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**Making good on migration: Exploring narratives of aspiration and imagined futures with students  from migrant backgrounds**

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# Making good on migration: Exploring narratives of aspiration and imagined futures with students from migrant backgrounds

Submitted by

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# Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

...............................................

Signed: Antoine Mangion

Date: 12 June, 2024

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# Table of Contents

**Declaration** .......... i

**Acknowledgements** .......... ii

**Table of Contents** .......... iv

**List of Tables** .......... viii

**List of Figures** .......... ix

**Abstract** .......... x

**Abbreviations** .......... xii

**Chapter One – Introduction** .......... 1

1.1 The research setting .......... 1

1.2 The politics of aspiration .......... 3

1.2.1 Is everything old new again? .......... 3

1.2.2 Redistributing responsibility .......... 5

1.2.3 Equity and economics in the aspirations raising agenda .......... 10

1.2.4 An apparent lack of aspiration .......... 13

1.2.5 Global imperatives .......... 14

1.2.6 But what of migrant students? .......... 19

1.2.7 Shifts in the Politics of Aspiration .......... 22

1.3 Thesis Statement: The Research Puzzle .......... 26

1.4 Thesis Outline .......... 27

1.5 Conclusion .......... 29

**Chapter Two – Literature Review** .......... 31

2.1 Introduction .......... 31

2.2 Defining aspirations and its functions .......... 33

2.3 Migrant, Second Generation and Ethnic Minority Youth .......... 42

2.3.1 Australian research on migrant and second-generation students .......... 48

2.5 Conclusion .......... 69

**Chapter Three – Conceptualising Aspirations ........................................................ 73**

3.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 73

3.2 The sociological and philosophical dimensions of aspirations ............................ 74

3.3 (Re)conceptualising aspirations ........................................................................ 76

3.3.1 Aspirations as a Cultural Capacity ................................................................ 76

3.3.2 Place - Migrancy, home, and belonging as fonts for aspiration ........................ 85

3.3.3 Aspirations as temporally bound .................................................................... 98

3.3.4 Aspirations as an affective orientation .......................................................... 103

3.4 Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 108

**Chapter Four – A Narrative Method/ology ........................................................ 110**

4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 110

4.2 The narrative approach ...................................................................................... 111

4.2.1 Narrative Inquiry ............................................................................................ 111

4.2.2 Three Commonplaces of Narrative .................................................................. 113

4.2.3 Working along the borderlands ...................................................................... 114

4.3 The Research Puzzle .......................................................................................... 123

4.4 Methods ............................................................................................................ 125

4.4.1 Positioning the researcher .............................................................................. 125

4.4.2 Data collection ................................................................................................ 128

4.4.3 Ethical considerations .................................................................................... 129

4.4.4 Recruiting CLSs .............................................................................................. 131

4.4.5 Recruiting Students ........................................................................................ 134

4.4.7 Focus groups .................................................................................................. 137

4.4.5 Data analysis .................................................................................................. 140

4.5 Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 144

**Chapter Five – Migration Narratives .................................................................. 146**

5.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 146

5.2 Findings Context ................................................................................................ 147

5.3 Family Migration Narratives .............................................................................. 151

5.3.1 Escaping conflict and seeking freedoms ..... 152
5.3.2 Exploring situatedness through migration narratives ..... 160
5.3.3 Drawing upon the archives, deploying migration stories ..... 171
5.4 Situated identities ..... 182
5.4.1 'They're completely Australian culture': Vietnamese CLS ..... 182
5.4.2 'Everything is based on our faith': Assyrian CLS ..... 187
5.4.3 'Everyone has the same experiences and that creates bonds': Persian CLS ..... 192
5.5 Conclusion ..... 195
**Chapter Six – Navigational Capacities ..... 199**
6.1 Introduction ..... 199
6.2 What do I want to do or be? ..... 200
6.3 Reading the map: using navigational capacities ..... 209
6.3.1 The temporal emergence of 'new' aspirations ..... 213
6.3.2 'Performing a play without a script' ..... 218
6.3.3 Reacting to and enacting new knowledge ..... 222
6.4 Ends and means: elective subject choices ..... 224
Conclusion ..... 236
**Chapter Seven – Good Students ..... 239**
7.1 Introduction ..... 239
7.2 NAPLAN: heightening pressures and insecurities ..... 240
7.2.1 Concern about future consequences ..... 240
7.2.2 'Asian' expectations ..... 244
7.2.3 School and individual performativities ..... 250
7.3 Visions of the future and the onus of making it ..... 254
7.3.1 (Not being) Driven to distraction ..... 258
7.3.2 Jobs: experience and opportunity ..... 266
7.3.3 Structural factors effecting imagined futures ..... 278
7.4 Conclusion: Life as project? ..... 282

**Chapter Eight – Conclusion ........ 286**

8.1 Introduction ........ 286

8.2 Key findings: Piecing together the research puzzle ........ 287

8.3 Limitations and opportunities ........ 295

8.4 Contributions to the field ........ 298

8.5 Implications ........ 302

8.6 Conclusion: Making good ........ 305

**References ........ 308**

**Appendices ........ 352**

Appendix A: Information for the CLS Principal ........ 352

Appendix B: Principal Consent Form ........ 356

Appendix C: Participant Information Letter – Parent/Caregiver ........ 357

Appendix D: Parent/Caregiver Consent Form ........ 360

Appendix E: Participant Information Letter - Student ........ 362

Appendix F: Student Assent Form ........ 365

Appendix G: Student Information Question Sheet ........ 367

Appendix H: Student Contextual Information ........ 368

Appendix I: Artefact Book Template ........ 371

# List of Tables

Table 1: Data Sources ........................................................................................................ 129

Table 2: Student Contextual Information - Assyrian CLS ..........................................................368

Table 3: Student Contextual Information - Persian CLS ............................................................369

Table 4: Student Contextual Information - Vietnamese CLS ......................................................370

# List of Figures

Figure 1: Cara's aspirations mind-map .......... 204

Figure 2: Liam's ideas for ten years' time .......... 257

# Abstract

This thesis explores the post-school aspirations of migrant-background students. It locates itself among a broadening literature that provides a critical sociological examination of the politics of aspiration, complicating notions of 'raising' aspirations and helping to reimagine how the processes of aspiring might be understood and provides greater focus to the role of migration and constructions of ethnicity in contemporary Australia. The research presented is based on focus groups conducted with students, and interviews with parents, from three community language schools across metropolitan Sydney as they move through Years 8 and 9. I examine how students story their experiences and the experiences of others to envisage their future selves. In so doing, the research also considers how aspirations for study and work interact with other hopes, desires, and interests.

To frame this, I utilise Narrative Inquiry and draw together several conceptual tools. Among these is Appadurai's conceptualisation of aspirations as a 'cultural capacity' formed "in interaction and in the thick of social life" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67). I also consider conceptualisations of migrancy, temporality, and affect (Ahmed, 1999, 2010; Ahmed et al., 2003; Appadurai, 1996, 2003; Boccagni, 2017a; de Certeau, 1984).

Through this process, the research raises several important insights, and theoretical and policy implications. Students' aspirations are supported by 'migration narratives' that are deployed to give purpose to the stories of family movement and resettlement. They signpost actions and experiences that could be used by students in their efforts to attain their aspirations. These images of the future are broad and complex, and students signal a range of interests and hopes. While they are supported by migration narratives, students' social and material contexts produce

varying navigational capacities with which to draw linkages between their aspirations and possible steps required for their attainment. In related ways however, both migration narratives and navigational capacities become implicated in the contemporary political of aspiration, with students affectively and performatively evaluating themselves against the neoliberal archetype of the ‘good’ student: enterprising, future-oriented, self-directed. Through its methodology and conceptual framing, the thematic analysis of stories foregrounds the role of social, political, and historical contexts on contemporary conditions and imagined futures, broadening our understanding of how students from migrant background come to aspire.

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ACU | Australian Catholic University |
| ATAR | Australian Tertiary Admission Rank |
| CLS | Community Languages School |
| CLSP | Community Languages School Program |
| CV | Curriculum Vitae |
| DoE | NSW Department of Education |
| EAL/D | English as an Additional Language or Dialect |
| GERM | Global Educational Reform Movement |
| GFC | Global financial crisis |
| HECS-HELP | Higher Education Contribution Scheme - Higher Education Loan Program |
| HEPPP | Higher Education Partnerships and Participation Program |
| HSC | Higher School Certificate |
| HSES | High Socio-Economic Status |
| IEA | International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement |
| IST | Information Software and Technology |
| IT | Information Technology |
| LGA | Local Government Area |
| LSAY | Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth |
| LSES | Low Socio-Economic Status |
| LSYPE | Longitudinal Study of Young People in England |
| NAPLAN | National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy |
| NESA | NSW Education Standards Authority |
| NESB | Non-English Speaking Background |
| NSW | New South Wales |
| NZ | New Zealand |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PASS | Physical Activity and Sports Studies |
| PIRLS | Progress in International Reading Literacy Study |
| PISA | Program for International Student Assessment |

| | |
|---|---|
| SBS | Special Broadcasting Service |
| SCV | Special Category Visa |
| SES | Socio-Economic Status |
| SICLE | Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education |
| TAFE | Technical and further education |
| TIMSS | Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study |
| TTTA | Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UNSW | University of NSW |
| US | United States (of America) |

# Chapter One – Introduction

## 1.1 The research setting

This study situates itself among a contemporary and broadening body of literature that takes as its starting point the political dimensions of aspirations, and the social, cultural, and material conditions of coming to aspire. Within this, some literature has considered the role of migration and the experiences of migrant-background students and families, building off earlier research that has been largely dominated by quantitative studies providing comparative empirical findings between different migrant or ethnic groups. Given, however, the diverse representation of ethnic and cultural communities in Australia and evolving social and political contexts in which they migrate and settle, continued research in this space is of increasing importance and allows us to draw upon different theoretical and conceptual frames and apply them to different and changing social conditions. My research attends to this in the several ways to make important contributions to the fields of education and sociology more broadly.

In using Community Languages Schools (CLSs) as a site of research, this study locates itself within non-mainstream, complementary places of education where students, parents, families and even their wider community demonstrate some interest in language and cultural maintenance as part of identity-making and broader aspiration work (Nordstrom, 2016). Several focus groups are undertaken with small groups of second-generation[1] students in each CLS over a 15-month period as they proceed through Year 8 and Year 9 of their mainstream schooling – a period in which students make academic subject choices for the first time and thus explore notions of

[1] Children who are born in Australia or arrived in Australia as young children to parents born overseas.

making decisions for the future. These research aspects tie into the study's narrative inquiry methodology and its three *commonplaces* – sociality, temporality, and place – which serve to specify the dimensions of an inquiry space through which experiences and stories are explored (Clandinin et al., 2007; Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). Such factors allow me to generate new understandings of how the aspirations of young people within these contexts develop and are given meaning over time, and to explore how experiences bound to time and place also influence students' imagined futures. The location also provides opportunities to consider how such 'in-between' places of education and culture (Tsolidis & Kostogriz, 2008) may play a role in the aspiration process.

To think through the narratives and re-storying of experiences that inform students' aspirations, this research also heeds the call from Gale and Parker (2015b) to continue developing a more robust and nuanced conceptualisation of aspirations. My study first draws upon the work of Appadurai (2004) to consider aspirations as a 'cultural capacity' "always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life" (p. 67); but I give attention to its temporal, spatial and affective dimensions by drawing upon a range of theorists and researchers who work across their socio-political and cultural aspects (for example Ahmed, 1999, 2010; Ahmed et al., 2003; Appadurai, 1996, 2003; Boccagni, 2017a; P. Brown, 2013; Somerville, 2013). This conceptual framework complements the narrative inquiry method/ology, and the commonplaces in which narratives come into being.

In so doing, the study expands the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological repertoire used among the broadening literature on the politics of aspiration. This approach also shows that although aspirations of study and work are prominent, research can become more receptive to the diverse aspirations students may hold, and both the ways and reasons why educational and occupational aspirations may be

positioned in relation to other hopes and desires. These aspirations are also recognised through their co-construction both between students and their families in the re-telling of stories, and through the interaction between peers within our focus groups, where experiences and their meanings are shared and collectively brought into being. As such, this form of research is open to reproduction in ways that do not prioritise comparative aims consisting of 'high' and 'low' aspirations, involving different young people and communities, and across different places, and social and material conditions. It also shares with other research a concern for the formulation of equity within education and wider policy agendas, by demonstrating a need to think how such policies impact, position, and shape the experiences and mobilisation efforts of migrant families.

## 1.2 The politics of aspiration

### 1.2.1 Is everything old new again?

Government interest in making citizens ready and capable for changing economies and employment opportunities is nothing new. Concern for 'low' education levels among youth, especially those from the working class, was particularly evident from earlier than the 20th century in industrialised societies, with attempts at improving and widening school participation intended to solve or head off several potential social and economic difficulties. In England, for example, early state intervention in schooling from the 1870s was seen in no small way as an attempt to manage social and political problems arising out of the rapid urbanisation of cities due to industrialisation: "'The urban'", Ball (2013) tells us, became "a repository and magnifier of social problems. Forms of disorder that were regarded as threatening political stability were manifested in crime, juvenile delinquency, changing kinship structures and gender relations and 'race' immigration", all of

which continue to be the focus of policy intervention to this day (p. 56). While the overcrowding in urban slums became a concern for the political establishment, so too did the rise of a new middle class of industrialists and managers, who "rapidly became conscious of itself as a class ... and which now articulated a specific education policy both for its own members and for the newly developing working class" (Simon, as cited in Ball, 2013, p. 66). Later, post-World War II interventions not only played at population management, but increasingly saw the role of education as a way to realise untapped potential that was central to both the needs of the economy and for securing and increasing the nation's economic advantage (Spohrer, 2011).

As the state began to intervene, the desires of the disadvantaged simultaneously became a concern, for both progressive and more conservative politician alike. For the conservative, greater state control of education was ambivalently considered as an undesired but necessary move to maintain social order by providing the lower classes an opportunity "that they may be able to appreciate and defer to a higher cultivation when they meet it" (Lowe [Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1868-73], as cited in Ball, 2013, p. 63). Meanwhile, socialists were concerned that the working class were too easily satisfied with their trivial forms of consumption and leisure which provided short relief from oppressive labour conditions (Sellar, 2013a). British socialists saw it as necessary to help workers overcome their 'poverty of desire' in pursuit and cultivation of more enlightened tastes. However, rather than work to maintain the social order through inculcation into the tastes of higher classes, such elevated pursuits would provide the grounds for greater political engagement and agitate a popular socialist movement.

Given the historical lineage of education policy troubles, it is therefore important to consider how the characteristics of the contemporary emphasis on aspirations represent something new, rather than simply older debates under

changed social conditions. Within the Australian context, the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley et al., 2008; henceforth Bradley Review) represents a decisive policy platform through which aspirations have taken centre stage. The review, in seeking to address both issues of equity and competitiveness, raises the concern that persistent skill shortages in several important occupations across Australia's labour market "threaten the long-term well-being of the community and the country's capacity to maintain and enhance global competitiveness and prosperity" (p. 9); and the need to address this threat by "increasing the desire to attend university and putting it firmly on the 'radar screen'" of high school students (p. 40). We must therefore begin our exploration of aspirations by asking, in the footsteps of Spohrer (2011), how such contemporary challenges represent and are part of a fundamental social, economic and political shift from those previously experienced, and why long-standing socio-economic issues are now being addressed by problematising aspirations.

### 1.2.2 Redistributing responsibility

To think about and through these questions further, we must begin by acknowledging the historical contingency of aspirations. Aspirations have always been artefacts of cultural and political construction and reproduction as they are, in part, a product of the socio-political constructions of status, personal quality of life, and societal prosperity: what we as individuals and communities aspire to, and how we do so, are embedded within this social and cultural context. How we think about aspiration is, therefore, "related to the specific 'historical' situation of the present" (Spohrer, 2011, p. 54).

While the political classes of the past may have bemoaned the lack of desire among the disadvantaged, academic and occupational aspirations, however, were

nonetheless couched as a largely individual matter outside the instrumentalities of governmental education policy. In Australia, for example, reports by Anderson, Boven, Fensham, & Powell (1980a) and Anderson & Vervoorn (1983) identify aspirations as one of the four required 'A's' for attaining entry to university – the other three being availability, accessibility, and achievement. The model attempts to highlight "the contribution which environment and inherited ability make to probability of entry to higher education" (Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983, p. 3). In order to gain entry to university there must be "the availability of places in higher education, the accessibility of available places to qualified individuals, the level of academic achievement necessary to qualify for entry, and the aspiration or determination of the student to seek a place" (Anderson et al., 1980a, p. 2). Within this model, governments can have varying degrees of direct influence over individuals' opportunities through the control of university places (availability) as well as decisions around personal costs of attending and geographical locations of institutions (accessibility). Importantly, wider influences on student aspirations are recognised, particularly in their mutual relationship with academic achievement – where high grades can serve as an impetus for higher aspirations – and the role of home and school environmental conditions in influencing levels of aspiration and achievement. Governments may be able to influence achievement more indirectly through schooling policy, though this is rather more secondary to the role of students and their families due both to genetic inheritance and the home/school environment. This perspective therefore argues that aspirations are more a matter for the individual and "beyond the purview of governments" (Sellar, 2015, p. 210).

In contrast, within the contemporary historical situation, the responsibilities of both the state and individuals have been redistributed and realigned. Aspiration now represents a key site of contemporary governmentality; a social policy issue

where the role of government is to help individuals become aspirational and in so doing take greater responsibility for themselves, and by extension, their communities and countries (Rose, 1999; Raco, 2009; Sellar, 2013a, 2015; Sellar & Gale, 2011).

One aspect that has significantly contributed to this rearrangement of responsibilities is the shift from a 'politics of expectation' to a 'politics of aspiration' (Raco, 2009). Raco (2009) argues that this reflects a post-Keynesian shift in governance and its associated conceptions of the roles of the state and individual in providing and distributing social and economic goods as well as of the utility and worth of those economic goods and commodities. According to Raco, the aspirational citizenship agenda set forth by the Blair 'New' Labour government in the United Kingdom from the late 1990s supplanted the 'politics of expectation' discourse that was previously understood as a cornerstone of social-democratic politics.[2] Within this old paradigm, social policy sought to construct welfare as a series of policies and programs that citizens could expect the state to provide them in times of need across most major aspects of life – including health, education, housing and income support – and thus arouse in them, in the words of Giddens (2013), a sense of 'ontological security', in that they "would be nurtured and sustained by institutionalised forms of support" (Raco, 2009, p. 438). This expectational citizenship, however, has been argued by contemporary governments (across the traditional left-right divide) to entrench dependency on welfare by individuals and communities, thus engendering a 'poverty of aspiration' "in which entrepreneurialism, dynamism, and individual potential were suppressed by an overly-bureaucratic, monolithic and inflexible ensemble of welfare institutions" (Raco, 2009, p. 438). As such, aspiration

[2] Though it is also worth noting the Blair Labour government's antecedents in both the UK and Australia through the 1970s and 1980s, where Labo(u)r governments helped establish neoliberal policy frameworks through the Accord (Australia) and Social Contract (UK) with their respective union movements (Humphrys, 2018; Humphrys & Cahill, 2017).

discourses work to absolve the state of the expectation to provide services and goods once received by citizens (in intention, at least, if not actualisation), just as wider political-economic discourses and agendas make such a delivery of services difficult or even untenable, and at the very least, normatively unpalatable.

Renegotiating the terms of the social contract between the state and the individual has also required a reconceptualisation of the notion of both citizenship and human capital wherein, as part of a tripartite logic for realising potential alongside talent and opportunity, aspiration is recast "as a source of economic value in its own right and not simply as condition for participation in education" (Sellar, 2015, p. 210; Spohrer et al., 2018). The role of government here is to create the necessary groundwork that allows for individuals to be aspirational, and remove obstacles from the paths of aspirational and entrepreneurial individuals. In return, by participating in this 'opportunity bargain' (Sellar, 2013a, 2015), individuals are tasked with taking greater responsibility for themselves, and by extension, their communities (Rose, 1999; Raco, 2009). Schooling and education become one such vehicle – "the producer of the required human capital" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 18) – through which aspirations can be raised and skills garnered so that individuals can better maximise their own opportunities and potential, and thereby playing their role as producer and consumer within the wider economy (Zipin et al., 2015). Having aspirations and ambition to 'better oneself', in material and commodified terms, is couched as an innate human desire and way of being. The political discourse reshapes individuals from civic participants to 'consumer-citizens', who are championed for their potential as drivers of economic growth, productivity, and social mobility. In this way, attributes considered to define human capital – knowledge, skills, ideas and information – have become indistinguishable from the individuals who acquire them (Sellar, 2013a).

In such a way, aspirations become what Rorty terms an 'existential yardstick' that "attempt(s) to capture and institutionalise definitions of successful citizenship by politicising the life-courses of individuals and the socio-economic roles that they are expected to 'perform'" (Raco, 2009, p. 437). As Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) contend, successful citizenship is laden with middle-class norms of supposed independent practices and tastes: as a process of self-maximisation, pursuing one's aspirations through (higher) education – increasingly 'lifelong' (Biesta, 2006) – and subsequent labour market opportunities are therefore accepted as self-evidently 'high' (Sellar, 2013a).

For the state to ensure, however, that individuals pursue such self-maximising processes, the aspiration yardstick also works to measure supposedly expectational individuals, casting those who have failed to hold such high aspirations as being unable to do so not so much because of wider social and economic structural issues but because of deficiencies and failures in themselves that prevent them from meeting their potential (Pimlott-Wilson, 2017; Spohrer et al., 2018). Furthermore, this stokes and taps into similar antipathies amongst those who have come to see themselves as aspirational. Individuals and communities, failing to show the normatively expected forms of individual responsibility and opportunity-seeking behaviours, are constituted as having a poverty of aspiration. They are invariably inherently lazy, lacking the necessary information and example to act in appropriate self-maximising ways, and/or are located within a mix of social and geographical spaces and relationships which reinforce and perpetuate these individual failings (Archer et al., 2010). "Hegemonic discourses of 'social exclusion' are themselves embedded in problematic assumptions about cultural deficit and working-class and minority ethnic failure" (Burke, 2006, p. 270). As such, while aspiration is 'unleashed' on the one hand, it is policed on the other (Sellar, 2013a). Those found to

be wanting in aspiration require interventions, whether in the form of other more model citizens or protective (or paternalistic) policy tools and regulatory frameworks, to be "encouraged to work on inner dispositions, such as confidence and motivation, and transform themselves through and towards geographical, social and psychological mobility" (Spohrer et al., 2018, p. 337).

### 1.2.3 Equity and economics in the aspirations raising agenda

Over several decades, university systems have been undergoing a process of massification, as governments internationally have been pushing tertiary education from elite to mass participation systems, and in the case of some countries including Australia, further towards universal systems (Leach, 2013). For large periods of the move towards mass participation, the imperative was on *increasing* student numbers. In Australia, while continuous population growth has contributed, increasing university student numbers have largely been the result of changing economic needs and a demand for a more skilled and credentialed labour force (Gale & Tranter, 2011). Another more recent focus, however, has been on *broadening* participation so that university becomes more accessible to traditionally 'under-represented' groups. The following focuses on the nature of these developments with particular interest on the Bradley Review (2008) and subsequent government reforms.

Literature on Australian higher education policy points to developments including the Bradley Review and subsequent government agenda as keeping largely in step with a global trend of increasing and widening higher education participation (Gale, 2015). Following its return to government in 2007, the Australian Labor Party established the Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008) as part of a wider education policy drive to improve education outcomes and increase tertiary participation more

broadly. Citing research (Access Economics, 2008) contending that demand for people with qualifications is going to be stronger than overall employment growth, the review argues that

> Australia will have insufficient qualified people to meet its medium- and long-term needs. The Australian labour market has experienced persistent skill shortages in a number of important occupations. This threatens the long-term well-being of the community and the country's capacity to maintain and enhance global competitiveness and prosperity. (p. 8)

Similarly, the subsequent government response emphasized the economic benefits and imperatives of tertiary reform:

> The tertiary education revolution will change and enlarge Australia's economic potential. The investments and reforms being made will drive improvements in productivity and create a smarter, cleaner and more competitive economic future for Australia. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009)

A concurrent interest in *broadening* participation, so that it may become more representative of society as opposed to simply *increasing* participant numbers, was also advanced through this reform agenda. Such concerns have been embedded in policy prior to Bradley. Gale and Tranter (2011) note that government initiatives can be traced back to the 1960s (see, e.g., Anderson et al., 1980a; Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983), however "Australia's universities have remained dominated by the more affluent members of the community" (p. 31), and the Bradley Review notes that in the 20 years preceding students of low socio-economic status (LSES) background continued to be three times less likely to attend university. What has notably changed is the economic imperatives to do so. For OECD nations in particular, expanding

participation in higher education is seen as the means to greater human capital investment, producing more knowledgeable and adaptable workers that can better compete in a globalising, transient and less geographically embedded 'knowledge economy' (Archer, 2007; Gale, 2015; Zipin et al., 2015). A highly educated and trained citizenry is thus considered "essential for a country's social and economic well-being" (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], n.d.), and in many countries this cannot be met simply by having more students enrol from middle- and upper-SES groups who already attend university in significant numbers.

As such, interest in equity, inclusion and social justice has been linked to and defined by economic requirements, representing an "amalgamation of competing ideological discourses" (Chapman et al., 2015, p. 997). The Bradley Review (2008), for example, argues that "Australia needs to harness the potential of all capable students to contribute to society and the economy… the failure to capitalise on the abilities of all Australians is a significant economic issue for the nation" (p. 10). Similarly, Julia Gillard, the then Education Minister, asserted that "Without greater equity in our higher education system, Australia simply cannot obtain the high-level knowledge and skills we need to compete with the most successful economies of the world. It's that simple" (Maslen, 2009). Wells (as cited by Gale & Tranter, 2011) also contends that given the significant shortfall in tertiary educated graduates at the time of the Bradley Review required by the wider economy, the economic imperative to widen participation provides a strong reinforcement for a social and moral imperative to increase participation amongst disadvantaged and under-represented groups: "Equity in higher education has now become as much a matter of economic necessity as a matter of social justice" (Gale & Tranter, 2011, p. 32).

### 1.2.4 An apparent lack of aspiration

In its interest to attain the economic by considering equity, the Bradley Review seeks to identify the reasons for low tertiary participation and subsequent employment directions among students from several 'equity groups'[3]: "members of groups currently under-represented within the system, that is, those disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth: Indigenous people, people with low socio-economic status, and those from regional and remote areas" (p. xi). The review notes barriers that hinder access to higher education for such groups, developing a narrative that is wrapped up largely in deficit discourses (see Hattam & Prosser, 2008; Valencia, 2010). Such barriers "include their previous educational attainment, *no awareness* of the long-term benefits of higher education and, thus, *no aspiration* to participate" (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 27 emphasis added). Aspirations among disadvantaged students thus need to be addressed: low aspirations, the review argues, would need raising because it is this 'lack of aspirations' that acts as the main barrier to participation in further study among various groups of disadvantaged students (see also Nguyen & Blomberg, 2014): "It is, therefore, necessary for any access initiatives to include encouraging potential students early in their schooling to aspire to attend university and providing information in an accessible form to such students" (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 40).

Among a raft of recommendations, the review proposed specific targets seeking both to increase and widen participation and attainment, which were largely taken up by the Australian Government. The Government sought to increase the

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[3] Equity target groups are university cohorts who come from recognised disadvantaged backgrounds and were first designated in *A fair chance for all: national and institutional planning for equity in higher education: a discussion paper* (Department of Employment, Education, and Training [DEET], 1990). Data from students is collected at enrolment. The equity groups are people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; people from rural and isolated areas; people with a disability; people from a non-English speaking background; women in non-traditional areas of study and higher degrees; and Indigenous people.

number of those qualified with undergraduate degrees to 40% of all 25-34-year-olds by 2025;[4] and to increase participation rates of students from LSES background to 20% by 2020 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).[5] The most prominent policy manifestation developed with the aim of achieving these targets was the removal of caps on domestic undergraduate enrolments from 2012. This has created a demand-driven system in which universities could set their own enrolment numbers according to the capacity and entrance marks and pathways they see fit. Along with this, the Australian Government developed the Higher Education Partnerships and Participation Program (HEPPP). The HEPPP provides universities financial incentives for enrolling students from LSES backgrounds, as well additional grants for outreach programmes, such as those in collaboration with schools and education administrations, aimed at raising secondary students' aspirations. Mission-based Compacts are also entered into between the Australian Government and individual universities in which targets for equity groups are made and additional funding delivered to those universities meeting their targets (Mestan & Harvey, 2014).

### 1.2.5 Global imperatives

It is important at this point to also note a wider global context within which these discourses and policies have fermented. As is discussed above, the concern for the global is ever present within Australian national policy frameworks. Yet, national policy directions are not only being influenced by the nation-state's place within international contexts. Rather, they have increasingly become shaped by global and supranational institutions. Globalisation, Ball (2013) describes, is important in this

[4] It is notable that the initial recommendation was for this target to be reached by 2020. In its response the Government noted that under contemporary policy settings, the attainment rate would only increase from 32% to 34% by 2025.

[5] Also notable, the 20% target means that if reached, LSES would continue to be under-represented given that by definition, 25% of the population are considered LSES.

space for two primary reasons: “First as an articulation of the ‘problems’ of policy, and second as a spatial frame within which policy discourses and policy formulation are now set” (pp. 28-29). Already discussed have been the national imperatives to compete and remain competitive within an increasingly global and transient knowledge-based economy. Thus globalisation produces certain ways of thinking about the purpose of education, what the problems are that lie within and consequently, how to address them: it is “almost a ‘performative’ concept, helping to create that of which it speaks and referring only to neo-liberal policy manifestations, in a process that brackets out any other possible meanings, including critical social science accounts” (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 21).

Concurrently however, the very mechanisms of becoming more global mean that nation-states have become increasingly inadequate, on their own, as settings within which policy can be considered:

> Policies are ‘made in response to globalisation and those responses are variously driven or influenced by authoritative supranational agents (World Bank, OECD, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Oxfam, Asian Development Bank, and so on), the policy work of intellectual and practical policy ‘fads’, ... ‘global policyspeak’ and the resulting ‘flow’ of policies between countries, the ‘borrowing’ and ‘exporting’, donating and selling of policy ideas. (Ball, 2013, p. 29)

Reflecting what Sahlberg (2016, 2018) terms as the Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM), the influence of the OECD, for example, is significant in fermenting a drive towards standardised testing across the whole school cycle within many of its member countries as well as others on the periphery. Not only have governments become increasingly concerned with scores and rankings achieved

through the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) – as well as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) – they have invested these concerns into a reshaping of their schooling framework according to neo-liberal logics: "prescribed curriculum, focus on literacy and numeracy, test-based accountability, standardised teaching and learning and market-oriented reforms" (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 19). The last of these include the introduction of private-sector management models to state-based institutions and sectors, discourses of school, parental and student choice, and demand driven funding allocation models.

Yet GERM developments – and globalisation more broadly - should not be viewed as monolithic. Rather, their adoption reflects localised historical, political, and institutional contexts. As per Sahlberg (2016), they have been most stridently pursued in Anglo-American countries – the US, UK, Australia – in part out of shock from results of the aforementioned global tests. In Australia, such developments include the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), and the subsequent MySchool website which was introduced under the Rudd Labor Government by then Education Minister Julia Gillard.

More specifically, Australia's broad education agenda is also particularly reflective of a policy 'borrowing' and 'donating' between itself and the UK (Lingard, 2010). That Bradley and the policy initiatives which derived from it look to address both social *and* economic goals through aspirations is consistent with a wider trend among 'Third Way' social democratic parties in particular (Spohrer, 2011; Spohrer et al., 2018). In no small way, Bradley follows the examples set in England in years prior, where the discourse of lacking, addressing and raising aspirations among youth regarded as 'at risk' or disadvantaged runs consistently through Blairite

education reforms initiated in 1997 to widen participation towards a targeted 50% of 18-30 year-olds by 2010 (Archer et al., 2010; Spohrer, 2011).[6] As Archer (2007) discusses, an important part of this widening participation agenda was to develop a "'seamless web' of interconnecting educational provision for 14-19 year-olds … intended to ease and encourage the transition from compulsory into post-compulsory and higher education" (p. 636). This web comprised multiple and overlapping initiatives, notably including *Aiming High*, targeting working-class students, and *Aim Higher*, targeting students of minority ethnic backgrounds, with both programs seeking to 'raise' student aspirations. Later policy papers, such as *New Opportunities* (Cabinet Office, 2009) – an interdepartmental white paper on social mobility – and *Unleashing Aspiration* (Cabinet Office, 2010) – sought to further widen access and participation in professional careers – continue this trajectory. In these reports, raising and (re)directing aspirations is seen as a necessary intervention to ensure that potential is not wasted (Sellar, 2015). Archer (2007) argues that the web involving such initiatives can be traced as part of a wider web involving early childhood – *Sure Start* – through to post-retirement – for example University of the Third Age. "Hence, this 'web' might be better understood as a net, designed to snare those who are needed to make up the 50% target, as well as attempting to draw in, or retain, as many of the 'missing' 50% as possible" (Archer, 2007, p. 637).

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[6] As noted earlier, the Blair and New Labor social policy agenda was in many ways itself influenced by Australia in the decade previous, under the Hawke-Keating governments' economic liberalisation and industrial reforms. Anthony Giddens (1998), however, provides the theoretical and philosophical underpinning of Third Way politics (Mendes, 2001). In the UK context the EU, as a supranational entity, has also had considerable influence over its member states – and also in spite of the historical antecedents of Brexit. This includes the 'European Social Model' which has sought to overcome and reconcile the tension between economic matters and the EU's increasing interest in social outcomes since the 1980s: The model's endeavours have been premised on strategies of employability – where the aim has been to increase knowledge and skills through education – and activation – where the welfare state has been reformed to increase the responsibility of the individual for economic participation (Spohrer, 2011).

As such, GERM – and intra-national influenced endeavours – establish the necessary apparatus to intervene early and consistently throughout the life course by providing further avenues of government auditing and the redirection of students and parents towards more normatively acceptable futures. They buttress the aspirations raising goals embedded in the widening higher education participation agenda by sharpening student awareness of post-school options and their requirements; provide purported transparency and choice around school performance; and enhance "retention of at-risk school students to the senior years through more effective engagement" (Reid & Young, 2012). While such goals appear to represent socially equitable endeavours, they move education away from a "'civil' actualisation through liberal educational philosophy" towards the "embrace [of] market orientations that place the individual learner ... within an economic environment in which he or she must take responsibility for a whole new range of economic imperatives and choices (Axford & Seddon, 2006, p. 267). As Billett et al. (2010) argue, this demonstrates a neo-liberal philosophy in that it is premised on the assumption "that individuals have access to information about the purposes to which they should direct their efforts as they seek pathways to post-school life ... (and) that students are empowered to then act as unconstrained, critical consumers to enact decisions based on that information" (p. 481).

Another significant aspect of these participation reforms, is their entanglement within wider cause-and-effects of globalisation, recognised by Appadurai (1996) as five 'scapes' of global cultural flow: ethnoscapes, financescapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. These scapes demonstrate the hypermobilities of peoples, ideas, capital, and technologies attributable to globalisation. As Lingard and Sellar (2013) argue, the transnational movement of students can be identified, particularly from Global South to universities in the

Global North, with related pressures on such universities to themselves be more self-sufficient and entrepreneurial in capturing market share and avenues for funding. Yet just as important, per Lingard and Sellar (2013), is a need to recognise how both "mobility and immobility have become new dimensions of advantage and disadvantage" (p. 23). This echoes Brah's (1996) contention that "the question is not simply about who travels, but when, how and under what circumstances" (p. 182). While the advantaged have choices about their global mobility, those less so do not – or, at least, their choices are constricted in other ways: they may, due to circumstance, be forced or compelled to travel; they may have no opportunity to whatsoever. Such movement of migrants, ex-pats, refugees and so on – the permanence of which having also become less certain – can work to reconfigure the identities of not only the individuals in movement, but also the communities into which they have arrived and from which they depart. This increased diversity of local populations internationally also creates new challenges on education policies that seek to both harness such changes for economic advantage and social cohesion. Concurrently, the very flows of peoples and ideas further entrench education policy networks globally (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 23).

### 1.2.6 But what of migrant students?

Given this globalised education policy context, the aspirations raising agenda set within and by the Bradley Review is further problematised. From a perspective interested in ethnicity and migrancy, Bradley provides almost no focus on the attainment pathways of various ethnic and cultural migrant groups in Australia. It is clear that ethnicity and socio-economic status do not go neatly hand-in-hand when considered as factors of disadvantage. In the Australian context – if not everywhere – being a migrant, or child thereof, does not automatically correlate with forms of

socio-economic disadvantage and deprivation. This is evident in the data demonstrating higher participation rates amongst the non-English speaking background (NESB) target equity group as compared with LSES and other non-traditional university cohorts (Bradley et al., 2008). This group, who are themselves only a minority of overall migrant-background people, have historically tended to be 'over-represented' in university access, participation, and retention rates (James et al., 2004).[7, 8]

Yet by only briefly noting the positive outcomes of NESB participation, Bradley appears to have prima facie taken this as a sign of success, pointing to a failure to consider wider important factors. This follows a lineage of research prominent in Australia in the preceding decades (Birrell & Seitz, 1986; Bullivant, 1988; Dobson et al., 1996; S.-E. Khoo et al., 2002) that points to an aggregated 'ethnic success'. Among these, works by Birrell and Bullivant are particularly strident in suggesting that "focus on migrant background students is both unnecessary and unfair to other students whose competitiveness would be further reduced" (Windle, 2004, p. 276). Such readings – and the particularly limited attention within the Bradley Review – downplay the diversity of outcomes among various ethnic and migrant groups. There are a range of potentially interlinked political, historical, and cultural dynamics that will account for the outcomes experienced, as well as the aspirations that may precede them – each of which will be considered in more detail through Chapters Two and Three and as part of this study's own findings. These

[7] Access is an indicator of the proportion of students entering a tertiary degree. Participation is the proportion of students in a degree – not just those commencing. Success is a measure of the proportion of units passed within a year (equivalent full-time) of total units undertaken by the student in that year. Retention measures the proportion of students who re-enrol in a subsequent year.

[8] It must be noted that their success rates have also historically been more mixed. Yet, while James et al. (2004) suggest that this 'paradox' between high retention yet lower success "might be explained by determination to persist", they argue that because "the data in this category present a number of methodological problems ... we cannot be confident that this effect is real" (p. 37).

include migration policies under which groups are likely to immigrate; SES and education levels of migrant groups at the point of departure from their home country; as well as other factors which have tended to demonstrate high levels of aspiration towards higher education amongst migrant groups. Some of these factors point to a greater likelihood for normatively high academic and occupational aspirations and high outcomes, particularly Australia's increasing focus on accepting highly skilled, pre-qualified migrants (Gemici et al., 2014; Jupp, 2002; Reid & Young, 2012). Yet even here alone, the various education experiences, as well as cultural and material barriers, mean that this may not necessarily be a straight forward process (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018; Stanley, 2020). A failure to consider these issues therefore limits an understanding of the various social, economic and structural avenues available to migrant families, as well as the divergent cultural resonance towards normatively expected aspirations and expectations (see S.-E. Khoo et al., 2002). One problematic possibility is that divergence is ignored under an all-encompassing banner of 'migrants', or other supposedly ethnic groupings such as Asian and European which both flatten diverse cultures (not only nationalities) and change across studies and time and socio-political context. Another, possibly worse, is the risk of falling into quasi-racist tropes of innate cultural dispositions towards academia, particular occupations, and general social outcomes, which has negative effects on individuals and communities regardless of 'where' migrant groups tend to cluster on academic and occupational trajectories. Even for 'model minorities', such ethnicisation works at once to laud success but leave members as scapegoats open to the frustrations of wider publics (Ho, 2019, 2020). It works also to discriminate against both group members and other minorities who fail to aspire and achieve the exemplar.

Furthermore, such a limited reading also assumes that migrant aspirations have been raised sufficiently, in the necessary direction and by the same means. And where they haven't, they can be addressed because of other social factors such as SES, thereby whitewashing complex intersectional experiences and material conditions. The critical perspectives raised above demonstrate the failure of the politics of aspirations discourse to adequately recognise the needs and wants of the disadvantaged in the promotion of individualist and consumerist archetypes. Importantly too then, they demonstrate a failure of this position to recognise and link into aspirations as a cultural artefact (Appadurai, 2004) and consider how narratives of ethnicity and migrancy may shape very different aspirations – and here we must consider the interactions of aspirations beyond study and work – in spite of or in interaction with other social dynamics.

### 1.2.7 Shifts in the Politics of Aspiration

In the years since the Bradley Review, aspirations discourses have continued but have been reshaped in the light of further austere social and economic policy agendas to further emphasise the role of individual responsibility. The decade since the 2013 return of the conservative Liberal-National Coalition government has witnessed several reforms and attempted reforms that echo those taking place in England, or have gone further (Browne et al., 2010; Communities and Local Government, 2011; Spohrer, 2011; Spohrer et al., 2018). In this time, the conservative government had sought unsuccessfully to privatise student loans and deregulate fees (Australian Associated Press & Swan, 2013; Croucher, 2014). Graduates now also face lower income thresholds to repay their loans, with an almost 20% change between 2017 and 2019 (Medhora, 2018). Since 2022 they have also faced losing eligibility for Commonwealth assistance for having a 'low completion

rate' – failing 50% of units after having attempted eight in a bachelor degree or higher (Department of Education [DoE], 2022a).

At the beginning of this decade the government also sought incentivise certain degrees seen as national priorities for jobs and the economy through Job-Ready Graduate Package commencing 2020 (DoE, 2022b). While decreasing student contributions for some degrees such as information technology, engineering, and science, it also increased fees for others such as law and business, as well as most arts and humanities courses which more than doubled. Despite, though possibly intentionally so, the curious situation where certain degrees with higher employment prospects (demonstrably 'job-ready') now could cost students significantly more (Norton, 2020), the employability agenda that was being established set to further instrumentalise tertiary education, entrenching a narrow definition of the purposes of education. Furthermore, the reforms ignore not only the social, cultural and intellectual purposes that students pursue tertiary education, but also that students do not respond to such financial indicators by switching interests and preferences (Norton, 2020; Patfield, 2021).

