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**A Study of the Academic Writing Problems of New Zealand-Born Samoan  
Students in Tertiary Institutions**

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## Attestation of Authorship

*“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution or higher learning.”*

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## Abstract

Academic success is clearly linked to one's ability to write well. Given this close link between the two and the poor academic record of Pacific Island students within mainstream education in New Zealand, it is surprising that very little research has been undertaken to examine the academic writing problems of Pacific Island students. This emancipatory, critical study focused on tertiary students who identified as New Zealand-born Samoan. Since Samoans constitute half the Pacific Island population in New Zealand, New Zealand-born Samoan participants were chosen as being representative of this larger group. They were also chosen because they represented a group of New Zealanders identified as disadvantaged in terms of their largely low socio-economic status and poor academic achievement levels.

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Bernstein's critical theories on communicative and teaching practices in mainstream education which disadvantage minority students from working class communities. These theories are discussed in conjunction with a general review of relevant literature in Chapter 2. The Samoan researcher in this study has added an inter-generational commentary to some of the views and experiences of school and Samoan homelife in New Zealand of participants, firstly from the perspective of her own first-hand experiences of school and Samoan homelife in the 50s and 60s and secondly from the perspective of an experienced English language teacher in New Zealand tertiary institutions.

This study used a triangulation approach to enhance reliability and validity of quantitative and qualitative data collected. Three data collecting instruments were used: a written questionnaire, face-to-face interviews, and students' actual essay assignments. A written questionnaire was completed by 14 students who identified as New Zealand-born Samoan. A case study approach was then used with a sub-group of five students, representative of the original 14, who were interviewed more closely in the following areas of interest which emerged through the questionnaire: students' perceived and actual academic writing skills, communicative and teaching practices of high school and tertiary teachers, students' learning strategies, the role and effectiveness of Pacific Island support staff and programmes and the impact of the cultural and communicative



practices of Samoan parents in traditional, bilingual Samoan homes on students' academic performance and success in the formal learning environment. The impact of factors such as poor self-motivation and time-management skills, inadequate reading skills and a lack of understanding of and exposure to the academic discourses of the formal learning environment, on the academic writing problems of the participants in this study, were also examined.

Teaching methods which perpetuated rote learning practices amongst students were reported by participants in this study from both low and middle-decile high schools. The communicative and teaching practices of Pacific Island teaching staff were also examined in this study. Relevant data from the one-to-one teaching sessions with participants were also included as part of this study. The face-to-face interviews and one-to-one teaching sessions were tape-recorded.

## Key to Narrative

The following abbreviations and conventions have been used in the presentation of my research findings.

Names: Pseudonyms have been used for the five participants in the case studies to protect their true identity

... The three dots have been used throughout interview excerpts in Chapter Four to replace fillers, repetition, false starts, and irrelevant information which have been omitted.

*Italics* have been used for the following:

*Samoan* words: *Feau* chores, housework, business

*Fia poko* Perceived to be trying to be clever by putting forward views, opinions or information that older members of the household may not understand or agree with.

*Palagi* European

*Fa'aSamoa* Samoan traditional custom

*Ia...Alu ia maguia le aoga* Now, go and all the the best at school

*O mai fai fe'au ia* Come and do these chores

# 1 Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 *Background to the Study*

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### 1.1.1 The New Zealand-born Samoan

The New Zealand-born Pacific Island population far outnumbers the overseas-born population. The 2001 Census figures show that 58% of Samoans, for example, who make up the single largest Pacific Island ethnic group in New Zealand (50%) are New Zealand-born. The figures for the New Zealand-born Cook Island Maori and Niuean populations are even higher at 70% for both groups.

If we look at the figures in 2000 for Pacific Island students in tertiary study in New Zealand, we find that Samoan students make up 48% of the Pacific Island student population (Anae, Anderson, Benseman & Coxon, 2002, p. 27). These figures compare closely with those for 2001 at the University of Auckland, which boasts the largest Pacific Island student population in New Zealand, where 42.6% of Pacific Island students identified as Samoan (Jones & Manu'atu, 2002, p. 27). Clearly, Samoans are a dominant group within the Pacific Island community.

In this study, the definition of New Zealand-born Samoan included Samoan-born Samoans who arrived in New Zealand at the age of five years or younger and were educated entirely in New Zealand. I, the researcher in this study, identified as a New Zealand-born Samoan, having arrived in New Zealand from Samoa at the age of four and having received all my formal education in New Zealand. One of the key foci of this study was to identify some of the key characteristics shared in common by the New Zealand-born Samoans in this study which impacted on their academic studies. Another important focus of this study was to present the viewpoint of this group of New Zealand-born Samoans, in order to understand some of the issues surrounding their academic disadvantage in the formal learning environment. I, the New Zealand-born Samoan researcher, injected commentary, where relevant, from an intergenerational and professional English language teacher's perspective.

### **1.1.2 Socio-economic status of Samoans in New Zealand**

Statistics for Samoan People in New Zealand (2001) revealed that the unemployment rate of New Zealand-born Samoans stood at 17%, which was more than double the unemployment rate of the New Zealand workforce as a whole. Furthermore, almost a third of Samoans (32%) received some form of income support in 2001 and the median annual income of Samoan adults was \$15,600 compared to the New Zealand median income of \$18,500. These statistics clearly position the majority of Samoans/New Zealand-born Samoans, as a group, in the lowest socio-economic bracket in New Zealand today. It is not surprising, therefore, that over one third (34%) of the Samoan population in New Zealand live in poor, working-class communities. Evidently, the socio-economic position of a significant proportion of the Samoan population has not improved since my own days as a child growing up in a working-class, Samoan home in the New Zealand of the fifties and sixties.

Research in New Zealand and Australia (Singh, Dooley & Freebody, 2001; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Singh, 2000, 2001; Dooley, Exley & Singh, 2000; Pitt & Macpherson, 1994; Jones, 1991) which examined the link between teaching practices and the low academic achievement levels of Pacific Island students focused on the students' Pacific Island ethnicity and working-class backgrounds as significant factors in the studies. This study sought to understand the academic writing problems of New Zealand-born Samoans from traditional and non-traditional, monolingual and bilingual, and middle-class as well as working-class backgrounds.

### **1.1.3 Language(s) Spoken by New Zealand-born Samoans.**

Statistics for Samoan People in New Zealand (2001) showed that while 92% of overseas-born Samoans were able to hold an everyday conversation in Samoan, this was true of only 48% of New Zealand-born Samoans. Pitt and Macpherson (1994, p. 16) pointed out that many New Zealand-born Samoans did not speak Samoan and were not comfortable with the traditional Samoan customs and practices. They did, however, recognise that Samoan was still the language of the home in most Samoan families (1994, p. 103). My own experience of the Samoan language in Auckland of the fifties and sixties generally supports the view of Pitt and Macpherson. In my own home,

Samoan was spoken mainly by my Samoan parents, while we, the New Zealand-born Samoan children, spoke only English at home. This study also explored the impact of the communicative practices used in the homes of New Zealand-born Samoans on their academic studies and performance in the formal learning environment.

#### **1.1.4 Academic Achievement Levels of Pacific Island Students**

By and large, academic success depends on one's ability to meet the specific writing requirements of assignments and/or exams. The high school achievement levels of Pacific Island students have been consistently low over a number of decades. The 2000 figures cited by Jones and Manu'atu (2002, p. 15), for example, showed that only 5.2% of the 3534 Pacific Island school leavers in New Zealand achieved an A or B bursary, 47% achieved a minimum entry qualification (i.e. a pass of 3 Cs) and 26.2% left school with no qualifications at all. While the figures for 2001 show an improvement with 9.5% of Pacific Island school-leavers having achieved an A bursary, when compared with statistics for Asian (44.5%), Pakeha (42.1%) and Maori (36.4%) school leavers, the academic results of Pacific Island students were still, in fact, well below that of the three other main ethnic groups. Moreover, only 10.2% of Pacific Island school leavers in Auckland left school with an A bursary. These figures are indeed disturbing given that Auckland also has the largest Pacific Island population in New Zealand (Jones & Manu'atu, 2002, p. 29).

Jones and Manu'atu (2002, p. 16) highlighted the link between high school academic qualifications and students' pass rates at university. They noted, for instance, that the overall pass rate of Pacific Island students, who entered the University of Auckland with minimum entry qualifications, was relatively low. Furthermore, the high rate of low achievement levels of Pacific Island students, more than any other ethnic group at university, was attributable to not sitting exams, not completing their coursework or withdrawing from the course altogether (p. 38). In 2001, for example, 52% of 'Not Pass' grades for Pacific Island students were attributed to 'Did Not Sit/Did Not Complete' grades, while 43% were 'Fail' grades. Jones and Manu'atu (2002, p. 37) suggested that poor attendance and not handing in coursework assignments were two of the main reasons why Pacific Island students failed their courses.

Of further note, is the high percentage of Pacific Island students who gained entry into university study as 'Special Admissions' students. Jones and Manu'atu (2002, p. 15), for example, found that 25% of 'Special Admissions' students at the University of Auckland were of Pacific Island ethnicity. They also noted that while both Pakeha and Maori 'Special Admissions' numbers had declined since 1996, Pacific Island enrolments have remained constant at around 25%. Furthermore, the Pacific Island 'Special Admissions' pass rate was the lowest of all three groups. According to Jones and Manu'atu (2002, p. 36), in 2000, the pass rate for Pacific Island 'Special Admissions' was recorded at 51.6%, which was well below that of both Maori (73.8%) and Pakeha (83.2%) 'Special Admissions' students.

Similarly, in 2001 (Jones & Manu'atu, p. 33), the pass rate of Pacific Island students who enrolled with either a B bursary or University Entrance was disproportionately much lower than that of the other main ethnic groups. The average pass rate of 63-64% between 1996-2001 for Pacific Island students at the University of Auckland, for example, indicated a strong link between minimum entry qualifications and low academic achievement levels at university. Furthermore, this low level pass rate was consistent for all Faculties except the Wellesley bridging programme (Jones & Manu'atu, p. 34).

Ministry of Education statistics (2004) for Year 13 School Leavers showed that only 14% of Pacific Island students passed NCEA Level 3 or higher qualifications compared to 37% of Pakeha and 56% of Asian students. Maori students were the only group with a lower pass rate in this group, at 11.7%. For NCEA, Level 2 passes in the same year, however, Pacific Island Year 13 students recorded the highest percentage of all groups at 36.5%, which would suggest that Pacific Island students entering tertiary institutions are predominantly from this second group. Harkness, Murray, Parkin and Dalgety (2005) also noted that 19% of Pacific Island Year 13 students achieved a University Entrance qualification but without an NCEA Level 3 qualification.

Between 1994-2000, Pacific Island student numbers in full-time tertiary study have continued to increase steadily (Arae et al, 2002, p. 30). This increase, however, has not translated into a comparable increase in academic achievement levels or completion rates for Pacific Island students in tertiary study. According to Scott (2004, p. 78), Pacific Island completion rates for degree-level and under-graduate courses between

1998-2002 were the lowest of any group. It is interesting to note that the pass-rate figures for Samoan students at the University of Auckland, which compared closely with those for Pacific Island students as a whole, averaged 60.3%. This pass-rate fell well short of the 89% pass-rate for Pakeha students, 79.9% for Asian students and 74.3% for Maori students (Jones & Manu'atu, 2002, p. 34).

Figures for completion rates of Pacific Island students at AUT supported those for the University of Auckland. AUT's Annual Report (2005) showed that the participation rates of Pacific Island students at AUT were only marginally higher, at between 77-79% from 2003-2005, than their completion rates of 65-66% for the same period. The completion rates were also the lowest of the three main groups at AUT. The AUT average participation for the same period was between 89-90% and the completion rate, 81%. Maori participation rate was also higher at between 80-83% while their completion rates had improved from 74 to 78%.

Government-funded initiatives and programmes were initiated as early as the mid-1970s, after research (Furieux (1973) in Anae et al, 2002, pp. 18, 19) had identified very low academic achievement levels of Pacific Island students enrolled in university study in New Zealand. Successive governments have responded to the consistently poor academic record of Pacific Island students in tertiary institutions by funding support programmes and curriculum initiatives to improve their retention rates. These largely *ad hoc* government measures have not, however, been subjected to regular review and assessment, nor have they been linked to ongoing rigorous research. Jones and Manu'atu (2002, p. 47), for example, noted the lack of consistency in the formal evaluation of government-funded initiatives at the University of Auckland. Special tutorials, mentoring and other initiatives were mentioned as examples of programmes showing uneven results against somewhat ambiguous targets in the short term (2000, p. 48).

The aim of these government funded programmes and initiatives was to improve participation and retention levels of Pacific Island students in tertiary study. The academic success record of Pacific Island students at both secondary or tertiary level has, nevertheless, continued to remain well below that of Pakeha, Asian and Maori student groups respectively. The emphasis of government funding on retention and participation rather than completion rates and higher academic achievement levels of

Pacific Island students could account, in part, for the lack of significant improvement in academic outcomes, despite a plethora of government funded initiatives and programmes targeting Pacific Island students. This study examined the effectiveness of Pacific Island support staff and programmes at university through the ‘eyes’ of New Zealand-born Samoan students in this study who accessed help from these government-funded initiatives.

A lack of adequate preparation at high school to meet the demands of academic studies at tertiary level has been cited as one of the main factors contributing to the poor academic achievement levels of Pacific Island students, particularly, from low decile schools (Anae et al, 2002, p. 59; Jones & Manu’atu, 2002, p. 15). ‘Insufficient preparation’ was also cited by students in Furneaux’s study (see Anae et al, .2002, pp. 18, 19) as the main cause of poor academic performance in their first year of university study. Anae et al (2002, p. 25) noted that around 50% of all Pacific Island students in tertiary institutions had attended low decile schools.

The cultural practices and traditional values of Samoan parents that impacted on the formal education of Samoan students were first articulated by Pitt and Macpherson (1994, p. 104) who pointed out that many Samoan parents regarded the formal education of their children as the responsibility of the school, through its teachers. At the same time, Pitt and Macpherson (1994, p. 105) also noted that certain practices within Samoan homes contributed directly to their low academic success levels. The lack of direction, inadequate study facilities and parents’ unrealistic academic goals for their children, for example, were highlighted as key factors which contributed to the poor academic record of Samoan students in mainstream schools. This study explored the impact of external factors on the ability of New Zealand-born Samoan participants in this study to complete essay assignments on time.

While a number of reports (Scott, 2004; Timperley, Parr, Portway, Mirams, Clark, Allen & Page, 2004; Anae et al, 2002; Jones & Manu’atu, 2002;) published over recent years have identified a number of key factors contributing to the consistently poor academic success rate of Pacific Island students in tertiary institution, these reports have not given serious attention to the impact of current teaching practices and methodologies used by both mainstream and Pacific Island teaching staff on the academic achievement levels of Pacific Island students in both high school and



universities. This study attempted to examine the impact of teaching and communicative practices of both mainstream and Pacific Island teachers on the academic performance and achievement levels of New Zealand-born Samoan students in tertiary institutions.

Furthermore, since the link between academic success and the ability to write well within the academic genres has been foregrounded as a key link in studies with minority students from academically disadvantaged communities (Baugh, 2002; Colombi, 2002; Gee, 2002; Ramathan & Kaplan, 2000; Scarcella, 2002; Finn, 1999; Lillis, 1997; Jones, 1991), this study focused on the academic essay-writing problems of New Zealand-born Samoans in tertiary institutions.

In order to enhance the validity and reliability of the data collected for this study, a combined qualitative and quantitative approach was used. Quantitative data for this study was collected by way of a written questionnaire, while a case study approach focusing on qualitative data was used during the face-to-face interviews and one-to-one teaching sessions focusing on actual essay assignments from each participant's respective courses. The theoretical framework for this study was guided by Bernstein's (1990, 2000) critical theories which foregrounded the pedagogic discourse of the school as the cultural relay of social power designed to disadvantage working class students from minority communities. This study was also informed by my own critical perspective through first hand experience as a student of the New Zealand education system and growing up in a bilingual, traditional working-class Samoan home, on the one hand, and my professional background as an English language teacher in tertiary institutions. In addition, this study used local and overseas studies with a similar critical emancipatory focus (Gee, 1996, 2002, 2004; Scarcella, 2002; Singh, Dooley, & Freebody, 2001; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Finn, 1999; Lillis, 1997; Jones, 1991) to inform my methodology and theoretical framework.

To my knowledge, no previous research in New Zealand which has focussed specifically on the academic writing problems of New Zealand-born Samoan students in tertiary institutions has been undertaken by a New Zealand-born Samoan researcher. Given the important link between the ability to write well academically and academic success, and the history of poor academic performance of large numbers of Pacific Island students at both secondary and tertiary level, the paucity of research in New

Zealand in this particular area is, indeed, surprising, particularly in light of the fact that New Zealand has the largest Pacific Island population in the Pacific. My decision to undertake this study was given further impetus by the conspicuous absence of research into the academic writing problems of Pacific Island students in tertiary institutions from the perspective of a New Zealand-born Samoan researcher with academic English teaching experience at tertiary level.

## 2 Chapter 2: Dominant Ideology and Education

### 2.1 *The Culture of Formal Learning*

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#### 2.1.1 Introduction.

The interests and power of the dominant group in society are supported by an ideology which exclusively promotes the belief systems and practices of this group as the norm and, therefore, 'commonsense' and 'natural'. This privileged ideology invariably creates a context of social imbalance wherein the interests and rights of minority and subordinate groups are insidiously suppressed or relegated to a position of least importance (Gibson, 1986, p.11 in Coxon, Jenkins, Marshall & Massey, 1994, p. 13). Subsequently, when school success or failure is attributed to an individual student's efforts, academic ability or lack thereof, the reality of the insidiousness of these power relationships within a society, particularly within its educational institutions, is concealed. Hence, when the school is presented as an institution designed to benefit all students, the processes which are weighted against students from 'disadvantaged' groups are once again cleverly concealed (Jones, 1991, p. 146). As long as school failure is explained away by teachers and students as a lack of individual ability and motivation, the myth of the school's offer of opportunity to all remains unchallenged. This unquestioning acceptance, according to Jones (p. 155), ensured that the processes of domination and subordination which worked against students from disadvantaged communities persisted. Thus, working-class students and their parents would see their academic failure as of their own making, thereby perpetuating dominant ideological beliefs and the processes of domination and suppression, in which they, the disadvantaged groups, participated unwittingly.

Interestingly, Jones and Manu'atu (2002, pp. 13, 14) noted how high school teachers reinforced the notion of the university as an 'elitist' institution for privileged, middle-class students, through the practice of actively discouraging Pacific Island students in senior classes from pursuing university study. Naidoo (2004, p. 459) compared higher education to a sorting machine that selected students according to an explicit 'social' classification and then reproduced the same students according to an explicit 'academic' classification. Moreover, Naidoo (p. 460) argued that the education system designated those endowed with cultural capital, who were usually middle-class, as 'academically

talented'. In this way, higher education established a close correspondence between the social classification of students at the start of their academic studies and the social classification at the end of their studies, without explicitly recognising and in most cases denying the link between such factors as social class and academic selection and evaluation. The higher education system continued to maintain the guise of academic neutrality, while, in fact, reproducing the principles of social class and other forms of domination. Jones (1991, p. 50) offered the view that it was social class, not students' ability, race or gender, which was the most significant factor in determining a student's academic success at school and transition to university studies. Jones (1991) argued that since the culture of the school resembled that of the middle class, the teaching methodology of schools assumed that all students possessed the same middle class cultural knowledge and dispositions. Those students whose culture matched that of the school were, naturally, in an advantageous position.

## ***2.2 The Dominant Culture and Education***

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### **2.2.1 Introduction**

Bernstein's (1990) theory of pedagogic discourse and practice asserts that teaching practices are in fact cultural relays of the distribution of power in society. It follows therefore that the distribution of different knowledges and possibilities is based not on neutral differences in knowledge but on a distribution of knowledge which carries unequal value, power and potential. Within this framework, Bernstein contends that social class relations which are essential to the regulation of the distribution of power, are reproduced through the school. The school, therefore, necessarily produces a hierarchy based on success and failure of students. It individualises failure and legitimizes inequalities by attributing failure to students' own innate characteristics or cultural deficits inherited from their family. Pedagogic discourse, or teaching practices within the school, according to Bernstein (p. 188), determine the rules of specialized communication through which pedagogic subjects are selectively created.

## 2.2.2 The Recognition and Realisation Rules.

Put simply, the **'recognition rule'**, according to Bernstein (1990, 2000), enables the formation of appropriate **'realization'** to take place. Although **'recognition rules'** facilitate the learning process within a given context, these rules in themselves are not sufficient for specific learning to take place. Bernstein emphasizes that the student must also produce evidence to show that learning has, in fact, taken place.

Hasan (2000, p. 18) makes the following distinction between the two: **'recognition rules'** are manifested as the subject's ability to make a distinction between contexts and **'realisation rules'** are manifested as the subject's sense of relevant meanings'. The basis of the **'recognition rule'** assumes that there is a strong classification between the context of the family and the context of the school. In support of Bernstein's (1990) theory on the **'recognition and realization rules'**, Hasan (2000) maintains that the value and identity of a given context is not defined by its own internal structure. It is, in her view, determined by the relationship between contexts. In other words, while the **'recognition rules'** apply to our perception and understanding of what defines possible contexts, the **'realisation rules'**, account for the individual responses and specialized practices we apply to a specific context. Hence, it is through the **'realisation rules'** that the student's sense of the context is realized.

## 2.2.3 Classification and Framing.

Also directly pertinent to the discussion is Bernstein's definition (2000, p. 12) of **'classification'** and **'framing'**. **'Classification'** refers to the 'what' of meaning that is transmitted to the learner and **'framing'** is about 'who' controls 'what' is transmitted. Bernstein (2000, p. 14) explains that when **'framing'** is strong, a visible pedagogic practice is normally used, wherein the teacher has explicit control over selection, sequencing, pacing, criteria and the social base of knowledge to be transmitted. Within this context, social class may play an important role. This often means that the images, voices, practices the school reflects make it difficult for children of minority groups to identify with the school. In other words, these students may be disadvantaged within the school system because of the unequal distribution of the **'recognition'** rules. When

**'framing'** is weak, on the other hand, the learner has more apparent control over the communication and its social base and an invisible pedagogy practice is likely.

Rose (2000, p. 225) advocated an approach to language teaching that made the realizations of decontextualised discourses visible to indigenous students. These realizations included both the language features of the written texts they engaged with and also the patterns of teacher-learner interaction around these language features. In order to do this, however, teachers had to be able to analyse both the cultural and linguistic competences students brought to the learning task, and the cultural and linguistic features of the texts and the interactions they would engage with.

Singh, Dooley and Freebody (2001, p. 52) explored 'disadvantage' within the context of differences in teacher-student practices and relations in both Australian and Samoan schools. Their study noted that explicit teacher control was evident when the lesson was structured through step-by-step questions and teacher instructions. When teacher control was less explicit, on the other hand, the student was expected to contribute more of his/her own knowledge to the learning task. This study pointed to the confusion and disruptive behaviour of Samoan students in classes where the teacher's expectations of the work to be completed were not communicated clearly to students, and when teachers made prior assumptions about the knowledge Samoan students brought to the class. These same students performed well when explicit instruction was used to transmit school knowledge to them. Singh and Sinclair's (2001) study with working-class Samoan students in a low decile Queensland high school also highlighted the absence of teacher explanation in teaching school knowledge to Pacific Island students, a practice which contributed directly to confusion and lack of understanding on the part of the student.

Jones (1991) who studied Pacific Island working class girls in a predominantly middle-class high school argued that since the middle-class teachers in her study were not familiar with the learning strategies of Pacific Island students from working class backgrounds, they had to rely on rote learning teaching practices, which, in fact, restricted this cohort of students to copying down copious notes and memorising rote learnt facts. Singh, Dooley, and Freebody's (2001) study with working class Pacific Island students in a low decile Queensland high school, on the other hand, reported that the teacher was the ultimate authority who decided how content knowledge was to be

taught. Confusion and disruption, the study observed, occurred when teachers did not explicitly teach students how to extract key information from the content (p. 65). Singh et al (2001, p. 66) proposed that teaching practices and methodologies aimed at making a difference to the literacy outcomes of academically disadvantaged students should ensure that the principles by which knowledge is selected, organised and paced and the criteria used to evaluate acquisition of knowledge be made explicit or visible to students. Furthermore, classroom knowledge should be relevant or linked to students' background of knowledge (p. 66). Cazden (1988, p. 72 in Singh, Dooley & Freebody, 2001, p. 53) also stressed the importance of teachers being able to demonstrate the relevance of the school curriculum to the background of knowledge and experience which students brought to the classroom.

## **2.3 *Dominant and Powerful Discourses.***

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### **2.3.1 Introduction**

Research (Gee, 1996, 2000, 2004; Baugh, 2002; Colombi, 2002; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Ramathan & Kaplan, 2000; Lillis, 1997; Jones, 1991) has supported the use of explicit teaching methodology to help students from minority groups identified as academically disadvantaged access important formal academic discourses and knowledge. Delpit, (1997 in Singh, 2000, p. 331) found that African-American working-class children, for example, were often excluded from middle-class cultural practices and discourses operating in the school because they did not have the appropriate language skills and knowledge to access these cultural practices and discourses. Gee (1996, 2000, 2004), likewise, argued that if working-class students were to participate fully in the academic life of school and university, then it was more important to teach them formal academic discourses and knowledge rather than focus on general reading and writing skills per se. The Pacific Island students in Jones's (1991) study did not have access to the same skills and knowledge rewarded by the school that the Pakeha middle-class students had access to at home. The lack of exposure to these important skills and knowledge proved to be a significant academic disadvantage to the Pacific Island students in Jones's (1991) study.

### 2.3.2 **Oppositional Identity**

Finn (1999) explained the disadvantage of working-class students somewhat differently. The discourse of working-class communities, according to Finn, which was supported by a system of working-class beliefs, attitudes, values, habits and behaviours, was often seen to be at odds with the formal discourse of the School, whose norms and values were clearly middle-class. The adoption of middle-class school discourses, therefore, for many working-class students was tantamount to adopting the culture of the 'enemy'. Many students from minority communities, according to Baugh (2002), deliberately avoided using formal school discourses that labelled them 'white'. Some researchers (Gee, 2004; Finn, 1999) have argued that this 'oppositional' behaviour has contributed directly to their status as 'academically disadvantaged'. Polynesian/Hawaiians, Maori, African Americans, Native Americans and Hispanic-Americans, who have historically perceived the dominant culture as oppressive and exclusive, Ogbu points out (1978 in Finn, 1999, p .49), adopted an 'oppositional identity' in an attempt to overcome their status of disempowerment. For this group, academic failure was almost an inherited legacy. A study by Wong, Fillmore & Snow (1999, see Scarcella, 2002, p. 216) discerned that non-native speakers of English who attended schools where speaking non-standard English was the norm and who had little or no exposure to formal school discourses, required considerable instructional intervention to acquire formal school discourses. Although non-standard English was highly valued in their own communities, this variety of English disadvantaged them in the formal school environment where mastery of academic English skills was essential if they wanted to succeed academically (Langer, 1991; Rogoff, 1990 in Scarcella, 2002, p. 216).

It has also been argued (Taufe'ulungaki, 2001; Tiatia, 1998; Pitts & Macpherson, 1994) that the use of Samoan as the principal language of communication in the homes of Samoan students did not necessarily lead to poor academic performance in mainstream schools. Tiatia (1998) advocated the use of both Samoan and English by New Zealand-born Samoans. Taufe'ulungaki (2001), in discussing the academic learning problems of Polynesian students in their first year of tertiary study, maintained that competence and literacy in the student's first language facilitated English language competence. Furthermore, she argued that "students without strong social and cultural identities are unlikely to be effective learners" (p. 36). Dooley, Exley and Singh's (1999) study of working-class Samoan students in an Australian high school highlighted the absence of



a direct link between re-contextualised school knowledge designed to meet the cultural needs of students and actual improvement in their English literacy skills. Briefly, the discursive resources within the school were re-distributed on the basis of a strong classification of the categorization of 'Samoaan' student'. This strong classification permitted a significant input from Samoaan students' parents and their communities, on what was to be taught and how the school's resources, including teachers and other professional staff, would be utilized. In other words, representatives from the Samoaan community determined which aspects of everyday Samoaan life and practices should be included in the school curriculum as legitimate school knowledge. This 'knowledge' was to be learned by all students in the school irrespective of their actual individual literacy needs and ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

Singh's (2000) Australian study with working-class, Samoaan students in a low decile Queensland high school approached the problem somewhat differently. Singh argued that if Samoaan students were to acquire the necessary school knowledge for academic success, they must be re-socialised into new ways of interacting, which differed from their traditional Samoaan communication practices. In her view, it was crucial in the learning process that students adopt the pedagogy of the school which encouraged questioning and challenging those in positions of authority. Singh recognised the differences in modes of social control between the Samoaan culture and that of the school.

