

Predictable pathways: Pacific Islander learners and school transitions in Melbourne's western region

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This paper tracks the education trajectories of a small group of Melbourne-based Pacific Islander (PI) learners who transitioned from secondary to post-school destinations, 2012 to 2015. Their school experiences were monitored over four years with the aim of identifying common pathways and underlying factors. The study found that the PI learners typically followed similar post-school pathways to non-PI learners. In all cases, they transitioned directly to higher or vocational education, non-school alternative settings or direct employment pathways. However, there was a consistent pattern of lower level academic achievement and, consequently, lower status post-school pathways. These low-level outcomes, whether directed by learners or schools, were often accepted even if inconsistent with initial learner or parental goals. While a direct transition from secondary school to university was the most desired pathway for many learners and their families, the study found that alternative school settings provided important spaces for learners to re-negotiate their school goals and return to university study. Acquiring employment immediately after leaving school was also perceived as an acceptable alternate pathway. Acceptance of these eventual but unplanned pathways helped reinforce a perception that school transitions of PI learners are typically low-level and mostly predictable.

Keywords: Pacific Islander migrant learners; school achievement and pathways

INTRODUCTION

The existing literature on Pacific Islander (PI)¹ learner migrants suggests that, even though the number of such migrant entering post-compulsory secondary school in Australia is increasing, the number completing such schooling remains proportionately low (Ainley et al., 2000; Chenoweth, 2014; Kearney & Glen, 2017; Rose, Moore, & Quanchi, 2009; Scull & Cuthill, 2008). The result is fewer PI learners enrolling in higher education and PI families' strong 'migrant dream' of achieving labour market success through education is lost.

Many PI parents and learners value education highly and view schooling as a realistic pathway towards achieving career success and wellbeing in a globalized world (Ravulo, 2015). Studies, however, consistently report that PI learners in Australia face challenges in terms of their school engagement and transitions into tertiary level studies (Chenoweth, 2014; Kearney, 2012; Pakoa, 2005; Scull & Cuthill, 2008). The inability of learners to overcome such challenges is

¹ Pacific Islander (PI) refers to the diverse communities of people who originate from the many islands scattered across the Pacific Ocean, and who identify as ethnically Polynesian (from American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Hawaii, Niue, Rapanui, Samoa, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu), Melanesian (from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu) or Micronesian (from Banaba, Guam, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia).

concerning, especially if it leads to situations where they develop low perceptions about their own opportunities in education (Biddle, 2014) and, even worse, a situation where PI parents, families and school staff regard this low-level trend as the norm for PI learners in Australian school settings.

The concern with low-level success in education extends to and directly impacts employment opportunities and patterns for PI learners and even the broader PI communities who experience ongoing challenges with accessing and securing stable, long-term and career-related sustainable employment (George & Rodriguez, 2009; Vasta, 2004). When we consider the significant impact of educational achievement on employability and job market success, it becomes clear that PI learners in urban settings, such as Melbourne, are missing out on the opportunities to become active and engaged members of their communities in Australia, with limited access to higher education pathways and ongoing, long-term restrictions to professional and career-specific employment that can fulfil personal goals and respond positively to parental and community expectations from schooling.

This paper tracks the schooling trajectories of a small group of Melbourne-based PI learners who transitioned from secondary to post-school destinations from 2012 to 2015. It focusses specifically on the experiences of eight of the 14 learner participants who had left secondary school over this four-year period to identify common pathways in their post school pathways and the underlying factors. Personal, home and school factors are considered as contributing towards the shaping and influencing of their schooling trajectories. The paper argues that PI learner perceptions, experiences and approaches to schooling and further education pathways are determined through the course of schooling by numerous, varied and complex factors. Navigating these competing and sometimes conflicting situations may lead to achievement and transition patterns that do not necessarily reflect low motivation or poor academic ability on the part of these learners. But accepting these low-level and predictable pathways as the norm for PI learners may cause ongoing challenges for this group of learners in Australia.

PI SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA

Current literature on PI migrants and secondary schooling in Australia affirms that personal, home, school, and community factors all have negative impacts on the school experiences of PI learners (Anae, Anderson, Benserman, & Coxon, 2002). Studies have particularly focused on the home setting when exploring physical and cultural barriers affecting PI learners, including: time and in-home structures for completing homework (Anae et al., 2002; Mafi, 2005); cultural identity and responsibilities (Pakoa, 2005); ‘collective cultural orientation’ (Kearney & Glen, 2017); low levels of parental experience in education, compounded by limited English language (Mafi, 2005; Rose et al., 2009).