Perhaps most significant among the post-Bradley reforms to student university participation by the Coalition government was the reintroduction of caps to places brought about through cuts to university funding from 2018. Despite a 2014 government-initiated review of the demand driven system (Kemp & Norton, 2014) providing broad support and even calling for its expansion to sub-degree qualifications, and to private tertiary providers and state-operated technical and further education institutions (TAFEs), several concerns had been raised (Norton, 2018). Among them, a prominent one had regarded concerns about the increasing students with below minimum course requirement Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks (ATARs). Primarily, quality was the overriding concern. At one level, given

greater funding pressures, increasing demands for research production and the casualisation of workforces, apprehensions about the quality of degrees had been raised – in other words, students would not be provided the level of academic instruction expected of a university degree. At another level, however, it was the students themselves who represented a lack of quality. Arguments were raised that by allowing students to enter degrees with lower scores, the fields in which they would subsequently work would be negatively affected (Blyth, 2014; Harvey, 2016; Robinson, 2018).

While a popular concern, rates of participation during this time indicate that the Bradley-instigated uncapping was largely heading towards most objectives. Overall student participation had been increasing and so too among targeted equity cohorts, like students from LSES backgrounds. While student retention and success rates were notably lower among students who would otherwise be unlikely to attend, the rate of change was not drastic (Harvey, 2016). Lower retention and completion does, however, point to the broader need for institutions to pay greater attention towards the cultural and academic needs of non-traditional students (Devlin & O'Shea, 2011; Patfield, 2021). Other concerns raised with the demand driven system related to the relationship with broader economic developments. These included the relationship with enrolments and job opportunities, as well as the possibility of credentialism, and the diminishing security of post-qualification employment, which are more likely to effect students already experiencing forms of disadvantage (Cook, 2017; Norton, 2018; Sellar & Gale, 2011), together reflecting an 'opportunity trap' (P. Brown, 2013) of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011). These, however, were not improved by the recapping of placements, which has seen the proportion of students from most equity groups stagnate and continue not to meet proportional participation, even though overall numbers have continued to increase (Gore et al., 2023; N. Zhou,

2021). Furthermore, the constant reforms and changes affecting universities have come at a time when public vocational education has experienced significant reductions in funding and government support (Norton, 2018), and there has also been no apparent interest to reformulate equity target groups to address factors like the inadequacy of the NESB category, and especially the lack of targeted consideration of first-in-family students (Patfield, 2018).

In the overtures to provoke and raise aspirations that ran alongside their Bradley-inspired reforms, the Rudd-Gillard Labor government could be seen to be legitimising its agenda as a concern for equity and social justice (Gale & Tranter, 2011), yet doing so "by encouraging the 'cast of thinking' that is required for market competition" (Sellar, 2013a). While the rhetoric of aspiration continued into the next conservative Coalition government, the costs and risks have been further privatised, where a "fair go" is given to those who "have a go" (Murphy, 2019; Special Broadcasting Service [SBS], 2019). This may go some way to explain for recent significant dips in overall university enrolments in recent years (Hare, 2022). Reflective of international developments, reporting has suggested that interest in university may be waning in the face of increasing costs (both to study and broader living pressures), and more lucrative opportunities in trades and elsewhere (Barbaro et al., 2023; Hare, 2023). Consequently, envisaging futures through university may be turning into a form of 'cruel optimism' for an increasing number of young people (Berlant, 2011; Sellar & Zipin, 2019).

With the return of a Labor government in 2022, there have been tempered signals that some aspects that have weakened the focus on equity over the last decade might be reconsidered. This has been most prominently demonstrated through the initial steps towards an Australian Universities Accord (Deparment of Education, Australian Government, 2023). Nonetheless, the extent to which an 'equity

disposition' (Gale, 2011), informed by recognising aspirations as a cultural capacity, will be centred over the championing of individuated aspiration raising[9] may yet be too early to assess.

## 1.3 Thesis Statement: The Research Puzzle

This study works deductively from the theoretical and conceptual argument that aspirations are complex images and ideas for future hopes and desires. Rather than a psychological trait, they are borne out of experiences that are both personal and shared, as well as storied and re-storied to give sense of the present, the past, and place. They are, however, constituted through political, social, and material conditions that ground and shape experience and give opportunities with which to make meaning of them. As such, I take into consideration the contemporary historical situation experienced by migrant-background students, and the centrality of aspirations within contemporary education policy agendas. The following questions emerge to form the 'research puzzle' (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) this research will explore:

1. How are post-school aspirations understood and enacted by migrant-background students who attend Community Languages Schools?
2. What narratives do these students draw upon in shaping their aspirations?
3. In what ways are stories of family migration, ethnicity and culture deployed in constructing aspiration narratives?

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[9] The notion of *raising* aspirations is still a very common thread in discussions about the university participation of equity groups throughout the Accord Interim Report. It is, however, important to recognise that a notion of community aspirations is drawn upon when discussing the interests and wants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in relation to higher education, though not fully developed, potentially becoming an open signifier for the reader to interpret as they will. The Accord also appears interested in looking at the structure of relationships between different forms of education – for example, the relationship between universities and vocational education institutions.

4. How do students adopt, (re)produce and/or resist wider narratives about education and aspirations constituted through family, social networks, schools, and other sites of education?

## 1.4 Thesis Outline

This chapter has introduced the study's policy and political context. I also establish the aims driving this research to explore the post-school aspirations of migrant-background students and the significance of the study to the fields of education and sociological research.

Chapter Two begins by providing an analysis of the literature that looks to define aspirations and its functions, notably its contested relationship with people's expectations as well as subsequent outcomes and achievement. It then investigates more empirical literature on aspirations for migrant-background and ethnic minority youth, families, and communities. Beginning with an overview of literature from the US and UK – two countries with which Australia not only shares experiences of cultural diversity and immigrant reception, but also policy formations (Lingard, 2010) – the review provides an in-depth examination of findings and developments in migrant-background aspirations in Australia over time.

Building upon the literature review, in Chapter Three I consider the theoretical and conceptual frameworks within which migrant-background aspirations have been couched, and I establish the conceptual framework that guides this study. This framing recognises aspirations as a 'cultural capacity' (Appadurai, 2004), rather than individualist psychological disposition, and also considers as central conceptualisations of migrancy, temporality, and affect.

In Chapter Four, I outline the ontological and epistemological foundations of the narrative inquiry approach undertaken in this study. I then outline the methods

used for the collection and analysis of data from focus groups with students and interviews with parents from Community Languages Schools.

Chapter Five begins the analysis of the narratives emerging from the focus groups and considers the construction of migration narratives as they are storied by participants. These work to highlight the different historical, social, and political contexts in which families migrate and settle; and they fill the archives of experience from which students draw upon to inform their aspirations.

In Chapter Six the study explores how students create aspirations to imagine futures in more nuanced ways than that is comprised through education policy regimes. While different navigational capacities are evident, the capacity to aspire is nonetheless shared across social classes.

Building upon this, the exploration within Chapter Seven provides an analysis of how students' aspirations and navigational capacities are permeated by neoliberal conceptions of the enterprising good student. Adolescent subjectivities appear caught up in processes of performativity and responsibilisation. Although these are adopted differently by different students, and all students question the discursive practices that construct such subjectivities, the archetypal student acts as a yardstick by which students find themselves in a process of self-evaluation.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis, providing an overview of key findings. The findings across the three previous chapters point to the importance of moving beyond calls to 'raise' aspirations, and to give greater space for understanding the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of young people's identity formations and images of future selves. I put forward that family migration narratives and diaspora institutions like Community Languages Schools play an important role in helping to strengthen students' navigational capacities, though this should not be read as a smooth and uncontested terrain. Generational differences in interpretations of

culture and aspiration across time and place also contend with the political context within which such narratives must be read. The conclusion also points to the importance of the narrative inquiry approach utilised to allow for such stories to emerge.

## 1.5 Conclusion

The interests of this study are borne out of a social and political context that has placed aspirations at the centre of actualising policy goals in education and beyond. Here, successful studenthood and citizenship is seen as holding normatively acceptable goals for the future, and the appropriate dispositions – entrepreneurialism, agility, and mobility – that allow for continual self-improvement. Being aspirational therefore, has become not just an act, but an embodied subjectivity. Where youth do not meet accepted outcomes, it is because they lack aspiration and fail to be aspirational. Aspirations must therefore be raised by inculcating students towards dispositions that will allow them to reach their potential.

A broadening body of research has called this agenda into question and has demonstrated how it fails to appropriately recognise and appreciate the socio-political, cultural, and economic conditions that give shape and meaning to the lives of individuals and communities. Rather than a lack of aspiration, the imagined futures young people hold, and the paths by which they hope to reach them, may be differentially formed and informed. They may also possess a range of intertwined desires, hopes, and wants - both complimentary and even competing.

Throughout, however, there have been attempts to wend the economic imperatives of the raising aspirations agenda to social justice commitments – their extent largely dependent on the government of the time. Also evident is a tradition of

considering various social and cultural factors within data and research looking at university access, participation, and success. Yet, such political attempts at equity have often also failed to appropriately consider the diverse experiences of the many migrant-background students and families, who are broadly brought together under ill-fitting categorisations such as NESB, or whose successes and difficulties are more-or-less hidden within other factors: complexity and nuance may help paint a richer picture.

It is within these policy and research contexts concerning migrant-background students that this research takes place and its research questions, as outlined, are established. To further develop our understanding of the breadth of literature concerning aspirations and its relationship to migrancy, culture and ethnicity, I now turn to review the scholarly literature. Following this I then focus on how aspirations may be conceptualised to give greater attention to the lives and experiences of migrant-background and ethnic minority youth.

# Chapter Two – Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

Researchers in academic and occupational trajectories have long taken an interest in studying the aspirations held by young people. Building from mobility literature developing in post-war Europe (Blau, 1992), considerable research is evident during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the United States (for example Blau & Duncan, 1967; for a review see MacBrayne, 1987), but also notable in Australia (Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983). Re-emerging interest over the last two decades has coincided with a growing policy emphasis on aspirations as a means of increasing participation in higher education and, consequentially, global competitiveness through participation in the 'knowledge economy' (Gale et al., 2010). According to Sellar and Gale (2011), three broad types of research have developed within this renewed interest. One is that borne out of aspirations-raising projects developed by tertiary institutions, often supported through government programs such as the HEPPP, or Aimhigher in England (Gale et al., 2010; Gore et al., 2017). Such research is evaluative in nature, focusing upon the effectiveness of programs in improving the numbers of targeted students who take up or consider taking up opportunities for higher education participation. Another is a significant body of research that identifies students' education and occupational aspirations and perceptions of future life pathways (Alloway et al., 2004; Gore et al., 2015; James, 1999, 2002; James et al., 2004, 2008; S.-T. Khoo & Ainley, 2005; Prince's Trust, 2004). This research largely focuses on students' stated aspirations and the possible factors influencing their development, and "tend(s) to be written with a focus on analysis *for* policy" (Sellar & Gale, 2011, p. 123). The third is a body of critical sociological literature (including Archer, 2007; Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2015b,

2015a; Hawkins, 2014b; McLeod, 2018; Naidoo, 2015; Patfield, 2018; Sellar, 2013b; Sellar & Gale, 2011; Zipin et al., 2015). It explores how structural inequalities involving social and cultural factors including class, gender, and race “shape aspirations in ways that serve to reproduce social structures” (Sellar & Gale, 2011, p. 123). Thanks to this literature, the conceptual tools have become increasingly varied, demonstrating ongoing potential in thinking about and understanding aspirations in diverse and more nuanced ways.

This vast literature has broadened knowledge of youth aspirations, however because of its breadth, different definitions of aspirations are employed and so too interpretations of its relationship to both people’s expectations for the future as well as eventual attainment and outcomes. As this chapter will highlight, such differences bring to the centre important questions about what it means to have ‘high’ aspirations for study and work, not only materially, but politically and ethically too. Kao and Thompson (2003), for example, argue that while much research in the US points to almost universally high educational aspirations and even majority expectations to complete college, this is problematised by much lower subsequent attainment. They surmise that “although aspirations are correlated with grades, test scores, and eventual attainment, it is unclear what having high educational aspirations actually implies for today's youth” (p. 423). More than a decade later, similar assertions are voiced by Khattab (2015) who states that “it is no longer possible to predict school achievement on the grounds of aspirations or vice versa. Many students from different ethnic, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds are likely to develop high educational and occupational aspirations that are unrelated to their present or future school performance” (p.731). This is not to say that no link between aspirations, expectations and attainment exists, as Khattab (2014, 2015) himself states. Rather, such links are complex, contextual and far from linear, and

therefore have significant implications for policy agendas that seek to *raise* aspirations because of an inherent assumption that they are, a priori, a productive force in the achievement of outcomes – where students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not attain high-status academic and occupational outcomes because they have 'low' aspirations, and aspirations for higher education and for higher status occupations will naturally and independently lead to higher academic and occupational attainment.

Considering this, the initial section of this literature review will examine how aspirations are defined and how their role has been interpreted in mobilising youth trajectories. The exploration of aspirations' relationship with expectations and outcomes provides an opportunity to then examine the empirical research on the role various social and cultural factors play in shaping young people's aspirations for the future. Focus will be provided to role ethnicity, migration, and culture, as well as the interaction of these factors with other social factors and contexts. In so doing, this will establish a basis for Chapter 3 in which I explore conceptual and theoretical frameworks for ethnic minority and migrant-background aspirations.

## 2.2 Defining aspirations and its functions

Various intellectual traditions and academic fields have conceptualised aspirations, reflecting ontological and epistemological differences that shape how research is framed, and this has provided much focus on its role in student achievement, occupational attainment and social mobilities (Leavy & Smith, 2010). Important influences on this body of literature are social stratification or status attainment theories, notably Blau and Duncan (1967) and followed by the Wisconsin model (Sewell et al., 1969, 1970) which sought to explain generational social class reproduction. While the Blau-Duncan model looked to establish a relationship

between paternal education and occupation, young men's educational achievement and the prestige of their first occupation, the Wisconsin model helped establish a social-psychological framing of aspirations. It provided a cognitive explanation for individuals' drive to achieve that is acquired through socialisation and therefore modifiable through the individual's interactions with their environment, parents, teachers and other significant role models: "an abstract motivational orientation, solidly grounded in his or her cognitive structure" (Morgan, 2005, p. 40).

One line of inquiry defines aspirations as being tied into a person's expectations of what could be achieved, and thus embodying a sense of reality. Quaglia and Cobb (1996), for example, see aspirations "as a student's ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals" (p. 130). Similarly, Morrison Gutman and Akerman (2008) add that aspirations "usually connote the achievement of something high or great … address(ing) both present and future perspectives" (p. 2). In this definition, aspirations are underpinned by motivational components of inspiration: towards and in activities of personal intrinsic value in the present; and ambition: towards activities that are perceived as important for the achievement of future goals.

As such, the formation and development of aspirations take on a rather rationalist and pragmatic bent, reflecting "any future goal in which an individual is willing to invest time, effort or money", thus distinguishing them from "idle daydreams and wishes" (Sherwood, 1989, pp. 61–62). Schaefer and Meece (2009) offer a similar framework, where educational aspirations operate as "a set of expected realistic educational plans … rather than a youth's idealistic goal pursuit" (p. 6). These definitions are influenced by theoretical frameworks of achievement motivation and social comparison theory (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996), as well as Bandura's (1986, 2001) social cognitive theory. Within such realist perspectives,

education is perceived as an opportunity for individual improvement, in which time and effort, at least, are invested by those with drive and initiative to make the best use of it (D. F. Carter, 2002). Aspirations here suggest a rationality in action, as individuals must consciously allocate resources towards a future goal, and an acknowledgement of risk – because investments do not necessarily yield the outcomes intended. These arguments therefore also contend a clear relationship between aspirations and expectations, as well as subsequent outcomes (Schaefer & Meece, 2009) because of the processes individuals undertake in negotiating opportunities, choosing goals and employing strategies to achieve them.

Several studies and reports produced out of Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) data operationalise aspirations along these lines, contending that while social and cultural effects on aspirations may be important, they can be mediated by more individual factors such as motivation, self-esteem and coping strategies, as well as family and social factors, including family cohesion or conflict, shared values, parental support, and the availability of wider support structures and networks (Frigo et al., 2007). Khoo and Ainley (2005), for example, illustrate how regardless of student background, the early development of aspirations and intentions towards either leaving or continuing schooling are related to such participation. A strong association was found between the expressed intentions of Year 9 students to continue to Year 12, and participation in that latter stage of education. Also using LSAY data, Curtis and McMillan (2008) and Homel and Ryan (2014) found a high correlation between aspirations to complete Year 12, and to attend university, and attainment of those intentions, regardless of background. In Homel and Ryan's (2014) study, students were found to be 20-25% more likely to complete Year 12, and 15-20% more likely to enter university if they had aspirations to do so. Aspirations were also found to correlate with perceptions of academic

performance, with those who doubted their academic abilities relative to their peers less likely to attain their aspirations. Curtis and McMillan (2008) state that "intention to complete Year 12 is the single most powerful influence on completion status" (p. 13). Similarly, Morrison Gutman and Akerman (2008) note that irrespective of social class, students with high confidence in their academic abilities hold higher aspirations towards tertiary education and employment and suggest that students with strong beliefs in their abilities, and who attribute success to hard work – as opposed to luck or outside forces – tend also to hold higher aspirations, regardless of SES.

Within much of this research however, the extent to which aspirations are demonstrated as acting as an independent determinant of outcomes, is unclear because of the difficulty in ascertaining the extent to which prior academic attainment, as well as schooling and wider social and cultural experiences and factors, have already served – and continue to serve – to shape student aspirations at the time of study. According to Morrison Gutman and Akerman (2008), those studies that have taken into consideration earlier attainment have found that while still apparent, the role of aspirations is small. This complexity leads them to conclude that the relationship between aspirations and attainment should be understood as one that is "mutually reinforcing … so the previous attainment itself may have been informed by earlier aspirations" (p. iv). Furthermore, as this and the next chapter will also highlight, while high numbers of students from LSES and other minority backgrounds may aspire to further education or university, as well as high-status occupations, differential attainment and occupational outcomes are evident, bringing into question the direct relationship between aspirations, expectations, and outcomes. In the UK context, for example, the occupational aspirations of students from LSES backgrounds, students from some minority ethnic groups and female

students were found less likely to be met than those of male students generally (Morrison Gutman & Akerman, 2008).

In contrast to literature conceptualising aspirations consistently with expectations, another line posits aspirations as hopes that are fostered for what *could* be achieved and are thus distinguishable from expectations held. MacBrayne (1987) provides a definition of aspirations "as an individual's desire to obtain a status object or goal such as a particular occupation or level of education" whilst "expectations are the individual's estimation of the likelihood of attaining those goals, plans, ambitions or dreams" (p. 135). This definition stems from Kuvlesky and Bealer's (1966) attempts to define occupational choice, which they understand as a reflection of aspirations and preference towards occupational status. Within this framework, subsequent attainment is "defined as the behavioural realisation of the goal" (MacBrayne, 1987, p. 135). This definition of aspirations has continuing prominence, where wants, desires and goals "in a world without obstacles" (Gil-Hernández & Gracia, 2018, p. 584) may continue in spite of changing expectations based on interpretations and assessments of what is 'realistically' possible (Bohon et al., 2006; Khattab, 2014, 2015; Marjoribanks, 1998; Reynolds & Pemberton, 2001; Strand & Winston, 2008a).

Critics of social-psychological approaches argue that such frameworks place too great an emphasis on learnt motivations and skills and limited recognition on structural forces that "identify, select, process, classify, and assign individuals according to externally imposed criteria" (Kerckhoff, 1976, p. 369; see also Bourdieu, 1973[10]). From a social-structural perspective, Coleman (1976) argues that such

[10] "The functionalist sociologists who announce the brave new world when, at the conclusion of a longitudinal study of academic and social careers, they discover that, as though by a pre-established harmony, individuals have hoped for nothing that they have not obtained and obtained

socialisation perspectives are tied into a vision of society as working in a functionalist manner – because aspirations are fundamental to motivation to succeed, they are crucial in the functional sorting out of people into necessary occupations and status roles. By emphasising the greater role wider social and demographic structures have in restricting opportunities – such as SES, urbanity, gender, ethnicity, and local educational and employment opportunities – researchers from more structuralist perspectives argue that a clear distinction between aspirations and expectations is evident both conceptually and empirically, and that the connection between aspirations and future outcomes is not as strong as that supposed by socialisation approaches. They argue that because individuals for minority backgrounds recognise socio-economic and other social and cultural barriers placed around them, they are likely to adjust their expectations to suit their perceived surroundings and opportunities, whilst still holding higher aspirations (Kerckhoff, 1976, 1995). Kerckhoff (1976) points to limitations in the Wisconsin model which could not account for the lower college attainment of African-American students than white students, despite higher aspirations.[11] As Carter (2002) describes, "it is assumed that individuals may want the same outcomes, but that they may expect different outcomes based on their assessments of their life chances (p. 134). Along with longitudinal studies by Coleman (1976) and Kerckhoff (1976), Farris, Boyd and

nothing that they have not hoped for, are simply the least forgivable victims of the ideological effect which is produced by the school when it cuts off from their social conditions of production all predispositions regarding the school such as 'expectations', 'aspirations', 'inclinations', or 'desire', and thus tends to cover up the fact that objective conditions—and in the individual case, the laws of the academic market—determine aspirations by determining the extent to which they can be satisfied" (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 83).

[11] It is important to note that the creators of the Wisconsin model were "well aware of its limitations. Almost immediately on publication they began to qualify its basic mechanisms, and in the process weakened its most parsimonious theoretical claims" (Morgan, 2005, p. 36).

Shoffner's (1985) study also finds that while expectations tended to decline with age, aspirations remained either high, or at least considerably more so than expectations.

Also emphasising the social structural shaping of aspirations are 'opportunity structure' approaches. Like, Kerckhoff (1976), Roberts (1968, 1977) terms the process of occupational attainment as one of 'allocation', questioning the notion of choice rooted in more psychological understandings of aspirations. Roberts did not intend for his theory to be universally valid but rather argued that explanatory frameworks built upon a range of social and cultural determinants including family, environment, peers, job opportunities, gender, and school, need to adapt according to the given social context. Aspirations can work independently of intentions in the sense that they may be lofty and not realistically fit the direction towards which students find themselves heading. According to Roberts (1977), students may have limited understanding of the range of potential occupations in society, even with careers counselling and even after initial steps into the jobs market. Furthermore, when focussing on aspirations as ambitions in the context of potential options, they cannot be relied upon as a determinant of educational and occupational plans and intentions. This is because they are driven by the context and scope of the occupational opportunity structures that individuals find open to them, which are shaped by structural elements over which they have little or no control. Because few students are likely or able to attain jobs that match their aspirations, Roberts finds more fruitful avenues in trying to understand occupational plans and decision-making through understanding the ambitions of subjects within their given social context – for example, when they are nearing school completion, trying to enter the job market, or having landed themselves an occupation. A student will have some flexibility in occupational choice and opportunity afforded them by the level of education attained and, even within a chosen occupation, the individual may be able

to seek out other opportunities that open up through that occupation, however the scope for such flexibility is by and large circumscribed at the level of education completed by the individual (Roberts, 1977). Aspirations are therefore, little more than "the subjective representation of the opportunity structure that dictates the course youths' careers will follow" (Alexander & Cook, 1979, p. 204).

Looking to draw upon the psychological within the structural, and account "for the ways in which aspirations develop within constraining frameworks" (Furlong & Biggart, 1999, p. 22), Gottfredson (1981) contends that an individual's aspirations are a reflection of their self-concept, where they seek occupations that are both agreeable with their own self-image and their understanding of various occupations. Self-concept involves the beliefs people hold about themselves, including interests, personality, and their place within society. These beliefs, however, are shaped and constrained by a series of social and cultural determinants, predominantly SES, gender-role socialisation, social and individual values and interests (Gottfredson, 1981; Cochran et al., 2011). Students develop perceptions about the appropriateness of occupations based on their self-concept as shaped by these determinants, and also begin to evaluate a range of occupations based on their assessment of academic levels required to attain them (Furlong & Biggart, 1999). As such, aspirations go through a process of 'circumscription' and 'compromise', where individuals limit their aspirations to a zone of acceptable alternatives and then compromise, or adjust, their aspirations to occupational choices that fit more realistically in their likelihood of attainment from within this zone (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000). According to this line of argument, individuals also go through two forms of compromise: anticipatory, where they perceive desired choices as not realistic; and experiential, where aspirations are modified in accordance with experiences within a given situation, such as when attempting to gain employment. Because of the practical implications

of its conceptual framing, Gottfredson's theory has regularly been drawn upon to point to the role of schools, particularly teachers and counsellors, as well as tertiary institutions in providing advice and support for students' understanding of occupations and potential pathways to them (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000; Berger et al., 2020; Cochran et al., 2011; Furlong & Biggart, 1999).

Contemporary studies also draw upon concepts of capital to explore if and under which circumstances aspirations, expectations and outcomes may resonate with each other (Bohon et al., 2006; Khattab, 2014, 2015; Littlejohn, 2022). Within these studies, Bourdieuian social and cultural capital, and the role of habitus (Bourdieu, 1973, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), as well as Modood's (2004) concept of ethnic capital are deployed. This gives scope to explore how differential post-school opportunities are (re)produced within or against social and structural power relations among different groups and communities. Considering his findings through these concepts of capital Khattab (2014, 2015) argues that rather than being direct and causative, the relationship between aspirations and expectations is complex and bidirectional: aspirations for continuing on with post-compulsory education are maintained where there are different forms of social, cultural and economic resources that can buttress commensurate expectations and eventual outcomes, thus increasing "the likelihood of a coherent structure of aspirations, expectations and achievement" (Khattab, 2014, para. 6.10; see also Berger et al., 2020).

As this exploration has thus far highlighted, there has been considerable diversity in considering what aspirations do, and how they relate to expectations and consequential attainment. While some research contends the importance of high aspirations to sustaining expectations and as a precursor to attainment, other literature problematises this linearity by demonstrating varying trends between these

three elements, as well as how they may affect and be affected upon differently for different people given different social conditions. Within this context, the review now turns to exploring empirical research focusing on the role of migrant, second-generation and ethnic minority status in producing, shaping, and mobilising youth aspirations.

## 2.3 Migrant, Second Generation and Ethnic Minority Youth

Research investigating the extent of difference in academic and occupational aspirations based on ethnic, minority or migratory status has historically reached somewhat conflicting conclusions, although major trends have been notable both at local levels and across English speaking countries that have experienced major waves of immigration. Some literature has claimed that ethnicity and migrant status have no or limited effects on aspirations. For example, studies in the US by Chang, Chen, Greenberger, Dooley and Heckhausen (2006) and Phinney, Baumann, and Blanton (2001) found no significant aspirational differences in terms of life goals, or occupation prestige across ethnic groups. Meanwhile other studies either found that white students held higher or the same aspirations as other ethnic groups. In the US, Hauser and Anderson (1991) found that the plans and aspirations of white and African American students followed similar trends (although the reasons for this differed between ethnic groups), and Bobo, Hildreth and Durodoye (1998) also found Anglo students to hold aspirations towards or consider a wider range of occupations for their future – though the researchers note in conclusion that this is possibly explained by the higher SES of white students in the study “who may have been exposed to a wider range of experiences due to the advantages inherent in higher SES families” (para. 25).

A significant body of international research however, argues that ethnic minority and migrant students' educational and occupational aspirations are persistently high, or higher than those of their peers from the community's dominant ethnic background of similar SES, and especially amongst students from lower SES (Anisef et al., 2000; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Kao & Tienda, 1995, 1998; Krahn & Taylor, 2005; Morrison Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Strand, 2008; Strand & Winston, 2008a). This literature also importantly notes differences in aspirations between and within various ethnic groups, as well as various trajectories in attained outcomes. In the US, for example, Kao and Tienda (1998) report that while aspirations to complete college among students from minority backgrounds are high through Years 8 to 12, there are differences between groups in the extent to which these aspirations are maintained. They found, for example, that black and Hispanic (or Latino) youth had less stable aspirations whilst Asian students in particular maintained aspirations for college completion. In their comparative study of various Latino nationalities, Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman (2006) also noted high aspirations and expectations overall, though weaker ones amongst adolescents of Mexican and Puerto Rican origins, and stronger ones amongst those of Cuban origin when compared with 'non-Latino' whites.

Other research also focuses on the (self-)selection process in migration, notably the political and economic climate in both the sending and receiving countries as well as the SES of migrant cohorts, that work to inform the potential migrant on the likely benefits or otherwise of migrating and provide avenues to do so for some (ethnic or class) groups over others (Borjas, 1987; Bray, 1984; Feliciano, 2005, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996, 2005). Potential income in the receiving country is weighed up against the likely income of remaining, along with other social and economic costs and benefits entailed in leaving the country of origin – such as

family and social separation, escaping political turmoil and so on. Given the various economic needs of the receiving country, there may be a range of opportunities across the income and socioeconomic spectrum and therefore, economic conditions and opportunities may provide incentives to people of lower SES in different countries, because these incentives are not necessarily enough to entice those of higher SES. In the US, for example, Mexican immigrants provided cheap labour to southern farmers for much of the twentieth century, labour that paid higher wages than immigrants would have otherwise received in Mexico, but neither the income nor type of work that would entice Mexicans with higher academic credentials. Meanwhile, high educational aspirations and expectations among Asian migrants, regardless of SES in the US, may reflect more selective access to migration: "Asian immigrants may come from higher-class strata in their origin countries, even if high premigration SES does not translate into high SES in the US context" (Feliciano, 2006, p. 285). The research points to a consideration of the effects of parental SES, especially in the pre-migration stage, as well as the socio-historical context in which migrants find themselves migrating to their new country, in order to place the aspirations and expectations of migrant and second-generation students.

In the UK, Strand (2007, 2008) and Khattab (2014, 2015) utilise the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) to analyse the educational progress of students across SES and ethnicity. Through survey findings and corroborating focus group interviews, Strand argues that high student educational aspirations[12], parental educational aspirations and high academic self-concept are important factors in mediating the effects of socio-economic classification on educational attainment. These factors "could account for the high attainment of

[12] High educational aspirations within this study were denoted as aspirations towards continuing full time education beyond the age of 16.

Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Black African pupils, and the low attainment of White British pupils, within low SEC [socio-economic classification] homes" (Strand, 2008, p. 3; see also Strand & Winston, 2008a). Ethnic differences among high socio-economic background (HSES) households were also pronounced, but in the inverse, where despite their high aspirations ethnic minority groups, particularly Black Caribbean and Black African students, did not perform as well academically when compared with their similarly HSES white peers.

In arguing that young people's ethnicity can be "a key factor associated with their level of educational aspiration" (Strand & Winston, 2008a, p. 264), the authors suggest that their findings align with Bourdieuian concepts of capital and Appadurian notions of aspirations as a cultural capacity that can be practiced and nurtured through routine opportunities that connect the abstract with "real-world conjectures and refutations" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69).[13] They also posit connections to literature reflecting 'blocked opportunities' theoretical framework[14] such as that of MacLeod (2009) in particular, where temporal-spatial factors influence newer migrant communities to see their surroundings and positions as opportunities for upward social mobility, in comparison with more established white communities that have become reticent in fostering aspirations due to recurring experiences of disappointment and frustration, and therefore encounter stagnation.

The authors also draw upon the framework to explain for the greater overall gap between aspirations and attainment among ethnic minority students, suggesting their data may reflect Mickelson's (1990) 'attainment-aspirations' paradox. They posit that high aspirations to continue with full-time education after age 16 may

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[13] A more in-depth conceptual exploration will follow in Chapter Three

[14] To be discussed further in Chapter Three

reflect an understanding and knowledge of the greater risks of unemployment relative to dominant (white) communities if they enter the labour market at that age, along with fears for racial discrimination in the workplace. That is, “white British students may have lower ‘aspirations’ because they do not face these barriers” (Strand & Winston, 2008a, p. 265). Using Mickelson’s distinction between concrete attitudes and abstract aspirations, they argue that while ethnic minority students may espouse general beliefs about the value of education, their experiences of its unequal returns for family and community “most strongly inform achievement behaviour and school grades” (p. 265). Yet they also stingingly posit that “of course, there is no paradox if aspirations are stripped of their causal role in relation to attainment”.

Khattab (2014, 2015), meanwhile, proposes a typology of possible combinations between student aspirations, expectations and achievement with which to consider future attainment, and finds broadly similar experiences to students in the Strand studies. His research contends that while socioeconomically advantaged non-minority groups have the social, cultural, and economic capital to maintain the expectations that they would achieve their aspirations for post-compulsory schooling, this is not necessarily the case for students from minority backgrounds. While Indian students were likely to hold similar aspirations and expectations and have commensurate outcomes, other “minority students achieved significantly less than their white counterparts” (2015, p. 741-742). This however did not mean the same processes were in play for everyone. Experiences of hardship living in low social class settings could result in circumstances where students from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds did not hold aspirations or expectations – or both – for university because of an “understanding and awareness of the structural barriers they might encounter within society” (Khattab, 2014, para. 6.3). Nonetheless, they

have higher rates of attaining post-compulsory schooling that are detached from their aspirations and expectations. Khattab contends that the role of ethnic capital (see also Modood, 2004; Shah et al., 2010) is important in providing the supporting networks and establishing the parental encouragement to positively affect attainment.

Though Khattab (2015) concludes that aspirations and expectations play important roles in supporting attainment, they do so most where they are "accompanied by other activities at the community level, such as enhancing community bridging and bonding social capitals, enriching community 'ethnic capital' and providing greater resources to meet the basic educational need" (p. 747). Strand and Winston (2008) also call into question "an uncritical interpretation of aspirations as evidence of psychological dispositions to achieve, or of a simple causal relationship between aspirations and subsequent attainment" (p. 265) that has driven policy agenda in the UK – and Australia.

Jackson, Jonsson and Rudolphi's (2012) study of students in England's and Sweden's comprehensive school systems also found both high educational aspirations among ethnic minority groups in both countries and significant heterogeneity amongst different groups, particularly in terms of academic achievement attained. Indian and Chinese minorities in England, as well as Iranian and South and East Asian minorities in Sweden performed notably well academically, consistent with other research internationally, including Australia (Marjoribanks, 2005; Morrison Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Parr & Mok, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005).

### 2.3.1 Australian research on migrant and second-generation students

In their influential *Access to Privilege*, Anderson and Vervoorn (1983) argued that to that point in time “the effect of migrant background on participation in higher education has received remarkably little attention” (p. 97). Focus had tended towards concern for the education migrant children were receiving, but diverted interest “away from the much more serious problems of late adolescent and adult immigrants” (Taft, as cited in Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983, p. 97) that was subsequently reflected in the limited participation in higher education. From early extensive research in the 1970s, by which time substantial numbers of children of post-World War II migration were becoming of tertiary education- and working-age, a body of literature – often comparative in research focus – on the aspirations of the children of migrants or migrant students has developed, though it remains substantially smaller than that concerning the influence of class and SES.

Several studies of Victorian students by Ronald Taft as well as other studies at local, state national levels through the 1970s (cited by Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983; and Marjoribanks, 2002b) were important in examining the educational and occupational aspirations among students from non-English speaking migrant backgrounds[15] and considering associations with attainment. These comparative studies found that aspirations to pursue post-school studies and university were higher among these students than those of non-migrant background students, particularly among working class students. On the other hand, children of immigrants from English speaking countries tended to have low expectations even though they had been either born or living in Australia for most of their lives. While

[15] For example, one or both parents born overseas where English.

this research categorised student cultures differently across studies,[16] it found great variance in the distribution of father's occupational backgrounds so that educational aspirations were less related to this marker of socio-economic background for some national or cultural-geographic groupings than others. Greek and Italian students, for example, had high aspirations towards technical and college studies, and university studies respectively, even though fathers were predominantly semi-skilled and unskilled labourers. Meanwhile, aspirations for university were held by Polish students regardless of fathers being businessmen, educated middle class or "poorly educated workers" (Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983, p. 98). The correlation between occupational status and anticipated participation in higher education was strongest among non-migrant background and English-speaking migrants.

Similar findings were made in Marjoribanks' early research (1979, 1986) which focussed upon the relationship between family settings and academic outcomes amongst students of Greek, Southern Italian and Anglo-Australian background. He found higher aspirations among Greek and Southern Italian students when compared with those of Anglo-Australian background, despite their lower SES. His findings supported the "proposition that parents' aspirations for their children and adolescents' perceptions of their parents' support for learning, act as 'regulators' of the effects of other variables on adolescents' educational and occupational aspirations" (Marjoribanks, 1991, p. 15). Although of generally higher SES, Anglo-Australian students generally held more negative perceptions of their parents' support, and had parents who held more moderate expectations of them.

[16] Sometimes specific countries are used, other times categories like 'English-speaking' (including Australians); 'non-English European'; 'Other' (mainly Asian); Northern European; Eastern European.

Marjoribanks' later follow-up study (1991) focussed on social-status attainment and found similar differences between ethnic groups and the role of influencing factors.

Anderson's research (cited in Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983) also sought to investigate the particular pathways and study enrolments of migrant-background students at college and university. While not strictly about aspirations, such studies give some insight into the preferences and interests at personal and community levels. In the late 1970s, "it was found that education, law and medicine were the most 'Australian', while commerce and engineering were the most 'migrant'" which was "almost the exact opposite" of the situation a decade earlier (Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983, p. 107)[17]. Anderson and Vervoorn, however, do not readily investigate the reasons for this shift, though Anderson and colleagues (1980b) posit that underrepresentation in fields such as medicine and law may have had to do with requirements for high achievement in matriculation and additional conditions preventing entry to those completing school overseas. They also suggest that aspirations towards commerce and engineering may have been persistent among migrant groups while falling among Australian-born, and thus creating a shift in proportional involvement over time. At a time of expanding university and college entry, greater participation from lower middle-class Australian-born and English-speaking migrant groups (UK, Ireland, NZ) in education and arts was evident, while Asian students were almost completely unrepresented in these fields, being "less attracted to, or less likely to achieve places" (Anderson et al., 1980b).

In seeking to explain for the higher aspirations among non-English speaking migrant background youth, literature tended to frame this as something related to culture. For example, Anderson and Vervoorn (1983) posited "that a high level of

[17] Categorisation of Australian and other migrant groups based on father's birthplace.

educational aspiration appeared to be more a cultural trait than a function of occupational standing" (p. 97), and that the significance of findings lie in the implication that

> there is nothing inevitable about 'class' attitudes to education, that the low value placed on educational achievement in many Australian working-class families is as much a matter of local cultural peculiarities as of socio-economic position. (p. 11)

Meanwhile, Marjoribanks (1991) argued that ethnicity had a 'pervasive influence' on the way parents structured the learning environments of their children, where socialisation practices were found to differ between groups to influence students' academic achievement. For example, Anglo-Australian adolescent occupational aspirations were said to be related to measures of early family influences and earlier affective orientations to school; for Greek adolescents, only cognitive measures affected occupational aspirations; and for Southern Italians, social status was the only measure.

Despite the proposition of high aspirations as cultural trait, the literature at this time also looks at other possible factors that could explain for the higher aspirations of most migrant-background adolescents and families. Anderson and Vervoorn (1983), for example, highlight the potential role of social class mediating these aspirations by considering the qualifications of migrants as opposed to their occupations following arrival. They pointed to several studies indicating that large proportions of migrants working in unskilled or semi-skilled labour held university degrees or other higher tertiary qualifications from overseas. Bourke's (1971) analysis of 1966 Census data demonstrated that migrants overall were more likely to hold university degrees than Australian-born, though less likely to hold non-university

tertiary qualifications. Furthermore, there was high variance between migrant nationalities among whom low rates of tertiary qualification and even school completion do not appear to align with previous findings of higher aspirations – such as among Italian migrants. Smolicz and Wiseman (cited in Anderson and Vervoorn, 1983) also argued that many professionals would get into Australia by concealing their qualifications in light of a prioritisation of manual labour to support the Australian economy. They however reject the contention that high aspirations could be explained solely by 'submerged middle-class influences' (p. 103), but rather point also to the high regard education is held within Central and Eastern Europe, as well as what could be considered as a response to the conditions of migration, reflective of blocked opportunities framings:

> 'Migrant drive', a type of social mobility orientation in newly arrived families without property and influence in the country of settlement but with a great desire to make good for these deficiencies in the second generation through their children's excellence in academic and professional pursuits. (Smolicz & Wiseman, 1971, as cited in Anderson & Vervoorn, p. 103)

Within more contemporary Australian research, difference in educational and occupational aspirations have continued to be identified, though the extent of this influence varies to some degree between studies. Marjoribanks' more recent studies (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005) took upon similar investigations to his earlier work. He continued to find that ethnicity did play a role in aspirations development, and that the interaction between aspirations and achievement differed by family background. He found that in particular, youth from Asian, Middle Eastern and Southern European backgrounds hold higher educational aspirations than do Anglo-

Australian, Dutch and UK backgrounds (Marjoribanks, 2002b, 2003).[18] In their study of students in western metropolitan Melbourne, Bowden and Doughney (2010) similarly found that while the level of academic aspirations were related to students' SES – measured by parents' academic attainment – aspirations towards university were also highest among students from more recently arrived NESB groups from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.[19] Weakest university aspirations were found amongst students born or whose parents were born in Oceania – New Zealand and the Pacific Islands – followed by students of Australian background. These findings differ in some ways to those of Parr and Mok (1995). Parr and Mok similarly found that overall, the students (and their parents) who aspired to go to university most were of Asian birth or background – though not from all Asian countries – and these aspirations did not diminish with length of time in Australia. Meanwhile, West European[20], South American and New Zealand students were the only backgrounds that had fewer students with aspirations towards university than those of Australian background. Notably, a significantly higher percentage of South Pacific students also aspired to university than Australians, differentiating themselves from their geographical neighbours.

#### 2.3.1.1 Aspirations-Achievement Gaps

Notably, some of the literature also raises concerns about the capacity of migrants to 'make good' and attain their aspirations in the ways Smolicz and

[18] Marjoribanks (2002b, 2003) notes that the broad ethnic groupings are somewhat blunt and present some limitations as they fail to recognise ethnic differences within nations. Further, students are classified as Anglo-Australian if both are parents born in Australia and English is spoken at home.

[19] Bowden and Doughney (2010) did not, however, readily evaluate the intersection between SES and ethnicity, considering the factors separately.

[20] It should be noted that West European includes countries from southern Europe and does not include the UK, which was examined separately. Furthermore, changes in groupings take place between different assessed factors due to low numbers, so that some individually assessed countries are regrouped into either geographical or culturally similar (for example, English speaking) groupings.

Wiseman earlier envisaged. This was already evident in early research, with Taft (1976, cited in Marjoribanks, 2002b) raising concerns that "the upward aspirations will be far from fully satisfied. Even if the economy could provide the necessary number of openings, an important proportion of the students will be blocked by the various competitive screenings in the mobility process" (p. 43). Across several studies considered by Anderson and Vervoorn, NESB students were at least as likely as native English-speaking students to enter a higher education institution, but that the extent of participation was not what would be expected from the higher levels of aspirations expressed.

Of particular concern was that more positive news about the *overall* patterns of migrant-background or NESB students to access and participate in education at representative rates had the effect of masking the poorer outcomes and unmet aspirations at more important category levels. Across earlier studies higher university participation rates of Asian and Eastern European migrant groups than their presence in the population compensated for others, particularly those of Southern Europeans background who participated in colleges in greater numbers (Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983).

