep because we were all suppose [have] perfect [unclear] English and then she picked her class and

> ... put all the islanders in Mr [SF] class. So she has only got one islander [name unclear] ... she's smart ... we were angry

While the intention was to achieve an outcome of effective learning, it rather had the appearance of being demeaning. This section has noted the characteristics of respected teachers and the behaviour of teachers who were less respected. It also signalled that learning styles need to be better understood.

Learning Styles

The students gave evidence of a learning style consistent with the descriptions found in the literature (Ritchie, 1979, pp. 126-128). Firstly, they were social learners and enjoyed working in groups.

> DE: I had a group of boys and its leader was Samoan ... [unclear]. Islander culture is a community working together and the Year 10 boys in particular they really work well and they help each other with assignments and that's improved the lower academic guys and they really bumped their marks up from Cs to Bs ...

Secondly, they indicated an auditory preference for learning, as described below.

> 05: If I write it down and read it and write it down. I don't learn like that, like someone telling me. I learn more by listening.

The auditory learning style of the Samoan students could well be based on Polynesian traditions of spoken language, considering that stories and poetry are communicated through the oratory use of mythic allusions, puns and metaphors (Ritchie, 1979; Nune, 2006). However, the data also suggested that, while these

students emphasised their auditory senses to gain an understanding, the information communicated from the teacher had to be descriptive – even graphic.

Int:	Do you learn by listening?
06:	I like listening
Int:	When you are listening, does the teacher have to be descriptive?
Group:	Yes
02:	Yes. Mr J does that. At the beginning of the class he says finish off your homework from the last class and after that you go onto your next class and finish what he does on the board.

Because the students learned by listening, there were some students who found it difficult to engage in the learning experience when their classmates periodically spoke to them during class.

Int:	So we can conclude that everyone here are audible learners … You guys like hearing something descriptive.
00:	Depending on where I'm sitting. If I sit next to someone who talks a lot, and I then I find myself … I talk a lot and because I'm loud … I get into trouble a lot and yesterday I got a detention. If I sit by myself I'm ok.
Int:	So 01, do you learn through hearing?
01:	Yep. I don't like it when someone's talking to me. But I don't want to be rude … I just say yep, yep. So when the whole class is yelling I just lose it.

The respondents noted that some teachers used graphic means like visuals to transmit important information that needed to be learnt. They also emphasised that instruction and explanations needed to be clear. They noted that some teachers made effective and appropriate efforts to make their instructions clear.

Int:	Ok… how do you find… with Mr DE? How does he articulate… how does he come across. Does he present it clearly?
B:	He explains it clearly and goes over with us.
D:	He puts it on PowerPoint.

In the interviews with the teachers of the students, several notable elements emerged in terms of student learning and what the teacher utilised to facilitate and enhance the learning experience. According to RF, explanations needed to be arranged in little steps, given that the Samoan students found it difficult to process abstract questions.

HI: I find with Maths, because I mainly teach Year 9 and 10 Math, the junior year, the abstract they find very hard, they find it exceptionally hard to deal with. I always teach the lower grade Math and to put it back into terms that they understand ...
... Their literacy is a problem that stops them from understanding what the question is asking and therefore being able to do it. You put it into other words and (snap of fingers) they've got it. Simple terms, but it's the literacy thy have a problem with.

However, other teachers were unaware of the need to structure learning experiences in incremental, sequential steps. Here is 06's response to a teachers style.

Int: Is she visual?
06: Yeah she is visual, but she doesn't know how to break it down for the FOB (Fresh of the Boat) kids to understand.

This section implies that personal relations are most important in developing effective learning environments for Samoan students in the Australian setting. Further it indicates that Samoan students exhibit a social, oral/aural preference for learning and they also prefer information to be structured into incremental, sequential experiences. They favour and learn from teachers who are sensitive to their needs.

Language Skills

The available literature provides a daunting view of high drop out rates amongst island students in all three major destinations of Samoan migration. One of the fundamental reasons according to Ritchie (1979) has been the employment of examination type assessments that have contributed to failure for many Island students. According to a study done by Gallimore and Associates cited in Ritchie (1979, p. 126), "there is no great mystery about why it is that Polynesian students turn off from schools and present the dropout phenomenon ... Polynesian children do not see any reason to persist in something if failure is certain" (Ritchie, 1979, p. 126).

It is to be noted that the students in this study appear to differ from those in the literature review. While the respondents to this study found education a struggle, they indicated a greater resilience and greater success that Ritchie (1979) would suggest. Nevertheless these students constantly battled against poor literacy and struggled with their difficulties. Teacher HI described their literacy problems this way.

