

CHAPTER 8 : STUDENT CASE STUDIES

8.1 Outline of Chapter

In this chapter, the responses of five interviewees are presented as case studies in which features attributed to groups of interviewees in the previous chapter are examined in more detail in the lives of the individual respondents. As with previous chapters, their 'stories' are told under the sub-heads representing the major categories of variables in this study. In these discussions, responses highlight key issues of the study in terms of how they exist in the reality of the context of the USP Region as represented by the lives of these students.

8.2 Introductory Comments

The following students were carefully selected on several criteria in order to represent, as much as possible, the diverse features and circumstances of students studying at a distance at the USP. Primarily, they represented each of the major locations and cultures of the USP Region, including the large Indian population of Fiji. In addition, although the interviewees were all located 'centrally' in their respective countries and were thus accessible to the interviewer within her limited visit schedule to these countries, the Fiji Indian student lived in another town in Fiji and represented, to some extent, the circumstances of the physically remote student. A gender balance was sought - three women and two men - as well as age and marital status differences. Other criteria also represented were the variations in family history and current situations, educational background and post-secondary experiences, economic circumstances and access to study support.

As for Chapter 7, quotations derived from the interviews in support of issues under discussion are all given verbatim so that atmosphere and emotional state are also captured in the responses. Verbatim responses also give an indication of the level of spoken English of the USP students, a major variable of this study, seen in previous chapters to be highly influential on the performance of these students.

Students have also been provided with pseudonyms in respect of the assurance of confidentiality given to them as a condition of the interview. Again, as for Chapter 7, information threatening this confidentiality has been downplayed or not included. However, this has not prevented the full discussion of issues and situations in question.

8.3 Case Study 1 : Maria

I could have finished my schooling (in New Zealand) but I was homesick. See I let that affect me and I didn't finish my education. You know I was so homesick I came home and didn't finish it ... But now since I'm married I realise the mistake I've made and I've tried to put that behind me and just carry on.

8.3.1 Demographic and personal information

1. Family background

Maria is 32 years old. She was born in Suva, Fiji to a mixed marriage of a Samoan father and a Fijian mother, the eleventh of their thirteen children. With such a large family, she recalled her childhood as a difficult one, economically:

Dad didn't have a very good job, basically he was a carpenter by trade so he ... it was just him. At the time I was growing up it was just him and two of my older brothers ... so basically we had a very hard life growing up.

Vivid therefore, in her memory of growing up as part of a very large household, was the sharing and stretching of limited family resources to accommodate her many siblings and herself. However, it was not with regret, but with nostalgia and warmth that she spoke of a close-knit and loving family held together by hardworking and self-sacrificing parents. She remembered them thus:

I think the relationship (between her parents) was really good because dad was really loving. ... The way I saw the relationship between him and my mum, he was always helping her around the house and doing things ... which I notice husbands and wives nowadays, our ... younger ones don't do. He would do the washing up for her and washing the clothes and things like that, you

know. And I appreciate that because it's left with me and my brothers and sisters, you know, its rubbed on to us and my brothers do that and I think their wives are lucky, you know.

There was no question that the circumstances of her childhood and the qualities of her upbringing had made their mark on her adult life and influenced to a very large extent, her own philosophy of life. For one thing, it gave her a wider perspective of life and sharpened her sense of appreciation for the economic distance she had travelled since then:

I'm more appreciative of it now because I have a good job and have so many things now which I can give to my kids - I don't want my kids to go through that but at the same time I wish they could go through that so that they can appreciate what they're getting ... we are getting now.

The years of being part of a large household were also responsible for the strong sense of family and community that became apparent as she spoke of her future plans, of which her study was a significant component. She saw any academic achievement on her part as a success shared with the rest of her family, and any benefits derived from it were never for just herself. This expansive philosophy was most likely also rooted in the circumstances of her childhood. She told, again without rancour or regret, of the incident of her eldest brother being singled out for special educational treatment by her parents:

You see John⁴ was the eldest and at that time mum and dad had a house at Veisari, ... and so ... they sacrificed that to send him to NZ. ... They paid for him. So I think giving him that the others had to struggle. ... No, no resentment. Because he was the eldest and at that time there was only about four others.

When she was asked how it was that the rest of the family came to accept this situation so well, she answered simply that it was the way they were brought up, implying the influence of cultural values. In addition, she explained that because her brother went on to become a Catholic brother, this was something that brought 'prestige' and 'blessing' to the family which rewarded the sacrifice entailed in sending him to school in New Zealand.

⁴ This is a pseudonym.

In looking at her own cultural background for an explanation of the generation of this kind of thinking and mentality Maria began to show the first signs of some of the regrets of her childhood. It was clear that her father's Samoan culture dominated many aspects of their family life. She attributed the strictness of their upbringing and the orderliness of family life with its defined gender roles, to Samoan values. However, because the marriage was a mixed one, neither parental culture was observed to the full, and there was more a borrowing of values from both parents and from other sources that constituted the eclectic cultural situation of Maria's family, "more like a Samoan, European-related, western-type upbringing". Consequently, Maria now found herself in a far from satisfactory situation viz-a-viz her knowledge of her parents' cultures. In addition, she acknowledged that, in not being able to speak her parents' respective languages, her own personal identity was in jeopardy in that she was unable to communicate with members of the wider family who did not speak English.

2. Educational experience

With regard to her educational experience, Maria described herself as having been an above average student who did not remember having to struggle through school. However, she felt too, that she might have made more of her educational opportunities but for the fact of her large family. There was no question about the value of education in her family, and the sacrifice on John's behalf bore testimony to this. But while her parents struggled to ensure that each child had a chance to go to school, that was the extent of their effort and ability. She put this down to two main reasons: that her parents had their hands too full with their large family, and that their own level of education meant that they did not have the capacity to appreciate the needs of education beyond what they themselves were familiar with.

I wasn't given that much motivation then, I sort of just flowed along. But I could have done better at school like I was coming within the first ten from primary school then I went to secondary school it was like just going through the process. And I didn't value the education then. You know I look back now and wished I could have - you know - done better. Because I had the capabilities to do better.

I think another factor is because mum and dad were so weighed down bringing up the thirteen children and that aspect, that side, you know like study and motivation, they weren't really concerned. ... I think their main concern was they got us through school and made sure we, you

know, got a good job than them. You know that was those days. When it came to study-wise and all those things there wasn't really much push.

And my dad and mum didn't have a really good education. I think around that time they only got up to fifth form and then they started working ... so he didn't have much of an education background to help me when I needed help with my homework and things so I didn't have motivation from that side or help at all.

Maria was fortunate at this time to have had a sister married and living in New Zealand to whom she wrote for assistance with her schooling. As a result of this correspondence, her sister offered to pay for her to go over and finish her secondary schooling in New Zealand. Never having been away from home before, this opportunity, although a most welcome one, came with its own set of problems. Her first major setback in New Zealand was what she described as the culture shock.

... at that time coming from two different societies I was sort of plonked into a new type of culture and all the new things were so new to me I was distracted by all that ...

Her next major problem was related to the educational experience itself.

I went from an educational society where, you know, the teacher says, and what the teacher says is right. And then I go to another educational system where the teachers are wanting you ... to talk freely and to give your comments and I was so shy, you know, ... it took me almost two years to relate to that, you know.

As a result, Maria did not complete her schooling in New Zealand, having failed her seventh form. This failure constituted the second major regret of her childhood, and one that was to have a significant effect on her second attempt at gaining an educational qualification later on in her life

8.3.2 Social environment

1. Current family status

Maria is now married to a self-employed surveyor and they have three children. At the time of interview, one child had already started school. The family live in Suva, where Maria works as a textprocessor at the main campus of the University of the South

Pacific, the equivalent position of a clerk-typist at the junior level of the administrative support services of the University. With their joint income, she was able to afford a housemaid who took care of her household and housework, so that when she got home from work, everything was taken care of.

2. Socio-cultural involvement

In terms of her social and cultural activities, Maria lived a quiet life. On the cultural front, her mixed ethnic background meant that there was very little involvement with either her father's or her mother's culture group. Their participation in any activity of a cultural nature was rare, with the occasional wedding or funeral, and their related customary observances, that had to be attended. She was not involved in religious activities beyond the weekly service, and as she had only one child in school, she did not feel the pressure to participate in the Parent/Teacher association and its related activities. Her major time-consuming passion, aside from work and family life, was her sports. Both she and her husband were involved in basketball on a competitive basis and she was a very strong contender for the national team. This required a heavy commitment to training on both their parts and represented a major hurdle to her current study.

