



# Pacific Parental Engagement and Intergenerational Storytelling in Aotearoa New Zealand

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## Abstract

In this article, we focus on how Pacific family support places success of individuals within a wider narrative of intergenerational family stories, contributing to successful futures for the participating Pacific youth and their families. Guided by Pacific research principles, we used interviews with families and adolescents to explore the role of family narratives, in ten Pacific families in Aotearoa New Zealand, which supported academic success for their children. Our data sources included conversations with youth, their families, and visual representations created by the youth to illustrate their perceptions of parental support. The findings highlighted the role of families' stories in supporting their children's education. Strong intergenerational expectations were expressed from the dual perspectives of parents and their children. The formative role of family stories within the youths' experiences of success provides opportunity to acknowledge the relational foundations of intergenerational stories.

**Keywords** Pacific education · Parental engagement · Intergenerational story-telling · Narrative research

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## Pacific Students in Aotearoa New Zealand

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific students are marginalised by inequitable teaching practices, cross-cultural misunderstandings and deficit theorising by educators (Hunter et al., 2016). Crawford-Garrett (2018) described New Zealand's education system as "a high quality, low-equity system in which a national discourse of educational equity conceals stark disparities between Māori and Pacific students and their Pākehā counterparts" (p. 1055).

Over time, a number of different terms have been used in reference to Pacific peoples, for example Pasifika which is a heterogeneous term and refers to Aotearoa New Zealand born Pacific peoples from the Pacific Islands (Sauni, 2011). Currently, in Aotearoa New Zealand the term 'Pacific' and 'Pacific peoples' is used consistently in government ministries such as the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Pacific Peoples (MPP). The Ministry of Education (MOE) shifted from Pasifika to Pacific in 2018 (Samu, 2020). Throughout this article, we will refer to Pacific heritage peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand as Pacific.

Like many minority groups internationally, Pacific students in New Zealand can be subjected to unfavourable stereotypes, such as being academically disengaged (Allen & Webber, 2019; Hunter et al., 2016). Subversive and arguably pervasive effects from negative stereotypes attribute gaps in academic achievement to Pacific students' home backgrounds which shape low teacher expectations for Pacific students (Turner et al., 2015). To counter discourses of deficit, studies from Pacific scholars (Theodore et al., 2018) operate with in-built strength-based perspectives. Utilising a strength-based approach emphasises the value of cultural knowledge and family practices on students' success already achieved within Pacific nations (Fasavalu, 2015).

The present study takes that strength-based approach advocated by Pacific scholars, and seeks to apply these understandings to the Aotearoa New Zealand context. The study considers international conceptions of parental engagement, but explicitly seeks to understand the uniquely Pacific ways that families engage with the learning of their children. We explore the ways Pacific families play a role in their children's academic success, using family stories as a window to understanding that influence. In doing so, we seek to contribute to improving educational practices based on a strengths-based understanding of Pacific learners and their families (Averill & Rimoni, 2019).

## Parental Engagement

Researchers have traditionally defined parental engagement as actions taken by parents to engage with their child's school or school related activities (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Internationally, evidence has demonstrated a strong link between levels of parental engagement and student achievement (Boonk et al., 2018).

Specific types of involvement are reported to be more effective than others, for example, parents' provision of educationally enriching activities is shown to have consistently positive associations with achievement. Whereas helping with homework is demonstrated as both positively and negatively associated with achievement (Wilder, 2014).

Many families engage in both school-related and academic activities with their children. They may help negotiate the demands of schooling, or participate in children's learning more generally (Taylor et al., 2004). In an effort to widen understandings of parental engagement, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggest considering the term parental engagement on a continuum: (1) parental involvement with schools, (2) parental involvement with schooling, and (3) parental engagement with children's learning. The continuum represents a shift in emphasis in the parent-school relationship whereby school agency in support of children's learning gives way to parent agency.

However, a focus on internationally effective activities or practices often doesn't account for the influence of contextual or cultural factors. The assumption of universality of effectiveness operates as normalising a single or particular culturally located discourse. Increasingly, a focus on context has highlighted that parental participation of any type occur in response to the organic needs, structured opportunities, and particular expectations of the context (Smith, 2020). Consideration of parental engagement in learning has broadened to include more subtle, implicit and cultural aspects of parenting including expectations of children's academic performance, high expectations and communication (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003).