> HI: Their literacy is a problem that stops them from understanding what the question is asking and therefore being able to do it ...

A second teacher stated that poor literacy was a problem faced by Pacific island students across the board, not just the Samoan students. Having to break down essay questions to basic "form and correct language" was one of the main challenges. In certain subjects, however, it was not just Pacific island students who struggled to

answer exam type questions. According to teacher BC, most of the Year 12 students were quite capable of writing multiple paragraphs, but without answering the questions.

The data indicated that the Samoan students had embraced computer technology and eagerly used computers at home and during school.

> 04: Um my favourite subject is IST and Bible um ... I enjoy about IST is working with technology and stuff and like going on the chat.
> Group: ... she likes Bebo [Chatroom - Internet]

Some Samoan students like 00, according to teacher FG, demonstrated a keen aptitude towards technology citing that 00 "just picks it up like that".

However, with technology new forms and forums of communication have emerged. The advent of chat-room, emails, and mobile phone text messaging has become widespread and may even be detrimental to the students' formal language skills and literacy skills. According to teacher HI, the English language and general conversation skills amongst the Samoan students are poor, and the language used in chat-rooms and mobile phone text messaging has become a problem in the students' formal writing prose. Teacher HI remarked:

> HI: Their language skills I find from what I would just use in general conversation is very poor. Like they say things like "lol" and I say what are you talking about? Because it's this MSN [Microsoft Network] language that means "laugh out loud" and I thought it meant "lots of love". It's this sort of thing they're using ... Their conversation about a topic area becomes hard because they're not use to using proper language. full sentences, so yeah I find it very hard because it is so built into their everyday life. Every morning when they get up, they get on MSN and also of an evening. They text [using mobile phones] and you'll find that it becomes such a large part ...

According to AB the *MSN* (Microsoft Network) style has largely infiltrated their writing that it has interfered with their ability to engage in formal and academic prose. To teacher AB, their essays have been nothing but "MSN style writing" which has inevitable repercussions because it interferes with the preparation for the formal Higher School Certificate Examination.

Motivation

The data strongly indicated that the students were generally extrinsically motivated. The feedback from some students suggested that motivation in some areas was the result of their socialization. That is, their network of friends was one of many contributors to why and how they applied themselves to their schoolwork. If their friends were doing well, to a large extent this gave them impetus to make an effort, as 05 notes in the extract.

Int:	Just on that, does that motivate you to learn?
05:	Yeah, they're friends and if you see them achieving their goals you want to be there as well.

For student 05 the impetus for effort came from the need to keep up with other students in terms of their achievements and marks.

Int:	05, what motivates you to learn?
05:	Ah, I think just keeping with the class, and I don't want to be the one that's left behind.
Int:	Is that a personal challenge?
05:	Yeah... I always think about what's ahead and what my report's going to say ...

Still it's not unexpected that students who are social learners should be motivated by their friends. However, other external circumstances motivated these respondents as well. For 03, it was his potential career.

Int:	Well, I'm going to ask these guys ... 03, just a question... what motivates you to learn and who motivates you and how do you motivate you?
03:	Better career.

Others like 02 indicated that they did not want to fail and end up being "nothing". 02 implied that he wanted to achieve better things. This could be achieved by getting good grades.

Int:	Ok, 02 who motivates you to learn?
02:	I don't want to be a "nothing"
Group:	Laughing.
Int:	So you are saying you want something different... or better?
02:	Better.
Int:	... so in class, who impacts you?
02:	Other students.
Int:	Now this is something that has been coming across... why other students?
02:	They get good grades.
Group:	You just want the academic award.
02:	Shut up... They encourage you to finish your work.

Student 01 commented that the *aiga* and her parents in particular, were struggling to pay the fees to keep her in school. This was a motivating factor for effort.

Int:	Well, what else motivates you to learn?
01:	... Well when you see your parents struggling ... they're stressing, they you stress ... here at school.

Being positive and happy was important to student 05's motivation.

05:	... If there's something bad that's happened to you and you come to school really upset... for me I'm really in a bad mood... and I just don't want to learn, but if you are happy... you're all energised.

Finally, students 01 and 06 indicated that teachers played a significant part in motivation.

Int:	00, what motivates you to learn?
01:	Like the teacher, like if he doesn't motivate me to learn ... [unclear] I just don't want to be in the class.

For 06 it was a combination of the presence of her friends and her teacher's personality that played a part in motivating her learning.

Int:	Ok 06, what motivates you to learn?
06:	Just my friends, teachers and their tone of voice. If it's boring I don't want to learn, but if they're fully hyped up it makes me want to learn.
Int:	Teacher personality...
Group:	Yeah.