8.3.3 The Educational environment

1. The motivation to study

Maria had more than one reason for resuming study, but the link between her current quest for further education, and her past was very strong.

I think it (her past) made me more determined to have a better life and if I were to have kids ... I wouldn't put them through the same thing.

It was also evident that this quest for 'a better life' was inspired by the hard work of her parents and the many sacrifices they made towards providing for their children to the best of their abilities. In another, also significant way, her eldest brother John was

also instrumental in inspiring her in that she wanted to "be educated like him" and to prove to her mum that another member in her large family was also able "to do it and to make her proud too." In this sense, Maria was fortunate that the hardships of her childhood were overridden by a loving family environment which allowed the nurturing of a positive outlook to life.

The strong sense of community that was also nurtured during her childhood and youth was also influential in evolving her educational vision. Through it, she saw her involvement in education as her personal contribution to both her own nuclear family as well as her extended family. Apart from pursuing her degree "for all my children, not for me", assistance to her brothers and sisters was also an important reason for her:

... if I get a good job, I'd be able to help them better you know, give them more than what I can give them now so it'll make me be able to help them more, better.

This contribution extended to role-modelling for the younger generations in her family so that if she got through, she could "be an example too" to her nieces who were about to enter university study.

Not least of all her study reasons was the social esteem that was accorded educated people in the island communities of the USP Region. As this was accorded to her for her educational achievement, so too would her extended family benefit from the 'elevation':

Yeah, I think with our society, that elevates the extended family too, when somebody gets a degree. ... the fact that it's one of us gets a degree it'll make them look good too.

All of these socially-related educational objectives did not diminish with her less successful endeavour in New Zealand. If anything, what she saw as her failure to achieve in New Zealand made her all the more determined to find and make good a second opportunity which came her way when she heard about distance education on joining the University as an employee. She recalled that "that's when I thought about

what I had left behind and what I can look forward to. So that's when I decided well I better start".

2. The study environment

As expected, Maria went through the concern and self-doubts, usually associated with the return to study after being away for as long as she had been. The first attempt, therefore, was a crucial confidence factor, as evident in her following comment:

You know, another thing too was I had left schooling behind for how many years - I think '81 was my last time at school and so I took my first course ... and I sort of went with it with so much fervour, you know. I was wanting to do so well and I'd lost touch so I think the first one I did I was really determined to do well. ... I did do well. I got a B but for me that was, oh I did okay because I'd been out of school for so long.

Once over this first hurdle, her confidence to continue was established and improved over the semesters. She became more aware and more critical of her study environment as well as of her own learning abilities. Maria described a study environment balanced between supportive and enhancing features, and those that could be improved. On the positive side, being a university employee meant that she not only found herself daily in an atmosphere of learning, she also had access to amenities and facilities in support of her studies. The campus Library and its resources, for instance, were readily accessible, and so were her subject area specialists. She therefore did not need to physically visit her local USP Centre, although this too, was not a problem as she owned and drove her own car. However, although these facilities were readily available to her, Maria's favourite study spot was her home.

The thing that she missed most in distance education was the group.

I think just that relating with students, that's what we need in distance education. ... Even if it wasn't an organised one like we have tutorials, you know maybe the Centre could organise all the students and somehow let us know who's taking what so, if they're taking our units so that we can have a meeting, organise ourselves. ... and then when you come back and you get feedback from your assignments and you can know where you stand in the group, and should you perform better, because you say "oh she got this much so I'm sure I'm capable of doing much better". So you interact, you talk, you know ... ideas and ... you know?

This was an important reason, among others, for the difference in learning quality between on-campus and distance students. She counted herself fortunate in that she had done some of her courses part-time on campus and was able to compare the two learning situations. She had a definite preference for group learning, counting among its benefits, the opportunity to meet with and share ideas with other students.

Well, for instance on campus because we have those groups, I find that I'm able to bring out more than I would otherwise have, if I was on my own. You know I find that I come up with so many more ideas than if I ... because other people are bringing up things and touching on little points and it sort of ... I just get that click "oh yeah, I know about that too" so I bring it all out. Whereas I'm on my own, it doesn't ... you know, it doesn't hit me.

When asked whether she considered her learning and her status as an extension student as good as that of an on-campus student, she replied

... on-campus they have everything available to them - they have the tutors guiding them along, and I always think it's easier for them to get theirs instead of ours ...

Included in the better deal that on-campus students got was the opportunity to interact and negotiate with tutors whenever it was necessary, on any aspect of study. Maria had a disappointing experience with a late assignment which was refused marking. However, it was not so much that it was not marked as the inconsistency of behaviour among tutors that was particularly upsetting for her. In this respect, she saw being a distance student as a disadvantage because she did not have the opportunity available to an on-campus student to make a personal case in her defence to her tutor. The opportunity to interact directly with her course tutor also had its advantages in terms of assignment feedback over communication in print only. In the latter case, Maria claims

You don't get much of a feedback. It's just "you've done well: well done assignment". You don't want to know really what you've done well, you want to know what you haven't done well so you can do better next time.

One of the things she came to appreciate in her efforts to learn at a distance was the assistance from and co-operation of her family, and in particular, her husband, in order to ensure the success of her studies.

The other thing I could add to that is the family part - how much the husband helps. I think often, at times, it's difficult ... and at that stage when I want to study, it's hard for me because he's ... too tired to want to watch the kids so I have to wait till the kids go to bed and then I study. So I probably start studying about 11 onwards.

Moral support from spouses was just as important as physical support for Maria, probably something she inherited from the past where she was used to being part of a larger group and larger activity which required the co-operation and support of many people.

And encourage you sometimes ... especially when they ... know you have assignments and then they see you sitting in front of the TV, just a word or two or something, you know. "Do you think you should be sitting there? Why don't you go and ..." Just a reminder. That helps.

8.3.4. Learning disposition

1. Personal attributes

There can be no doubt about Maria's high level of motivation to study, and confidence in her ability to do so. What problems she encountered were caused mainly by factors in the external environment. In terms of the time required for part-time distance study, Maria appeared to be in a well-placed situation. In an earlier section, it was seen that she did not have too many other commitments outside of work, family and sports. However, in spite of the seeming availability of time, she soon became aware that becoming disciplined and learning to juggle the priorities in her life were key problems that she knew she had to come to terms with in order to be a successful distance student.

And that was the hard part for me - discipline - because ... see I'm still involved in sports. That is so much a part of my life, and my family life, my husband. So I had to try and work it out between my sports and ... even at this stage I'm still trying to cope with that and I still have to try and realise that one is more important than the other. ... And I still find it so hard to maybe give up one night's sports to study for a few hours. And I'm still trying to get that right.

At the time of interview, she was still trying to reconcile herself to the requirements of independent learning.

You know, funnily enough when they said distance education, I never thought about independence. I just thought, just the word distance, that's all. Until I actually started taking it myself then I realised the distance between you and ... the tutor and, you know ... there's nothing really personal like on-campus. Then I started to really get the meaning of distance - I never realised before.

2. External factors

Maria enjoyed courses that had some aspect of relevance for her. With regard to her Management courses, although it did not have much value for the work that she was currently doing as a textprocessor, she found learning it immediately fulfilling for two main reasons. In the first instance, learning about management principles improved her position in helping her husband with their family business. More importantly, management principles had a direct relationship "to life as well - time management, how you manage your money at home - so that's helped me a lot too".

There was one aspect of her study where she found relevance wanting, and that was with respect to the learning materials. They focussed almost exclusively on ideas and concepts of a foreign nature and made learning a little more difficult for her.

But all the texts that we get, examples are all overseas examples. And if they could change that, give us Pacific island examples that we can relate to I think it'd be better.

However, she felt that she was at an advantage with her overseas educational experience in that she was able to relate to her expatriate tutors at the University. Her following comments suggest that the problem for her was the communication barrier across the different cultures represented by regional students and expatriate teachers:

Well, it's helped me a great deal because ... I can almost imagine what he's expecting of me ... So because I've had experience with expat teachers and I was brought up in their sort of educational way of thinking and their children's way of thinking, it's helped me a great deal, you know, because it's totally different from our way, our education, the way we were brought up - a new approach.