Scarcella (2002) whose study focused on first year college students from low socio-economic, minority groups in California argued that students whose first language was not English were in fact able to acquire advanced literacy in English even after they had lost their first language. While Scarcella acknowledged that advanced literacy in a first language was helpful, she argued that it was neither sufficient nor required for the development of advanced English literacy. Scarcella pointed instead to the importance of frequent interaction with speakers of standard English, basic reading ability, attention to form, excellent English instruction, including (especially) instruction in reading, in acquiring advanced literacy. Jordan, Au and Joesting (1981 in Singh, Dooley & Freebody, 2001, p. 52) asserted that the learning of academic knowledge and new discourses simultaneously were directly beneficial to the academic learning needs of Pacific Island students.

Academic discourses, according to Gee (1996, 2004), provided students with certain values, perspectives, attitudes, goals and ways of interacting that would benefit them in the formal learning environment. Gee (2002) used the term ‘filtering’ to describe the processes by which families incorporated these values, behaviours, communicative practices and goals valued by the school into their homelife. The strong, cultural link between the middle-class home and the middle-class culture of the school, Bernstein (1990) explained, was developed through the use of explicit discourses which facilitated understanding of the structures and rules of discourses valued by educational institutions. Finn (1999), himself from a working-class background, recognised the importance of using highly explicit language to acquire higher levels of literacy. Thus, students who did not acquire formal literacy skills and discourses naturally, because their communities did not engage habitually in these practices, should, in his view, be explicitly taught these skills. However, Finn was adamant that students should not be made to feel school discourse was superior to the discourse of their homes.

### **2.3.3 Two Sites of Acquisition**

Bernstein (1990, p. 77) argued that where the catchment area of a school draws upon a lower working-class community, it is likely that the school will adopt strategies which will affect both the content and the way school knowledge are taught to this group of students. As a consequence, these students’ consciousness is differentially and invidiously regulated according to their socio-economic background and their families’ communicative practices in the home. The strong pacing rule of the academic curriculum, according to Bernstein, (1990, p. 78) created the necessity of two sites of acquisition: the home and the school. In addition, this pacing rule created a form of pedagogic communication which did not privilege everyday narrative. Thus the pacing rule through which academic knowledge was transmitted privileged those who could acquire the school’s middle-class pedagogic code. Consequently, students from minority and low socio-economic groups were doubly disadvantaged since their homes did not provide a second site of acquisition. Effectively, this was what Bernstein referred to as the ‘social class principle’ of selection.

Christie (1993 in Rose, 2000, p. 224) summed up school discourse, as a discourse about other discourses whose contexts lay outside the classroom. Students from literate

middle-class families, according to Rose (2000, pp. 224, 225), were already prepared to engage in these decontextualised forms of discourse before they arrived at school. Rose maintained that as these middle-class students progressed through school, their discursive experiences of home and school would invariably be mutually reinforced. Moreover, an invisible school pedagogy which benefited students from literate middle-class homes, at the same time, ensured failure for most students from minority and low socio-economic groups, despite the apparently liberal progressive ideologies in which they were framed.

Gee (2002, p.167) differentiated between an ‘authentic beginner’ and a ‘false beginner’. An ‘authentic’ beginner, in his view, was someone who was introduced to formal academic discourses without the background, previous practice, skills, values and motivation that more advantaged learners or ‘false beginners’ had already acquired through ‘filtering and chains of filtering’. These more advantaged learners or ‘false beginners’ might look like beginners, but they had already had an important head start on the acquisition of academic discourses and the identity they entailed. In addition, Gee (p. 170) pointed out, that ‘authentic beginners’ were often marginalised by the discourses they were attempting to acquire as they were compared to more advantaged ‘false beginners’ who had already gained practice in skills and identities relevant to the new academic discourses.

## ***2.4 Explicit Instruction in Teaching Academic Writing Conventions***

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### **2.4.1 Introduction**

The support for explicit teaching instruction has been widespread (Gee, 1996, 2002, 2004; Baugh, 2002; Colombi, 2002; Scarcella, 2002; Singh et al, 2001; Bernstein, 1990, 2000; Ramathan & Kaplan, 2000; Finn, 1999; Lillis, 1997; Coxon et al, 1994; Jones, 1991). It was argued that since students from minority and ESL communities were disadvantaged academically because they did not have the necessary genre writing skills to succeed in schools and academic institutions, by making instructions at least partially

genre-based, all learners ,regardless of socio-economic or cultural background, would have relatively equal access to essential academic literacy skills.

Instruction was identified (Colombi, 2002; Gee, 2002; Scarcella, 2002; Finn, 1999; Jones, 1999; Lillis, 1997; Jones, 1991) as a key factor which separated academically-successful students from those who lacked the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed at university. Scarcella (2002, p. 222) pointed out, however, that students, who were already familiar with text-based language or engaged frequently in extended discourse in the form of academic conversations did not need instruction to the same extent as students who had little or no exposure to the language of formal learning.

The university system clearly rewarded those students who had mastered the academic writing genres. A study by Lillis (1997) of British-born, black, bilingual, female university students in British universities, found that explicit teaching and the exploration of rules governing the writing of academic texts were not common practices in schools and universities in the United Kingdom. The assumption within tertiary institutions, according to Lillis, was that students should have already acquired the necessary literacy skills for advanced academic studies. Another assumption noted by Lillis was that students entering university would be, for the most part, from white middle-class English-speaking backgrounds. Furthermore, explicit instruction in academic writing conventions was not perceived to be the role of either the school or university. Part of the problem of teaching academic writing conventions to students from ‘academically disadvantaged’ backgrounds, it was asserted (Lillis, 1997; Gee, 1996, Heath, 1982 in Gee 1996), was that it could not be achieved in a single teaching session. It was an ongoing, repetitive process

#### **2.4.2 Explicit Teaching Instruction and Minority Students from Working Class Backgrounds**

Findings from recent studies (Singh, Dooley & Exley, 2001; Singh & Sinclair, 2001) in Australia with high school students from working class communities identified teaching and communicative practices as instrumental in reducing the gap between the level of transmission and the level of reception. Provided the principles by which knowledge was selected, organized and paced were made explicit or visible to students, along with

the criteria used to evaluate this knowledge, it was argued that the reduction in this gap would be effectively reduced. Singh and Sinclair's (2001) study found that the literacy needs of 75% of the Samoan students were not being met by the existing arbitrary ordering of school knowledge. Making knowledge explicit and sharing it with students, Martin (2000, p. 131) argued, put all students on an equal footing and helped demystify the hidden curriculum of writing. Furthermore, explicit shared knowledge gave teachers and students a common language for discussing texts

Scarcella (2002) attributed the academic failure of students from minority communities largely to poor English language skills in writing, on the one hand, and to teachers who were ill-prepared and lacking in appropriate knowledge and teaching skills to help these students effectively, on the other. She further argued that teachers, who overlooked students from minority communities because they presented as being fluent speakers and writers of general English in informal situations, denied these same students much-needed explicit instruction in advanced literacy skills to prepare them for tertiary study. As a result, many of these students entered tertiary institutions with inadequate literacy skills. The skills listed by Scarcella (2002) which were available to students who were taught advanced English literacy skills included: "1) summarise and analyse texts, 2) extract meaning and information from texts, 3) evaluate arguments and evidence presented in texts and relate to other ideas and information, 4) recognise and analyse textual conventions used in various genres for special effect, 5) edit writing style accurately, 6) use grammatical devices to combine sentences concisely and effectively and use appropriate devices to combine sentences into coherent and cohesive texts, and 7) construct a well-developed text supported by relevant evidence and details" (p. 211).

### **2.4.3 Reading Skills and Academic Writing**

As noted by Scarcella (2002, p. 215), non-native speakers with strong oral English skills may or may not have had the pre-literacy experiences of native speakers. The absence of these preliteracy experiences should not, however, prevent non-native speakers from learning how to read. Scarcella (p. 217) insisted that students who failed to read in the early grades could not achieve advanced literacy skills without intensive instruction to bridge the proficiency gap between the student's actual level of proficiency and the required level of competence for academic studies. Moreover, if their previous

schooling had been poor, they would also require intensive content instruction to build up their background of knowledge. Without this intensive content instruction, Scarcella argued, these students would continue to have difficulty understanding the reading requirements in their studies. Furthermore, their inability to read undermined their ability to develop basic skills in general English proficiency. As a result, their vocabulary was highly restricted and their grammar proficiency severely limited.

The Indigenous Australian students in a study by Rose (2000) had had little experience with reading English texts. Subsequently, they were not able to identify, decode or appropriate unfamiliar wordings to extend their own range of vocabulary and grammatical structures. These students needed strategies that integrated learning to read with writing. Bernstein (1990, p. 75) maintains that reading allows the student more independence in accessing alternative perspectives to that of the teacher. Thus those students who are unable to meet sequencing rules as they apply to reading become more teacher-dependent and rely on oral forms of discourse.

## ***2.5 Teacher Feedback in Students' Writing.***

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Teacher feedback in students' essays has been the focus of recent research (Colombi, 2002; Scarcella, 2002; English, 1999; Fatham & Whalley, 1990). Much of the debate has centred around whether teacher feedback should focus on form (i.e. grammar and mechanics) or on content (i.e organization of text and amount of detail). In recent years, however, emphasis has shifted to the writing process. Research into the writing of native speakers (Stallard, 1974 in Fatham & Whalley, 1990, p. 179) identified that good writers revised their writing more than poor writers. In particular, good writers revised content rather than form (Perl, 1979; Sommers, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1981 in Fatham & Whalley, 1990, p. 179). These findings suggest that teachers should focus more on content than form and provide content feedback between initial and final drafts of papers.

Freedman (1987 in Fatham & Whalley, 1990, p. 179) further noted that effective teachers provided feedback primarily during the writing process. In commenting on teachers' comments, Sommers (1982 in Fatham & Whalley, 1990, p. 179) maintained

that for the most part they were vague and did not directly address what students had written. Subsequently, little improvement was evident in students' revision. Some revised essays, Sommers pointed out, were actually worse than the original draft. English (1999, p. 31) maintained that the text of the essay provided the focus of discussion rather than the subject itself. Feedback tutorials based on analysis, according to English, enabled students not only to know where they had gone wrong but also to know what to do about it.

Teachers who were unaware of the specific English language requirements of the academic writing context, Scarcella (2002, p. 220) claimed, mistakenly assumed that fluency in everyday situations automatically translated into 'fluency' in academic English. Consequently, high grades were often awarded to students who were 'fluent' speakers of English for assignments in which their writing was actually very poor. Strategies, Scarcella contended, which enabled learners to communicate with low level English proficiency in informal situations were the same strategies that prevented them from recognising the deficiencies in their language. The assumption was that they had, in fact, acquired sufficient English to succeed academically at school. This misperception was further reinforced by the practice amongst some teachers of either not providing relevant, corrective feedback on students' writing, or giving students inflated grades on written assignments in which the academic English language skills were, in fact, of a very poor standard.

English (1999, p. 32), in her study with Japanese students in British universities, included discussion with the student about the tutor's written comments in order to bridge the gap between the tutor's actual expectations, on the one hand, and the student's perception of tutors' expectations on the other. English found this approach to work equally well with students whose levels of English language competence and academic literacy awareness varied quite considerably in some cases. Students' perception of their own written work sometimes differed greatly from the perceptions of those who assessed their work (English, 1999; Gay, Jones & Jones, 1999).

English (1999) focused on the gap between what the student understood to be valuable and what the teacher/marker/university determined as valuable. She argued that what was ignored was the need for students not simply just to 'know' the conventions and forms of the so-called academic style but also to understand how this style and its

conventions could be used to represent and construct students' own meanings. Her focus was, therefore, on content organisation, the writer's 'voice', and discourse organisation or the management of ideas and the development of the argument. Cohesive relations, sequencing, paragraph development and the overall structure of the text were given particular attention by English (1999, p. 17).



## 3 Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 *Theoretical Framework:*

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#### 3.1.1 A Critical Emancipatory Approach

This study was informed by Bernstein's (1990, 2000) critical theories on dominant pedagogic practices that disadvantage minority students from working class communities within the mainstream education system. It was also guided by local and overseas critical approach studies influenced by Bernstein's critical theories (Gee, 1996; 2002; 2004; Scarcella, 2002; Singh Dooley, & Freebody, 2001; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Exley, Dooley, & Singh, 2000; Coxon et al, 1994; Jones, 1991).

Coxon et al (1994, pp. 121, 122) pointed to the maintenance and reproduction of inequality within the education system in New Zealand through firmly established structures and processes of teaching and learning which advantage middle-class students from the dominant culture. Currently, it would seem that despite a greater access to conventional schooling for working-class, Pacific Island students their academic success record and achievement levels have remained the lowest at both secondary and tertiary level. Inadequate preparation of Pacific Island students at high school for university studies has been cited in a number of studies (Anae et al, 2002; Jones & Manu'atu, 2002; Jones, 1991) as one of the key contributing factors to the low academic achievement levels of Pacific Island students at university. These practices have been largely attributed to a commonly held assumption amongst teachers that all students possess the same middle-class cultural knowledge and dispositions (Tiatia, 1998; Coxon et al, 1994; Pitts & Macpherson, 1994; Jones, 1991). Within the context of this argument, those students whose culture matches that of the school are, therefore, naturally advantaged within the current education system. Naidoo (2004, pp. 459-460) asserted that by designating those endowed with cultural capital, who were invariably middle-class, as 'academically talented', the education system established a close correspondence between the social classification of students at the start of their academic studies and the social classification at the end of their studies, without explicitly recognising and in most cases denying the link between such factors as social class and academic selection and evaluation. In this way, the higher education system

continued to maintain the guise of academic neutrality, while, in fact, reproducing the principles of social class and other forms of domination.

Singh and Sinclair (2001) examined the impact of teaching methodology and the school curriculum on working-class Samoan students in a low decile Australian high school. Their study revealed that both teaching methodology and the school curriculum specifically accommodated the learning needs of mainstream English-speaking, middle-class Anglo-Australian students who had acquired high levels of reading and writing proficiency. Furthermore, Singh and Sinclair noted that since all students were assumed to be familiar with school discourses, they were expected to be able to access, with relative ease, school knowledge through the teacher. This normative model clearly 'disadvantaged' Samoan students and students from other minority groups.

My research focused on 14 New Zealand-born Samoan students studying in tertiary institutions. One of the aims of this study was to examine the impact of communicative and teaching practices in relation to the academic essay writing skills of the participants in the study with a view to understanding whether or not there existed direct links between teaching and communicative practices and low academic achievement levels of participants in this study through their academic essay writing problems. This study also examined the impact of external factors on the academic writing problems of participants. Personal commentary based on my own experiences as a student in the New Zealand school and university system, on the one hand, and my teaching background as an English Language lecturer in tertiary institutions, on the other were also added where relevant to the views of the participants in this study.

### **3.1.2 The Case Study Approach.**

The case study approach was chosen as the most appropriate method of collecting qualitative data from individual participants. This approach, which focused on the personal and individual, allowed each participant to have a real sense of control over the data gathering process, so that risk of disadvantage in the study was minimised. The individualised, personal input provided important contextualised details unavailable through quantitative data in the questionnaire alone. Other qualitative studies (Singh, Dooley & Freebody, 2001; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Dooley, Exley, & Singh, 2000;

Singh, 2000; Jones, 1991) which have used the case study approach, have done so to enhance participants' sense of control over the data collected, thereby minimising the prospect of disadvantage through the study.

Individual narratives of Samoan students were used as data in the following case studies (Singh, Dooley & Freebody, 2001; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Dooley, Exley & Singh, 2000). The personal narratives of Samoan students, in Singh & Sinclair's (2001) Australian study articulated the lack of access to appropriate discourses and essential resources at the school. Their narratives also pointed to the use of teaching methods which deprived them of important instruction needed to achieve outcomes comparable to those of mainstream students. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method for the the New Zealand-born Samoan participants in this study to provide individual details from a personal perspective on the data provided in the written questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews were also used as part of the data gathering process in other New Zealand case studies with Pacific Island students (Tiatia, 1998; Jones, 1991).

### **3.1.3 Interviewing New Zealand-born Samoan Students.**

Since the 14 participants were New Zealand-born Samoan, both Samoan and English were given equal status of legitimacy in this study. The participants were free to use either language or a combination of both languages if they so wished. Lisa, Pua and Philip who identified as monolingual speakers of English communicated only in English. James and Sefo, on the other hand, who identified as bilingual speakers of both English and Samoan used Samoan words and phrases during the face-to-face interviews. All five participants demonstrated fluency in general English skills during interviews and teaching sessions.

Observable evidence of traditional Samoan practices such as infrequent eye contact, the lowering of the voice when speaking to the interviewer, and maintaining a respectful distance were demonstrated by Lisa, James, Philip and Sefo. Pua, the only participant in the case studies from a middle-class, non-traditional Samoan background, maintained a respectful distance but did not lower either her eyes or voice during interviews and teaching sessions. My own upbringing in a traditional Samoan family facilitated my

understanding of the cultural implications behind the behaviours of the four New Zealand-born Samoan participants from traditional Samoan homes. I did not, therefore, comment on the lowering of their voices and eyes as they spoke. At all times, I maintained an appropriate distance between myself and the participants. I also spoke English only during interviews and one-to-one teaching sessions since all five participants were fluent speakers of general, everyday English.

### **3.1.4 Participants in the Study**

Over 50% of Pacific Island people in New Zealand are Samoan and of this group 58% are New Zealand-born (Census, 2001). New Zealand-born Samoans have been of particular interest in a number of studies (Singh, Dooley & Freebody, 2001; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Dooley, Exley, & Singh, 2000; Tiatia, 1998; Jones, 1991). Twelve of the 19 participants (63%) in Jones's study (1991) with Pacific Island, high school girls, for example, were New Zealand-born Samoan. In Tiatia's (1998) study with 14 New Zealand-born, Pacific Island students, 71% (10 out of 14) were Samoan. Similarly, in Singh and Sinclair's (2001) Australian study with 16 Samoan high school students, New Zealand-born students comprised 69% (11 out of 16) of the group. In this current study, all fourteen participants identified as New Zealand-born Samoan and had attended mainly low or middle decile high schools.

The participants for this study were approached through my New Zealand-born Samoan contact. She was asked to approach her friends who were New Zealand-born Samoan and university students through her social and former high school networks. Each student was asked to complete the written questionnaire after being informed of the relevant information about the study. Fourteen of the original twenty who were approached completed and returned the questionnaire. Five of the fourteen respondents also agreed to be interviewed face-to-face and attend one-to-one teaching sessions. All five interviewees were given pseudonyms (James, Philip, Lisa, Sefo and Pua) to protect their real identity and ensure their anonymity. The group of five was then reduced to three when one male and one female member of the group withdrew after having attended the first teaching session.

### **3.1.5 The Samoan Researcher.**

Differences between the participants' and researcher's ethnicity, first language and cultural backgrounds can potentially disadvantage both researcher and participant in the study. On the one hand, participants may feel threatened or disempowered by the attitude and/or behaviour of a researcher with no previous contact or very little experience with participants' culture, customs or language, prior to the study. In the same way, the researcher may also be disadvantaged through adopting an unquestioning approach when collecting information from parents, the participants themselves and/or members from the participants' community, who may or may not be fluent speakers of English or the researcher's first language. Non-Samoan researchers who have undertaken studies with Samoan students in New Zealand and Australia (Singh, Dooley & Freebody, 2001; Singh & Sinclair 2001; Dooley, Exley & Singh, 2000; Singh, 2000; Jones, 1991) may not have the same access to the Samoan language, traditions and communicative practices in the home, perceived to affect the learning behaviour and academic progress of Samoan students at school as perhaps, Samoan researchers who share the same first language, home and cultural background as the Samoan participants in their studies.

## **3.2 Data Collection**

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### **3.2.1 Methods Used**

To enhance the validity and reliability of the data collected, the triangulation approach of combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data was used. Quantitative data was collected from 14 participants through the written questionnaire. The responses from the questionnaire were then examined in more detail through qualitative semi-structured, face-to-face interviews conducted with five of the 14 respondents. The face-to-face interviews were recorded on tape. The quality of the taped recordings was clear and easy to understand. Written transcripts of taped interviews were completed to facilitate analysis of this information. *Nom-de-plumes* (aliases) were used instead of the actual names of the five participants during the interviews, on their written transcripts, and for their essay assignments. This was to ensure, once again, that their anonymity

and the confidentiality of personal information that could otherwise be traced back to them were protected. The course tutors' names and particular information about the course also remained anonymous as this information was not pertinent to the study.

Although each respondent was assumed to be a fluent speaker of English, since only New Zealand-born Samoans were included in the study, a standard procedure was followed whereby the aims of the study along with the Consent form, Interview Schedule and the Information sheet were explained clearly to each person who was invited to participate in the study. They were also invited to contact either myself (the researcher) or my supervisor and/or the Post-graduate Studies Office if they had any further queries or concerns about the study. Each student was also informed that the data collected from the one-to-one teaching sessions with me would also be used as part of the research study.

### **3.2.2 Survey Questionnaire**

Survey questionnaires completed by eleven females and three males were returned to me through my assistant. The three different question formats used to gather information from the survey questionnaire were: multiple choice, yes/no questions and open-ended questions. This mix of questions formats to gather information was designed to keep reading content, comprehension problems and writing time for respondents to a minimum in order to facilitate completion of the questionnaire with the targeted information that the questionnaire was designed to retrieve. The main categories covered in the questionnaire (see Appendix 1, pp. 1-9) were: gender, age, home languages, school and university background, academic essay writing skills and strategies used to improve essay writing skills, teaching methodologies used at high school and university and feedback on tutors' comments. The questionnaire was designed to identify key categories of information that could be explored and examined further through face-to-face interviews and one-to-one teaching sessions.

### **3.2.3 Face-to-Face Interviews**

Questions for face-to-face interviews were focused around gaps in the data gathered from the questionnaire. Each interviewee attended two face-to-face interviews, the aim of which was to expand on, clarify, and contextualise targeted written responses from an individual perspective. The five interviewees were asked questions that covered the following themes (see Appendix 2, pp. 10-11).

#### **Interview 1:**

- Main areas of difficulty in assignment writing/Teaching methodologies and practices at high school and university
- Written instructions in exams and assignment writing/Teacher's instructions
- Teacher ethnicity and Samoan students/ Support from teachers and tutors with assignment writing
- Feedback on assignments/Writing multiple drafts
- Languages spoken at home/Samoan fluency and academic studies/Academic studies and parent support and home background
- Reading habits

#### **Interview 2:**

- Steps students follow in the essay writing process
- Effectiveness of resources and teaching support at university
- Accessing reading materials and information within academic reading texts
- Strategies to improve academic reading skills
- Most serious identifiable problem areas in assignment writing
- Aspects of assignment writing that students manage well.

Based on their individual answers, respondents were asked additional questions to complete the information gathering process. Information from face-to-face interviews and the survey questionnaire also informed the teaching sessions.

### **3.2.4 One-to-One Teaching Sessions**

The aim of the one-to-one teaching sessions was twofold: to assist participants in understanding and addressing their 'actual' academic essay-writing problems by adopting an individualised step-by-step structured teaching approach to suit each student's specific essay writing needs, and secondly, as a gesture of appreciation for the contribution of each student to the study. They were also informed that since the teaching sessions were part of the study, these sessions would be recorded as well.

I explained to the five interviewees that I would work with them on their essay assignments for semester two of 2004. They were given the option of attending a session, either once a week for about an hour, or once a fortnight for two hours. These teaching sessions were scaffolded with advice and comments which I emailed or phoned through to individual students in addition to the teaching sessions.

The methodology used in the one-to-one teaching sessions was also guided by information collected from the Questionnaire (see Appendix 1, p. 4; pp. 6-9.) and individual information from face-to-face interviews (see excerpts from recorded Transcripts in Chapter 4 Results and Discussion) with Pua, Sefo, James, Lisa and Philip.

During the teaching sessions, I also discussed with each student, their tutors' written comments in their marked essays. English (1999) whose study with Japanese students in a British university also included discussion with the student about the tutor's written comments in order to bridge the gap between the tutor's actual expectations, on the one hand, and the student's perception of tutor's expectations on the other. Students' perception of their own written work sometimes differed greatly from the perceptions of those who assessed their work (English, 1999; Gay, Jones & Jones, 1999). English (1999, p. 32) maintained that this approach worked equally well with students whose levels of English language competence and academic literacy awareness varied quite considerably in some cases. English argued, that what was ignored was the need for



students not simply just to 'know' the conventions and forms of the so-called academic style but also to understand how this style and its conventions could be used to represent and construct students' own meanings. She found that by talking through teacher analysis during follow up tutorial, students recognised the kind of meanings that the text conveyed. Content organisation, the writer's 'voice', and discourse organisation or the management of ideas and the development of the argument were foregrounded in English's study (p. 17). In particular, she focused on cohesive relations, sequencing, paragraph development and the overall structure of the text.

The academic 'voice' of the New Zealand-born Samoan participants in this study was of interest to me during the one-to-one teaching sessions. The problems the participants demonstrated through their essays with regard to content, discourse organisation, the development of the argument and structural features of their writing reflected their limited understanding of what constituted an 'academic voice' in their writing. The direct link between the academic reading problems of participants and their academic writing problems emerged during the teaching sessions.

The three students who attended the one-to-one teaching sessions included Pua, who was in her first year of university studies and had achieved an A bursary from high school, Sefo, a mature-age student, with no formal academic qualifications, and was enrolled in his second year of studies and James who had achieved 6<sup>th</sup> Form Certificate as his highest qualification from high school and was also in his second year of studies. All three students were enrolled in full-time studies.

### **3.2.5 Location**

A genuinely welcoming and inclusive environment is very important in Polynesian/Samoan culture. Conducting the initial face-to-face interviews in the non-threatening, informal and inclusive setting of my home ensured that the environment was one in which the participants felt socially and culturally accepted and at ease. The study room in my home, was also used as an alternative venue when the interview room at AUT was not available or when interview times and teaching sessions fell outside my teaching hours at AUT. The interview room at AUT was, otherwise, agreed upon jointly by the participants and myself as a suitable venue for the one-to-one teaching

sessions. Both venues chosen were quiet locations where interviews and teaching sessions proceeded without any interruption.

### **3.2.6 Focus Questions in this Research.**

Against the background of discussion in this and the previous chapters, the present study sought to answer the following focus questions:

- How do the home language(s), socio-economic, cultural and home background of New Zealand-born Samoan students impact on their academic achievement and performance in tertiary institutions?
- Are New Zealand-born Samoan students who attend middle and/or high decile schools better prepared for academic studies than those in low decile schools?
- Are the perceived and the actual academic essay-writing problems of New Zealand-born Samoan students one and the same?
- Do New Zealand-born Samoan students have a distinctive ‘voice’ in their writing?
- How do New Zealand-born Samoan students rate the effectiveness of teaching practices and methodologies used at high school and in tertiary institutions?

## 4 Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

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The data forming the subject of this chapter are of three kinds. Firstly, information, using a questionnaire, was collected from 14 NZ-born Samoan tertiary students concerning their general educational backgrounds and language usage at home. The purpose of this information was to extract a general profile of a typical cohort of students from a New Zealand-born Samoan background, with which to draw comparisons against results from relevant research literature and to establish the typicality of two sub-groups chosen from them for more detailed study. The five students selected as a sub-group from the 14 students who completed the questionnaire were representative of the original group of 14 in the following ways. For instance, both the main group and the sub-group of five included both male and female students who had attended either a low or middle-decile high school. Both groups also included students who identified as either bilingual speakers of Samoan and English or monolingual speakers of English; another feature in common was the predominance of students with minimum entry qualifications as the highest academic qualification in both groups.

Secondly, the dimensions of the five students' struggles with academic literacies were explored using individual interviews, under the following themes of headings: the concepts of primary and secondary discourses, traditional cultural practices, perceptions of writing and reading, the academic voice, writing strategies, tutor feedback, impediments to assignment completion, teaching effectiveness, and special support staff effectiveness.

Thirdly, the effectiveness of one-to-one specific or genre-related writing instruction was explored with three of the five students. The one-to-one teaching sessions were offered to the five students who participated in the face-to-face interviews. Initially, all five interviewees attended the first one-to-one teaching session. The group of five was then reduced to three when one male and one female member of the group withdrew after the first teaching session. Information gathered from their questionnaires and interviews with regard to their home and school background and the academic writing problems of

both these students strongly suggested a need for explicit teaching instruction in academic essay writing skills and ongoing support. Throughout the various reports and analyses, I inserted, where relevant, personal and professional commentary or my own experiences, to provide an inter-generational and professional teaching perspective to the discussion.