Recognition of the need for schools, parents, families, and their communities to work together on common goals is a strong feature of the New Zealand schooling system (Flavell, 2017; Mutch & Collins, 2012). Engagement with parents is one of the Ministry of Education's priorities across the sectors, and a number of initiatives have been undertaken to foster and sustain the involvement of parents, families, and communities in schools. Examples of such initiatives include, the Reading Together programme (Biddulph, 1993) and the Talanoa Ako project (Tongati'o et al., 2016). Findings from the Talanoa Ako project indicated that participating Pacific parents felt that a positive relationship with their children's schools was important, and a stronger sense of belonging developed when they were personally invited to contribute their knowledge to help children's (and teachers') learning. As well as when the school showed that it valued and incorporated their identities, languages and cultures (Tongati'o et al., 2016). This finding highlights the importance of relationality for Pacific communities (Anae, 2019).

## Pacific Parental Expectations

Historically, for many Pacific families, a major reason for migrating to New Zealand was the desire to give their children access to greater opportunities to fulfil aspirations for education and employment. Although migration to New Zealand involved significant sacrifices (Leauepe & Sauni, 2014), within Pacific communities, parental high expectations are evidenced in parents' aspirations for their children and for

academic achievement (Fa'avae, 2018; Theodore et al., 2018). Academic success is seen as the fruit of a collective effort, in which Pacific students are supported heavily by peers, their families and communities (Matapo & Baice, 2020). Internationally, studies by Wilder (2014) and others (Veas et al., 2019) illustrate the importance of parents' educational aspirations for their children's academic performance.

The ways that parents raise their children to value the importance of education, and the messages they communicate to their children about schooling is a form of academic socialisation (Suizzo & Soon, 2006). Forms differ between families according to culture, parental experiences of schooling and belief systems (Fan & Chen, 2001). Given the centrality of this form of parental involvement, we argue for the importance of examining the wider cultural and societal influences that shape the ways in which academic socialisation plays out within the family.

The messages that Pacific parents pass onto their children about the importance of education are embedded within intergenerational expectations (Si'ilata, 2014), which seems an important form of academic socialisation, unrecognised in parental engagement research. Using stories described within interviews with ten Pacific parents and their children, we illustrate how storytelling served as an important form of academic socialisation which upheld cultural practices, reinforced the value of education and honoured the messages from past family members.

## Intergenerational Storytelling

Storytelling is a key way that messages and expectations are communicated within families, and can be considered as simultaneously individual, social and cultural. At a social level, Hymes (1994) proposed that storytelling practices must be identified through storytelling events, including what individuals and communities do with stories and how they talk about the stories that they tell. These social events of storying shape an individual's stories, "the stories we share of our life's experiences are shaped, in terms of content and organisation, by the stories others tell to us within our culture" (McKeough et al., 2008, p. 150). The ways in which stories are told will vary across cultures, because of their purpose of meeting social goals and embedding cultural practices (Ochs & Capps, 2001).

Storytelling represents a sociocultural practice, embedded with purpose; shaped by and closely connected to the beliefs and valued prioritised by a community (Heath, 1983). Smith (1999) highlights that storytelling is a prerequisite of any indigenous based research, and as such, should be respected as a way of sharing lived experiences, exploring personal beliefs and discovering place-based wisdom. It is also a way to connect individual stories to community narratives, while inciting and eliciting dialogue between and among diverse peoples and groups (Smith, 1999). Narratives allow people to organise and represent experiences by providing an account of events over time, understand behaviour and, provide a way to reflect and interpret the underlying intentions behind action. Thus, by representing events, narratives facilitate reflection and analysis and make meaning of experience. (Bruner, 1991).

Parents select and tell stories to their children with goals of teaching, bonding, and transmitting values. According to Fivush et al., (2011), intergenerational stories may serve as a type of cultural teaching. Family narratives may be particularly significant vehicles for facilitating cultural teaching of knowledge and values, because their informal and interactive nature facilitates learning to occur before formal schooling (Rogoff & Toma, 1997). Through reminiscing about parents' and grandparents' experiences, children come to understand different perspectives and ways of being in the world, and "begin to reflect more deeply on values and commitments, in ways that shape their own individual identity" (Merrill & Fivush, 2016, p 75). Parents and youth were also asked to reflect on the process of the research. Williams et al. (2003) highlight a consequence of people telling their own stories is that they may discover new ways of seeing themselves. One participant reflection stood as instructive about the role of storytelling.