Her fluency in English was also another factor which facilitated her learning experience. Again, she attributed this in some degree to her overseas experience in an English-speaking country and the fact that all of her schooling, even in Suva, was done in the English language.

8.3.5 Conclusion

In the final analysis, however, the distance mode was the only other option available to people like her, in her circumstances:

We have to work harder, but that's the choice we've made anyway because of ... the fact that we have families and we can't take time, so that's the extra ... effort we have to put into, in order to get our degree, compared to the on-campus students where they have everything handed to them. They have lectures, they have everyday meetings relationships, discussions, whereas we have to do everything on our own.

There was no missing the sense of isolation with which she made this statement. It did not seem like an accident, therefore, that the group meeting she appealed for was couched for its social rather than educational appeal:

That's why I appreciate that social group meeting.

She also wondered just how much better her learning might be if she did not have all the other time commitments so typical of extension students that affected how much she put into her own study.

... because I'm really tired. I'm not concentrating. So I just wonder whether doing it when I'm really tired and managing to get a B and ... well most of my assignments I've been getting A's and B+'s. I'm just wondering if I do it when I'm not tired I could do better.

She continues therefore in her endeavour to get her priorities right and to come to terms with the need to make the appropriate sacrifices that will improve her opportunities to learn at a distance.

8.4 Case Study 2 : Anand

In my work area I always want to be a person who has knowledge of the business. The second thing is in the community I want to be a person with a good education. Like I'm involved in social work so everybody knows that this person how much he's educated. And the third thing is with my education I can get a good job. Now if you have a good job, people recognise you very well he's got a good knowledge that's why he's got a good job - they come to that conclusion.

8.4.1 Demographic and personal information

1. Family background

Anand was born 31 years ago, and spent the first few years of his life in Ba, a small rural town on the western side of Viti Levu, one of the two main islands of Fiji. Not long after he started primary school, the family moved to Korovuto, on the outskirts of Nadi town, location of Fiji's international airport and centre of the country's tourist industry. They set up home in a small, two-room unit, built from the father's savings from the various manual jobs he had held until this point including being a driver for a supermarket firm. The number of children was now four, two girls and two boys all going to primary and high school. Anand described his family life as one run on a very tight budget and to a very well defined plan:

Like the income from my father was enough to run our family and little bit of saving he could do. He used to get groceries from that income and pay our school fees and buy our books and save a little bit of that money say of the total income he probably was saving 10 percent to 15 percent every week. We were not in this house before. Before we were in a smaller house and this house was built from his income. So this is a six-room house. Before we had a two-room house and now on this saving he managed to get this house and he managed to educate me, my sister and like I said, two brothers, two sisters were educated.

Within this basic two-room unit, the family conducted all of its activities. One room served as kitchen/bedroom, the other was a sitting room/bedroom in which there was

a table. For studying, the children used the table, bed and floor under an oil lamp as, at that stage, they did not have electricity.

Under these severe circumstances, Anand and two other siblings made it through high school. When Anand's father died, not long after this, Anand was full of regret. Being the older boy, he had vivid memories of his father as the driving force behind his family and in particular, behind the quest for education that dominated throughout.

Very hard working. He, as a person, did not bother to wear a good shirt, a good trousers, a good shoe. But he was much worried that his children get educated. He was much worried that I get high educated and better for my future. And I'm sure that he didn't thought ever that he would go so soon but before he left he had house for us, he had educated us up to high school ...

2. Educational experience

Anand did not harbour any regrets about the strictness with which he was brought up. He was able to see the positive results it bore for him in comparison with the lives of some of his peers who he described as being "in a bad position now". He himself completed high school up to Form 6 and then began work in the tourist industry working as an apprentice in the accounts section of one of the large hotels in Nadi. Several jobs later in other international hotels over the years, Anand picked up computing skills and skills in the management area, as well as increasing competence in the field of accounting. One of his employers prompted the return to study by offering to pay for his expenses in an extension course. Although this opportunity was provided, Anand did not accept payment as he felt he was not ready to be bonded to a particular company, preferring, at this stage, to keep his job options open. He succeeded in his first distance course, and since then has continued to study towards a Diploma in Financial Management.

8.4.2 The social environment

1. Current family status

Included in the legacy left behind by his father, were two distinct features: a close-knit and well-managed family unit, and the quest for a better life through education.

Anand's older sister was now married, lived with her husband and worked as a secretary. The rest of the family, including new additions, were still together: Anand and his wife and two young sons just starting primary school; his brother who was a policeman and was still unmarried, and the younger sister who was the only one still at high school. Anand's mother took over as the matriarch of the family which reflected the continuing influence of the father's type of family management:

In the beginning she said no, it shouldn't be like this, it should be my wife. But I said no, you should have a role in the family as the leader and you should maintain on that one and we should listen to you. See the father was telling the right things and that's how we came up and we are in a good position and we want to listen to you and you give us good advice and you handle the finance.

The family income consisted of a large contribution from Anand and some financial assistance from his brother, the only other member of the family in paid employment. The budget at this point was described as rather tight in that whatever savings was made from living and other expenses, including Anand's fees and study-related costs, went into the extension of the family house, on-going at the time of the interview.

While Anand continued to impose on himself the hard educational discipline characteristic of his father's household, he himself recognised changing times and the need to go with them in terms of the upbringing of his own children. Their day's programme was less rigid, and included watching a bit of television, going for car rides and other forms of entertainment, as well as some school work.

2. Socio-cultural involvement

Anand's social life, at this stage, was cut right down to a minimum. Being in the centre of the tourist trade, and being a hotel accountant, he was in the midst of a group of people for whom socialising was part of the job in many instances. This did not faze him, and he turned down many invitations to cocktail parties and social functions because he knew that drinking and studying did not go together.

Other time-consuming activities were also cut down to what he could cope with and, at this stage, involved being the treasurer for the Parent and Teacher Committee for his children's school. In his estimation, this involved only up to two hours a week on an average, which he was able to afford. He did not include, among his extra activities, any involvement of a religious or cultural nature, because they were insignificant in terms of time commitment.

Anand was well aware of the need to make changes and sacrifices in support of his extension study. His major regret was the fact that he could not spend as much time with his children and family, as well as his friends and workmates, as he would have wanted to. However, he did realise that the investment in his study now, would mean improved opportunities for his family and their social life in the future.

8.4.3 The educational environment

1. The motivation to study

That education formed the pivot around which all of the activities of family life rotated in his childhood, there was no question. Studying was so central to Anand's life then, that he never questioned it:

To me it was just happening - like I need to do this. It's like I could not do anything which I want cause what I wanted was to go and watch movies and play with the other boys which I was not allowed to do.

This attitude towards education prevailed into the adult lives of Anand and his siblings and was most evident in the way family life continued to be organised around study:

Normally in my case, and my sister's too, what happens is that we give them (other members of the family) time to watch TV - ok this is the time to watch TV, eight o'clock you have to go to bed because in the morning you have to wake to go to school. From eight o'clock we start studying.

His return to formal study came almost ten years after high school and therefore, was approached with a lot of apprehension and self-doubt. The fact that this was university-level studies also challenged his confidence, and his ignorance of what to expect from the institution, coupled with inadequate information on how to go about basic study functions generated a fear that resulted in his concern to remain anonymous.

Firstly, the first course it was a very short one. At the same time I didn't know much about it. I used to give a call to USP Centre and I was a bit frightened that those people might know my number and know me. They might think how this person doesn't know. Most important things I used to ask them like how to do this, you know really nowhere in the book it says you can use a foolscap or you do this. if you can do typing or you handwrite, you know. Those sorts of things - how to do it. You see a study guide and assignment book and then you have assignment. So how to go about it. And you know I met a few students who have already done it and I discuss with them. And I used to ring Fiji Centre to get some information. So beginning it was difficult.

His confidence has built up significantly since this beginning. He continued to believe in the significance of education. For him, gaining further qualifications opened many personal doors: a career in Accounting and Financial Management, higher salary, knowledge of the wide world of accounting, and social esteem.

This latter objective appeared to hover strongly above all of Anand's educational aims and objectives. Although unmentioned, the inclination towards being a recognised person in society, felt very much like rewarding the social anonymity of the hardworking, self-sacrificing father who pioneered Anand's move towards educational achievement.