Later research also highlights how some ethnic groups are less likely to do well in education or attain their aspirations. For example, while Vietnamese and Chinese Year 12 students from Melbourne's western suburbs in the 1990s – contemporaneously a lower SES region – were enrolled in university entrance physical science and mathematics subjects at rates significantly higher than either other migrant or English-speaking origin groups, Teese, McLean and Polesel (cited in Suliman, 2001) raised concerns that their aspirations to reach university could be hampered by a high risk of failing English: "these groups have the highest failure rates of any group. Nearly 70 percent of Vietnamese in the western suburbs failed.

Other immigrant groups also prove vulnerable, Croatians and Turks in particular" (p. 51-52).

Furthermore, a number of other studies highlight how up to the turn of the century, there is variation in or between the academic attainment levels or aspirations of second generation and migrant background students (see S.-E. Khoo et al., 2002; Suliman, 2001). In Marjoribanks' studies (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005) the proportion of NESB students enrolling or deferring university was as high as that of other overseas-born or those with one parent born outside Australia, and slightly higher than that of all participant students overall. Aspirations towards university had however been proportionally highest among NESB students, and considerably higher than that of the overall cohort. Further, while NESB students most strongly perceived parental support, there was no real difference in perception of positive support across the whole cohort.

Bowden and Doughney (2010) also found that an aspirations-achievement gap was most marked for NESB students in the context of university entrance, indicating the impact language background may have on students' capacity to attain their educational aspirations, and reinforcing earlier studies going back to by Anderson and Vervoorn (1983) that "there is little doubt that language difficulties are the main stumbling block for these migrant groups as far as post-compulsory education is concerned" (p. 104).

While the literature provides a strong argument for how English language barriers can play an important role in unmet aspiration and gaps, particularly where such barriers intersect with socio-economic factors, other important factors that could give reason to such gaps have also been put forward. Anderson and Vervoorn (1983), for example, posited that alongside students' own generally high aspirations, the 'extremely high aspirations' held by parents could be "'symbols of anxiety and

fear lest the children end up in an unskilled labourer's job' of the sort which all too often is the lot of the parents themselves" (p. 115). They reflected on Isaacs' 1981 study of Greek students in inner Sydney, in which students were caught between aspirations towards further education, family pressures to study and being called simultaneously to enter the workforce, whilst also having their attempts to succeed academically diminished by "self-perpetuating, inbuilt discriminatory factors in texts, test material and administrator and teacher attitudes" (p. 115).

In her study of Lebanese background Year 10 students in Western Sydney, Suliman (2001) highlights important generational and social 'aspiration gaps' that can also arise. She found significant aspirational differences between students and parents, as well as to other Lebanese. Where more than eight in ten students indicated their parents wanted them to continue to the Higher School Certificate (HSC) or beyond, just under half the students held similar aspirations for themselves, and they also perceived a lack of support from their parents. Suliman argues that these educational aspirations also differed to findings of other studies of both Lebanese in Lebanon and in Australia, where aspirations were found to be generally high. These arguments are important because they suggest that students' aspirations and achievements need to be considered "within their own cultural, social and historical context" (p. 187): as children of parents who migrated to Australia in the 1970s as a result of war in Lebanon, and had experienced economic and social hardships in Australia, "the family culture of this group of students is not in any way representative of all Lebanese students in Australia or in Lebanon" (p. 187).

More recently, Naidoo et al.'s (2014) report on the experiences of refugee students transitioning from school to university also highlights the importance of teachers and other staff at both schools and tertiary institutions in mobilising towards aspirations. Many, though not all, refugee students across the schools

involved in the study had aspirations for careers requiring university, but teachers reported that among some, "the field of aspiration was narrow, specific and based on perceived status and financial rewards" (p. 8). Teachers in both school and tertiary institutions also demonstrated that they were conscious of challenges students faced and factors inhibiting their progress but were "sometimes inclined to share deficit thinking" (p. 91), shifting the need to adapt onto students. Meanwhile, students felt that they were most supported in their aspirations where there were supportive English as a Language or Dialect (EAL/D) structures and teaching. By contrast, they often found themselves 'rendered invisible' in broader NESB equity groups in university, increasing difficulties in completing their degrees.

#### 2.3.1.2 Gender

Some Australian studies also present research that examines the role of gender in migrant and second-generation students' aspirations (Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983; Coates et al., 2008; Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2008; Parr & Mok, 1995). Taft's 1971 study of working class and migrant background year 8 students (cited in Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983) teased out gaps between students' educational and occupational aspirations. Though this differs from conceptual debates about the ways or extent to which aspirations are considered to reflect concerted efforts towards attainment,[21] Taft posits the extent to which occupational aspirations are connected to concrete understandings of the necessary steps to achieve them. The study considered students' educational aspirations to matriculation level or beyond and their occupational aspirations to upper-level occupations. Working class national groups tended to have higher occupational aspirations than their educational aspirations and overall, the greatest disparity was found, in increasing

[21] See Chapter Three

order, among British, Italian, Australian, German/Dutch, and Maltese students, indicating that differences across cultural groups were mediated by other factors including social class, as well as gender, and not strictly related to migrant-status alone. Consistently across different groupings, fewer female students had educational aspirations to matriculation and beyond than males, and the gap was largest among Southern European nationalities and the German/Dutch grouping. Regardless, occupational aspirations were somewhat more consistent and, in some instances, higher for females than males – Australian working- and Greek working-class, and the German/Dutch grouping for whom Anderson and Vervoorn commented they "appeared unrealistically high considering their low educational aspirations" (p. 102).

Significant shifts in gendered aspirations and education participation in subsequent decades however indicate that these more pronounced education-occupation aspiration gaps and differences in the 1970s were more than being primarily a misunderstanding of necessary pathways or wishful thinking. Rather, they could also reflect latent aspirations and structural impediments that prevented young women from attaining them. Two decades after Taft for example, Parr & Mok's study (1995) finds female student aspirations higher amongst all cultural or country groupings except for the Middle East and North Africa grouping, while the gender gap was also largest amongst students from English speaking (including Australia) and West European backgrounds. The perceived importance placed on university education by parents was also seen as higher by daughters than sons across all groups except Middle East-North Africa and Hong Kong, however possible reasons for these differences are not proposed. Coates et al. (2008) note that among second generation students in Queensland, gender does not have an effect on educational aspirations – on the extent to which students aspire to university or TAFE – however

being female has an effect on reducing the likelihood of planning to get a job, an apprenticeship or join the defence forces after high school. On the other hand, it increases the likelihood of taking a year off to travel before further study. Similarly, mother's and father's ethnicity also reduced the likelihood of seeking work, apprenticeship, joining the defence forces or travelling – with mother's ethnicity found to be a particularly important determinant – indicating greater likelihood of continuing study.

#### 2.3.1.3 Social contexts of aspiring

While most Australian literature in this space has focused on comparative aspects between students of different migrant-background groupings (and also non-migrant groups), some research has turned more attention to the situational and socio-political contexts in which aspirations take shape (see, e.g., R. Butler et al., 2017; Coates, 2006; Ho, 2019, 2020; Ho et al., 2022; Naidoo et al., 2014; Naidoo, 2015; Ravulo, 2018, 2019; Ravulo et al., 2020; Stanley, 2020; Watkins, 2017; Watkins & Noble, 2008). Within this literature the research focus and approaches differ, however they situate themselves and contribute to a wider body of research, both in Australia and internationally, that has brought renewed interest in aspirations of so-called 'non-traditional' university students and the effects of class, gender and place and their intersections within contemporary conditions (Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Alloway et al., 2004; Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Berger et al., 2020; Bok, 2010; Gale, 2015; Gale et al., 2013; Gale & Parker, 2015a, 2015b; Gore et al., 2015, 2017, 2019; Hawkins, 2014b, 2014a, 2017; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002; Kintrea et al., 2015; Patfield, 2018; Pimlott-Wilson, 2017; Sellar, 2013a, 2013b, 2015; Somerville, 2013; Somerville et al., 2013; Wilks & Wilson, 2012; Zipin et al., 2015). Consequently, a more critical lens is being cast over the role of aspirations, and there is now greater interest in shifting

policy and practice towards a more nuanced appreciation of how aspirations are given life. Coates (2006), for example, utilises aspirations as an individual motivational factor that are shaped by social and cultural experiences and, within a segmented assimilation theory framework[22], interact with other individual and structural factors to influence student outcomes. On the other hand, Naidoo (2015) focuses on aspirations as an Appadurian cultural capacity in her collaborative ethnography, while also utilising concepts of capital from Bourdieu and Modood. Here, the capacity to aspire develops "within a specific social and cultural context [that] enforces norms and values that lead to high educational aspirations and imaginings of a positive educational future" (2015). While also utilising frames such as those of Appadurai and Bourdieu, among others, to construct an understanding of aspiration development, Ho and colleagues (R. Butler et al., 2017, 2022; Ho, 2019, 2020; Watkins et al., 2017) focus on the political and policy context within which mobilising efforts for educational aspirations are undertaken, particularly among Asian-Australian families who are dominant (both numerically and academically) in selective schools. In so doing, their research focuses on how aspirations are caught up in the neoliberal logics of immigration and educational policies that not only condition educational opportunities and exacerbate inequalities evident in schools, but also society and social cohesion more broadly. Also drawing upon similar conceptualisations of aspiration, Stanley (2020) frames her research within Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model to identify the experiences shaping the aspirations to attend university of Pacific Island high school students in South-East Queensland. In this way, Stanley considers how students' "life experiences point-in-

[22] To be discussed further in Chapter Three.

time” (p. 197), within the model’s micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro systems in which they live.

An important aspect across many of these studies is how migration is positioned within aspirations and the efforts to support their attainment. Coates (2006), for example, uses the term ‘migration narrative’ and Stanley (2020) the ‘migrant dream’, while Ho (2019, 2020) points to the widespread theme of ‘migrant sacrifice’ used by study participants. These reflect on how stories of efforts to achieve a better life through migration and pursuing opportunities for their children’s education and future prosperity are framed, and how actions, attitudes and behaviours are given justification as they are told to children and others. They “encapsulate the intergenerational transmission of the experiences of immigration, cultural values, ethnic heritage and the way of life in the parents’ country of origin” (Coates, 2006, p. 27) that are verbally and behaviourally communicated between parents and children.

As such, many of the students and families in these studies hold aspirations for high academic achievement, further study – particularly university – and occupations that will bring prosperity and financial stability. Among the students in Coates’ (2006) study[23] for example, migration narratives are embedded in themes of culture and ethnic heritage maintenance; seeking a better life; and poverty avoidance. These were strongly associated with the aspirations that they expressed, particularly noting that poverty avoidance – involving an impetus to ensure financial stability and opportunities – acted as a bridge between the stories of migration and what students wanted in the future. In one interview, a student’s aspirations for

[23] All participating students, aged 12-13, were born in Australia to parents born overseas coming to Australia as immigrants or refugees, with at least one from a NESB. Children were not immigrants or refugees themselves.

becoming a doctor develop from both a hope to be able to give back and help his parents in the future – given they have helped him – and what he sees as his wider family's interest in the occupation because of the money it will bring.

The experiences, however, of mobilising for aspiration attainment differ given the diverse social and material contexts and conditions, and several studies highlight the importance of governmental policies concerning migration and education in this space. Stanley (2020) places the students in her study within the context of changing and stricter migration policies affecting Pacific Islander and New Zealand families. Though Australia and New Zealand allowed for citizens of each country passport-free travel and permanent residence status through the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement (TTTA), Australian government concerns about 'backdoor migration' through New Zealand by Pacific Islander and Asian migrants has seen changes over the last two decades. New Zealand citizens now receive non-protected special category visas (SCVs), rendering them ineligible for a range of social support, including social security and educational support for students like the Higher Education Contribution Scheme - Higher Education Loan Program (HECS-HELP). Because many families do not earn enough income over an extended period, they remain ineligible for permanent residency and despite recent changes to allow greater access to programs like HECS-HELP, most students remain ineligible. As students speak of their families' 'migrant dream', Stanley notes a theme of parents "leaving behind closely attached communities and more relaxed, even if economically poor lifestyle" whilst urging children "to 'get a better life' and to 'get a degree'" (p. 193-194). This has helped drive many of the students to hold aspirations for university, however for several reasons they are difficult to attain. Other aspirations and obligations tied to supporting family and community culturally and socially can conflict with these personal aspirations, but these are also heavily entwined in

economic imperatives that result from conditions engendered by these migration and residency policies. Only one student in the study had a parent who had attended university, "which not only motivated his desire for university study, but also prepared him for the journey he was able to commence" (p. 194). For many, even where students did later go on to university, their participation was made difficult by limited family and community experiences with tertiary education, family emphasis on other responsibilities and the economic necessity to undertake them: reflecting navigational capacities, "migrant dream stories conveyed to them what to do, but not how to do it and thus did not prepare them for pursuing university in Australia" (p. 194). Further complicating successful attainment, students conveyed that universities were not readily receptive to adopting diverse cultural and pedagogical approaches and practices that would support students. Rather, they assume that students understand the demands and have requisite skills for a self-directed learning environment (see also Naidoo et al., 2014; Ravulo, 2018, 2019). Though several university programs established through HEPPP exist, Stanley's and Ravulo's research argues that these are not developed systemically.

Whereas the aspirations of Pacific Islander families are structurally hampered by migration policies, the same migration apparatus helps establish the capacity to mobilise aspirations for high academic achievement by families in Ho's and Naidoo's studies who enrol their children in selective and partially selective schools.[24] Rather than being an ethno-racial disposition or orientation, Ho emphasises that family aspirations and interest in educational success are reflective of the professional and

[24] In NSW, partially selective schools accept all students from within their catchment area in the same way other government comprehensive schools do, but also accept other students based on academic ability through testing.

educational backgrounds many Asian[25] migrants possess prior to arrival in Australia. This is not by chance, but rather itself reflective of the country's "elitist migration policy, which admits applicants on the basis of their professional skills, qualifications and wealth" (Ho, 2019, p. 517). This is a similar situation among families in Naidoo's (2015) study. As a consequence of such 'hyper-selectivity' (Lee & Zhou, 2017), migrants from Asia are both more likely to hold university or other tertiary degrees than the general population, and significantly more so than their country of origin.

While this is likely to engender strong interest in their children's education, it alone does not explain for how their aspirations for their children's success are mobilised through selective schools and how issues of race and culture become enmeshed in their development. Reflecting on this, both Ho and Naidoo explore the structural and institutional contexts within which family and student aspirations play out, although they emphasise different aspects and affects.

Ho argues that schooling and education policies have shifted greater focus towards choice, where parents are positioned as consumer subjects, and increased federal government funding of private (and Catholic systemic) schools has come at the expense of public schools which have become increasingly undesirable. In NSW, as a way of attracting middle class and upwardly mobile families through differentiation in the schooling 'market', a proliferation of selective and partially selective public secondary schools over the last two decades has been accompanied by increasing numbers of opportunity classes and gifted and talented programs in later primary years.

[25] Ho (2019, 2020) provides a discussion on how the concept of 'Asian' is socially constructed and "gains meaning within the specific history of inter-cultural relations in the Australian context" (2019, p. 522).

Although families tend to come from relative economic and academic advantage in their country of origin, Ho contends that Asian-Australian families typically experience social and economic downward mobility through migration, along with discrimination in the labour market, leaving them in what can be described as the 'marginal middle-class' (Campbell et al., 2009). Because selective schools are public schools with relatively minimal fees in comparison with private schools, but with reputations for high academic achievement and success, many migrant families already brought up succeeding through highly competitive education systems in their home country envisage them as accessible vehicles for their children to (re)gain future upward mobility.

In this context, Naidoo (2015) introduces Yeoh, Huang and Lam's (2005) theorising on transnational families who attempt to improve ethnic, cultural and symbolic capital by educating their children. This plays an important role in shaping and influencing the aspirations that children develop, with one participating teacher in Naidoo's study noting how "students identified as mid-high SES chose careers because of family … Transnational parents were acutely aware of the status university education and professional qualifications would bring. The aspiration to do well educationally and pursue high career options is co-constituted by the high school students and their parents as transnational actors" (p. 110).

As part of their efforts to support their children, many families in Naidoo's study indicated that they had moved into the area so that their daughters could attend the school, given that as a partially selective school local residency would provide automatic enrolment. Among those interviewed by Ho, many heavily utilised private tuition as a way to prepare their children for school entry tests and maintain high achievement. Across both studies, some migrant parents also voiced

dissatisfaction with the curriculum their children were being taught or what they perceived as a less rigorous approach to teaching:

> curriculum … needs to be looked at so that children achieve much more and they get more focused. What I have done in year 7 … my child has not done in year 10. I think it is below par if I look at international standards. (Naidoo, 2015, p. 111)
>
> …
>
> Cecilia, a Chinese-Australian parent, said, ‘school is too relaxed’, and did not ‘push’ students enough. This is why she sent her son to tutoring. She hoped that as her son entered senior high school, he would start to ‘feel that pressure’, explaining, ‘I think there should be a little bit of stress, otherwise he won’t work hard’. Lien agreed that her high school-aged children ‘should be more stressed’ because that would indicate they were taking their studies seriously. (Ho, 2019, p. 524)

The authors argue that this should be seen as part of a repertoire of practices that mobilise educational aspirations through selective schools in a strategic manner. The work – by parents, children, and families collectively – to attain selection and continual achievement is undertaken to augment and overcome the social and cultural – and even economic – capital that is devalued or diminished through migration and settlement. Despite this loss of capital, parents nonetheless evaluate against ‘global knowledge systems’ through their positions as transnational actors (Naidoo, 2015). In this way, activities that engender a perception of a very instrumental approach to education can be seen as pedagogical practices that seek to overcome an unfamiliarity with the expectations and approaches to teaching and the

wider schooling system that is exacerbated by a lack of localised social networks (Ho, 2019, 2020; Watkins et al., 2017).

In examining how these parental and family strategies play a role in students' own choices and aspirations, Naidoo draws upon Modood's (2004) concept of ethnic capital which focuses the study towards the role of familial norms and cultural capital transmission in the reproduction of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage: "for those where imagination and ethnicity are a resource, ethnicity as social capital collapses the Bourdieuian distinction between cultural capital, acquired through the family, and social capital as mediated through social networks and highlights the roles that ethnicity can play through 'ethnic capital'" (p. 110). Attempts to augment this ethnic capital thus reflect a social context in which parents "demonstrate culturally specific imaginings of a particular type of aspiration and education system that was possibly part of their cultural experience prior to migrating" (p. 111). Similarly, Ho (2019) also recognises that the homogenising and often essentialising effects of self-identifying as 'Asian' reflect what Spivak terms 'strategic essentialism'. While this "approach to culture sometimes ignored the role played by structural factors in the production of this 'culture' of hard work" (p. 522), it nonetheless allowed students to feel comfortable in Asian-dominated spaces, and strengthened their position where they perceived an unequal distribution of power.

Although also touched upon by Naidoo, the practices of parents and families is centred more heavily by Ho and colleagues in a political context. As the migration and education policies have engendered heightened school competition and consequently helped to shift the demographic makeup of many high performing schools and their surrounding suburbs, migrant strategies have been popularly perceived, critiqued and challenged in increasingly racialised framings that are entangled in what has been called the 'ethnicisation' of educational achievement (R.

Butler et al., 2017; Watkins & Noble, 2013). Rather than being understood as strategies to overcome structural inequalities, differences in attitudes towards achievement are seen in culturally essentialist terms; most strikingly a 'clash' between Asian families perceiving success through effort, hard work, and persistence, compared with those of western background emphasising ability as key to achievement. This has helped fuel further aspirational anxieties around access to present and future academic, occupational and lifestyle opportunities that are themselves reiterations of legacy, (post-)colonial anxieties concerning Anglo-Australians' position in an Asian region (Watkins et al., 2017). Many Anglo-Australian parents in Ho and colleagues' research symbolically signposted a concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2002) of 'civically' and 'community-minded' students in contrast with 'tiger' parenting, framing the strategic practices such as tutoring almost as cheating, and were angered at losing opportunities for 'genuinely gifted' students who missed out (R. Butler et al., 2022).

In demonstrating how differences in participation and attitudes towards schooling are racialised – and can serve to mask some of the structural advantages middle-class Anglo-Australians continue to enjoy – the studies considered nonetheless recognise concerns for students within such pressurised environments, and they explore how their aspirations are shaped by and within such contexts. In Naidoo's (2015) study, some students aspired to particular occupations 'due to my parents' or 'because of my Dad', and this meant they "therefore carry a heavy burden with expectations from their families" (p. 111). Ultimately, however, students "present themselves as immune to any social constraints wanting to have careers, and being able to overcome adversity through hard work and determination" (Naidoo, 2015, p. 110). Among some of the students in Ho's studies (2019, 2020), they also state that while they experienced pressures, doing so meant they developed

the work ethic to reach university. Rather than simply being about parents however, Ho contends that both the micro practices and pedagogical approaches of selective schools themselves heighten pressures for students and families through a greater focus on formal assessments, examinations, and performative ranking practices.

In considering students' presentations of themselves as unconstrained by structural impediments, Naidoo argues that their resilience should be understood as a form of resistance and develops as a response to marginalisation, and subsequently "represents concomitant agency to produce change in their life experiences and social realities" (p. 110). In so doing the contemporary literature demonstrates that the capacity to aspire, imagine futures and mobilise towards these hopes takes place differentially, within specific social and cultural contexts (Appadurai, 2004). Concurrently, however, it casts a critical lens on the social and material conditions within which resistance and resilience become so fundamental to the capacity to aspire, emphasising the political at federal, state, and academic institution levels in giving shape and resonance to the way youth and their families aspire. This itself begins to ask what sort of society we might collectively be aspiring for.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Policies designed to raise academic and occupational aspirations have generally been established on the premise that youth from 'non-traditional' equity group backgrounds – particularly LSES backgrounds – have a 'lack' of aspiration which, if addressed, will produce commensurate achievement and outcomes (Bradley et al., 2008; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). As this literature review has shown, however, while some research does posit that aspirations work in this way, a larger body within the literature argues that aspirations may be held distinguishable from the expectations to attain them, demonstrating that the relationship between

aspirations and achievement is complex. Among these studies, a strong interest in the role of social and structural constraints in effecting students' aspirations, their change over time, and their relationship with expectations and subsequent achievement is also evident. Together, this literature argues that greater emphasis on alleviating social, cultural and financial impediments across various social and institutional settings, whilst providing meaningful experiences with a range of possible pathways, will be of more applied benefit than attempts at 'raising' aspirations (see, e.g., Berger et al., 2020; Khattab, 2015).

Among this, research on migrant, ethnic and second-generation youth present findings of the significant prevalence of aspirations for post-compulsory education and high-status careers. Indeed, it is possible that because migrant groups have historically been – and continue to be – more likely to hold aspirations for university and professional occupations than Australian-born, and participate in university in higher rates proportionally, policy agendas interested in supporting university participation among equity groups have not given priority to the 'over-represented' NESB cohort. As the review demonstrates, however, such readings of *overall* aspirations and attainment significantly miss important differences that members of different cultural and migrant groups experience, as well as aspiration-attainment gaps that reflect poorer outcomes and unmet aspirations.

As part of a broadening literature that is concerned with the 'politics of aspiration', several contemporary studies also highlight the ways institutional policies, and educational and economic imperatives may direct or effect aspirations and mobilisation efforts. This helps to further explore how and why differences in coming to aspire might be experienced by different individuals, families, and cultural groups at point-in-time, extending on the stronger comparative focus that had dominated research in this space. Such work is pertinent given important

developments in Australia related to post-compulsory education and increasing cultural diversity.

With trends for widening participation in tertiary education going through massification and towards universalisation, historically dominant ways of assigning aspirations into categories of 'low' and 'high' begin to appear somewhat simplistic as the reproduction of social and economic advantage manifests itself in different ways: demonstrating 'high' academic aspirations has shifted away from the monolith categorisations of post-compulsory or university participation and more towards calculating participation in certain degrees at certain institutions (Kenway & Fahey, 2014; Morrison, 2014). This takes place as education has become further instrumentalised, and the broader notion of aspiration is further commodified and co-opted into political overtures to 'get ahead' (Sellar et al., 2011), even though the likelihood of social and economic wellbeing and security associated with university participation has eroded. Consequently, this may all "serve to disadvantage some groups even when they appear to be included" (Sellar & Gale, 2011, p. 117), so the processes of coming to aspire and imagine futures increase as a point of concern for research.

And although borders have become more rigid for many, global markets have allowed and even compelled many more – and even those same people – to anticipate movement within realms of possibility, and necessity. Simultaneously, the same political and economic apparatus that fuels the want and need for global movement has also fuelled further apprehensions and antagonisms towards notions of multiculturalism and cultural plurality. The contemporary literature on migrant aspirations examined in this review has helped to establish a discursive shift that opens analysis to the effects of these factors, but there are nonetheless opportunities to research this in other diverse contexts. Expanding the range of conceptual tools

utilised in this field (Gale & Parker, 2015b) opens space to consider how the temporal, spatial and political contours of migration give life to the aspirations of young people born or raised after migration. In this way, research can also open itself further to the potential plurality of aspirations that young people's imagined futures entail, as well as the ways in which they intersect. The following chapter establishes the conceptual framework with which this can happen.

# Chapter Three – Conceptualising Aspirations

## 3.1 Introduction

After considering differences in the ways aspirations are understood to interact with expectations and attainment, the literature review explored largely empirical research and findings on the aspirations of students and young people from migrant backgrounds. These findings together demonstrate that aspirations for post-compulsory education – particularly university – and high-status occupations have been predominant among migrant-background youth and their families. Yet very importantly, this is not a universal. If read in such a way, it masks significant variations between and within groups, as well as differences and gaps between aspirations held, the expectations to achieve them, and subsequent outcomes experienced. The literature points to the effects of a range of social factors that may produce both differences in aspirations and aspiration-achievement gaps, and later studies within the review in particular point to how aspirations are differentially formed and mobilised within distinct socio-political and historical conditions.

Within our contemporary historical moment, such conditions have involved – as established in the Introduction – the championing of aspirations as an 'individualist psychological register' (Zipin et al., 2015) that can be harnessed and, where not sufficiently demonstrated, raised for the benefit of both individual consumer-citizen and the wider economy. This affirms a normative hierarchy of aspirations where certain forms of education – for example, university – occupations, and sometimes more importantly, the lifestyles that can be consumed and displayed through their attainment, are positioned as self-evidently high, and this consequently serves to legitimate "some subject positions ... over others" (Southgate & Bennett, 2014, p. 35). Questioning such logics and attuned to the

politics of aspiration, the later studies examined in the Chapter Two sit among contemporary literature that has looked to open more complexity to the ways we conceptualise aspirations.

It is from here that this chapter commences to develop the conceptual framework that will drive this study. Being cognisant of its various sociological dimensions, the chapter first considers how aspirations have been conceptualised in response to the aspirations raising agenda that has been central to higher education policy. From there, I develop a conceptual framework for aspirations that builds upon this and is attentive to the interaction between migrancy and youth aspirations.

## 3.2 The sociological and philosophical dimensions of aspirations

Contemporary aspirations research has broadened to develop a deeper understanding and recognition of the social and cultural contours that give people "the capacity to imagine futures" (Sellar & Gale, 2011, p. 122). Somerville (2013), for example, develops the notion of 'placetimemattering' to draw greater analytical attention to the intertwined spatial, temporal, and material elements and conditions that give form and meaning to aspiration. Zipin et al. (2015) draw upon the Bourdieuian logics of 'doxic' aspirations – where certain ideas and beliefs permeate powerfully to acquire a taken-for-granted, common-sense status; and *habituated* aspirations – the dispositions that work as principles generating and organising perceptions and practice; and then introduce the logic of *emergent* aspirations. These aspirations are of the kind the constituting parts of which are "hardly audible … because … they are not primarily grounded in the past-made-present, but are emerging among young people as their lives apprehend the present-becoming-future" (Zipin et al., 2015, p. 10). Meanwhile, Gale, Parker and colleagues (Gale et al.,

2013; Gale & Parker, 2015b) identify 'concept-clusters' that are built from sociological and philosophical literature. In work of 'systemic reflection' (Mills, 1959), the concepts brought together are social imaginary (Taylor, 2004); taste, and status and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984); desire (J. Butler, 1999); possibility (Bourdieu, 1984); navigational capacity (Appadurai, 2004; de Certeau, 1984); and resources – both financial and material, and collective knowledges and experiences (Appadurai, 2004).

Central to the theme linking these concepts with one another is the tenet that aspirations are not "simply the whim of disparate individuals" (Gale et al., 2013, p. 7) or "an array of all futures from which people pick and choose according to individual taste, even though this is how it is represented in much policy and practice" (Gale & Parker, 2015b, p. 141). Gale et al. (2013; see also Gale & Hodge, 2014) summarise aspirations as being entangled in a "collective social imagination of where we 'fit' in relation to others" (p. 10). For Gale, this positionality is also embodied with our notions of *taste*, which are themselves developed in relation to the tastes of others – and thus a reflection of *status* and *distinction*. Such a relational distribution can inform divergences between what we *desire* and what we understand to be *possible*: "Our aspirations are not simply 'blue sky' dreams. They are formed in relation to the circumstances in which we live" (p. 11), and because of this, our *capacity to navigate* to our imagined futures is contingent on the material and cultural *resources* we have to draw upon.

While our understanding of aspirations can be informed by the conceptual frames Gale, Parker and colleagues bring together, the authors also emphasise that their utility comes from the possibilities of deploying them in diverse methods, whether in isolation or in different combinations. Further to this, Gale and Parker (2015b) signal that the intention is not to foreclose on the contributions that other

concepts and concept-clusters may bring to our understanding of aspirations. We can, for example, see several of these concepts and the introduction of others, in the works of other researchers who explore aspirations under a range of social, cultural and spatial circumstances (see, e.g., Bok, 2010; Duggan, 2017; Gannon et al., 2016a; Hawkins, 2014b; Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011). Encouraged by this call, I explore several interrelated conceptual frames that allow us to be attentive to the diverse experiences of migrant-background youth, whose aspirations may be formed through multilayered forms of time and place, whilst also capturing "dialectic relations between public and private interests, as implicated in each other" (Gale & Parker, 2015b, p. 149). While keeping the above concept-cluster in mind, I start similarly to other literature with Arjun Appadurai's (2004) notion that aspirations are cultural capacity. I follow this by considering how place, as constituted through migrancy and understandings of home, acts as a font of aspiration through spatial practices; how aspirations are temporally bound through narrativised and practiced constructions of past, present and future; and finally, how aspirations are an affective orientation that interact with other emotional dispositions within contemporary political and policy normativities.

## 3.3 (Re)conceptualising aspirations

### 3.3.1 Aspirations as a Cultural Capacity

Appadurai's (2004) conceptualisation of aspirations as a 'cultural capacity' moves aspirations beyond individualist trait, and thus sets out to recognise how culture provides the context for shaping and driving future goals. Because aspirations are related to "wants, preferences, choices and calculations" (p. 67) they have, he argues, tended to be connected with notions of markets, economics, and the

individual. For Appadurai (2004), however, aspirations stem from “larger cultural norms” (p. 67) and localised understandings of the good life.

In setting out ‘the capacity to aspire’, Appadurai (2004) first seeks to dislodge the duality between, and oppositional positioning of, culture towards both development and economics often found within popular and political discourses. In making explicit the future-oriented dimensions of culture, he argues, “we run against some deeply held counterconceptions” (p. 60): Whereas culture has been embodied with a sense of pastness – habit, custom, heritage, tradition – development, in contrast, is seen to point to the future – plans, hopes, goals, targets. So too for economics, which as the ‘science of the future’ compels “wants, needs, expectations, calculations” (p. 60):

> In a word, the cultural actor is a person of and from the past, and the economic actor a person of the future. Thus, from the start, culture is opposed to development, as tradition is opposed to newness, and habit to calculation. It is hardly a surprise that nine out of ten treatises on development treat culture as a worry or a drag on the forward momentum of planned economic change. (p. 60)

Appadurai argues that most (anthropological and sociological) approaches to culture do not ignore the future, but rather “smuggle it in indirectly, when they speak of norms, beliefs, and values as being central to cultures, conceived as specific and multiple designs for social life” (pp. 60-61). The concern for Appadurai with such approaches, however, is that in not expanding upon the implications of such concepts for futurity as a cultural capacity, culture as a sense of pastness is afforded prominence.

To build an explicit understanding of the future-orientated logics that are bounded in culture, Appadurai (2004) points to three key dimensions that emanate from contemporary debates in anthropology. First is a relationality between norms, values, and beliefs. This builds out of a linguistic understanding of elements of a cultural system: cultural coherence cannot be understood through its individual items but rather by their relationship between one another. Second, that some form of dissensus works within a framework of consensus – "especially with regard to the marginal, the poor, gender relations, and power relations more generally" (p. 62) – so that a "shared culture is no more a guarantee of complete consensus than a shared platform in the democratic convention" (p. 61). The third key dimension is that of weak boundaries which are made visible through migration, trade, and conflict and "now writ large in globalising cultural traffic" (p. 62). Cultural boundaries are not (and cannot) be fixed, but rather in a constant state of transmission. "Traffic and osmosis are the norm, not the exception" (p. 61), and in an era of globalisation, plurality, heterogeneity, and diversity act as the critical features of culture: "no culture, past or present, is a conceptual island unto itself, except in the imagination of the observer. Cultures are and always have been interactive to some degree" (p. 62). These dimensions allow Appadurai to investigate both the positioning of 'the poor' and other disadvantaged or marginalised groups within wider cultural and socio-political frameworks and practices, as well as their own production of cultural practices and responses to their positioning.

Within this frame, aspirations can be understood as a cultural capacity because they represent hopes and visions that are inflected by certain cultural – social, historical, localised, political – contexts, "never simply individual (as the language of wants and choices inclines us to think)" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67). Neither should they be seen, however, in an 'ethnicist' conceptualisation of culture (Brah,

1991; Windle, 2004) where, as in both popular interpretations and some prominent academic presentations (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu & Simons, 1998),[26] there is a tendency towards essentialising particular cultures with dispositions for or against aspiration work (Ho, 2020; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Sue & Okazaki, 1990; Valencia, 2010). Rather, as a repertoire of contextual and relational practices, the cultural capacity is "always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67; see also P. L. Carter, 2001; Foley, 1991; Lundy, 2003; Wiggan, 2007). In all societies aspirations about the good life can be found, 'moral-intimate-economic things' (Berlant, 2011) encompassing beliefs about health, material security, happiness and so on. But so too, in all instances they are

> part of some system of ideas (remember relationality as an aspect of cultural worlds) which locates them in a larger map of local ideas and beliefs about: life and death, the nature of worldly possessions, the significance of material assets over social relations, the relative illusion of social permanence for a society, the value of peace or warfare". (Appadurai, 2004, pp. 67-68)

#### 3.3.1.1 Navigations to the good life

Importantly, particularly from a perspective that does not wish to limit aspirations to a consideration of academic and occupational opportunities, this 'larger map of ideas and beliefs' allows aspirations for the good life to be recognised in manifestations around "marriage, work, leisure, convenience, respectability, friendship, health, and virtue" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 68). Oftentimes too, such 'intermediate norms' only emerge in narrow contexts as specific wants and choices, such as the desire for or choice between particular material goods, or one

[26] Ogbu's work is central to the concept of oppositional cultures (see Lewis, 2013; Lundy, 2003)

occupational opportunity and another. Appadurai (2004) warns that it is within these choices that we often fail to see the intermediate normative contexts, and consequently regard such choices as individual, to be explained by the "science of calculation and the market-economics" (p. 68).

The poor, like any other group in society do hold aspirations for the good life, but as Appadurai argues, the capacity to aspire is not evenly distributed. Not only is this capacity a cultural capacity, but it is also a 'metacapacity' and a 'navigational capacity' that is built through greater exposure to a variety of social, cultural, and economic opportunities and experiences. This means that those who are relatively well-off and powerful invariably have more of an opportunity to develop their capacity to aspire, because they have greater "'archives of experience' accumulated through previous successful navigations (of one's own but also the successful experiences of family and community)" (Gale & Parker, 2015b, p. 147). They are more likely to be conscious of and recognise "links between the more and less immediate objects of aspiration ... have more complex experiences of the relation between a wide range of ends and means, because they have a bigger stock of available experiences of the relationship of aspirations and outcomes" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 68).

This does not represent a lack of aspirations on the part of those experiencing structural or institutionalised forms of disadvantage. Rather, because the capacity to navigate towards aspirations is dependent upon "both a sense of destination and of intermediate nodes along the way" (Gale & Parker, 2015b, p. 147; see also Bok, 2010), poorer and more marginalised members of society are more likely to perceive fewer reasonable possibilities – and by extension, greater impossible possibilities. On their map of aspirations, they are likely to have a less dense series of

> aspirational nodes and a thinner, weaker sense of the pathways from concrete wants to intermediate contexts to general norms and back again. Where these

> pathways do exist for the poor, they are likely to be more rigid, less supple, and less strategically valuable, not because of any cognitive deficit on the part of the poor but because the capacity to aspire, like any complex cultural capacity, thrives and survives on practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation. (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69)

As Gale and Parker (2015) argue with reference to university aspirations and access, a student whose family includes members such as judges or academics is going to have more than simply greater financial resources to inform their navigation towards entry into university – and beyond – than a student who would fit the first-in-family category. Here one may also say that such navigational pathways are not only filled with nodes about university access, but about the 'right' and 'best' course, the 'right' university or institution, the 'right' networks within and outside university that support subsequent opportunities. In this context, Gale and Parker (2015) draw upon what de Certeau (1984) conceptualises as 'tour' and 'map' knowledge to understand how knowledge can take different forms in fermenting aspirations for groups occupying different spaces with a given society's normative structures. 'Tour' knowledge, they argue, limits individuals and communities to the 'tour guide', where "knowledge of the terrain is governed by the direct instruction of others" (Gale & Parker, 2015, p. 148). Those with tour knowledge follow pre-determined and when obstacles surface, the options available tend to be to choose another tour: "to adapt their preferences … from a doctor to a teacher, for example, when the demands of the former exceed their navigational capacities and archives of experience" (p. 148). Those with 'map' knowledge, on the other hand, have first-hand knowledge and greater understanding of the social terrain, as well as the various possible pathways available to reach their destination: "They have not just been given the map; they are

the cartographers, able to create new routes and to improvise alternatives if obstacles appear in their way" (Gale and Parker, 2015, p. 148). Poverty, therefore, acts to limit and diminish the social and cultural spaces and circumstances in which to practice navigational capacities which, subsequently, also leads to a shallower archive of experiences upon which to draw.

#### 3.3.1.2 Strengthening the Terms of Recognition

In referring to 'the poor', it is pertinent here to acknowledge that Appadurai writes about, and builds up his conceptualisation of, the capacity to aspire from an anthropological perspective focused upon development within India and other nations and regions whose relative and material experiences of disadvantage and poverty differ considerably from those found in most of Australia. They would also, importantly, differ to the lived experiences of the vast majority of Australia's immigrant population, in large part due to Australia's policies around migrant and refugee reception, which has increasingly 'picked winners' (Ho, 2020) – members of a globally mobile cohort of already middle class and academically educated, able to fill professional, skilled roles within the labour market (Jupp, 2002; Walsh, 2011). Nonetheless, though focusing primarily on the poor, Appadurai also recognises and extends such reference to other excluded, disadvantaged, and marginalised groups within a given society more generally (p. 66). Following this thread, we can thus recognise several factors potentially reflective of migrant experiences more broadly, given differential distances from their host country's normative centres – whether that be ethnicity, language, SES, religion, historical and political circumstances of migration, and the intersection of such strands.

Importantly in this context, Appadurai (2004) argues that the poor – and by extension, others experiencing structural marginalisation or disadvantage in society

– have an understanding of themselves and of the world around them that has cultural dimensions and expressions:

> These may not be easy to identify, since they are not neatly nested with shared national or regional cultures, and often cross local and national lines. Also, they may be differently articulated by men and women, the poorest and the merely poor, the employed and the unemployed, the disabled and the able-bodies, the more politically conscious and the less mobilised. But it is never hard to identify threads and themes in the worldviews of the poor. (p. 65)

First among these is an ambivalence towards the dominant norms of the society in which they live. This ambivalence may not reveal itself in openly hostile ways, but rather be represented through forms of irony, distance and cynicism that allows the disadvantaged to maintain a sense of dignity in difficult circumstances – a de Certeauian tactic of sorts against the broader strategies of the dominant system (de Certeau, 1984). This, however, is but one aspect of their relationship with dominant cultural norms. The other is compliance. For Appadurai (2004), however, this is "not mere surface compliance but fairly deep moral attachment to norms and beliefs that directly support their own degradation" (p. 65). Consequently, "the poor are neither simple dupes nor secret revolutionaries" but rather, they are survivors who seek "to optimise the terms of trade between recognition and redistribution in their immediate, local lives" (p. 65).

'Terms of recognition' establish one of the foundational blocks upon which a capacity to aspire is built. The terms of recognition – analogous with terms of trade or engagement – underscore the conditions under which people can negotiate "with the very norms that frame their social lives" (p. 66). In part, poverty and other forms of social disadvantage work as a limitation of resources where the terms of recognition

are concerned, with those experiencing disadvantage often finding themselves in a position where they are encouraged to subscribe to norms which detrimentally impact upon their dignity and access to material goods and services, thus systemically worsening the inequality they readily experience (see also Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Lundy, 2003). The terms of recognition are balanced unevenly towards those who already hold power and determine its affects. Where those possessing less power are recognised, this is exhibited in ways that ensure limited changes in the terms of redistribution. For Appadurai then, "to the extent that poverty is indexed by poor terms of recognition for the poor, intervention to positively affect these terms is a crucial priority" (p. 66).