## ***4.2 A General Educational Profile of a Current Cohort of NZ-born Samoan Tertiary Students***

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### **4.2.1 Summary of Home and Education Background of 14 Respondents**

The results of the survey questionnaire on home and education background (see Appendix 1, pp 1-5) of the 14 participants have been summarized under the following headings: gender, age-groups, home and school background, language(s) spoken in the home, high school results and first year tertiary results (see Table 4.1, p. 36). The questionnaire was completed by eleven female and three males: The respondents ranged in ages from between 18-40 years of age. The largest group, (64.3%) were in the 18-20 age group; 21.5% of respondents were between 21-30 years of age and 14.3%, of respondents between 31-40. Jones and Manu'atu (2002, p. 15) noted that 25% of Pacific Island students at Auckland University with no formal academic qualifications enrolled as late starters or 'Special Admissions' mature students and that Pacific Island students took longer than the standard minimum three-year period to complete their first degree.

The 14 respondents attended high schools ranging from decile 1, the lowest on the SES scale to decile 10, the highest. However, the majority of respondents attended middle-decile high schools with a total of 78.6% having attended either a decile 5 or 6 school in central (64.3%) and/or west Auckland (14.3 %), while only 7.2% of respondents had attended a decile 10 school in central Auckland and 35.7% a decile 1 school in south Auckland. It was also interesting to note that the majority of respondents (85.7%) had attended single-sex schools, with 57% having attended a single-sex Integrated school

(SSI), 21.5%, a single-sex State school (SSG), and 7.2% a single-sex Private school (SSP). The percentages for attendance at high schools reflect the attendance of two of the respondents at more than one high school in column 3 (see Table 4.1, p. 36).

**Table 4.1: Summary of Education Background and Characteristics of 14 NZ-born Samoan Students**

Gender	AgeGroup	School (1)*	Language(2)	HS Results	Course of Study	First Year Tertiary Result(3)s
M	31/40	D5SSG	Samoan/English	Nil	BSc	F2 P4
F	31/40	D5SSG D1Co-EdG	Mainly English	B bursary	PhD	FC
F	26/30	D5SSG/D6SSI	Samoan/English	6 <sup>th</sup> Form Cert	BA	F2 P4
F	21/25	D10SSP	English	B bursary	BA	P6
F	21/25	D1Co-EdG	Mainly English	6 <sup>th</sup> Form Cert	BSc	P7
M	18/20	D1SSI	Samoan/English	6 <sup>th</sup> Form Cert	BA	F3 P3
M	18/20	D1SSI	English	UE	BA	FC
F	18/20	D6SSI	English	A bursary	BA	F1 P5
F	18/20	D6SSI	English	6 <sup>th</sup> Form Cert	Cert.Bus	F2 P5
F	18/20	D1Co-EdG	Samoan/English	NCEA L3	BA	P3
F	18/20	D6SSI	English/Samoan	UE	Cert. P.Arts	No Grades
F	18/20	D6SSI	English/Samoan	UE	B.Ed	P7
F	18/20	D5SSI	Mainly English	6 <sup>th</sup> Form Cert.	CertHosp.	FC
F	18/20	D5Co-EdG	Mainly English	UE	BA/LLB	P6

1 (\*Decile 1-10 =Decile ranking of schools on Ministry of Education SES-scale; SS=single-sex; Co-Ed=co-educational; G=government; I=integrated; P=private.).

2 Where both languages are used, the first-placed language is dominant or more commonly used.

3 F=fail; P=pass; C=course; 1-7=number of papers passed or failed

Table 4.1 (p. 36) also shows that while the high school qualifications of respondents ranged from an A bursary at the top end of the qualifications ladder to no academic qualifications at the other end, the grades and academic qualifications of most of the 14 respondents predominated at the lower end of the academic scale. Specifically, 71.5% of respondents achieved minimum entry qualifications as their highest qualification from high school with 59.4% C passes, compared to 29.7% B passes and only 10.9% of A passes for subjects passed for all high school qualifications (see Appendix 1, pp. 2-3).

The 14 respondents were enrolled as full-time students in three Auckland tertiary institutions. 71.5% of respondents were enrolled in degree-level courses, 21.5% in Certificate-level courses of study and one respondent enrolled in a PhD course. First year tertiary results showed that while 57% of respondents failed between 1 paper and the entire course, 57% of respondents also passed most or all of their first year papers. Jones and Manu'atu (2002) pointed to a direct link between the low overall pass rate of Pacific Island students who entered the University of Auckland with minimum entry qualifications. At a glance, the first year tertiary results of the respondents in this study did not indicate a direct link between minimum entry qualifications and first year academic results. Individual respondents, for example, who had achieved A or B bursary results had also failed between one paper and the entire course in their first year of tertiary study. In contrast, almost all the respondents who had passed their first year papers had entered university with minimum entry qualifications from high school. At the same time, 43% of the respondents with minimum entry qualifications from high school had also failed from between two papers to their entire course of study in their first year of study. Jones and Manu'atu (2002, p. 37) identified poor attendance and not handing in coursework assignments as two of the main reasons why Pacific Island students failed their courses. Furthermore, Pacific Island students in tertiary study consistently recorded the highest rate of 'not pass' grades, including fail grades, 'Did Not Sit/Did Not Complete' and 'withdrawals' than any other ethnic group (p. 38).

Table 4.1 (p. 36), shows that all 14 respondents spoke English at home. At the same time, 64.3% of respondents identified as bilingual speakers of English and Samoan. Of this group, 77.7% also stated that they spoke mainly English at home, 21.5% indicated

that they spoke only Samoan to their parents, while 43% stated that they spoke mainly English with some Samoan to their parents. Only 14.3% of respondents, in fact, actually spoke both English and Samoan equally at home (see Appendix 1, pp. 1-2). The data points to Samoan parents as the main speakers of Samoan in the home, rather than their New Zealand-born Samoan children. In Singh & Sinclair's Australian study (2001, p. 75) all 33 Samoan students, eleven of whom were New Zealand-born, stated that Samoan was spoken at home, while 42% identified Samoan as the only language spoken at home.

#### **4.2.2 Languages Spoken in the Home**

The following transcripts illustrate the variability of specific individuals' language situations. Sefo and James identified themselves as bilingual speakers of Samoan and English. Lisa, Philip and Pua, on the other hand, stated that they were monolingual speakers of English. Lisa and Philip, however, both fully understood everyday Samoan usage and their respective parents and extended members of their families communicated with them in both Samoan and English at home. Lisa and Philip, nevertheless, preferred to speak only English at home. Pua did not speak or understand Samoan. Furthermore, English was the only language of communication in Pua's home.

As a child, Sefo was encouraged by his parents to speak only English at home. As an adult, however, he taught himself to speak Samoan in order to communicate better with his parents.

(Transcript 1 p. 6 26.8.04)

**Sefo:** '...I can speak Samoan pretty fluent now because of practice...but growing up with my parents I didn't really speak Samoan'.

**Int:** No. So ...the language that you spoke mainly at home is English'.

**Sefo:** 'English'

**Int:** 'But your parents spoke...'



**Sefo:** 'Samoan'

**Int:** '...And the language that you speak now is...'

**Sefo:** 'English and Samoan'.

Philip and Lisa were not comfortable speaking Samoan at home, although both their respective parents spoke to them in Samoan. Furthermore, both students understood Samoan.

(Transcript 1 p. 6 22.7.04)

**Int:** '...Do your parents speak the same language as you do at home?'

**Philip:** '...yes they do...yeah English. Sometimes they speak Samoan and I can understand that but I can't really speak it'.

**Int:** 'So they speak Samoan to each other?'

**Philip:** 'Yes'.

**Int:** 'but not to you?'

**Philip:** 'Oh they speak...sometimes to me. It's just that I don't respond in Samoan'.

**Int:** 'In Samoan'.

**Philip:** 'I only respond in English'.

**Int:** 'In English. So you understand it?'

**Philip:** 'Yeah'.

**Int:** '...but you don't speak it'.

**Philip:** 'Yeah'.

(Transcript 1 p. 5 12.7.04)

**Int:** '...Now you speak English at home, don't you?'

**Lisa:** 'Yeah, I do'.

**Int:** '...Do your parents both speak English at home or do they both speak another language at home?'

**Lisa:** ‘... like most of the time they speak English...they do speak...Samoan to the kids, like me and my brothers, but we don’t speak Samoan back’.

**Int:** ‘...The language you speak at home always is English...isn’t it?’

**Lisa:** ‘Yeah...Mostly, yeah’.

It is also of confirmatory interest to note that both Samoan and English were also spoken in my own home. My father who was a fluent speaker of English spoke both English and Samoan at home, while my mother spoke only Samoan. My New Zealand-born siblings and I communicated only in English to each other and to our parents at home. However, the English we used at home was largely general, everyday usage. My siblings and I were not exposed to the discourses valued and rewarded by the school. Under the direction of the Catholic nuns, I learnt to use formal school discourses with confidence and gradually integrated this knowledge and skills into the English I used at home. I was further exposed to formal school discourses through predominantly middle-class friends and fellow students at university and Teachers College.

A number of studies (Taufe'ulungaki, 2001; Tiatia,1998; Pitts & Macpherson,1994) have highlighted the link between the use of Samoan as the principal language of communication in the homes of Samoan students and their academic performance in mainstream schools. The Samoan language was viewed by the participants in this study as an important aspect of their family and cultural lives, but of no direct relevance to their academic studies, as evidenced in the following transcripts. Pua, Lisa, Philip, Sefo and James held firmly to the view that the ability to speak Samoan fluently would not improve their academic achievement levels nor would it necessarily lead directly to academic success. They did, however, acknowledge the disadvantage of not being able to speak Samoan fluently in family and cultural gatherings. Within these social and cultural contexts, respondents felt that their lack of fluency set them apart from extended family and community members who were fluent speakers, despite the fact that four of the five respondents could fully understand commonly used, everyday Samoan. English, on the other hand, was viewed by all five respondents as more important than Samoan because it was the language of power and the principal language

of communication in formal education. It was also the language of everyday communication in mainstream society.

(Transcript 1 p. 7 11.7.04)

**Int:** 'Do you think that has disadvantaged you in a way because as you...said you're Samoan?'

**Pua:** '... '...yes it did disadvantage me not in my academic life but in my cultural life.

(Transcript 1 p. 6 22.7.04)

**Int:** '...personally...do you think you are disadvantaged if you do not know how to speak Samoan?'

**James:** 'Yeah, I think I would because I've grown up ...in a traditional environment, you know, raised by my grandparents so...it's hard for me to imagine what it would be like if I couldn't speak Samoan to them because they don't understand English. So I think that we'd have a breakdown of communication'.

(Transcript 1 p. 6, 7 22.7.04)

**Int:** '...Do you think students are disadvantaged academically because they cannot speak Samoan?'

**Philip:** 'No...I wouldn't say that'.

**Int:** 'Why?'

**Philip:** 'Because of the fact that ...English is the ...sort of the main sort of language at you know any tertiary institution and that's what's used ...to teach the subjects...I just say no'.

**Int:** '...do you think there are any situations where...you think you may be disadvantaged when you're with some who actually are able to communicate freely? Has that ever been your experience?'

**Philip:** 'Yeah, I think all of the time... especially with family...sometimes I just get sort of ...embarrassed ...when... they say it in Samoan...like I know what they're saying and ...I'm not able...to speak the language'.

(Transcript 1 p. 7 12.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...now do you think students are disadvantaged academically because they cannot speak Samoan?’

**Lisa:** ‘...no I don’t think so’.

**Int:** ‘Why?’

**Lisa:** ‘Well...because we live in New Zealand, it’s...the official language is English and Maori but English...I think that you get more opportunities if you...know how to speak English, yeah’.

**Int:** ‘Do you think that you are disadvantaged ...in some ways ...if you cannot speak Samoan or if students can’t speak Samoan?’

**Lisa:** ‘...yeah to do with family and ...stuff like that, yeah I am disadvantaged but...it really hasn’t really affected me that much, but yeah ...I do understand when people speak Samoan but it’s really hard for me to...speak it back to them because I’m not sure if I’m saying it right...In some ways I am...like to do with your culture...’

My own personal views and experience of Samoan and English resonate those expressed in the transcripts above. My own lack of fluency in Samoan as a high school and university student during the 1960s did not impact on my academic studies. The academic disadvantage I experienced was directly linked to a lack of fluency in and understanding of the formal school discourses to which I was exposed daily in the classroom and lecture theatres. The lack of fluency in Samoan ‘marginalised’ those of us who were New Zealand-born Samoan children at extended family and Samoan community gatherings.

In discussing the academic learning problems of first year Polynesian students at university, Taufe'ulungaki (2001) argued that competence and literacy in the student's first language facilitated English language competence and that "students without strong social and cultural identities are unlikely to be effective learners" (p. 36). An Australian study by Dooley, Exley and Singh (2000) with working-class Samoan students, on the other hand, found no direct link between re-contextualised school knowledge designed to meet the cultural needs of the Samoan students and an actual improvement in their

English literacy skills. It was also interesting to note, in this current study, that Pua, who had achieved an A bursary, the highest high school academic qualification of all 14 respondents, spoke and understood only English and was raised in a non-traditional, Samoan home.

### **4.3 Cultural and Communicative Practices in Samoan Homes**

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#### **4.3.1 Samoan Parents and Academic Success**

Pitt and Macpherson (1994) were among the first to point out that many Samoan parents considered the education of their children the responsibility of the school and not that of the parents. Samoan parents reasoned that while it was/is their duty as parents to meet the financial and material costs of educating their children, the responsibility of teaching their children academic knowledge and skills was that of the teacher and the school. Pitt and Macpherson's (1994) view was reiterated by participants in this study in the following transcripts.

Sefo's parents, for example, held firmly to the view that it was the school's responsibility to teach Sefo the academic skills and knowledge he needed to prepare him for a better future in mainstream society. Their contribution towards Sefo's education was seen solely in terms of providing for his financial and material needs while he was at school.

(Transcript 1 p. 5 26.8.04)

**Sefo:** 'I think my Dad...I never saw him take a day off work. His form of support was as long as we had our school uniforms our fees and our books...all that stuff paid for then in terms of support that's the way he supported ... and my Mum as well made sure that we always had lunches and that, but as far as teaching and learning's concerned my parents thought that well that's why you go to school. You know the teacher's going to teach you everything. They didn't think it was their role to teach'.

Commitment to extended family and church demands was, however, often given priority over schoolwork. Sefo accepted without question his parents' authority in the home. Although his parents verbally encouraged him to do well at school priority was always given over to household chores and extended family and weekly church commitments.

(Transcript 1 p. 4 26.8.04)

**Sefo:** 'Everyone knows their place at home and you basically know there's a routine...when you're at home you do your chores. There's less time to play. Just do as Dad and Mum says and that's it...the discipline is quite strong...religion and cultural obligations are quite strong too...You were involved with the church, youth stuff...there's a lot of other activities through the week...I enjoy them but it's just that it does take up time'.

(Transcript 1 p. 4 26.8.04)

**Sefo:** 'When I was at school my Mum and Dad say '*Ia*' you know '*alu ia maguia le aoga*'. You know go and hopefully you do well. But when you come home, it's '*O mai fai feau ia*'. ('Come and do these chores')...and then we got family stuff and church stuff...like they say they support you but your actions don't...when you get home and that it doesn't seem to go because you've just got to put family and those sorts of things first before all your schoolwork. Your schoolwork is never...the priority...that's how they knew how to support...through words or encouragement and that...'

James also grew up in a home where unquestioning obedience to parents and family leaders was a normal part of everyday life. He accepted this practice as an integral part of both the traditional *fa'aSamoa* culture and the church culture in which he was raised and which supported traditional Samoan practices in the home.

(Transcript 1 p. 10 22.7.04)

**James:** 'When I grew up I learnt how to cook, when I was eleven and that was because being raised by my grandparents...they were still traditional...like they had that Samoan mindset where you have to do all the *feaus*

and that's or the chores ...whereas now my Mum still tells me to do everything'.

(Transcript 1 p. 11 22.7.04)

**James:** I think it's a Samoan thing...that brought over from the islands...yeah churches are real important thing as *fa'aSamoa*... I think they've gotten the two mixed up whereas *fa'aSamoa* have some aspects that are unfair, for example, submission. *Fa'aSamoa* you gotta submit to your leaders or whatever and there's no area for sort of...you have to be a leader...if you wanna do things...that's what I've seen in my family. You have to do everything that the Dad says.

The following transcripts illustrate how the cultural practice in traditional Samoan homes of unquestioning obedience to parents and extended family elders and strict discipline impacted on the academic performance of James, Sefo and Philip in the formal academic environment and on their confidence to access important information from lecturers/tutors that mainstream students from middle-class homes were able to access with relative ease.

Sefo, for example, was uncomfortable with the practice of criticizing people in positions of authority and leadership. This was reflected in his unwillingness initially to comment on the quality of support he was receiving from the Pacific Island mentoring programme and staff. By his own admission, his traditional Samoan upbringing viewed any form of criticism of people in positions of authority as a negative and undesirable practice and therefore to be avoided under any circumstance.

(Transcript 1 p. 3 26.8.04)

**Int:** '...Why do you think we don't like asking questions or we don't like perhaps responding to questions that require us to give perhaps quite a long-winded answer?'

**Sefo:** '...I know for me I've never been encouraged to ask questions. If I ask a question then...my Dad or Mum would say in Samoan '*E ke fia poko?*' (English translation: 'Are you trying to be clever/smart?')...You know that sort of thing and..so I suppose it's probably better not to ask questions'.

**Int:** 'But in this environment, you've got to ask questions...'

**Sefo:** 'Yeah, it's difficult'.

(Transcript 4 p. 3 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** '...it's hard for me to...to make a judgement on them.

**Int:** 'Not so much a judgement but...from your personal experience with them...do you think that they're equipped with the skills to help you personally? You're not speaking about everybody else'.

**Sefo:** ' I ...personally? No I don't. I've been to them about three times ...and all three times I've come away feeling like I haven't been helped although they've seemed like they've helped... I've come away not really knowing if I was any better than when I first walked in...I don't mean to bag them like that but yeah'.

This inability to criticize people in authority and/or their writing, for example also affected his approach to tackling the 'critical appraisal' essay which Sefo found quite challenging for him on both a cultural and an academic level.

(Transcript 4 p. 1 18.11.04)

**Int:** '...Have you done this sort of analysis before?'

**Sefo:** 'Never...other than in the work area where I had to do...appraisals for staff, but that's different...whereas this...talk about someone's work...I've never done that before...not even if we take it back to the culture... back to cultural background. You don't take someone's kinda work and start criticizing it and tearing it...you know breaking it down and that. So yeah it was an experience'.

**Int:** 'Is it difficult culturally to do that?'

**Sefo:** 'Yeah it is... this you have got to create your own ideas and do that sort of thing'.

James attributed his unwillingness to ask questions or contribute to class discussions to his own lack of confidence.



(Transcript 1 p. 4 22.7.04)

**James:** ‘...sometimes I’m too shy to ask in front of people ...’

**Int:** ‘Do you ...think it’s because ...the lecturer appears intimidating or...is it because...?’

**James:** ‘Oh just shyness’.

Philip admitted that he was uncomfortable talking to Pakeha tutors and preferred to attend tutorials for Pacific Island students with Pacific Island tutors.

(Transcript 1 p. 5 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...in your experience or in your opinion do Pacific Island students feel more comfortable with one group more than another group...from what you’ve seen?’

**Philip:** ‘Yes ‘cause I...when it’s mentioned at the beginning that there are Pacific Island tutorials ...I go to that one because I’d feel a bit more comfortable...and that and talking to a Pacific Island tutor rather than ...a *Palagi*...I’d sort of be a bit quiet’.

My own experience of strict parental discipline and unquestioning obedience to parents and family elders in the home mirrored those of some of the participants in this study, as illustrated through the transcripts. As a rule, negotiation and discussion were not practices that were encouraged or developed in traditional Samoan homes. Singh (2000) argued that the communicative practices in Samoan homes did not prepare Samoan students adequately for the rigorous demands of the formal learning environment. She further argued that if Samoan students were to gain access to school knowledge it was important for them to be re-socialised into new communicative practices which differed from traditional Samoan communication practices. She also maintained that it was crucial in the learning process that students adopt communicative practices which encouraged questioning and challenging those in positions of authority. The Pacific Island students in Jones’s (1991) study were also observed to be unwilling to question the teacher who they viewed as the authority figure and the principal source of knowledge for them. This practice, in Jones’s view (p. 95), actually retarded their access to real knowledge and consequently academic success.

The strict, authoritarian practices of Samoan parents, on the one hand, were often accompanied by verbal encouragement to do well at school, on the other. This verbal encouragement was not, as a rule, supported by resources and practices in the home which contributed directly to academic success at school or university, where the strong 'pacing' rule of the academic curriculum, according to Bernstein, (1990, p. 78) created the necessity of two sites of acquisition: the home and the school. Clearly, students from minority and low socio-economic groups were doubly disadvantaged since their homes did not provide a second site of acquisition despite ample verbal encouragement from the parents who genuinely wanted their children to succeed academically at school and at university.

Philip pointed to members of his extended family who had graduated from university and were now teachers as his role models. He stated that he looked up to these family members and was strongly influenced by their verbal encouragement. Verbal encouragement was cited by Philip as one of the key motivating forces behind his decision to pursue academic studies at university.

(Transcript 1 p. 5 22.7.04)

**Philip:** 'Yeah, I would say...I'd be encouraged academically 'cause a few of my family...they're teachers so...they know...what I'm going through and so...they give me encouragement to do well...academically'.

Academic support and encouragement, according to Philip, were important factors which contributed to the success of Samoan students at university. He did not however elaborate on what he meant by academic support and encouragement.

(Transcript 1 p. 6 22.7.04)

**Int:** '...Do you think it's important...to have that academic... support and encouragement or do you think they can actually do it without it?'

**Philip:** '...I think it's very important because I don't think you can do it on your own...Personally, yeah you've got to have that sort of...someone sort of...walking next to you...you can't do without that encouragement because like say...if you're doing an assignment and it's like ...it's a C grade...sort of effort...that encouragement could have

got you to a B or an A. So I think that encouragement's ...very important ...academically'.

The verbal encouragement Pua received from her parent at home was supported by a disciplined and structured homework and study routine developed in her from a young age. This structured approach to Pua's academic studies was strongly influenced by her parent's academic background. Pua acknowledged that the well-developed study strategies and routines of her home environment assisted her greatly in managing the academic demands of her studies at school and university.

(Transcript 1 p. 7 11.7.04)

**Int:** '...how would you describe your background?'

**Pua:** 'Academic like my Mum went to university and actually works in a university environment'.

(Transcript 1 p. 8 11.7.04)

**Int:** 'Would you describe your background as one where you're encouraged and supported academically?'

**Pua:** 'Yes, I would'...from the time I went to Primary School right up until the end of 7<sup>th</sup> form, I was taught how to set aside...a certain part of the evening to do my homework...I was also taught the importance of doing my homework, not just because...you had to do it but also it would help you in the long run... because the way I'd been taught to do my homework and...keep to that routine, I was able to manage it in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and now'.

Pua held the view that a parent's educational background and academic ability level were less relevant in supporting their children's academic needs than the parent's actual presence in the home to supervise and encourage their children's homework and study routines. She did, however, view discipline as a positive practice in the home.

(Transcript 1 p. 9 11.7.04)

**Pua:** '...I think discipline from a young age works in...a positive way. I mean not being too harsh but ...just having your parent there to help you and your parent doesn't have to be very academic just as long as your parent is there to kind of...oversee your homework....also

I think a lot of encouragement from home ...I think just having parents ...who are very supportive but at the same time can set down strict guidelines that will make you ...stick to your study and homework’.

The advantages of Pua’s home life, as she explained them, were reiterated by Rose (1999) who argued that students from literate middle-class families were already prepared to engage in decontextualised forms of discourse before they arrived at school. Furthermore, as these middle-class students progressed through school, their discursive experiences of home and school would invariably be mutually reinforced

The lack of direction, inadequate study facilities and parents’ unrealistic academic goals for their children were identified by Pitt and Macpherson (1994, p. 105) as significant factors which contributed to the poor academic record of Samoan students in mainstream schools. The following transcripts identified a number of physical barriers within the homes of the New Zealand-born participants similar to those previously noted by Pitt and Macpherson (1994) that impacted on their ability to complete assignments and prepare for exams sufficiently.

James’s homework and study routines, for example, were frequently disrupted by the constant noise at home, cramped living conditions, and extended family or church demands during the school week. James cited family commitments and a noisy, overcrowded household as factors that prevented him from applying himself fully to his studies and handing in his essays on time.

(Transcript 5 p. 8 15.10.04)

**James:** ‘Oh yeah...family...being the eldest at home...I’m expected...to do all those stuff...so...sometimes...on a Saturday, I wanna come into to do...some work...but I have to stay home ...and clean up or help out...with the housework...So and then I got no choice’.

**James:** ‘I’ve got quite a loud house... ‘cause we have so many children at home... and it’s really loud...and so I can’t concentrate at home anymore’.

Lisa too cited physical conditions at home as the cause of disruptions to her schoolwork routines, but accepted without question these 'disruptions' in the home.

(Transcript 1 p. 6 12.7.04)

**Int:** '...Would you describe your background as one that is good for academic study...?'

**Lisa:** '...No. Sometimes it is, but sometimes not because we're busy...you know...family. Well not now, mostly when I was younger, there was a lot of family stuff...like we had to go and do stuff with them or go over to our cousin's house and I know when it was time for studying for me, the house wasn't quiet and I didn't have room to...didn't have quiet around the house...I was always distracted...maybe because it's like always loud and noisy...'

The Samoan custom of opening up one's home to extended family as described in some of the transcripts above was also practiced in my home as a child. Our home was more often than not overcrowded with extended family living with us. Under these noisy, cramped conditions, completing homework assignments and/or studying for exams proved to be very difficult.

Pua, on the other hand, who grew up in a non-traditional, Samoan home pointed to key differences between her homelife and that of her Samoan friends from traditional homes. Frequent contact with extended family, sports and church-related commitments were not prioritised over her schoolwork. Furthermore, Pua had never experienced living with extended family in her home, except for short visits. Hence, the disruption to her schoolwork and studies was kept to a minimum as evident in the following transcripts.

(Transcript 1 p. 9 11.7.04)

**Int:** '...would you describe your ...home as a typical Samoan home, if there's such a thing?'

**Pua:** 'No, I wouldn't because ...the type of backgrounds my Samoan friends come from... they've got a lot of other commitments, you know, church, sports... family gatherings... youth groups...more importance is placed on

those other commitments. But in my household ... I think it's mainly just...the only commitment my mother and I have is ...like outside commitments out of the family ...is schoolwork or work. So... I don't think I come from ...a typical Samoan family

**Pua:** '...most Samoan families...like they have a lot of people in the home, whereas ...in my home there's only just my mother and me...and so...I don't have a lot of interruptions in my household'.

The evidence from the transcripts suggests that the communicative and traditional practices of Samoan parents of some of the participants in this study did, in fact, disadvantage them in the formal learning environment. Having said that, it is also important to point out that there is no evidence, in this study, to suggest that these practices were the only or the main cause of academic disadvantage for the participants in this study.

#### ***4.4 Primary and Secondary Discourses.***

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##### **4.4.1 Introduction**

The general complexity of the language situation of loosely termed 'bilingual' students, discussed above, has been usefully illuminated in research studies by Heath (1982 in Gee, 1996) and Finn (1999) who have shown that students continue to use home discourses within the formal learning environment. According to Finn (1999) one's ability to acquire secondary discourses depends largely on the degree to which the secondary discourse was similar to one's primary discourse. Hence, students who did not acquire formal literacy skills and discourses naturally, because their communities did not engage habitually in these practices, should be explicitly taught these skills. Finn, however, was also adamant that students should not be made to feel school discourse was superior to the discourse of their homes.

In addition, Gee (2002, p. 161) used the term 'filtering' to describe the processes by which families incorporated aspects of valued secondary discourse practices into their home discourses. The goal of 'filtering', according to Gee, was not to teach children

certain skills, but rather to equip them with certain values, attitudes, motivation, ways of interacting and perspectives which were more important than mere skills for successful later entry into specific secondary discourses. These more advantaged learners or ‘false beginners’ might look like beginners, but they had already acquired the secondary discourse practices and the identity it entailed at home. Gee (2002, p. 170) also pointed out that ‘authentic beginners’ were often marginalised by the discourses they were attempting to acquire as they were compared to more advantaged ‘false beginners’ who had already gained relevant practice in skills and identities relevant to the new discourse.