It gave me a fuller picture and became clearer to me how we live as a family. Every time I talk to you about it It's like I'm on the outside looking in. Realising things I took for granted and just realising we are doing ok.

The Pacific way is said to be spoken rather than written, based on oratory and verbal negotiation which has deep roots in Pacific cultures (Vaiotei, 2013). Through stories and legends Pacific people preserve what is important in terms of language, culture, and identity. Tuafuti and McCaffery (2005) highlight that while parents tend to be children's first teachers, within the Samoan cultural context, both parents and the wider family support the child's learning.

Better understanding Pacific students' experiences is important and widely acknowledged (Chu et al., 2013). However, current approaches to parental engagement rely on international explanations about forms of parental engagement that support learning for young people, and less is known about what works within specific Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the current study we consider the nature of Pacific parents' academic engagement for youth in Years 8 and 9. The role of parents in their children's success was examined through listening to the stories of both parents and children that were shared with the researcher.

### **Theoretical Framework: Ecological Systems Theory**

The theoretical perspective adopted within this study is that academic socialisation is a central form of parental involvement which contributes to children's academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). From an ecological systems perspective, individuals develop within multiple interacting systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A child's immediate experiences within the micro-system shape development. However, the child's experiences are embedded within a series of nested systems which may indirectly influence the child, for example the parents' experiences outside of the home. According to this theory, activities that take place within the microsystem reinforce key messages and practices dependent on the family's culture and value systems. For example, for some families, these practices may include story-telling. McLean and Breen (2009) suggest that, through the process of reflecting back with others and being exposed to stories from the surrounding macro-system, events that have not been directly experienced may have an influence on the developing child's identity.

The present study positions the practice of sharing family stories as a form of parental engagement which contributes to adolescents' resources to achieve academically. Recognising the socialisation role of storytelling, we used the lens of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to seek understanding of how this intergenerational cultural practice operates as parental engagement in children's education within Pacific families.

## Context of the Study

The study took place within participants' homes and work-places in central Auckland, New Zealand. We talked with parents and adolescents over a one-year period at three points in time. Firstly, when the participating adolescents completed Year 8 (12–13 years old), secondly when they started Year 9 (13–14 years old) and finally at the conclusion of Year 9.

## Methods

We used an interview approach to gather stories and reflections from ten families gathered across a year-long interview process. To help us understand the role of the stories we gathered, our analyses drew also from understandings about narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), allowing us to pay close attention to the expressions of academic socialisation described by the participating families within the stories that they shared. Thus, we were able to access the content of the stories thematically, as well as consider the role of those stories in the young people's education (Smith & Monforte, 2020).

The first author undertook the data collection for the study. As this was a study that took a relational approach, we chose to draw from school networks where the first author was known and had established relationships with the schools. It was critical for the research to be underpinned by Pacific research ethics which aim to advance Pacific issues and include the Pacific concepts of collective ownership (Airini et al, 2010). Anae et al (2001) highlight that Pacific values need to be respected during the entirety of any research project; recognising at the same time that they may be practised differently amongst individual groups under the Pacific umbrella. Values include "respect, reciprocity, communalism, collective responsibility, gerontocracy–respect for elders, humility, love, service and spirituality" (Anae et al, 2001, p. 14). Ongoing reflexivity and research practices were guided by these Pacific values. It is important to acknowledge that the first author did not have the expertise or cultural knowledge to undertake a study which utilised a Pacific methodology such as Talanoa, and it would have been inappropriate to claim to be doing so. As a non-Pacific researcher, support was needed for her to enact Pacific research guidelines, and cultural guides and advisors supported this ongoing process. Sanga and Reynolds (2017) point out that "researchers confident in their field should be able to use whatever is at hand to achieve Pacific purposes without the need for renaming; offering a Pacific name does not necessarily ensure alignment with Pacific thought

or practice” (p. 201). Therefore, whilst a Western framework was used as the lens with which to view Pacific parental engagement through storytelling, the values embedded within the Pacific research guidelines were carefully incorporated into the design, methods and methodological choices. Cultural guidance supported the reflexive and ongoing learning of the researcher.

## Participants

The youth were recommended as participants by their teachers and school principal. Parents were contacted and invited to participate initially by the schools’ Pacific liaison teachers, then by the researcher. At the time of the research, the first school (School A) had a school roll of approximately 780, with seven percent of Māori descent and 12 percent from Pacific Island nations. The second school (School B) had a roll of approximately 360 children, with six percent of Māori descent and 24 percent from Pacific Island nations. Ten Pacific parents and their children participated, pseudonyms were used to protect identity. The details of the participants, their ethnicity and birthplaces are provided in Table 1.