... with my education I can get a good job. Now if you have a good job, people recognise you very well - he's got a good knowledge that's why he's got a good job - they come to that conclusion.

In addition, the monetary benefits in particular, were necessary in order to give his young and growing family, material and other opportunities he never had as a child:

Yes, when we are talking about a better job there's a better pay too, there. If I get more money I can do good house and look after my children in a more better way. They need more things, they need new bicycle, they need new bag, they need new shoes, so ...

In his drive towards achievement, his wife was described as his number one encouragement, making his educational efforts very much a family affair.

2. The study environment

On the physical front, the extension of the home continued to be an important family project. From the original two-room unit, the family now shared more than six rooms among them, with electricity. However, physical study facilities were still far from ideal:

... like sometimes I study here like this and my sister is studying too. She's in Form 7, so we take turns for the table. If I'm writing ... we take turns for that. And sometimes we share the table.

At work, Anand claimed that as much as 60 percent of his learning came from practical applications. However, other circumstances were not as conducive to study enhancement. Management staff, for instance, were often Asian expatriates whose English speaking skills left much to be desired and which tended to influence his own level of operational English which was, by Anand's own admission, not of a high enough standard. In addition, he counted among his weaknesses, the preference for speaking in his mother tongue whenever he could, which did not help him improve his ability to speak English.

I only speak English when I'm speaking to a person who understands English and speaks English only. If that person speaks my language, Hindi, I speak to him in Hindi. I prefer speaking in Hindi than in English because it's my mother tongue.

3. The USP Centre and institutional support

Being so far away from his USP Centre had many regretful elements for Anand's distance study. His Centre is located in Suva, more than 100 kilometres away.

We have our Centre in Suva and when we normally communicate by mail, they send letters to us telling us the time for the examination or telling us any instructions. That plus we are not able to attend the library, get more books on the particular subject. Those two are the main things I'd say. And not to attend any tutorials which USP has for particular courses in the afternoon - I wish I was near the Centre I would attend afternoon classes ...

His only access to assistance provided by the Centre was a Local Tutor who conducted weekly tutorials in support of the accounting course that Anand was enrolled in. This support was invaluable; if he did not have it, Anand estimated it would make a 20 point difference in his assessment marks.

There were other things that would have enhanced his study if he had them. Self-assessment material in the textbooks would have made a difference; the supply of past examination papers by the Centre to give students an idea of examination standards would also have been appreciated. It meant that all the help he needed hung precariously on the shoulder of one person. The enormity of this situation was captured in this articulated thought:

And if the tutor (didn't have the answer)... I don't know!

8.4.4 Learning disposition

1. Personal attributes

In spite of the limitations that he faced in terms of learning support, Anand's very clearly defined educational objectives, the disciplined approach to study nurtured from childhood and his determination to make the changes and the sacrifices required to enable him to accommodate his study helped him to adjust to independent learning without too much trouble. In fact, independent learning was not altogether a new idea for him. He explained that in high school he went from a small rural religious school to a large town school to complete the final year.

... when I was in high school up till Form 5 level I was studying in Korovuto where all the teachers here are trying to get each and every student to write a note and do this, do that, and they check the assignment the next day. And when I go to Sangam College which is in town, they had plenty students. ... and the form teacher used to come - subject teacher - they come, they go; they don't bother. They come and read this and this and then go. They wouldn't check the assignment. ... the way they were treating me here and over there, I see the difference. ... and I realised that ... these people wanted us to go and research and study on our own. From

Form 6 I learned - study is ours. We have to bother how to study, how to grab information. If you need something to ask them we ask. Otherwise sort of they were not bothered. So I'm the person to bother how to study. Now when I get this one (extension), I hardly depend on the tutor.

He was now a confident distance education student, his self-esteem having improved over the semesters as his study experience expanded.

2. External factors

It would appear, therefore, that by the time Anand came to distance education, he was already equipped with the two most important attributes for learning at a distance - discipline and learning independence. He continued, however, to have a preference for group learning and the opportunity it provided for discussion and the sharing of ideas. His weekly tutorial being only an hour long each time, there was sufficient time only for tutor discussion of the topic of the week. Anand got the maximum out of a tutorial therefore, by listening:

I don't ask any questions. I listen. Other students they ask. The tutor explains and we go to tutorials, we give the assignments, we get the assignments and some of the notes we write. And after writing the notes I come back and cross-check the topic and make my own notes - very simple notes, very short notes to get into my head to understand the concept rather than the way the tutor wants to explain and get you to understand the whole concept. So I try to learn myself - okay, this is the concept, this is how I'm going to learn.

In many ways, he saw the advantages that on-campus students had over distance education students. They had a lot more time, they had access to lectures and direct access to course tutors, they had the library, and they had one another to share with. Under such circumstances, they were set up for more qualitative learning than the extension student. In his favour, the local tutor was a good friend and he was trusted enough, therefore to be lent his reference books, an opportunity he took advantage of whenever it was necessary.

At home, with the rest of the family in bed at scheduled times, Anand was then able to use the rest of the evening for his studies:

So we start studying ... In my case like at least two hours everyday, but it goes more, normally goes more till 11, 12. If I have to submit the assignment, if I have to give the assignment tomorrow, so I have to finish this today, so sometimes it's one o'clock, two o'clock

8.4.5. Conclusion

Anand has come a long way since the 'beginning'. From being self-conscious about his ignorance of the requirements of university and extension study, he is now a confident student, well aware of the personal attributes that he needs to nurture in order to be able to study successfully, and the kinds of changes and adjustments that he needs to make in and to his environment in order that his learning be facilitated. His responses however, suggest that he feels he can do much better if given the learning opportunities that on-campus students had. He regrets also that employers, in his experience, do not seem to value qualifications obtained by distance as much as they do on-campus qualifications. On the other hand, however, distance education students hold a very important trump card - they are able to work and study at the same time. For many people, as for him, this opportunity was imperative, and an overriding one.

8.5 Case Study 3 : Ana

Yes, I mean, you know, in the society they look at you that you are 20 going on to 25 up to 30 it's either they think ... oh what's wrong with you! But I have learned to ignore what comments that they have. Only if they ask me why aren't you getting married then I say well I want to be independent, that's all. I want to develop my own career, I want to do what I want to do.

8.5.1 Demographic and personal data

1. Family background

At 32 years of age, Ana was, as she declared, still single by choice. She lived with her parents, her unmarried brother and an 'adopted' daughter in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, where she was born and raised. Under pressure from her mother to get married so that she would have someone to look after her in her old age, she saw the solution in the adoption of her child. In the following description of the 'adoption', the fact that cultural protocols and norms were still very much alive in Ana's life, was evident:

... then there came a time when my brother and the wife, they had this child and he rang me (they're in Australia) to say - well it's in our culture that the sisters are the ones who are in higher rank and you know the brother's children, I have the right to do what I want with them. And so right from the beginning when the baby is born it's the sister who gives the name. So he rang me and then I said or then this must be something that will cool off my mother, you know, will stop her from saying these things. So I asked my brother to name the baby after me and then at the same time I said if you want me to look after the child I'm most willing to. ... firstly I wanted to have the child because I want to, knowing that I have nothing to spend my money on, my resources, whatever. She will be somebody very dear to me and also ... I said mum look, there's someone here who will look after me so stop pushing me to get married because it's not what I want. So my brother was willing then to give the child so I sent my mother to Australia and she brought back the baby, five months old, and now she's four.

Ana's daughter was not legally adopted, she was fostered in the 'Tongan sense' which was suggested in her comments above, in which case "you don't sign papers or documents but it's agreeable, it's understood".

As a USP Economics and Management graduate, Ana worked first as an administrative officer for the Ministry of Civil Aviation for one and a half years. From here, she moved on to a regional organisation involved in projects on family health in the South Pacific Region. In this organisation she continued in the capacity of administrative officer, although her job now involved travelling to other parts of the Pacific, servicing meetings organised by the office.

2. Educational experience

Ana did all of her primary and high school education in Tonga and went as far as sixth form. Her school life was uneventful in that she progressed through its requirements as a matter of course. Her parents gave her the support of parents who knew that good education held opportunities for a better economic future for their children. However, beyond high school, they did not have very much enthusiasm, most probably because it was an area which they knew nothing about. Ana described their reaction to her current studies as follows:

... the truth is they didn't care whether I took extension study or not. Maybe they are not interested ...I don't see them happy when I say I'm taking an extension course but I think if I was saying to them, "oh, I've got another degree", they would be thrilled ...