#### **4.4.2 Formal Secondary Discourses**

The participants in this study, from traditional Samoan homes demonstrated certain behaviours characteristic of what Gee (2002, p. 167) defined as an ‘authentic beginner’ or someone introduced to a secondary discourse without the background, previous practice, skills, values and motivation that more advantaged learners or ‘false beginners’ from middle-class homes had already acquired through ‘filtering and chains of filtering’ to which they had been exposed from an early age through their upbringing and home background.

These linguistic interrelationships can be seen as working more vividly in the following individual case paraphrases and transcript excerpts. The comprehension and speaking problems experienced by the New Zealand-born Samoan students from traditional ‘bilingual’ homes when interacting with and listening to middle-class speakers in their mainstream classes are highlighted in the following transcripts.

Sefo, for example, reported that he felt completely inadequate in his classes where mainstream lecturers, tutors and Pakeha students used formal academic discourse which he stated was virtually a foreign language to him. He also reported feeling disadvantaged by the lack of awareness amongst mainstream academic teaching staff of the cultural, language and socio-economic differences of students like himself in the class. The assumption and expectation of some mainstream lecturers and tutors at university, according to Sefo, was that all students regardless of first language, ethnic and/or socio-economic background could and were expected to understand the formal academic English discourses used in class.

(Transcript 4 p. 10 18.11.04)

**Int:** ‘...you’re saying that it’s because I’m a Pacific Island...I’m Samoan that it’s easier for you to relate to me. But you must surely have come across some good... Pakeha lecturers that you can relate to in the same way...like this lecturer of yours sounds as if she’s a person...or do you relate to her?’

**Sefo:** ‘I think they’re great ...when it comes down to the language use... I think that’s where the barrier is... because like... I notice that you can speak different with your peers and that and you can speak to me differently... and I don’t think ...she can ...you know speak to...she speaks to everyone the same and so it’s sort of hard for me to take on board what she’s talking about... because I can sit in class and...there’s not much I can understand sometimes. It... takes me a while... to understand what they’re talking about because they’re using like...you know you talk about *colloquialism* ...before I came to varsity, I didn’t even know what that word was...and I find every book that I read I have to have a dictionary next to me’

Sefo reported that his lack of familiarity with the academic discourses of the university environment was one of the reasons he was not able to access important knowledge directly relevant to understanding and completing his essay assignments. Moreover, he noted that his mainstream lecturers and tutors made no attempt to adapt their communicative style to accommodate the English comprehension problems of the students in the class who were neither Pakeha nor middle-class. Sefo expressed feeling alienated in his tutorials. Since he was unfamiliar with these academic discourses, Sefo stated that he simply switched off in class.

(Transcript 4 p. 11 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** ‘I think it also stems too from the people that are in your tutorial...quite a few of them actually speak language that I couldn’t normally speak...but as time ...got further on in the course I’d notice ‘No, that that’s the way they actually speak’.

... ‘And out in the corridor when they’re speaking to each other...you know it’s...’

‘...still the same so I figured ‘No, these guys actually talk like this’.



**Int:** ‘And...you think that was a bit of an obstacle...?’

**Sefo:** ‘Because...when they contribute to the class...It sounds like it’s from Mars... I just found out what ‘*imperialism*’ is you know...and they use *imperialism* and words like that...to that effect I just...I switch off’.

James reported problems similar to those of Sefo. However, in James’s view, it was the Samoan lecturer whom he was not able to understand because she used formal, abstract language to communicate key information in class to Samoan students like himself.

(Transcript 5 p. 2, 3 15.10.04)

**Int:** ‘So what was it that you didn’t understand about her before you wrote the essay?’

**James:** ‘Her language’.

**Int:** ‘Was she the one that you said...used quite a lot of big words? ...And it was really hard for the class to understand?’

**James:** ‘...she’s very intellectual...you know she can converse...supposedly ...able to converse...like with ...informally...with you know like Samoans and that...and when she’s with intellectual people like...you know professors and that...of the university, she’s able to turn it to her intellectual self. And maybe...she left it on for the lectures. But...nobody really understands her’.

**Int:** ‘...So ...how are you going to approach her about this?’

**James:** ‘I’ve already told her’.

**James:** ‘...she doesn’t say much about it. She’s like ‘Oh yeah. You just need to grasp the language...and then you’ll understand it’...and because ...the readings that we’re given...they’re probably more harder to understand than...just listening to her’.

James stated that he preferred his Pakeha subject tutor who used English they could understand easily. He emphasized the importance of competent and effective English communication skills for teachers of students like himself.

(Transcript 1 p. 5 22.7.04)

**Int:** 'What do you think it is that's important for them to be able to get the knowledge across to you? You...obviously don't think ...that it's a race that's important? What is it then that you think works for you?'

**James:** '...speaking English in a sense that...like when I said that... my ...lecturer now is boring is because she uses big words and whereas my... tutor ...the *Palagi* guy. He was simple and so I understood him better than... I do my ...lecturer... So it's just keeping things simple'.

Lisa reported that it was her own lack of confidence which prevented her from asking the questions that she needed to ask of lecturers and tutors on the courses in which she was enrolled.

(Transcript 1 p. 3, 4 12.7.04)

**Int:** 'Do they give you any opportunity to discuss...some of the problems that you might have with understanding or...with gathering information..? Do they give you that opportunity or...is it a time constraint factor...that you haven't got time to go back to them?'

**Lisa:** 'No...maybe you just have to go and ask. But I usually don't go and ask for help'.

**Int:** 'Why?'

**Lisa:** '...I don't know why. Usually, I don't know why...'

She did however point out that mainstream lecturers and tutors in her course used a different way of communicating information to Samoan or Pacific Island students.

(Transcript 1 p. 5 12.7.04)

**Int:** '... Do you think some teachers are able to communicate...better...or much easier, more comfortably with Samoan students than other teachers? ...When it comes to helping them with assignments?'

**Lisa:** 'Oh, I think it depends on the teacher but...maybe they do communicate differently if you are Samoan or Islander. Yeah'.

**Int:** ‘And when you say differently, what do you mean?’

**Lisa:** ‘...maybe ...’cause I know when I need explanation or sometimes I really don’t get it at first but then they kinda have to explain more like giving examples and stuff, usually from the teachers and tutors... Maybe they have to explain more, depends on the person...I do get away from like understanding them after they’ve explained it...but...I think they do communicate differently’.

In contrast, Pua reported having positive experiences with her mainstream tutors in tutorials. She stated that her tutor’s instructions in class were very helpful. Moreover, in Pua’s view, the small tutorial classes facilitated more constructive interaction between the tutor and students and enabled students to have their questions answered to their satisfaction.

(Transcript 1 p. 3 11/7/04)

**Pua:** ‘...the tutors are very helpful...part of the class time is actually ...if we have an assignment coming up or we have to write an essay...class time will be given to actually explain what we need to do and ask questions, if we have any problems and because the classes are so small...you feel comfortable enough to ask and the tutors are very helpful...Before an exam you are given time to...ask and the tutors are very helpful’.

**Int:** ‘So you quite like the idea of having a small class?’

**Pua:** ‘Yeah’.

**Int:** ‘And you feel quite comfortable about asking questions’

**Pua:** ‘Yes’.

It is interesting to note that of the three participants, Lisa, Philip and Pua, who identified as monolingual speakers of English, Pua alone, in fact, did not experience any comprehension or communication problems with the communicative practices of mainstream teaching staff or mainstream students in her tutorial classes. This would suggest that Pua was already familiar with and was frequently exposed to the formal discourses used at university. Furthermore, it is also significant that Pua was raised in a

non-traditional middle-class Samoan home where only English was spoken. Philip and Lisa, on the other hand, were both from working class communities and had been raised in homes which were bilingual and traditionally Samoan. Although, they spoke only English at home, their parents communicated with them in both Samoan and English.

#### **4.5 Skills and Qualities of Effective Teachers**

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This study sought to understand the qualities and skills that New Zealand-born Samoan students identified as effective in teachers at university. Table 4.2 (p. 59) is a summary of the views of the 14 respondents (see Appendix 1, pp. 7-8). All 14 respondents chose either **very important** or **necessary** for the following skills and qualities: **communicate information clearly, approachability of Pacific Island staff and lecturers, must have competent teaching skills, and must have necessary academic knowledge.** With the exception of one respondent, the remaining 13 chose either **very important** or **necessary** for **must have excellent command of English** and **must be friendly**. All except two of the respondents listed **must be able to motivate students** as either **very important** or **necessary**.

In contrast, all except two of the respondents stated that **Samoan ethnicity** was **irrelevant** in an effective Pacific Island teacher and 71.5% of respondents also expressed the same view about **fluency in Samoan**. The responses of almost all the participants in this study strongly suggest that the Samoan ethnicity of the teachers and their fluency in the Samoan language have no direct relevance to their academic learning needs.

**Table 4.2: Skills/Qualities of Effective Teachers**

Skills/Qualities	Very important	Necessary	Irrelevant
	%	%	%
Communicate clearly	85.7	14.3	0
Approachable	78.5	21.5	0
Ability to motivate	64.2	21.5	14.3
Relevant academic knowledge	57	43	0
Teaching competence	57	43	0
Friendly	42.8	50	7.2
Excellent command of English	35.8	57	7.2
Fluent speaker of Samoan	0	28.5	71.5
Samoan ethnicity	0	14.3	85.7

The responses of the five participants who were interviewed face-to-face (Lisa, James, Sefo, Philip and Pua) were, by and large, representative of the views of the 14 respondents above. For example, all five participants stated that it was either **very important** or **necessary** for Pacific Island support staff to have **the necessary academic knowledge, an excellent command of English, the ability to communicate clearly, an approachable and friendly disposition and competent teaching skills** when working with New Zealand-born Samoan students. James, Sefo, Philip and Pua also stated that the **ability to motivate students** were also either **very important** or **necessary**. Lisa, Pua and James stated that the **Samoan ethnicity of Pacific Island support staff and lecturers** was **irrelevant to their academic writing needs**. While

Pua and Sefo felt that the **ability to speak Samoan fluently** was **necessary**, for Lisa, Philip and James this skill was **irrelevant to their academic writing needs**.

Pua highlighted the approachability factor of her Pakeha lecturers and tutors who she described as competent and effective.

(Transcript 5 p. 7, 8 1.9.04)

**Pua:** ‘...the lecturers I’ve had ...they’re really approachable, like I’m sure they would help’.

**Int:** ‘Are you talking about the Pakeha?’

**Pua:** ‘Pakeha yeah...I mean they’re actually lecturers. They’re actually put into the job not because...they’re like for Samoan the only...our tutors were only put there because they were Samoan. They couldn’t even speak the language properly some of the times...but I’m sure if the kids were actually told that these other lecturers were willing to help they’d go to them...’

Some non-Pacific Island teaching staff were also reported by Pua as distant and impersonal towards Pacific Island students and therefore, in her view, Samoan students did not approach them for help. One of the reasons offered by Pua to explain why some Pacific Island students sought help exclusively from Pacific Island support and teaching/staff was that Pacific Island students did not feel comfortable speaking to non-Pacific Island teaching staff about things they did not understand in lectures and tutorials. They therefore opted to speak to Pacific Island teaching and/or support staff who shared the same ethnicity and culture as they did.

(Transcript 5 p.6 1.9.04)

**Int:** ‘So why do you think Pacific Island students or Samoan students go to Pacific Island mentors?’

**Pua:** ‘...first of all they’re probably not understanding what’s being taught in the lectures and tutorials...they don’t feel comfortable with actually approaching the lecturer afterwards. They also come across as quite unapproachable and distant so I can see how kids who haven’t been in that type of environment, like kids from South Auckland who have had teachers that they’ve

known for years and who they can go up to...how they can find someone who's quite cold in class, you know. How are you supposed to approach someone like that? ...and just actually being desperate in the end...like there's no one else...some of them, I'm not saying all of the kids who probably don't have parents that are able to help them with their work. So I think mentors in the end are their last option and that's why they go to them. And 'cause they're not given any other option'.

Sefo also stated that, in his view, teaching staff who understood the Pacific Island and/or Maori culture were able to communicate better with students like himself.

(Transcript 1 p. 3 26.8.04)

**Int:** '...Are some teachers or tutors or lecturers able to help Samoan students better than others when it comes to writing assignments?'

**Sefo:** 'Oh, definitely. I think..if you've sort of got a background or an understanding...of Pacific Island or Maori culture...you tend to be ..more able to get your message across...communicate better...but I think like some lecturers...they don't notice that there are differences...and probably a prime example is the class that I got to with just Maori and PI. When asked to ask questions...everyone just sits there, but when you're in a mixed class with other ethnic groups and that, you'll find the *Palagis*...they tend to...you know they're out there...they keep asking questions and that and I think it just makes me feel a bit below...'

Philip maintained that Pacific and non-Pacific teaching and support staff were capable of helping Pacific Island students. However, in his view, it depended largely on the academic writing skills of individual Pacific Island students and how comfortable Pacific Island students felt about talking to Pacific Island and/or non-Pacific Island teaching and support staff.

**Int:** ‘...are some teachers or tutors able to help Samoan students better than others when it comes to writing assignments?’

**Philip:** ‘...I’d say yes and no...because like there’s some...there could be...various Samoan students...that have like sort of...the ability.to be able to do essays...fairly good and then there might be some that aren’t able to and ...so it depends maybe on the student...And then the teacher can ...sort of ...add to that... sort of ability that the student has to writing essays’.

**Int:** ‘...So it doesn’t matter whether it’s a Pacific Island or a ...Pakeha?’

**Philip:** ‘I wouldn’t think so but I think it’s just...for the students to be comfortable to be able to talk to a Pacific Island tutor...So I think it’s just...the student because I think that whether the tutor is Pacific Island or *Palagi* or...any other...ethnicity...that they can help’.

Fluency in the Samoan language and the Samoan ethnicity of teaching and support staff both received the lowest rating for skills and qualities of effective teachers, from respondents in this study. It was revealed that, in fact, the importance of a teacher’s Samoan ethnicity was more significant for New Zealand-born Samoan students who were not familiar with the expectations of the formal university culture and environment. Respondents who indicated the importance of Pacific Island teaching staff were mainly those with minimum entry qualifications from bilingual, traditional Samoan backgrounds.

Well-developed communicative skills, English language and teaching competence, approachability, the ability to motivate students and a friendly disposition, on the other hand, were skills and qualities highly valued by the overwhelming majority of respondents.



#### 4.5.1 Evaluation of Pacific Island Staff and Support Programmes in Tertiary Institutions

The 14 respondents were also asked to evaluate the Pacific Island Support Staff and Programmes (see Appendix 1, pp. 7-8) they accessed for help with their academic essay writing needs.

**Table 4.3** (p. 63) is a summary of this evaluation. 64.3% of respondents described the Pacific Island mentors, the tutors in special tutorials for Pacific Island students and Pacific Island lecturers as either **lacking in necessary communication skills, a waste of time** or **not applicable to their academic needs**. Only 35.5% found the three targeted groups to be **very competent and helpful**. Half the respondents, however, maintained that Pacific Island tutors **were very competent and helpful** while the remaining 50% stated that they either **lacked the necessary communication skills, were a waste of time** or **were not applicable to their academic needs**.

**Table 4.3: Evaluation of Pacific Island Staff and Support Programmes**

Pacific Island Support Programmes/Staff	Very competent & helpful	Inadequate communication skills	Waste of time	N/A
	%	%	%	%
Pacific Island Tutors	50	21.5	14.3	14.3
Pacific Island Mentors	35.7	35.7	21.5	7.2
Tutors in Special Tutorials	35.7	28.5	14.3	21.5
Pacific Island lecturers	35.7	21.5	14.3	28.5

The responses of the five participants who were interviewed were similar to those of the 14 respondents. Sefo and James, for example, described Pacific Island mentors in the

mentoring programme as either **lacking the necessary communication skills** or **were a waste of time**. Sefo also identified tutors in special tutorials for Pacific Island students and Pacific Island lecturers as **not relevant to his study needs**. Lisa and Pua both stated that Pacific Island support staff and lecturers as either **lacking the necessary communication skills** or **were a waste of time**. Philip and James did, however, agree with a small group of the 14 respondents that Pacific Island lecturers and tutors in special tutorials for Pacific Island students were **very competent and helpful**.

Pua questioned the ability of Pacific Island support staff to manage the range of academic writing problems brought to them by Pacific Island students, given the lack of teaching experience, appropriate communication and interpersonal skills and limited academic literacy skills demonstrated by support staff charged with the responsibility of supporting the numerous academic needs of these students.

(Transcript 5 p. 5 1.9.04)

**Pua:** ‘...we’ve got mentors and that...but I really can’t see them helping me....And I know that...it’s good to have someone else to look over your work and give you an opinion but I think at this level you’d want someone who’s a lot more qualified than you and who has had a lot more experience and it’s no reflection on them but someone who’s actually only two years older than me or who have just finished their degree...I really can’t see them helping me ...especially if they were average students’.

Pua stated that Pacific Island staff in the Tuakana Mentoring programme, while familiar with the types of problems Samoan students brought to the university, often did not have the confidence, skills and knowledge themselves to help these students address their essay-writing problems effectively. Pua maintained that if Pakeha mentors were introduced into the Tuakana Mentoring programme, Samoan students would go to them for help. According to Pua, students simply wanted effective, practicable, approachable staff, who were able to help them understand their lectures better and also improve their essay writing skills. She was convinced that some Pacific Island students restricted themselves to accessing only Pacific Island support staff and services because they were led to believe that these resources were all that were available to help them with their academic learning needs.

(Transcript 5 p. 6, 7 1.9.04)

**Int:** ‘So is it only the fact that they’re mentors or is it because they’re Pacific Island or Samoan? Would they go to a Pakeha mentor, for example?’

**Pua:** ‘...if Pakeha mentors were introduced into the Tuakana Programme, I’m sure they would go to them. I mean if these kids really want to learn and I’m sure they do, I don’t think they really care whether or not the mentor is Pakeha or Pacific Islander. I think it’s how approachable they come across. And I think that they’ve fallen into the stereotype that because these mentors are Pacific Islander that they’ll be more approachable and they’ll understand all their problems. Yeah, they might understand their problems, but it’s a question of whether they can help them with their problems and that’s why I don’t go to them...I mean... some of them actually can’t put a sentence together when they’re actually speaking to you or they’re actually too shy to come and approach you. ...I think it’s been instilled in them (these kids) that the only people that can help them at university are Polynesians and I don’t think that’s true’.

Initially, Sefo was positive about the Pacific Island support staff in assisting him with understanding his lecture notes. He remarked that the language they used to explain aspects of his lectures was much easier for him to understand than that used by mainstream lecturers.

(Transcript 1 p. 1 26.8.04)

**Int:** ‘...How useful are the lecturers’ or the tutors’ instructions in helping you to understand how to write the assignment?’

**Sefo:** ‘Not...as helpful as when I actually go to...there’s a programme for Pacific Island and Maori...students and they seem to make it easier for me to understand...they give me a lot of help and support’.

**Int:** ‘...what is it that they do for you that you find very helpful which the mainstream lecturers or tutors aren’t able to do?’

**Sefo:** ‘It’s really the language that is a lot easier for me to understand...like I’m currently doing an English Paper and when I sit there listening to the lecturer, the words are just going above my head...I can’t understand him...but when I take notes about some of the ...words that he’s

using and I take it back to the programme, I was talking about. It's called the *Tuakana Programme*...they ...break it down for me'.

At the same time, Sefo also reported that Pacific Island staff at the Student Learning Centre were not readily approachable when he sought help with his essay assignments nor did they make him feel comfortable in their company. He reported feeling quite disillusioned with Pacific Island support staff and decided to seek help for his essay assignments through his friends, his subject tutor and with me.

(Transcript 4 p. 4 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** 'Yeah...it's actually decreased my faith in them. You know ...where it's a place that should feel inviting and want you to come back all the time, you know, if you feel the need to come back all the time...It's probably the last place I look now...in terms of looking for help... I probably go to my friends or I go back to the tutor...and with the service that you provide...but I sort of like turn my back now... on the Student Learning Centre'.

**Sefo:** 'Yeah I think...like at the end of the day if that's all you know...if that's the only help service you know... you'll only ever go there'.

Sefo changed his view about the importance of teacher ethnicity when he realized the Pacific Island support staff expected him to be familiar with the general requirements of academic essay writing and could not assist him with his specific learning problems in this vital area of his studies.

(Transcript 4 p. 3 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** 'They're...very helpful. I think they're very helpful and they mean to do their best ...but it's sort of like...there's an expectation I think that you should know it so when you come in they explain...you show them ...an essay question and ...like when I came to you and you broke it down... and basically broke it down...for me... to understand...they sort of like just summarized it, just rushed over the top and say 'Hey ...you know that's what you need to do'... and then you know you're supposed to go away...and have a go at it... instead of like sitting down and really breaking down and analyzing the question and breaking it down into words that I'd understand'.

Philip stated that he preferred to attend tutorials run by Pacific Island staff. He reported feeling more comfortable in this learning environment and confident enough to communicate with Pacific Island tutors staff. With Pakeha tutors, on the other hand, Philip reported that he would not have the same confidence or comfort level.

(Transcript 1 p. 5 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...in your experience or in your opinion do Pacific Island students feel more comfortable with one group more than another group...from what you’ve seen?’

**Philip:** ‘Yes ‘cause I...when it’s mentioned at the beginning that there are Pacific Island tutorials ...I go to that one because I’d feel a bit more comfortable...and that and talking to a Pacific Island tutor rather than ...a *Palagi*...I’d sort of be a bit quiet’.

Philip stated that he sought help exclusively from Pacific Island mentors and tutors to help him understand his lecture notes and essay assignments. He claimed that the Pacific Island support staff used English he could easily understand.

(Transcript 2 p.1, 2 29.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...who or where on campus do you go to for help with your assignment?’

**Philip:** ‘...I usually go to see the ...because there’s a programme...that’s running through the university called the ‘Tuakana Arts Programme’ ...that’s for the Arts students and mainly for the Maori and Pacific Island...students where...there’s mentors for different...subjects...in different classes...different Papers...they’re ...sort of like a guide and they can also be a tutor as well...so...I’d go to see .. the mentor...the class mentor’ ...

**Int:** ‘...and you’ve found this to be quite effective...useful?’

**Philip:** ‘...yep...I found that in the class to be useful’.

**Int:** ‘What are some of the things they’ve done to help you?’

**Philip:** ‘...yeah, their availability and to be able to sort of ...re-look at what...has been said in the lectures whether...or not I didn’t understand anything in the lectures...they can sort of try to...put it in a simpler...way...that I’ll be...able to understand’.

According to Philip, Pacific Island support staff helped him through group work to brainstorm ideas and used step-by-step instructions to show him and other Pacific Island students how to integrate ideas into the structural components of the essay.

(Transcript.1 p. 3, 4 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...and what about in terms of how to set out the essay itself...do you get guidance there or do they expect you to know that?’

**Philip:** ‘...for one of my classes last year the mentor went over...sort of structuring the essay and ...we brainstormed this... question and like everyone in the class came up with ideas and he sort of tried to put it...into an essay-type...and he put one idea in a paragraph and then we ...start writing about it’.

Pua did not seek help to understand lectures or with her essay assignments from Pacific Island teaching or support staff. She stated that she questioned their ability to help students with her academic and first language background. Sefo was positive about the help he received from Pacific Island support staff with understanding his lecture notes. He was, however, highly critical of their response in terms of the help they offered with academic essay assignments. Philip reported feeling comfortable and completely satisfied with the support for his essay assignments and lecture notes he received from Pacific Island support staff in tutorials and in the student learning programmes.

#### ***4.6 Perceived Academic Writing Problems/Skills of 14 New Zealand-born Samoan Students***

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The 14 students in this study were asked to identify their academic writing skills as well as the problem areas in their writing in the survey questionnaire. Table 4 (see p. 70) is a

summary of the perceived academic writing skills and problems (see Appendix 1, pp. 6-7) of the 14 respondents. The results below suggest that the majority of respondents **fully understood** the structural requirements of an academic essay. 78.5% of respondents, for example, stated that they **fully understood** how to **write an introduction** and **divide an essay into paragraphs**. 71.5% of respondents also stated that they **fully understood how to write a conclusion**. 64.3% claimed that they **fully understood** how to **find appropriate quotes from reading texts** and **referencing within an essay**. Just over half of the respondents (57%) also claimed that they knew how to **link the conclusion to the introduction** as well as **link ideas between paragraphs**.

On the other hand, 64.3% of respondents identified the following skills as problem areas: **writing a main idea or topic sentence**, **constructing sentences to support a main idea or topic sentence**, and **paraphrasing main ideas/key information from reading texts**. 57% of respondents also stated that **linking ideas between sentences**, **using grammar and vocabulary appropriate to academic writing**, and **summarising key ideas/information from reading text** were also problem areas in their writing. The respondents **needed help with** rather than **did not understand at all** how to apply the skills identified above to their essay assignments. The two key problems areas in participants' writing as suggested by the pattern of their responses were limited academic English vocabulary and grammatical structures and academic reading skills.

**Table 4.4: Perceived Academic Writing Skills of 14 Respondents**

Academic Writing Skills	Fully understand	Need some help	No understanding at all
	%	%	%
*Write introduction	78.5	14.3	0
Write conclusion	71.5	28.5	0
Link conclusion to introduction	57	35.7	7.3
Summarise main points	50	42.8	7.2
Divide essay into para	78.5	21.5	0
Link ideas between para	57	35.7	7.3
Write main/key idea for para	35.7	57	7.3
Write supporting sentences to main/key idea	35.7	57	7.3
Link ideas between sentences	42.8	42.8	14.4
Use contextually appropriate grammar	42.8	57.2	0
*Use contextually appropriate vocabulary	42.8	50	0
Summarise key points from reading text	42.8	57.2	0
Paraphrase key points from reading text	35.7	50	14.3
Find appropriate quotes from reading text	64.3	35.7	0
Referencing within an essay	57	35.7	7.3
Referencing at the end of an essay	50	35.7	14.3

- 1 respondent left a blank for each of the questions marked with an \*



The academic essay writing skills, listed by the sub-group of five participants as those they **fully understood** were identical to those of the main group of 14 respondents (see Appendix 4, pp. 14-15). Pua, Sefo Lisa and James reported that they **fully understood how to divide an essay into paragraphs** and except for Sefo the other three participants stated they also **fully understood** how to **write an introduction**. Pua, Lisa and Philip also reported that they **fully understood** how to **link the conclusion of an essay to the introduction** while Pua and Philip listed **linking ideas between sentences and paragraphs** as one of their essay writing skills. Lisa and Pua listed **how to write a conclusion to an essay** as a skill which they **fully understood**. Pua and James listed **finding appropriate quotes in reading texts and referencing within and at the end of an essay** as essay skills they **fully understood**. Pua, James Sefo reported to know how to **use appropriate grammar and vocabulary in academic essays**, Sefo and Philip listed **writing the main idea for each paragraph** as one of their essay writing skills. Only Pua claimed to **fully understand** how to **paraphrase information from reading texts and write supporting sentences for the main idea**.

As with the original group of 14 respondents, the sub-group of five also indicated that they **needed help with** rather than **did not understand at all** the academic writing skills listed as problem areas. Moreover, the pattern of academic essay writing problems of the sub-group of five, once again, closely resembled that of the original group of 14. All five respondents, for example, listed **summarising information from reading texts and summarising main points in the conclusion** as a problem area for which they needed help. With the exception of Pua, the remaining four respondents also stated that they needed help with **writing supporting sentences for each main idea and paraphrasing information from reading texts**. Philip, Lisa and Sefo also stated that they needed help with **finding appropriate quotes from reading texts and referencing within and at the end of an essay**. James, Philip and Sefo reported **writing a conclusion** as a problem area. James, Lisa and Sefo pointed to **linking ideas between sentences and paragraphs** as problematic. James and Sefo needed help with **linking the conclusion to the introduction**, while Sefo and Philip pointed to **writing an introduction** as a problem area in their writing. Lisa, James and Philip reported needing help with **writing a main idea for each paragraph** while Lisa and Philip listed **using appropriate grammar and vocabulary for academic essays** as

problematic. Only Philip reported needing help with **dividing an essay into paragraphs**.

#### **4.7 Academic Reading and Writing Problems**

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In a sample study of the reading abilities of Samoan primary school children in Auckland schools by Marie Clay (1970) as cited in Pitt & Macpherson(1994, p. 104), it was found that the reading skills of bilingual (Samoan-English speakers) Samoan children were not inferior to those of monolingual English speakers of the same age.