At a personal level, some PI learners have found the higher education (HE) setting to be too unfamiliar, particularly HE’s emphasis on English language proficiency and formal academic communication styles and formats (Rose et al., 2009). In some PI learners’ homes, English is not the main language of communication; thus, learner confidence to speak and write English to the required academic standards is compromised. This challenge also impacts on PI communication levels and relationships with school staff and peers, which affects PI learners’ perceptions of identity and belonging within classroom and school settings (Nabobo, 2012; Thaman, 2008).

Lack of PI role models in these formal spaces further account for a sense of isolation and demotivation, with some learners finding it difficult to maintain appropriate relationships with staff or peers at school. In addition, low family incomes experienced by most PI migrants means that they will be unlikely able to meet tertiary education costs, further compromising learner

aspirations to undertake tertiary study and thus meaningfully engage and achieve at secondary school (Chenoweth, 2014; Kearney, 2012). Some PI learners have dropped out purposely to find work and contribute to family finances (Ravulo, 2015).

At the school level, cultural distance was identified as a particular barrier for PI learners, especially where the social and cultural requirements of schooling were antithetical to Pacific “lived” experiences and cultural forms of learning (Gegeo, 2001; Sanga, 2013; Thaman, 2008). Many PI Indigenous researchers have highlighted the differences between Western and Pacific cultural forms of knowledge and pedagogies, and their effect on PI approaches to socialization, engagement, and relationships at school (Dooley, Exley, & Singh, 2000; Samu, 2007; Thaman, 2008). Some of these differences relate to ways of working, where PI are said to learn better using experiential approaches and working collectively in groups compared with the formal, theoretical and individualistic approaches that are emphasized in Western classrooms. PI are also known for placing emphasis on trusted relationships and meaningful connections with those around them, which may not be encouraged in today’s classrooms (Samu, 2007; Thaman, 2008). The resultant, ongoing, low outcomes of PI learners resulting from these differences give both learners and teachers incorrect perceptions about learners’ abilities and potential (Biddle, 2014).

At the community level, notions of citizenship, identity and belonging also affect PI levels of social and cultural integration and adjustment to broader society. Most importantly, these self-concept notions affect PI access to community and government services and benefits, with differences between and within PI groups, depending on migration background and visa status. For example, not having access to educational assistance such as HECS-HELP² for university studies may demotivate some PI learners from undertaking university studies. If they also come from low-income families that have insecure or intermittent employment, these learners may forgo HE studies to focus on family livelihood needs. For these learners, earning an income is viewed as a valuable contribution to family wellbeing.

METHODOLOGY

Much of the data for this paper was derived from semi-structured interviews conducted as part of the author’s doctoral research, which was designed as a longitudinal case study with data collection spanning a four-year period from 2012 to 2015. Information sourced from 78 semi-structured interviews form the baseline data for this study’s findings. Data gained from the interviews were analysed using an inductive and thematic analysis approach. NVivo was initially used to transcribe and open-code raw data into categories that were then related together to extrapolate common overall features and formulate over-arching themes. A process of constant comparison analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) then followed to identify the connections between various categories and to formulate recurring and pertinent themes.

Employing a longitudinal study approach was necessary to cater for the generally small size of the PI population size and ethnic distribution in Australia, where New Zealand Maori, Polynesians, Melanesians and Micronesians account for approximately 45%, 38%, 15% and 0.4% of the PI population respectively (Ravulo, 2015). Efforts to recruit more Melanesians and Micronesians from selected and known community networks proved difficult, given the generally low numbers of these two ethnic groups in Australia and, particularly, in Melbourne. Nevertheless, this study’s sample size reflects proportionately the national PI distribution.

² Higher Education Contribution Scheme – Higher Education Loan Program (HECS-HELP) is a loan scheme for eligible students enrolled in Commonwealth supported places and studying a higher education qualification and is used to pay for their student contribution amounts.