This intervention involves providing people experiencing disadvantage with the opportunity to strengthen the capacity to exercise 'voice'. Voice provides the capacity to debate and contest the direction of one's 'collective social life'. Not only is this the case because it largely defines the ideal of participatory democracy. Rather, for it to take effect it must also be recognised as a cultural capacity that engages socio-political and economic issues through ideologies and norms that are "widely shared and credible, even by the rich and powerful" (Appadurai, 2004, pp. 66-67). Such voice must also be expressed in a culturally attuned manner for it to have resonance: to enact voice is to utilise tools of "metaphor, rhetoric, organization, and public performance" that suit a given social and cultural world:

> So, there is no shortcut to empowerment. It has to take some local cultural form to have resonance, mobilise adherents, and capture the public space of debate. And this is true in the efforts that the poor make to mobilise themselves (internally) and in their efforts to change the dynamics of consensus in their larger social worlds. (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67)

### 3.3.2 Place - Migrancy, home, and belonging as fonts for aspiration

Complementary to an understanding of aspirations as a cultural capacity is one that considers the spatial contours that shape this. Within aspirations research, notions of such space and place have often been tied to the signification of geographic locations within which study subjects and participants live (Somerville, 2013). While this remains an important aspect for consideration – and arises in parts of the following exploration – conceptualising aspirations as a navigational capacity (as we have above) opens the opportunity to consider it as an enactment of diverse 'spatial practices' and 'spatialised knowledges' (de Certeau, 1984; see also Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011). Just as aspiration as navigational capacity inculcates places as metaphor – we are *somewhere*, and we envisage and attempt to travel towards our desired future *destination* – the concept of spatial practice is similarly deployed to elucidate the cartographic and strategic work of the map and the tour – reflecting (legitimised) knowledge from above – as well as the tactical and "unregulated knowledges that arise from below" (Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011, p. 153). The map and the tour may also be interpreted distinctly (Gale & Parker, 2015b), where "those with tour knowledge are subject to the limits of the 'tour guide'" (p. 148) in comparison with others who may be able to write their own map. Yet just as de Certeau explores, spatial practices and spatialised knowledges are also tied to the material and socio-political condition of places, and therefore the differential and relational ways people inhabit and situate themselves within them. These notions help to draw attention to the ways that a sense of home and belonging, agitated through different transnational spaces with divergent socio-political conditions, establishes social mobilities for migrant families and their children.

Before continuing to explore the various aspects that may make up these spatial practices, I wish to outline some major frameworks that have considered the position of children of migrants – most commonly referred to as the second-generation – within aspirations and attainment literature.

#### 3.3.2.1 Evolving conceptualisations of the role of the second-generation

In looking to understand migrants' and diasporic communities' attempts to mobilise aspirations through migration and resettlement, the second-generation has often been the locus of extensive debate and research, presenting as "a litmus test for the viability of ethnic groups" (Skrbiš et al., 2007, p. 264) within new surrounds. Traditionally, the 'success' of migrant groups was seen through their second-generation's cultural and economic incorporation into dominant culture (Coates, 2006; Xu & Wu, 2015); a process written about as if "assimilation, acculturation, and upward mobility were virtually the same thing" and seen as "both desirable and inevitable" (Kasinitz et al., 2004, p. 4). Whilst such straight-line assimilation perspectives became theoretically problematic for their cultural assumptions, they were also found wanting empirically, with the outcomes of long-standing minorities and diverse migrant communities not fitting the assimilation process being theorised (see Windle, 2004 for an Australian context).

Various researchers broke away from this to explore the extent of and interplay between the incorporation or assimilation into the new country and the maintenance of transnational and cultural ties with the country or place of origin. While Gans (1979) held that such cultural ties were largely symbolic, and thus nonetheless pointed to eventual structural incorporation, both he and Waters (1990) highlight how this symbolic selectivity is more open to white ethnics who, unlike racialised minorities (of colour), are afforded the capacity to choose when, where and

how to identify with their ethnic heritage. Others have built off Gans' continuing work – which pointed to sustained interplay between incorporation and transnationalism, as well as stymied or 'low' aspirations among second-generations due to turbulent economic conditions (Gans, 1992, 1997) – to develop a theory of 'segmented assimilation' (Fernández-Kelly & Konczal, 2005; Portes et al., 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996, 2001, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 1993). The theory contends that not all assimilation is necessarily positive and that not all successful outcomes need occur through linear assimilation. One avenue for immigrants and their children is to assimilate into the white middle class, as had been traditionally predicted in the linear assimilation theories. Another is the possibility of facing downward assimilation into the culture of a minority underclass, where limited economic resources, along with a discriminatory reception by the dominant culture and 'low' parental human capital are likely to result in 'low' or oppositional aspirations and practices.[27] A third option may be to selectively acculturate and thus delay either upward or downward forms of assimilation. To do so, immigrants utilise their ethnic culture and group as a means through which to acculturate their children in practices they deem desirable, whilst avoiding undesirable attributes that they perceive are embedded in the wider society around them.

Whilst this theory sits among literature that posits processes of simultaneous assimilation and transnationalism (Brocket, 2020), several researchers nonetheless note a number of important shortcomings and conceptual difficulties. Notably, researchers have critiqued the binary and fixed nature by which culture and ethnicity is considered, where second-generation aspirations and mobilities are overestimated to trend either downwards or upwards depending on the migrant community (Alba &

[27] Thus having associations with Ogbu's theorising of oppositional cultures (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Nee, 1997; Kasinitz et al., 2002). This fails to take into account how ethnicity might differentially affect different migrant groups, and fails to appropriately recognise the ways in which minority ethnic groups influence and change social and cultural practices of the mainstream society (Agius Vallejo, 2012; Alba & Nee, 1997; Ngo, 2008).

Further to this is the conceptualisation of the socioeconomic incorporation of immigrants and, more critically, their children. Segmented assimilation is modelled in the long term as a possibility between the white middle class and the minority underclasses. This discounts circumstances where already evident minority middle classes may provide an alternative cultural framework that provides a sense of home and community, aspirational cues and support for their mobilisation, to newer minority groups (Neckerman et al., 1999). As such, it disregards “the possibility that some immigrants and their descendants assimilate into a minority middle-class community after they achieve upward mobility” (Agius Vallejo, 2012, p. 16). Importantly, we can ask “what ‘assimilation’ means” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, p. 9) when identities and affiliations are formed and reformed in response to changing socio-political and economic conditions.

#### 3.3.2.2 Differential possibilities of belonging

Given these limitations, we may be able to acquire a more fruitful exploration of how aspirations are mobilised by considering the practices of home and belonging within and across different spaces, and thus as spatial practices. In this sense, home is understood to be “a social experience of place rather than a fixed and immutable place in itself” (Boccagni, 2018, p. 315). It invokes a relationship between home as a dwelling and home as a place of belonging that, for migrants, are often and likely scattered and transnational, and consequently produce and are produce by different experiences and significance (Boccagni, 2017b; Fathi, 2022). Such differential

experiences are contingent on the socio-political, economic, and cultural conditions that shape trajectories. Though contemporary globalisation might suggest a weakening of boundaries, as Appadurai contends – earlier, and through the 'scapes' (Appadurai, 1996) – this weakening is not afforded to all equally. There is a politics of movement, where "the question is not simply about who travels, but *when, how, and under what circumstances*" (Brah, 1996, p. 179).

Through migration, home is also often understood as a process of finding stasis, where migration leads from loss to finding safety and repose. Acts of migrancy can however be productive experiences for homing. The efforts behind uprootings and regroundings (Ahmed et al., 2003) simultaneously invoke estrangement – an experience of not being able to make sense of what was once familiar; and work towards 'being-at-home' – where the "lived experience of a locality" sees "subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other*" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 341; see also Belloni, 2018).

Because of this, 'being-at-home' is an affective site that reflects people's sense of belonging. To belong is to feel inclusion to a group, a social space or transnational location (Fathi, 2022; Wood & Black, 2018), and these give space for (re)presentations of self and idealised future selves and groups, including ideas of what is or will be im/possible. Drawing upon similar notions and recognising how they unfold in the development of aspirations is evident in several studies (see, e.g., Gore et al., 2019, 2022; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011; Pimlott-Wilson, 2017; Somerville et al., 2013; Stephens, 2021), and others have also drawn this towards their focus on young people from migrant backgrounds (Ho, 2020; Naidoo et al., 2014; Stanley, 2020; Zipin et al., 2021). This framing allows us to shift connotations of diaspora away from images of trauma, separation and

dislocation, towards their potentiality as sites of hope and new beginnings (Brah, 1996). Often however, belonging is invoked through the language of essentialism, permanency, and authenticity – by people about themselves and others, and especially where claims of *who* belongs are being staked. But this obscures the contextual flux within which people and groups "are caught up in a continuing and dynamic dialectic of seeking and granting belonging" and as a consequence we must be attentive to how people 'do belonging' (Skrbiš et al., 2007, pp. 261–262).

Here, the notion of 'in-betweenness' is useful in helping us to understand how migrants, and especially their children, experience home and belonging. As Tsolidis and Kostogriz (2008) suggest, "people identify themselves with particular spaces and places by drawing on discursive formations to create a sense of belonging" (p. 322). For members of the second-generation, feelings of in-betweenness contend particularly with discursive practices that position them as not fully part of the country of their birth or settlement, and simultaneously not fully part of their parents' home country (Brocket, 2020). As such, forming belonging takes place through and in relation to dominant and normative ideas about spaces and places (Anthias, 2018), but as a negotiation within such ideologies rather than an acquiescence to them: there is a synthesis of "playful artistry and considered intention and that through this process new forms of identification become evidence of multiple spaces linked through birthright, circumstance, travel, technology and imagination" (Tsolidis & Kostogriz, 2008, p. 322). While such feelings of in-betweenness suggest tension, this also highlights the generative nature of (re)forming belonging.

#### 3.3.2.2 Deploying spatial practices in in-between places

In-betweenness does not only attach itself to people's sense of belonging and home, but also reflected in the very institutions and organisations that migrant

groups build, sustain, and utilise. As noted in the Introduction, CLSs – the sites in which this study is situated – present as one such in-between space, while others will arise in some of the discussions below. Tsolidis and Kostogriz (2008; see also Tsolidis, 2012; Nordstrom & Jung, 2022) suggest that as 'after hours' schools, CLSs are peripherally part of wider spatial practices "that organise knowledges hierarchically" and consequently "positions these schools outside what is seen as the core business of Australian schooling, which happens within the hours of 'normal' school" (p. 326). Nordstrom (2020) also demonstrates how such a positionality can become embodied within the experiences of teachers within such schools, whose work is treated as less legitimate than in mainstream schooling – even if they are themselves mainstream teachers. Simultaneously, however, 'after hours' also highlights CLSs' integral role to belonging for participating families and communities: "after 'normal' schooling are the hours associated with home and family. In this sense, 'after hours' schools capture the tensions and contradictions implicit in 'in-betweenness'" (Tsolidis & Kostogriz, 2008, p. 326; Nordstrom, 2016, 2022). That CLS participation often runs several generations after the migration experience demonstrates how such in-between spaces can help sustain and reproduce in-between identities. With this in mind, the following sub-sections explore different conceptualisations of how aspirations interact with and are shaped by people's experiences of place.

##### *3.3.2.2.1 Strategic Essentialism*

The contingent situatedness of belonging that generates in-betweenness also means that migrants and their children may adopt cultural identities that cross traditional boundaries through new spheres of cooperation. While some may be the result of proximities that intersect experiences of social class and gender, others may "internalise the racial definitions of the dominant society, to see oneself through the

eyes of that society” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, p. 9). Minority individuals and groups, however, may participate in this as a way of favourably redistributing power imbalances, as the example of ‘Asian’ identities in Anglosphere countries demonstrates (Ho, 2019, 2020; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Ho (2019) highlights how migrant-background youth who identify as Asian ‘work the hyphens’ and participate in “context-specific ‘strategic essentialism’ and ‘strategic hybridity’” (p. 521) within schools and the wider education sphere. Such strategic use of essentialism (Spivak, 1988) worked as a practice in school settings that supported families and students to mobilise aspirations, particularly where they lacked access to the social capital ‘Anglo’ families had. By adopting a pan-Asian identity, students experienced a sense of belonging that allowed them to talk about issues over which they shared common ground. Further to this, Ho discusses how families adopt specific practices, such as private tuition, that are not only regarded as being necessary for academic success, but discursively positioned as being distinctly Asian, and reflective of Asian qualities and cultures concerning education.

##### *3.3.2.2.2 Ethnic Capital and Minority Cultures of Mobility*

These and a range of other social and spatial practices can be seen to be reflective of what Modood, Shah and colleagues (Iqbal & Modood, 2023; Loury et al., 2005; Modood, 2004; Shah et al., 2010) term as ‘ethnic capital’. Within this conceptualisation, “the Bourdieuian distinction between cultural capital, which is acquired through the family, and social capital as benefits mediated through social relations, is not maintained; the former is indistinguishably incorporated within the latter” (Modood, 2004, p. 101). This arises where ethnic minorities may not adequately share in the social capital resources of the dominant culture, and so rely upon and utilise similar resources that are distinctive to that group or at least independent from the dominant one. As members of such minorities have found

successful navigations of their aspirations, this establishes particular norms – such as the value of education or success in business – but also the basis through which information and resources can be shared with others within the ethnic group. This allows new migrants as well as those from lower social class backgrounds to access social and spatial knowledges built and deployed in ethno-culturally inflected ways. For participants in Ho's (2020) study, 'education talk' was prevalent among Asian migrant communities: community networks provided information about the selective school system, what tutoring centres they use and what schools they are aiming for. Here, CLSs are one such network space where communities come together through shared cultural interests and practices. These are buttressed by community media, in which advertisements for tutoring centres are run alongside stories of academic success by the community's young. Tutoring centres tend to be concentrated in 'migrant-dominated' suburbs, which are themselves a reflection of spatial practices by migrants to not only live in proximity with others of their ethnicity, but to do so in a way that is designed to mobilise their aspirations for academic success. Both Ho and Naidoo (2015), for example, note the practice of moving into the catchment areas of primary schools with opportunity classes and semi-selective secondary schools. Once children are participating in private tuition and in the schools families desire, these institutions deploy academic cultures of competition and high expectations that reinforce the ethnic capital families embody. As Nordstrom (2016) also explores in relation to Swedish migrant families' participation at a CLS in Australia, ethnicised forms of cultural capital are also considered spatially in terms of future hopes and opportunities. Here, parental efforts to send their children to the CLS were undertaken as an investment in cultural maintenance and belonging, but they were also aspirationally mobilised to engender

capital perceived to be valuable for the future in Australia, Sweden, and in other transnational spaces.

Given that the concept of ethnic capital was influenced by Zhou's (2005) usage of the notion of 'ethnicity as social capital' to build on from segmented assimilation theory, it shares many important interests and ideas with the 'minority culture of mobility' framework – itself stemming from critiques of the same field (Neckerman et al., 1999). Within this framework, the costs associated with upward mobility lead to "the deployment of individual-based strategies that a strictly class-based analysis may not capture" (Shahrokni, 2015, p. 1053). These costs include the overtures and normative discourses calling for cultural assimilation that are set off against both the experiences of discriminatory practices and structural disadvantage as well as relationships with cultural kin left socioeconomically behind. Several researchers have investigated such minority-specific experiences through the narratives of upwardly mobile ethnic minorities (Agius Vallejo, 2012; Archer, 2011; Neckerman et al., 1999; Shahrokni, 2015, 2017, 2018).

Archer's (2011) research, for example problematises understandings around middle-class academic practices, particularly middle-class family and parent engagement with education, that have traditionally been framed within the context of the *white* middle classes. Her exploration of the identities and middle class practices of members from minority backgrounds, highlights how "minority ethnic middle-classes occupy a particularly interesting structural location at the intersection of class privilege and racial subordination" (Archer, 2011, p. 148). Though participants acknowledged that they held forms of middle-class capital, tastes and practices, they did not feel or identify with being middle class. Many felt subordinated by racial connotations of ethnic minority status and "thus felt denied the politics of

recognition – whilst also expressing deeply ambivalent views about middle-classness per se" (Archer, 2011, p. 148).

Shahrokni (2015), similarly notes this disonence, following Bourdieu (1998), as 'habitus dislocation'. Among the descendents of North African immigrants attending France's *grandes écoles* a 'symoblic violence' is identified through the students' underrepresentation of 'people like us' in both ethnic and class senses; people's conflation of their minority status with stereotyped oppositional culture habits; and feelings of exclusion within schooling and associated activities based on ethnic and class dynamics. Meanwhile, Agius Vallejo (2012) explores the institutional participation of upwardly mobile Mexican immigrants and second generation Mexicans in the US. Using the Mexican women's business association[28] as a case study, she examines how active participation in such organisations provides a refuge amongst co-ethnic members of the middle class, but is also aimed at both working against ethnic stigmas and developing anti-racist discourses intended to encourage a sense of ethnic and cultural empowerment. Agius Vallejo, along with Carter (2007) and Shahrokni (2015, 2017, 2018) also demonstrate various strategies of 'giving back' to members of the community who had not 'made it', which therefore allowed for continued cohesion that is framed along both ethnic and class-based terms. Upwardly mobile community members often find that such upward mobility is also outward mobility away from the spatial locations and experiences of social and economic marginalisation. They seek to disrupt this by going back in, providing affirmative opportunities, such as programs for youth or scholarships for the schools they attended, or through other forms of participation that look to renegotiate the

[28] It is worth noting here that while not considered in this way in Agius Vallejo's study, constructions of identity, and in particular the Association of Latinas in Business examined, reflect a strategic essentialism that merges Mexican identities within a wider Latino/a one.

terms of recognition, to destigmatise the place they grew up in from the marginalisation associated with its ethnicisation.

#### *3.3.2.2.3 Anticipatory Socialisation*

Exploring how social inequalities are reproduced intergenerationally, MacLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It* (2009) focuses upon social (im)mobilities through the intersections of class and culture in a local context of an American inner-city housing project. Contradicting popular imaginations, African American minority status for MacLeod does not produce diminished aspirations in and of itself – indeed, MacLeod demonstrates African American youths as having higher aspirations than similarly placed white Americans. Rather, diminished opportunities resulting from localised disadvantage – including limited economic opportunities, and cultural and institutional obstacles – shape aspirations that disregard the values of schooling and upward economic mobility. McLeod argues that the reason for the white youths' lower aspirations is their length of time within the housing project, where they witnessed and experienced generational trends of unmet aspirations, as well as social and economic immobility and stagnation.  The parents of these students were also reticent to instil high aspirations in their children, which they saw as unrealistic and feared would lead to disappointment. In contrast, the parents of African American youth, all of whom were comparatively recent arrivals to the projects, instilled aspirations towards middle class values in their children. MacLeod frames this development in Merton's concept of anticipatory socialisation. He suggests that African American's higher aspirations were partly a result of their shorter time in the housing projects that, furthermore, represented an improvement in housing conditions to those they had previously experienced, touching upon themes also raised by Marcelo and Carola Suárez-Orozco (Suárez-Orozco, 1987; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009). MacLeod posits that those who have lived in and experienced

places of systemic deprivation will likely be unwilling to embrace aspirations that promise an escape from such situations because they perceive them to be unrealistic. Notably, MacLeod found that both groups of youth attributed their own current and future situations as of their own making and, while African American youth tended to express their aspirations in more abstract terms, white youth were more concrete about their aspirations towards working class occupations, also alluding to constraints on their mobility. In the UK, Strand and Winston (2008b; Strand, 2008) utilise MacLeod's framework to suggest reasons for lower aspirations amongst urban white working class students, compared with their counterparts from immigrant communities. White British students aspired to typically working class jobs, "whilst those Black African and Asian children whose families were more recent arrivals to the country demonstrated high levels of both educational and career aspiration" (Strand & Winston, 2008b, p. 264).

In a more recent Australian study, Gore et al. (2019, 2022) draw upon Somerville's (2013) 'placetimemattering' in examining young people's constructions of future selves within their local communities. One of the studies (2022) provides a case study on places where university was a 'taken-for-granted'. In one upper-middle-class suburb, 'Damperia', community is seen to act along Bourdieuian terms "as an agent of social reproduction, in combination with family and school" (Gore et al., 2022, p. 40), perpetuating aspirations and expectations about tertiary education through wealth, privilege and access – both socially and geographically. The spatial practices that perpetuate such aspirations, however, also help foster a 'bubble' that may leave students ill-prepared for what is outside their suburb. But the bubble also constructs a form of social closure between Damperia and the outside world which helps to preserve and maintain social stratification through education. Meanwhile, in nearby Teasel, rather than social reproduction, the aspirations for university stem

from different spatial conditions. The rapid change of the suburb from a white, middle-class demographic to one with great cultural diversity that has helped instil high expectations and a range of practices also noted earlier in Ho's and Naidoo's studies. These are produced through hopes of upward intergenerational social mobility, and students also envisage opportunities and careers beyond their suburb and beyond Australia.

### 3.3.3 Aspirations as temporally bound

While drawing upon the cultural and spatial practices of aspirations, we must also ensure that the complexity of its temporal dimensions are not unintentionally discounted, reducing these to a chronological and linear orientation (Wang & Collins, 2020). Indeed, dominant political presentations assume aspirations to be a coherent, future-oriented disposition directed towards self-maximisation. Within the above literature however, we can see that such an assumption has been eschewed, with allusions to the entanglement of space and time. Belonging is not just spatial practice, but permeated by dislocation with and memories of past homes that are impossible to now inhabit and be inhabited by, but which can be mobilised in the present for the purposes of the future (Ahmed, 1999; Fathi, 2022). In contemporary research, there is growing interest in how such interactions develop to produce aspirations, and an important strand has also emerged from migration literature (see, e.g., Anthias, 2018; Belloni, 2018; Boccagni, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Fathi, 2022; Wang & Collins, 2020).[29] Boccagni (2017a), for example, states that "at first glance, the connection between aspirations and migration is straightforward, even tautological" (p. 4). The very act of migration can be understood as a tentative mobilisation of distinctive 'capacities to aspire': "an intransitive effort at obtaining

[29] For an overview of literature on temporality in migration, see Robertson (2022).

something more, whatever the ways of defining it and the definitional clarity" (p. 4). Whatever migrants' aspirations represent in terms of the future, for themselves and for others, the act of migration itself acts as an intermediary step towards their possible realisation.

Yet while a very many may be able to attain their migration aspirations, the influence of both the aspiration and experience do not cease upon their realisation, and it is in this context that the children of migrants find themselves positioned. As the following discussion explores, the aspirations of these migrant-background youth are conditioned temporally across several processes that complicate the relationship between past, present, and future.

#### 3.3.3.1 The past as a future-oriented archive

If the capacity to aspire – as we explored earlier in this chapter – brings culture into the future, and the future into culture, then Appadurai's (2003) analysis of archival practices does the same for the past. That is, the past itself, through personal and collective memorialisation, is an orientation towards the future. Appadurai (2003) draws upon Foucault (1970) who demonstrates how the archaeological and historical practices of archiving are no accident, nor are they innocent and neutral tools. While Foucault's interests lay predominantly in the archive's role as a panoptical function of policing, surveillance, and governmentality, Appadurai also draws attention to the way archival practices are democratised, and

> part of everyday life outside the purview of the state. The personal diary, the family photo album, the community museum, the libraries of individuals are all examples of popular archives and, of course, oral archives have been repositories of intentional remembering for most of human history (Appadurai, 2003, p. 16).

Archival practices are therefore 'intervention'; personal and collective projects that anticipate collective memory. "Thus the archive is itself an aspiration rather than a recollection … the material site of the collective will to remember" (p. 16). Appadurai argues that such a function has been concealed by officialising practices of governmentality, and of willing the process to be understood and envisaged as a movement towards the conservation of some notion of human spirit.

For research that is interested in the narrative constructions of aspirations, there is enormous benefit in conceptualising the past as an intentional (re)collection of archival memories and experiences that are deployed to give direction and shape to imagined futures. In Chapter Two's literature review, for example, I have already touched upon the 'migration narrative' (Coates, 2006), 'migrant dream' (Stanley, 2020), and the 'migrant sacrifice' (Ho, 2019, 2020). Each, in their own way, highlights migrant families' practices and approaches to developing the archives of experience to mobilise aspirations for their children. For migrant-background children, Appadurai's conceptualisation can allow us to explore the ways parents narrativise experiences of migration and settlement to establish a normative framework for their children's efforts and aspirations. These reflect attempts to foment the capacity to aspire, thickening and multiplying navigational nodes and routes to inform present decisions and paths to the future. Even more so, however, we should also be attentive to the ways children themselves re-narrativise these stories; adopting, (re)collecting, and reorganising the pasts of their parents, alongside their own pasts, through the social and material conditions of their own present.

Yet in this context, it is important to perhaps act with somewhat more circumscription and caution than the optimism Appadurai ascribes to a democratisation of archival practices, while still looking to 'strengthen the terms of recognition' by acknowledging the role of imagination and experimentation in the

production of futures. Here, we can recall earlier considerations of how dominant and normative discursive practices shape and direct spatialised feelings of belonging (Anthias, 2018) to extend this to its temporal dimensions. This helps to avoid considering 'official' and 'popular' archives and narratives not as separate entities. Narrators may assemble their (or their family's) migration narratives in response to – but not necessarily approvingly of – popular logics of social mobility in their current setting. These stories may themselves adopt forms and signification that are acceptable to and reflective of the narratives of the diaspora, or smaller spaces within. They can even be shared across diasporic groups, and thus be relationally constituted by host and migrant as shared or contested narratives of the migrant experience – for example 'multicultural Australia' (Moran, 2011). In similar ways then, the archival production of the past is not just about a future achieved through academic and occupational success, but may also be seen as a way to augment diasporic futures through belonging and home. As such, the temporal development of aspirations is one that recognises possibilities for their evolution over time (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2021) and therefore explores how exertions of agency are both constituted through and seek to augment institutional and discursive governmentalities.

#### 3.3.3.2 Shifting futures

Boccagni (2017a) also suggests that attention needs to be paid to the ways aspirations develop over time "as narratively constructed from and in the present" (p. 4). For Boccagni, aspirations represent an interdependence between memories of the past, conditions in the present, and constructions of the future: "emotionally thick representations of what one's future *might* and *should* look like, given the present circumstances and the experiences of the past as re-codified from the 'here-and-now'" (Boccagni, 2017a, p. 2). While present circumstances and senses of belonging

shape future-oriented aspirations, they also influence both narrative reconstructions of the past and the aspirations that were constructed then – a *future-of-the-past*. Further to this, systemic and structural conditions not only condition present experiences, but are also part of anticipated futures: the anticipation of what future conditions will be like – for example work, housing options, savings – influence the formation and mobilisation of aspirations in the present.

Within this context, Wang and Collins (2020) also refer to 'institutional times' which involve in their most-apparent form external state-imposed "orderings that may simultaneously enable and limit aspirational possibilities" (p. 584). These processes manage migrants' access and progression through settlement, including institutional settings like education and welfare, as well as the capacity to work and access naturalisation. Their histories, in both sending and receiving countries, have bearing on spatial orientations of aspirations – where one might wish to or is able to migrate, and where one might able/need/required to reside and work – but they also maintain their influence over future possibilities. This can include the capacity to imagine making home in new settings (see also Boccagni, 2017b, 2018; Fathi, 2022; Robertson, 2022), but Wang and Collins also explore situations where aspirations for family reunification have been curtailed through changing migration policy regimes. As institutional settings and practices change in the country of departure, these can also compel changes in aspirations, or a return to previous ones: whether, for example, one might begin to see the possibility of return; or where children can envisage futures that seek their own social mobility transnationally through opportunities tied to the mobility of their parents' country – the sort of mobility opportunities for which their parents had originally departed.

While these conceptualisations focus primarily on migrants having gone through migration, they nonetheless provide a rich way of thinking through the

temporalities affecting the lives and aspirations of their children – whether through the narratives told to them of migration experiences past, or where they construct their own narratives of experiences with and alongside their families. Supporting this further, Boccagni's research demonstrates that beyond aspirations for work "laid a great diversity of subjective aspirations" (Mandin, 2021, p. 20), and these could be understood through three key dimensions: *contents* - aspiring what?; *relational references* – to the benefit of whom?; and *space-time horizons* – where, and when?. As such, thinking through imagined futures compels attention to the ways various types of aspirations, for oneself and for others, intersect and entangle themselves over space and time.

### 3.3.4 Aspirations as an affective orientation

Throughout the exploration of conceptual nodes that I have undertaken, ever-present but not yet called out have been the affective dispositions with which aspirations are agitated. The migration narratives storying despair, obstacles, and hope; the relational building of belonging through feelings of estrangement across diffuse multiple spaces; the reflection and reconstruction of past achievements and frustrations informing future-oriented decisions. Each embody particular affects that, even if they are not organised into a coherent assemblage of aspirations, can nonetheless allow us to explore how young people "position themselves in relation to desired futures" (Rodan & Huijsmans, 2021, p. 149).

#### 3.3.4.1 The acceptable orientations to happiness

The spatially and temporally bounded characteristics of aspirational navigations discussed have important resonance with Ahmed's work on 'happiness' (2007, 2009, 2010). Ahmed suggests that people orientate themselves towards that which they expect will make them happy; a process through which people anticipate

(and reach) certain doxic (Zipin et al., 2015, 2021), socially-approved life events – successful careers, home-ownership, marriage. In this way, "happiness becomes not what might happen, but what will happen if you live your life in the right way" (Ahmed 2009, p. 2). And while there might be elements of chance in reaching happiness, this chance only becomes more readily evident if you take the opportunities given: as Ahmed contends, for a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course.

This can be seen at work in the anticipatory logics of contemporary widening participation and aspirations raising agendas, where such a promise of happiness is central to the 'opportunity bargain' made by the state about the relationship between education, economic prosperity, and social mobility (P. Brown et al., 2010; see also Gale & Parker, 2015b; Sellar, 2015). Here, aspirations themselves have become "a valuable emotional disposition – the imagined importance of *being* aspirational" (G. Brown, 2011, p. 12), producing optimism for the rewards that await those aligning their desires and dispositions with those of policy goals (Berlant, 2011; Sellar, 2015). Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011), for example, have noted that the wishes working-class parents hold for their children to be happy and attending school are often admonished in deficit terms as lacking the appropriate forms aspirational wants. These 'objects' of happiness (Ahmed, 2007, 2010) are positioned as inadequate, a *low* aspiration, because they do not adopt anticipatory logics aligned with official interests for young people and their families: motivated toward social and spatial mobility through on-going and future achievement, where priority is on the importance of aspiring towards becoming something, rather than the explicit object of that aspiration (G. Brown, 2011; P. Brown, 2013; Pimlott-Wilson, 2017). In

tandem, this works to downplay parents' emotional investments in ensuring their children are "safe and maintain a positive sense of self-worth at school" within areas constrained by social and material disadvantage and immobility (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011, p. 84).

#### 3.3.4.2 Anxieties and uncertainties

Yet if aspirations for the good life and the promise of attaining happiness are meant to work by directing and mobilising people to take up the opportunity bargain, they also produce other affective orientations. Because aspirational happiness comes after, *once* future goals are attained, other feelings are present which are differentially distributed or produce different responses. Particularly present are hope and anxiety, or even fear. The conjunction *and* rather than *or* between the more positive and negative emotions is intentional because these often sit present together, as Froerer et al. (2022) note, a sense of in-betweenness. Decisions and actions undertaken to mobilise aspirations are often constitutive of dichotomous affects simultaneously and interactively. Hope, being about what we may wish or desire to achieve or become, also involves some subjective sense of the possible and a mobilisation of efforts in their direction, however (in)formed. Intermingled within, however, are anxieties about the uncertainties of attainment, because while the opportunity bargain engenders hope and promises happiness for adopters, it also portends risks for those that do not invest, or invest in the right way. Suggested in the bargain are an appropriate repertoire of mobility dispositions, one of which is choice making. Just as the social safety net that may once have caught unfortunate sojourners has unravelled, people must now be responsible – become responsibilised – to make the *right* choices for themselves, their families, and their communities (Keddie, 2016; Morrison, 2014; Trnka & Trundle, 2014; Wardman, 2016).

Such considerations arising within contemporary aspirations research have been noted across class, gender, spatial, and cultural contexts. One such context concerns students who are or would be first-in-family to university (Alloway et al., 2004; Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Gore et al., 2015; Patfield, 2018). Feelings of hope and anticipation are intermingled, on one side, with students who hold concerns about 'leaving friends and family behind' in the readily tangible geographic sense, but also in less explicit classed and cultural ones too. These are met on the other by families uncertain of their ability to support students in fields (again both geographically and culturally) that their own archives of experience may not readily connect. The happiness being promised through the aspirations raising agenda is far from certain.

Among migrant communities, anxiety manifests itself not uniquely in an essentialist sense, but with inflections reflecting intersections of classed, racialised, and historical positionalities. Narratives of 'migrant dreams' (Stanley, 2020) and 'migrant sacrifice' (Ho, 2020) can bring hope that is practiced as a resource to support family and child aspirations, yet they can also produce anxious subjects. Anxiety arises and rises as subjects fear they will not meet the high expectations set before them through cultural belongings that are established concomitantly with neoliberal normativities of being a good parent or good student (Gore et al., 2019; Ho, 2019, 2020). For students, family and community aspirations can produce high expectations that they feel they cannot meet. Sometimes coupled with the tensions to attend to competing aspirations, this can also lead to a foreclosing of aspirations where children feel their visions of the good life run against those of family and community: foreclosing aspirations thus forecloses conflict (Stanley, 2020). Also notable are the expectations students can place on themselves to live up to a student archetype that is at once neoliberal but marked with internalised understandings of

their culture's place in the world – this itself produced from within and outside of the diaspora.

Meanwhile, for parents, the aforementioned deficiencies of non-future oriented parenthood mean that it is no longer appropriate to leave schooling up to the school. Good parents, displaying good middle-class mobilising values, are expected to be heavily invested – emotionally, materially – in their child's education, making the right choices of school, and increasingly the right choices of university (Ball, 2003a; Campbell et al., 2009). The language of anxiety that sits within choice – "worry, scared, fears, afraid, mistake, and reassurance" (Cucchiara, 2013, p. 89) – can be intensified among migrant and minority groups who experience the structural and material a/effects of racism and discrimination. Perceiving this as a likely future encounter for their children, they may see more of their future fortunes as riding on the successes attained through education.

#### 3.3.4.3 The opportunity bargain becomes a trap

Resulting from global changes in education, modes of production, labour markets, and related social and spatial mobilities, many are finding that the promise of happiness made to them appears increasingly unlikely (Sellar, 2015), or calls on them to pay additional social, economic and emotional costs in continuing to be aspirational. Thus what were once optimistic investments are now being cruelled, as "realities … do not match the utopias of knowledge capitalism foretold in education policy" (Sellar, 2015, p. 213). Berlant (2011) suggests that 'cruel optimism' arises where "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (p. 1), and it is doubly so when you sustain an attachment with an object of desire regardless of how and how much it may betray you. As more students and families have been animated to take up the opportunity bargain, organising their lives around a hope for upward mobility and the happiness that will come from it, many may find their

aspirations going unfulfilled. Nonetheless, those bound up in the bargain often continue within it, even if it heightens both anxieties as well as hopes. Potentially then, as Philip Brown et al. (2010) suggest, the opportunity bargain has gradually become an opportunity trap.

## 3.4 Conclusion

In concluding their conceptual exploration, Gale and Parker (2015) recall Mills (1959) who explains that the sociological imagination has "an unexpected quality about it", where the combination of ideas that may not be expected to be brought together produce a 'playfulness of mind' that "often loosens up the imagination" (Gale & Parker, 2015, p. 150). "But it is" they emphasise, "playfulness with purpose" within which exists a "truly fierce drive to make sense of the world" and address "problems of substance":

> That is, the importance of conceiving of aspiration in more nuanced robust ways is not just in 'correcting' simplistic policy and practice. It is important work because at stake are lives that people have reason to value. (Gale & Parker, 2015, p. 150)

Drawing in further processes through which to conceptualise and understand aspirations, this chapter has reemphasised how political and policy framings have often inadequately presented the ways people aspire and the contents of those aspirations. It also further demonstrates limitations regarding migrant-background. As Appadurai (2004) contends, to aspire is to demonstrate a cultural capacity that everyone holds, but the processes of mobilising must be understood through young people's navigational capacities and their spatial, temporal, and affective dimensions. The various – but complementary – sociological ideas that have been brought together here open such opportunities to think more deeply about what it means to

aspire and imagine futures for young people who affectively experience the multiple social, material, and historical conditions brought about through family migration. For students and young people from such migrant-background contexts their navigational capacities and the maps which guide them may be differentially filled by the repertoire of skills and dispositions that are normatively expected of students and their families, reflecting diverse classed, spatial, temporal, and affective positionalities by which they are bounded. Nonetheless, the range of spatialised and temporal practices that individuals, families, and diasporic communities mobilise and narrativise may also fill the map in ways that are productive to aspirations and images of the future. These practices respond both to the material conditions in which they find themselves, as well as the feelings of belonging they seek to produce both between themselves and in-between others across local and transnational divides. Such a conceptual framing, and the tools and processes through which it has been established lend themselves to the Narrative Inquiry methodological framework that guides this study's research. It is to this that I now turn in Chapter Four.

# Chapter Four – A Narrative Method/ology

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the foundations of the narrative inquiry approach undertaken in this study. This approach reflects several important concerns with my interests in aspirations, and the ways students from migrant backgrounds come to aspire and imagine futures. As the conceptual framework that was crafted in Chapter Three establishes, aspirations are informed by complex and myriad experiences that are folded into and onto each other, and often storied and re-storied to produce meaning and give grounds for future directions. This emphasises the need to think about aspirations as a cultural and navigational capacity that is produced through entangled processes of spatiality, temporality, and affect.

In this chapter, I discuss how narrative inquiry provides both the grounding from which to explore how students story their aspirations and give meaning to experience, as well as the framework that informs the processes of inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I begin by first examining the 'turn' to narrative inquiry and the 'commonplaces' of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) which establish the dimensions of the inquiry space (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). I then explore theoretical and onto-epistemological 'borderlands' with which narrative inquiry meets (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), reflecting the threads of more poststructural, critical phenomenological and contemporary pragmatic theorising amongst which my thinking with aspirations sits. I then outline the research puzzle my research will attend to, and provide the social context of my research as well as the processes through which it unfolds.

# 4.2 The narrative approach

## 4.2.1 Narrative Inquiry

Within this study, it is narrative that provides the opportunity to explore and understand how students from migrant backgrounds experience and reflect upon their families' migration and settlement, and how these interact with the accommodation of changing cultural and educational settings as they envisage their future selves. Narrative inquiry differs from a vast number of other academic practices and traditions where research interest is 'on' the participants' stories as the object – data – through which outcomes may be derived or produced. Rather, it is interested in the meaning-making processes that are revealed through story. In the area of student learning, for example, it opens a space in which students, as narrators, make sense and give order to events that have taken place – or have been interpreted to have taken place – and thus, *explain* or *normalise* what has occurred, and give reason to why things are, have become so, or may be so in the future (Bamberg, 2012). Thus, this allows us to break away from modernist and empiricist pursuits that treat the individuals' subjectivities and the events in their lives as variables rather than lived and constructed experiences (Hayes, 2009).

Described most generally, narrative inquiry is the exploration and analysis of people's experiences as they are shaped and re-produced, individually and socially, through stories (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Within the field of education, narrative owes much of its contemporary conceptualisation to Connelly and Clandinin's *Stories of experience and narrative inquiry* (1990). A main claim for utilising narrative in education research, they state, "is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). In this conceptualisation, education is seen as part of the construction

and reconstruction of personal and social stories where individuals are both storytellers and characters in their own stories, and the stories of others. Narrative plays a dual academic role in that it is both phenomenon and method, drawing out the structured attributes to be explored as well as naming the patterns of inquiry employed for its study.

Though the relationship between narrative, identity, and meaning-making has long been theorised across various academic branches, the increase in interest in narrative forms of analysis, interpretation and exploration has developed out a number of academic, social, cultural, and political movements and developments. These include the 'narrative turn' in the social sciences in the aforementioned response to modernist and positivist forms of inquiry, as well as to grand narratives (such as Marxism); the related growth of identity politics, including the emancipation of minority and marginalised groups in society; the boom in memoir within popular culture; and the growth in the therapeutic exploration of personal life (Riessman, 2005).

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) also point to four overarching themes – directional 'turns' in thinking – in the shift towards narrative inquiry. These involve first, a change in the relationship between the researcher and the participant as subject, where the researcher can no longer position themselves 'outside' the research as a passive observer; second, a move from the use of number toward the use of words as data; third, a change in focus from the general and universal toward the local and specific; and finally, greater recognition of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing – that different understandings about a given experience can coexist simultaneously.

### 4.2.2 Three Commonplaces of Narrative

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) assert that three 'commonplaces' serve to specify the dimensions of an inquiry space: temporality, sociality and place. Because narrators "position characters in space and time" to give order to what has happened (Bamberg, 2012, para. 3), the commonplaces provide a conceptual framework through which these experiences and stories are explored (Clandinin et al., 2007; Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Connelly and Clandinin (2006), envisage the commonplaces "in the spirit of checkpoints" (p. 479) where, although other forms of qualitative research may utilise one or a combination of the commonplaces, undertaking narrative inquiry requires a "simultaneous exploration of all three" (p. 479): "we cannot focus only on one to the exclusion of others" (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 23).

*Temporality* involves consideration of the past, present and future, of the people, settings, and happenings under study. Importantly, temporality also means that these dynamics are always in a process of transition, never stable. In attending to temporality in narrative, inquirers reflect upon the notion that "we are composing and constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along" (Carr cited in Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 436).

Through *sociality*, inquirers focus upon personal and social conditions. For Connelly and Clandinin (2006), personal conditions refer to "the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (p. 480) of the inquirer and participants, whilst social conditions encompass the existential conditions, environment and surrounding dynamics under which individual's experiences and events unfold. These social conditions are comprehended as cultural, institutional, and linguistic narratives. Another dimension of sociality that inquirers must

acknowledge is the relationship between the inquirer and the participant. "Inquirers are always in an inquiry relationship with participants' lives" and therefore, "we cannot subtract ourselves from relationship" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480).

*Place*, meanwhile, involves "the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place… all events take place some place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, pp. 480–481). The particularities of place are central to narrative inquiry because, as place can change in the processes of temporality, inquirers must think through the impact of each place on the experiences studied (Clandinin et al., 2007). This is particularly pertinent if inquirers believe identity to be inextricably linked with experiences as they happen in particular places, and as they are subsequently brought back into being through narrative (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

### 4.2.3 Working along the borderlands

Although some years have passed since Chase (2013) had last described narrative inquiry as 'a field in the making', the inscription nonetheless continues to hold. Though narrative inquiry is largely "distinguishable from other qualitative inquiry methods that are primarily concerned with generating analytic categories and concepts" (Hwang, 2008, p. 68), differences among narrative inquirers arise over "how, where and when the processes of narrativity unfold" (Gerbensky Kerber, 2011, p. 45). Riessman and Speedy (2007), for example, note that narrative inquiry has "'realist', 'post-modern', and constructionist strands, and scholars and practitioners disagree on origins and precise definition" (p. 428). Phenomenological, post-modern and art-based performative approaches have also been noted (Sconiers & Rosiek, 2000). Meanwhile, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) focus on the conceptual 'borderlands' with which narrative inquiry interacts – post-positivist, Marxist/critical

realist, and post-structural traditions – by providing an exploration of the (in)compatibilities of these philosophical traditions with narrative. In the following, I give an account of Dewey's conception of experience, which are the 'philosophical roots' (Caine et al., 2022), adopted by narrative inquiries major pioneers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). I then consider other paradigms that also hold an interest in experience while assisting in developing further conceptual and theoretical depth.