Interestingly, four of the five participants in the sub-group, James, Sefo, Lisa and Philip who were raised in bilingual, traditional Samoan homes, all reported experiencing reading-related problems when writing academic essays. It is also interesting to note that the culture of story-book reading from early childhood years was not a part of the home culture of these same four students. Furthermore, the same four students reported experiencing almost identical reading problems with academic texts in their university studies. The following discussions reflect some of the differences in the home cultures of Pua and the four students from bilingual traditional Samoan homes in terms of their exposure to reading books and storybook reading during their childhood.

James remembered having stories read to him at school when he was young, although he stated that he himself did not read books that he took home from school.

Furthermore, James reported that his experiences of reading as a child have not had a long-term impact on him.

(Transcript 1 p. 9 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...do you think having stories read to you when you were a child has helped you or stories told to you when you were a child has helped you to develop your reading skills?’

**James:** ‘No, not really. I didn’t really read much at...primary and that...I used to read at school but when I brought books home I didn’t read it because...’

**Int:** ‘...do you think that teachers reading stories to you helped you in some way to develop your reading skills?’

**James:** ‘Maybe in high school...yeah like in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> form. But not now’.

Sefo pointed to the Bible as his main source of reading as a young child at home. Storybook reading and children’s books were not, according to Sefo, part of his home culture during his childhood.

(Transcript 1 p. 7 26.8.04)

**Sefo:** ‘My reading habits? ... I used to read the Bible...never really took it in but just read it... you couldn’t say I had a reading habit before... Probably because we never had any books at home when I was growing up so it’s not a habit that ...I picked up from being young’.

Philip and Lisa both stated that they did not normally read books as a leisure activity. Reading was perceived, by both participants, as an academic-related task. Philip and Lisa indicated that their preferred choice of reading material was limited to popular magazines and the newspaper.

(Transcript 1 p. 7, 8 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...Now tell me about your reading habits’.

**Philip:** ‘...I don’t think I have a habit...of... reading...sometimes like maybe... newspapers...I don’t know if that counts what you’re asking...newspapers, magazines ... but I think I only get a habit of reading...is when I’m ...writing an essay or doing an assignment...that’s the only time I’m ...in the habit of reading because I have to read the material...to... write the essay ‘

(Transcript 1 p. 7, 8 12.7.04)

**Int:** ...tell me about your reading habits? What sorts of books do you read? And how often do you read? ... Do you enjoy reading?’

**Lisa:** 'To be honest I don't read that much. But ...I do... enjoy what I'm reading now because like ...what I'm studying is what I'm interested in. So I enjoy reading my... textbooks that I have to read'.

**Int:** '...so you're reading a lot of study-related texts?'

**Lisa:** 'Yeah, study-related,yeah'.

**Int:** 'But in your free time, is there any other type of book or type of reading material that you enjoy reading?'

**Lisa:** 'Yeah...well I always read magazines and newspapers but...that's about it...'

**Int:** 'What sort of magazines do you enjoy reading?'

**Lisa:** '...just the gossip ones...don't you know?'

Pua reported quite a different experience of reading and of storybooks from those of Sefo, James, Philip and Lisa who grew up in traditional Samoan homes. The culture of storybook reading was, according to Pua, a normal part of her homelife as she was growing up. Moreover, she maintained that this exposure to reading and storybooks from a very young age provided her with essential reading skills which she was able to later apply to her academic studies.

(Transcript 1 p. 9,10 11.7.04)

**Pua:** '...actually I read a lot more when I was little than I do now...the teachers would give us Age grade books and I used to ... read them'.

**Int:** 'Do you have any favourites?...or did you have any favourites when you were young?'

**Pua:** 'Yeah, I liked...**Goose Eggs** books... I used to enjoy those books and ...it didn't really bother me whether they had pictures or not, just as long as the story was good and it progressed from...reading books where there wasn't a lot of pages to books where...the books got thicker until...I could actually sustain reading a bigger book...but when I was little, I just enjoyed...those types of books like **Goose Eggs**.

**Int:** ‘...do you think your reading habits...developed from perhaps books being read to you at home or did you have stories read to you when you were young?’

**Pua:** ‘Yes, I did. When I was little, I always used to get read to...and all different types of books. I mean no not different types of books but just different types of stories, but the normal stories like **Sleeping Beauty**, and **Snow White**, and all of those stories so...my...interest in reading was...instilled in me ...quite early’.

Sefo, James, Philip and Lisa all stated that they had problems following written instructions in essay assignments and exam questions. Although Philip had also reported in the questionnaire that teachers’ instructions were useful. Limiting reading skills caused significant problems for these three participants when trying to satisfy the specific reading requirements of their academic essay assignments

Sefo specifically pointed to his lack of understanding of written instructions and his inability to analyse essay and exam questions as key problem areas in his writing.

(Transcript 1 p.1. 2 26.8.04)

**Int:** ‘...with your assignment...how useful are written instructions for you?’

**Sefo:** ‘Written instructions ...I think like you saw when I was trying to fill out the form...maybe I need someone to expand a bit more...on the question before I’m able to answer the question’.

**Int:** ‘So how does that affect you when you’ve got to...answer questions in ...an exam-type of situation? How do you cope with that?’

**Sefo:** ‘I think the telling part for me was how I failed a Paper last semester...I did all the coursework and I only had to get 16 marks and I went into...the final examination and I had three hours to write...three essays and I couldn’t even get one’.

**Int:** ‘Why was that?’

**Sefo:** ‘I froze...I didn’t know how to analyze the questions’.

During the interview, Philip reported having difficulty following written instructions and therefore did not find written instructions particularly helpful.

(Transcript 1 p. 2 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...how useful were the written instructions you were given to follow?’

**Philip:** ‘These for me was a bit difficult because sometimes...when you’re reading a text or...a question that could mean different things and ...by reading something it maybe...you don’t get everything from reading...what the...marker wants ...so yeah I thought that...written information...was not that useful...that...I actually needed ...to have some extra... or verbal kind of information about how to write an essay...how to answer the question’

James also stated that he struggled with written instructions.

(Transcript 1 p. 2 22.7.04))

**Int:** ‘How useful were the written instructions you were given to follow?’

**James:** ‘Yeah not very useful because ...it’s easier when I hear it explained to me. Whereas if I read it.....I’m just reading it, but I can’t ...process it...as well as I should’.

According to Lisa, written instructions were useful most of the time, but she stated that she still needed clarification with meaning which she sought from her friends rather than the teacher when she did not understand what to do.

(Transcript 1 p. 2, 3 12.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...and when you’re reading written instructions, how useful are those instructions for you, for example, in an exam situation or when you’re reading instructions for an assignment? ...’

**Lisa:** ‘...most of the time, useful, ‘cause...usually I do get what they’re saying in the written

instructions...sometimes I need clarification...but yeah...most of the time it's alright'.

**Int:** 'So when you didn't understand...you'd ask your friends?'

**Lisa:** 'Yeah, most of the time'.

My own reading problems with academic texts at university closely resembled those of Sefo, James, Philip and Lisa who were also from traditional Samoan homes. Often, I would have to read written instructions a number of times before fully understanding what to do, locating relevant texts for essay assignments and identifying important information from texts were also problems I struggled with. Furthermore, popular magazines were my first choice of reading material, primarily because I could relate to and understand with ease the language and content of these popular magazines.

The absence of a reading culture in my own home from a very early age coupled with rote learning teaching methods at school could have contributed significantly to my poorly developed comprehension skills and my inability to analyse texts accurately. Mastery of these academic reading skills was clearly an essential pre-requisite for meeting the complex demands of academic writing at university.

The research literature abounds with studies that point to reading and storybooks in the home as essential for development of children's speaking and literacy skills at school. Students who fail to read in the early grades, according to Scarcella (2002), cannot gain advanced literacy without intensive instruction that should take them from beginning proficiency level to the intermediate level quickly. Moreover, if their previous schooling has been poor, they would also need intensive content instruction to build up their background knowledge. Without this instruction, Scarcella argues, these students will continue to have problems with their reading. She goes on to say that their inability to read will further undermine their ability to develop important English proficiency skills which include the ability to read in order to acquire these skills. The vocabulary of this cohort of students is highly restricted and their grammar proficiency is severely limited (p. 217).

Rose (1999) reiterated this view in a study with Indigenous Australian students. He ascertained that inexperienced and poor readers of English were not able to identify, decode or appropriate unfamiliar wordings to extend their own range of vocabulary and grammatical structures. These students needed strategies that integrated learning to read with writing.

## **4.8 Teaching Methodology**

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Bernstein (2000) contends that since the basis of **recognition** is a strong classification between the context of the family and the context of the school the **recognition rule** is a necessary condition for producing a text or practice that is both legitimate and context-specific. While the **recognition rule** is, in itself not sufficient for specific learning to take place, learning how to construct the specific text or practice must, in fact, also follow. The point that Bernstein makes here is that the **recognition rule** arises out of distinguishing **between** contexts, whereas what Bernstein has termed the **realization rule** arises out of specific requirements **within** a context. The **realization rule**, therefore, determines how we put meanings together and how we apply this knowledge in order to produce a legitimate text.

The 14 respondents were asked to choose teaching practices that helped to improve their academic writing skills (see Appendix 1, p. 7). **Teacher's explanation in class** was listed by 12 of the 14 respondents as **very helpful**. **Teaching instruction** was identified by 8 of the 14 respondents as **very helpful**, while around half the respondents pointed to **written instructions on the assignment** and **discussion with fellow students as very helpful**.

Of the sub-group of five, Pua, Philip and Lisa stated that they found **explanation by teachers in class very helpful** with their essay writing needs. Sefo, however, did not share the same positive view with regard to **teacher explanations**. Philip and Pua also found **teacher instruction, very helpful**. Pua was the only one in the group who listed **written instructions on assignment sheets** as helpful.



#### 4.8.1 Teaching Methodology at High School

Pua maintained that the teaching methodology used by mainstream teachers at high school was difficult to follow. In her view, they did not explain how to apply the format for academic essays to actual essay questions. Pua described the feedback for her essays from some of her high school teachers as vague, dismissive and confusing. In her view, it was due largely to this ineffective teaching methodology that she scored low marks in her assignments during her senior years at high school.

(Transcript 1 p. 4, 5 11.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...How did the teachers at your school help you with assignment writing?’

**Pua:** ‘They helped us in class time just to pick out the main ideas that we should be including in our essays and just going over the main points on how to structure these essays’.

**Int:** ‘So ...they did work on structure with you?’

**Pua:** ‘Yes, but not in depth, no’.

**Int:** ‘When you say structure, ...what exactly do you mean?’

**Pua:** ‘Just the introduction and the paragraphs and the conclusion. Like that...that’s how basic it was...my main problem was... like retelling the story...they wouldn’t tell you specifically how to stop retelling the story in your paragraphs’.

**Int:** ‘So ...did they actually know what problems ...the students had when it came to writing...?’

**Pua:** ‘I don’t think so because by the comments that you got back on your essays, they were so vague... you couldn’t tell what was wrong with your essays’

**Pua:** ‘And you’d get such outrageous marks like you’d go from E to D ...And...the only comment that would accompany that was ‘Oh you’re having a bad hair day’. Well, that’s not really telling you what’s wrong with your essay’.

**Int:** ‘But, generally speaking, this would not be the sort of comment that teachers would be giving out to students surely’.

**Pua:** ‘...well, in 7<sup>th</sup> form it was. Everyone...in my class ...we were all getting these comments that we didn’t know what they meant’.

**Int:** ‘And...what about 6<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, was it the same?’

**Pua:** ‘Oh no 6<sup>th</sup> was worse...you’d think that you’d actually structured the essay properly and then you’d get back a really low mark...and you knew that it was right...the essay, but you’d get back such a low mark that you’d change... the way you wrote the essays just to try and get a better mark from this teacher, but they just kept on getting lower so you kinda lost focus on how to write an essay. And in 4<sup>th</sup> form the teacher actually wrote the essay for us but we had to change it into our own words...so you weren’t ever really actually taught ‘This is a topic sentence and you should write this for every paragraph. You shouldn’t be retelling the story... You should be saying what the story means not ...what’s it about...when I reached 5<sup>th</sup> form and the teacher was writing the essays for us, it did make things a lot easier but once you got to 6<sup>th</sup> form and the teacher wasn’t doing that anymore, that’s why...the way we wrote our essays and our marks went down’.

Pua’s middle-class home background had already familiarized her with what Bernstein (2000) referred to as the **recognition rule**. The **realization rule**, on the other hand, which could only be accessed through the school, by way of its teachers and other academic resources was not, in Pua’s view, readily available to her. Pua reported that although she was awarded low grades for class assignments and internal exams, she, nevertheless performed well in external exams achieving an A bursary at the end of her 7<sup>th</sup> form year at high school. In other words, Pua was still able to apply the **recognition rule** (Bernstein, 2000) to her advantage in the context of external exams where she was assessed by impartial markers.

James reported that it was at university he realised the teaching methodology teachers used at high school to teach him essay writing skills did not prepare him adequately for the demands of academic essay writing at tertiary level. As an example, he stated that he was not taught important research skills. Instead, he was given all the reading material and resources to ‘help’ him write his essay. The assumption was if James was provided with the relevant reading texts for his assignments, his reading problems would then improve.

(Transcript 1 p. 2 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...Do you think the way you were taught to write assignments at high school has helped you with assignment writing at university level?’

**James:** ‘...no because...I think maybe the reason why I struggle now with essays is because in high school we were given the readings and were given the information...the books that where...the information came from. All we had to do was to go get it and read it sort of thing...we were basically...told...everything...But now here at university, you have to do everything yourself...and so I’m sort of adjusting to it’.

The only sources of ‘real’ knowledge, in James’s view, were the teacher and academic texts he was expected to read. This rationale naturally caused James to blame himself for his essay writing problems.

According to Philip, the way in which he was taught essay writing at high school helped him considerably at university level, since it provided him with an important foundation which helped him to manage the essay writing demands of his course.

(Transcript 1 p. 1 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...How were you taught to write an essay when you were at high school?’

**Philip:** ‘To analyse the question and to break it...sort of take out the main...the key words..that would sort of...I don’t know how to explain it...but like the key words that...are actually what the question is asking...just the main points of the question...and to take those...into account...to see what the teacher’s asking...from that question...like really analyse it...not to just read it and then answer...to just see what the question’s asking’.

**Int:** ‘...and do you look at the structure...how to structure the essay? ...were you taught how to actually structure the answer...?’

**Philip:** ‘...yep...you’ve always got to have an introduction...and...my 7<sup>th</sup> form English teacher was always ...saying that you’ve gotta have...an opening sentence or...a topic sentence at the beginning of...each

paragraph so that you just...you say what you want to say in the sentence and then back it up by the rest of the paragraph...and then also with those links...to try and link paragraphs together if you're wanting to...keep the...essay going...but into a new paragraph to do those...to have those links...those first sentences'.

(Transcript 1 p. 2 22.7.04)

**Int:** '...do you think the way you were taught to write assignments at high school has helped you with assignment writing at university level?'

**Philip:** '...yeah. A lot...I think it's helped a lot because it was sort of that first...it was that foundation to try and ...do essay writing because of...the work that I'm doing...at university...there is a lot of essays...so yeah...it was...helpful because I didn't have to try and learn at university because I'd already gone...through it at high school...So I think it was very helpful'.

Philip reasoned that since teachers were going to mark his essays, they would naturally know how to communicate the relevant knowledge to students and therefore the teaching approach they used had to be the best possible approach to teaching essay writing skills to him.

(Transcript 1 p. 2 22.7.04)

**Int:** '...So how useful were teachers' instructions in helping you to understand how to write the assignment?'

**Philip:** '...I guess they were very useful because they knew what they were...talking about...and us as students sort of didn't know...what we had to do for an essay...yeah I think it was like very useful so that we knew...because they were going to mark it...that we knew how to do it and...that was...to take ...the information from the teachers...what they knew about...how structuring and writing an essay'.

Philip's actual essay showed that he had not understood how to apply a number of key requirements of the academic writing process to his essay assignments.

Lisa claimed that the teaching methodology of some high school teachers had helped her with her writing requirements at university.

(Transcript 1 p. 1 12.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...how were you taught to write an essay when you were at high school?’

**Lisa:** ‘Okay... introduction, fact, explanation and planning as well and then the usual like ... paragraphs for each topic or idea that you’re gonna write about in your essay’.

**Int:** ‘And ...did that help you to prepare you for your tertiary studies, do you think?’

**Lisa:** ‘...I think it did...because ...I didn’t really know how to write essays when I first...the first time I started knowing how to write a actual essay was when I came to 5<sup>th</sup> form School C.’.

**Int:** ‘What particular part of teaching you how to write an essay has been the most helpful for you?’

**Lisa:** ‘...the structure of a essay was. Yeah knowing that. a introduction and explaining and give an example and the facts...because at first I didn’t even know what to write in a essay’.

Lisa also reported that she struggled with a number of key aspects of the academic essay writing process and with applying some of the rules she had learnt to her actual essays.

#### **4.8.2 Teaching Methodology at University**

Pua noted that students entering university were expected to be familiar with the conventions of academic writing, in general. Very little time, in Pua’s opinion, was given over to explaining to students key information about the conventions of a particular academic essay genre students were expected to reproduce in their assignments.

(Transcript 1 p. 3 11.7.04)

**Pua:** ‘Well I think at university ...they kind of expect us to know the basics about ...writing and...’

**Pua:** ‘...yeah as I was saying...they expect us to know the basics about...writing an essay so they...I think they go straight to...the ideas that we should be including in our essays...’

**Int:** ‘So they don’t talk about structure?’

**Pua:** ‘No’.

(Transcript 1 p. 4 11.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...and how do your lectures, subject lectures help you with assignment writing?’

**Pua:** ‘...they help us...like they take out main ideas that we should be including in our essays. That’s all. They don’t talk about how to structure it or anything’.

Pua pointed out, however, that some of her course tutors did provide opportunities within the tutorial to address the main problem areas in students’ writing after each assignment.

(Transcript 1 p. 4 11.7.04)

**Pua:** ‘...if we’ve already done an essay...an assignment, they base their next... tutorial on the main mistakes that we made in our...in like the main mistakes that everyone made in their essays and then they’ll go over that ...in class time’.

When asked about specific things that tutors did to help him understand an assignment, James referred to model essays as useful. Yet he himself did not use this resource to help him improve the quality of his writing.

(Transcript 1 p. 4 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...what are some of the things your subject tutors do to help you understand what to do for an assignment?’

**James:** ‘...sometimes, they make available copies of old...like other past answers sort of think like, for example...someone else’s essay that’s been written in the past on the same question’.

**Int:** ‘They...use a model essay...model answers?’

**James:** ‘Yeah, model answers yeah’.

**Int:** ‘Are they useful? Do you find that it helps?’

**James:** ‘...Yep, but I’ve never ...taken ...borrowed one. I’ve never read one’.

Lisa also stated that her course tutors expected her to know how to write an academic assignment. She observed that they focused mainly on explaining procedures that students were expected to follow when completing and handing in assignments. Lisa stated that she did not find course tutors at university very helpful at all. Much of her time was spent trying to work things out for herself.

(Transcript 1 p. 3 12.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...how do your subject tutors help you with assignment writing?’

**Lisa:** ‘At school?’

**Int:** ‘No at uni’.

**Lisa:** ‘...didn’t really help me, no...you kinda just did it for yourself’.

**Int:** ‘...what did they actually do? They give you the assignment?’

**Lisa:** ‘...they just give you... hand you the assignment and they tell you... what you need...how to hand it in and what to put in it but not really that much on how to write it. They give you the basic stuff... that you already know...maybe already know in high school’.

The perception that Philip and Lisa held of teachers having taught them the academic writing skills they needed for university study was in contrast to the actual problems they also identified in their writing when discussing their essay assignments. James and Pua, on the other hand, pointed directly to teaching practices at high school as clearly contributing to their academic writing problems.

#### **4.9 Strategies to Improve Academic Essay Writing Skills.**

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Table 4.5 (p. 87) is a summary of how the 14 respondents evaluated strategies for improving their academic writing skills (see Appendix 1, p. 7). More than 70% of respondents described the following strategies as **very useful: explanation by subject teacher, reading notes from lectures and texts, writing multiple drafts and proof reading by mentors**. Just over half the respondents listed **proof reading by English language support staff** and **one-to-one discussion with a subject tutor or lecturer as very useful strategies**. The same number of respondents also stated, however, that **discussion in special tutorials for Pacific Island students, proof reading by Pacific Island support staff** and **discussion with Samoan students** were either **not necessary or irrelevant** to their essay writing needs. For 11 of the 14 respondents, **discussion with English language support staff** was either **not necessary, or irrelevant** to their essay writing needs, while 9 of the 14 respondents also stated that **one-to-one discussion with a Pacific Island course lecturer or a Pacific Island mentor** was either **not necessary or irrelevant**.



**Table 4.5: Strategies to Improve Academic Writing Skills**

	Very useful	Not necessary	Unhelpful	Irrelevant
	%	%	%	%
*Explanation by subject teacher	78.5	0	7.2	7.2
Reading notes from lectures & texts	85.6	14.4	0	0
*Writing multiple drafts	71.5	21.5	0	0
*Proof reading by mentor	64.4	21.4	0	7.2
Discussion with subject lecturer	57.2	35.6	7.2	0
Discussion with subject tutor	50	42.8	0	7.2
*Proof reading by EL staff	42.8	35.6	7.2	7.2
*Proof reading by PI staff	35.6	42.8	0	14.3
Discussion with PI tutors	42.8	35.6	0	21.6
Discussion with PI mentor	35.6	42.8	0	21.6
*Discussion with PI subject lecturer	28.5	42.8	0	21.6
Discussion with EL staff	21.6	50	7.2	21.2
*Discussion with Samoan students	35.6	42.8	0	14.3

\*1 respondent did not complete each of the questions marked \*

All five participants (see Appendix 4, pp. 14-15) listed **writing multiple drafts as very useful**. With the exception of Lisa, the remaining four also stated that **proof reading by mentors and English Language support staff, and one-to-one discussion with course lecturers and/or tutors** were also **very useful**. Lisa, James and Pua identified **proof reading by** and **one to one discussion with Pacific Island support staff** as either **not necessary** or **unhelpful and irrelevant**. Sefo and Philip, on the other hand, maintained

that this resource was **very useful**. Sefo and Lisa described **proof reading by English Language support staff** as either **not necessary** or **unhelpful and irrelevant**. Pua, Philip and Lisa stated that **explanation by course lecturers and/ or tutors in class** and reading notes from lectures and texts were **very useful**. For Sefo, Philip and Lisa, **one-to-one discussion with mainstream course lecturers** was either **unhelpful, unnecessary** or **irrelevant**. Sefo and James also stated that **explanation by course lecturers during lectures** and **reading notes from lectures and texts** was either **not necessary** or **unhelpful and irrelevant**. James, Lisa and Sefo listed **discussion with English Language support staff** as **not necessary**, while Pua and :Philip stated that **discussion with English Language support staff** was **very useful**. Sefo and James stated that **one-to-one discussion with fellow students** was **very useful** and Sefo also listed **discussion with Samoan students** as **very useful**. Lisa, James, :Philip and Pua all described **discussion with fellow and Samoan students** as either **not necessary** or **unhelpful and irrelevant**.

#### 4.9.1 Actual Strategies Used by Sub-group of Five

Sefo depended on the editing skills of others to proof read his essays.

(Transcript 1 p. 2 26.8.04)

**Int:** ‘...what do you understand by the term ‘multiple drafts?’

**Sefo:** ‘I understand that a draft is a rough copy. But multiple drafts is not...how do you say? I’ve never done multiple drafts’.

**Int:** ‘...Why not? Why do you not do multiple drafts? Is it a time factor?’

**Sefo:** ‘My ...thought is they ...you write the paper...and then you just give it to someone and then they proof-read it and try and fix up the little mistakes that you’ve got in there and then once you’ve taken out all the mistakes, that’s it’.

**Int:** ‘...And is that what you do with your first draft? You take it to somebody?’

**Sefo:** ‘Yes’.

**Int:** ‘...and that person reads through it and edits it for you and then gives it back to you?’

**Sefo:** ‘Yes’

(Transcript 4 p. 10 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** ‘...You talk about ‘multiple drafts’... I’ve only ever been used to putting one draft together and just taking out all the spelling mistakes and handing that in but I think that as I said...’

Pua reportedly attributed her lack of understanding of what was involved in writing multiple drafts to not being taught these skills at high school.

(Transcript 1 p. 2 11.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...how many drafts do you write before you’re satisfied your assignment is ready to be handed in?’

**Pua:** ‘Well, I’ve only started doing... multiple drafts now...that’s another thing in high school that we weren’t taught to do a lot of drafts...we were kinda taught that one or two drafts was sufficient but... now that I’ve started to...do multiple drafts, I think I’d probably do about five or six’.

**Int:** ‘...why?’

**Pua:** ‘...because... with my first essay this year, I learnt that... one or two drafts wasn’t enough and I found that by writing... around five or six drafts, it made it a lot easier to actually write the final copy... structure the final copy and see what needed to be taken out or what needed to be put in. It just makes things a lot easier ...’

**Int:** ‘For you or for your reader...?’

**Pua:** ‘for both’.

Pua reported that writing multiple drafts for each essay was a useful way of helping her to improve each draft.

(Transcript 7 p. 4 13.11.04)

**Int:** ‘What about your paragraphs then? How has multiple drafts helped you there?’

**Pua:** ‘ I still think for my conclusion, I am still having a bit of difficulty there trying to sum up what I’ve written...but also trying to make the conclusion powerful, not just rushing the conclusion so you finish the essay’.

**Pua:** ‘...my introduction I’ve learnt that you don’t have to have a really long paragraph...just, you know... three or four sentences...and I think I’ve improved in my introductions ... But I think probably the body and the conclusion’.

James stated that he was taught how to edit his writing at high school and that he wrote several drafts during the essay writing process.

(Transcript 1 p. 3 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...were you taught how to edit your writing at high school?’

**James:** ‘...Yep...I’m not sure because...basically we were told ...that after we’ve written up our draft to read over it and if it makes sense to us then that’s it. ...but ...what makes sense to us may not be the right thing’.

**Int:** ‘So what sort of things do you do when you edit draft copies of your assignment?’

**James:** ‘...I sort of still use that principle that I learnt at high school ...if it sounds right to me...then...it’s okay but...there are other ways that I see my friends do...like they ...read it to each other or they give it to someone else to read. And...I think I’m just too lazy to do that...’.

**Int:** ‘...how many drafts do you write before you’re satisfied your assignment is ready to be handed in?’

**James:** ‘Two...Yeah, my first draft...I just write down my ideas and my paragraphs and then the second draft...I put it into place sort of thing. I rearrange it so that it looks good. Yeah I think I have a third because then after that I go through it. Oh no, that’s editing. Yeah I go through it again and make sure that it makes sense and if there’s ...other points that I can include that I just put a massive arrow, join it to another page and then write on there’.

Philip asserted that he was able to identify weaknesses in his writing through writing 'multiple drafts'.

(Transcript 1 p.3 22.7.04)

**Int:** '...What sort of things do you do when you edit draft copies of your assignments?'

**Philip:** 'Maybe the vocab that I use...whether it's appropriate ..in essay writing...the actual grammar...whether it makes sense'.

**Int:** So ...how do you decide...when the vocabulary items that you've chosen are appropriate or not? ...what is it about the sentence that helps you to decide whether or not it's appropriate or inappropriate?'

**Philip:** '...when I starting writing like I talk to my friends, I think that's when I know when...it's not appropriate'.

**Int:** '...How many drafts do you write before you're satisfied your assignment is ready to be handed in?'

**Philip:** 'To be honest, sometimes, it's only two...but...and if I can be honest sometimes, I usually leave it to ...few weeks before it. That's why it only gets to two or maybe even one'.

Lisa claimed that she was familiar with the steps involved in writing 'multiple drafts'. However, she restricted herself to writing one sometimes two draft copies.

(Transcript 1 p.2 12.7.04)

**Int:** '...Now what do you understand by the term 'multiple drafts'?'

**Lisa:** '...writing a first draft for a essay and then maybe going through that and then writing another one to improve it'.

**Int:** 'And what do you do to improve on the second draft, do you think?'

**Lisa:** '...more relevant information. Maybe...adding more information to the essay. Making it better...grammar and stuff like that'.

**Int:** ‘...How many drafts do you write before you’re satisfied your assignment is ready to be handed in?’

**Lisa:** ‘To be honest about one, yeah’.

**Int:** ‘...and has that been helpful just to have one draft, do you think?’

**Lisa:** ‘...usually I write a draft then I go through it and put other stuff to add through it but maybe that’s not counted as two or more...I’m not too sure. Maybe two’.