There were 48 participants involved in the study; 14 were learner participants and the other 34 comprised 22 parents or guardians of the learners and 12 members of staff from their schools. The learners were recruited using a combination of purposive sampling and snowballing techniques (Merriam, 2009) and mostly identified through informal networks in schools, churches and the PI communities in Melbourne’s western region. From an initial pool of 26 positive participant responses, 14 were selected on the basis of seniority at school, with preference for those already enrolled in Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Parents/guardians and school staff were recruited only after the primary participant (the learner) had agreed to participate and if they also agreed to their parents and/or school staff participating.

The 14 learner participants comprised:

- Nine females and five males, self-identified as PI from Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Niue and Papua New Guinea, all resident in Melbourne’s western region.
- Twelve Polynesians whose parents or guardians had migrated to Australia from New Zealand.
- Two Melanesians who had migrated directly from Papua New Guinea.

All the learner participants attended one of seven secondary schools in Melbourne’s west: five were co-educational Government schools and two were Catholic schools. All seven schools offered a full secondary school curriculum (Years 7 to 12) with a two-year post-compulsory option comprising the VCE and the VCAL. Of the 14 study participants, 13 were following the VCE option, the most popular pathway into university studies, and only one was doing VCAL studies, which provides a pathway towards Technical and Further Education (TAFE) studies.

The western region of Melbourne, which includes the local council areas of Brimbank, Marybyrnong and Wyndham, where the participants lived and attended school, is one of the more popular residential areas for PI as well as other migrants, all attracted to the area’s industrial and manufacturing base with easy access to unskilled and semi-skilled employment, public transport and cheaper housing and rich multi-cultural vibe. This area is also known for having generally low levels of socio-economic status and lifestyle, high unemployment and crime rates, and poor education and health outcomes (Helme, Teese, Dulfer, Robinson, & Jones, 2009; Sheehan & Wiseman, 2004).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the participants’ pathways over four years, with the shaded area demonstrating the trajectories of the eight participants who had left formal schooling during the research period.

Table 1: Pathways of study participants over 4 years

No.	Sex	Age	Year 1 2012	Year 2 2013	Year 3 2014	Year 4 2015
1	F	17	Year 12 VCE	University Degree	University Degree	University Degree
2	F	16	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE Year 12 VCAL	TAFE Certificate	TAFE Diploma
3	F	16	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE TAFE Certificate	TAFE Diploma	University Degree
4	M	17	Year 12 VCE	Employment	Employment	Employment
5	M	17	Year 12 VCE	Employment	Employment	Employment

6	M	15	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCAL	TAFE
7	F	15	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE	University Degree
8	F	15	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE	University Degree
9	F	14	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE
10	F	14	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE
11	F	14	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE
12	M	14	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE
13	F	14	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE	Year 12 VCE
14	M	13	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11 VCE

The school trajectories of the eight learners who had transitioned to post-school destinations during the study period are the focus of this paper because their pathways are more or less completed compared to the remaining six participants still pursuing formal secondary schooling. Their trajectories provide general but useful insights into the pathway patterns of PI learners and help provide the evidential basis for this paper's discussion and findings. The experiences of individual learners were initially assessed before being systematically mapped against the trajectories of the collective group to determine common factors influencing the group's post-school pathways.

Pathway options

The results for this group of PI learners show generally similar transition patterns as for non-PI learners, with learners transitioning from secondary- to post-secondary destinations using three common pathways: a direct transition to university or TAFE; a pathway to university studies through a non-school alternative education setting; and a direct pathway to employment. An interesting feature in this group's school pathways is that there was no disruption to their trajectories within the compulsory years of schooling (Years 7 to 10) but this trend changed when learners reached the post-compulsory schooling stage.

VCE was the most popular post-compulsory pathway selected, with 13 participants selecting this option at Year 10. However, not all of those who selected this pathway were able to successfully complete it. Of the eight participants who left school during the research period, only five successfully completed a senior secondary qualification (Year 12 VCE or VCAL) at their school: three were female participants (1, 7, 8) and two were male (5, 6). The female participants went directly to university while one male participant (6), who had selected VCAL studies at school, transitioned successfully to a TAFE course. The only male (5) who had successfully completed VCE took up employment directly after leaving school. Three participants did not complete VCE at school: two had been withdrawn from VCE studies at their schools but had continued their studies at alternative education settings, and a third participant, a male (4), took up direct employment.

An important finding is the importance of non-school alternative settings for learning, which provided a pathway for two participants who had been withdrawn from VCE studies at school. Although viewed by both sets of parents as a less desired pathway (compared to a direct transition to university), both learners accepted this pathway as a means to remain engaged in formal schooling, viewing it as a genuine pathway back into university study.