Ana completed her first degree at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, in 1988, and began work in 1989.

8.5.2 Social environment

1. Current family status

Ana and her family still lived in Nuku'alofa where she worked, and her daughter went to preschool. Her father, who used to work for the church, was now a retired teacher. Her brother worked as a civil servant and her mother ran a small retail store from home. With her salary, Ana helped with the support of her family, and was entirely responsible for her daughter's upkeep as well as her own. She paid for her own education, taking advantage of the USP Centre's time-payment scheme which enabled her to cope with her financial obligations.

2. Socio-cultural involvement

Ana's community work and cultural commitments were undertaken through the Youth Groups of her church, and Christian Workers Fellowship, of which she was a member. In her description of her commitments to the work of these groups, the interplay

between culture and institutional politics was quite evident. Trying to disassociate the two was part of her commitments:

We have this workers fellowship it's a christian meeting every week of all these government employers. And we also have some cell groups (who) also attend the youth activities ... you know the church activities... And there's also a separate group - it's called the Beloved Youth of Kolomotu'a - it's not under the church they want it independent of the church regardless of ... so that any youth in the district from any religion can join, be a member, which is something that I tried ... I tried to get the youth group out, separate it from youth activities which is under the church umbrella ...

Some of the activities associated with her Youth Groups she described as culturally-associated. The community element was also obvious:

For instance, suppose that there is this wedding and it's always the youth who goes to the homes and helps in the preparations of this, preparations of that. Any funeral, the girls they go sweep out the place help the elderly women and all that. And at the moment we also have a communal yam garden where not only youth but we also have elderly men, I mean men who also wants to join in ... We have separate plots allotted to each and every member which is every two weeks one has got to go and see which one is the best where.... We'll harvest it next year and distribute it to some needy members in the community, and give share to the pastor

Aside from these activities, Ana also participated in the Parent-Teacher Association of the International Montessori School where her daughter was enrolled as a pupil. This entailed attending council meetings of the school. She was also a member of the school fundraising committee. All of these tasks, including work and those related to the household, took up the bulk of her time so that she admitted that "... sometimes it's just too much."

8.5.3 The educational environment

1. The motivation to study

The opportunity to return to study was provided by her employer who offered to pay for her enrolment. Her description of this offer as "something I value" reflected her appreciation for the opportunity. The reason for giving it serious thought came from two sources: her great interest in Accounting, and a situation at work. In the latter case,

there had been an on-going problem with finding a permanent accountant for the organisation which resulted in the hiring of several people in temporary positions. This caused the organisation much inconvenience and Ana saw a partial solution in improving her own Accounting qualifications so that she could assist with this aspect at work. Aside from providing her with qualifications that would be useful to her work in the organisation, the fact that it would complement her current qualifications would improve her future job prospects.

The fact that other members of staff were also taking extension courses added to the motivation to take up studying again:

We've also got a physician ... she's also taking a management course. And it's kind of fun, you know we all come together ...

2. The study environment

Ana did most of her study after hours at work, on days when she was not committed elsewhere. This was because her daughter presented a major distraction for her:

... how I manage my time for studies is after work here because, see I can't do much studies at home because my child is always there. Except if there's no meeting after hours - ... the preschool or the youth group ... I will stay here (in the office) after hours and do my work.

She supplemented this time with some study on Sunday, although that too, had its problems:

And also sometimes on Sundays, when my families go to church, although it's not acceptable at home I also take my textbook home and do my reading.

Her family was not very happy with this situation because Sunday was set aside for church services. Ana's family, along with the rest of the community, attended two services on Sunday and she was expected to do the same. On the occasions when she did some work on Sunday, she skipped the morning service which was not without the

displeasure of the family and community. Fortunately for Ana, there was a compensatory option:

No, not a big pressure because see if I miss going to church morning service, then my going to afternoon service is sort of telling them, oh, she made it up ...

However, the fact that the social pressure did exist meant that she was able to use her Sundays in this way only when it was absolutely necessary.

The pressure that she did find overwhelming was that of revision of her course materials for her final examination. Her comments below indicated how busy she was with work and her other commitments resulting in her inability to take time off when she required it:

But it was only at the end when I had to have a whole day or two days to do my revisions I couldn't ... find the time.

However, this was all part of the experience she gained in studying by distance over one semester, which enabled her to cope fairly comfortably under the circumstances of her current enrolment, and in the time available to her for it:

... and I find that from what I've gone through last semester, semester one, I could manage.

This was certainly a reflection of the ability to control and manage her time well, a quality that might well have been enhanced by her experience with university study on campus and her familiarity with the requirements of university courses, as well as her more limited experience over one semester of distance study.

3. The USP Centre and institutional support

In terms of her expectations of support from her USP Centre, it appeared that other than administrative support and the provision of information pertinent to her study programme, as well as facilities for both local and satellite tutorials, Ana's response did

not indicate that anything more could be expected. This came out quite clearly in her following comments:

I think the USP Centre is very good, the support, I mean. From my experience I go there to look for my assignments, there's always somebody there at the counter. Once I say I want to check whether my assignment is there, she checked it right away. Otherwise I'd feel disappointed. And also I go there to find out how much is the rest of my fees to be paid before the exams. ... is always there to run up and down and look for it instant, which is something I appreciate. It's very good the supporting facilities.

Any information she got was limited to her course and study programme and she indicated that other information pertaining to the University and matters related to it, would be useful for students studying remotely from it. Access to the Centre was also an obstacle to attendance of the learning support activities organised by the Centre. Although the Centre is only 8 kilometres from the Centre of Nuku'alofa, the bus service to and from it was infrequent after hours and taxi fares expensive for most students. This meant that students like her could not benefit as much from learning support opportunities as those with private means of transportation. In this context, Ana's description of the Centre as being "right out there" was understandable, and her request for the USP to organise transportation of students for tutorials, appreciable.

The other major problem that Ana had was with the scheduling of satellite tutorials with her course tutor in Suva, by the USP Centre. These usually occurred during the day and while her employer was willing to pay for her studies, work policy forbade the attendance of other activities during work hours:

Sometimes the satellite is at three o'clock or four o'clock. Sometimes I just can't ... I couldn't make it because I cannot get out from this place because we made it clear at the beginning that let not your studies interrupt your work here ...

For someone used to the lecture method of on-campus education and the opportunity for direct tutor interaction that it offered, this represented a major shortcoming for Ana.

8.5.4 Learning disposition

1. Personal attributes

Ana's decision to resume study was part of her overall objective of placing her first priority on the development of her career. Part of achieving this objective was her decision to remain single, a decision which could not be taken lightly in the Tongan community. Her explanation showed how close-knit Tongan society was and how strong social pressure could be in ensuring appropriate cultural behaviour in the community. It also carried an indication of the strength of personality and motivation that was needed in Ana's case for her to continue to be able to stand up for what she wanted:

Yes, I mean, you know, in the society they look at you that you are 20 going on to 25 up to 30 it's either they think ... oh what's wrong with you! But I have learned to ignore what comments that they have. Only if they ask me why aren't you getting married then I say well I want to be independent, that's all. I want to develop my own career, I want to do what I want to do.

With this kind of determination, Ana faced the challenges of distance study with the positive attitude to be expected of her, although not without the initial misgiving about attempting something new and different:

When I got my textbooks from the Centre and I came back home first thing that I felt was that I miss the tutor-student face-to-face discussion back in Fiji where you can ask questions directly everyday because you have these tutorial classes. But also it was a challenge for me to try this different thing altogether, ouh, see if I can make it. Because see in Fiji you have a tutor there but at the same time you can have the attitude like back in Fiji even though the tutor was there but everytime I can run away from class I don't appreciate it but now I said I'll do it myself and see if I can make it. That was the first thing that I missed was talking directly - getting ... the information directly from the tutor.

It took her just a semester to come to terms with the requirements of independent learning. In her case, the challenges were quite a few as were apparent in her following comments:

I think I enjoy working on my own. When ... everybody's gone home and I sat down to ... get things out from the textbook alone I really put all my effort into this ... my studies because I knew the tutor is not there and the Centre is right out there and I have to do it and because the

deadline is next week⁵ I have to do it and finish it. So because there was no tutor here like I had at USP I said I have to get it, the answer is right here in the textbook and I have to get it.