Philip, James and Lisa reported having been taught editing skills at high school. Sefo, on the other hand, relied heavily on other people to edit his writing. Of the five participants, Pua, who stated that she had not been taught how to edit at high school, was the only one who wrote more than three drafts for her essays. She was also able to point to particular areas in her writing which had improved as a result of writing multiple drafts during the writing process. Philip, James and Lisa who claimed to understand how to edit their writing did not comment on any improvement in their grades or writing skills as a result of reportedly writing several drafts for their essays.

## **4.10**      ***One-to-One Teaching Sessions***

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Instruction has been identified (Colombi, 2002; Gee, 2002; Scarcella, 2002; Jones, 1999; Lillis, 1997; Jones, 1991) as a key factor which separates academically-successful students from those who lack the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed at university. This is true for students from both mainstream and minority backgrounds. Singh, Dooley and Freebody's (2001) study of high school students from working class communities identified poor literacy skills as a problem common to students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds across all ethnic groups including Anglo- Australians. The use of explicit instruction to teach academic literacy and genre writing skills to students from minority and/or disadvantaged communities has, in fact, yielded measurable results in overseas studies (Baugh, 2002; Colombi, 2002; Scarcella, 2002; Singh & Sinclair 2001; Gee, 2000; Ramathan & Kaplan, 2000; English, 1999; Jones, 1999; Lillis, 1997).

I offered one-to-one teaching sessions to the five participants who requested help with their essay assignments. One of the aims of the teaching sessions was to introduce the participants to a new academic culture by relating it to some aspects of their background of lived experiences. Pua who was already familiar with the 'academic culture' of the university through her home background benefited the most from the one-to-one teaching sessions. She also participated fully in all the sessions offered. James and Sefo, on the other hand, attended scheduled sessions irregularly and on one or two occasions turned up unannounced for last minute help with an assignment for which they had been granted an extension. Philip and Lisa attended the first teaching session only. Philip did not turn up for any further teaching sessions. Lisa maintained that she did not have any essay assignments that she needed help with.

The teaching approach I used during the one-to-one teaching sessions combined an informal, interactive conversational style of communication during discussions, with a structured, step-by-step, explicit teaching methodology in which teacher explanation and instruction featured prominently in helping participants understand key aspects of the essay writing process. The interactive, conversational approach acknowledged the student's status as an adult who brought to the table, as it were, his/her own unique world view and background of experiences and ideas that were given serious

consideration when discussing the assignment question. The rationale behind this approach asserted that I, the teacher, was not the only source of knowledge which students could access during the reading and writing process. Their knowledge and experiences were also treated as important resources to be drawn from to enhance their academic learning. This approach also facilitated a more relaxed interaction between participants and me as the authority figure, without participants feeling threatened or disrespectful. Participants expressed their views and feelings with confidence and they were not embarrassed to ask questions of me.

During our discussions in the one-to-one teaching sessions, Pua had pointed specifically to constructing and structuring an introduction, and writing a conclusion and individual paragraphs as features of essay writing that posed difficulties for her. Pua also stated that she needed help with using contextually appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures in her essays

(Transcript 2 p. 3 1.8.04)

**Int:** 'What do you think you need help with the most?  
And we're talking about this particular assignment now'.

**Pua:** 'Right. I think...using the type of language that  
applies to this type of assignment...because it's different  
from...'

**Int:** 'Expository essay'.

**Pua:** '...yeah those essays and...you're actually writing  
about yourself...I'm not used to that... I mean ...just  
using the language that is appropriate for this type of  
assignment ...and also still structuring it...like  
'introduction' and 'paragraphs' and...the 'conclusion'.  
Just structuring it like that...because I think in this  
assignment, I think I might slip back into ways of...just  
going from point to point to point...but no structure...'

Pua also stated that writing a clear, topic sentence, structuring and sequencing her ideas in logical order within the introduction and individual paragraphs of her essay and editing her work effectively were key problem areas in her essays.



(Transcript 1 p. 1 11/7/04)

**Pua:** ‘...writing paragraphs that make sense...I mean...I don’t really write a topic sentence. I just...throw all my ideas into the paragraph and so it’s just like a bunch of sentences but...the single paragraph actually isn’t structured’.

**Int:** ‘When you say ...a bunch of sentences, do your sentences actually ...link up within the paragraph or are they also disconnected?’

**Pua:** ‘They’re disconnected...I think my main problem with that is that I’m actually retelling the story...but not actually saying why that was important. And that’s where I think the paragraph breaks down’.

**Int:** ‘And...you mentioned that your introductions are too long. Can you give me a bit more information about your introductions, because obviously it sounds like a difficulty with you?’

**Pua:** ‘...in high school we were taught...to write what the book was about, who it was by and ...some background information and I’ve kept to that, but I think I’ve gone overboard with giving background information to the book...and what it is about in my introduction and...it’s kinda lost its focus, so you don’t actually answer the question in the introduction’.

Pua maintained that her participation in the teaching sessions contributed to the improvement in her academic essay writing skills.

(Transcript 5 p. 10 1.9.04)

**Pua:** ‘...I think...with you telling me that I need to actually write about six drafts before I’ve got the essay that I should be handing in...it’s just helped me to go through my essay and structure the sentences and paragraphs...I think the main point that you’ve taught me with the multiple drafts has helped a lot with improving my weaknesses’.

James reported that his essay writing problems were due largely to his inability to access specific reading texts and important information from texts which he needed for

his essay assignments. James did however acknowledge that his own lack of motivation in completing reading tasks retarded any real progress in his academic essay writing and reading skills.

(Transcript 1 p. 1 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘Could you tell me about some of the main difficulties you’ve had when it comes to assignment writing?’

**James:** ‘...the readings ‘cause most of the times the readings I found...too many readings’.

**Int:** ‘So when you say ‘readings’ do you mean finding the books or finding the information in the books or identifying ...the important quotes, or paraphrasing? Which part of the reading do you find difficult?’

**James:** ‘...finding the books that are relevant ...to the question because ...there’s too many...I’m not good at ... using the database and stuff like and also on quotes’.

Philip brought the final draft of one of his essay assignments to the first one-to-one teaching session. He wanted me to proof read it and give him feedback. The problem areas I identified in Philip’s writing included the following: his inability to write a clear, relevant introduction and conclusion to his essay; an absence of appropriate referencing for ideas and views quoted or paraphrased from texts, a lack of cohesion and key cohesive features within and between paragraphs, overdependence on the words and ideas in the text to express his own and little evidence of proof-reading or editing skills.

Philip himself stated that his main problems with essay assignments involved actually getting started with the writing process and not knowing how to break down the essay question in order to understand what he was being asked to do in the assignment. He also reported having difficulty locating and understanding academic reading texts which he needed for his essays.

(Transcript 1 p. 1 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘Could you tell me about some of the main difficulties you’ve had when it comes to assignment writing?’

**Philip:** ‘...actually being able to try and start it...where to start...when it comes to assignment is actually where to start’.

**Int:** ‘...when you say where to start, do you mean in terms of looking at the topic or the reading?’

**Philip:** ...actually trying to... break down the question...what they’re asking...what materials to look for and actually to start reading...and stuff like that’.

Philip pointed specifically to constructing and structuring paragraphs, his introductions and conclusions, and the lack of cohesion between his paragraphs as the main problem areas in his essay writing.

(Transcript 2 p. 3 29/7/04)

**Int:** ‘...now what do you think you need help with the most? Now you’ve mentioned introductions... introductions seem to crop up quite a bit with you’.

**Philip:** ‘...I think another... sort of area would be... to link up paragraphs ‘cause I’ve had a few...essays... come back to me with comments saying that the structure ...is a bit out of it...there’s just no structure to it...where I’ll be talking about one and then straight away I’d bring up another...Oh yeah sometimes... introduce new material in conclusion’.

The problems I highlighted in Philip’s essay were almost exactly the same as those Philip had identified himself. Philip did not return after our first one-to-one teaching session. The reason he offered was that he was busy with his other assignments.

Lisa attended the first one-to-one teaching session to inform me that she did not have any written assignments she needed help with. During the face-to-face interviews, however, Lisa pointed to problems she had with content and using academic grammar and vocabulary in her writing.

(Transcript 2 p. 2 30.7.04)

**Int:** ‘And when you say your writing...are you talking about the structure, the content, the way you write your sentences? What exactly do you mean when you’re talking about your writing needing help?’

**Lisa:** ‘...mainly the content of it...structure...that I get that stuff, but it’s usually the...content or what I’m writing and probably my like...the words that I put in ...I still feel like I’m in high school sometimes but I’m trying to improve it to university level...’

One of the main problems Lisa pointed to was locating reading texts relevant to her essay assignment and identifying relevant information within the text.

(Transcript 1 p. 1 12.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...could you tell me about some of the main difficulties you’ve had when it comes to assignment writing’.

**Lisa:** ‘...mainly the research, but where you have to gather all the information together and...sorting out what to write in each paragraph also...so what points I have to make and sometimes the conclusion as well’.

**Int:** ‘And when you say the research...what do you mean? Is it finding the books?’

**Lisa:** ‘Yeah’.

**Int:** ‘...or finding the information from the books?’

**Lisa:** ‘Yeah. Like I’m not too sure what’s relevant or not...like the stuff that I or ...the information I gather. I’m not too sure if it’s right for the assignment or it’s good enough mainly yeah’.

Lisa stated that she struggled on her own to understand the reading texts in order to complete her essay assignments. She reported feeling frustrated, confused and a lacking in confidence in managing the reading demands of her course.

(Transcript 2 p. 2 30.7.04)

**Lisa:** ‘...usually when I get resources and I read it...it’s really hard for me to pick out what’s really important or not really important to the assignment and then I just get really confused with myself but yeah ...that’s the bit where I’m not really that strong at...trying to find out from those like important information from resources’

**Int:** ‘... What are some of the things you’ve done to improve the situation?’

**Lisa:** ‘...I read over what...usually I make notes of what I think is important and then from there I try to ...see which one’s most relevant to the assignment or the question to the assignment...yeah that’s what I put...that much I do yeah’.

Through the one-to-one teaching sessions all five participants identified actual problem areas in their writing. All five reported experiencing problems with constructing and structuring paragraphs. Access to academic vocabulary and grammatical usage appropriate to academic writing was also reportedly problematic for all five participants as well. James, Philip and Lisa reported problems with the reading requirements of the essay assignment. A lack of motivation was also cited by James, Sefo and Philip as one of the reasons they struggled with completing assignments. James and Philip, in particular, reported problems understanding the specific requirements of the essay topic and relied heavily on the words of the text to express their views and ideas. Sefo, James and Philip did not demonstrate any evidence of editing skills in their essays and seemed to rely on others to edit their work. Moreover, course tutors’ feedback was reportedly not always constructive or helpful in helping James and Philip to understand where their weaknesses were in their writing nor why they were achieving low grades despite the amount of work they devoted to completing their essays.

Part of the problem with teaching academic discourses to students from ‘academically disadvantaged’ backgrounds was that it was, more often than not, an ongoing repetitive process (Lillis, 1997; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1982 in Gee, 1996). I found this to be true with Sefo and James.

#### **4.10.1 Evaluation of One-to-One Teaching Sessions**

Sefo asserted that a one-to-one teaching approach suited his style of learning. In Sefo’s opinion, our shared ethnicity helped him stay motivated.

(Transcript 4 p. 10 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** ‘Yeah probably my style of learning is for this ...I needed a sort of more one-on-one.

**Sefo:** ‘...and I found that I need that little push and yourself being a PI you know it helped...I have a better

understanding of putting the essay together and I know now that I need to get onto it as soon as possible...’.

Sefo also stated that my Samoan ethnicity was an important factor in his decision to seek help from me for his essay assignment. He felt more confident discussing his academic problems and ideas with me because of our common Samoan background.

(Transcript 4 p. 2, 3 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** ‘...with others like yourself... helping out... PIs and...it just makes it a bit easier...but if you probably weren’t a PI...I probably...wouldn’t’ve... come back maybe because I feel more comfortable speaking with you because you probably understand me... a bit more than possibly someone else...so yeah... that helped me immensely’.

Furthermore, Sefo expressed the view that Pacific Island students who were preparing for university studies would benefit from one-to-one teaching sessions. He added that it was important for teaching staff to be aware that students from non-mainstream backgrounds such as New Zealand-born Samoan students like himself, who were raised in traditional Samoan homes, brought to the learning environment certain cultural differences that impacted on their formal academic studies. Sefo pointed out that all too often mainstream teachers assumed that since New Zealand-born Samoan students were fluent in everyday, general English, they had access to the same English language skills as New Zealand-born Pakeha students to manage classroom discussions and assignments. This assumption had clearly disadvantaged New Zealand-born Samoan students, in Sefo’s view, like himself, who in fact were biingual English and Samoan speakers at home.

(Transcript 4 p. 13 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** ‘Because I think like a programme like this would probably be awesome for students that are coming through to study in order for them to achieve’.

(Transcript 4 p.13 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** ‘...like people make the mistake ‘Oh were you New Zealand-born... or are you Samoan?’ Okay, I’m New Zealand-born but I’m brought up Samoan style so that doesn’t mean that...I’m fluent...fluent in English or in the New Zealand culture and that... It just means that I was

brought up different and ...there is a gap there for me to try and catch up ... 'cause ...once I left school and I was back at home...I'm speaking Samoan and at school I speak English. So there is that sort of barrier for me and I think maybe for other students'.

Pua held firmly to the view that quality, teaching instruction from an experienced and skilled teacher with the appropriate background of academic writing knowledge would benefit both mainstream and Pacific Island students. However, she saw particular benefit in offering one-to-one sessions to Pacific Island students with English Language difficulties.

(Transcript 7 p. 12 14.11.04)

**Int:** '...Do you think that's the sort of thing that Pacific Island students need? Or do you think it's something that students who have difficulties at university regardless of their background need to get them through?'

**Pua:** '...this type of work...could help any student ...that is having trouble at university, but obviously...with the figures...that are being brought out, the students who are having problems with work like this or like English work, are particularly Pacific Island students and I think it just affects...their chances of getting better jobs. And...if they get better jobs, it improves their health...and...the environment they live in so I think...with little baby steps like this...having one-on-one teaching sessions will improve and I do think it is helpful...I mean there's just so many Pacific Island kids that need help with work like this and yeah...I do think they do need teaching sessions...I mean everyone else has the opportunity to find people that can help them...they are able to...tap into resources that...the people are of a standard that can help them to get better marks. Whereas Pacific Island kids have been given...mentors that are only... nineteen or twenty'.

**Pua:** ' I think people...who have proven qualifications and skills should be...used to help these kids, not people who have just graduated or ...just mediocre people who haven't really proven that...they've got experience in English to teach English skills. You know, it's one thing to speak the language but to help someone with an essay is really different'.

During our teaching sessions, Pua stated that my background as an English Language lecturer rendered the help that she received from me relevant and appropriate to her academic needs. Pua also reported that my Samoan ethnicity neither contributed nor impeded her progress in improving her academic writing skills during our one-to-one teaching sessions. Instead, she pointed to my competent teaching skills, honest communication and level of academic knowledge as key factors which impacted significantly on the progress she had made. Pua stated that for encouragement to be effective in the essay writing process, it needed to go hand-in-hand with practical help.

(Transcript 5 p. 9, 10 1.9.04)

**Pua:** ‘...I’d have to say the encouragement that I’ve had from you every step of the way and I put emphasis on every step of the way. You’ve been there to guide me through the writing process every step of the way, not like teachers or mentors do. They send you off with a couple of buzz phrases to ...follow when you’re writing an essay. But you’ve actually sat down with me and pointed out the different areas that I’ve improved on, the areas I don’t need to improve on which are my strengths and the areas that ...are really actually quite terrible...and you’re honest with how you help me....and I just think having someone to refer back to...and because you’re at the level that markers...like you know ...what the markers are looking for ‘cause you’ve been there. You’ve done that so when you tell me that I’ve done something right I feel confident in the knowledge that...that’s what the marker is also going to think’.

**Int:** ‘Has it had anything at all to do with the fact that I am Samoan?’

**Pua:** ‘No...I think it’s the competent way that you actually teach me. It’s hard to explain...but it’s just that what I said before...you’re not patronizing, that’s for one, you know, and you’re honest’.

(Transcript 5 p. 10 1.9.04)

**Pua:** ‘I think that’s why anyone goes to someone for help. It’s because they feel that they’re ...in a higher level than you are, you know, more experienced and more knowledgeable than you are’.



The one-to-one teaching sessions did highlight a lack of understanding, in particular, where Sefo, James, Lisa and Philip were concerned in how to apply academic discourses effectively to the reading and writing requirements of academic essay assignments. It also highlighted how James, Philip and Lisa in particular would continue to experience problems with academic essay writing partly because they were not aware of the extent of the actual academic writing and reading problems they had to address in order to make any real progress to the standard of their essay writing skills and grades. Both Pua and Sefo pointed to the benefits of offering one-to-one teaching sessions to Pacific Island students with minimum entry qualifications from traditional bilingual Samoan backgrounds. Pua also pointed to the benefits of this type of teaching session for any student seeking help with their essay assignments. It was difficult to gauge the long-term benefits of this type of teaching session. The short term benefits reported by Sefo, James and Pua were, however, positive.

#### **4.11 Respondents' Feedback on Tutors' Comments and Assessment of Essays**

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Tutors' written comments were also used as part of the data in this study. Respondents were asked via the questionnaire for their views on tutors' feedback and comments in their essays. Five of the respondents were also interviewed face-to-face to provide further comment on their written responses.

Table 4. 6 (p. 105) below is a summary of the feedback on tutors' comments and assessment of their assignments from the 14 respondents (see Appendix 1, pp. 8-9). Eight of the 14 respondents stated that their tutors' comments were **relevant, clear and helpful and easy to understand**. Only one respondent described their tutor's comments as **difficult to understand**. Five respondents stated that their tutors' comments were **too vague and the meaning unclear**. Three respondents described their tutors' comments as **irrelevant and unnecessary details** and **difficult to read**.

**Table 4. 6: Student Feedback on Tutor Assessment of Essays**

Gender	Age	Relevant & helpful	Clear & helpful	Easy to understand	Difficult to understand	Too vague & Meaning unclear	Irrelevant & unnecessary details	Writing difficult to read
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%
F	18-20	43	35.7	35.7	0	14.3	14.3	7.2
M	18-20	0	0	0	0	14.3	7.2	7.2
F	21-25	7.2	14.3	14.3	0	7.2	0	7.2
F	26-30	7.2	7.2	7.2	0	0	0	0
F	31-40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
M	31-40	0	0	0	7.2	0	0	0

Sefo was critical of his tutors' feedback in the questionnaire. He stated that the language his tutors used when writing comments on his essay was difficult to understand. He also added that he had only ever written three academic essays in his life and therefore needed frequent clarification from tutors about their comments. During face-to-face interviews, however, Sefo expressed appreciation of his tutor's detailed feedback in his essay. In fact, he reported finding her comments to be accurate and useful.

(Transcript 4 p. 7 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** '...If I go through it...there's probably some stuff I might agree with or disagree with... then I can sit down and ... talk with her about it ...I mean if there's something wrong you know I'm most appreciative of

someone...pointing it out to me... and I have a look and...then I'll make a decision whether...I'll take it on board or whether I'll just discard what she says'.

**Int:** '...So ...what do you think of...the writing and she has got quite a lot of writing on each page...in both columns, the left and the right columns? ...How useful is that to you?'

**Sefo:** 'It's quite useful... She's got a lot of...*colloquialisms*... Like a word I've used, words like '*off par*'... she's commented on...good bits and pieces... that I've written in there...she's telling me how to start...She's just put in suggestions on how I should start

**Sefo:** '... I need to be precise... because it doesn't give an exact meaning or context or something like that'

**Sefo:** 'And also ...if it's a quote then I should be putting it in... quotation marks... and it should be accompanied by a page reference'.

It is not clear whether his critical views in the questionnaire were referring to tutors' comments in general. For the essay assignment he discussed with me during the one-to-one teaching sessions, Sefo stated that he found his tutors' comments to be both positive and useful.

(Transcript 4 p. 8 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** '...even here you know, 'Needs a paragraph transition'...here...'

**Sefo:** 'Next step. Yeah'.

**Int:** '...and do a little more ...deeper analysis...so you think...her comments are very useful to you?'

**Sefo:** 'Yeah, useful...in that obviously I'm going to take it on board. I just reckon that they're quite positive...for me...'

Sefo pointed to the brief summary of his tutors' comments at the end of his essay as helpful.

(Transcript 4 p. 9 18.11.04)

**Int:** '...Now what about her final summary at the end? ...do you think that she's repeating anything or do you

think it really does sum up what ...you've done in terms of the overall essay?'

**Sefo:** 'Yeah it sort of does sum up... what I've done...she's just reiterating what she's basically put through... on my marking on the sides and I need to be a bit more clearer...and just organizing them as a coherent summary'.

Pua was positive about the feedback she had received from her tutors at university in both her written questionnaire and during face-to-face interviews. She stated that the tutors comments and explanations were relevant, clear and helpful and that her tutor had accurately identified both her strengths and weaknesses in her writing. Pua also found the language used by her tutors easy to understand. She reiterated her views again during the face-to-face interviews.

(Transcript 1 p. 8 11.7.04)

**Pua:** '... 'They're clear...they point out... very clearly what you've done wrong ...but in saying that they also... really try to encourage the good points that you've done in the essay and so when you've got both good and bad comments in the... essay... not only peeps your confidence up thinking, 'Oh, I can actually write an essay ' but when you see the mistakes, you have the confidence to ...think 'Oh, well, yes I have mistakes and I know that next time I won't be doing those mistakes again'...

**Int:** '...so you...actually work...from the comments?'

**Pua:** 'Yeah'.

**Int:** 'And they are useful?'

**Pua:** 'Yes'.

James stated in the written questionnaire that tutors' comments in his essays were **too vague, too general and irrelevant**. He also stated that he did not understand what his tutor meant by some of the written comments. Nor could he read his tutor's writing. James was critical of the lack of comments from his tutor for his second essay

assignment which he had sought help for from me through the one-to-one teaching sessions.

(Transcript 6 p. 7, 8 12.11.04)

**Int:** 'Now, let's look at your tutor's comments. Do you think they were fair, accurate, useful, helpful?'

**James:** '...I think she was just happy to see an improvement and that's why she didn't write much'.

**Int:** '...what else do you want to say about your tutor's comments?'

**James:** '...there aren't enough comments'.

**Int:** '...you would've preferred some more comments?'

**James:** 'Maybe. Yeah'

**Int:** 'Okay about what in particular?'

**James:** 'Just about areas that I could've improved in just like the last one'.

Philip also stated in the questionnaire that tutors' comments in his essay were **irrelevant, too vague and included too much detail**. Although Philip felt confused about his tutor's assessment of his work, he did not discuss his concerns with his tutor.

(Transcript 1 p. 5 22.7.04)

**Int:** '...do you ever go back to them and discuss their comments with them when you're not sure whether they've been helpful or whether ...you think you've done a good job?'

**Philip:** 'No...that's the problem with me'.

During the face-to-face interviews, Philip also expressed his dissatisfaction with his tutor's comments given the amount of work he had invested in his assignment. In Philip's view, his tutors' comments did not reflect an appreciation of his hard work. Nevertheless, Philip maintained that the comments in his assignments were fair some of the time.

(Transcript 1 p. 4 22.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...tell me what you think about teachers’ or tutors’ comments on your assignments’.

**Philip:** ‘...sometimes...I think that they’re fair because when I think about...the effort and the amount of work that I put into it...but then I think ‘Yeah, they’re fair comments’ but...there’s been times when...I put a lot of work into the essay and I think ‘Oh I think this is a good essay’...and then they come up with their...some comments which are...I sort of wouldn’t think are fair or I disagree with. But sometimes I think ‘Yeah they’re pretty fair comments because they’ve done it before. They know what they’re talking about and I’m just learning to do it’.

Lisa was positive about tutors’ feedback in the questionnaire stating that tutors’ comments were **helpful, tutors’ explanations were clear and helpful and the language that tutors used was easy to understand**. During face-to-face interviews, Lisa pointed to comments from the teachers at high school as being fair and helpful.

(Transcript 1 p. 6,7 12.7.04)

**Int:** ‘...What about at school, at high school? What sort of comments...can you remember the sorts of comments that perhaps...your teachers gave you on assignments that you’d done? Let’s say in your 7<sup>th</sup> form’.

**Lisa:** ‘Yeah, in 7<sup>th</sup> form. ...usually I got the...’Have you read the book?’, ...’Have you not given examples?’...stuff like that... ‘Haven’t explained it properly’ and ...that’s the general stuff...I’m not too sure what else’.

**Int:** ‘And...do you think that was fair?’

**Lisa:** ‘Yeah it was’.

**Int:** ‘Were they helpful?’

**Lisa:** ‘Yep, they were’.

Pua, who participated fully in the teaching sessions and in her mainstream tutorials, was positive about her tutors’ written feedback in both the questionnaire and during

interviews. The tutors' written comments reflected Pua's clear understanding of the specific requirements of the essay assignment. Sefo's views about tutor comments were somewhat contradictory. Responses from James and Philip suggested that their understanding of the requirements of the essay assignment was quite different from that of the tutor who marked their work. James and Philip did not approach their course tutors to discuss their confusion or dissatisfaction with his/her comments or lack thereof and grades after receiving their essays back. Lisa reported both in the questionnaire and during the interview that she thought her teachers' comments were fair. However, she did not elaborate on her opinion further.

The general consensus has been that teachers should provide feedback on both content and form. Teachers' general comments on first drafts and the rewriting process by students, without feedback, were both seen as effective means of improving students' writing (Fatham & Whalley, 1990, p. 186).

#### **4.12          *Actual Academic Writing Problems of Sub-Group of Five Participants***

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The following data was taken from tutors' written comments in the essays of some of the participants and from interviews and discussions between participants and myself during one-to-one teaching sessions. The data revealed a number of inconsistencies between what participants' had listed in the questionnaire as their academic writing skills on the one hand, and the actual problems evident in their essay writing, on the other.

Sefo received a B- grade for an essay assignment for which he had sought help through teaching sessions with me. His tutor pointed to several weaknesses he had not identified in the questionnaire. For example, s/he pointed out that his writing lacked key cohesive features and cohesion between sentences: **'make sure different parts of the sentence relate logically to each other; need clear sentence transition; this is a key example but does it belong in the introduction; need a paragraph transition here, this is an abrupt jump'**. Punctuation was also a problem area in Sefo's writing



noted by his tutor: **‘ use pairs of commas to separate extra info from the main clause’.**

Although Sefo had indicated in the questionnaire that he fully understood how to use academic vocabulary and grammatical structures in his essay, his tutor pointed to weaknesses in both these areas. For example, his tutor replaced **moreover** with **however, to finally arrive at** with **in favour of, alas** with **at last**, and **is** with **are part of**. Overuse of colloquial phrases, for example, **‘off par, puts a smile on the face of, thanks but no thanks, in the too hard basket, to bite the bullet’**, was also highlighted in his tutor’s comments: **‘colloquial and imprecise: what exactly does this mean in this context & avoid colloquialisms in formal essays; meaning unclear’.**

Sefo’s tutor also commented on the absence of referencing features in his essay: **‘this is a quote so needs to be enclosed in quotation marks and should be accompanied by a page reference’**

His tutor summed up Sefo’s academic writing skills at the end of his essay in the following way: **“As far as your academic writing is concerned, the areas to concentrate on, as your writing continues to develop, are paragraph structure and development, and precise and concise expression”.**

The tutor’s written comments and suggestions in Sefo’s essay covered problems areas in both the content and structural aspects of his writing. S/he also provided clear explanations for the errors in his writing and corrected these errors as well.

Sefo’s problem of using implicit language in his writing which prevented his intended meaning from coming through more clearly was highlighted in the feedback he received from his tutor.

(Transcript 4 p. 8 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** ‘...I know what I’ve got in my mind and what I want to say... See ‘cause I’ve got this thing, ‘Well, if I know what I’m talking about then that person that’s reading it should know what I’m talking about’. And I think that’s half the problem’.

Pua received an A- grade for both essay assignments she sought help for from teaching sessions with me. The tutors’ comments highlighted some problems with structuring

paragraphs in Pua's writing: **'brilliant first paragraph, sometimes you need to clarify subjects of sentences with several clauses; one sentence is not sufficient for a paragraph –join to previous paragraph, same paragraph or new one?'** The tutor also highlighted frequent occurrences of punctuation errors in Pua's writing for both essays.

Tutor's comments at the end of essay 1 identified a number of strengths in Pua's writing: **'This is a lucid, engaging piece of writing that uses a variety of modes successfully. The structure is complex but it seems effortless, the overarching narrative punctuated with intense detailed narrative 'moments' allows you to blend the expository work seamlessly with the narrative. Your reflections are well-reasoned and clearly expressed...Well done'**.