This section has provided an insight into the causes of motivation for these Samoan students. The data suggest that this group of Samoan students is more resilient than Ritchie (1979) suggests. Further, this resilience may stem from their social cohesion. In many instances the data suggested that, although they may have difficulty with their studies and received a lower grade than other students, they continued to battle. They were aware of the challenges ahead of them, but remarked that good school grades and good reports were something to be proud of. All the students indicated that they were eager to learn despite the challenges.

Concluding Remarks

The study has provided a view of Samoan students in operation within a bi-cultural setting. These students can move comfortably between the Australian culture and the Samoan culture. These young Samoans desire to be good citizens of their school, yet they are beset by some problems. They favour an instructional style that is highly structured, teacher centred, graphic, oral/aural and based on modelling and scaffolding. This style is not necessarily being serviced by all their teachers. The result of the study also highlights the importance these students place on positive social relationships. Among themselves, with other students and with their teachers, positive social relationships contribute to their motivation and their success. The next chapter discusses these results and draws the study to a close.

Chapter Five

Conclusions of the Study

Discussion

The *fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way of life) has a proud history. Its prehistory incorporates a period of stunning navigational skills, tenacity and resilience (Lewis, 1994). The historic period began with European contact in the late 18th century and there has been a script for Samoan language for over a century. This in turn has spawned a home-grown literature. The nation of Samoa has been independent for nearly half a century.

Yet the educational literature paints a grim picture of many expatriate Samoan secondary students. In the United States, New Zealand and Australia, Samoan families exist under low socio-economic circumstances. The secondary students from these homes often exhibit low educational success. While their conversational skills in English appear functional, their deep understanding of English and their literary skills in English are not sufficient to meet the skills required in the mid and upper high school levels. In general they find the classroom to possess a culture foreign to their prior experience and the instructional styles of the teachers do not meet their learning styles. Finally, the pressures of the *aiga* (home culture) load the students' time, making study commitments extremely difficult. Many Samoan students in the United States, New Zealand and Australia simply drop out before completing their secondary education.

The Characteristics of the Participants

The seven Samoan students who participated in the study identified themselves as firstly Samoan but acknowledged strong Australian influences. Their cultural centre was not static and its position on the Samoan-Australian dimension appeared to be dictated by the context. However, the students still maintained their sense of "Samoaness" as they indicated a strong identification with their cultural heritage. Even though their Samoan language skills were poor, the influence of culture and tradition served as an anchor in their lives. As a result they spoke of family obligations without resentment and felt that traditional Samoan respect for elders was a natural courtesy.

These students gave evidence of a learning style that was consistent with that found of Samoan students in the literature. This was:

- A preference for highly social, even communal learning environments;
- A preference for oral/aural transmission of information;
- A preference for teacher-centred lessons;
- A preference for greater structure in their lessons (this means breaking lessons into incremental steps and sequencing these steps appropriately);
- A preference for modelling and a need for scaffolding – particularly in inquiry type lessons.

Their teachers noted that, as with the literature review, their skills in English were not sufficient to meet the demands of upper high school.

Despite this they were students of West Sydney Christian College. They generally desired to be good citizens of the school and on the whole they liked their teachers and enjoyed their subjects. The students were motivated to succeed and willingly made an effort – even though their methods may have not been efficient. The differences between these students and those described in the literature may well be caused by the attitude of their parents. Their parents were paying to send these students to a non-government school and there was an expectation that the investment would be repaid in educational success.

The overall tone of the interviews indicated that the school staff were committed to the success of their students. Most of the teachers had established a working rapport with the students and one teacher in particular, because of his authority and graceful manner, was accorded high respect. He appeared to understand their needs and had earned their trust. However, some teachers appeared to be employing teaching strategies that conflicted with the natural learning styles of the students. This involved the use of abstruse or difficult language and the dictation of notes to students whose English abilities were not strong. The students were also sensitive to inadvertent decisions that gave the impression of discrimination.

A review of the transcript found that at no time did the teachers refer to the literature involving the needs of minority students. The implication is that they were unaware of this literature.

Limitations of the Study

This is a case study involving a small selection of Samoan students and the findings apply to this case only and cannot be extended to other situations. During data collection, the researcher, a novice at the task of interviewing, on occasion used leading questions. In addition, some themes that were important to the study were not adequately pursued.

Recommendations

Students, who exhibit failure in school, terminate with limited choice in life. School success permits students to make choices among their career options. The ultimate objective of this study is to learn enough about minority students in order to equip them with the abilities that permit choice. From the results, this study makes the following recommendations:

- The school establish a mentor (preferably one who is an educator and is familiar with island culture) who will act in the capacity of a cultural liaison for island students. The role of mentor is to establish a working relationship with the students and act as a conduit for information between them and the staff.
- The school implement an early intervention program in primary and junior secondary levels to assist island students in the adequate development of their skills in English literacy.
- The school maintain rapport with the parents of island students and with island communities.