One of the main challenges of independent study for Ana, was the level of English and the special language of Accounting that she had to cope with on her own. Because she was unfamiliar with Accounting vocabulary and terms, she faced the need to put in an extra effort and therefore extra reading time:

If I read it once I wouldn't understand, but if I read it again and slowly, going through it slowly ... because it's instructions - debit this, credit this - I could follow it certainly. ... always have to turn to the examples that it's giving ... if not it would be hopeless for me.

2. External factors

Besides not having sufficient opportunity to interact directly with her course tutor, and not having easy access to the facilities at the USP Centre, Ana was also dissatisfied with her local tutor. She felt he did not challenge her enough in the marking of her assignments and although not directly, she appeared to question his credibility as a tutor:

Because to be honest, some of my assignments I received during the coursework ... I received assignments rated A's. But I don't know why I just felt that I shouldn't have got A's. Maybe because I was biased because I thought it's because he is a Tongan tutor, ... maybe he didn't mark it properly. Because I would rather see a B or a C+... But getting these A's I kind of say oh he's local maybe he ... marked it just to finish it off and ... because then the A's ... kind of tells me false hope ... I say oh this is okay, I can make it through the exams because I've got A's I won't put in too much effort because now I approximate, I get 45 percent course work ...

If it were indeed the case that her work did not have adequate supervision and assessment, this situation would represent a significant variation in the learning opportunities of USP distance students. For people like Ana, sincerely motivated towards learning, the amount and quality of learning she was doing would be suspect and might well influence her performance in the final examinations. For others,

⁵ At the time of interview, the Accounting course that Ana was enrolled in required the submission of weekly tutorial assignments.

interested only in the qualifications that the courses brought, passing the course was essentially reduced to putting the bulk of the student's effort into the final examination.

Another shortcoming in her study programme was the insufficient provision of tutorial and group support. She was quite clear about the benefits that she would derive from this opportunity, particularly as a relative newcomer to the accounting field:

... because we have different levels of knowledge of this accounting thing and for me I know so little while some of my classmates are experienced people from government ministries. They've been working in accounting departments of these ministries for years and years and they know more, whereas for me I have to get it from the textbooks only and my job here does not involve any accounting ... Sharing, yeah, sitting there and listening and learning from the others I would know more.

8.5.5 Conclusion

By inference, then, Ana's comments suggest that USP students studying in the different modes, can expect to be treated differently in terms of the provision of learning support and study facilities. In her experience, they are treated differently. Being in a position to be able to judge, having been an on-campus student, it is obvious from her following statement that she has a strong preference for her on-campus student experience:

Uh it's funny because I feel more a part of the University in Fiji. I don't feel the same as this extension Centre, I don't.

For the time being, going away to study on a full-time basis is out of the question because of the strong attachment she has to her daughter and vice-versa. However, her career development plans and her determination to meet the challenges of distance education as the only opportunity currently available to her to pursue them, are factors and qualities in her life which make her future plans seem highly feasible. Her on-campus experience probably stands her in good stead in so far as the requirements and level of university studies are concerned. There is also no discounting the support she gets from her family, in spite of their apathy to her involvement in studies. This is shown in the exemption from household obligations that she gets when she has to do her studies.

In all, therefore, Ana seems poised for a successful programme of distance studies in the semesters ahead of her.

8.6 Case Study 4 : Simon

... it would depend on how I do my studies and how much time I have. ... I can assure you that I don't believe in failing 'cause I'm sure that everybody can go through it. One person can go through it, there's no reason why we shouldn't be able to go through it.

8.6.1 Demographic and personal information

1. Family background

Simon, now 22 years old, was born in Wagina, Solomon Islands, to iKiribati parents. The island of Wagina was allocated for settlement to iKiribati immigrants in the 1950s, so he spent his childhood among people of his culture group. His mother had had two previous marriages from which she had one son each. Simon was the eldest in her third marriage which produced another three sons and the only daughter of the family. Simon described the relationships in the family as a good one where all the siblings "get along very well". He attributed this to the fact that they were all brought up by his biological father, and were all treated equally.

He also described his family as a 'very poor' one. When Simon was still of pre-school age, his family moved to another island, Kolombangara, where his father worked as a labourer in the forestry industry. After this, on their return to Wagina, he worked as a cook on a tug boat. His mother never worked, staying at home to take care of her large family. Simon attributed the family's low economic status to the fact that both his parents never went to school and, by implication therefore, could not get well-paid jobs.

2. Educational experience

Simon started his primary schooling at Kolombangara and completed it at Wagina when the family returned there. He remembered his uncle who was the headmaster of the school at Wagina, as the driving force behind him then:

He's the one who always, you know, sort of push me all the time - go to school and never to miss doing my studies and all this.

Simon saw this source of support and encouragement as crucial to his schooling because his own parents had an apathy to education that Simon attributed to their own lack of it.

You know, I mean because they are people who are not educated so they don't really worry about it. Probably if I finish at form five level they will just think that it's all right you can still get a job.

On completion of his primary education, Simon came to Honiara to undertake secondary schooling at the national high school. He was fortunate that by this time his eldest brother was working and was able to pay for his fees. More than this, he also provided the encouragement and moral support through high school. Having himself won a government scholarship to undertake and complete a university degree in Australia, he, no doubt had the same vision of achievement for his younger brother in the advice that he often gave him:

... see what I did. Do what I teach you, you will be successful.

The vision took shape in reality in 1991 when Simon went to the University of Papua New Guinea to pursue a medical degree on a government scholarship. However, his studies were disrupted six months later by student riots on campus. He returned home, and in the following year was sent to the University of the South Pacific in Fiji on another government scholarship. This opportunity was foiled by ill health, and Simon returned once again to Honiara. His scholarship was terminated at this point.

8.6.2 Social environment

1. Current family status

Subsequently, Simon married a Solomon Islander and they had a baby son. The three of them lived with his wife's family in Honiara where Simon worked in one of the banks in town. With his income he supported his wife and child, as well as contributed food and things that he could afford for the extended household. He also paid for his own education, and his fees and study-related expenses constituted the initial deduction from his salary. However, he described himself as 'coping well' with all of his economic commitments.

2. Socio-cultural involvement

Aside from the responsibilities of his family life, Simon's social and cultural life was lived at a minimum. For instance, there was very little involvement that could be described as culturally-obligatec. Simon ascribed this situation to the fact that both he and his wife now lived away from their culture groups and therefore were not physically present to be expected to participate in cultural activities. However, the situation would have been different if he were 'back home':

If it was back home, yes I think it will be almost every week!

Social life in Honiara was therefore restricted to the occasional visits from and to relatives living in town. There also did not seem to be any religious obligations:

I don't go to church very often. In fact I haven't been to church the whole of this year.

Simon's only other time commitment, aside from work and the family, was a maximum of five hours a week to sports, usually after work.

8.6.3 The educational environment

1. The motivation to study

It was evident from Simon's attitude to study that education had a significant role to play in his life and his future plans for his family's progress and development. It has already been seen that this perception was instilled in him from an early age, and nurtured in later years, by educated family members. This early motivation towards education appeared to continue to have an effect in Simon's refusal to give up in spite of two unsuccessful attempts at university education, and his almost dogmatic continued pursuit of further potential opportunities.

I was really disappointed but I've been trying many other ways to find funding for studies for this problem. ... Yeah, that's why I thought to myself I'd better not let any chance run away anymore. I've wasted the other two already.

Simon now had an opportunity to compete for a scholarship to study computer systems engineering in Australia. His present enrolment in USP distance education courses was mainly to improve his eligibility for it.

On the family plane, his newly-acquired marital and family status also provided him with strong personal reasons, and sharpened the urgency for improving his qualifications at the earliest opportunity:

I think one of the main reasons now that is giving me the motivation to go further is that because I'm now having a family and that is a major problem. Like if I was on my own I wouldn't mind if I just continue where I am now and maybe getting probably a better chance in the future, later in the future. But right now ... I see that my family is very in need of financial assistance and a lot more.

Implicit in the above comments was the connection between educational achievement and improved economic status and conditions for himself and his family. The 'better pay' that he aspired towards would help them get a 'better home' among other necessities for the improvement of their family circumstances.