For essay 2 her tutor wrote: **'This is a difficult essay to summarise, but you make an admirable attempt: your summary is comprehensive, covering all the central ideas of (...)'s) text. You discuss individual strands of her argument intelligently, but ideally there would be more of a sense of (...)'s) argument as a unified whole; stronger paragraph transitions may have helped here. in general, though, your evaluative work is sound, and I thought your conclusion was well judged. Well done.'**

This tutor commented on and offered suggestions for weaknesses and problem areas in both the content and structural aspects of Pua's writing. Written comments from Pua's tutor would suggest that while Pua recognised that her writing demonstrated structural weaknesses in her paragraphs, she had the ability to address these weaknesses and produce academic essays of a high standard. More careful editing by Pua of her writing could also have contributed to her high grades.

Pua expressed satisfaction with the A- grade she received for this essay, considering that her tutor had a reputation for being a 'hard marker'. She also agreed with the errors that the tutor had identified in her writing. However, deducting marks for mechanical errors which did not affect the overall quality of her writing was an aspect of her tutor's marking that Pua disputed.

(Transcript 5 p. 3 1.9.04)

**Pua:** ‘...So maybe...I’m trying to think of why she’d pick me up on those...so harshly and I think that’s why because we’ve been covering them so intensely over the last couple of weeks’.

Pua focused mainly on the tutor’s comments at the end of the essay which summarized the overall strengths and weaknesses of her essay. She found these final comments to be quite encouraging and also took on board the suggestions offered by her tutor, in relation to editing local grammar errors more carefully.

(Transcript 5 p.10 1.9.04)

**Pua:** ‘I take notice of her ones at the back. I mean they’re quite encouraging.

**Int:** ‘At the end of the essay, you mean?’

**Pua:** ‘...I think what I am going to take notice of now are my careless errors. I’m gonna be more careful with editing...’

(Transcript 5 p. 11 1.9.04)

**Pua:** ‘...I think what she wrote at the end...it does show that she does understand what she’s doing and she could appreciate what I’d written in my personal narrative. So I’m not too hard on her. I just know that I’m gonna have to...like watch out for those little mistakes because I know that she’s the type of marker that really picks up on those’.

While Pua noted that her tutor’s writing was easy to read and agreed with most of the comments she wrote, she did, however, challenge her tutor comments on problems with transitions in Pua’s writing.

(Transcript 7 p. 5, 6 13.11.04)

**Pua:** ‘Yeah her writing is pretty easy to read...I mean I didn’t think my transitions were that bad...I do agree that...I could’ve developed my personal experience a bit more ‘cause I think I only wrote a sentence on that so you know if I was using that as evidence I didn’t use enough of it’.

**Int:** ‘ do you actually take the comments that she writes on your essays and use them in your next assignment?’

**Pua:** ‘... I can take comments like the ‘transitions’...having to make the transitions stronger...that type of comment, I can use’.

James was disappointed with the D+ grade he received for the first essay assignment he had brought to the one-to-one teaching sessions with me. James, maintained that the low grade did not reflect the amount of time and effort he had devoted to completing his essay.

(Transcript 5 p. 1 15.10.04)

**Int:** ‘...Tell me what are your feelings and thoughts about her comments?’

**James:** ‘...I was quite...disappointed with my marks...but ...I guess I deserved it. But I did spend a lot of time on this essay, longer than any other essay I’ve writ on...I’m quite proud of myself in that sense’.

James received a D+ for essay assignment 1 and B for his second essay assignment which he had asked me to help him with through the teaching sessions. James’s tutor identified a number of serious problems in his first essay. S/he noted, for example, that James’s writing lacked any clear cohesion and did not include key cohesive features: **‘The flow of the argument is often interrupted by the various leaps of thought you make throughout the essay. This makes it difficult to pick up on and follow your line of reasoning.** Poor sentence structure was also noted by his tutor: **‘You need to watch your sentence construction, especially the use of ‘and’ as the first word in the sentence’.** James had not answered the actual assignment question: **‘Though much of the material you highlight is interesting it failsto adequately address the essay question’.** His tutor also highlighted the absence of essential referencing features in James’s essay: **‘You often make generic statements that have not been adequately evidenced or referenced. As such they are more opinions than fact and so need to be expressed accordingly; your bibliography and endnotes need tightening!** James’s overuse of a colloquial style of writing was also noted by his tutor: **‘Your colloquial style of articulation although makes for interesting reading does involve many unpacked assumptions. You need to work on this.**

James’s tutor commented mainly on content in James’s essay. Grammatical and vocabulary errors highlighted by James’s tutor throughout the essay were corrected.

However, no explanation accompanied these corrections. There was very little evidence of careful editing having taken place in the final copy of James's first essay which he submitted for marking.

In James's second essay assignment for which he received a B, there was a noticeable absence of tutor's written comments or suggestions within the essay itself. The tutor used ticks to indicate features of James's writing, s/he agreed with and wrote as a final comment at the end of the essay: '**This is good...wonderful progress from 1<sup>st</sup> essay.** Problem areas which I noted that were still evident in James's writing in this second assignment included: failure to answer the second part of the assignment question, a lack of cohesion within and between paragraphs, over-dependence on the 'voice' of author in reading texts to express his views, and a weak introduction and conclusion. James himself reiterated the observation I made about the lack of cohesion within and between his paragraphs.

(Transcript 6 p. 7 12.11.04)

**Int:** '...so what do you think the main problems are still in ...your assignment writing?'

**James:** '...I think trying to...link my paragraphs...Because ...when I was writing ...the essay...I was just sort of writing paragraphs like...on points...that I had but I didn't really...link them ...together when I brought the paragraphs together...and so I think that's something that I need to look at'.

I did, however, concur with the comment made at the end of James's essay by his tutor, that he had made some progress in his essay writing skills between the first and second essay. The one-to-one teaching sessions which James attended between Essay 1 and Essay 2 could have contributed to the improvement evident in the second essay.

The tutor's comments in James's essay highlighted serious grammar, vocabulary and referencing problems.

(Transcript 5 p. 2 15.10.04)

**Int:** '...Now...briefly what would you say in summary are the key points that you've got to remember for the next essay?'

**James:** ‘...more formal work...I tend to use ‘and’ a lot so...I got to try and expand my vocab...I need to ...work on my referencing...’.

In James’s second essay, for which he received a B grade, there were no written comments from his tutor throughout this essay. Her brief comment at the end of the essay offered one suggestion only.

(Transcript 6 p. 5, 6 12.11.04)

**Int:** ‘What mark did you get?’

**James:** ‘I got a B’.

**Int:** ‘... How do you feel about the grade you received for this assignment?’

**James:** ‘Oh, I should’ve done better ‘cause...considering...I missed out the other part of ...the question ...If I did...I could’ve got a better grade than that’.

**Int:** ‘...because it was quite a substantial amount of information that was left out...what were the positive things that you feel you did in this essay that perhaps you didn’t do in the last one?’

James’s disappointment at the D+ he received for his first essay mirrored those of the Pacific Island high school students in Jones’s (1991, p. 57) study who could not understand why their grades for assignments and exams were so low despite the fact they had worked hard in class. . On the other hand, Scarcella (2002, p. 220) pointed out that the practice amongst some teachers of not providing the necessary corrective feedback on students’ writing, or giving students high grades on written assignments in which the academic English language skills were, in fact, of a very poor standard, merely reinforced the inaccuracy of their perception in relation to the level of their academic English skills. English (1999, p. 32) in her study with Japanese students in British universities also included discussion with the student about the tutor’s written comments in order to bridge the gap between the tutor’s actual expectations, on the one hand, and the student’s perception of tutors’ expectations on the other. English found this approach to work equally well with students whose levels of English language competence and academic literacy awareness varied quite considerably in some cases.

Students' perception of their own written work sometimes differed greatly from the perceptions of those who assessed their work (English, 1999; Gay, Jones & Jones, 1999).

All five participants, in fact, stated that they experienced problems with introductions and conclusions, constructing and structuring paragraphs and using vocabulary and grammatical structures appropriate to academic writing requirements at tertiary level. Referencing within and at the end of the essay was a real problem for Sefo, James and Philip in their essays. Evidence from tutors' written comments suggest that the participants' perception of their academic writing problems and some of the actual problems evident in their writing was somewhat confused.

English (1999) in her study with Japanese students studying in British universities focused on the gap between what the student understood to be valuable and what the teacher/marker/university determined as valuable. She argued that what was ignored was the need for students not simply just to 'know' the conventions and forms of the so-called academic style but also to understand how this style and its conventions could be used to represent and construct students' own meanings. Her focus was, therefore, on content organisation, the writer's 'voice', and discourse organisation or the management of ideas and the development of the argument. Cohesive relations, sequencing, paragraph development and the overall structure of the text were given particular attention by English (1999, p. 17).

I myself was not aware of the extent of the deficiencies in my academic writing and reading skills until I became an English language teacher and taught academic essay writing skills to university students from minority communities like my own. It was only then that I came to understand more fully how to apply the conventions of academic essay writing to specific writing genres and to access, summarise, paraphrase analyse and reference information from reading texts.

One other problematic feature of my own writing as a student which was also a problem in the writing of some of the participants in this study was an overdependence on the words and ideas of the text to express my ideas and views. Consequently, I never questioned, refuted, challenged or discussed the views or ideas within the text; they were simply copied. It was also my belief that my world view and background of knowledge were irrelevant to my formal, academic studies.

#### **4.13 External Factors that Impacted on Completion of Essay Assignments**

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Where the catchment area of a school draws upon a lower working-class community, it is likely, Bernstein (1990, p. 77) asserts, that the school will adopt strategies which will affect both the content and the way school knowledge are taught to this group of students. As a consequence, the consciousness of students is differentially and invidiously regulated according to their socio-economic background and their families' communicative practices in the home. The transcripts below illustrate some of the cultural and communicative practices in the homes of the five participants which impact on their studies and the extent to which practices within the academic environment reinforce practices of the home which disadvantage these students academically.

Sefo, for example, reported having to rely heavily on extensions to complete his essay assignments.

(Transcript 4 p. 5 18.11.04)

**Int:** '...Now, let's talk about extensions...how many extensions have you had to have ...during this course that you've enrolled in and for what Papers...and why?'

**Sefo:** '...There's always an extension...there was one for the first assignment, the second assignment and the only other essay I've ever written... was an extension as well...'

Sefo also pointed to a lack of motivation as his biggest problem in 'putting pen to paper' and the need for continued support from teaching staff to keep him 'on track' with his assignments.

(Transcript 4 p. 2 18.11.04)

**Sefo:** 'Motivation was probably the biggest setback for me...putting the pen to paper and actually...setting aside time to actually do it. It was the fear of just stepping out...and going and attacking it...I sort of just sat back and thought '...no I'll do it tomorrow ... I had that much fear of actually doing the... essay that I just walked away from it until you gave me a call that morning...then I



knew 'Oh well...you know obviously... you invested some time in me and you know ...I'm not one to turn away from a commitment so I thought I better get back on track and...try and get this done'.

James stated that his requests for extensions were granted on the understanding that he was struggling with the assignment topic and readings.

(Transcript 5 p. 8 15.10.04)

**Int:** '...Why did she extend everybody's deadline?'

**James:** 'Oh not everyone, just ...the special ones...because...a few weeks ago we told her...that we were struggling...and...she sort of sympathised with us and she said 'Oh yeah okay...just hand it in before the exam'...and so we got another month to work on this...which was really nice of her'.

James justified his requests for extensions to complete his essay assignments on the basis that he experienced problems with course readings. James was given extensions for both assignment questions that he brought to the one-to-one teaching sessions.

(Transcript 6 p. 1 12.11.04)

**Int:** '...I just wanted to ask you a question about...extensions. Have you found that they've been of use to you...in meeting the deadlines?'

**James:** '...I had to...get through the readings first because...I struggled a lot with the readings...they're boring reading so it took me a while to get a grasp ...of what I was supposed to...get out of those readings and that's why the extension was good. I think I needed that extension.

**Int:** '...So have you had to have an extension for all your assignments or only for certain assignments?'

**James:** '...just this one because...the topic I did my essay on...the lecture on that topic was the last lecture. So ...that really gave me only about two weeks to work on my essay and I needed ...more time and that's why...she gave me an extension'.

**Int:** ‘Okay so you needed more time than the two weeks because of the lecture...how much time ...does the reading...component take for you in preparing for the essays?’

**James:** ‘...depending on what the readings are...whether they’re interesting or not interesting...I can maybe get through them in a week...usually when I sit down and I start reading my attention span...is quite short’.

Lisa stated that it was harder for Samoan students to learn in an academic environment because of either their home backgrounds or their inability to apply themselves to their studies due in part, in her view, to a lack of motivation in class.

(Transcript 1 p. 5 12.7.04)

**Lisa:** ‘...I don’t know, maybe it’s all to do with background and stuff like that. You know how you’re brought up but yes I think it is harder for us to learn than other students...maybe because we don’t pay attention and stuff’.

Pua, on the other hand, brought to her university studies well-established study routines and practices which ensured that she always handed her assignments in on time.

(Transcript 7 p. 6 13.11.04)

**Int:** ‘...Have you ever had to ask for an extension for your essays this semester?’

**Pua:** ‘No

**Int:** ‘...How do you manage to get your assignments in on time?’

**Pua:** ‘...I wouldn’t say I’ve the best time management, but I know that when you’ve got a deadline for an essay...I just don’t think I’ve ever been brought up to think...you know asking for an extension...I just don’t think it’s appropriate...I mean everyone’s been given the same amount of time...maybe in, you know, a family tragedy...but I mean just if you’re having difficulty with it, I don’t think that deserves an extension... I know if I’m

finding it difficult that won't be a reason to ask for an extension'.

Pua pointed out that poor time management skills, dependence on extensions to complete essay assignments, and using family and other commitments to justify not completing assignments or preparing adequately for an exam were prevalent practices amongst her Polynesian friends.

(Transcript 7 p. 7 13.11.04)

**Pua:** 'I think time management would be at the top of the list...and just the way they allocate time to...different activities in their lives. Like they know that they've got an essay or an exam coming up, but they'll spend a whole day at church. And I know church is important and I'm not taking anything away from it, but in the immediate future the exam and essay should take preference, you know...and I think saying that 'I've got to go to church' or 'I've got to go to a family function' is just an excuse to avoid doing an essay or studying for an exam because everyone does it in their own way.... and they're kind've accepting Cs and Ds as, you know, as normal'.

**Int:** 'Do you think that's one of reasons...is ...their approach to their studies?'

**Pua:** 'I think the approach and...I'm speaking from my own experience, because when I get bad marks, these are the things that let me down, is my time management, the way I allocate time to different activities and also the importance that I place on the exam or the assignment...or the essay. Those are the factors that...could contribute to a bad mark'.

Although critical of students who overused the extension system to complete their assignments because they found the coursework difficult, Pua, nevertheless acceded that an 'exception' to the rule should be made for New Zealand-born students whose mother tongue was not English and who had to compete alongside mainstream native speakers of English already familiar with the formal academic discourses of the university system.

(Transcript 7 p. 6 13.11.04)

**Pua:** '...I mean I'm still saying that they shouldn't ask for an extension but ...you kind've see where they're coming from, when they do ask for an extension. You know, if

you come from a background where everyone speaks a different language to English and when you've never really been exposed to academic writing or reading...I could see how it could be a lot more difficult. And you know people say 'Oh but Asian kids are able to do this'. Yeah but they're taught academic English whereas Pacific Island kids are taught the same...you know follow the same English curriculum that kids who come from English-speaking backgrounds do. So I still don't think they should get an extension. What they should be getting is probably one-on-one time with the tutor or with the lecturer'.

External factors such as family and social commitments, poor motivation and time management skills caused New Zealand-born Samoan students in this study from traditional Samoan homes to depend heavily on extensions to complete their essay assignments. Pua experienced problems with time management skills but had developed appropriate strategies to ensure that she was still able to complete her assignments and hand them in on time. Sefo, James and Philip relied solely on extensions for essay assignments to help them manage their family and social commitments and other external factors which prevented them from completing their assignments on time.

## **5 Chapter 5: Conclusions**

### ***5.1 Introduction***

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The critical approach which informed this study was grounded in Bernstein's theories on pedagogic practices in mainstream education which have disadvantaged minority students from working-class communities. This study was not, however, limited to New Zealand-born Samoan participants from working class communities (see Appendix 1, pp. 3). It included a New Zealand-born Samoan participant from a middle-class home as well. An inter-generational commentary was also offered by myself, the New Zealand-born Samoan researcher, to add a personal and professional perspective, where relevant, to the study. My assistant contacted prospective participants for the study through her high school and social networks. Fourteen of the twenty students who were approached, completed and returned the questionnaire, through my assistant. All fourteen respondents who completed the questionnaire were enrolled in full-time study at three tertiary institutions in Auckland. Thirteen had attended either a low or middle decile high school, and one had attended a high decile 10 high school.

The sub-group of five participants, who were interviewed face-to-face, presented as fluent speakers of general, everyday English; the two male participants who identified as bilingual speakers of Samoan and English also used one or two Samoan words and phrases during face-to-face interviews with the understanding that I was also fluent in Samoan. This study sought to understand the academic writing problems of New Zealand-born Samoan students through the personal and individual narratives of the participants. English and Samoan were both accepted as legitimate languages of communication in this research study, to allow participants to use either or both language(s) if they so wished. The discussion below will review the extent to which focus questions 1-5 in Chapter 3 have been answered.

#### **5.1.1 Home Backgrounds of New Zealand-born Samoan Students**

Samoan parents of participants in the study from traditional Samoan homes viewed their primary responsibility in the education of their children as financial rather than

academic. Reported verbal encouragement which this group of participants received from home, of itself, proved to be insufficient in the highly competitive, academic environment where middle-class students from well-resourced, privileged homes were able to exploit their home advantage fully. Verbal encouragement was seen as largely ineffective, in particular, for participants with minimum entry qualifications from bilingual, traditional Samoan homes, as it was not reinforced by appropriate resources, structures and routines in the home to meet the rigorous demands of academic study at school and university. The participants who pointed to verbal encouragement from home as the only motivating force behind working hard at school and university also experienced problems with poor time management skills, inadequate preparation for academic studies at high school, a low self-confidence and a lack of resources and structures in the home to provide the academic support needed to reinforce the parents' and family's verbal encouragement.

Traditional Samoan communicative and authoritarian practices were also found to impact on the academic performance and achievement levels of the New Zealand-born Samoan participants in this study who enrolled at university with minimum entry qualifications. Participants from traditional Samoan homes reportedly lacked the confidence and academic discourse skills to interact with mainstream students and teaching staff. Furthermore, they depended almost entirely on Pacific Island teaching and support staff for their academic learning needs. It is interesting to note that in traditional Samoan homes, teachers, parents and people who hold important positions within the family and community are revered as authority figures. Their authority is respected and accepted without question. The unwillingness of the participants from traditional Samoan families in this study to discuss the written comments and grades in their essays with their tutors exacerbated their confusion, resulting in little or no progress in understanding how to improve academic writing problems identified in their essays. The assumption was that the teacher was the sole 'authority' on the knowledge students were attempting to access and was therefore 'right' and should not be questioned or challenged.

The respondents in this study pointed to effective communication skills, competent English language skills, approachability in teachers, the necessary academic knowledge and the ability to motivate students, along with friendliness and effective teaching skills as more important and relevant to their academic needs than the Samoan ethnicity of a

teacher. The Samoan ethnicity of teaching staff was listed by all except one of the respondent in the questionnaire as irrelevant or unnecessary to their academic needs.

The lack of exposure of this cohort of New Zealand-born Samoan students to formal academic discourses outside the school clearly disadvantaged them in classes where they were not familiar with the communicative practices of mainstream teaching staff. Hence they were not able to compete effectively alongside mainstream, middle-class students already experienced and skilled in the use of these same discourses.

This study highlighted that access alone to formal academic discourses at university is, in itself, insufficient in developing these same discourses to a level that would meet the academic speaking and writing needs of New Zealand-born Samoan students from academically disadvantaged backgrounds sufficiently in class. What was needed, in fact, was an understanding and frequent practice of appropriate academic discourses to optimize participation in the academic community of the university.

The New Zealand-born Samoan participant, in this study, from a middle-class, monolingual English speaking home was already well-equipped with the necessary academic language skills valued by the school and university culture. She was therefore able to compete effectively alongside other middle-class students at school and at university. Despite the reported ineffective communicative and teaching practices of high school teachers, being instrumental in her below average grades for assignments and internal exams in her senior years at high school, this student was still able to achieve above average academic results in national, external exams. This student clearly did not need to access Pacific Island teaching and support staff or programmes to assist her in her academic studies at university.

All the respondents in this study spoke mainly or only English at home. Fluency in Samoan and the Samoan ethnicity of teaching staff were reported as irrelevant to their academic and everyday needs within the wider New Zealand community where they pointed to the language of instruction and communication as English. The participants in this study, nevertheless, acknowledged the importance for them of being a fluent speaker of Samoan within extended family and social gatherings in the wider Samoan community.

### **5.1.2 Academic qualifications of New Zealand-born Samoan Students from Low and Middle Decile High Schools**

Research which foregrounds the ‘deficiencies’ of Pacific Island students’ home and language backgrounds as the main cause of their academic failure in mainstream education minimizes the role that teachers play in this failure. In other words, ineffective teaching methodologies and practices within the education system escape the scrutiny of researchers when the focus of research is diverted to the home background of ‘disadvantaged’ students in an effort to attribute primary cause for academic disadvantage away from the education system.

Data from the questionnaire pointed to low academic achievement levels of New Zealand-born Samoan respondents in both low and middle decile high schools. Only three of the 14 respondents who completed the questionnaire achieved either an A or B bursary, while the remaining 11 achieved minimum entry qualifications. These included University Entrance, Sixth Form Certificate, NCEA level 3 or no formal qualifications at all. C grade passes accounted for 59.4% of all passes for high school qualifications (see Appendix 1, pp. 2-3).

The disproportionately high number of minimum entry qualifications of New Zealand-born Samoan respondents, in this study, across both low and middle decile high schools would suggest a failure on the part of these low and middle decile high schools to meet the specific academic needs of this cohort of students. Furthermore, the participants’ perception of their academic writing problems and their actual academic writing problems did not, in fact, concur. Since academic success is directly linked to one’s ability to write well, this mis-perception amongst New Zealand-born Samoan participants from both low and middle decile high schools in this study would suggest more serious attention be given to this problem.

### **5.1.3 Teacher Ethnicity and Academic Success in Tertiary Institutions**

The New Zealand-born Samoan participants from traditional Samoan homes, where both Samoan and English were spoken, particularly those with minimum entry



qualifications, depended almost entirely on the Pacific Island support staff and programmes to assist them in understanding their assignments and lecture notes. While their shared ethnicity and cultural background accommodated the lack of confidence on the part of New Zealand-born Samoan students from working class communities who were new to the university environment, there was no evidence in this study to suggest that the Samoan ethnicity of the teacher, per se, enhanced the academic achievement levels of the same students.

The New Zealand-born Samoan participants in this group assumed that all tutors and lecturers at university had the academic knowledge, background of experience and skills to understand and meet their particular academic needs. Those who opted to access support from Pacific Island teaching and support staff reported that they did so because they felt more comfortable with staff who shared the same ethnicity and culture as theirs. All the participants in this study who sought help from Pacific Island teaching and support staff had entered university with minimum entry qualifications and were from traditional Samoan homes. The essays of these same participants showed clear evidence of serious gaps in their understanding of the specific requirements of an academic essay, very limited academic reading skills, an over-dependence on the words of the text to express their own ideas and little evidence of contextually appropriate academic grammar and vocabulary. Some of the participants reported that the teaching methodology used by Pacific Island teaching staff was largely ineffective and irrelevant to their academic writing needs.

Four of the five participants who attended the first one-to-one teaching session with me had enrolled at university with minimum entry qualifications. These participants reported having to rely heavily on extensions to complete essay assignments due to poor time management skills, and family and/or social commitments. The three participants who continued with the one-to-one sessions reported a noticeable improvement in some of the key problem areas in their writing. For the participants with minimum entry qualifications, it was important to continue with these teaching sessions until they understood how to tackle assignments with a much greater degree of independence and understanding. The participants in this study who attended the teaching sessions also reported that writing more than two drafts during the writing process and more careful editing of each draft contributed to a much better standard of work, which was reflected in a higher grade for the essay assignment they received help with.

The participants reported that the explicit, step-by-step teaching approach I had used during the one-to-one teaching sessions was effective and helped them to improve some of their academic reading skills as well as the academic essay writing process as a whole. I have used this approach successfully, on a one-to-one basis, with tertiary students from a range of ethnic, cultural, socio-economic backgrounds and age groups. I have also used it successfully with small groups in a classroom situation. Although the number of participants in this study was small the reported success with this teaching approach, particularly with students entering university with minimum entry qualifications, is suggestive of measurable benefits in terms of improved academic writing skills. One-to-one teaching sessions were reported as useful for Pacific Island students with minimum entry qualifications who are either entering university study for the first time or who need assistance with academic discourses essential for success in the specific academic writing and reading requirements of essay writing. I hope to explore this further in a research study in the future.

#### **5.1.4 New Zealand-born Samoan Students' 'Academic' Voice**

Participants in this study from bilingual, working class, traditional Samoan homes who had enrolled in full-time university studies with minimum entry qualifications, demonstrated a low level of fluency and competence in the use of academic vocabulary and grammar in their academic essays. In particular, the absence of a personal, academic voice and an over-dependence on the words of the text to express what was perceived to be a formal, academic 'voice' were characteristic features in the writing of this group of participants. Furthermore, poorly developed academic reading skills and the lack of a reading culture in the homes of this cohort of students exacerbated their academic writing problems.

Although English was used exclusively by all 14 respondents to communicate with siblings, with five of the participants also stating that English was the only language of communication between themselves and their parents (see Appendix 1, pp. 1-2; interview transcripts, Chapter 4), three of the five New Zealand-born Samoan participants in this study, James, Philip and Lisa, used a limited corpus of language to express their ideas and views. For example, during interviews and discussions, they frequently used short often incomplete sentences to introduce their views. However,

there was often little attempt by these participants to elaborate or expand on their views. Four of the five participants, all of whom reported having Samoan and English spoken in their homes, reported having difficulty understanding the academic discourses used by teaching staff and/or mainstream students in their classes at university. The academic-English comprehension problems reported by this group of participants would strongly suggest that the English discourses used in their homes did not appear to prepare them adequately for the complex speaking and writing demands of the formal academic environment.

In fact, Sefo, Lisa, James and Philip reported feeling a lack of confidence and out of their depth in classes where academic discourses were used by either teaching staff or students or both. One of the reasons some of the participants reported attending tutorials for Pacific Island students was to avoid mainstream tutorials where the mainstream students were able to express their ideas and views with ease and confidence using academic discourses. Sefo and Philip, in particular, reported feeling alienated during discussions in mainstream tutorials. Furthermore, they commented that the English used by Pacific Island support staff to help them understand their lecture notes and essay assignments was simple and easy to understand.

The dependence on the words of the text by New Zealand-born Samoan students with minimum entry qualifications, from bilingual, traditional Samoan backgrounds, such as James, Lisa, Philip and Sefo, could well be a transitional stage of acquiring academic discourse skills over a period of time. My own experience as one who also depended largely on the words of text to express views and ideas during my own days as a young high school and university student, seems to point strongly in that direction, Furthermore, my experience with explicit teaching instruction facilitated a deeper understanding of the specific requirements of academic reading and essay writing at university. This type of instruction also promoted a real sense of confidence in my approach to writing academic essays and reading academic texts.

### **5.1.5 'Perceived' Versus 'Actual' Academic Writing Problems**

Course tutors' written comments in the essay assignments of Pua, James, Philip and Sefo were received with mixed responses. Pua reported feeling, on the whole, satisfied

with her tutors' comments and the subsequent grade she received for both essays. James and Philip stated that they were somewhat confused with the low grade(s) they received from some of their tutors despite the amount of work they had devoted to completing their assignment(s). Lisa reported feeling positive about feedback from tutors but did not present any writing during the teaching sessions.

The grades Pua, James and Sefo received for the assignments they worked on during the teaching sessions reflected the level of commitment each participant had given to the editing process and their level of understanding of how to address the problems areas in their essay assignments. James, for example, received a D+ for an essay assignment in which there was no evidence of careful, close editing or following through with detailed suggestions and comments I had made to help him improve key problem areas in his essay. For his second essay, however, there was evidence that his writing had undergone some proof-reading and careful editing. There was also evidence of some of the key problems areas having been addressed in the second essay. He received a B for this second essay. Sefo, on the other hand, followed through with the suggestions and comments I had offered during our teaching sessions and received a B- for his essay.