## Data sources

Audio recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents, and also with their children. The youth also completed two illustrations which were used to visually represent the ways in which they perceived the support they received in their learning. The first illustration was completed at the end of the children’s Year 8 and the second at the conclusion of Year 9. Each of the data sources offered a different perspective of the ways that Pacific families supported the learning with their children.

**Table 1** Participants’ pseudonyms, ethnicity and place of birth

Parent participants	Child participants	Ethnicity	Place of birth
John and Lovai	Toakase	Both Tongan	Both New Zealand
Mihe	Maria	Niuean	Niue
Melino	Emeni	Tongan	Tonga
Salesi (older brother)	Semisi (younger brother)	Tongan	Tonga
Teuila	Loto	Samoan	New Zealand
Sina and Henare	Sione	Both Samoan	New Zealand (Sina) Samoa (Henare)
Eleni	Sefina	Samoan	Australia
Leilani	Manaia	Samoan	New Zealand
Kalasia	Heneli	Tongan	Tonga
Ana	Lelei	Samoan	New Zealand

## Interviews with adolescents

Within this study, the youth were active participants within the research process. Uprichard (2010) contends that children have much to contribute as “potential informants” (p. 11) who can help researchers make sense of not only the experience of childhood but also children’s experiences of the larger world. From this perspective, youth are recognised as active and agential within the research process (Compton-Lilly et al., 2017).

We used drawing as a methodological approach to gathering data with the youth. Weber and Mitchell (1996) highlight that “drawings offer a different kind of glimpse into human sense-making than written or spoken texts do, because they can express that which is not easily put into words” (p. 34). Unlike questionnaires or formal interviews which may limit the data that is gathered with young people (Pain & Francis, 2003), the use of drawings provided the youth with choice over what they shared.

The drawings were created at home prior to meeting with the first author. Instructions were to draw pictures illustrating three specific areas; how they felt their families showed their value for education, activities that they engaged in related to learning, and how they perceived their family’s role in their education. The purpose for the drawings was that they gave them time to process and reflect on the topic of the interview. Additionally, they were useful for the youth to use as prompts to lead discussions. Figure 1 provides an example of a student representation.

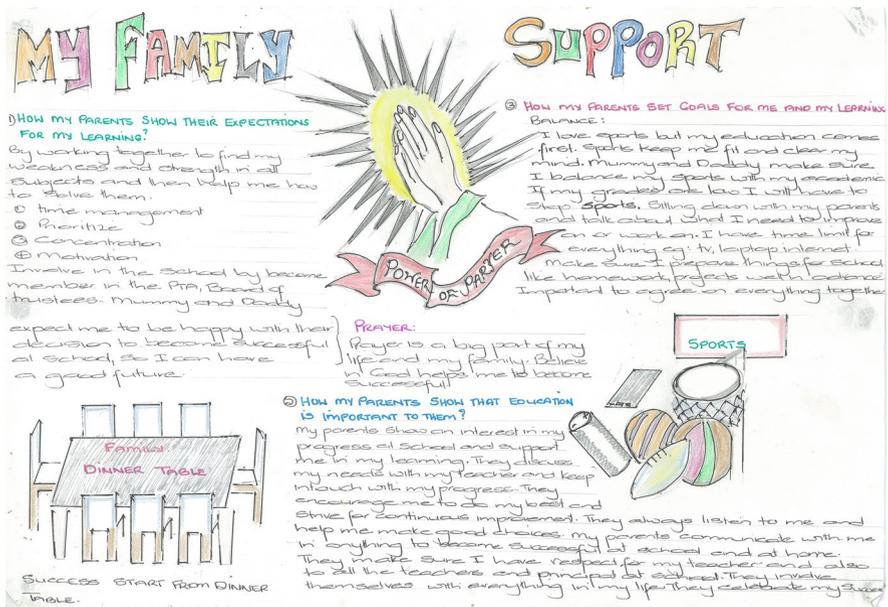


Fig. 1 Sefina’s representation

## Interviews with the Parents

The first two interviews investigated current home practices and the support parents provided to their children related to learning, as well parents sharing their own experiences of schooling the third interview explored parents' experiences of their child's transition to high school and sought to identify how or if their support changed during this period. The majority of the interviews involved the mother only, just four of the interviews involved both parents.