2. **The study environment**

The ambition for a better home can be better appreciated, juxtaposed against his current physical situation. Simon and his family occupied a room in the family home of his wife's parents. All other facilities in the house were shared, but Simon's study was done in their bedroom. With a wife, and especially a baby to accommodate as well, this posed problems for him such as his lack of control over study times described below:

I only have a certain limit to the time I have to do my work because if my child feels like going to bed I have to put off the light. Because we don't have a house on our own so we sort of live in just a room of that house and so if I use the light, when my child goes to sleep I have to put off the light and that will be the end of the work that I'm doing. ... Sometimes he gets up very early in the morning so that was also when I also have time like when he wakes up at four and probably stays up for the rest of the morning, I can get up and then do my work because even though I put on the light he will be playing around - although he gives me some disturbance ...

Being involved in his studies also meant that Simon was unable to afford much time to assist his wife in family-related responsibilities. This sometimes put a strain on their relationship which was an additional problem for him:

Sometimes my wife gets fed up looking after the kid but I sort of have to encourage her - it's very important that I sit down and do my work ...

On the other hand, the offer by Simon's employers of a half day off each week for his studies provided him with much needed balance in his study situation. Given his home situation and family conditions, this opportunity was a much-appreciated one because it was regularly available and he was therefore able to control his use of it with regard to his studies.

3. **The USP Centre and institutional support**

Overall, Simon appeared to be disappointed in his USP Centre, suggesting that there was much that needed improvement in its study and learning support programmes and facilities. In his comments there was a strong suggestion that the learning opportunities provided by his course materials needed to be supported and enhanced by other means. In this respect, Simon's main criticism of his extension studies was the lack of, or

inadequate tutorial support in the system. This was making the difference, for him, in the quality of his learning, or, as he put it, in his ability to cope:

To me at the moment I am coping quite well, not very well, but quite well. Cause I know that I've been having some quite hard time with my time - same thing with my Maths because we don't have a tutor and that is one of the subjects that is really challenging and we really need a tutor for that - we don't seem to have one.

With regard to library support, he found a major drawback in the level of science books held by the Centre library which he described as "very early secondary level" and therefore of not much use to him. The Honiara Library was not a viable option either because although he had time available in the lunch hour, the distance to the library meant that he would not be able to make it there and back on time.

A more feasible option for him and other students in his situation, was peer group assistance during which students could support one another by pooling their experiences, knowledge and information. However, even here, problems were encountered, particularly with respect to organising group meetings among students with varied time schedules and commitments. Simon saw the assistance of the USP Centre as crucial in situations such as these:

I think if the Centre make arrangements in such a way that we can come together and meet and discuss about the problems that we have like that, than probably it (the Centre) would give us a good benefit. ... Yeah, in the Centre I think I don't see much encouragement from the Centre.

8.6.4 Learning disposition

Simon's criticism of his study support environment as an extension student was perhaps a reflection of the learning orientation that he had acquired from having been a full-time student for more than a year. It was not surprising, therefore, that he found studying independently the biggest challenge in distance education:

I think the biggest challenge that I faced when I first started extension study was that, you know, doing your work without the lecturer. And sometimes we don't have tutors as well which is one of the major problems. Cause all we have is our course books and all this ... But I mean all of these course books you know, the way the things are explained in them are not that clear as you would expect. Sometimes you'd really need, you know, some sort of assistance. Like if your tutor can go through it with you then I think you'd probably find it easier.

These comments appeared to suggest two things: an inclination towards group and face-to-face learning, and the inadequacy of his course materials for independent learning. It was also possible that the two situations were related and that the inadequate course materials were cause, in his case, for need of tutorial and group support. His inclination towards group learning was rationalised largely by the opportunity it provided to interact and share ideas and information with other students. However, in his case, it was not so much the opportunity to 'borrow' from one another, as it was a means of stimulating his own thinking by the discussion and exchange. This was evident in his following comment:

To me I think that's the only way you can learn a lot. Like if we share ideas and exchange ideas of how we do things then I think we will be able to gain more. ... Yeah. Like if I do my assignment, for example, myself, then if I find it difficult and there's no one else I can talk to, you know to sort of discuss the matter, not to copy the answer but to sort of discuss the problems, then probably we can come to a consensus because he might have a different idea as well on how he approach it.

In his comparison of the USP on-campus and distance education programmes, there was an implication that the latter was seen by the community as second-rate and a soft option for less competent students. He indicated that in the Solomon Islands, more competitive students were selected for study abroad, the others remaining behind to take up local opportunities such as USP extension courses. He admitted that he probably felt that way himself!

However, in the final analysis, Simon was quite adamant that successful studying and learning was dependent primarily on the individual's commitment to it. Everyone had the potential for successful learning by extension. As he explained it:

I can assure you that I don't believe in failing, cause I'm sure that everybody can go through it. One person can go through it, there's no reason why we shouldn't be able to go through it.

However, to 'be able to go through it' there had to be a readiness to do the work required of the student, and to commit the time required to do the work:

... it would depend on how I do my studies and how much time I have. ... It's just that if you don't do your work because of maybe time or maybe because you just don't feel like doing it, that's when ...

He strengthened his point by citing the example of the student who left school at Standard 6 but was currently successfully involved in Form 6 level work at the Centre.

8.6.5 Conclusion

In light of Simon's description and criticism of the lack of support for extension studies that he is experiencing, his comments on successful learning at a distance contain strong suggestions of the need for qualities of independence. In particular, self-determination, time-management and the ability to seek out additional support where necessary, are key elements of success. The ability to learn, as far as he is concerned, is inherent. Perhaps this kind of confidence is bred from the realisation that the individual's destiny is largely composed of two main elements: the opportunities for development present in the environment, and the personal decision to use them. In Simon's case two key people, in his youth, initiated the awareness of the value of education for life in the modern world, that influenced the development of his current outlook. Along the way, no doubt, other factors in his life, such as family life, economic need, unsuccessful first attempts at university education, and personal determination for achievement, helped to sharpen and add other dimensions to this outlook. At this stage, he is confident as a student, his educational plans well-determined, and their place in his future well-understood.

So I seem to be getting on, everything is looking positive and I hope that after completing the course that I'm doing I will be able to go for further qualification.

8.7 Case Study 5 : Teri

... to help me in my job and also he told me this is really important to have further education so that's why I'm planning to just take accounting plus they check all my report and they find out that I am good in accounting just weak English but not much so they help me take courses.

8.7.1 Demographic and personal information

1. Family background

Teri's parents were working on Ocean Island, a phosphate rich island west of Kiribati, when she was born there 25 years ago. There were seven children altogether, four brothers and three sisters; she was the fifth child. When she was 12 years old, the family returned to their home island in Kiribati, while she continued her education in Tarawa, the administrative capital of the island republic.

Her parents did not have much education. Her father completed primary school only and her mother went a little further, to about two years at a local high school. As a result, they managed only manual work on Ocean Island, as domestic workers for phosphate mining officials. However, they did not want the same kind of life for their children and aspired towards providing them with the education that would ensure them better jobs. Teri described her father's ambitions in this regard as follows:

Because that time he's not really have a good job at Ocean Island so they want us to be ... have a good future. ... Yeah, because he only earn a little money not much as those who pass [complete high school]. And so they plan for us to have further education and encourage us ...

With this vision for the future of their children, Teri's parents developed in them the desire to get as much education as possible, encouraging them in various ways and means. They went to the extent of finding alternative schools for the children if they were not successful in the schools they were enrolled in. In Teri's estimation, the bulk of their parents' earnings from Ocean Island was spent educating their children. It might

have been a result of this esteem for education by the parents that caused Teri herself to be proactive in the pursuit of her own educational opportunities.

2. Educational experience

When Teri was 12 years old, she returned to Tarawa, and tried to find a place in high school. She claimed that because her mother was not a Catholic before she got married, the attitude to this by the church authorities was such that it was difficult for her to get a place in a Catholic high school, even though she had passed her entrance examination. Hence she decided to become a Mormon and pursue her education through the Mormon high school in Tarawa. At the end of third form she was selected out of 72 students, in a group of 15, to continue the rest of high school to Form 6, in Tonga. This achievement was an indication of her high aptitude as well as her determination to get ahead. She described this period of her life with great zest, from the excitement of her first trip overseas, to the experience of a new way of life in a different country and culture. In this experience, she remembered in particular, being able to shed the cultural restrictions and inhibitions imposed on her in her own country.