At a personal level, the pathways followed by each of the eight study participants somewhat reflected their initial school goals but consistently at a lower level than originally planned. For example, the three females who had transitioned directly to university were accepted into lower level courses than originally hoped. Participant 1, whose initial goal was to study medicine, achieved a lower than expected Australian Tertiary Admissions Result (ATAR) score, subsequently enrolled in a general science degree at a different university from the one she preferred. Similarly, participant 7 whose aim was to score an ATAR of 70, achieved a much lower score and had to enrol in a course different from her preferred choice. Participant 8, whose teachers, supported by her parents, had encouraged her to apply for a teaching degree, also achieved a lower ATAR score and enrolled in an Arts course. These examples evidence clear gaps in the preferred pathway choices and the consequent academic results achieved by PI learners and reveal obvious anomalies between the aspirations of learners in terms of school achievement and their subsequent pathways to post-school destinations.

This consistent, low-level pattern of pathways is also reflected in the trajectories of the two participants who transitioned to alternative education settings from VCE studies at school. Despite the opportunity to continue studying, thus keeping their dreams of university study alive, they had to defer their initial goal of transitioning directly to university from secondary school. Poor academic results and behaviour issues forced these withdrawals and both girls were steered by their schools towards certificate level courses. Although both learners were eligible for Commonwealth Support Place (CSP) support for their tuition costs, their roundabout pathway to university study meant that they would incur higher financial costs for their education in the longer term.

Only one participant (6) was able to follow his original choice of pathway, which comprised enrolment in a TAFE course, after successfully completing VCAL studies at school. His pathway was the smoothest but also most predictable. He had decided from an early age to become a tradesperson and both his family and teachers supported his choice. In his case, parental support for choice of course and flexibility to make his own pathway choice as well as support from teachers who knew his academic strengths helped to facilitate a smooth transition.

The pathways of the three participants who successfully transitioned to university are similar in some ways. All three females had experienced personal successes at school in the form of class prizes and good school reports (participant 1), satisfactory exam results and positive feedback from teachers (Via) and class prizes and a leadership position (participant 7) which motivated them to succeed at school. Each one had a parent or older sibling who had satisfactorily completed a university qualification in which they were currently engaged. All three were sufficiently supported with material and financial assistance at home. The main difference between them was their Australian citizenship status. While participants 7 and 8 had Australian citizenship, which meant they could receive Government support for their tuition costs, participant 1 did not have a similar benefit. As an Australian permanent resident, participant 1 was ineligible for a CSP and was also unable to acquire a HECS-HELP loan to pay for tuition costs. Her parents could not afford these fees but, due to a special arrangement with her enrolling university, participant 1 was allowed to enrol and encouraged to apply for Australian citizenship, which she did, preventing a premature withdrawal from her course. For these three girls, their personal motivation to succeed, their successes at school, the positive home support and high parental expectations, and the financial support to pay for tuition costs, all contributed towards facilitating their positive albeit lower level pathways to university.

The pathways of two females (participants 2 and 3) who moved to alternative educational settings are different in distinct ways. Before being withdrawn from school, each had experienced some successes at school (one had attended a prestigious leadership camp and achieved good results

while the other had been nominated for a sports scholarship after successful completion of VCE and had been getting good results). However, both were unable to sustain these positive results right through to school completion. While both girls were Australian citizens and eligible for Commonwealth support (CSP) for university studies, their personal and family circumstances triggered challenges that affected their school transitions. Their respective schools had been helpful in negotiating their subsequent pathways into alternative education settings but the immediate reaction from their parents to these decisions had been anger and disappointment. In both households, low family income, continued parental absence from home due to work responsibilities, and low levels of communication between parents and their children and their children's schools contributed towards distracting their personal motivations, learning interests, and school achievements.

DISCUSSION

Despite post-school transitions of PI learners following similar pathway patterns as for non-PI learners, their pathways are typically characterised by consistent lower than expected academic results, leading to general-based courses that are followed even when these do not match with their initial pathway goals, preferred courses, and institution choices. Such a negative pattern is concerning because it contributes to a perception that PI learners generally achieve low-level post-compulsory schooling results and outcomes, which inevitably lead to predictable low-level pathways. This is a serious concern for education providers and PI families and communities who want to see improvements in PI learners' school and employment pathways in Australia.