## Relationality is at the Heart of Research with Pacific Communities

Anae (2019) wrote that “the focus of relationality is on whole people as interdependent moral agents and the quality of the commitments between them” (p. 9). As a Pākehā outsider researcher, the first author's positionality in relation to the participants was different to that of a Pacific researcher. Her positionality was influenced relationally (Anae, 2019) by her years as a teacher, personal experiences of schooling and her relationships with the participating families. The first author had taught in the participating youths' schools at different points in time, where she worked in a part time basis. Others she knew as they were siblings of past students.

Pacific research principles accentuate the importance of relationships with participants, and ensuring that the relationships are nurtured (Airini et al., 2010). Therefore, a component of researcher positioning is what the researcher offers to the research participants and their communities (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019). Wilson (2008) highlights that relational accountability and integrity shape which knowledge is sought, how it is gained, analysed, and used by the researcher, and will demonstrate “respect, reciprocity and responsibility” (p. 99).

However, relationality from a Pacific worldview goes beyond relationships to epistemological understandings and as such, outsider researchers risk misinterpreting the stories that are shared. Efforts to understand using a relational worldview meant that participants were key to understanding, therefore participants reviewed the transcripts together with the researcher to co-construct key themes, to check that perspectives were correctly represented, and to ensure the faithful and respectful recording of participants' stories. The importance of building the relationship translated into practices committed to throughout the research process. For example, reciprocity was indicated through the gifting of ‘time’ represented by home baking as respect for participants' gifts of their time and their stories.

## Data Analysis

Audio recorded interviews and visual representations were analysed using thematic analysis (Stake, 2006). Data were analysed in several stages inductively, and patterns were sought across the data sets of both parents and youth. After we reviewed the interview transcripts for descriptive codes, we then analysed them within our theoretical model and in relation to the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Initially

fifteen codes were developed which were reduced down to eleven. In the next wave of analysis, themes were identified across the focus areas and theoretical model. Over time and after numerous iterations across the sets of data from the parents and youth, the themes were redeveloped as the importance of the relational goals emerged from the practices, and the emphasis on the practices themselves receded.

Although the study was interview based, it became apparent during the analyses that participants were telling stories, and also telling about the role of stories for education. Insights from narrative research helped position the researchers as listeners, and re-tellers of stories. Smith (1992) cautions that, “when doing research either across cultures or within a minority culture, it is critical that researchers recognise the power dynamic which is embedded within the relationship with their subjects” (p. 53). There is a danger of creating even further distance between the interviewer and the storyteller, and at times, the analysis and interpretation of research results can even be ‘an act of colonization, of violence’ (Hendry, 2007, p 493). In relation to cross-cultural research the building of relationships is so important as “shared knowledge is never void of relationships but always located in the development of them” (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017).

A narrative research stance aligned with the oral story telling history of Pacific communities, and provided a method which was intended as respectful and supportive of the strengths-based approach adopted in this study. Braun et al. (2020) highlights “the researcher is a storyteller, actively engaged in interpreting data through the lens of their own cultural membership and social positionings, their theoretical assumptions and ideological commitments, as well as their scholarly knowledge.” (pp. 848–849). As an outsider researcher, an awareness of implicit Western bias was crucial to ensure that the researcher record what the participants wanted to be shared, and in ways that they wanted to share it. In capturing the stories of participants, careful self-reflexivity and mindful positionality were employed as processes to mitigate potential inherent cultural violence.

## Findings

### Stories Served to Frame Expectations

A key finding was that without exception, parent participants shared details of their migration stories to their children in the form of stories that conveyed important messages. They shared the dreams and goals of past family members which reinforced relationships across multiple generations, with family members alive and passed, and their shared commitments to the value of education. Several parent participants also spoke of the challenges they encountered navigating the New Zealand education system as young people.

The youth spoke of their knowledge of their own parents’ challenges and the impact of those challenges on their own engagement in schooling. They reported hearing of the struggles of their parents and grandparents; while they had not lived through it themselves, they were aware of the sacrifices that had been made. The youth expressed how the stories from their parents and grandparents motivated them

to do their best in school. As one young person shared: ‘their stories make me so grateful for what I have’.