#### 4.2.3.1 Deweyan Pragmatism and Experience

As discussed earlier, Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) assert that one of the main impulses driving the turn to narrative inquiry is a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, live storied lives. They (2006) embed this view of experience within Dewey's pragmatic philosophy, citing two particularly salient features of the Deweyan conception of experience (see also Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The first is that experience is an ontological classification from which all forms of inquiry, including narrative, proceed. Dewey's claim that experience is "a notation of the inexpressible" signifies "a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). Deweyan ontology is therefore transactional, not transcendental, and creates further epistemological repercussions:

> It implies that the regulative ideal for inquiry is not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower. The regulative ideal for inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world—one that [citing Dewey] 'makes possible a new way of dealing with them, and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced objects, not more real than those which preceded but

> more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive'. In this pragmatic view of knowledge, our representations arise from experience and must return to that experience for their validation. (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39)

Along with the always-personal-and-social nature of experience, its second pragmatic ontological distinction is that it emphasizes continuity:

> namely, the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)

According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), continuity of experience is fundamental to a pragmatic approach of a transactional ontology because it breaks down the necessity for any transcendental force to hold experiences together. How we think about inquiry is also part of this process of experience and problematized by it, so that researchers are called upon to resist reifying the context of their inquiry. Because experience is continuous, the parameters of inquiry that are established "are themselves a form of relation that can and should be questioned in the course of ongoing research" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). This pragmatist ontology is further supplemented by an emphasis on the social dimensions of inquiry and understanding. As stories are lived and told, they are constituted through the connections of social influences on their lives, their environments, and their personal histories. Narrative inquiry ensures that this development of stories is not treated as epiphenomenal to social inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

#### 4.2.3.2 Moving to(wards) the borderlands

While a Deweyan pragmatic foundation establishes narrative inquiry's interest in and approach to experience in stories, the work of narrative researchers along other theoretical strands appears to take into consideration some of the limitations that critics have put forward against the theory. Not only does narrative inquiry find itself receiving critiques from positivist research paradigms, but it also contends with, amongst other factors, challenges suggesting its theoretical basis is limited. Kim (2008, 2010, 2016) terms this as a lack of narratology in some narrative work where there can be little political and theoretical foundation from which to form new understandings: "Unfortunately, many narrative researchers seem to fail to make their methodological and theoretical approaches transparent enough to help their audiences know explicitly how they reached their conclusions" (Kim, 2008, p. 255). In this light, Kim (2016) suggests drawing upon 'macro-level' theories – exploring phenomenology, post-structuralism and post-modernism, critical theory, critical race theory, and feminist theories – that can provide an overarching interpretive lens, while deploying narrative inquiry as a 'meso-level' theory providing a methodological paradigm. Such a position is contentious, and one that Clandinin, Connelly and colleagues resist, insisting rather on "an understanding of narrative inquiry beyond a research methodology" as they re-emphasise a Deweyan ontology of experience that precedes other ontological frames (Caine et al., 2013, p. 576, see also 2022; Clandinin et al., 2016).

To this point Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) contend that there is no easy resolution in working at the borderland with other theories. Rather than refusal of consideration it is a call to attentiveness so that the tensions along the border open new possibilities for theoretical perspectives to enhance each other. Rosiek's own work in contemporary pragmatic theorising and his engagement with new

materialism are reflective of an interest in "identifying multiple points of connections and disconnection between … philosophical and methodological literatures" (Rosiek & Snyder, 2020, p. 1160; see also Pratt & Rosiek, 2021; Rosiek, 2013).

Such engagement is reflective of broader movements within and across several significant knowledge systems in which the ontological positions of voice and experience have become decentred, whether through a discursive turn through poststructuralism and other post-qualitative theorising (St. Pierre, 2008, 2011, 2014); a turn away from transcendental idealism in critical phenomenology (Guenther, 2020; Kinkaid, 2021); or a turn on experience among neo- and other contemporary pragmatists (Rorty, 1989; Rosiek, 2013; West, 1993). The following considers such movements within these theoretical and philosophical traditions to consider how they may be productive for my research.

***4.2.3.2.1 Poststructuralism***

Narrative inquirers join with poststructuralist and other 'post' theorising a shared use of language as the describer of human knowledge and experience and, as such, a shared mistrust of positivist, and even post-positivist, ontologies and epistemologies that emphasize transcendental and atemporal knowledge and experiences (Sconiers & Rosiek, 2000). Rather than representing an atemporal state, "articulations of language make reality possible for us, that is, intelligible and meaningful" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 79). From a poststructural perspective, the suspicions commence from the Saussurian contention of the association between a word and its object, where the relationship between the signifier (word) and the signified (object) is arbitrary. This arbitrariness turns Enlightenment conceptions of knowledge back upon themselves, so that processes of inquiry create the object of inquiry, not the other way around. As such, the object of inquiry is uncovered as a process of social reproduction which serves to legitimate the norms associated with

that object: "the enlightenment project of establishing a knowledge base beyond politics becomes impossible" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 54).

While poststructuralists contend that "discourses constitute the meaning of subjects, objects and practices, and thus make the social world intelligible" (Biegoń, 2013, p. 195), an important distinction within this ontology is that it nonetheless accepts that "agents find themselves 'thrown into' a system of meaningful practices, an immersion that both shapes their identity and structures their practices" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 79). Within this lies an understanding of how a contextual base shapes the temporality, sociality and place of experiences and their narrating, along with the discursive practices employed throughout: "without the context of economic exploitation or social marginalisation, without understanding ways of thinking and feeling interpreted through the stories of particular participants" an analysis of any given social and political phenomena "is suspended outside reality" (Fox, 2008, p. 336).

Within this context, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) raise concerns about the place for agency. They demonstrate an ambivalence towards 'postera' perspectives, which are purported to represent a formalistic 'framework' view; "a view that things are never what they are but are rather what our framework or point of view or perspective or outlook makes them" (p.39). The framework, they contend, is a trap or a prison in which one cannot act except to reproduce the social structure, and the actor "can never see themselves as they are because they are always something else" (p. 39). In the work of narrative inquiry, both experience and the narrative reconstructions that are produced from them therefore become suspect.

Such an interpretation appears to minimise the ways agency abounds in the posts. Glynos & Howarth (2007), for example, argue that the social structures individuals find themselves in are "ontologically incomplete", with 'acts of

identification' forming "across a range of possible ideologies or discourses – some of which are excluded or repressed" (p. 79), it is within these incomplete spaces, rendered most visible in times of crisis, that alternative discourses permeate and counter-hegemonic actions take place (see also Bäcktorp, 2007). Butler (1990), for example, asserts that while performative expectations come with positions established within a societal discourse, gaps emerge for reformulation, so that a signified category "is open to intervention and resignification. Even when [it] seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the "congealing" is itself an insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means" (p. 43).

While the connection between narrative inquiry and poststructuralism initially appears to be a natural coming together, it works out to be more ontologically complex. Yet as Gerbensky Kerber (2011) argues, both alone and together, the theories "offer a robust set of resources that allow researchers to unpack the assumptions embedded within the communal and individual stories that constitute broader discourses" (p. 56).

##### *4.2.3.2.2 Critical Phenomenology*

Classical phenomenology arose as an early twentieth-century philosophical movement in Germany and France, and is most associated with the works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In classical phenomenology "knowledge begins with *subjectivity*, and this *subjectivity* is the epistemological starting point in phenomenology" (Kim, 2016, p. 55). As such, the individual is the epistemological subject who experiences and gives conscious meaning to the world they inhabit and the objects within it.

Establishing the basis for contemporary critical phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty's work sought to provide an account for an embodied nature of perception. This would break away from the dominant western dualism of the subject and an

object that is ready-made and revealable (Salamon, 2018). Perceptions are the starting point of knowledge, where lived experience shapes our understanding of the world and our relationship to it. This is not simply a mental experience that builds a cognitive schema separate from the body, but rather it is an experience of the body, sedimented corporeally through spatial and temporal practices. In turn, the body is an integral element in the way we understand the world and our place in it, and just as perception is not separate from the body, neither is it separate from the object it perceives. As Guenther (2020) describes, "Merleau-Ponty shows how the world shapes consciousness, without depriving consciousness of the agency to shape the world in return" (p. 13).

From here, critical phenomenology proceeds to acknowledge the social and historical contingency of experiences and perceptions, "while attending to the *systemic* and *systematic ways* in which certain bodies experience the constraints of space and social formations" (Kinkaid, 2021, p. 311). This means that critical phenomenologists consider the ways and the reasons why some experiences of the world are privileged, normalised, while others are marginalised and discredited; and they explore what corporeal e/affects this has on an individual or group of people, and in turn, what e/affects and orientations they project back onto the world. These are important aspects of participant experience worthy of exploration in narrative inquiry. Critical phenomenology is intersubjective, resisting - like narrative – the transcendental idealism of certain classical strands of the philosophy (Guenther, 2020; Salamon, 2018); but also extending on Merleau-Ponty's framework by pointing relationality to power and its shaping of the temporal and social spaces within which experiences unfold. Individuals' experiences and subjectivities may therefore be different, but they are not just different. Rather, they are differentially

and unevenly produced; a “situatedness in intersubjective fields of power”  (Kinkaid, 2021, p. 301).

#### *4.2.3.2.3 Contemporary and Neo-pragmatism*

I have already discussed the place of Deweyan pragmatism in narrative inquiry, however there are other theoretical aspects that help to enhance narrative, especially through a renewal of interest in contemporary pragmatic thinking. Primary among these is the theory’s reflexive frame. According to Rosiek (2013), Deweyan ontology of experience already brings it alongside post-structuralism and macro theories like Marxism in terms of conceptualising reflexivity, where “interrogation of the cultural and historical origins of our habits of knowing is a necessary component of inquiry” (p. 694). Building on this, Rosiek also suggests that contemporary pragmatic thought turns also to a material and embodied reflexivity: “Language is one among many habits that arise through the course of our experience. Once established, these habits may be considered part of our environment; at other times we are the habits” (p. 695).

Within this context, neo-pragmatists draw our attention to some important considerations. First Rorty’s (1989) recognition of the ‘contingency of language’ which share similarities with the role of language in poststructural theory. Here, Rorty emphasises the incapacity of stepping ‘outside’ to find a metavocabulary that “somehow takes account of *all possible* vocabularies, all possible ways of judging and feeling” (p. xvi). In other words, “there is no way to come between language and its object” (Rorty, 1998, as cited in Hildebrand, 2020). Another aspect is an understanding that the social construction of cultures and institutions nonetheless has real a/effects. Here, Pratt and Rosiek (2021) draw upon Cornel West (1993) to emphasise that rather than imagining these a/effects as universal, transcending

social and cultural mediation, "the pragmatist still has to do the work of discerning and overcoming problematic ways of being that they have inherited" (p. 3).

In so doing, contemporary pragmatic thought recognises the relational contexts within which experiences are formed, and opens space to reflexively examine ontological and normative commitments that are themselves culturally contingent. It also raises important implications for narrative method/ologies. Even though experience drives theorising and thinking in narrative inquiry, contemporary pragmatic philosophies work to trouble the ontology of experience in productive ways, allowing us to examine lived experience with greater analytical and critical depth.[30] While Clandinin and Connelly (2000) propose the concept of *wakefulness* as a way for non-judgmental awareness or mindfulness of contextual difference, Pratt and Rosiek (2021) argue that it lacks the capacity to "easily hold space for the more acute emotions that things like institutionalised racism [and other forms of institutionalised subjugation] warrant" (p. 4). Incorporating a 'critical' lens, therefore, opens the capacity to re-story stories with and alongside an analysis that recognises experience as at once insightful and socially, politically, and culturally contingent – and in a way that is more analytically charged than what may often arise through narrative inquiry's commonplaces.

## 4.3 The Research Puzzle

In the above, I have discussed the methodological underpinnings of my research, led by a narrative inquiry that should be understood as more than an application of a research method – to which I will attend in the following. The

[30] Pratt and Rosiek (2021) note: "the use of the term 'critical' when referring to an analysis of the influence of racism in educational processes has become almost exclusively associated with the critical pedagogy literature and the presumption that personal experience is too compromised to be trusted as a source of knowledge. This leaves no space for the pragmatic use of the term critical for describing careful and incisive analysis of cultural and institutional influences on our experience from within the stream of personal experience" (p. 4).

Deweyan conceptualisation of experience plays an important role in shaping thinking through narrative inquiry, and this is particularly so for the theory's main proponents. Nonetheless, it is not uncontested space, and it is important to recognise how complementary and contemporary lines of thought may help in extending on this by drawing further attention to social and political elements upon which experience is contingent.

Together with my conceptual arguments about aspirations as complex images and ideas for future hopes and desires, this methodological framing helps give shape to the 'research puzzle' (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) around which my study is developed. Though it is built by questions, the concept of a research puzzle is utilised in narrative inquiry as a way to signify the importance of re-search, "that is, searching again in deeper ways to understand the nature of experience" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 26). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also emphasise, 'inquiry' within narrative inquiry is always attentive to its commonplaces, and through this it holds a sense of continual reformulation, rather than a method of defining a problem to be solved.

Consequently, in thinking about aspirations conceptually as I have, I am drawn to exploring how they are borne out of experiences, and how these are storied and re-storied to give sense of relationality, time, and place (Clandinin et al., 2016). And in doing so, I also reflect on the role that political, social, and material conditions play to ground and shape experience and aspirations, as well as give opportunities with which to make meaning of them. As such, I take into consideration the contemporary historical situation experienced by migrant-background students and their families, and the centrality of aspirations within contemporary education policy agendas. The following questions emerge within the research puzzle I will explore:

1. How are post-school aspirations understood and enacted by migrant-background students who attend Community Languages Schools?
2. What narratives do these students draw upon in shaping their aspirations?
3. In what ways are stories of family migration, ethnicity and culture deployed in constructing aspiration narratives?
4. How do students adopt, (re)produce and/or resist wider narratives about education and aspirations constituted through family, social networks, schools, and other sites of education?

# 4.4 Methods

With these key questions in mind, the following presents the process I undertook to piece the research puzzle together. Because of the ways that the researcher is embedded in their research through narrative inquiry method/ologies, I first explore the role and purpose of reflexivity and positionality. I then discuss the data collection process and ethical considerations involved. Following this, I discuss the recruitment and contexts of the CLSs, students and parents. This provides an opportunity to consider the role of focus groups in research, and I discuss the analysis and interpretation of narratives, providing considerations of saturation, verisimilitude, and fidelity.

## 4.4.1 Positioning the researcher

Both the narrative inquiry approach and the conceptual framing that guides my understanding emphasise my research as a relational methodology where "subjectivity is implicated in the research" (Green, 2013, p. 68; see also Rosiek, 2013). Such a standpoint allows researchers to account for their role in the research process in a deliberative manner. In observing and reflecting upon participants, their

actions and experiences, and the interactions that take place in the field, reflexivity draws researchers into reflecting upon reflections and observations. In this way researchers' own actions are brought under a critical lens in similar ways to the rest of the data produced through the research (Kim, 2016; Riessman, 2008). Importantly, reflexivity in narrative inquiry also allows researchers to develop *phronesis* – ethical judgment (Kim, 2016). Such judgment entails acting wisely and prudently in ways that allow the researcher's academic and social skills and knowledge to be "put into action with relevance, appropriateness (and) sensitivity" (Kim, 2016, p. 105). Such action requires deliberation to take in proper account the ambiguities and tensions that arise in the research field, between researcher and participants and even between participants themselves.

The role and practice of reflexivity is not, however, unproblematic, and several researchers point to the risk of its misuse as a way of demonstrating research legitimacy and validity (Lather, 2013; Pillow, 2003, 2015; Rath, 2015). There is risk, as Finlay (2002, cited in Carr, 2021) warns, of falling into a "swamp of interminable self-analysis and self-disclosure" (p. 2). Rather, researchers must keep in mind that they "are (always already) subjects who engage in readings, and in analysis, and who draw on their own experience of being in the world to make sense of it" (Davies et al., 2004, p. 362).

Some (maybe too many) years ago, as I was completing a post-graduate initial teacher education course, I was invited to the office of who would soon become my supervisor, Dr Amy McPherson, who suggested the idea of undertaking a PhD. I certainly was interested and had flirted with the notion of post-grad research before, but was unsure if I was capable of it, my own affective uncertainties of the unknown. Here, however was some validation. We spoke about my interests, and I thought about my own experiences growing up, myself a child of Maltese migrants, and

remembering the number of times I'd been asked by aunties and uncles – never my parents - what sort of work the social sciences degree I was doing was going to get me. I also thought about the type of work many Maltese migrants had entered and where their children's pathways went, where my own parents' migrations fit into this. I could see the divergent histories of migration people had experienced, and the stories the community told itself of its hard-work successes – as well as my critique (built off others') of the recolonised, grist-for-the-labour-mill positionality many had endured but was relatively muted within such narratives. As I was thinking and reading about where my research could go, Amy brought my awareness to the growing post-Bradley literature on aspirations, and I began to recognise potential contributions I could make by turning its attention to migration and minority cultures. These understandings have been further shaped through my role as an emerging academic within the field, and the experiences gained by researching and teaching sociologically about schooling, education policy – including widening participation – and the socio-political contestation taking place within these spaces.

My experiences and positionality can be seen within the potentialities of my research, but rather than being configured within the insider-outsider researcher paradigm, I consider how they inform an attentiveness to those who are similarly positioned as second-generation, but whose own positionalities and experiences are marked by various material and socio-political conditions within the contemporary historical moment. I also recognise the role of the literature I have engaged with, particularly that which is theoretical and conceptual. This literature has come to shape my understanding of my own positionality – in a process reminiscent of Barad's (2007) *intra-action* – and is embodied in the questions asked to prompt stories, in the initial and subsequent interpretations, and consequently in the re-construction of (co)constituted stories that are brought together to form this study.

### 4.4.2 Data collection

The process used to select the CLSs and student participants was purposive sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2016; Liamputtong, 2020) because of my primary interests in involving students from migrant backgrounds within the bounded setting of CLSs. The following parameters were established to select participants:

- Students were to be in Year 8 of mainstream schooling; and
- students' parents or guardians were to be born overseas – that is, the students themselves are 'second-generation' – born in Australia – or arrived in Australia as children.

In addition, I established the following parameters for the study to ensure that I was able to explore my various interests concerning aspirations with sufficient depth:

- Three CLSs representing different language and cultural/ethnic communities;
- focus groups of between two to six participants;
- three focus group rounds from the latter half of the Year 8 school year to the end of Year 9; and
- interviews or focus groups with any parents or primary caregivers of participating students.

Table 1 presents an overview of the data sources used for this study and the number of participants across the three CLSs. I was able to collect over 16 hours of recordings across nine student focus groups, ranging from 75 to 120 minutes each, and three parent/caregiver interviews of between 30 minutes and one hour. The student focus groups were held over a 15-month period with the first held in

September of Year 8; the second, in May of Year 9; and the third, in November of Year 9. Interviews with the parents and primary caregivers were also held at the time of the first student focus group. Along with information collected through the focus groups and interviews, some information on family background factors was also collected through a form that students completed (Appendix G), and the information on the participating students is collated in Tables 2-4 in Appendix H.

**Table 1: Data Sources**

| | Assyrian CLS | Persian CLS | Vietnamese CLS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student Participants | 3* | 2 | 5 |
| Focus Groups – No. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Focus Groups – Time | 4h 38min | 4h 32m | 5h 03m |
| Parent Participants | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Interviews – No. | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Interviews – Time | 29m | 58m | 40m |

*4 participants in the first focus group, then 3 for the remaining

## 4.4.3 Ethical considerations

Outreach to relevant CLSs and students was made only after approval was granted by Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference 2017-40H). Ethics, while pertinent to all research, involves considerations that are central to narrative inquiry. Narrative forms encompass an ethical conundrum in that the researcher is positioned in a dual role (Josselson, 2007): in an intimate relationship with the narrator that is usually (and in this case) instigated by the researcher; and the role taken to be professionally responsible towards the academic community. "Interpersonal ethics demand responsibility to the dignity, privacy, and well-being of those who are studied, and these often conflict

with the scholarly obligation to accuracy, authenticity, and interpretation" (Josselson, 2007, p. 538). In looking to address ethical issues in this research, several practices were enacted as part of the formal processes that outlined the relationship between researcher, participants, and other interested parties – what Josselson calls the explicit contract.

First, consent was sought from the CLS for the participation of students through the school's principal who was sent a CLS Principal Information Letter (Appendix A) and Consent Form (Appendix B). Given that students were below the age of 18 during their participation in this study, informed consent was also sought from parents or primary caregivers for their children's participation, similarly involving a Parent/Primary Caregiver Information Letter (Appendix C) and Consent Form (Appendix D). Through this consent form, parents could also consent to their own participation. Though student participation was agreed to through parental consent, it was nonetheless important to provide students opportunities for agency and voice to express a willingness to participate and demonstrate an understanding of the proposed research and its potential risks and benefits. They were provided a Student Information Letter (Appendix E), and their explicit agreement was initially provided through the signing of a Student Assent Form (Appendix F). Providing both students and parents a voice in participation also ensured opportunities to navigate an extended assent process collaboratively. This ensured that assent reflected a 'best-interests model' which centres several factors including a young person's preference for participation, emotions and considerations for advantages and disadvantages in participation (see Unguru et al., 2008). In keeping with the navigational conception, participants were also able to withdraw at any time without any adverse effects. Due to the more open nature of focus groups however, where discussions take place between different participants and stories are co-produced, rather than as question-

answer between interviewer and interviewee, it was also made clear that their participation up to the point of their withdrawal could not be removed from the study. During the study, only one student from the Assyrian CLS had withdrawn between the first and second focus groups because she did not continue attending CLS classes in the new school year.

Along with this extended and collaborative process of consent and assent, and to ensure participants did not feel apprehensive about the stories they told and who they invoked, confidentiality was be provided through anonymity of data. Focus groups will be professionally transcribed using encrypted file transfer and confidentiality agreements. Transcripts were anonymised prior to analysis, with pseudonyms used for narrators. Students were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym and where they did not, I selected ones which were of similar cultural/ethnic origin but did not relate to their own. Where other people were mentioned, as well as schools, locations, and other descriptors which may identify anyone personally, only a generalised reference has been made – if necessary – throughout the exploration of data in this study.

### 4.4.4 Recruiting CLSs

A list of CLSs was compiled from the NSW Department of Education's (NSW DoE) Community Languages Schools webpage which provides the names and lesson locations of all schools registered as part of the NSW Community Languages Schools Program (NSW DoE, 2021b). From this list I gathered contact information from the CLSs' websites. Six schools were randomly chosen and initially approached via email which included an attached CLS Information Letter. The intention was that if I were not able to get three schools (see 4.4.5.2 Saturation below) from the first round of contacts, I would be able to go through with another round. Initially, three schools

responded, and from this initial contact I spoke with the schools' head administrators or principals and arranged meetings with them. I met either at their organisational offices or the school where the CLS ran its classes during CLS operating times, and I was able to discuss further what my research was looking to explore, and how I had prepared to undertake it. It also gave them an opportunity to introduce me to their school, its operations, and the community.

Through this process of contacting and then meeting CLS leaders, I was able to inform them and reconfirm the parameters of my research. While I was able to proceed to the next step of recruiting students at two CLSs (the Assyrian and Vietnamese), there were delays in proceeding at the other. After several months, difficulties at the school that were unrelated to my study extended delays further, and I made the decision that it was not feasible to persist. Because it was now late in the year, and because I was interested in the transitional period from Year 8 to Year 9 and related experiences to elective choices, I decided to wait until the following year so that I could conduct focus groups with students across the same timeframe, and through similar points across the two school years. Had I looked to recruit and commence with a third school immediately after the other had fallen through, the first focus group would have been when students had already commenced Year 9. Given the narrative inquiry methodology I was and am employing, I felt it appropriate to attend to the focus groups through similar temporal developments in students' lives. The following year, I contacted the Persian CLS, and after following the same approach as before, I was able to commence with the study there.

#### 4.4.4.1 The CLS context

Reflecting my conceptual framing of aspirations, my interest in having different language and cultural groups involved in the study was not to essentialise ethnic group differences. Nor was it to stratify the aspirations and achievements of

students from different migrant backgrounds to explain for divergent social, academic, or economic outcomes between participating groups. Rather, I sought to explore how narratives that are borne out of experiences of family migration and settlement in Australia, and may be shaped by varying social, economic, political, and spatial histories in both countries of origin and settlement.

I was also interested in conducting research with CLSs because of their role as non-mainstream and non-traditional sites of education and schooling, as well as that of cultural transmission. While the Community Languages School Program (CLSP) in NSW is administered by the NSW DoE, CLSs are run mostly by not-for-profit community organisations either established specifically to operate the school, or with the school being a part of their larger cultural remit. Over 60 languages are taught to 38,000 students at more than 560 locations (NSW DoE, 2021b). Classes are open to any school-age student, though many schools also run adult-classes, and are "held outside of normal school hours" (NSW DoE, 2021a).

Tsolidis and Kostogriz (2008) argue that this 'outside of normal hours' demarcation – or 'after hours' as in their study – "positions these schools outside what is seen as the core business of Australian schooling, which happens within the hours of 'normal' school" (p. 326). In recent years however, increasing policy attention has been directed towards CLSs. In NSW, for example, the state government provided funding in 2017 for the establishment of the Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education (SICLE) at the University of Sydney. SICLE engages in research; provides several teacher accreditation pathways for CLS teachers; and has been developing resources and programs in several languages that align with NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) K–10 syllabuses (University of Sydney, n.d.). Nonetheless, because of their structure and remit, CLSs represent a site of education where students, parents, families, and even their wider community

may demonstrate some interest in language and cultural maintenance that are reflected through a broad repertoire of personal, social and academic aspirations (Kostogriz & Tsolidis, 2008; Nordstrom, 2016, 2022; Reath Warren, 2018). As such, this provides an avenue for better understanding how students (as well as their community) construct and share narratives of past and present in future aspirations.

The three CLSs involved in this study each share a spatio-cultural context in that they are located in areas where there are prominent numbers of respective language speakers according to the 2021 Census (SBS, 2022). Both the Vietnamese and Assyrian CLSs are in South Western Sydney while the Persian CLS is located in Sydney's north/north-west (see Appendix H for CLS local government areas [LGAs]). Reflective of a larger population, the Vietnamese school is one of twenty in NSW, the majority of which are found in the same or nearby LGAs – and some of which are run by the same organisation. Meanwhile, both the Assyrian and Persian schools are one of three CLSs of their respective language, all of which are located within proximity to one another.[31]

### 4.4.5 Recruiting Students

After having received formal consent from the principals or administrators of each school, they arranged for me to meet with students who fit the parameters of my study. This was an important step to "negotiate entry into the field" with young people (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 85) because it gave me the opportunity to discuss my study and reasons for my interests in their experiences. Students were given information letters and assent and consent forms for themselves and their parents/caregivers respectively. Because the field is a relational space between

[31] It should also be noted, however, that there would be other schools – not to mention private tutors – not recognised through the NSW CLSP. For example, participants through the Persian CLS noted that there are six or seven schools in Sydney.

researcher and participant, the process of negotiation and participation is an ongoing process. Families were able to contact me prior to confirming their participation, and their ongoing interest and volition in participating was reaffirmed through contact in the weeks before each focus group was to take place, and at the commencement and end of our meeting at the CLS. Focus groups took place at the CLS school site on Saturday mornings during CLS class times, and in a spare accessible classroom that had been assigned by the principal. During the focus groups, we also stopped for breaks during the established CLS recess times.

#### 4.4.5.1 Participant Context

My interest in involving students whose parents were born overseas emanates from an interest in how the stories and experiences of migration are told by families and drawn upon by children in imagining the future. Here, the quasi tautological relationship between migration and aspirations (Boccagni, 2017a) is a 'second-hand' one to students. Even if they too migrated with family as young children and can recall some experiences prior to and through the period of migration, the decisions and motivations to pursue movement are not of their own making and choosing, and so would be retold and storied to them by parents, other family members, and potentially their diaspora community. As I have also alluded to earlier, my interest in Year 8 of mainstream schooling was anticipated to highlight that aspirations are already 'well underway' by the time they are in this stage of secondary school, but within a process of (re)formulation as they consider and imagine their futures in light of present and historical circumstances. This suggests a difference to common assumptions about young people's aspirations, which "results in the provision of most careers education in Year 10" (Gore et al., 2017, p. 1397). Commensurate with such assumptions is the limited attention to the ways multiple and diverse aspirations, beyond just future study and occupational aspirations, intersect to

produce images of future selves – for an example of such research, see Hawkins (2014a, 2014b). Alongside attending to this this, I was also interested drawing in experiences tied to positionalities of ethnicity and cultural belonging that are mobilised to achieve aspirations, and that sit on the periphery of the work of mainstream education and schooling.

I was also interested in holding an interview or focus group with the parents or primary caregivers of participating students at each CLS. Involving parents or primary caregivers at this phase of the study was intended to develop a greater depth to background aspects of the social, cultural, and material conditions of migration. Their involvement was also envisaged to provide a lens for interpreting intergenerational and family dynamics, particularly around issues connected with aspirations, beliefs and values of education, and post-education life courses. Social and cultural circumstances can have various influences on the interactions between parents and children – whether these are shared or rejected values, beliefs, or motivations. Within popular imaginings that have driven policy, normatively 'low' aspirations held by students tend to be linked to the low aspirations held for them by their parents – reflecting a 'culture of poverty' thesis – despite research indicating this as being far from the case (see, e.g., Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; James, 2002). Research into aspirations has also shown that students may hold misaligned or unclear perceptions of the aspirations parents and other significant adults have for them (Kerckhoff, 1976). Furthermore, parental narratives of lived experiences, and social or cultural change and relocation are seen as potentially providing one contextual element to which students relate and reference in articulating their own aspirations and decisions (Coates, 2006; Gannon et al., 2016b; Naidoo, 2015).

### 4.4.7 Focus groups

To achieve the empirical, theoretical, and methodological aims of the study, and to do so in an ethically sound manner, I decided to use focus groups as the method of gathering narratives with students. The use of focus groups helped overcome several aspects of concern inherent within traditional one-on-one interviews given the circumstances of my study. First and foremost, in undertaking research with students under the age of 18, and particularly with students and parents for whom English may be a second language, one-on-one interviews give rise to implicit and explicit power imbalances between researcher and participant. As Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2008) discuss, the focus group can be deployed strategically in order to inhibit this power imbalance, allowing participants to 'own' the interview space (see also Adler et al., 2019). This was supported by the classroom setting which, apart from being familiar to students and nearby to staff, had seating set at tables in a manner that allowed everyone to face and talk to each other. Importantly from a narrative method/ology, the focus group plays other significant roles. Focus groups allow for the exploration of collective memories and shared knowledge that elucidates stories and experiences that the narrating participant may feel unimportant in a traditional one-on-one interview space. Furthermore, focus groups can comprise a productive capacity that can agitate and mobilise participants towards particular personal or community objectives: they do political work, regardless of whether consensus is sought, achieved, or not (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2012; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Stewart et al., 2011). In this way, the research space may become one for student participants to (re)consider in various ways their aspirations and possible futures.

It is important to also recognise some of the potential limitations inherent in the focus group approaches. Among these, focus groups can risk inhibiting certain participants from telling stories or experiences that they do not wish to disclose among peers or others, thus foreclosing on the potential of some stories, or threads of stories and their unknown directions. Coinciding with this is the potential for one or several participants to dominate a space and thus prevent opportunities for others to tell their stories (Liamputtong, 2020; Stewart et al., 2011). Embedded in both circumstances are "the potential effects of social desirability, such as participant or peer conformity and unwillingness to disagree with another participant" (Adler et al., 2019, p. 11).

Here, the structure of my focus group method helped to limit or take into account such issues, and I also considered other aspects both prior and during the focus group process. First, the extended nature of three focus groups allowed participants and myself to deeply explore several various issues of interest without feeling the need to rush through or curtail conversations, and we could revisit certain experiences across each of my visits to the CLS. Alongside this, the use of a semi-structured format, with several key and over-arching questions or discussion points, ensured that I could come back to individual participants to give space and time for their thoughts if I felt that they might not have had adequate opportunity to do so. The temporal and extended aspect of the focus groups also helped to establish and renew trust and rapport between myself and the participants, and therefore create a space where personal and intimate stories may be explored more comfortably (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2012; Kim, 2016). It also gave space for the tentative and transitional elements of aspiration development, potentially in light of new social and academic experiences across different academic years.

While some research recommends six to eight participants, and even up to 12, to increase the likelihood of sustaining discussion across participants and avoid issues with depth (see Liamputtong, 2020), I felt that smaller numbers, given the structure of my focus groups, more suitably fit the purposes of my study, and also helped circumvent potential issues. Rather than add depth, larger numbers were likely to dilute the capacity for young people to tell stories, hold conversation, and reflect on experience. Importantly too, as a narrative inquiry interested in the (co)construction of stories, elements of dis/agreement, the elaboration on other peoples' thoughts and utterances, and the possibility of conformity are all central to the study of experience as opposed to a quest to uncover hidden truths. I did not wish for participants to feel pressured to go along with others' positions, or fear consequence for revealing their own, and so the above considerations recognise ways of curtailing this, but if instances of conformity were to have occurred, they would have also been considered as worthy of analysis.

I sought to support participants in telling their stories through focus groups in two other ways. First, the background information form students completed (Appendices G and H) helped elucidate some social and material contexts. It meant that I could understand some aspects of student narratives without potentially diverting conversations away from their threads, or in other circumstances, they could help prompt further discussions.

I also sought to utilise an 'artefact book' (Appendix I) to support the development of narratives. This method of generating and supporting narratives has become an established means of expanding upon traditional interview methods in narrative inquiry (Chase, 2013; see for example Chase et al., 2005; Kim, 2016). Artefacts and other forms of data are "made *with* and by participants as well as *of* them" but cannot be considered end products, and require analysis and

interpretation, and are therefore an intermediate step in the research (Kim, 2016, p. 179). I was initially open to the potential of encouraging students to utilise these books for the collection and production of other artefacts if I felt that these would be important to encouraging and eliciting narratives, and further help to overcome the (real and perceived) power imbalances that may arise in traditional interview formats as discussed earlier. Hawkins (2014a, 2014b), for example, opened space for her participants to use and produce photographs, art, mementos and keepsakes, and other documents. In the circumstances that developed in my study, both within each focus group and across them, the books were important for allowing students give form and structure to their ideas and scaffold their response to prompts. Students wrote in short or extended format, produced mind-maps and dot-points, and sometimes supported these with small drawings to initial responses and thoughts. These were important early on when we were just commencing with the focus groups, and where I introduced a new topic. There is important potential in using various forms of artefacts and co-composing other forms of field texts generatively, as ways to trigger or support young people's stories (Clandinin et al., 2016) and these may even help to elucidate other stories from the same students than those that are narrativised in my study. In the context of my research, the conversations became rich and complex with minimal prompts from the books, and I felt that it was not so necessary to rely on composing additional material.

### 4.4.5 Data analysis

Narrative inquiry has long sought to distance itself from the goals of validity, reliability and generalisability that have their epistemological roots in quantitative social sciences and other scientifically based research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1995). Because narrative inquiry is interested in how individuals give

significance to their experiences, in particular places and over time, knowledge that arises out of the narrative process "is textured by particularity and incompleteness – knowledge that leads less to generalizations and certainties and more toward wondering about and imagining alternative possibilities" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, pp. 439–440). Furthermore, narrators' stories can diverge from 'established' or expected 'truths' to reveal experiences not previously exposed by other forms of research, which calls upon narrative inquirers to take on greater care in the claims being made (Riessman, as cited in Chase, 2013). In undertaking this study, I therefore look to attain legitimacy through the entire research process by several means.

#### 4.4.5.1 Analysis

Audio recordings of the focus groups were shared electronically with a professional transcription service. The transcriptions were then returned via email, and I kept the both audio and transcript electronic files in password protected folders on a local cloud-based online storage service as per ACU's Research Data Management Toolkit and in line with my ethics approval. Also in line with my ethics approval, back-up copies were also saved to a local drive that was password protected. I also took field notes from focus groups and my times at the different CLSs, and I commenced my initial analysis following each focus group, through the audio recordings and notes. These were tentative, 'interim' texts (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) because the stories being told were still unfolding, and they allowed me to consider what aspects of the discussions and stories I might have wanted to explore further in following meetings with the students.

According to MacLure (2013), coding can be a languorous pleasure of "poring over the data, annotating, describing, linking, bringing theory to bear, recalling what others have written, and seeing things from different angles". I approached my

analysis of the focus groups much in this way, an iterative process of reading and re-reading transcripts (and re-hearing recordings). I coded the texts manually using a combination of descriptive, thematic, and deductive codes (Saldaña, 2016), bringing various excerpts of the conversations together under broader categories. The questions or discussion points that gave shape to the focus groups sometimes 'signposted' stories, but by returning to the transcripts, I kept myself keenly aware of the ways that responses to different prompts – whether from a question or discussion of a different issue, through incidental conversations, and across time – might find themselves entangled with each other.

These processes allowed me to re-story participants' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), focusing on the meanings they gave to their experiences but with an interest in providing an analytical lens as part of the narrative configuration and emplotment (Polkinghorne, 1995). In the narratives that develop in the following chapters I do not seek to present stories that centre the individual's voice as if they "speak for themselves ... and tell their own story" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 11). Rather, in keeping with the methodological and conceptual framing I have drawn upon, what emerges is a re-storying that seeks to explore and bring together young people's experiences, considered in the light of our situatedness, and the issues and politics in which these experiences are implicated. Within this, there is room to use personal experiences to drive narratives, but observant of the complex ways they weave between the co-produced and co-narrated.

#### 4.4.5.2 Saturation

Having focus groups comprised of two to five students with three meetings across a 15-month period allows sufficient breadth to explore narratives as they are co-constructed by participants, whilst also allowing sufficient space and time for individual stories and experiences to be elucidated and subsequently analysed,

without being lost among or crowded out by other participants (Kim, 2016, p. 161). This richness and complexity of this data is also furthered by the involvement of different migrant background groups represented by the involved CLSs, where different community experiences can emerge. It is nonetheless recognised here that an absolute saturation of data may not necessarily be achievable – nor is it intended to be – in the sense that the range of migrant background groups is limited to a small number of the very many found in Sydney. Participants from different migrant backgrounds, raised in different parts of Sydney, and whose families have migrated in different historical and material contexts, may have experiences that would elucidate different narratives or, at least, points of interest relevant to the questions and aims of the study. This, however, is an intrinsic element of the narrative inquiry methodology, which recognises that stories are produced and unfold in particular times and places and among particular people, whilst recognising the wider contemporary historical and political conditions within which they take shape. The convergence of these aspects all give a specific context to the telling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The contextually bound nature of narrative inquiry means that the research produces opportunities for additional and different research that can further explore both the questions that prompt this study and phenomena that arise out of it.

#### 4.4.5.3 Verisimilitude

Rich accounts collected and presented in narrative inquiry allow the researcher to demonstrate verisimilitude, where the intention is to provide readers with the opportunity to interpret the stories of experience vicariously, as 'conceivable experience' (Bruner, 1986). This does not mean developing accounts that discount theoretical and methodological considerations in interpretation and analysis, but rather ones that recognise the role of the reader, or audience, as central to telling of

the story and text. One important way that allows for verisimilitude is through the acknowledgement of ambiguity, contradiction and tension in the stories told by participants which are brought forward for analysis instead of making attempts to clean up and make consistent. In this way, the reader's own imagination and interpretive capacities may be effectively engaged (Kim, 2016).

As Madriz (cited in Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2012) also demonstrates, verisimilitude can be enhanced through focus groups, where participants may support each other in discussing shared and divergent experiences. The focus group can provide a context that mitigates the intimidation and suspicion that might arise out of one-on-one interviews, as well as the self-doubt and second guessing with which participants enter (or even, prevent themselves from entering) such scenarios.

#### 4.4.5.4 Fidelity

Supporting verisimilitude, narrativist research also attends to calls of fidelity to what participants tell and show them. Whereas seeking truth in stories focuses upon the veracity of events told, fidelity focuses upon what those events and experiences mean to the storyteller – to contemplate, as Rorty (cited in Bruner, 1986) does, "how we come to endow experience with meaning" (p. 12). Research also attends to fidelity and authenticity by accounting for the research processes, including how access to the research field was gained; the ways in which they were embedded within the field and with participants, and approaches used in doing so; and to provide interpretations that convey the complexity of the settings in which research is conducted (Gerbensky Kerber, 2011).

## 4.5 Conclusion

In considering the methodology and methods that guide this study, this chapter sought to establish an onto-epistemological framing that was at once robust

in its capacity to demonstrate a path along which the research can unfold, and reflexive towards the conceptual and theoretical literature that has come before it. Given narrative inquiry's position as both method and methodology, I outlined the theory's key tenets, and how they can guide research. Yet, as my conceptual framing of aspirations would have already indicated, I also recognised the role of other theoretical frames. These are not presented to supplant narrative inquiry, and nor is it a case of sitting on the fence undecidedly.[32] On the contrary, I am readily aware of and interested in the potentiality for other strands of theorising to walk alongside to support the exploration of stories told.

[32] You always risk hurting your backside.

# Chapter Five – Migration Narratives

## 5.1 Introduction

In this first analysis chapter I explore participants' migration narratives as they are storied through focus groups with students from the three CLSs, and through interviews with parents of three of the students. The findings across this and the next two chapters are drawn from the participants' stories and responses to questions and topic areas raised throughout our three focus group rounds, discussed further below. In considering the role of migration narratives here, I examine how stories of transnational movement and mobility are constructed to give meaning to both the experiences of migration as well as subsequent experiences and circumstances. The chapter explores how stories establish participants' understandings of the historical and socio-political contexts of family migration, and how they give shape to the social and material conditions families encountered both prior to and after migration. In so doing, the chapter responds to the second, third and fourth questions of the narrative research puzzle by attending to the ways such stories of migration are constructed, shared, and deployed to shape identities and aspirations, and direct efforts towards their realisation.

The themes presented in this and subsequent chapters have been developed through careful, iterative readings of the focus group and interview transcripts and audio recordings (see Chapter Four, section 4.4.5 for further details). My re-presentation of participant narratives into these themes draws out individuals' storying of lived experiences and interpretations of other personal, family and community phenomena, as well as the role and influence of consequential social and cultural factors. It remains, however, attentive to how such narratives have been co-

constituted in researcher-facilitated peer groups and interviews in the contexts of time and place within which our meetings occurred.