This study uncovered three dominant factors that influence PI learner pathways: student ability; school support; and parental expectations and support. A learner's school experiences and personal perceptions of their own abilities and performance had a significant influence on their actual post-school pathway. Some participants were quite self-aware of their abilities early on in their schooling and made decisions that matched these assessments. For example, those with less confidence in communicating in the English language would have realised early on that their academic work would be insufficient to acquire certain results or outcomes at school. Their self-concept, developed and informed by marked differences in their lived experiences and the unfamiliar requirements of formal academic settings may have affected their aspirations for further study.

School personnel and academic results also had a significant impact on pathway choices, and learners took school suggestions about possible career pathways very seriously. Some schools were quite influential in directing students towards certain pathways and a few learners benefited from the advice. However, this advice was mostly based on students' academic results. When students were doing academically well, staff generally supported their HE preferences of course or pathway. Interestingly, staff did not normally suggest "higher" options, even if some learners could have benefited from such advice. Generally, when learners showed poor effort or low academic results, they were steered towards lower level subjects or courses or withdrawn from school.

In some instances, school staff and learners worked together to facilitate the most suitable options. An example of this is where a student was kept at school until the VCE exams to appease a parent although the school had decided to withdraw him from sitting the VCE examinations. When possible, parents' views were considered but these had limited influence on final decisions about post-school pathways. Some parents were quite happy deferring to their children the responsibility for deciding school pathways if they were generally doing well at school. In these cases, learners mostly accepted school suggestions.

Parents, while being very influential at the goal setting stage of their children's development, became less instrumental in steering them towards certain pathways. More often than not, parents with the least amount of communication or interaction with their children's schools also had less knowledge of their children's interests, school progress or pathway plans other than what they learned from their children. In some cases, some parents were not able to communicate frequently with schools or their children about schooling issues due to work or other home commitments. In these circumstances, some learners tried to manage their own transitions to fit with parent's expectations but were also more likely to follow school suggestions even if these did not match with their preferred career goals. This situation often occurred if and when parents did not have the confidence to negotiate more favourable options for their children. For parents who did make the effort, they were sometimes deemed to have "too high and unrealistic" expectations if their children were not achieving good results at school.

Unsurprisingly, those learners who successfully secured places at university or TAFE generally accepted their pathways, even if these were offered at a lower level course or institution. A pathway to tertiary level education courses was seen as a benchmark of success for most learners and parents in this study. Where the choice of tertiary course or institution differed greatly from parental expectations (which was true for four participants), these disappointments were short-lived and the learners and their parents eventually accepted the outcomes. Gaining a university or TAFE place reflected a success in the children that many parents were proud of. However, the study also revealed that some parents held higher expectations for daughters to go to university and for sons to enrol in TAFE or take up direct employment. From the study findings at least, gaining entrance to university or TAFE for both girls and boys, and the ability to secure employment were acceptable benchmarks of success, with the capacity to earn considered as a positive second-option pathway for PI males.

The transition patterns of these eight learners were marked with both opportunities and challenges in the ways they navigated their secondary and post-secondary school experiences and trajectories. Concurring with past studies (Anae et al., 2002; Chenoweth, 2014; Kearney & Glen, 2017; Scull & Cuthill, 2008), these opportunities and challenges were facilitated and influenced by personal, home and school factors. These diverse spaces and the complexities of the relationships and experiences within them provided these learners with some positive trajectories but also many disruptions along the way. Some of these disruptions can be traced to ineffective strategies employed by learners, parents and schools in navigating the secondary school environment and its requirements.

Most noticeably, the post-compulsory level of secondary schooling was a particularly problematic phase for some learners, whose families struggled to provide the necessary resources and support required at this higher level. Characterized by more theoretical and formalised enquiry and instruction methods, some learners found it difficult to keep up with the academic requirements and standards, concurring with Pacific Indigenous researchers' views (Nabobo, 2012; Thaman, 2008) that the contradictions between a school's academic requirements and PI learners' cultural identities (Kearney & Glen, 2017; Pakoa, 2005;) and lived-in home experiences (Anae et al., 2002) present as critical challenges for many PI learners. For PI, too, there is a constant need to find place and fit within a harmonious setting and this can be difficult in spaces and with audiences that promote individualism and self-determination. Samu (2007, p. 21) refers to this concept as "I am part of a wider audience" where PI acknowledge that the choices individuals make can have significant implications on family and their wider community. Additionally, Gegeo (2001) and Thaman (2008) propose that PI learn best using practical, experiential and non-formal methods which are not typically catered for in urban Australian schools which focus more on formal, theoretical, and inquiry learning approaches.