Whereas some stories focused on the challenges their parents had had starting school in Aotearoa New Zealand, others focused on the migration experiences of their parents or grandparents. For some, experiences as youth served as catalysts for reframing the educational experiences of their children. For example, one parent shared her motivation to provide the support she wasn’t able to access.

Whatever I didn’t have in my youth, and in growing up I’m going to do whatever I can to make sure that my kids get. I had to find my way through stuff, now looking at my daughter ... I know what’s available to her, whereas it was different for my Grandma - she didn’t know.

A number of parents in this study shared that they wanted their children to do better than they had academically. For example, several parents had not completed high school, while others shared in their stories they felt they had not had a great deal of input from home regarding their education. Other parents articulated specific aspirations, for example that their children attend university or gain employment in a field that was purposeful and that they enjoyed. The youth expressed collectively that their parents held high expectations of them, which served as sources of motivation to achieve well at school.

### **Stories Invoked Reciprocity Between Generations Over Time**

Sacrifices that had been made to come and settle in Aotearoa New Zealand were illustrated in stories that invoked a sense of relationship with those family ‘characters’. For Semisi, the family stories he heard regularly throughout his life served as motivators to achieve well at school. Here he articulates his value for his family stories.

My parents and my family constantly remind me about what we did to get to New Zealand. They tell me these stories to motivate me and to tell me how hard everyone’s worked to get here. Some stories might be about my brother or my great grandfather ... it makes me feel that I don’t want their work to go to waste.

Loto shared that his mother Teuila communicated her goals for him to succeed and do well at school through her stories. Loto knew that his mother’s aspirations for him were those that his grandparents had wanted for her.

Nearly my whole life my Mum tells me that her parents wanted her to succeed and get a better job than them, my Mum wants the same thing for me. She wants me to get a higher job and succeed.

Participating parents showed reciprocity to forebears, by enacting the intergenerational expectations of their own parents through transforming the educational experiences of their own children. For example, Salesi and his wife shared that they were planning to move to a different suburb so that their son and Semisi could attend a

particular boys' high school. Salesi expressed the associated challenges the move would mean for the family, however given what his parents had sacrificed for his education, he asserted that the move was a way of "paying forward" what he had experienced. Salesi's decision was future focused, he shared on the sacrifices his parents had made for their children migrating to Aotearoa New Zealand from Tonga.

I'm taking the same approach that my parents did for me. I know the sacrifices that they made for me to have a good education and I've told them (his son and Semisi) that I want to do the same for them.

Reciprocity and relationship were key ways that the youth were able to take up the support offered to them; supportive relationships seemed key to success. Support systems their schools had established for Pacific students, were expressed in reference to key people, for example liaison teachers, friends and classmates, who offered support at meeting places, such as homework clubs and parent meetings.

### **Family Talks Provided The Site For Wider Values Expressed Through Story**

The stories of parents and their children included the value of education, but interwove this value with faith, family and culture. Parents and youth described the time allocated for the routines of prayer, culture, talk and story as embedded through evening or dinner-table family talks. Parents explained that time was set aside for prayer and worship as well as discussions about school and learning. Leilani explained that the evening talks were a part of Samoan culture. As a young person she reflected that this was prioritised in her family, and she was repeating this practice with her own children. The evening talks included discussing the expectations associated with the different roles of each of her children. Leilani shared that she was hopeful that her children would continue the evening talks with their own families.

Samoans have always had evening worship, from there you have the evening talks. It's not always about the children, it's about the family and a time for everybody to come together. If you talk to some of the elders, they've come through the evening talks. My parents have been through it because they've done it with us, and we hope that they will also develop evening talks.

Evening talks were described as a time for the family to come together prayers as well as to discuss preparations for family events. Teuila expressed that the communication that took place during this time played a role in contributing to her children's confidence.

We have family prayers in the evenings, typically after that we get a chance to talk anyway. We don't do it every day but when something comes up, at school, or something that we have to discipline them on. We talk about what we expect, and communication is key to both of them being so confident.

Dinner table conversations were a similar family practice also passed down through families. Sefina's mother Eleni, had shared that during her childhood her

grandparents taught her that “success starts at the dinner table”. Eleni integrated this value into her own family through prioritising coming together each evening and making time to connect. Sefina’s story mirrored the same value her as her mother about the importance of family discussions and the dinner table.