## 5.2 Findings Context

As outlined in Chapter Four, the research puzzle has developed by taking into consideration the body of literature on youth and student aspirations – including that which focuses on second generation, migrant or ethnic minority student aspirations – and thinking about this literature through a perspective that is interested in the socio-political, economic, and historical conditions that help constitute students' subjectivities and their capacities to aspire. With the questions in mind, the three student focus groups that took place over the 15-month period with each CLS group (therefore totalling nine focus groups), along with the parent/caregiver interviews that took place immediately prior to the first focus group round, covered a broad range of topics using semi-structured questions and points of interest. This meant that, for the most part, each focus group round followed a similar pattern at each CLS by covering the same themes, although due to the co-productive and deliberative characteristics of focus groups, not all questions received equal prominence, as conversations and stories were allowed to flow in the directions participants took them.

In first round of our student focus groups, I opened our meeting with introductory topics that allowed me to get to know a bit about each student and, in turn, allowed them to get to know about me, my background, and how I became interested in my research. The first questions I asked prompted students to talk about themselves, where they lived, their family and friends, their schooling, their local and cultural communities, and their interests and pastimes. To support this and subsequent narrative development, I provided students with artefact books

(discussed further in Chapter Four – see Appendix I) to act as prompts that would assist in thinking about the major themes I wished to explore. Particularly in the focus groups' initial stages, the artefact books therefore acted as a platform for the co-production and structuration of meaning, creating greater space for student re-presentation (Hawkins, 2014b). The remaining topic areas for the first round involved questions regarding the students' aspirations and what they saw influencing these ideas and interests; and then questions related to their experiences of mainstream schooling, and particularly their subject elective choices for Year 9.

The autobiographical questions and responses were important given that my interests lay in exploring students' stories of lived experience: by drawing upon each student's preliminary accounts, I could begin to explore other questions and themes related to aspirations, youth pathways, and family and community migration. They also, however, served other important purposes. First, they helped set a space in which students could build trust in me, my research process and even the purposes of my research. Furthermore, through this early stage, I could begin to recognise the dynamics of the groups – how the students would respond to me and my questions or comments, and how they interacted with one another. For example, students within the Assyrian CLS were generally most prepared to converse directly with one another, or not wait for prompts from me to proffer their response following that of another student. Meanwhile, students in the Vietnamese CLS were more likely to wait for my prompt. This, however, was particularly the case in the early parts of our first meeting, so that as time went on, the trust and comfort that had been built allowed students to discuss and narrate more detailed and intricate stories and extended responses. As such, these early autobiographical accounts set an important foundation upon which other stories could be told.

It was at this time that I also held interviews with parents and primary caregivers that agreed to participate. These were Anh's mother from the Vietnamese CLS; Darien's mother from the Persian CLS; and Lionel's grandparents from the Assyrian CLS. These interviews were held a week before the first focus groups. The questions largely focused on their own experiences of growing up and those of their children. These included topics like childhood and adolescence; their migration and settlement in Australia; their own aspirations and hopes throughout their lives; their children and their own connections to and experiences of their child's education and schooling; and their hopes, aspirations, and concerns for their children. Through these topic areas, the parent participants were able to give meaning to their experiences, the different ways they may mobilise efforts to support their children into the future, and the ways they give reason to such efforts.

In the second round of focus groups, the topics first covered the transition from Year 8 to Year 9. I asked if there were any significant or interesting changes that had taken place, what the change to Year 9 was like, and if there were changes to expectations or pressures placed upon them by teachers, schools, and parents. I was interested in knowing if they managed to get into the elective subjects they had chosen, and whether they were enjoying or had interest in those they were studying. I also asked about whether there had been any changes to the aspirations and interests they had talked about in our first meeting. Together, these topics and questions allowed us to reflect on possible developments over time, linking one focus group meeting to the other. I then moved on to ask them further about their ideas for the future by calling them to consider how they imagine themselves in ten years' time. Part of this process allowed for an exploration of how stated aspirations fit into imagined futures, and how students envisaged what may support or obstruct attainment of their future selves. I then asked about what the concept of a good life

meant to them as a way of engaging the ideas of aspirations and imagined futures into broader ideas of desires, interests, and present beliefs and values that are co-produced and constituted through interactions between the personal, familial, and social or cultural.

The third round of focus groups worked in a largely iterative manner. Held in Term 4 of Year 9, we revisited several of the major topics that had been discussed through the first two rounds. These included life events and family; schooling experiences; and aspirations and imagined futures. Drawing into these topics, I also expanded the discussions by then focusing on questions related to their CLS and their cultural communities to investigate in further depth how students interpreted these aspects of their lives in their upbringing, identity-making, and aspirations.

On the morning of our first focus groups, I met the CLS principals and staff who knew of my project prior to the commencement of classes. The principal or a staff member allocated an unused classroom to hold the focus group. They then helped round the students up by finding them as they played or socialised in the playground, as they were dropped off by their parents before the school bell rang for the start of lessons or, in the case of the Vietnamese CLS, at a short assembly. We then began our focus group as classes started. For subsequent focus groups, a date was agreed with the principals and students. I would also call in the days prior to confirm that I would see them there. On the day I would then meet the students at the staffroom, and we would head to the allocated room to commence.

In each CLS group, most students knew each other well through their CLS, although relationships between students outside of this setting varied. Only two pairs of students from the Vietnamese CLS – Cara and Chess, and Liam and Maia – knew each other through their mainstream weekday schools, and although Chess subsequently commenced at another school in Year 9, she and Cara were close

friends who socialised in other spaces as well. From the Assyrian CLS, Lionel and Willow attended the same bible/religious studies classes run at their community church, while Aramina and Miriam were close friends through their families. Darien and Hanaa from the Persian CLS shared involvement in some of the Persian community's events and knew each other through family friendship networks. Although all students were in Year 8 of mainstream schooling and aged 13 or 14, they were not necessarily in the same CLS classes: in both the Vietnamese and Assyrian schools, the student and teacher cohorts were large enough to allow students to be grouped by language knowledge and proficiency (written and oral/aural) so that students of different ages would be in the same CLS class. For example, when we were in our third focus group round, with the students in Year 9 of mainstream schooling, Maia explained that she would be finishing from Vietnamese classes at the end of the year because she was in Year 6, the final academic year of their CLS, while other students were spread across the next few lower Years. At the Assyrian CLS, both Aramina and Willow were in Year 5 when we met for our first focus group, but Lionel was only in Year 1. Lionel explained that as it was his first year at that school, they had "put me in Year 1. And if I get 50% on the test, I go to Year 2. If I don't get, and I get lower I have to repeat". By our second meeting, both he and the others had progressed to the next academic year.

## 5.3 Family Migration Narratives

Among narratives that arose prominently in our first focus groups and interviews, and continued to re-emerge across each meeting were those involving students' families and experiences of culture and ethnicity, and an important aspect within these were stories of family migration. While initial questions about family acted as introductory prompts to help elicit some background context about

relationships and allow participants to settle into the setting, subsequent discussions began to explore the significance of migration and settlement experiences. The process that developed across subsequent meetings with students also allowed for family stories to unfold in different ways and through different prompts, and through this, students assembled complex narratives that reveal the multifaceted ways such stories can be discursively deployed.

A significant aspect in the development of these migration narratives is how difference is embedded within the shared. Common across the stories is how departure from home was contingent upon more than the hopes for a better life through social and economic opportunities. Across all students, their families' departures from home was necessitated through political conflict, upheaval, and tensions. These experiences, however, differed both across CLSs and even between students from each cohort. This helped to bring into focus the differing social, historical, and material conditions families and communities experienced both before and during migration as well as in settlement in Australia.

### 5.3.1 Escaping conflict and seeking freedoms

Most of the parents of students from the Vietnamese CLS had arrived in Australia as children or adolescents, coming with their families to escape war and life in poverty that had resulted from the conflict and changing political circumstances. The various narratives students tell develop a patchwork of experiences of life in camps and incarceration followed by escape or departure, for several family members, by boat or subsequent family reunification. They draw together experiences reflective of many who sought refuge outside the country as north Vietnamese forces overran South Vietnam, and those associated with the former

government lost property and jobs, and were sent to concentration and re-education camps:

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| Anh | They told me that um they were scared- it was bad back then. Many of my mum's relatives died of starvation due to poverty. ... When my dad left, he left like a bit earlier than my mum. When my dad left there were some pirates- some bandits came to their boat, took all their women with them, and killed some people in the boat. Eventually they left but they took all the food and water with them, and so some people died on the boat. Yeah, and thankfully some boats, I think English boats, passed by them and helped them... |
| Maia | Yeah, and so what happened was the first time my mum's family tried to escape, my grandpa for my mother's side um, actually got caught and he was put in jail for around like a few years, and they tried again and they went to one of the islands near um Asia, and then they lived there for until my mum was around 16, and until they moved to Australia, whereas my father he um like, his parents were actually quite wealthy in Vietnam. ... And so my grandpa and all the older brothers left to Australia first and then a few years later, um, like brought my grandma, my father and his four sisters over. Um, and yeah, like my grandma actually always complained how she always wanted to go back to um Vietnam, and then until, like she started here for like a few years, and then she just loved Australia. |

Similarly, constant conflict throughout the Middle East, coupled with a position as an ethnic and religious minority without a sovereign nation-state, has borne witness to the departure of Assyrians from traditional homelands as well as nearby regions in the flux of displacement and resettlement. The experiences are in many ways shared among the families of Assyrian CLS students, despite the generational distance and evolving political contexts between their taking place. Lionel here, for example, talks about his primary-carer grandparents who arrived in Australia in the early 1970s when they were in their early twenties, while Aramina recalls her mum's experiences almost two decades later as a teenager:

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|---|---|
| Lionel | My granddad, my grandma, my grandma's from Syria. My granddad's from Iraq, and they met at– cos her, cos my grandma's cousin and my grandad's cousin were having- were getting married. So they met each other there. They said that they came to Australia like by plane. Because– and after they left like a couple of days after they left the war started. So like 'a good thing we left'. Before they left, they knew like something was going to trigger it and then they just went and then, like– like they thought like 'I'm so happy, I left now because I–' Joyful. Joyful I think, like joyful that they didn't stay. |
| Aramina | Ok, so on my mum's side, my grandma was a nurse and my grandpa was an engineer. They lived there for a while.. Oh they were in Iran. And they lived under the King, and then the king left and you know it became like Islamic State and all of that. And, they had to wear hijabs, and my mum's school was like constantly bombed and so my mum had seen like her classmates, |

> like bombed in front of her. She still can't see fireworks; she gets a bit upset.

Central to these stories is the theme of escape from conflict as well the lived experience of or potential for persecution. The passages to freedom from such persecution described reveal rather non-linear paths to Australia, particularly among Assyrian and Vietnamese families who largely found routes to and through intermediary countries and, in the case of Vietnamese families, refugee camps. Aramina's narrative of her mother's experiences share with the Vietnamese students an understanding of the precarity in which the family lived in Iran, and she recognises the turmoil and upheaval brought about by the Iranian Revolution through the likening of more contemporary contexts - "and then the king left, and you know, it became like Islamic State…". The positioning of Assyrian Catholics as an ethnic and religious minority is also indicated as part of the reasons necessitating the migration of these families. Alongside the reference to Islamic State in recalling the emergence of the Islamic Republic, Aramina describes how her mother's school had been targeted in bombings. Meanwhile, adding further to Lionel's story of their experiences, his grandparents describe the religious persecution experienced by their families. Their migration the grandfather's family who had already migrated to Australia: "like a Christian in an Arab country, we can't live. We feel like a second division, third division people. So we were looking for a better life, you know. That's why came to Australia".

Although not mentioned and possibly not fully understood by students, Anh's mother highlights the role of Australian policies in managing resettlement through humanitarian programs designed "to provide a more targeted and orderly response to future refugee crises" (Department of Immigration and Border Protection [DIBP],

2017, p. vi). She describes how her father, a former major, after having spent over five years in a re-education camp, managed to "escape from Vietnam" with the whole family after several unsuccessful attempts, and settled in a refugee camp in Malaysia: "we stayed there four and a half months, and then we've got a grant from the Australian government, and then my family we got to Darwin in 1983". Along with the persecution already experienced, the potential for future repercussions that would narrow family opportunities was also understood by Anh's mother as an important factor that prompted seeking asylum:

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|---|---|
| Anh's Mother | We stayed in the hostel for six months. All the refugees have to stay in hostel for six months and after 6 months we all moved out. We got a housing commission house for each family, and uh- First it was very tough, especially for my parents. They were forty, forty something during that time, and we came here, with nothing, and they had to start all over again. Yeah. |
| Antoine | Because they would have had to have left everything… |
| Anh's Mother | Yeah because of the children- you know, they, they would like us to have a better life. If we stayed in Vietnam we would not be allowed to go to school, or uni, especially uni because of the um, with the background, everyone who works for the [former] government, you're not allowed, no room for you to go to uni. |

Among both students from the Persian CLS and Darien's mother, the discussions of departure from Iran are initiated with a different focus that centres the agency of their parents in their families' migration. Whereas war and conflict compelled departure for the families of Vietnamese and Assyrian CLS students,

Hanaa's migration story, for example, foregrounds her parents decision-making processes and considerations amidst the social and political tensions experienced:

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|---|---|
| Hanaa | Yeah they said they wanted a better life because the opportunities you get here you don't get in Iran like the variety of jobs and education you can get here and the good life you can get here you can't get in Iran, so they moved here for us. |
| Darien | Yeah I think my mum also brought up – it wasn't really safe in Iran too. Like a lot of crime. |

As we shall consider in further depth later on, the construct of seeking 'a better life' and the belief in more 'opportunities' awaiting at the end of the migration path are somewhat universal and teleological motifs intertwined through the narratives of students and their families, reflecting what Boccagni (2017a) describes as the tautological connection between aspiration and migration. Within the mobilisation of aspirations Hanaa reflects on here, her parents are presented as being able to assess their position within Iran against that which is possible elsewhere. While other students draw upon the language of escape to frame the migration and asylum process and the seeking of a better life, Darien's and Hanaa's stories reflect upon a breaking of and away from the restrictive conditions – social, political, economic, religious – that governed everyday life.

This is further emphasised through their own lived experiences in Iran. Unlike other participants who were born in Australia at different points after their parents' migration, both Darien and Hanaa were born in Iran and migrated as young children[33] and both have made return visits – for Darien, "every two years" until

[33] Darien at four years of age, and Hanaa at seven.

recent political troubles had stymied attempts for both to revisit. This allows them to construct narratives of migration rather differently to other participants. Though migration was similarly not of their own choosing, Darien and Hanaa are able to draw upon lived experience with which they interlace the ongoing experiences of family and friends, coupled with their learning about Iran and its recent history – both through their CLS and away from this setting. While the students talk about personal experiences, restrictions on the individual are raised, and Darien also juxtaposes contemporary Iran with his beliefs and understandings about life prior to the Revolution:

| | |
|---|---|
| Hanaa | I don't want to wear a scarf. … We are not allowed to wear these short pants I am wearing now. I couldn't go out wearing this. I would have to wear full jeans covering my whole legs, but I don't want to wear a scarf … but it's very hot there. It's been recorded a couple of decades ago that it's one of the hottest places on earth. |
| Darien | It's an opinion, I feel like it is because a long time ago, I think Iran actually used to have a King I think it was, and he actually made people be like free and it used to be a really popular tourist place because a couple of days ago I watched the Kings wife. She was talking about how like people were like really free and what the husband actually did, and then some people waited for the more – I don't know how to call it? |
| Antoine | Sort of the more conservative- |
| Darien | Yeah the King and then he was overthrown by these Islamic people and then took over and put these Islamic rules in. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Hanaa | And now everyone is regretting it. |

The above exchange highlights how the students articulate what was lost and being sought through migration, and as the conversation continues the juxtaposition is not just temporal, but develops into a spatialised one that envelopes their present experiences in Sydney:

| | |
|---|---|
| Hanaa | We have so much more freedom here. You could do much more things than you could do in Iran. There, there are religious restrictions but in terms of law enforcement and everything they are very very- both corrupt and weak. They can't do much to help people there with problems. Like my cousin went to Iran a couple of years back and she got robbed twice coming out from a bank and like and she hopped into a taxi and then she was robbed, and this other time she was walking down the street and she got robbed again. And it's not very safe there at all. |
| Darien | No security. |
| Hanaa | No security at all – like my mum – we were there and my mum only just allowed me to come down from the apartment and walk say 200 metres to a shop – I can't go past that. I need my mum and my brother there just so I can walk down to shops. [Here] I go from my house and it's say, two kilometres. I walk down to shops, I walk to school and I walk back from school and if I was in Iran I would have to take the car everywhere or walk with someone much older. |

For both Hanaa and Darien, the contrast moves beyond social and religious norms and requirements. As the above passage demonstrates, it shifts into an emphasis of the corruption that they see as enabled and overlooked through their imposition. Together, these act as an inhibitor on everyday life in comparison with the freedom they see being afforded to them in Australia, and in so doing the narratives establish justifications for their parents' decisions to migrate.

### 5.3.2 Exploring situatedness through migration narratives

The stories students tell of their families' migration to Australia also work to highlight the social and material contexts within which their families lived, both prior to and following migration. Though not evenly distributed, among several students', families and parents appear to have had occupations, social roles, or academic backgrounds reflective of a middle-class positionality, or a favourable socio-economic experience within the context of their home country prior to the circumstances that brought about movement and migration. This was most clear in the stories of Persian CLS students as well as in Aramina's from the Assyrian CLS. The stories that give light to such experiences also indicate the complicated processes of resettlement tied to the historical and socio-political contexts within which family movement took place, and they also reveal sometimes different understandings of these processes and contexts – both between different students, as well as students and parents. In so doing, migration narratives work not only to disclose social and material conditions, but (re)presentations of participants' interpretations of the significance of such conditions.

Early in my discussions with students from the Persian CLS, Hanaa explained that in Iran, her father worked in the family business selling commercial kitchen equipment. On migration to Australia, however, he had not been able to find work

for some years, but two years' previous moved into a trade becoming an "electrician, so yeah every morning he has to wake up very early". In a similar way, her mother had taken up trade-related work in Iran becoming a baker, and now in Australia, "she works at a restaurant and she like bakes cakes and sweets and she just really likes cooking". Yet Hanaa discusses that her mother had been studying at university "but she had to stop because she found that she was pregnant with me, so it was hard for her to study". As Hanaa narrates the family expectations and disappointments for her mother as she did not complete university studies, we can recognise several important social and cultural contexts. First among these is that Hanaa sees and positions her mother as someone whose academic and occupational pathways were curtailed through gendered social structures. Nonetheless, the discussion also establishes the importance of education as a vehicle for upholding status or driving social mobility among the family in Iran. Another aspect that arises across the retelling of both parents' experiences is the way that opportunities and aspirations for education and work coincide and can come into conflict with other desires. Hanaa's retelling embodies a sense of her parents taking a step *down* occupationally in their attempts to establish a family both prior to and through the migration process.

This step down is further emphasised in Darien's family, although it is not equally disclosed across different narrators. Reflecting on their middle-class social position in Iran, Darien discusses how his parents went to university, how his mother worked as an English teacher and, because of her knowledge of English, "she worked well in Iran and had lots of experience" across professional jobs. He also emphasised that after arriving in Australia, his mother continued with further studies "because she wanted these good jobs". It is within the context of settlement in Australia, however, that Darien's understanding of his parents' experiences differs markedly

from their retelling by his mother. When I had spoken to Darien's mother prior to my meeting Darien and Hanaa, she constructed an image of herself as having a "very good life", with work opportunities and a lifestyle in Iran that were largely untroubled by economic or political concerns but nonetheless embodied by a perpetual anxiety about the future. As we can see in the following passage, his mother's storying reinforces Darien and Hanaa's co-construction of agentic migration on the part of the parents, and it also further establishes the social class positionality Darien's family experienced prior to migration. Her occupation not only provided her a sound financial position, but it also gave her the capacity to make calculated decisions in evaluating to where she and her family would migrate. Yet unlike Darien's understanding, his mother provides a very explicit account of the step down that she experienced in this migration:

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|---|---|
| Antoine | And can I ask about the reasons for leaving? |
| Darien's Mother | Well, that's a very interesting question. I worked for multinationals for many years and, well, basically in Iran, you never have the – you never can make sure that you have a stable future, so it's not that I had any religious issues or I had any economic issues or anything like that, so I had very good life. I was working for a multinational, I was travelling to Europe seven eight times per year, so that was quite luxury life I can say, compared to many people living there, but actually, we considered to downgrade also. I call it downgrading because I was in a senior position back in Iran and my husband the same so and naturally when you migrate, you have to downgrade your job levels and everything and your lifestyle, but the one thing |

> that was very important to me about Australia, because I travelled to many places in the world and I chose Australia to come, and I came to Australia before that as a tourist to see how the environment is, is the safety and the family friendly environment, so that's – I told myself, that's the way I want to raise my kids. So it's a very stable country, it's relaxed, compared to many places in the world it's stressless, I can say, in any sense that you can think of, and it's beautiful climate, everything is so nice about it, so that was the main reason, so main reason was that, just making better future for my kids and for myself as well.

While political and social instability had not yet affected her career opportunities, Darien's mother positions this as an ever-present possibility, whose future likelihood orients practices and mobilities in the present. In addition to this, as she touches upon here and will be explored further in this chapter and in Chapter Seven, central to the family's migration is the pursuit of a 'stressless' quality of life that encompasses academic and occupational opportunities but is not centrally predicated on particular forms of achievement. Despite such perceived benefits, she also makes it explicit that she is using the term 'downgrading' in a deliberative way to juxtapose her social and economic position in Iran with what she both expected and experienced upon migration. Within this passage, she also positions downgrading as a common, shared experience among migrants: "naturally when you migrate, you have to downgrade". As she also goes on to describe, downgrading also involves being unable to draw upon the forms of social capital once beneficial in familiar surroundings, and it becomes a social practice that she and her husband would have

to perform several times in the face of social, economic, and even racialised structures and expectations before upward mobility could then be reobtained:

Darien's Mother Again, things have moved on, 'Oh, you don't have enough local experience'- and that's through the agents and when you, as a migrant, you don't have that network so you have no other choice than going to the recruiting agencies… So I ended up really taking my experience out of my CV [curriculum vitae], I had to downgrade myself and take out all those titles out, okay, no, I don't know them… It's funny because I came as a skilled migrant so actually my job was in demand in Australia, so you assume that when you come in on that profile, so that's where you can find things, yeah, right?

Antoine You're going to land yourself-

…

Darien's Mother For him was much more difficult because my husband was in sales and language barrier plays a big role in that role because– and he's got stronger accent than I have and it was GFC [global financial crisis]. … He couldn't get a permanent role for two-three years and then after that he was working for a local company … and then he decided to have his own business so he left the company… Despite all the skills that you have, you might be very good, but that's the first thing, so as you start to talk in an interview, that's a push back, you know what I mean, so I think that there was..

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| Antoine | Yeah, so it might not be a direct discrimination but like a sort of implicit bias in a sense might be there? |
| Darien's Mother | It might not be, yeah, and now that we are talking about discrimination, maybe, well, that's what I experienced personally because I'm a woman and my situation is very different to a man too because when we are coming from Iran, they think we are Muslims and their expectation is to see a- your appearance to be- and I could understand in many cases that I went for an interview that, and people, not directly but indirectly they gave me that feeling that they were fearing of me not being able to fit in their organisation culturally, but then they saw me as I am because I'm not a– I don't practice, and they were shocked in a way, they were not expecting that, so that's, yeah. |

Weaved throughout these passages, Darien's mother is clearly aware of the policy apparatus through which she was required to navigate to be granted entry into Australia. She draws upon her prior occupational skills and experiences and those of her husband to construct a positionality that comprises the veneer of a normatively dominant and desired social status, but is at once troubled by a structural subordination within the ethnic and cultural norms of the new dominant. An increasingly neoliberal immigration regime focused on 'picking winners' for economic imperatives (Hawthorne, 2005; Jupp, 2002) had made migration to Australia much more possible for her family than for other migrants and those wishing to be. Yet the story that Darien's mother constructs calls attention to the inconsistencies and ambivalences that migrants must contend with within that same

neoliberal economic framework, and the efforts this necessitates on their part to redefine and value their terms of recognition (Appadurai, 2004; Naidoo, 2015).

Among students in both the Vietnamese and Assyrian CLSs, a broader sense of loss that precipitated movement is prominent, reflective of experiences necessitating escape explored earlier. Nonetheless, the stories these participants construct also often position family, in Anh's mother's earlier words, as "starting over again", needing to restart processes of social mobility and attaining a 'better' life. In discussing her father's migration, for example, Aramina emphasises the social status and distinction her father's family once held, and through conflict lost: "well my grandpa owned a village but he left all that behind, because he was like, you know, 'we need to' you know, 'get out'". Settlement in Australia, for both sides of her family, was marked by an escape from conflict and its dangers, however it nonetheless represented an initial downward movement occupationally and socially: "Like all my grandparents lived like a really good life over there and then when they came here they obviously had to like start again; start working in factories or whatever".

As discussed earlier, most families of Vietnamese CLS students arrived in Australia as refugees through managed humanitarian programs. Several students could locate the age when their parents arrived in Australia by the education they would go on to complete following arrival, as Cara describes for her parents: "So when he [father] came to Australia, he did Year 11 and 12 ... And then my mum, she came by plane because her brother and sisters came here and they made her come over here, and my mum did year 10, 11, and 12". Several also had grandfathers who had some association with the South Vietnamese government through military service. As explored earlier, Anh's grandfather was a major whose family was first able to escape to property in the countryside, and in his mother's retelling, she positions opportunities for children's education – "we would not be allowed to go to

school, or uni, especially uni" – as a central future endeavour that would be gained by her family's departure from Vietnam. Meanwhile, according to Chess, her grandfather "had like a pass to go on a boat to a refugee camp" because he was a soldier. While this indicated that their families may have held some social status and that they previously held resources that would allow them to access certain academic and occupational opportunities in pre-war Vietnam, it also put them in particular danger following regime change. One's position might give access to movement not possible for others, but the conditions leading to resettlement produced social and economic loss for several families on multiple fronts, and in helping to reveal such loss, narratives underscored the extent of traumatic experiences that family members endured.

A notable difference to such family backgrounds was that of Lionel's grandparents, whose migration narratives diverged from others in terms of the social and material conditions and contexts preceding and allowing for migration. Unlike most other students, Lionel's knowledge of, and therefore capacity to re-story, the experiences of his grandparents was somewhat limited. He was not sure, for example, what work they did "because when I was born he [grandfather] wasn't even working". However, alongside the story of departure he retold earlier, he nonetheless makes some links between their childhood and how this continues to factor in their lives. While his grandfather completed the equivalent of high school, Lionel's grandmother

> knows how to write numbers- my grandma doesn't know how to read English, cos she didn't go to school. So she doesn't know how to read English and, but she can read numbers. My Granddad can read English and numbers.

Lionel’s grandparents extend upon this by highlighting how class and the spatial effects of rurality intersect with discrimination through their treatment as ‘a second division, third division people’:

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|---|---|
| Antoine | When you left for Australia, you had finished your schooling as well? |
| Grandmother | No, no. No. My husband is finished. |
| Grandfather | In Year 9, I stopped, because I didn't have money to pay for school. |
| Antoine | And did you- were in the same position? |
| Grandfather | No she didn't go to school. |
| Antoine | You didn't go to school much? |
| Grandmother | I didn't go to school, because I live in a village, everybody no go to school. No have school. Behind us [gesturing to another village with a school] is very far away. My mum and dad say 'No, you not go there because they come and kill the kids and women', something like that. They tell us not to go. No, I stay at home. |

In contrast with families who had migrated to Australia since the 1990s – such as those of other Assyrian CLS participants, Miriam and Willow, as well as Persian CLS participants Darien and Hanaa – the migration of Lionel’s grandparents was marked by different historic conditions of Australian immigration policy. Prior immigration schemes were less rigorous in their selection, while family reunion was also a prevailing aspect (see Jupp, 2002). Unlike Darien’s mother, who earlier storied her concerted economic and navigational capacities to assess migration

options and her experiences with immigration requirements, there were no expectations of what Australia would be like for Lionel's grandparents beyond that they would be reunited with his grandfather's family who had "already come to Australia, so they already make their way".

Within the storying of their migration experiences, Lionel's grandparents give the sense of a lack of expectations about what and where they were migrating to. It is an affective orientation that in many ways reflects Lionel's own re-telling, presented earlier, which inculcated a notion of spontaneity of movement and feeling: "and then they just went and then, like– like they thought like 'I'm so happy, I left now because I–' Joyful. Joyful I think, like joyful that they didn't stay". Yet, within their narration the structural effects of intersecting class and culture are also quickly brought to the surface:

| | |
|---|---|
| Antoine | And then when you arrived in Australia, did you find settling in Australia easy or was it difficult? |
| Grandmother | It was beautiful, was beautiful.. |
| Grandfather | Very good yeah |
| Grandmother | It was little bit difficult. I speak, well, our language.. |
| Grandfather | ..Yeah, when we start.. |
| Grandmother | ..speak Arabic and Assyrian and these people speak English. Little bit difficult for us. Just little bit- oh, one or two years, it's ok for us. |

'It was beautiful' is quickly complicated by the difficulty of language barriers for the first couple of years which also ties into occupational opportunities they discuss: Lionel's grandfather limits his description of his occupations to "just normal.

Any job ... not special, like a specialist, no", while his grandmother reflects on her work in a bridal factory, where she only interacts with Arabic, Assyrian and some, other migrant-background women, but not "English people" (although "English people are very good"). These conversations serve to suggest how occupational opportunities which are already narrowed towards migrants with limited credentials in turn narrow the scope for building broader networks that may open opportunities for further social mobility. Despite this, the passage's discursive shift from 'beautiful' does not mean that such an affective response was not felt. Rather, it reflects a substantial change in experience and, notably, social and material conditions. Lionel's grandmother in particular makes several comparisons between what they could not do prior to migration, and what they can continue to do freely in Australia:

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|---|---|
| Grandmother | Australian people is very good. Is not like our country, say you comin' from overseas, no good. It's all the time is.. |
| Grandfather | At work was alright, but in the Fairfield area, when we coming, sometime we get some ehh, like a drunk people or if you pass by, he call you wog, but.. |
| Antoine | Ah yes, yes |
| Grandfather | Nah... |
| Grandmother | Yeah, much different than our country. Our country you see this one, crosses [shows a Christian crucifix and rosary beads].. no good. Put away. Here, I wanna go and talk my language with my kids, nobody tell me nothing. There no. Speak Arabic, or no speak Arabic they say, 'oh it's no good'. |

In spite of structural limitations tied largely to language and credentials, and what are considered as incidental instances of racism, their stories present reflections on the anticipatory socialisation (MacLeod, 2009) through which they have seen their settlement in Australia. The subjugation prior to migration has acted as a frame of reference by which experiences within new surroundings are interpreted and evaluated, and just like other participants and their families, such interpretations allow them to establish a framework to build hopes for the future.

### 5.3.3 Drawing upon the archives, deploying migration stories

While these strands in students' narratives give an indication towards the social and material conditions of migration, another important aspect that begins to emerge is how students and their families draw upon such experiences as an archive that can be deployed with an orientation towards the future (Appadurai, 2003, 2004). In so doing, the conversations draw our attention to how migration stories and the (re)telling of such experiences developing a form of ethnic capital (Naidoo, 2015) that helps to establish value and norms as a teleology to guide youth in their present and into what can lay ahead.

Across participants' narratives, the hearing and retelling of migration experiences appear to have developed into a pedagogical device for mobilising aspirations. The students across the three CLS focus groups all acknowledged and appreciated their parents' prior decisions, actions, and achievements as positively affecting their own upbringing. In recounting these, they re-constructed narratives that demonstrated lessons that parents sought to imbue within their children who could in turn draw upon them in when needed.

What is also notable is the way that stories were narrativised through the different elements of family life they recounted and emphasised. Aramina and

Darien, for example, who in later chapters can be seen possessing navigational capacities replete with social, cultural, and material resources to define and support their aspirations, appeared to make more explicit accounts of their families' different steps in departing country of origin and eventual settlement in Australia, the justifications for decisions made and their connection to their own lives. In particular, both emphasised parental education experiences as part of the migration story. Here, for example, Aramina speaks about her mother's family:

> ...when my mum was in year 10, they came to Australia. Well they went to America first, and then in America they said you have to wait 6 months and then you'll get like a permanent visa to stay here and my Grandpa didn't want my mum and my- and her two younger brothers to like miss out on six months of school, cos education was very important to him. So they said like if you go to Australia you can just settle in there straight away, so they did. Whereas the rest of my family is all in America, so, but they came here. And they came here and they didn't know a word of English, and so my mum started Year 10 here knowing 'yes no boy girl' and she said that she used to work really really hard at studying in order to, you know, to like get a good job, later on and she said that like for example she'd lock herself in her room and she'd do like maths textbooks for fun, like just to get through. And so she sat the HSC and she became a lawyer and her two younger brothers are lawyers as well.

Just as she locates escape from bombing in the context of her mother's education in an earlier part of this chapter, we can see in this passage the importance Aramina places on education as a catalyst for social position and mobility through its centrality in her storying of her family's migration. While she recognises how the social and occupational status held by her grandparents (before needing to migrate)

benefitted her family, educational opportunity is central to establishing grounds for a good life. Aramina places particular emphasis on her grandfather's decision to migrate to Australia because of the smoother resumption of his children's education, and she goes on to identify the low (English) schooling point from which her mother had to commence, as well as the hard work undertaken. The centrality of education within Aramina's understanding of success and achievement is not only drawn out by the elaborate discussion of the pathways to and starting points of schooling in Australia, but also heavily underscored by the brevity between the final steps of her mother's academic and occupational journey which reinforces an 'effort-achievement-success' paradigm.

In a similar way, Darien establishes the role his parents' education, here talking about how the role it played in providing his mother occupational opportunities in Iran, that subsequently allowed her to find work in Australia.

> Mum studied in Iran, and because she was an English teacher in Iran, and she knew English and she worked well in Iran and had lots of experience. When she got here it wasn't that hard to find a good job, a well-paying job as it would be for an average person from Iran... Because she wanted these good jobs she also did do a little bit of study here... Because my mum, as I said worked and my dad worked very hard and have very good experience, and the jobs they have are much better than what an average person would have if they came here.

Although Darien's understanding of his mother finding work differs from her own account, and as explored earlier, obscures the difficulties she experienced, the latter part of this passage highlights how Darien makes deliberative of links between his parents' educational achievements and their occupational outcomes. Like

Aramina, he centres the role of their 'working hard' for these accomplishments. Both do not appear to heavily trouble the possible role of their families' social and economic positions in fermenting opportunities to develop the practices conducive to academic achievement and 'hard work'. Yet as we can see in Aramina's passage above, as well as in the earlier narrative with Darien's mother, parental 'success' depended on hard work to circumvent the structural and institution barriers common to migrant experiences that necessitate efforts. Although not apparent in our discussions during our first meeting, where Darien portrays a relatively smooth experience in finding 'good jobs' post-arrival in Australia, at a later stage when he is talking of the pride he has in his parents' achievements, he too demonstrates a recognition of how migrant trajectories might be hindered through structural and institutional demands:

> My parents they always have enough money to support us, I'm proud of them for that because they came to another country where they had to work for their degrees again because apparently they're not valid.

While Aramina and Darien make very clear and detailed links between different aspects of their parents' steps through migration, and notably the role of their education, the notion of 'hard work' as a device with which to understand family experiences is prevalent and co-constructed among students, and often related back to the precarity encountered in lives before and after migration. Students in the Vietnamese CLS, for example, drew heavily on the narratives of escape discussed above to juxtapose those experiences with the conditions and circumstances experienced in Australia. Liam, for example, talks here about his father:

> My dad went by boat to Australia, because of the hardships and poverty and war. So that when he got here, he had to work really hard as a builder, but it was a good job so he was able to live off it. But then he went back to Vietnam and married my mother, so she was able to go by plane to Australia.

Though the work his father had to undertake after arriving in Australia was difficult and demanding, in Liam's re-telling, this allowed him to re-establish himself and provide for his family in ways that would not have been possible if he could not leave Vietnam. This could, however, come at serious personal costs, as Chess recounts about her mother's family, who upon arrival in Australia "had no money so my grandfather, Grandpa, had to work really hard and he ended up dying".

In instances, students explain how their parents explicitly deploy the archives of experience pedagogically, as Maia describes:

> My parents always talk about their experience, as well as my grandparents as well. And cos my parents normally like, relate their experience to what I'm doing, like at the current moment. So, my parents would always be like oh, try your hardest cos, um, if you don't you won't get what you want in the future, and all of those things and um especially when it comes to food as well, and other things that they couldn't have when they were younger, they want me to be able to have and for my children in the future and all that. So it's like they always, like, *link* their experiences to what I'm doing.

We can see in this passage that the urgency instilled by Maia's parents towards 'trying your hardest' is one based around avoiding possible future precarity like they had experienced. Yet it is also one oriented towards shared desires and expectations for the future good life involving both material needs and wants, and hopes for family-making for their daughter. In this way, the storying and re-storying

of different facets and experiences held in the archives can become opportunities to practice aspiration development, with parents and family establishing experiential paths along which children can traverse.

Opportunities for children to interpret and adapt the archives for themselves emerge as they reflect on their significance in their own lives. At times, several speak broadly of the inspiration and motivation that they draw from the narratives:

| | |
|---|---|
| Anh | I feel inspired from the stories, which motivates me to do better at school. My parents would always encourage me do well otherwise you won't achieve your dreams. |
| Maia | Yeah, when I hear my parents tell me their stories, like after they tell me their whole story, they would normally, like, say 'Oh that's why you should try your best' and all those, like inspiring words. So, like, I would always try my best and all that. |

This, however, gives way to deeper understandings of the difficulties experienced by families. As the following conversation from the Assyrian CLS highlights, students draw upon a sense of compulsion towards repaying, and making good on, their parents' difficulties, and the comparatively poorer material and social conditions they had lived through and subsequently worked against in establishing better circumstances that the students see themselves having:

| | |
|---|---|
| Antoine | Do you think about what they've gone through in their lives as, you know, in growing up in, in you know difficult circumstances and coming to Australia? |
| Miriam | Yeah, I do. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Aramina | That plays on me a little bit, because, like I feel, I work really hard at school because I feel that if they've come all this way and then they've worked so hard to like get the jobs they have in order to like pay for my schooling and give me all these opportunities, then like I have to take advantage of it and then, like, sort of improve the next generation and then that generation improves. |
| Antoine | Yeah, yeah. And, and was that, I saw you nodding too. |
| Miriam | Yeah, like I'm agreeing with her, on like the part where she's saying like our parents did all this for us, we've got to do something good in return, but also because my parents always told me it was hard to come here and, like get where they are so, they want me to not to end up where they are, like they want me to be higher and know better. |
| Willow | Yeah |

Both Aramina and Miriam demonstrate some understanding of the broader social and economic factors that can be at play in shaping opportunity. Aramina appreciates and recognises the social and material outcomes of her parents' endeavours to give her 'opportunities' that consequently call on her to embody a similar set of attitudes and aptitudes to continue improvements intergenerationally. Meanwhile, Miriam's similar conclusions are drawn from a different range of experiences in which she feels it is incumbent on her "do something good in return" for her parents' sacrifices and own foreclosed opportunities and aspirations.

Darien, for example, might not raise or fully recognise the links between his parents' own upbringing and their successes discussed earlier. Yet the overcoming of

social and institutional obstacles that they have accomplished is a source of pride that allows him to recognise how the status his parents have achieved in Australia confer privilege onto himself, and are consequential to where he lives and what he is able to do and pursue:

> Because even though they came from a different country as migrants, they make more than the average family does which I'm really proud of because they work so hard. And they always make sure we have enough to live a comfortable happy life. I live in [northern Sydney] which is a pretty good place. It's a very, very good place for immigrants because the houses are very expensive. They are much more bigger and better than say Chatswood or something.
>
> …
>
> My Mum and my Dad both of them are very helpful and very supportive. They always help me with anything, with all of these activities; those two people are the ones that help me to start them off and continue with them. My Mum and my Dad both support – I started tennis in kindergarten and from then my Mum and my Dad take me to my lessons and music I started a couple of years ago with my Mum and my Dad they take me there and they pay for it obviously.

If Darien was deliberative in linking parental educational achievement and occupational outcomes, he is also deliberative in his recognition of the spatial privileges he enjoys, especially in the context of his family's position as migrants in a new country. While there is certainly a sense of the classed connotations of normative success in his responses, it is one that recognises how such a classed position bestows diverse opportunities for himself with an imperative to be taken. At

once it is both a deep sense of familial accomplishment and opportunity building, as well as recognition that such opportunities, trajectories and pathways are not open to all migrants in the same way.

Although these discussions serve to emphasise students' receptiveness to family stories of migration, and the lessons bestowed and adopted through them, there are also instances where students express frustrations or ambivalence to the ways their parents use stories of their youth. Although these are not widespread, they point towards broader issues and concerns that several students raise about the expectations that parents have for them. Some students discussed how they felt that parents could on occasion be dismissive of their own difficulties or troubles, whether at school – particularly as evaluated through performative measures of assessments and exams – or in their social lives, as Willow and Aramina suggest:

| | |
|---|---|
| Willow | Yeah because they don't get that we have so much assignments they expect us to do housework and all this when we have 10 assignments due tomorrow. And if we get one bad grade they make us feel like crap.. |
| Aramina | That my mum got really good grades all throughout school she was always top student, so. |

While such tensions and anxieties will be explored further in Chapter Seven, their appearance in the re-storying of parents' migration and education appears to suggest that students related such perceived dismissiveness with the difficulties and social and material circumstances those experiences embodied. Because parents had themselves been through turbulent, and sometimes traumatic experiences, and because they are mobilising resources and emotional labour in their aspirations for their children, issues that their children face in what they perceive to be a

comparatively peaceful and rich life may seem less consequential. Although Cara was somewhat initially flippant in her response in the following, she suggests how her mother would position her experiences to indicate to Cara a sense of both the obligations that one shares with and to others in the family to support each other, and the good fortune she should appreciate in her own circumstances. As the conversation weaves between participants and comes back to Cara, it also draws our attention to another important aspect in the re-storying and deployment of such experiences:

| | |
|---|---|
| Cara | When they try to make me do chores, and then I don't want to do it, they always like refer, 'Oh I had to go through this. I had to, when I was your age I had to go make money, I had to make these silk things,' |
| Chess | Silk things? [giggles] |
| Cara | ...and then, yeah. |
| Antoine | Can I ask about those silk things, [Cara laughs] was it like, oh no sorry I don't- like do you understand or [to Chess] do you know what she's referring to? |
| Chess | No idea |
| Liam | Isn't that more like Asian dresses? |
| Cara | I think they, like, they were like in the sew- my family, my mum's side was in like the sewing thingy. |
| Liam | Oh ok so it wasn't... [everyone talking over each other] |
| Cara | ..My Aunty continued that and she's still like sewing, making couches and that. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Antoine | Oh ok, is that here in Australia or..? |
| Cara | Yeah |
| Antoine | Oh, OK so yeah, so she's involved in that trade over here now, as well. Is that what your mum was doing when she arrived here, like she was doing that sort of work? Or after she arrived and finished school, or..? |
| Cara | I think when she came here she just focused on study. I think she might've had a job [questioning intonation], but she didn't really talk about it. |

As Cara concludes here, although her mother's need to work upon arrival in Australia is something she can recognise, it is not a story that can be retold in more detail. Her mother had not gone beyond suggesting that it is an experience she would not wish for her daughter. There are several instances across the CLS groups where students indicate that they do not have a full understanding of their parents' experiences. Liam, for example, precedes his story of his father's hard work – told earlier – by telling the group that his parents "didn't talk about it too much". Meanwhile, we can also recall the divergence between Darien's stories of his parents' successful migration and settlement, with those of his mother who fills in the trajectory with several experiences of institutional and social discrimination, and the 'downgrade' migration can necessitate. Chess also establishes an unwillingness to story:

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|---|---|
| Chess | I asked my father once, and he lied to me [students laugh]. So I don't know the truth. |
| Antoine | Oh ok, so he didn't really want to sort of talk about it? |

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|---|---|
| Chess | Nah |
| Antoine | Sometimes that happens. |

I responded to Chess with “sometimes that happens” as a way to intimate that not wanting to talk about such experiences is likely not an unusual circumstance. Because there is no definitive reason offered or evident in any of the moments where students did not have thick or complete stories of their parent’s experiences, there is no definitive resolution to them. It is, however, possible that such narrative silences are deliberate and deliberative. Just as the storying of migration experiences can be deployed to shape and encourage children’s ideas about themselves, their place in the world, and their possible futures, silences may be used in the same way to keep them untroubled and unencumbered by the complexities, contradictions, and even trauma that these experiences entail.