This study also revealed some inter-generational gaps in terms of understanding the needs of modern day learners, particularly in new urban settings like Melbourne. Some PI families clearly did not have the necessary information to assist them in providing advice or support to their children at school. Insufficient information or advice about scholarship or career options caused some parents to have differing expectations about their children's opportunities and potential pathways. In some instances, some parents were so focused on their children going directly to university that they considered other pathways, such as TAFE or alternative settings, as less desirable outcomes from schooling.

For many PI learners, the home and the school presented as two important settings in which they reviewed, negotiated, and selected their educational goals and their consequent pathways (Paulsen, 2016). This supports the view that PI learners' identity and personal sense of concept is strongly connected to family, where giving support to family and upholding the "common good" (Samu, 2007; Sanga, 2013; Thaman, 2008) is a high priority. This belief both shapes and informs learner goals and priorities. For this group of learners, their families' cultural values, parental educational experiences, and financial situations played central roles in determining the support levels that a learner could access at home. The priority placed on upholding family and cultural values resulted in PI learners having to consistently negotiate personal and school goals against family needs and socio-cultural wellbeing. Sometimes, the pressure to do right by the family caused learners to put their own educational and career goals on hold, which ultimately resulted in a few learners' choosing to withdraw from school and find jobs to assist the family finances.

The need to please and appease parents was a huge motivating factor for some learners, and was often couched in a language of service, obligation, and reciprocity (Hau'ofa, 1994). Due to having a strong "collective cultural orientation" (Kearney & Glen, 2017, p. 11; Samu, 2007), wherein school outcomes represent a whole family's success or failure, learners may feel pressured to display a positive front to their families about their school achievements when the actual results show otherwise. For some learners, the pressure to please parents drove learners to mask the realities of their performances and achievements at school which, when uncovered, caused frustration and disappointment for some parents. However, these parents mostly blamed themselves or their children for these shortcomings, concurring with Bronfenbrenner's (1996) theory that disadvantaged people often blamed themselves for their insufficiencies.

Sometimes learners who were not doing too well at school deliberately built walls between the home and school to prevent their parents from knowing what was truly happening at school, especially if they were not doing well. Similarly, school staff were sometimes kept in the dark about situations at home as a way to safeguard family vulnerabilities from being exposed. These strategies consequently led to further alienation of parents from the school or staff from the home context, causing these two parties to have incorrect or unrealistic perceptions of schooling or the home. Learners were found to readily apply such techniques on parents who had fewer experiences with education and fewer opportunities to communicate with schools.

Low parental income and education unaffordability also impacted on learner pathways, and sometimes learners were driven to find employment directly after leaving school to assist with family finances. This situation was common amongst those families whose citizenship status or socio-economic status restricted the opportunities to pay for university or TAFE studies.

CONCLUSIONS

The pathways of the PI learners in this study, whether forced or designed, caused them to encounter many obstacles along the way, including adapting school and career goals, courses

and institutions to fit with academic results, personal commitments, school expectations and family circumstances. Most pathways were taken up to fulfil a long-term goal to study at university or TAFE and to make families proud. The danger of these recurring pathway patterns is that schools as institutions have pre-conceived views about how PI perform. Schools may need to practice positive affirmation to encourage PI learners to excel both in class and out of class, and be understanding of their preferred ways of learning.

Within the home, there is a need for active engagement by parents with schools to learn about their child's whole of school experience, their strengths and needs, and practical strategies for supporting them more appropriately. Parents must be encouraged to communicate and collaborate better with schools about realistic academic potential, results and pathways for their children. Schools must also provide early and specific intervention to families to prepare PI learners for the post-compulsory stage of schooling. Career advice centres must engage actively with PI families to promote awareness about their children's abilities and choices at the post-compulsory schooling stage and provide adequate information and advice on scholarships, careers and pathway options that are relevant to learner's interests and abilities.

Finally, schools and other educational providers must develop a specific communication framework and toolkit for working more effectively with PI families and communities.

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