Sefo and James both required extensive remedial work to close the gap between their actual academic reading and writing problems and the specific academic requirements of their essay assignments. All of James and Sefo's academic writing problems could not be addressed within the time frame I had available for each session. The academic writing problems of both participants were further exacerbated by reportedly poorly developed time management skills and an overcommitment to work, family, church and social responsibilities and events which prevented them from completing their assignments on time. Both participants also depended heavily on extensions from tutors in order to complete their course assignments.

Pua, on the other hand, had enrolled at university with an A bursary from high school. She also had already developed effective study habits and routines from home and was able to work independently on her writing assignments after our third teaching session. Pua received A- for both essays with which she received help from me during the teaching sessions.

Despite the myriad of academic reading and writing problems experienced by Sefo and James, they were nevertheless able to adopt appropriate strategies to address some of

their more serious writing and reading-related problem areas with more confidence and understanding. External factors linked to home, family, social and church commitments, however, impeded consistent progress in the work of both Sefo and James.

## **5.2 Significant Strengths of this Study**

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This study focused on the academic writing problems of New Zealand-born Samoans, a group representative of the largest Pacific Island/Polynesian group in New Zealand today. Furthermore, the participants in this study were from a highly visible, academically disadvantaged group in New Zealand, namely, the Pacific Island community, who have the unenviable track record of the group with the lowest academic achievement levels in New Zealand high schools and universities (see Chapter 1).

This study differed in a number of key aspects from other similar studies undertaken with Samoan students in New Zealand and Australia (see Chapter 2). Firstly, the researcher in this study shared the same ethnicity and New Zealand upbringing as the participants in her study. Secondly, this study included a New Zealand-born Samoan student from a middle-class, monolingual English speaking background who expressed her academic writing problems as a New Zealand-born Samoan student through a middle-class perspective. My fluency in both Samoan and English and in the local languages of working class Polynesian communities legitimized the use of languages other than standard English in this study. Unlike other similar studies with Samoan students (see Chapter 2), the Samoan researcher in this study was not dependent on the ‘expertise’ of Samoan parents and community members to interpret the behaviours and learning problems of the Samoan students in this study. One of the disadvantages of having to rely on the translation skills of speakers of another language, is that they may not have the same skill level in translating their first language into English.

This study combined both a qualitative and quantitative approach designed to enhance both the reliability and validity of the data collected. While the views and perspectives of the participants were accorded a role of primary importance in this study, the

triangulation method of collecting data provided a number of sources against which the data could be checked for reliability and validity.

A further strength in this study was the researcher's background as an English language teacher in tertiary institutions. The teaching sessions were informed by my own professional background as a teacher of academic English language skills to university students from different ethnic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and age-groups.

The study empowered the New Zealand-born Samoan participants in a number of ways. First of all, the voice of New Zealand-born Samoan students was perceived as a 'voice' of authority in this study. That is to say, that the participants themselves, as the academically disadvantaged group could express their 'disadvantage' from first hand experience. This study further 'empowered' the participants through the teaching sessions which provided them with effective strategies to help them address problem areas in their academic essay assignments, specific to each participant's needs.

### **5.3 Limitations.**

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While data from 14 respondents was insufficient to attempt to generalize the findings from this study to the New Zealand-born Samoan student population in general, the findings were nevertheless suggestive of a link between teaching practices in both low and middle-decile high schools and low academic achievement levels of New Zealand-born Samoan students in tertiary institutions, particularly those with minimal entry qualifications from bilingual, traditional Samoan home. This study combined both a quantitative and qualitative approach to collect data from 14 respondents. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data about respondents' gender, age, home and educational background and academic writing skills. The qualitative case study approach is often criticized for its lack of scientific objectivity. However, this qualitative approach provided key information not readily available through the quantitative data from the questionnaire alone.

Since course tutors could not be identified in this study, it was not possible to discuss their comments with them for clarification. Having said that, discussion and direct contact with course tutors were not essential to the overall requirements of this study. Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, the quantitative data gathered from the 14 participants through the questionnaire combined with the individual contributions of five participants and the written comments of course tutors in the essays of three participants to provide key information about the academic writing problems of this group of New Zealand-born Samoan students.

Currently, there is a paucity of research interest in New Zealand in the area of the academic writing problems of New Zealand-born Samoan students at both high school and at university. This is, indeed, surprising given the significantly low academic achievement levels of Pacific Island students compared to those of the other main ethnic groups in New Zealand. The paucity of New Zealand-born Pacific Island researchers in this field is also of note. This current study relied on a few studies undertaken in New Zealand and Australia with Pacific Island high school students for comparative purposes and to support its methodology and theoretical framework. I was not, however, unduly disadvantaged by the lack of research in the area of interest I had chosen for my thesis. I was able to refer to similar studies undertaken overseas for comparative purposes.

While it was important for me to personally check transcripts for accuracy and relevance of information, the inordinate amount of time devoted to this exercise threatened to extend the time frame for the thesis well past the two year deadline. This was, however, avoided largely by readjusting my timetable to reflect a much more tightly structured schedule of daily writing to meet the two year deadline. In the end, I had to apply for a six month extension to ensure that the discussion and analysis of a substantial amount of data collected in this study adhered to the specific requirements of the discourse and structure of the thesis.

#### **5.4 Dissemination of Findings**

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I expect to submit articles for publication to the editors of the following journals *NZ Journal of Educational Studies* and *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*. The

particular areas of interest that have emerged from my study are: the role of teacher ethnicity in the academic achievement of New Zealand-born Samoan students at university; the explicit teaching of academic discourses to New Zealand-born Samoan students with minimum entry qualifications from bilingual traditional Samoan homes. It is also my intention to disseminate some of the findings from my thesis through presentations and workshops at local and international conferences and workshops. A report summarizing the findings of this study will also be available to AUT, the participants who helped me with my research and to key stakeholders and interested groups within the education and Pacific Island sectors

## ***5.5 Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research***

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A major finding of this study is that admission to and participation in an academic discourse community can lead to increased successful interaction in that community. In order for New Zealand-born Samoan students to benefit fully from access to and participation in an academic discourse community, they must be adequately prepared for the specific demands of this environment. Explicit teaching methodology has been identified in this study as contributing to improved grades and a better understanding of the specific requirements of academic learning.

The teaching approach I used during the one-to-one teaching sessions focused on active listening skills, step-by-step explanations and explicit instructions and an approachable, friendly demeanour adapted to the individual needs of each participant. This inclusive approach facilitated participation for James and Sefo whose homes were not a second site of acquisition. Despite not attending teaching sessions regularly, both students, nevertheless, demonstrated observable improvement in certain aspects of their essay writing skills for which they received instruction through the the one-to-one teaching sessions. Pua who listened actively during the teaching sessions benefited the most from the teaching sessions. Sefo and James, on the other hand, only benefited when they listened actively and actually attended teaching sessions. Of the three participants, Pua was the only one who understood fully how active participation in an academic



discourse community led to a greater understanding of and an improved performance within that community.

Data from this study strongly supports an inclusive, explicit teaching approach with New Zealand-born Samoan students with minimum entry qualifications from both low and middle decile high schools. Evidence from this study also highlighted personal characteristics of New Zealand-born Samoan participants themselves which exacerbated their academic problems and impeded long-term progress in their academic reading and writing skills at university. The implications of the findings from this study, albeit preliminary, are indeed a challenging proposition for educators, parents and stakeholders. One of the recommendations of this study is that teaching staff, irrespective of their ethnicity, be selected on the basis of appropriate teaching skills, qualifications and experience, academic English language skills, and personal qualities that include approachability, a friendly and respectful disposition and pro-active listening skills. This study did not find evidence to suggest that the teaching of academic discourses along with academic reading and writing skills should be restricted to students based on ethnicity alone. The socio-economic background of participants in this study presented as a much stronger contributing factor to their academic 'disadvantage' than their Samoan ethnicity per se.

This study found one-to-one teaching support to be effective as a short-term option only, rather than a teaching method which should replace attendance at courses designed to meet the same academic learning needs of targeted groups such as New Zealand-born Samoans. Academically disadvantaged students should be assisted in developing skills and behaviours to allow them to participate fully and with confidence in their mainstream classes alongside mainstream students and teaching staff.

I am not aware of any research to date which has shown that academically disadvantaged New Zealand-born Samoan students as a group should be separated from other New Zealand-born students experiencing similar problems with academic discourses at university. This does not mean, however, that New Zealand-born-Samoan students should be indiscriminately grouped into classes with newly-arrived immigrant students who have not had the same exposure to the New Zealand culture and education system as New Zealand-born Samoan students and also lack the same fluency in general English as New Zealand-born students.

Further research into the academic writing problems of other New Zealand-born students from minority, working class communities would contribute significantly to the paucity of research literature in this vital area of knowledge here in New Zealand. Finally, this study contributed a New Zealand-born Samoan perspective , through the New Zealand-born Samoan researcher, to the body of existing research knowledge in this field both locally and overseas.

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## APPENDICES

- Appendix 1**    **pp.1-11**    **Survey Questionnaire**
- Appendix 2**    **pp.12-14**    **Interview questions for Face-to-Face Interviews**
- Appendix 3**    **pp.15-16**    **Questionnaire Results on Teaching Methodologies, Learning Strategies and Academic Writing Skills for Sub-group of Five**





Survey Questionnaire **14 Completed**

Code:

**i) Demographic Information**

Circle the correct answer for each question.

- 1 a) Male **3** b) Female **11**
- 2 I am: a) 18 yrs -20 yrs **9** b) 21 yrs-25 **2**  
c) 26yrs- 30 **1** d) 31years-40 **2**
- 3 I live in: a) Central Auckland **7** b) West Auckland **2**  
c) South Auckland **5** d) Eastern Suburbs **0**
- 4 I am a: a) New Zealand-born Samoan **13**  
b) Samoan-born Samoan **1**
- 5 If you are Samoan-born, how old were you when you arrived in New Zealand?  
a) 5yrs or younger **1** b) 6-to 12 years **0** c) 12+ years **0**
- 6 Do you live at home with your parents?

a) yes **13** b) no **1**

7 If your answer is YES, what language(s) do you speak at home

a) with your parents? Samoan **(2f)** **(1m)** Samoan and English-mainly English **(1f)** Samoan and English **(1m)** **(2f)** English only **(4f)** **(1m)**

Mainly English with some Samoan **(1f)**

b) with your siblings? English **(8f)** **(1m)** Mainly English **(1f)**  
English and/Samoan **(2m)** **(1f)** n/a **0**

c) with other members of your family? English **(4f)** **(1m)** , English and Samoan **(1m)** **(5f)** English and Samoan/mainly English **(2f)** Samoan **(1m)**

7 If you live away from your parents' home, do you live with other Samoans?

a) yes **6** b) no **2** n/a **1** no responses **5**

8 If your answer is YES, what language(s) do you speak at home?

Samoan and English **(1f)** English **(2m)** Mainly /English, but some Samoan **(3f)** n/a **(1m)**

If your answer is NO, circle the correct the answer.

The people I live with are a) Pakeha b) Maori c) Pasifika **(1f)** d)

Other no reply **(1f)**

10 What language(s) do you speak at home? Samoan and English **(2m)** **(2f)**

n/a **(1f)**

## ii) High School Information

11 Which of the following qualifications was your highest achievement from High School? Circle the correct answer.

a) A Bursary **(1f)**

- b) B Bursary (2f)
- c) University Entrance (1m) (3f)
- d) Sixth Form Certificate (1m) (4f)
- e) Other. Please specify: NCEA Level 3 (1f)  
No formal qualifications (1m)

Grades	A	B	C	Fail
A Bursary	2	2	1	0
B Bursaries	1	5	4	0
UE	2	2	14	0
6 <sup>th</sup> form Cert.	1	8	17	0
NCEA L. 3	1	2	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>=C passes 59.4%</b>	<b>B passes 29.7%</b>	<b>A passes 10.9%</b>	

12 In what subjects did you achieve a C pass or lower? List the subjects below

English (2 m) (6 f) Maths (2m) (7 f) PE (1 m) Accounting (1 m) (2 f)  
 Geography (1 m) Chemistry (2 f) Physics (2 f) Biology (2 f) History (3 f)  
 Economics (2 f) Music (2 f) Computer Studies (1 m) Science (1 f)

13 In what subjects did you achieve a B pass? List the subjects below.

English (6 f) History (3 f) Art (1 m) PE (1 m) Statistics (1 f)  
 Biology (3 f) Latin (1 f) Geography (2 f) Drama (1 f)

Development Studies (1 f)

14 In what subjects did you achieve an A pass? List the subjects below.

Classics (2 f) Geography (2 f) Samoan (1 f) Music (1 f) Art (1 f)

15 What High School did you attend? **5 decile 1** S.Auckland, **4 decile 5 and 5 decile 6** C. Auckland, **1 decile 5 and 1 decile 6** W.Auckland, **1 decile 10.**C.Auckland

(2 f) (1m) SSG (single sex state high school) (2m) (6f) SSI (single-sex integrated high school) (1f) SSP (single-sex private high school) (4f) Co-EdG (Co-ed. State high school)

**2 female students** attended more than one high school

16 Which of the following programme(s) helped you with your studies at High School? Circle your answer (s).

a) One-to-one mentoring with subject teachers (3f) (1m)

b) After school homework classes with subject teachers (5f) (1m)

c) Seventh Form pre-exam tutorials (4f) (2m)

d) English classes for speakers of Other Languages

e) Special Reading Classes (1f)

f) Other n/a (1m) **workshops for each subject/revision sessions (1f)**

17 How often did you attend each one? Circle your answer and write the name of the

programme in the space provided.

- a) Daily remedial reading (1f) After school homework sessions (1m)
- b) Weekly exam revision during class (1f) After school homework class (3f) mentoring (1f) subject tutorials (1f)  
7<sup>th</sup> form pre-exam tutorials/mentoring with teachers (2m)
- c) Fortnightly
- d) Monthly revision sessions (1f)
- e) Once a semester workshop/pre-exam tutorials (2f)
- f) Never (1m) N/A (1f)

18 Which of the following method (s ) helped you to understand assignment tasks?

Circle your answer(s).

- a) Teacher instruction in class (7f) (1m)
- b) Teacher explanation in class (10f) (2m)
- c) Written instructions on the assignment sheet (6f)
- d) Discussion with fellow students (5f) (2m)
- e) One-to-one discussion with subject teachers (3m) (1f)
- f) One-to-one discussion with PI teachers
- g) Other past exam papers (1f) No such programmes N/A (1f)

19 Which of the following methods did **NOT** help you to understand assignment tasks? Circle your answer(s)

- a) Teacher instruction in class (1f)
- b) Teacher explanation in class
- c) Written instructions on the assignment sheet (3f) (3m)
- d) Discussion with fellow students (1f) (1m)
- e) One-to-one discussion with subject teachers (2f)
- f) One-to-one discussion with PI teachers (1f)
- g) Other None (1f) N/A (1f)

### Tertiary Study Information

20 Circle the correct answer below.

I am in my a) first year **(3f)** **(1m)** b) second year **(5f)** c) third year **(2m)**  
**(2f)** d) other **(1f)** of tertiary study

21 Circle the correct answer below. I am a a) full-time **(10f)** **(3m)** b)  
part-time student **0**

22 I am studying:

a) Degree(s) **BA (4f)** **(2m)** **B.Ed(1f)** **BA/LLB (1f)** **BSc (1f)**  
**(1m)**

b) Diploma(s)

c) Certificate(s) **Cert.Bus. (1f)** **Cert.Hosp.Managemt (1f)**  
**Cert. P.Arts (1f)**

d) Other **PHD (1f)**

23 Please complete the following information.

**First year of study:** Papers passed and grades:

**(F1)** Psychology..C, C+ English C Stats **B+** **(F2)** Language **A**, Music **B**,  
Health/PE **A**, Social Studies **B+** , Pasifika **B-** , Teaching in NZ **C-**, Professional  
Enquiry **B** **(F3)** Sociology **C+**, **C+**, Psych. **B**, **B+**. Ancient History **C+**, Dance **A+**  
**(F4)** Communications **C+**, Maths **Pass**, Info.Tech **B+**, Info.systems **C**, Maths  
**failed**, Programming **failed**, Desktop publishing **B-**, Website maintenance **C** **(F5)**  
Maths **A**, Bio **B**, **C**, **C**, Stats **C**, Psych. **C**, **B**, Anthro **B** **(M1)** Psych. **C+**, **B**, Stats **B**,  
English **C-** **(F6)** **Failed course** **(F7)** National Cert.: Dance (Hip Hop, Cultural,  
Jazz), Music (Bass, guitar) **(F8)** Psych.**B+**, **C**, Samoan **A+**, Tongan **A+**, Anthro. **B**,

**B+**, Stats **B-** (F9) Failed course (F10) International Relations **B**, Psych. **C**,  
Sociology **C** (M2) Sociology **C, C, C-** (M3) Failed course (F11) Samoan **C+**,  
English **A-, B**, Psych. **C, C+**

**Year 2 of study:** Papers passed and grades

(F1) Stats **C** (F3) Psych. **B+, B+**, Sociology **C+** (F5) Stats **C**, Bio **B, C, C**, Psych.  
**C, C, B** (F8) Ed. **B**, Pacific **A-**, Tongan **A**, Women **A**, Psych. **B+, A+, A+** (F9)  
failed course (M2) Samoan **A, B**, Sociology **C-**, Theology **C**

**Third Year of Study:** Papers passed and grades

(F8) Psych. **A**, Anthro. **A+**, Tongan **A** (F9) English **C**, Political Studies **C**

24 I know how to: Circle the correct answer(s).

- a) write a narrative essay (F7) (M2)
- b) analyse a text (F8)
- c) write an expository essay (F3) (M1)
- d) write an argumentative essay (F7) (M3)
- e) write a formal report (F4)

**Two females did not complete this section**

25 Below is a list of essay writing skills. Identify your ability in each one by writing either **1, 2**, or **3** in the space provided. **1= fully understand 2= need some help 3= do not understand at all.**

a) 1=(11) 2=(2) 3=(0) No response=(1) Write an Introduction to an essay

b) 1=(10) 2=(4) 3=(0) Write a Conclusion to an essay

- c) 1=(8) 2=(5) 3=(1) Link the Conclusion to the Introduction of an essay
- d) 1=(7) 2=(6) 3=(1) Summarise main points in the Conclusion
- e) 1=(11) 2=(3) 3=(0) Divide an essay into paragraphs
- f) 1= (8) 2=(5) 3=(1) Link ideas between paragraphs
- g) 1=(5) 2=(8) 3=(1) Write a topic sentence for a paragraph
- h) (5) 2=(8) 3=(1) Write supporting sentences for each topic sentence
- i) 1=(6) 2=(6) 3=(2) Link ideas between sentences
- j) 1=(6) 2=(8) 3=(0) Use appropriate grammar for academic essays
- k) 1=(6) 2=(7) 3=(0) No response (1) Use appropriate vocabulary for academic essays
- l) 1=(6) 2=(8) 3=(0) Summarise information from reading texts
- m) 1=(5) 2=(7) 3=(2) paraphrase information from reading texts
- n) 1=(9) 2=(5) 3=(0) Find appropriate quotes in reading texts
- o) 1=(8) 2=(5) 3=(1) referencing within an essay
- p) 1=(7) 2=(5) 3=(2) referencing at the end of an essay
- q) (0) other. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

26 How do you rate the following strategies in terms of their usefulness when



completing assignments. Write either **1=very useful** **2= not necessary**  
**3= unhelpful** **4=irrelevant**

- a) 1=(10) 2=(3) 3=(0) 4=(0) No response(1) writing multiple drafts
- b) 1=(9) 2=(3) 3=(0) 4=(1) No response (1) proof reading by mentor
- c) 1=(6) 2=(5) 3=(1) 4=(1) No response (1) proof-reading by English Language support staff
- d) 1=(6) 2=(6) 3=(0) 4=(2) proof-reading by Pacific Island support staff
- e) 1=(11) 2=(0) 3=(1) 4=(1) No response (1) Explanation by the subject lecturer during lectures
- f) 1=(8) 2=(5) 3=(1) 4=(0) One-to-one discussion with subject lecturer
- h) 1=(7) 2=(6) 3=(0) 4=(1) One-to-one discussion with subject tutor
- h) 1=((6) 2=(5) 3=(0) 4=(3) Discussion with Pacific Island tutor in special tutorials for Pacific Island students
- i) 1=(4) 2=(6) 3=(0) 4=(3) No response=(1) One-to-one discussion with Pacific Island subject lecturer
- j) 1=(5) 2=(6) 3=(0) 4=(3) One-to-one discussion with Pacific Island mentor
- k) 1=(11) 2=(2) 3=(1) 4=(0) Reading notes from lectures and texts
- l) 1=(5) 2=(6) 3=(0) 4=(2) No response=(1) Discussion with other Samoan students
- m) 1=(3) 2=(7) 3=(1) 4=(3) Discussion with English Language support staff
- n) \_\_\_\_\_ Other Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

27 Rate the skills below in relation to Pacific Island support staff and lecturers, by writing **1, 2 or 3** in the space provided. **1= very important** **2=necessary**

**3=irrelevant**

- a) 1=(8) 2=(6) 3=(0) must have the necessary academic knowledge
- b) 1=(5) 2=(8) 3=(1) must have an excellent command of English
- c) 1=(0) 2=(4) 3=(10) must have the ability to speak Samoan fluently
- d) 1=(12) 2=(2) 3=(0) must be able to communicate important information clearly to students
- e) 1=(11) 2=(3) 3=(0) must be approachable
- f) 1=(8) 2=(6) 3=(0) must have competent teaching skills
- g) 1=(6) 2=(7) 3=(1) must be friendly
- h) 1=(0) 2=(2) 3=(12) must be Samoan
- i) 1=(9) 2=(3) 3=(2) must be able to motivate students

28 How would you rate the Pacific Island support staff in helping you to complete your assignments successfully. Write **1, 2, or 3** in the space provided.

**1= very competent and helpful**  
**2= lack necessary communication skills**  
**3= waste of time**

- a) 1=(5) 2=(5) 3=(3) n/a=(1) Pacific Island Mentoring programme
- b) 1=(7) 2=(3) 3=(2) n/a=(2) Pacific Island tutors
- c) 1=(5) 2=(2) 3=(2) n/a=(2) Pacific Island lecturers
- d) 1=(5) 2=(4) 3=(2) n/a=(3) Tutors in Special tutorials for Pacific Island students
- e) Other =(0) Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

29 From the list below, tick the ones which describe your response to lecturers' comments in your assignments.

a) (1m) (1f) I can't read his/her writing

b) (2m) (2f) Too vague. I don't understand what he/she means.

**Reasons: They either point out what's wrong and does not explain why or explains too much and goes off the subject.**

c) (1f) I disagree with the comments

d) (1f) I think the comments are unfair

e) (1m) (1f) The comments are irrelevant

f) (2f) (1m) Too much unnecessary detail

**Reasons: Writing comments that has nothing to help me out with what I need to correct an assignment.**

g) (1f) The language s/he uses is difficult to understand

h) (7f) Comments are helpful

i) (6f) Tutor's explanations are clear and helpful

j) (6f) The tutor uses language that is easy to understand

Thank you for your participation



List of questions for taped interviews:

Interview 1 for First Assignment.

- 1                    Could you tell me about some of the main difficulties you've had when it comes to assignment writing.
- 2                    How were you taught to write an essay when you were at high school? How useful were teacher's instructions in helping you to understand how to write the assignment? How useful were the written instructions you were given to follow?
- 3                    Do you think the way you were taught to write assignments at high school has helped you with assignment writing at university level? Why or why not?
- 4                    What do you understand by the term 'multiple drafts'? Were you taught how to edit your writing at high school? What sort of things do you do when you edit draft copies of your assignment? How many drafts do you write before you're satisfied your assignment is ready to be handed in?
- 5                    How useful are your subject tutor's/lecturer's instructions in helping you to understand what you have to do for an assignment? Why do you think this is so?
- 6                    What are some of the things your subject tutors/lecturers do to help you understand what to do for an assignment? Tell me what you think about teachers/tutors comments on your assignments
- 7                    Are some teachers/tutors/lecturers able to help Samoan students better than others when it comes to writing assignments? Why do you think this is so?
- 8                    Would you describe your background as one where you're

encouraged and supported academically? In what ways?

9 Would you describe your home as a typical Samoan home? In what way (s)?

10 Would you describe your family as a typical Samoan family? In what way (s)?

11 What sort of things do your parents do to support you from home with your studies?

12 Do your parents speak the same language as you do at home? Do you think that students are disadvantaged academically because they cannot speak Samoan? Why or why not?

13 Do you think it's important for students to read a lot about different subjects and books from different periods of time? Why or why not? Tell me about your reading habits

14 What sort of books do you read? How often do you read? Do you enjoy reading? What are your favourite sections in the newspapers? When you were a young child did you have stories read to you? What were some of your favourite stories? Do you think having stories read to you when you were a child has helped you to develop your reading skills? How?

### **Interview 2 for Assignment 1**

15 After you've read the assignment question, take me through some of the things you do before you start writing the final copy of your assignment.

16 Who or where on campus did you go to for help with this assignment? And what are some of the things they've done to help you?

17 What have you done to help yourself understand what is required in this assignment?

18 Do you have any problems locating the information you need from reading texts? Why do you think that is?

19 What are some of the things you've done to improve this

13

situation?

20 What do you think you need help with the most?

21 For you personally, what do you find easy when writing an assignment?

**Teaching Methodologies and Strategies: Sub-group of five**

<b>Very Useful:</b>	Writing multiple drafts	<b>Pua, James, Sefo, Philip, Lisa</b>
	Proof reading by mentor/English Language support staff	
	One-to-one discussion with subject lecturer/tutor	
		<b>Pua, James, Sefo, :Philip</b>
	Explanation by subject lecturer/teacher in class	
		<b>Pua, Philip Lisa</b>
	Teacher instruction	
	Discussion with EL support staff	<b>Pua Philip</b>
	Proof reading by PI support staff	
	One-to-one discussion with PI mentor/tutor	<b>Philip Sefo</b>
	Reading notes from lecturers and texts	<b>Pua Lisa Philip</b>
	Discussion with fellow students	<b>Sefo James</b>
	Discussion with Samoan students	<b>Sefo</b>
	<b>Not Necessary</b>	Discussion with EL support staff
Discussion with Samoan students		
Discussion with fellow students		
Proof reading by PI support staff		
One-to-one discussion with PI mentor/tutor		<b>Lisa James</b>
Proof reading by mentor/PI & EL support staff		
One to one discussion with subject lecture/tutor/PI subject lecturer		<b>Lisa</b>
Explanation by subject lecturer during lectures		
Reading notes from lectures and texts		<b>James</b>
<b>Unhelpful/Irrelevant</b>	Written instructions on assignment sheet	
		<b>Sefo, Philip, Lisa James</b>
	Discussion with fellow and Samoan students	<b>Philip Pua</b>
	One to one discussion with subject lecturer	<b>Sefo Philip</b>
	Proof reading by PI support staff	
	One to one discussion with PI mentor/tutor/PI subject lecturer	
		<b>Pua</b>
Explanation by subject lecturer during lecturers		

Reading notes from lectures and texts  
Proof reading by EL support staff **Sefo**

### **Perceived Academic Writing Skills of Sub-group of Five**

#### **Fully Understand**

Divide an essay into paragraphs	<b>Pua James Sefo Lisa</b>
Write an introduction to an essay	<b>Pua James Lisa</b>
Link the conclusion to the introduction	<b>Pua Philip Lisa</b>
Use appropriate grammar and vocabulary for academic essays	<b>Sefo James Pua</b>
Find appropriate quotes in reading texts	
Reference within and at the end of an essay	<b>Pua James</b>
Write a conclusion	<b>Pua Lisa</b>
Write a main idea for each paragraph	<b>Sefo Pua</b>
Link ideas between sentences/paragraphs	<b>Pua Philip</b>
Paraphrase information from reading texts	
Write supporting sentences for the main idea	<b>Pua</b>

#### **Need Some Help**

Summarise main points in the conclusion  
Summarise information from reading texts

#### **Pua Philip James Lisa Sefo**

Write supporting sentences for each main idea  
Paraphrase information from reading texts

#### **Sefo Philip Lisa James**

Write a conclusion	<b>James Philip Sefo</b>
Finding appropriate quotes from reading texts	
Referencing within and at the end of an essay	<b>Philip Lisa Sefo</b>
Link ideas between sentences and paragraphs	<b>James Lisa Sefo</b>
Link conclusion to introduction of essay	<b>James Sefo</b>
Write an introduction	<b>Sefo Philip</b>
Use appropriate grammar and vocabulary for academic essays	
<b>Lisa Philip</b>	
Write main idea for each paragraph	<b>Lisa James Philip</b>
Divide an essay into paragraphs	<b>Philip</b>