## 5.4 Situated identities

The migration stories that participants tell also help to (co-)produce student identities across different social, material, and spatial circumstances. What follows focuses on identities formed through constructions of culture and ethnicity within these different circumstances. The discussions highlight how, like migration stories, ‘everyday’ practices and social life as adolescents further elucidate students’ senses of belonging that establish the conditions from which to aspire. The following sections explore how students’ understandings and experiences of culture are negotiated and mediated through interactions within the various spatial and social contexts they inhabit.

### 5.4.1 ‘They’re completely Australian culture’: Vietnamese CLS

A notable aspect of identity making among participants from the Vietnamese CLS is the divergence between students and Anh’s mother, but so too the ways

students drew themselves into a broader category of Asian identity that flattened the specific social, historic, and cultural contexts of Vietnamese identities. While we will see this used specifically in the context of their schooling experiences in Chapter Seven, students also utilised the supranational identity to demarcate and describe particular places and activities. They recognised the large Vietnamese community in their local area, however the discussions of this urban region in Sydney's south-west included 'Asian Huntersville'[34] as distinct from a wider Huntersville, with 'Asian shops' that they would frequent with their parents.

| | |
|---|---|
| Maia | Yeah every time we go down to the Asian shops they would always, like, stand there for like 10 minutes talking to every person who walks by, so I have like *wait* and you know.. |
| Liam | Only for 10 minutes? Usually my mum comes, goes to Huntersville, or Asian Huntersville, and like, everywhere they walk, they happen to know every second(?) person that walks past. |

'Asian Huntersville' was a space in which their families would meet friends and relatives while shopping and at leisure, providing opportunities for the (re)production of informal and formal networks. Though under the more homogenous Asian category, it was a racialised and ethnicised understanding of space and place that was not evoked by (or potentially available to) students from the other CLSs.

When asked more directly about culture and identity, the Vietnamese CLS students' descriptions seem limited, and there is an uncertainty in how this could be

[34] Suburb name changed

articulated. Some are not very prepared to utilise the category of Vietnamese, “not really” feeling that they are, while others see themselves as Vietnamese-Australian. Representations of ‘Vietnamese’ culture are mostly found within the home, where they draw upon symbolic practices like food and the removal of shoes, while connections with family overseas such as calls and chat are largely done by parents. As touched upon earlier, students’ own connections with any family overseas are not very strong.

Indeed, the apparent lack of connection to Vietnamese culture was something that concerned Anh’s mother who speaks of an array of efforts mobilised to instil a sense of Vietnamese culture as part of broader opportunities for the future, including naming her children Vietnamese names that would be easy to pronounce for English speakers,[35] and speaking Vietnamese and playing Vietnamese music at home and in the car. These were temporal as well as spatialised practices that she hoped would be appreciated through repetition: “I said, ‘Oh, you have to listen to it because later on somehow it gets into your mind, and then you can understand it’”. There was almost a tone of defeat in what she saw as a generational shift, and I ask if her children and their generation felt a ‘tug’ between “the Vietnamese culture of the home and the Australian culture”:

> Ah.. for me I always like to try to keep the culture, but I think when it’s their generation I don't think they'll do it anymore. Only the parents, like my

[35] Ahh, all my four children, they don't have English names. It's, it's a bit I think- um different compared to other families that only have English names. Somehow, my husband and I, we agreed on one thing. Um so I choose something, you know, for easy, for people to pronounce their name. Because I thought, if you have English name and Vietnamese name together, the Vietnamese name never, you know.. they always call you in, in English. So what's the point? What's the point of giving a Vietnamese name? So I, I said to them ‘Oh, you, when you're grown up, you going to school, if you like English name, you can have your English name.’ And maybe they get used to it now. They said ‘Oh, no, it's ok..’ yeah ‘just leave it as it is.’

generation now. But when my kids, when they're grown up with a family as well, when they have children... They're completely Australian culture. Even at home, I always, I always speak Vietnamese with them but they always respond in English, yeah. And among themselves, and even with the parents they always respond in English and when they say in Vietnamese, you couldn't understand. And I said, 'Oh don't speak English at home, speak Vietnamese', and they won't listen.

Anh's parents also interact in similar ways about his enrolment in the CLS:

He's completely different from me. 'Why you sending them to the Vietnamese school? It's not going to help them. They're not going to use it in the future. It's just, just a waste of time.' I said 'No no no no no.' I said 'No no no no no'. And then I just keep sending them.'

While her efforts are about cultural maintenance, and forming a certainty about identity – to 'know who you are' – Anh's mother also recognises the potential social and cultural capital that can be derived from additional language knowledge and cultural understanding. This is something that Liam also raises when discussing identity and the CLS in our focus groups. Although there is a seemingly limited articulation of cultural identification among the students, Liam looks to extend upon what meaning could be derived from his Vietnamese culture by differentiating it with other Australians who are positioned as monocultural and monolingual:

More opportunities, I guess. Because you have – for most Australians though they have one language they can stick to. For Vietnamese, since we speak more than one language, you're able to take up more opportunities. But you're also able to travel to another country and actually be able to speak the language at a decent level.

Despite this, Anh's mother believes that "all of the Vietnamese kids I don't think- I think only maybe 1 out of 10, like coming to do on Saturday doing Vietnamese. And most of them they don't like it". It was a surprise to me given the number of students – several hundred – attending this one campus, among the many other Vietnamese CLSs. That is potentially a lot of students who do not like coming. She associates it with continual use of English even when in class, but is hopeful that they will see a reason for being taught it when they are older.

The sentiment of not enjoying Vietnamese school is more ambiguous among the students in the focus group. As a group they dislike the early starts on a Saturday – a day that is additional to the five already completed in mainstream school – however they do like learning about the culture. Collectively, there is a sense that their interest in learning is dependent on the teacher, what they are learning (and being taught by their teacher), and how this is made relevant to their lives, particularly in between and against other academic priorities that they are expected to attend to.

While limited language use might be circumvented to some degree through participation in the CLS, the discussions appear to indicate a 'loss' of culture from one generation to the next, along an inevitable integration and absorption into becoming 'Australian'. Yet although the students' generation appears less enthusiastic for the cultural practices Anh's mother looks to engage her children, and they do not appear readily able to articulate a strong sense of Vietnamese culture, their recognition of culture is enveloped in a different set of contemporary social and political contexts. The everyday-ness of walking the streets of their suburbs and areas of commerce – Asian Huntersville – and the everyday-ness of schooling as Asian students – for several, in schools being particularly attractive to Asian families – might make a definitional response to what culture means or looks like difficult, but

nonetheless shows how students at once demarcate themselves and are demarcated by their culture and ethnicity differently within different contexts.

### 5.4.2 'Everything is based on our faith': Assyrian CLS

Among Assyrian students, there is a firmer articulation of identity formations through ethnicity, and students recognise specific practices as well as longstanding political circumstances defining their culture. Students identified themselves as Assyrian, however Lionel and Willow debate whether they are 'Assyrian' or 'Assyrian-Australian':

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|---|---|
| Willow | But if you think about it, we're raised on Australian laws, Australian qualities, we do live here, we get our education here, so technically we are Australian, we're citizens but we have our own culture and customs, so we're Australians that are Assyrians if that makes sense. |
| Lionel | I mean just because you live somewhere doesn't mean you're that thing … it doesn't mean that you're one of them, you're just following the rules. |
| … | |
| Willow | I do [feel a connection to Australia] because– I don't know how to explain it, but I mean it's all I've ever known apart from Assyrian, so what else am I? … Because it's home to us, we live here so why aren't we, you know. |
| Lionel | Because our parents aren't that. Just because we speak- |
| Willow | Yeah, but they decided to come here for a better future. So, say Iraq and Australia they're very different, it's safe here, it's |

|  |  |
|---|---|
|  | dangerous there, so they chose this for us because they want us to have a better future. So we should be proud to be Australian. |
| Lionel | We are proud, I am proud that I'm in Australia, but what I'm saying is it doesn’t matter if you speak the language or follow by their rules, it doesn’t mean you’re one of them. |

Lionel shows ambivalence towards the idea of being considered Australian, although he claims pride for being *in* Australia where he can experience comparative safety. The norms, rules, and wider social practices that Willow highlights as being the things that make them different to Assyrians elsewhere – what makes them Assyrian-Australians – are positioned by Lionel as ‘theirs’. He sets boundaries of what counts between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and these play out across different settings that we explore further below: it is Assyrians who go to Assyrian school, who go to his church and bible studies; it is Assyrians who go to the school he would like to attend. It is also important to consider that Lionel’s identification as Assyrian may also be shaped by the ways ethnic affiliations are (re)produced within his mainstream school among peers, and their interaction with the broader social settings and high cultural diversity of South Western Sydney. In contrast, Willow recognises identities through shared practice, where even though she shares in her diaspora’s practices, she also participates in ‘Australian’ ones that would also differentiate her from other Assyrians in other places and conditions.

In describing Assyrian culture, I receive responses that heavily centre religion as a defining aspect, and though this allows for an exploration of how lives are lived guided by culturally specific Christian principles, morals and norms, religion is also deployed in different ways to create different boundaries with the other whilst reaffirming shared community aspirations that are embedded in the Assyrian

diaspora's politics of recognition. On top of 'Christian Aussies' not being as strict as them, Australians more broadly are also seen to lack meaningful culture and customs in the way they celebrate important ceremonies and rituals like weddings, where there is only "like dance/song/radio/DJ stuff like that". Apart from the celebration, marriage also carries family hopes that the students will eventually marry within the culture. It appears to be a messy and contradictory expectation, because the students mention family who are not married to Assyrians, and Lionel says that neither his father nor his father's siblings married Assyrians. While the three students are expected to so as part of the hopes to sustain the ethnic community, it may possibly be one borne in hope rather than dictate.

While Willow explains that Assyrians share customs in this space with other cultures that also "makes us Middle Eastern", Lionel quickly seeks to reaffirm that inevitably, "everything is based on our faith". In this way, faith does not just define them as different to other Australians, but it is also seen and used by students to define themselves as different to additional others. In our first meeting, Aramina describes how the linguistic similarity to Syrian often confuses people – "no we're *Assyrian*" – and other students also explain that they are sometimes mistaken for being Muslim. This works to avoid misrepresentation, but is also caught up in the diaspora's statelessness and the shared personal experiences of persecution as a Christian minority that were reaffirmed through family migration stories. It also appears to be entangled in a broader politics concerning religious minorities and persecution both in Australia and internationally. Through these stories, we see how students' own aspirations are drawn into and adopt diasporic aspirations, as Aramina describes:

> I do a lot of public speaking about the Assyrian issue, so spoken at Parliament House in front of like Tony Abbott, like I do- I love public speaking, so that's what I do to like help.
>
> ...
>
> God put me in this culture for a reason, and I feel like my reason in this culture, I do a lot of activism work and I feel like that's the reason that God put me in this position. So I feel blessed that I was born into this culture because he's put the responsibility on my shoulders to help with my cultural difficulties.

While we will see Aramina display a responsibilised subjectivity that defines her as a highly aspirational student in future chapters, we see here that she also shares aspirations for Assyrian recognition and causes. These too are caught up in an imperative to work on the self as a way to better work for the advancement of Assyrians in the Middle East and the wider diaspora. Similarly, Lionel locates the reasons for taking up a position on his school's student representative council as a way that 'Jesus uses him as a worker', and this reflects the moral dimensions of helping people that have gradually drawn him towards a change in aspirations that evolve in Chapter Six.

It is within this context of diaspora that we discuss the students' CLS, appears to be one that helps reaffirm the broader community and diasporic aspirations, and students all appreciate what they learn in this space. There are degrees of enthusiasm however. Miriam explains that she does not feel forced to attend by parents, but rather enjoys "coming here because you know, I learn about my background and like my culture.." while Lionel adds that "I'm the one, I'm the one that told my grandparents I wanted to go to Assyrian school", while his grandmother confirms his

eagerness, describing the ritualised early morning preparation at home every Saturday, so that he can “go there, (and) come good”. It is also notable that both Lionel and his Grandparents refer to his mainstream school as ‘English school’ in comparison with ‘Assyrian school’. It suggests that they may see both sites as broadly similar in importance to one another in terms education and learning.

Although, Willow also enjoys what she learns in her class, in the last year she indicates that she has been coming more to satisfy her parents, and in contrast with Lionel, the school’s temporal location as a ‘Saturday school’ comes to bare: “they don’t force me, but they really pressure me into studying all the time, I never have time for myself and that’s due to Assyrian school”. She and the others go on discussing the different teachers they have and have had, and the different opinions they have of them, and within this Willow points to one example of a well-liked teacher:

> We had a teacher.. and he’s the absolute best, so I think every second week he’d do history and then the next week he’d do the language learning. So I learned a lot from that, but we only had him for a year because I think he had a full-time job and he got married and all that. Anyways, it was one of the best years of my life here, he was really fun, we’d do projects at home and bring them in, so I miss that.

As the conversations continued, the students demonstrated their receptiveness to engaging, empathetic teachers who were able to demonstrate the relevance of what they were teaching. Yet the last passage from Willow above also serves to reinforce the precarity and ‘in-betweenness’ of the role of teachers within these academic spaces. Because of the limited amount of teaching and

reimbursement, such roles are very often secondary to other occupational priorities, particularly among those who hold academic qualifications.

### 5.4.3 'Everyone has the same experiences and that creates bonds': Persian CLS

Unlike other students participating, Darien and Hanaa were both born overseas, in Iran, before migrating to Australia as young children. While leaving Iran was not of their choosing, migration and the experiences of Iran prior nonetheless situate the construction of cultural and ethnic identities for both of them. Both they and Darien's mother discuss having made regular visits 'back' to Iran – a word I also use in referring to my family visiting Malta – which were stymied by political tensions at the time of our first meeting. For both participants, this pause in visits appeared to be extended and seemingly perpetual, however before our third meeting, tensions appeared to ease to a point which had allowed them to visit. In between visits, they are in constant contact with family in Iran, particularly with grandparents, and cousins with whom they grew up. Darien explains how relationships with extended family are maintained and developed through different technologies:

> So my family basically is two generations. One the older people and one the young people. So the older people I contact through my mother. She calls a lot of them and I talk to them. But the young people all my dozens of cousins I have direct contact with them and speak to them pretty regularly myself.

Both Darien and Hanaa discuss how outside of CLS, some of their social life is tied into the social activities of the Persian community. They discuss broader social activities and pastimes that extend their social networks into non-culturally aligned spaces, however cultural events play an important role in allowing them to maintain

relationships with their circles of friends and family friends with whom they participate in this social side:

| | |
|---|---|
| Darien | We do go to a lot of celebrations and events with friends. Like certain celebrations and festivals they have here and elsewhere where me and my mum and brother go, and we saw a couple of concerts from Persian singers that me and my mum and friends went – that's just about it. |
| Hanaa | Yeah my friend, my best friend that lives next door we actually go out together a lot but there is just us two or both families. It's mostly like parties and like restaurants, concerts – we have been to every Persian singer's concert. |

Through these activities, the students also notice that the community appears to be 'young', with Hanaa mentioning that people attending concerts are usually in their twenties, while Darien provides a link between the youthfulness of the community and people's formation of belonging through participation in it:

> Yeah everyone's really involved because it's a community. Everyone has the same experiences and that creates bonds within people. Yeah they're [the Persian community] really young, there's a lot of young Persians and that's good.

Darien's mother also frames the demographic formation as a younger one but constructs an urban and social class divide between Iranians in Sydney, with early working-class migrants living in Western Sydney and recent professional and tertiary education migrants residing "around Hornsby, North Shore". These differences, she posits, go some way to explain why Iranians are "getting more connected and more established like a community", where it is not so much because of increasing

numbers but the social capital and education brought with more recent migrants: they are not only more comfortable with representations of their Persian culture than older migrants and their families, but they are also more comfortable with adapting to a 'new' culture within Australia.

Yet despite this adaptability, Iranians – as Darien's mother has already suggested – are not averse to experiencing discrimination. Darien's mother mentions incidents for her younger son at school, where other children have called him a terrorist, sweeping them into racialised claims of who belongs after 9/11. Meanwhile, Hanaa describes comments indicating "you have to have blonde hair and blue eyes to be Australian". Again, the postulation of who belongs as Australian arises, this time codified through gendered appearance. Hanaa negotiates between "two lives" she says, particularly in the experiences of increasing observance of dress codes for women in Iran, and the complications of race and who fits as a 'real Australian' (Ali & Sonn, 2010).

Darien's mother uses such experiences to give justification for her wishes to teach her children about their background, notably through the Persian CLS. Developing this knowledge is not simply about knowing about the past, but also about understanding one's positionality within the present. Darien's mother describes a negative affective orientation that may develop around their identities from not knowing and understanding:

> ...and you know Antoine, one of my concerns always was that because of the bad image in the media about Iran, if they don't feel good about their own connections with their relatives, then they will feel bad about being Iranian, that's what I wanted them to distinct between Iranian government and what's happening in media for the government and in political world compared to the

> family world and your origin, so no, they're okay and they know, we talk about it.

Both Darien and Hanaa indicate they enjoy attending CLS lessons and learning about the culture and language. They recognise an importance in learning about cultural aspects as opposed to just language, however as Hanaa contends, "how weird would it be if you go to Iran and you're just like standing there not knowing how to speak your own language". These interests are associated with their appreciation of cultural events and practices that the Persian community gathers around in Sydney. In this way, learning about the special days and celebrations from Iran is not a lesson in the abstract, taught in the classroom as a practiced demonstration of historical, traditional, or geographically distant occasions. Rather, it helps strengthen the Persian diaspora community, upholding the connection within community and maintaining cultural practices as a lived experience.

Like other CLSs, however, the transitory nature of students is also potentially present here. At the time of our last meeting, Darien is considering stopping, feeling that he reached the limit of what he can learn through the classes. It is not a boredom with the learning of language and culture, but rather with the lack of challenge in the content. He has already begun learning at home independently through texts he has chosen, and he speaks "full Persian" at home. It would appear that the navigational capacities his mother has sought to instil with support of the CLS have been established.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The storying and re-storying of movement, migration, and resettlement explored throughout this chapter highlight the multiplicity of experiences as well as the multiplicity of means to which they can be put to use. At one level, these stories

tell of the historical circumstances in which students' families made their way to Australia. Often, they are embodied with feelings of loss that give way to joy and relief as they are constructed around notions of escape from conflict and the hardships that such conditions produce. Here, participants position their families' relocation to Australia as an opportunity to re-establish and build home and family unencumbered, however the affective orientations that reflect happiness and hope are interspersed with complications and frustrations with the ambivalence of broader structures in their new settings. Nonetheless, several accounts indicate that regardless of the difficulties experienced in resettlement, they perceived their new settings in anticipation of what could be (MacLeod, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009), based largely on their interpretations and comparisons with previous experiences in their former home country.

While it is in these contexts that we can begin to notice differences between the stories told by the parents involved and their children, it is also where other important aspects of the stories emerge. The migration stories told here show how such storying of the past is not just recollection and remembering, not just about the past. Stories do things, and they are told – and retold – to point the recipient towards certain ends. In these experiences, participants' stories worked at one level to reflect on the social and material conditions of families prior to migration, and their mediation through the historical socio-political and economic contexts in Australia at the time of their arrival. Alongside this, the stories also demonstrate the role of the past as an archive (Appadurai, 2003), a device to be deliberatively scoured and kept alive to prompt present action, and orient these actions towards the future.

Moving from migration and settlement, and into the contemporary cultural contexts of students' lives, the discussions explored the situatedness of identities. The analysis highlights how, like migration narratives, there is divergence in the

ways students' identities and senses of belonging are constructed. These develop in light of the various social, spatial, and temporal conditions of the diasporas, but there are also several important Australian and international political contexts through which such identities are also constituted. It is important here to recognise that the cultural and ethnicised identity formations that students discuss do not necessarily hold a causative relationship with the aspirations we will see emerging in the following chapters. Such a reading would reinforce an essentialist interpretation of culture that we have already recognised participants undertaking and will undertake further as the narratives continue. Rather, they help shape the spatial practices (de Certeau, 1984) and senses of belonging (Ahmed, 1999; Brah, 1996) that become part of the groundwork for imagining futures. Within this space, the role of the CLS also emerges. Students' receptiveness to their attendance appears connected to the relevance of their learning to their present identities and social settings. This highlights how such sites of learning can be simultaneously about the maintenance of culture but also about developing students' cultural capacities (Nordstrom, 2016, 2022; Tsolidis & Kostogriz, 2008). Yet these sites find themselves perpetually in a state of in-betweenness, whether it be in the competing demands students face from their mainstream schooling, extracurricular activities or social lives, or the teachers unable to stay on.

As my exploration of students' stories moves onto their own aspirations in the following chapter, these elements call attention to the ways migration stories form a foundational basis upon which students' navigational capacities are developed. As will emerge through the rest of the study, it is not in the type of aspirations students hold, but in the purpose for holding aspirations and in the purpose of efforts to achieve them that migration narratives do their work. Although not without quibbles and contradictions, participating students were clearly receptive to the stories told to

them by parents and family, even in their potential incompleteness, and in their own retelling they establish their understanding of the social, cultural, and quasi-moral practices that their families undertook to build qualitatively and materially better lives for them, and therefore the sort of practices they too could draw upon. In this way, family migration stories work to produce and reaffirm collective aspirations for a ‘good’ or ‘better’ life that can be cast beyond a single generation. Together with the divergent social and material resources that are also established through storying, we may therefore begin to see how students piece together their pathways towards their future selves.

# Chapter Six – Navigational Capacities

## 6.1 Introduction

As the migration narratives took shape, they demonstrated the multi-layered ways stories were told, remade, and utilised by the participants. Not only did these stories recount the historical experiences of movement, and the 'starting over' in new spatio-cultural and material circumstances, but they also established the use of such experiences as forms of instruction for children to understand their own circumstances and give meaning to endeavours – of their own and their family. For many then, the construction of such narratives works to instil hopes for the future. It is from this point that this chapter commences to explore students' aspirations, and the influences and processes students recognise and pursue in looking to attain them. Reflective of a conceptual understanding attentive to the temporal and spatial dimensions of aspiration, I also consider their development over time, and their connections to the broader social and cultural contexts in which students are situated.

While supporting the research puzzle, the findings presented in this chapter pay particular attention to its first question by considering how students' aspirations develop as a *navigational* and *cultural* capacity "in the thick of social life" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67). Building upon these concepts of aspiration, this chapter first expands on students' early articulations of their hopes and interests for the future, and then examines the differentiated navigational capacities students hold to mark out their way towards their aspirations. Here, we begin to see further the influence of a range of social and material factors that began to emerge out of participant migration stories in Chapter Five, and this is reinforced in many ways by the discussions had in our focus groups about the students' elective subject choices

for Year 9. While the importance of Stage 5 – Years 9 and 10 – in its connection to future work appears to have diminished as students have increasingly (been) expected to complete studies beyond Year 12, both the choice-making process of Year 9 electives and the experiences had undertaking them appear to have consequential and different influences in their interactions with students' evolving sense of the future.

## 6.2 What do I want to do or be?

Initial conversations on aspirations provided glimpses into how students' visions of future selves were mediated by experiences of social, economic, and cultural difference. Students first had the opportunity to put pen to paper in the artefact book where I provided the prompt *'Aspirations - what do I want to do or be when I'm older'*. I encouraged students to think broadly about what aspirations could mean for them to open possibilities about imagining their future selves. The early responses that followed reflected this, and students highlighted a range of hopes, interests, and desires, including aspirations for doing well in school, post-school study, work, travel, and family. As these progressed into extended conversations and narrative building, a focus on study and career aspirations developed, but these nonetheless demonstrated complexity and heterogeneity that calls into question simplistic notions about 'high' versus 'low' aspirations (Bok, 2010).

In the context of the aspirations raising agenda and subsequent policies developed in Australia, what is notable from these conversations is an almost universal aspiration to do well at school – with success indicated through high HSC marks – to go to university, or to have a career in a field that would require tertiary education. In the couple of instances where students were considering careers that likely did not require university qualifications – or did not yet have any clear

aspirations – high expectations for university were still evident in some: parents expected or strongly aspired for their child to go to university, while many students envisaged university as part of a somewhat natural, almost inevitable future path.

In our first meetings, some students spoke about holding a range of possible post-school career-oriented aspirations, while others spoke about specific ones with greater prominence or certainty. Students drew upon relevant interests and various familial, network and social influences:

| | |
|---|---|
| Hanaa | Well I have three things down. I've been wanting to be an on-road police for like three years now, but my parents like they support me but they want me to become a doctor. So like I tried to give reasons why I want to be in police, and it's just like I really like helping people. Like at school when we have like open days and days that we have to donate or help people… And I want to be a professional guitarist and professional basketball and gymnast. |

…

| | |
|---|---|
| Willow | I aspire to be a rapper, not just because I want to be *cool* and like, clout, that's the term. It's because I express my feelings through music and I just like music in general and I like rap, and I'm good at it too. Um, yeah.. If, but like if rapping doesn't work out for me which it will, but *if* it doesn't, I am going to become a psychiatrist because I like helping people. |

…

| | |
|---|---|
| Anh | I want to become an electrician like my dad. I want to go to Spain, Barcelona. I want to achieve, like 90% in the HSC. Um, I think that's all. |

...

| | |
|---|---|
| Maia | And I would like to be an architect when I'm older. Partly because my dad's an engineer, so like, yeah I kinda want to do that kind of work. |

...

| | |
|---|---|
| Chess | Um, my future careers would be lawyer, police, banker, traveller. |
| Antoine | Ok, yep. And can I ask what influenced those sort of ideas or, you know, your goals around those? |
| Chess | Lawyer I saw from a show [laughs]. Police, I don't know, I just- I remember I used to be interested in the police force or something. But yeah.. Banker. I don't know, mum said to earn more money. Traveller, I like to go around and talk to local people and all.. yeah. |

Here we can see how several students talk about some of the various aspirations they hold, introducing the sorts of futures they envision for themselves. Given the introductory nature of our discussions at this point, it would be presumptive to ascribe definite difference between ‘likely’ or ‘attainable’ aspirations and ‘dream’ or ‘idealisation’ as some aspirations literature attempts to differentiate or define. Even where students were solely or primarily focused on one career or field aspiration, they nonetheless also imagined other aspects of their future selves and the possible interests that they could entertain or achieve. Regardless, rather than a

lack of aspiration students demonstrated that their futures were open to a range of possibilities, despite diverse social, economic, and cultural experiences. As I shall examine in this and the following chapter, the unfolding of these stories demonstrates students' understanding of themselves as learners and their developing ideas about adulthood within the diverse cultural and political contexts they are at once positioned and position themselves.

Discussing a range of possible career pathways above, Chess presents what appears to be a more tentative or exploratory position at this stage, a consideration underpinned by her response of "No, not really" when I ask her if she has considered any possibility of combining any of these jobs – like travel with one of the other possibilities. It is further reinforced by her laughter when she divulges that wanting to become lawyer comes from a television show. This reaction reveals a certain self-consciousness with the notion that she should draw upon such media for her aspirations and is repeated in another conversation in our second focus group, where she expands on her interest in policing: "I don't know, I just like – like, I watch Brooklyn 99 [laughing] - And it's really good too, like police and all. That's why I'd like to become a police", to which I respond, "If a police department could be like Brooklyn 99, I think I'd be there too [laughter]". Chess has family experience of university and diverse occupations through both her parents,[36] and as will be explored across the findings, such family experiences play an important and nuanced role in informing adolescents of what is possible. With such basis for imagining the future, Chess also draws in other, popular culture sources to envisage possibility in a space unrelated to family experience. Yet her self-consciousness in this process

[36] Her father has undertaken post-graduate studies and works in IT, and her mother has also studied at university and owns a salon.

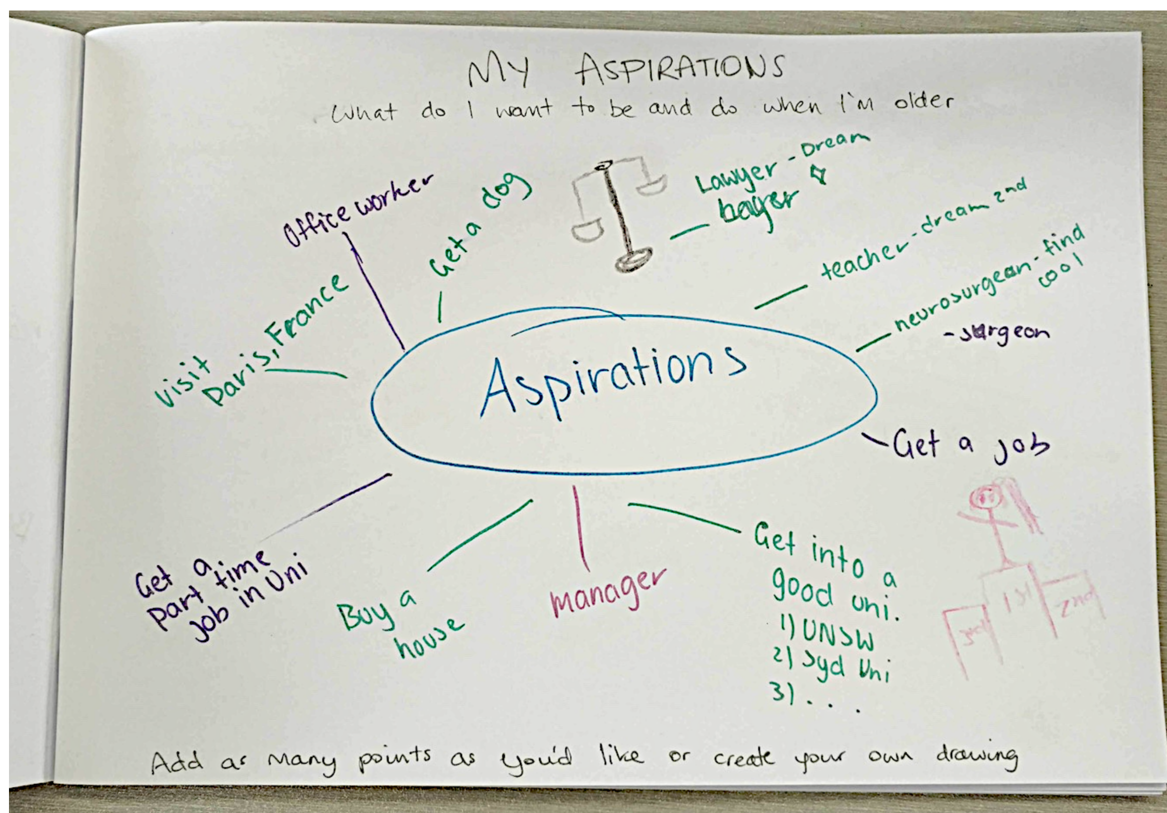
conveys an affective expression of uncertainty in its legitimacy which is also shared with her close friend Cara.

Cara also holds a range of aspirations, both with regards to post-school study and work, as well as wider facets of future life, as can be seen in her artefact book mind-map in Figure 1. In utilising the mind-map to present her aspirations – which was one of the possible ways I put forward to students – Cara suggests an atemporality to their possible attainment. This is not to propose that she has not considered how one aspiration, like university, may sequence to or have consequence for another. Rather, it emphasises how some of these aspirations also sit tentatively and experimentally, almost as abstractions of imagined futures.

There are numerous objects of desire awaiting future attainment that are presented as not necessarily bound by the attainment of other specific goals, such as

**Figure 1**

*Cara's aspirations mind-map*



travel, pets, and home ownership. Tertiary studies are also envisaged, although it is noteworthy that this is presented as “getting into a good uni” which is presented through the prism of public status and prestige of Sydney’s major, Group of Eight institutions. The several occupations listed are considered as dreams and as intrinsically interesting (finding neurosurgery ‘cool’), while others appear to be those which are not constituted with such inherent qualities through the generalised way they are framed – office worker; manager – but will nonetheless ensure a good life.

In our conversations Cara reveals that, like Chess, one possible future career has been influenced by its representations in popular culture, with her interest in being a (neuro)surgeon also influenced by television. Yet the narrative development that takes place across the following passages divulges how aspirations, to reiterate Appadurai (2004), “are never simply individual … [but] always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life” (p. 67):

| | |
|---|---|
| Cara | So, my top what I want to do in the future as a career is to become a lawyer. Um there are more, such as like teachers… I wanted to be a neurosurgeon [Chess laughs], but someone! [looks at Chess] |
| Chess | Look that way! |
| Cara | So I decided to become a general surgeon, and that was influenced by a drama I watched [Chess & Cara, among others, laugh], and I thought like, you know, that doing the process of surgery was pretty cool. |

The shared reactions through this passage highlight the important mobilising work that friendships can perform. Cara’s desire to be a neurosurgeon is evidently something that had been raised previously with Chess, and possibly other friends,

but Chess has laughed this off both here and elsewhere, as something not for the likes of them. Cara has therefore readjusted this aspiration to a 'general surgeon', which she appears to consider more realistic. Yet their reactions again reinforce a shared feeling that popular culture is not the normatively acceptable way to be influenced towards careers.

Maia also shares that the topic of careers aspirations is something occasionally discussed with friends, although she has not, at least yet, readily broached the topic with her parents:

> Um, my friends … sometimes, they're like 'Oaw, Maia what do you want to be when you grow up?' and like, we always like talk about that. To my parents, like, not as much, they're always like 'if you want to have like your future job, you have to try your hardest', but like they've never really known what I wanted to be, so..

Whether this is because of hesitancy, embarrassment, or concern with how her aspirations might be received at this time is not clear, but I ask if it is a case of them wanting her to "do well at school and whatever you want to do you'll be able to achieve it" to which she agrees. Nevertheless, even if parents have not been immediately called upon for advice, or have not been seen as being heavily involved, they can often play a no less significant role through what students might think of as quick, diffuse, and incidental interventions that shape their aspirations and ideas about the future. As Cara continues her aspiration-making experience, I ask about what has influenced her now-number one career aspiration, that of becoming a lawyer:

| | |
|---|---|
| Antoine | And as you were talking about you know 'my ideal job', going into law- was that influenced by anything in particular? Have |

| | |
|---|---|
| | you had suggestions from friends or family that, you know, that's something that you might think of or was something that you saw? |
| Cara | I just really felt like law, like the law and the study of law really interesting. You know what, my parents laughed at me. They told me like- when I told them what my second option was a teacher and they were like, oh yeah that's more realistic [laughter]. |
| Antoine | Is that right? Oh OK so yeah, so there's some- is it if you want to pursue law, yeah go ahead but this is something that's more, you know, that might work better in the long run? Or, not work better, but you probably are more likely to find... |
| Cara | Yeah I think they said that as a joke, like to laugh at me, but then like, they were like you can become whatever you want. You just have to study hard and not be like you are now [Chess laughs]. |
| Antoine | Oh ok, so yes so they're reminding you that there is a need to really push ahead- like if you do wanna do law, there's going to be a lot of work that goes in on it isn't there, so... And have you thought about that like when you were saying, like you mentioned finding a good University, have you thought about that or- and thought about what makes a good University? |
| Cara | Um.... like my Dad, I asked him what the top universities in Australia were. He was like UNSW and Sydney University. But then he was like choose one that it make- it's good in what you |

> want to become, not just like because... He said like UNSW was good for engineering, I don't really want to become an engineer...

Across both career aspirations and reflective questions on university, Cara's parents appear to intercede decisively to reshape her ideas of the possible. Just as when she disclosed her aspiration to become a neurosurgeon to friends, her parents also have given a dismissive reaction to flirtations with law. Despite finding the law interesting, Cara's parents quickly establish that teaching would be something considerably more achievable – *realistic*. Yet while neurosurgery may not be realistic to Cara and Chess through a shared sense of what is possible, according to Cara, her parents position her more individualistically as not yet or currently embodying the academic qualities of a student that would be able to attain such lofty aspirations. That is, opportunities to become whatever one wants are available, but one must work hard and show the appropriate aptitudes and dispositions towards school and study (explored further in Chapter Seven). Cara's discussion of universities also exemplifies a similar interventionism. Asking about what universities are 'good' universities, Cara's father tells her of universities in Sydney that are considered as some of the best, and we can see this reflected in Cara's listing within her mind-map above. He nonetheless goes beyond this, taking the question as an opportunity to expand understanding. Likely using his own experiences of tertiary education, he helps Cara understand how to plan and strategically think about university options in ways that will best support her career choices, rather than on prestige and status. Although Cara has listed UNSW and University of Sydney as numbers one and two on her 'good uni' list, she demonstrates the influence of her father's knowledge, by elaborating that UNSW may not be her top priority because she is not interested in engineering.

## 6.3 Reading the map: using navigational capacities

As Cara's narrative indicates, and as my conversations with students progressed, what became readily apparent were the differences in the ways students formed and talked about their aspirations and interests. Providing insight into how students articulated and understood possible futures, narratives began to reveal differentiated navigational capacities, thus highlighting several important limitations in the policy framing of aspirations raising. The following conversations from the Assyrian CLS provide one such example:

| | |
|---|---|
| Lionel | I want to get good grades in school. And I want to HSC. And what I want to do, be, do is be a gamer and a famous soccer player like my idol Lionel Messi. ... But sir even though I want to be a soccer player I'm not gonna- I'm still going to go to university because you don't, never know, I could fail, and then, what do you have to fall back on? Nothing. If you've got an education, it picks you up. |
| ... | |
| Aramina | Ok so, um, I've wanted to be the same thing since I was three, which is really weird. Um, I've always been somebody that, like has a very, like secure dreams and aspirations, like things that like I know how to achieve. Um, well, I really love um well since I was three I wanted to study medicine and then specialise and become a paediatrician, and I figured that out because like I love everything to do medicine. I love biology, I love chemistry, and then I love kids, and so I just put two and two together and then like from now, like our school it's a bit like focused, and so from |

| | |
|---|---|
| | now girls are looking at like what unis they're going to try to get into and everything, and link my dream uni for medicine because I know so many people who have gone there is Sydney, so I really want to go to Sydney Uni. And um, I've started [chuckles a little as she talks] thinking about my HSC subjects. It sounds really planny, but I'm a very like, planny person, like I plan like ten steps ahead... |
| Antoine | You agree, Willow, that she's right there..? |
| Willow | Yep, aww... She's already chosen her formal dress |
| Aramina | Yeah, I've planned everything |
| Lionel | What's a paediatrician? |
| Aramina | It's a children's doctor |
| Lionel | Oh.. |
| Aramina | Anyway, so I want to do 3 unit maths, 4 unit history, 4 unit English, chemistry, and music if I need extra subjects. And, um, beside career goals, my other goals for the future is like I want to go straight to uni after I finish school, like I don't want to take a gap year because I'm a year younger for my year anyway so I just want to get rid of uni as soon as possible and start my life really early on, cos then I'll have like 2 years ahead of like most people which I think is pretty good. And then, I really want to have a family, like I really want kids and, like family means a lot to me so |

| | |
|---|---|
| Antoine | And Miriam you were nodding when Aramina was talking about some of the subjects; were you- are they some of the similar ones- |
| Miriam | Oh yeah, no I was confused, like, 'how did she know all this stuff already'? |
| Antoine | Oh I see, yeah |
| Aramina | Our school's very like 'choose electives that will help you in the HSC' so like 99% of my year knows their HSC subjects. |

As I introduce in Chapter Three, Appadurai (2004) contends that rather than being a special domain of the privileged, the capacity to aspire is held across all strata of society. Yet because aspirations are shaped by various social, cultural, and economic contexts and experiences, the strength of this capacity is unevenly distributed so that those who come from higher SES are more likely "to be conscious of the links between the more and less immediate objects of aspiration" (p. 68). Building upon the social positionalities emerging from earlier migration narratives, in the above discussions we can see how the conversations play out to relationally position students as different from one another. Aramina establishes herself as, almost to a fault, a 'planny person' who has not only defined her aspirations but has already strategised a detailed path to attainment. There is a shared understanding of this among the group, and students appear to internalise it as the repertoire of academic skills that are the result of Aramina's personal dispositions and attributes. Yet the effects of this understanding are felt differently across participants. Although perhaps unintentional, the confidence and clarity in her knowing leaves in its wake three students who either experience not knowing where to begin – Lionel; resigned

acceptance – Willow; or a sense of inadequacy - Miriam. Aramina meanwhile also exhibits that her values are in accord with those of her school.

Between the two passages, we can also see a marked difference in not only the type of post-school aspirations of both main protagonists - Lionel and Aramina - but also in how they recognise the importance of post-school study for future opportunities. Though Lionel has an at times central interest and belief in his hopes of 'making it' as a footballer, he nonetheless concurrently holds hopes to do well at school and progress with tertiary studies. A cursory reading of stated aspirations may indicate that Lionel shares with Aramina and other students the same 'high' aspirations for university. We could even conclude that Bradley-inspired policy initiatives established in the preceding decade may be having their intended effect in guiding students towards 'appropriate' aspirations. Certainly, the discussion here reflects how all participants, regardless of holding a specific occupational aspiration, associated having a good education with the ability of getting the type of good job that one desired. Moving beyond this reading however, and the often "limited sociological imagination that informs government policy" (Gale, 2015, p. 258) we can see greater complexity and differentiation in students' responses. Lionel's academic aspirations, for example, are spoken of in general terms, and there is a particular focus on avoiding future hardship. This is also evident in his argument that certification is an essential requirement for work opportunities:

> but in the real world after school, it's- I need to find a job and what do jobs look for? They look for experience. 'What have you done?' 'Oh, I've I've done my high school education'. 'Ok', and- it's like, it's like if you were a boss, would you rather hire someone that hasn't got a Higher School Certificate or someone that does?