- Teachers are made aware of island students' learning styles and ensure that a proportion of the lesson delivery meets these needs. Teachers should also recognise that lessons may need to be highly structured and that student efforts in problem solving, inquiry lessons, and problem based lessons need scaffolding. Teachers should monitor group learning sessions and allow discussion and help within the group.
- The school should monitor the literature involving research about minority groups with the purpose of keeping the staff abreast of current developments.

Further Study

While there were some limitations of this study it does raise some interesting questions that can become the subject of further study. For example:

- What do teachers know about the needs of minority groups?
- What is the current broad picture involving students of island origin?
- What kind of language intervention program would benefit island students?

Importance of the Study

This study has provided a glimpse into the cultural background of Samoan students that places their school success within a context of home pressures and it has provided a set of recommendations that could be explored to other minority students.

Human society is dynamic – it is changing continually. Therefore studies of this nature must be ongoing to establish situations and trends. If recommendations made by studies of this nature are implemented and lead to the improved education of minority students in schools nationwide, then the nation as a whole benefits.

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Glossary

Aiga: n	Family – both immediate and/or extended.
Fa'aaloalo: v.	Respect. Demonstrating decorum. and admirable behaviour expected of all Samoan persons. *Fa'aaloalo* permeates every facet of social conduct.
Fa'alavelave: adj.	An emergency or contingency. It mostly takes place within the family both immediate and extended. It also extends to events like weddings, funerals, and church.
Fa'asamoa: adj.	The Samoan way of life
Faia'oga: n	A teacher or educator.
Faifeau: n.	Minister of religion, Pastor or Reverend.
Le susuga le a'oa'o: adj.	Official and esteemed title given to a teacher.
Mamalu: adj.	A special honour conferred on those who hold their office or position with grace and respect.
Matai: n	Chief – Traditional head of a village
Matua: adj.	Elderly or those older in age.
Toana'i: n.	A large banquet. This is generally held as part of the church service.
Tufale: n	Village orator

Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Protocol Sheet for Students and Questions

Interview Protocol Sheet (Students)

Avondale College Ltd (2006-2007)

Process

- Invite the participant into the interview area and make him or her feel welcome
- Supply the participant with the information sheet
- Discuss the interview process and remind the participant of his or her rights within the interview
- Ask the participant if he or she is willing to participate and if he or she would be disturbed if the interview was to be recorded
- Invite the participant to sign the participation agreement
- Invite the participant to select a code name
- Share some personal background information and experiences (I am of Samoan heritage and educated in Australia)

For the students, the key questions are listed below

- What year are you in?
- What subjects do you enjoy?
- Why do you enjoy these subjects?
- What subject do you not do well in?
- Why do you think that is?
- Does the school have extra academic assistance for students having difficulty?
- Do you know any students who have been assisted by such a program?
- Without naming them, is there a teacher who understands you and motivates you to study?
- What is it about this teacher that switches you on?
- What causes difficulty for you in relation to your study?

- Do you do homework?
- Do you have a place to study at home?
- How much time do you spend in study at home?
- Do you watch much TV?
- Is it easy for you to do your study at home?
- Can you get away from the other members of the family at home in order to complete homework?
- What career would you like to enter when you finish school?
- Do you think you will make it?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol Sheet for Teachers and Questions

Interview Protocol Sheet (Teachers)

Avondale College Ltd (2006-2007)

Process

- Invite the participant into the interview area and make him or her feel welcome
- Supply the participant with the information sheet
- Discuss the interview process and remind the participant of his or her rights within the interview
- Ask the participant if he or she is willing to participate and if he or she would be disturbed if the interview was to be recorded
- Invite the participant to sign the participation agreement
- Invite the participant to select a code name

Teachers of Samoan students will be asked the following key questions:

- Does the school have policy with regard to students coming from other cultural backgrounds?
- Is there assistance provided to students with non-English speaking background?
- Does the school identify students who are academically at risk?
- Is there a program available to assist at risk students?
- Do you have many Samoan students in your class?
- How are the Samoan students performing in their studies in comparison with other students?
- How is the behaviour of Samoan students in comparison with other students?
- In general, what subjects do Samoan students perform well in?
- In general, what subjects do Samoan students do less well in?
- Do you know why that is?
- In general, do your Samoan students have homework completed?
- Do you have any recommendations that could improve their situation?

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