My parents will always be there and tell me that my education will lead me where I want to be in life. I feel with their help I’m going towards what I want to be. The dinner table means the world to us, this is where our whole family comes and sits down together and we talk about everything. We believe success starts from the dinner table, when we all sit together, we can pass around our knowledge, from our eldest to our youngest, and our parents will always be there for us.

## Discussion

Literature on parent engagement indicates the importance of academic socialisation as implicit values and expectations (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Alongside this, Pacific scholars have underscored the importance of understanding of Pacific identities as relational, developing over generations and embedded in cultural meanings (Fa’avae, 2018). From a relational perspective, the relationships between entities are as real as those entities themselves. Central to this is the notion of *vā* – the socio-spatial connection between people which must be nurtured so it remains strong (Thaman, 2008). In the present study, a small part of the development of those relational identities was glimpsed through the youths’ engagement in intergenerational, cultural activities such as storytelling and family talks. Embedded within these conversations, values and expectations were expressed as reciprocal relationships with family members over time. Thus, a key form of parental engagement in the present study was relational and intergenerational as families built reciprocal relationships with family past and future through story.

Family stories may have also played a key role in establishing a collective responsibility contribute to collective success. Identified within these stories by the youth, was the importance of cultural ways of imparting values and messages. In the present study, the youth acted as key meaning makers for the researchers as they described the cultural messages in stories, which included not only the literal happenings of the events, but the values, and expectations that those imparted, thus enabling an opportunity for a culturally ‘audible’ research methodology. The important factors identified by youth which supported their schooling were relational: the support given to them by their families, friendships, and good teachers. Importantly, for the focus of this article, family stories played a key role in enabling them to be open to benefitting from that support, as motivation to take up support, and also provide support to others.

The subtle shift of focus, from practices to relationships, has implications for how parental engagement researchers might seek to understand the influence of a relational worldview. From an ecological perspective, cultural values are passed on through family practices (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), with a strong focus on ‘doing’. In

the present study, while family practices were a vehicle for storytelling, intergenerational expectations and relationships contributed to worldviews not explainable as practices, but rather, are more explainable as relationships. Through stories, youth were able to build relationships with family members past, and parents were able to pay forward the experience of their own parents.

On the basis of our findings we would argue for the importance of re-examining what constitutes valid and legitimised forms of parental engagement. In our study, parental engagement extended beyond conventional activities cited in the literature such as: helping with homework and attending parent/teacher meetings (Wilder, 2014). Examples of engagement were evident in the shared family values, passing on of cultural knowledge, such as the evening talks, family prayer times and storytelling which emphasised the importance of education. The high expectations held by the participating parents served as a significant form of engagement with their children's learning. These forms of engagement motivated their children to do well at school and highlighted the role of past family members in their current academic success. Parent participants were confident to engage with their children's teachers, and expressed that they knew where to access support, should they choose to. But importantly, they were engaged with their children's learning more widely, including in that learning a wide array of people living and no-longer living, who were invested in the youths' success.

In our interviews with families, we were told stories and we were also told about stories. The process of storytelling is how we share who we are with others. It is up to researchers to listen closely to what is being shared. This is even more important when engaging in cross-cultural research, where there is a very real risk of missing the essence of what is being shared with us by our participants (Smith, 1992). As this study demonstrates, it is the responsibility of researchers to continually refine methodological approaches to hear the cultural messages embedded in stories.

We also argue for the importance of Pacific family support being acknowledged and valued by educators who work with Pacific youth (Theodore et al, 2018). *Tapasā* (Ministry of Education, 2018), a recent policy implementation publication, was designed primarily to: "support non-Pasifika leaders, teachers, and [governance] boards to engage with Pacific learners in culturally responsive ways" (p. 1) towards building: "Pasifika cultural competencies across the education workforce" (p. 3). A key finding in this study was the ways in which the youth expressed value for family practices and cultural knowledge that had been passed on to them from their parents and extended family through shared stories. This finding offers insights for non-Pacific teachers of the significance of learning about the important cultural perspectives that any individual Pacific child brings, and the collective nature of their success.

The findings reiterate what previous studies (Theodore et al., 2018) and educational policy related to Pacific learners (Ministry of Education, 2018) have highlighted about the importance of a shared focus on the positive practices and values that are built within Pacific families, rather than perpetuating disempowering perspectives. This shared focus would be useful for cultivating effective, authentic relationships between schools, parents, teachers and students based upon a shared interest in the future academic success of their youth. Prerequisite to this is an approach

which makes audible these messages, and makes relationality, as well as activity, visible.

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