Because in other place, and maybe because we don't have like my own people, maybe I can involve with other people and we can discuss -that's what I always have in mind when I was in school.

At Liahona High School in Tonga, she took up Accounting because she realised she had an aptitude for it and could make a career of it:

Yes, like when I was in Liahona High School, I'm good in Accounting, so that way I know that accounting is like my fieldwork [future career prospects] and whether I can have a job of that. Also I know that if I do the accounting I think I will be pass 'cause I know the kind of knowledge of that.

8.7.2 Social environment

1. Current family status

On completion of high school, Teri served two years of mission work in Guam. She returned to a job as an accounts clerk in the Fisheries Department of government in Tarawa, where she lived with her brother, his wife, a niece and a nephew. As yet, she is still single, with good prospects in her Accounting career. Her skill at accounting earned her a promotion to senior accounts clerk in 1991, with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Employment, a job that she currently holds. With her income she continues to help support her parents, now living on their home island, as well as pay for her study expenses.

2. Socio-cultural involvement

Aside from work, Teri was involved in a lot of church-related activities. She attended services regularly on Sunday, and was the president of the young Mormon women's association. In this capacity, she organised charitable community activities in which the young women of the church participated. One such project was the assistance to widows in the community:

We have like a service for the widows - we can help them out maybe just only a weekend like Saturday we all go out and help them. We spend maybe two hours.

She was also involved in recreational sports organised for after work by ministry staff, but this occurred only once a week and did not take up much of her time. What she appeared to resent was the time she felt was wasted in social protocols and obligatory commitment to activities involving the extended family and culture group. When people visited, for instance, she was caught up in the small talk:

Like they talk too much - like we don't have time because that's our custom too, if someone talk you cannot leave.

There was also the matter of family activities and social functions:

Maybe the family if they like to have a party or something like that then they will bring us like to help first instead of doing our studies. Other relatives, not my dad but people they come and ask us if we can go to their place and help them.

8.7.3 The educational environment

1. The motivation to study

This might well be traced back to the days of her childhood which was characterised by a priority on going to school imposed on the family by her parents. Later on, at about the time of her promotion to senior accounts clerk, she was encouraged by her brother to enrol in extension courses in order to improve her Accounting qualifications and consequently, her career prospects in the Accounting field. At work, a memo was sent to everyone informing them that

... if we have like a diploma maybe you can jump, maybe earn more money, promotion, increase your wages - make me more careful for that - encourage me.

Financial assistance schemes offered by her employers and her local USP Centre also provided incentive towards the positive consideration of extensions studies. There was a refund of fees by the Ministry for every course passed. In addition, she was able to cope with her study-related expenses by taking advantage of the time-payment scheme offered by her local USP Centre which she described as 'a good help'.

With her own high aptitude and interest in Accounting, all of these considerations were more than sufficient to get her involved. However, although her last formal education experience was, as yet, still within fairly clear memory, she approached her initial involvement in extension studies with some misgiving and self-doubt, her confidence in herself as a student returning after the first successful attempts at studying.

2. The study environment

Within her small family unit, Teri did not appear to have any problem with physical study facilities at her brother's home, although she did not say whether or not this meant she had her own room. However, being satisfied with what she had was a fortunate situation because although her brother gave her the initial encouragement to study, and continued to offer her his support, he also enforced a traditional requirement that his sister always return home before nightfall.

... that's another problem like when I do my private study at USP maybe almost at nights, my brother get mad of that. ... He get mad because it's not right that girls ... they should not leave the place at dark, they should leave before the night.

This had implications for study support: opportunities provided after hours:

That's another problem like if we have a tutorial and then if I don't have ... not enough time for me so I just leave the class right away.

Aside from the restriction on her ability to participate in learning opportunities, Teri lived with the constant knowledge that at 25 years of age, she was still subject to parental chastisement and physical punishment for wrongdoing. Although not explicitly discussed, it was implicit in her responses and her reference to 'girls' that this situation was specifically related to her gender and unmarried status. The customary before-dark curfew was intended to not only protect their reputations as 'good girls', it was to ensure their physical protection. The fact that she saw her brother and her father in particular, as the guardian of these statuses, gave a clear indication that iKiribati females were restricted to a clearly defined gender role within the society, and that males stood in supervision over the observance of this role by the women in their charge. There was an element of fear in her discussion of the potential reaction of her father if she should step outside of this boundary:

Like if he (brother) get mad maybe ... I don't know, maybe they will send me home, I don't know ... Maybe they will tell my parents, my dad, and I don't know about my ... My dad is not a good man like once we make a mistake I don't know what he's gonna do to us.

Most of Teri's study, therefore, was done at home, after work and after her household chores. Her 'before dark' curfew also meant that she was almost totally reliant on her course materials for her learning, having very little time to use the facilities and services provided elsewhere, and particularly by her local USP Centre.

8.7.4 Learning disposition

Teri described her process of settling into distance study as 'lazy', although on further reflection she realised that her initial slowness to respond to the requirements of her course was due to her lack of preparedness and self-discipline. Into her study programme, the opportunity to interact with her fellow students became an enjoyable experience for her. Again this reflected the sociable nature that contributed to the fulfilling experience in Tonga. For her, the most enhanced feature of her extension experience was the opportunity for group learning, when it occurred:

Yeah, I prefer the extension because I'm involved with other friends and maybe they have an idea and then maybe they discuss and they have different ideas and then maybe they can combine with mine and I can do mine.

This did not preclude a preference for direction and also for being taught, which was conveyed in terms of her enjoyment of the summer courses for which lectures and face-to-face teaching were provided. She was also disappointed with the lack of tutorial support for her current extension course.

Discouraging part like when we don't like have tutorial - like we don't have a man to provide for us to be our tutor.

It was fortunate, therefore, that Teri was able to learn from the practical experience afforded her by her job.

Sure, it help me a lot ... like I know like the budget and some other thing, I can do it. Like last year our SAS - senior assistant secretary, he asked me to just draft my estimate for this ministry so I just did up the budget and I just give to them and they know that I'm good.

This, plus a friend who was ahead of her in the programme and who was approachable for assistance, provided the alternative options for learning, although did not altogether compensate for the lack of tutorial support.

One other obstacle to learning for Teri was her level of English expression. Her primary school subjects were taught in the vernacular, and it was not until high school that English became the teaching medium. Later, in Tonga, English speaking was enforced, although Teri continued to speak in her native tongue whenever she had the opportunity, a habit which prevailed to this day. As a result of inadequate background in, and experience with the English language, Teri now found that although she understood English fairly well, she had a problem with written and oral expression. Her halting explanation of her problem with the language was indicative of her level of difficulty:

Like English - I understand but only a little bit. ... It's okay but, ... yeah, like in talking it's kinda hard.

This had implications for the quality of her course work and assignments, and to a lesser extent, for her understanding of her course materials. It was likely that this shortcoming was a partial reason for her tendency to learn through work experience and practice.

8.7.5 Conclusion

Teri admits that over the years she has become adept at studying at a distance because she now knows what to expect and is better disciplined. She counts herself lucky too, that her study is relevant to her job which provides opportunities for her to put new information into practice and learn from the situation. She feels, however, that USP qualifications obtained through extension do not rate as highly as those obtained on campus. This is perhaps due to the fact that on-campus studies are done at the university proper, while extension courses have less of that association. Consequently, on-campus courses are perhaps more academic in nature compared to the more socially organised extension course. She describes it thus:

Maybe because they thought that it's like academic more than social having in extension here.

She also refers to the fact that on-campus education is 'overseas' education and therefore has more esteem in the eyes of the community. These attitudes do not faze her too much though; as far as she is concerned

We all plan to pass by working hard so that I can have the same level ...

She herself admits a preference for full-time study on campus, but if she put as much as she had into her extension studies, she deserves the same recognition of achievement accorded the on-campus student. She is certainly willing to accord it to herself, if nobody else did!

8.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has focussed on the lives, as distance education students, of five of the study respondents in the form of a narrative. No attempt was made to link the information with that in any of the previous chapters in any detailed way as it was intended primarily to add depth and detail to the composite discussion in Chapter 7 and to provide real life contexts for the statistical outcomes in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.