At one level, Lionel's early justifications may appear to be a very legitimate response to education policies that have increased credentialism and contemporary societal expectations that have arisen around them, reflecting what Connell (2003) refers to as "the new minimum" (p. 248). Indeed, the belief in meritocratic achievement and the need to invest in oneself through study is universally shared across participants. Yet, the classed disparities between students can be read if not so much in the type of aspiration, but in their construction: whereas Lionel talks about needing to complete the HSC and university as a reality of contemporary life, to "have something to fall back on" should his aspirations for football not eventuate, Aramina demonstrates an expansive understanding of her occupational aspirations and the likely academic pathways to attaining them. She is not alone in holding strongly considered aspirations, nor in aligning school subject electives with her desired career, however, her storying of these reflects the middle-class norms that permeate through her upbringing.

### 6.3.1 The temporal emergence of 'new' aspirations

Initially, alongside his deep interests for football and the instrumental centrality of credentials, what was striking about Lionel's discussions about his aspirations was what he did not disclose but were raised by his grandparents:

| | |
|---|---|
| Grandfather | Yeah he want to finish school like, to be something good, better like a doctor or anything yeah. |
| Grandmother | Like teacher for school, Assyrian school he say 'I want to be teacher to Assyrian school'. |

…

| | |
|---|---|
| Antoine | And has Lionel talked about what he would like to do in the future? You mentioned he'd like to teach Assyrian as well when he grows up? |
| Grandmother | Ah he say to me I want to go to... I wanna do, something like.. I dunno. He say have little bit more somebody look after me. I wanna go higher and higher, and lawyer or something like that, and I say 'Good'. I love to do something good. I don't know. |
| Antoine | And so he's, like he's talking about doing for other people as well |
| Grandmother | Yes, yes. No not for himself. And doctors, if somebody's sick, he want to look after somebody sick and give him something to coming good, and like, like this thing... Before, he was young [seven years], he say to me, 'Mum I want to come a big priest'. I say 'big priest he can't marry [Grandfather: laughs] You want to not married?' he say 'No, I'm not like to marry'. Now I say to him you want to come a big priest? He say to me 'No.' I say 'look!', now he say no. [Antoine: laughs] Before he say to me I want to come a big priest.. |
| Grandfather: | Yeah |
| Grandmother | ..yeah. [laughing] Now he changed. He wants the family, he wants to get married [laughing] |

Lionel's aspirations for priesthood could be understood through his family's involvement in the Assyrian community's church, and the central role this has played in identity formation. His grandparents give insight into how changing images of future selves over time through childhood and early adolescence can lead to dropping

particular aspirations that (can) no longer 'fit', and we can understand why Lionel would not have raised it in our focus group given that this was something he had explored and already closed off some time ago.

Within this same conversation however, other occupational aspirations have been discussed that Lionel had not raised in our focus group, raising important conceptual and methodological interests about what is said and left unsaid in the narrative process. Especially after this first stage of the focus groups, just as I can begin to understand the social class positionality Lionel experiences and the navigational capacities he possesses, the narrative he has begun to construct leaves open several uncertainties about the aspirations he may be considering.

Among these, I considered whether becoming an Assyrian teacher, a lawyer, or a doctor are the type of aspirations he felt able to tell his grandparents but does not wish to disclose in the focus group. Whether because it is a public forum, or because it is a group of peers (where he is the only male student), the level of uncertainty he may have held about these potential roles – particularly in contrast with Aramina's clarity – may have inhibited their articulation. In this light, it is possible that he had considered them, but less importantly so when compared with his aspirations for football. At the same time, such a focus group setting may have helped to establish his interests in affirming his aspirations for professional football, itself reflective of the centrality football has played in forming his friendship networks at school. The focus group may have thus been a site to perform certain forms of adolescence and masculinities. His grandparents themselves mention that it is an important social activity in his life; something his grandfather has taken him to watch. "He likes soccer too much," his grandmother says, while his grandfather explains that "He plays soccer in the school and in the park".

On the other hand, I also considered whether his grandparents did not mention football aspirations because they understood it as something more of a fantasy, an idealisation that is performed and enjoyed with his friends. In a similar way, it may have also been one aspiration, though deeply held, that he did not tell them because they would not accept or appreciate. There was also the possibility that his grandparents presented to me the sort of 'high' career aspirations they felt would be best to highlight. This does not mean that these have never arisen in conversations between Lionel and his grandparents, but rather might reflect a choice in emphasis within the context of an interview that was interested in learning about their child's schooling and social experiences, and his hopes for the future.

While I was prompted to reflect on the divergence between the stories told by parents and child, for Lionel the transition through Years 8 and 9 appeared to be a period of learning to read the map. Between our first and second focus groups, Lionel's realism about the need to go to university had begun to germinate into a particular occupational aspiration. Though professional football was still the number one priority and an interest in game was also still present, Lionel raised teaching as a possible future occupation:

| | |
|---|---|
| Antoine | And what interests you about teaching if I can ask too? |
| Lionel | I like to teach people things, I taught this Year 4 kid algebra one time. |
| Antoine | So it's something that you find enjoyable? |
| Lionel | Fun. I'd like to become a teacher so I can be teaching them. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Antoine | So is that something that's more recent or is it something that you've thought about a bit before but it's really coming more strongly now? |
| Lionel | It's coming because I'm like, what am I going to do at Uni? And I thought teaching, because I like to teach people and I'm good at maths so. |

As the conversation indicates, although this aspiration remains wedded to his need of a good education to ensure a better future for himself, Lionel has taken into consideration intrinsic interests and values to give life to the idea of becoming a teacher. Within this context, we can also note some of the earlier suggestions his grandparents provide about the types of aspirations Lionel had told them but had not disclosed within the group. There is a conspicuous link between being an Assyrian teacher at the CLS and this aspiration for teaching emerging in our focus group, and this is reinforced by the enjoyment in going to the Assyrian school we have already heard about. His grandparents' construction of his aspirations also intimates not just a reaching for something 'higher' but also an interest in helping others. Lionel's grandmother suggests that he wishes to have the resources to ensure she is looked after, and even their disclosure of his past-future image as a priest, being raised after discussing other 'vocational' occupations, serves to underscore a notion that giving and helping has long permeated his character. Both he and they foreground this as part of their constructions of his identity. Both mention his involvement in his school's student representative council, and while his grandmother mentions how he sprays his aunty's cigarettes with water when she smokes – "He say to my daughter 'You want to die now? This is not nice'" – he regularly highlights circumstances

where he helps friends and teachers. This even takes place where, as a school representative, he positions himself opposite the 'wrong' acts of peers.

### 6.3.2 'Performing a play without a script'

Nonetheless, the discussions we have about this aspiration for teaching show that Lionel's navigational capacities are still emerging. Attending university is like "performing a play without a script" (Bok, 2010, p. 175) for Lionel and his family. Just as Lionel has already emphasised his desire to complete the HSC, his grandparents also mention that he wants to finish school, but conversations do not extend to tertiary pathways – let alone those relevant to the aspirations they mention. Alongside this, there appears to be some dissonance between family knowledges and approaches to education, and institutional expectations about schooling:

| | |
|---|---|
| Grandmother | In other school as well, English one, is all the time say to us, congratulations he's very good boy. |
| Grandfather | Yeah, they say very smart boy. |
| Grandmother | Sometimes, the teacher ring me up, he say, 'Why Lionel not coming to school this week?' I say I take him to somewhere, sorry to not ring you up. He say 'is alright, just he's not ehh sick?' I say 'No', He say 'why- I worry about Lionel, I love him very much.' I say 'thank you very much'. Say to me, 'Say hello to Lionel, I want to see him in school', I say 'ok' [laughs] |

Aligning with earlier conversations, we can see within this passage a desire from Lionel's grandparents for him to be an upstanding person and to do well school so that he could have 'more' than they did. Yet as his grandmother's story about the

conversation with his teacher also indicates, the efforts they undertake to achieve this may sometimes involve routines away from school that are not normatively established as the 'right' approach to parenting schoolchildren (see Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Pimlott-Wilson, 2017). Within this context, the impacts of the intersection between social class cultures, language, and family circumstances on navigational capacities is further reinforced by the juxtaposition between the practices of Lionel's family with those of others.

Ball and Vincent (1998) contend that the capacity of students and families to make decisions about their pathways is reliant on unevenly distributed 'grapevine knowledge' which is comprised of both 'hot' information gleaned from family experiences and knowledge of social networks, and 'cold', official information received from schools and disseminated in more abstract and 'objective' forms. From the Persian CLS for example, Darien's mother discusses her own steps to overcome her limited social and cultural capital within an Australian context, and in so doing, further emphasises how aspirational navigation is developed as an unevenly distributed metacapacity (Appadurai, 2004):

Darien's mother That was a learning journey for me with my kids from primary here in Australia, to understand that how they – that those group readings, the way that they work at school, that one year that I was not working, I was always at school. I do - I went to all the excursions, all the group readings, everything. I said, okay, because I really don't know what's happening in the school so I have no idea what my child – what kind of environment he is sitting in, right, and- … you have to do it because otherwise you don't know because it's so different, it's so different, you have no

idea how different it is and then now I'm growing with them, I'm learning with them, so every day, every year the new things comes up I'm learning with them and I'm sure until the Year 12 that they're choosing what they're studying.

| | |
|---|---|
| Antoine | You're going to be learning. |
| Darien's Mother | I'm going to be learning with them and discussing things with them. |

Though Darien's mother experienced structural and institutional obstacles finding employment appropriate for her qualifications – reflected in the 'downgrading' explored in Chapter Five – she not only highlights the range of scholastic practices she learnt and participated in to support her children, but also the necessity with which they were undertaken. Not doing so would shift the disadvantages she had experienced onto her children. Learning such practices, however, did not start from scratch, and Darien's mother could draw upon both the academic knowledge she already possessed as well as experiences through professional work to transfer such skills to the foreign socio-spatial conditions of Australian schooling. As she also demonstrates, this is something that is and will continue to be practiced and re-practiced in a concerted manner through cultural interaction between family members and school.

In this context, it is also interesting to note how efforts by Anh's parents to invest in cultural maintenance – discussed in Chapter Five – reflect a broader pattern of gendered material and emotional labour. Along with the work to have her children appreciate and participate in their cultural background, it is Anh's mother who enrols and takes her children in extracurriculars of sports and music, who made school-choice decisions and performs the school drop-offs and pick-ups while her

husband works. Her husband works hard as an electrician to support the family, she explains, but he is largely detached from these undertakings and exerts a more relaxed influence:

> I'm more like, pushing them, you know, pushing them more than my husband. My husband 'Aw-aw, ok, if you don't like it, ok, I'll let you quit. If you don't like it, ok, you can stay at home', 'Hmmm, ok, daddy doesn't care', yeah. But for me, you know, you have work hard, you have to push yourself harder. If you want to achieve something, you have to work harder, yeah. Completely different from my husband!

In an effort to circumvent what she experienced growing up as the structural limitations and foreclosed opportunities forming her family's migration narrative, Anh's mother constructs a discursive positionality akin to the stereotyped 'Tiger Mum', racialising the concerted maternal endeavours that seek to provide a broader range of experiences to support future possibilities:

> I'm a monster mother [both laugh]! 'You do not like it, aw I still send you there', I still take them even, you know, they got cold face, they got cranky, but I still drag them [laughter]".

Otherwise, she explains, all her children would want to do is stay home, and she uses the example of her eldest daughter, who continued with piano lessons now gives private lessons, to her other children:

> I said to them, 'See, you look at your sister. If you work for McDonald's or KFC they only pay you $10 an hour, and you have to stay on your feet the whole day long. And you teach piano, something you can relax your mind, and good income too'.

Yet the worries Anh's mother holds about the loss of culture with Anh's generation also reflect her broader worries about Anh's future and what concerns her about a lack of direction on his part. These feelings, however, are not shared by her husband:

> I think Anh um, he's more likely working in the office but I don't know what is it. Yeah. He's not someone who is doing.. a trade person. Umm but I don't know. My husband said, 'Oh there's plenty things out there', you know, 'Don't worry'. I do worry [laughs], I do worry, yeah. I don't know what he going to, to become when he finishes year 12. hmm.."

Anh's aspirations for becoming an electrician like his father seem at first reading noteworthy because they appear unsaid to his mother and they represent the type of career she cannot imagine him taking up. Yet his reaffirmation of this aspiration during my third visit allows him to elaborate how he goes along with his father for work sometimes on weekends and in holidays. Although this does not dismiss all the investments his mother has made to support a wide range of possible opportunities and experiences, the significance of the incidental but ritualised practice of first-hand experiences through which his father is able to intercede and give direction to Anh's ideas about the future is difficult to understate.

### 6.3.3 Reacting to and enacting new knowledge

Rather than reinforce a lack of knowledge, however, the conversations within the Assyrian CLS student focus group highlight how Lionel utilises what opportunities he can to gain 'hot' knowledge from others about possible futures and the processes of attainment. Discussing parental expectations for university, I mention to the Assyrian CLS students that each of them have career aspirations that university would support. "How do universities support soccer?" Lionel asks, and I

explain that many universities have sports programs or scholarships that allow people to train and play while studying, even at the university I study. His response highlights how his strategies for decision-making are reliant on the information he is presently receiving, because he immediately proposes a course of action that he will undertake:

| | |
|---|---|
| Lionel | So I'm thinking, I'm think- because there's that sporting thing, you can do soccer. I'm thinking of doing teaching and then joining your soccer thing- so can I do teaching, can I do teaching and that at the same time? |
| Antoine | Yes there's, that's the potential- |
| Lionel | How much does university cost because I know it's far away but I want to start getting ready |
| Willow | A lot of money |
| Lionel | Ten, five thousand? |
| Willow | More than that- |

The conversation continues to discuss possible costs, how these are calculated across each semester and the whole degree, and even how semesters work. Yet the discussion causes a sense of apprehension and astonishment:

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|---|---|
| Lionel | "Oh my goodness … Oh my goodness. 13 weeks for $5,000? |
| Willow | But don't you pay it after you get a job, after Uni, so you pay it off? |

I explain the availability of HECS-HELP and how it works, but this only goes some way to allaying Lionel's concerns. "If it costs $5,000 for six terms, that's like

$30,000… That's a lot, I don't have that much". While a range of issues related to university costs and the potential benefits of attending are discussed, Lionel's interest in this path remains but the attraction is tempered by "an affective expression of the uncertain conditions in which he must chart his future" (Cairns, 2013, p. 340).

## 6.4 Ends and means: elective subject choices

It was within discussions concerning electives during our first meetings that students' differentiated linkages between 'ends and means' were first broached. Ball and Vincent (1998) contend that the capacity of students and families to make decisions about their pathways is reliant on unevenly distributed 'grapevine knowledge' which is comprised of both 'hot' information gleaned from family experiences and knowledge of social networks, and 'cold', official information received from schools and disseminated in more abstract and 'objective' forms (see also Bok, 2010). Such divergence is evident in the reasoning behind elective subjects students had chosen for Years 9 and 10, where different forms of understanding about the role of particular subjects intersected with personal and family experiences that influenced both choices and evolving future directions. Some students considered electives that they felt aligned well with their future aspirations. For example, Maia – who wants to become an architect – had four choices which, running in order of preference, were Information Software & Technology (IST); Electronics; Physical Activity and Sports Studies (PASS); and Design & Technology (DT). Asked why the subjects were chosen, Maia explained that they aligned well with her aspirations that are influenced by her father's work in engineering:

> I would like to be an architect when I'm older. Partly because my dad's an engineer, so like, yeah I kinda want to do that kind of work. And these

subjects, they're kind of based around what my parents do. So like, I kind of want to experience what they do for a living.

By our third meet-up this aspiration had solidified, reaffirmed by developments in her father's employment:

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|---|---|
| Maia | And especially because now that my dad actually owns the business that he used to work at. |
| Antoine | Oh okay. And is that a change – that's only a change in the last few months then, isn't it? |
| Maia | Yeah, yeah. So, my dad took over the business because his boss was getting old. Because it was only – it used to only be my dad's boss and himself. So, then he just took over and then so now he's creating his own business. I want to kind of do something along the lines of that so to help him and work there. |

Alongside this, elective choices also provided an opportunity to select subjects that keep avenues to alternative pathways and aspirations open:

I chose food technology and commerce. Um, I said I want to be a pharmacist [science subjects are compulsory] but if that doesn't work out I want to, like, lean onto something like with law, so I chose commerce for that, and I like cooking so that's why I choose food technology.

Miriam appears to be thinking through both pathways and interests, reflecting how she imagines her future as a whole person. There is her primary envisaged future, while a 'plan B' is prepared for through another elective, and a further elective aligned with the notion of deepening her understanding in a space that she enjoys but does not have a specific academic or goal-oriented purpose. Meanwhile, Darien

looks to enmesh interests with possible futures. As he explains, his interest in law comes from the career's capacity to fulfil two interests. First, as he both writes into his artefact book and mentions in conversation, "I definitely do not want to sit behind a desk all day. I want a job where every day is a surprise". Law itself, also provides an inherent interest in its workings and in the processes of the system, as opposed to, primarily, a certain status that is often associated with the occupation:

> I just think it's cool to like study how the law system works and how it sometimes how it works in favour and against some people and like how law can also help you out and like hoop holes … that would be so fun.

While he is very interested in pursuing a career in law, he also takes great interest in the arts and sees the possibility of taking up acting as something worth giving some consideration, even while studying law:

> Yeah so when I picked my electives like I want to be a lawyer, so I chose visual arts because I love arts, and commerce which is made up of business and all that stuff, and IST… and well I chose those because of the things I wanted to like being a lawyer or an artist … would fall under those categories, but I like them.

Darien understands different opportunities and perceives the likelihood of 'making it' in acting and the arts as somewhat more difficult, but worth the pursuit out of interest and enjoyment. Unlike Lionel or Miriam, however, one career option is not a more distant back-up. For Darien, law sits as a more achievable aspiration, but if he has the opportunity to pursue his other interests in the arts, he will see where it can take him. In this way, he presents himself as one who thinks strategically about how he can maximise opportunities that are at once borne out of and can cultivate his interests.

For some students, finding subjects interesting was the primary motivator for elective choice, and a connection to future aspiration was not as readily evident. Anh's interest in becoming an electrician, for example, was not clearly linked to any subjects, whether compulsorily enrolled or elected, and this appears to reflect the ways his occupational aspiration developed and the processes this has been raised with his parents. Rather, his choices of PASS and Military History were guided by his sister advising him "not to do subjects that are boring subjects otherwise I'm not going to survive". Given that there is an electronics component in the Industrial Technology elective, subject-occupation alignment does not yet appear to be fully realised. This decision-making might also be reflective of his aspirations for a high, 90-plus ATAR which may be situated in similar understandings as Lionel's pursuit of going to university. Though becoming an electrician would not generally require such a grade, he has given it thought as a sense of achievement and pride in and of itself, but not aligned with a subsequent academic purpose.

An important consideration of the electives selection process is that students' capacity to make choices can also be mediated by factors beyond their control. Several subjects are mandatory for Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10) therefore limiting subject and timetable availability, in most NSW schools, to two or three electives. Furthermore, a significant factor is whether the school is able to offer a subject, either due to insufficient demand; the availability of suitable teachers and resources; and the capacity offer enough places for all students wishing to enrol. The allocation process varies considerably between schools, and most participating students were initially required to pick additional, or reserve subjects. Nonetheless, the impact of being unable to receive initial choices appears to have weighed more greatly on those whose aspirations were, as yet, less clearly established.

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| Cara | Three of my electives got rejected. |
| Antoine | Yeah? |
| Cara | Yeah it was a very simple reason. It's because there wasn't- he didn't have enough people to become a class so only one of them got accepted and I had to choose another one. So when the lady first asked me what I wanted to do I picked another elective. I was scared of that lady (group laughs). She was scary. |
| Chess | Who was it? |
| Cara | I don't know. It was a lady. And um, so I scanned the list and the last thing I saw was art, so I just spat out art. When I went home, I thought about it and I was like, 'I can't draw' (group laughs) 'Why'd I choose art?' So, um, the next morning I thought about- like the next morning, I'd forgot to tell my parents about it, so I left it to the third day, and the third day I told my parents and they're like, 'Oh yeah just do whatever you want. These are your subjects'. Um so then I went to school, cos like before when I was choosing my electives, I had this really strong mindset that I didn't want to do commerce. Um, cos it sounded boring. It was like another maths. So, um, but then I ended up choosing commerce, because I saw that if I want to become a lawyer, there was the law subject under commerce, and, I didn't want to be lonely cos I couldn't draw, so- and the rest of the subjects I'm bad at as well. |

We can see in this discussion that just as Cara's career aspirations are drawn from a range of influences, her elective choices are mediated through a similar manner. Some consideration of her future career in law is given, though it is not immediately nor enthusiastically taken up: her recognition and understanding of the Commerce curriculum compels her to choose it although it may not feel like something that would bring much immediate or intrinsic satisfaction. Alongside Commerce, her other elective choices were History – "I found history interesting"; Textiles – "I find it fun"; Food Technology – "I can't cook but it'll be good for the future"; and Graphic Design – "(A friend) was doing it so I chose it as my fourth option". In Cara's telling, the supporting nodes along her path appear less direct or explicit: guidance doesn't appear to come strongly from family nor from teachers at school, reflecting the incidental approach of direction and advice described earlier. In this context, the choices aside from Commerce being based on being fun, interest or usefulness, or where she can find her friends throughout the school day, could be seen less as a lack of consideration for the future, and rather more as a means to support and maintain interest in the various opportunities provided in Year 9.

Another factor that also needs to be considered is the position and status of Stage 5 in the bigger picture of academic pathways. Though Year 9 electives provide the first opportunity for students to choose subjects and consider how these may align with their aspirations, changes in education policy over the last decade[37] appear to have diminished the stage's importance as a foundational steppingstone towards post-school education and training and careers. Certainly, and as touched upon above, for the most part students positioned Year 9 electives as an opportunity for

[37] In NSW this includes the replacement of the Year 10 School Certificate with the Record of Student Achievement (ROSA) and increases to the school-leaving age, which were introduced in the years following expansion of university access.

experimentation and exploration. Several students also indicated that their parents gave them wide leverage to pick what they wanted, with some explaining the only caveat was that they needed to be conscious of what may help them in the future. Students could therefore evaluate their experiences of their electives as well as other options throughout Stage 5, before making decisions for the HSC which have a more consequential link to their post-school interests. Certainly, this is exemplified by Maia's experience of elective choices, where it is implied that Stage 6 is when the important game is played:

> they're [Maia's teachers] like, oh... 'the electives you choose for Year 9 and 10 won't really matter', but for me, I kind of want to base it on what I want to do when I'm older.

Despite this, the progression through Year 9 demonstrates how elective choices can nonetheless play an important role in shaping and (re)directing decisions as students experience, experiment, and evaluate new or different academic opportunities. By the end of Year 9, Chess' interests in law have also dissipated during a year of Commerce, becoming a pathway not for the likes of her: "... but now I don't want to be a lawyer because I feel like it's too much work for me. So, I'm going to drop that career idea off". Her interests have shifted elsewhere, but by now she has also begun to explore the possibilities of combining study or work with her other strong aspiration for travel:

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|---|---|
| Maia | You can do nursing and then you can travel. |
| Chess | Yeah, I can do that. |

Though nursing sounds new and has not been previously raised, it aligns with doing humanitarian work which itself was listed in her artefact book, and also acts as

a possible driver for overseas travel. Chess goes on to explain that she has held a wish to travel for study or work in a place in an unfamiliar country:

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|---|---|
| Chess | I want to go to a country where I don't know the language of. So, that – I will have to force myself to learn that language and that's what I want. [Laughs] |
| Antoine | Yeah, yeah. That's cool. |
| Liam | Damn- [laughing] |
| Chess | Well [laughing] |
| Liam | -big- that's a big task. |
| Chess | I know. |
| Liam | How does that even work? You don't know anyone from that country, you don't know how to speak the language, so how … actually learn a language? |
| Chess | Go to school. |
| Chess | Start from kindergarten [laughter] |
| Antoine | … You can start at kindergarten again. Another 18 years of school before you start again. No, no. But you have – in saying that as well, I mean, it's not unusual for people of course to travel overseas and study overseas, whether it's for a semester or whether it's for a whole degree. |
| Chess | It's basically what my parents did – how they moved from Vietnam to Australia and knew nothing about it. It's kind of like that in a way. |

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|---|---|
| Antoine | Yeah, yeah. And when you think about it, I'm amazed at – and especially then… So – yeah – so, it was a bit step into the unknown. Yeah. And that's what you're keen on trying yourself? |
| Chess | Yeah. I mean, I want to live a fun life. Might as well make it interesting. |

In this passage we see how she connects her own academic experiences while drawing upon her parents' migration narratives. Though her interests for travel contrast starkly to the reasons her parents sought refuge and migrated, it demonstrates how parental migration both informs her desires for travel and her capacity to imagine what is possible, moving beyond the familiar and known.

Like Chess, Commerce also had an important impact on Cara's aspirations on her considerations for a career in law. Whereas Chess redirected her attention to other subjects and career possibilities, Cara however began to take greater interest in other fields related to her Commerce elective. In the following, we can see that there is still some experimentation and possibilities being left open, so that she does not foreclose to stringently on any options, however her chance to engage more deeply in the Commerce elective have opened other, new opportunities that had not been previously considered. Chess' comment at the end only serves to reinforce this newness, and the playfulness and imagination used in constructing possible futures:

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|---|---|
| Cara | It basically everything still the same. … time I might more lean towards business instead of law and law can just be an extra. But – yeah. |
| Antoine | So, you're looking at – for example, it'll be a business degree that might be the first primary thing that you're looking into? |

| | |
|---|---|
| Cara | Yep. |
| Antoine | Is there something in particular in business that interests you or that-? |
| Cara | I'm more into the sales and advertising because it's more fun. |
| Antoine | Oh cool. Well – and can I ask what sort of has brought that interest about likely? |
| Cara | We did some assessments in commerce about- an assessment and it was fun. And we also did it in English as well. Whereas advertising and techniques for advertising ... well, there's so many different techniques out there. And ... |
| Chess | Become an entrepreneur. |
| Cara | What? |
| Chess | An entrepreneur. You're a businessman. |

As Aramina had earlier demonstrated, her school also places greater importance on the HSC, yet there is a considerable difference in how opportunities leading through Years 9 and 10 are framed. Rather than being 'simply' an opportunity to explore and experiment with various subject options, Aramina appears to have developed a framework where every opportunity is one that could be strategically utilised and deployed towards HSC success. Here, she also explains that her parents mediated the selection process, where approval for electives needed to be given to ensure subjects were not chosen "just for fun. Like, they're electives that'll actually like help you, because they want to minimise my study for year 12 from now". Her conversations about her subject choices, interests and pursuits

demonstrate how she navigates between norms established by high parental and school expectations towards her specific wants:

> I chose different electives to what I'm doing, to what I said I was going to do for my HSC. Um I chose- so, at our school we're also offered to do Cambridge courses which, like, once you get to Year 10 you sit like a huge exam and you get like a global ranking. And I love History and English, they're my favourite subjects. I chose Cambridge History and I chose Cambridge Global Perspectives, and then, I wanted to do Cambridge Physics and Chem, but my mum said 'that's going to be too much to manage' so I chose drama, but now like, I spoke to my science teacher and he said 'you know, you're good at science and you know if you're doing it in the HSC, do it', so I'm thinking of dropping drama and doing science, and I spoke to my mum and she goes, 'Whatever makes you happy. I just didn't want you to like stress', so, I think I'm changing from drama to Cambridge physics.

At this stage, Aramina looks at her possible Year 9 elective choices bring opportunities as enjoyment – picking her favourite subjects of intrinsic interest in History and English – where she can afford to, before going into the subjects that matter for her aspired career. Even within these electives, however, in pursuing several Cambridge units – including for those chosen more out of interest – Aramina has chosen subjects that offer high academic standards and prestige, and competition through a 'huge exam' that confers a 'global ranking'. Even though she would go on to pick drama instead of Cambridge physics, these units provide significant academic preparation for HSC study:

> So for example, I have a lot of friends in older year groups and when I was choosing my electives I spoke to them to see what they liked, what they didn't

like, which subjects they recommend, which I feel like is really helpful if you have friends in older years. And a lot of them who did Cambridge History said, in Year 9 and 10 it's really, really difficult because it's a new workload, a Cambridge workload is triple a normal subject's workload. And they're, 'you'll find it really hard in Year's 9 and 10', but then when it came down to the HSC, they found it a lot easier than girls who didn't do Cambridge History because the exam style is the same, the workload is the same, there's a lot of workload… And the foundations that you learn in Cambridge History are carried onto Modern History and it's the same time period as well so.

Another example of Aramina's strategic deployment of electives is also established in what she has chosen *not* to pursue:

> So I wanted to do music as one of my electives but the girls at my school are very, very musical. So I was, I'm not going to do well, my grades aren't going to be very high up because for example, I'm doing sitting my Grade 6 piano but girls have their teaching degrees in piano, other girls play 8 instruments and are all Grade 8 in them. So it's, a bit like you've got to choose what you're good at?

Through a competitive schooling regime, Aramina demonstrates how she is being produced to always critically assess herself against others. Aramina enjoys music, but through this performative work (examined further in Chapter Seven) only positions herself *behind* her peers and as not good enough, regardless of how her accomplishments in piano stand on their own merit. The focus must then be on pursuing elective subjects that may be intrinsically interesting, but nonetheless in which she can be competitively successful.

Various forms of 'hot' and 'cold' information and knowledge available to Aramina – family, teachers, other students, the curriculum and its pathways - are evident within these passages. Evident too, however, is her awareness of how to strategically utilise such supports to develop "a more complex experience of the relation between a wide range of ends and means" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 68). Given the clarity and certainty with which Aramina can draw upon experiences and developed practices, as well as those of others who have walked similar paths before her, it is possible to envisage her capacity to not only read the map but act as cartographer. Certainly, Aramina positions and crafts herself as a self-determining and enterprising individual who is continuously looking to maximise opportunities towards success in the HSC and beyond. Her conception of herself is largely defined and constantly measured and assessed against parameters of success that involve various testing regimes; competition with peers inside and outside of her school; and a successful future worker identity that is achieved ahead of others. In many ways, while we remember that she is driven also by the activism in which she participates for the Assyrian community, Aramina represents the archetypal example of the 'good' student in neoliberal discourses of citizenship.

## Conclusion

The narratives and conversations throughout this chapter reinforce Appadurai's (2004) contention that the capacity to aspire is shared across social cleavages. They also highlight the inadequacies of normatively stratifying aspirations from 'low' to 'high', and consequently the adolescents who hold them, as this misses the nuances of aspirations, and the complexities of how they are formed, held, and worked upon. In all three CLSs, early discussions with students demonstrate a range of aspirations that show an interest in post-school study and diverse possible careers.

Yet, just as Appadurai also suggests, the capacity to aspire is unevenly distributed so that students who experience more advantaged social class positionings have more intricately charted maps with which to understand the links between means and ends.

As I show throughout, the task of aspiring operates affectively to constitute students' understanding of themselves as young people transitioning towards adulthood. This takes place in several ways, from the questioning of the legitimacy of one's aspirations; the positioning of the self in response to idealised notions of studenthood; or the uncertainty about whether the costs to attain one's aspirations are surmountable.

In the move from Year 8 to 9, elective choices are also an opportunity to reflect on the methods students utilise to consider their aspirations in light of academic opportunities. Reflective of this initial step in academic decision-making, students take the chance to experiment and explore – where given the opportunity. For the most part, students looked to strike a balance between those subjects they believed would be beneficial for future study and work opportunities, and those that would provide enjoyment and held intrinsic value. This is nonetheless mediated by students' understandings of their navigational pathways, where a clearer articulation of subject choices was shown by those who appeared to have a stronger comprehension of how those electives would be beneficial to plans and hopes for the future.

This chapter has demonstrated how students create aspirations to imagine futures in more complex and nuanced ways than how they are constituted within education policy regimes. As this chapter begins to demonstrate, however, such regimes nonetheless influence how young people see themselves, calling upon them to undertake work on the self as they hold themselves personally accountable for

their own futures and outcomes. As subsequent sections consider, there are numerous ways that conceptions of the enterprising good student permeate the narratives that participants tell and the identities they construct. While not all students adopt a student identity that reflects the idealised good student, the language and tools of measurement and evaluation are hegemonic. "Neoliberal discourses continue to be naturalised and taken-for-granted in what counts as being a good student and a good citizen" (Keddie, 2016, p.110) even as students seek to build identities and aspirations beyond the parameters of schooling and careers, and even as they critique and question various aspects of their schooling and wider lives.

# Chapter Seven – Good Students

## 7.1 Introduction

Chapter Six demonstrated how students held a range of occupational and educational aspirations. Most students envisage university studies as being part of their future, and a diverse range of possible careers were mentioned: while some stated aspirations appeared quite firm, for others several possibilities were being explored with various forms of planning evident. As earlier findings also underscore, the 'navigational capacities' of students – that is, their knowledge and understanding of the necessary and possible paths towards attaining their aspirations – also vary markedly, reflective of divergent social positionalities. Within this context, the following responds to each of the major pieces of the research puzzle, but particularly the fourth research question, with its interest in the reproduction and contestation of narratives about education and aspirations established in contemporary political, social, and cultural contexts.

As students move from Year 8 and through Year 9, they are readily aware of the increasing expectations that encompass their lives and positions as adolescents in contemporary schooling, however their interactions with these expectations varies. Nonetheless, the discussions below highlight how students' beliefs about themselves and their imagined futures are all filtered through the neoliberal framings of successful studenthood and adolescence, and these can also intersect in complex relationships with constructions of cultural and racialised identities. To examine these issues, this chapter will first explore students' interactions with NAPLAN, a standardised testing regime which has become increasingly considered 'high stakes' due to its deployment as an instrument to scrutinise, manage and discipline student, teacher, and school performance. The chapter then goes on to discuss how students

both imagine their futures and construct their understanding of what may support or impede their abilities to successfully navigate to these aspirations. Students have broader visions of the future than those constituted in post-school study and work, however they share among themselves an almost universal belief about the opportunities and limitations to achieving these imagined futures that reflect an archetypal 'good student' who is responsible for their own fortunes. Yet while the archetype may be commonly internalised, the affective responses diverge to begin revealing a relationship with, and producing important implications for, conceptions of students' navigational capacities.

## 7.2 NAPLAN: heightening pressures and insecurities

NAPLAN tests, which had just been completed in Year 9 in the weeks before our second meeting, appeared to be an area where students were, collectively, clearest in their critiques of education policy. Other aspects of education and schooling were part of the day-to-day routine, and the increased workloads between Years 8 and 9 discussed earlier were positioned as expected – even if difficult for some – and anticipated as part of the natural passage towards high school completion. By contrast, discussions about NAPLAN positioned the standardised testing regime as outside this norm for many students because the methods students were being held accountable for their outcomes – and those of their schools – were at once more public and more consequential.

### 7.2.1 Concern about future consequences

Several aspects came under deliberation among students, however an initial concern was the proposal to require students to pass minimum scores in order to be eligible for an ATAR from their HSC marks. There had been considerable debate in the media about this plan, as Maia alludes to:

> because like at one point there – like, what do you call them – the media say that if you don't, yeah, like a certain band or mark for NAPLAN, you will be ineligible for the HSC test.

This proposal created additional pressures on students to perform well on the NAPLAN, because of the subsequent effect it would have on their ability to be eligible for university. Students in the Vietnamese CLS discussed how this pressure was heightened by both teachers and parents, though to varying degrees. This reflected how school and teacher attitudes and perspectives towards NAPLAN tests were impressed upon the students. Laughing, Chess said there was little pressure coming from her school:

> We still have teachers who didn't care about NAPLAN. Actually, like they provide the stuff for us, so we can do NAPLAN, but they didn't support NAPLAN at all.

She elaborated further that it wasn't exactly the case that there was little or no interest in NAPLAN from teachers:

> ... like, they wanted us to study as much so that we weren't worried on the day. Yeah, but they did provide us test examples for homework, as well".

The discussion revealed that there was certainly concern and interest in ensuring students prepared well for the tests, but Chess indicated that the support was provided in a way that did not add additional stress and pressure on her or her peers, and it did not interfere with the other curriculum work that needed be done day-to-day.

Chess' NAPLAN experience was shared by Cara, who explained that little additional attention was given to the tests by her teachers, with an example of her English teacher who assured students that "you don't need to worry, it's just a

snapshot in time" before moving with other curriculum work. This experience, however, was vastly different to those of their other friends in the Vietnamese CLS. "Look at these two here, enjoying life over there", exclaimed Liam. "I know!", agreed Maia:

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| Liam | And then you have us, day in and day out NAPLAN... |
| Maia | ...NAPLAN NAPLAN NAPLAN... |
| Liam | ...really drowning in the work... |
| Maia | ...ohhh... |

Liam explained that their school – a semi-selective public school both he and Maia attend – placed significant pressure to do well in NAPLAN, including the principal coming to their year group to talk to them about it. This created an environment in which the tests were placed constantly at the forefront of what was important for the Year 9 students. Anh also faced a lot of pressure to do well from his school, where required – "they literally forced us" – to go to lunch classes to practice NAPLAN papers.

At least after my initial reflections on our conversations, Chess' response was somewhat unexpected, particularly as it juxtaposed so considerably with those from several other peers. At the beginning of Year 9, Chess had commenced at a private, academically selective school aligned with her family's religion. The school promotes itself on the high academic marks and rankings achieved by its students as an indicator of its quality and success, one important element of which is its '1st for NAPLAN' ranking in the region. With this image being positioned to both local and international publics, it seemed contradictory that teachers placed comparatively little pressure on students to do well. Given, however, that students must sit entrance

exams and have previous NAPLAN results considered as part of their assessment for enrolment, they are already likely to perform well in standardised testing. The school, in some sense, would be selecting for its success. Whereas the schools Liam, Maia and Cara go to also have some element of this as semi-selective public schools, Cara highlights that even if her own school did not allocate significant time or performative weight to the tests, pressures also have to do with parents' reception and understanding of other state policies tied to NAPLAN: "I think it's more like when they heard about, well if you don't get a good mark on NAPLAN, you don't get your HSC".

As discussed in Chapter One, in the year prior, the NSW Government had introduced a requirement that Year 9 students would need to meet a minimum Band 8 in NAPLAN literacy and numeracy tests to 'pre-qualify' to earn an ATAR through the HSC. Failing this, students would be required to sit and re-sit online tests before being allowed to earn an ATAR. Though the minimum NAPLAN requirement was removed before our focus group students sat NAPLAN (the online tests would remain in a revised format), enough pressure and lack of clarity was evident in the students' discussions to reflect a certain 'ontological insecurity' (Ball, 2003b) – both of their own and of their parents. Considering that all their parents appear to have made strategic choices about schooling – alongside the semi-selective public schools, and selective private school, we remember Anh's enrolment in a 'reputable' out-of-area public school – several students internalised NAPLAN as a high-stakes test with additional external pressures to demonstrate their academic excellence – and all while the expectations themselves remain uncertain and in a state of flux.

### 7.2.2 ‘Asian’ expectations

What was nonetheless certain for the students in this and other conversations was that while students linked policy decisions with pressure that was felt and subsequently exerted by parents, they also associated these additional parental pressures with their ethnicity, and the role this plays in their education. Earlier, during conversations in our first focus group round, I asked students across all three CLSs about the cultural diversity of their schools as a way of broaching their experiences as well as their constructions of the concepts of culture and multiculturalism. Among the students from the Vietnamese CLS, schooling was discussed in racialised terms in similar ways to the ways they experienced their urban settings. They recognise diversity, but more specifically this highlights how school and schooling both defines and is defined by their own identities:

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| Maia | Since (my school) is such a high expectation school, most Asians go there, um [small laugh] and there's only like a few Lebanese and um, can I say English people? So I am, like, friends with a lot of multicultural people but I most likely hang out with Asians because most of the school is populated with Asians. |
| Antoine | Do you find that because it's a high expectation school a lot of Asian students go there, do you feel that there's a particular reason in terms of why parents of an Asian background do that? |
| Maia | I think because, the thing is Asian parents expect a lot from their, um, children. They like try- they make you try your best and, like, most Asian children like are able to do that, so um they gain like good- like high scores and all that kind of thing. |

High expectations for education and academic success are essentialised by students as part of their cultural identities. Because Liam and Maia's is a partially selective school, not only are Asian parents drawn to it, but their children are also able to live up to the expectations they set for them – and that are symbiotically buttressed by schooling practices. Even though Cara and Chess do not see their partially selective school as specifically 'Asian', with a greater cultural mix of students, and Anh agrees with the descriptor 'multicultural' for his, they are still drawn to defining academic experience through a similar lens. It is a display of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1988) that is deployed to signal both cultural and community, as well as personal successes.

In Chapter Five, the connection to a supranational 'Asian' identity was noted as a homogenising construction in the context of urban experiences. Here, as students subsume the particularities of their Vietnamese identities, they draw themselves into broader, situated subjectivities of Asian academic success that differentiate them from other racialised identities. Even if not explicitly intentional on the part of students, it can serve to work against the historical subjugation many Vietnamese experienced through Australia's debates about 'boat people' and refugees (Van Kooy et al., 2021).

This is not to say other students do not recognise constructions of culture in the academic expectations set before them, however for the most part such an association is tied to migration experiences and the lessons that could be derived from them. As Aramina and Willow talk below, expectations assigned to the 'cultural' are quickly inverted into high migrant parent expectations. Reemphasising the deployment of narratives in Chapter Five, these can develop out of the anticipation of what is offered in new spatialised contexts, but can also be experienced as tensions

and feelings of inadequacy for children who do not have the same reference points, and experience their own performative pressures:

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| Antoine | Do you have certain expectations around school and study and all those things that you feel are partly to do with your cultural background or where you're going for career-? |
| Aramina | Yeah definitely. I feel like there's this expectation that if you have it way easier than us, you should do even better than us. |
| Willow | Oh yes, oh my god- |
| Aramina | There's that expectation there- |
| Willow | She [mother] tells me this every day, I'm just like.. mmm! She's like, 'Oh we came here when we were your age and it's hard, we had to learn English and start Year 10 da, da, da, da.' And then she's, 'But you're born here so you should know better.' But what if my smartness – what's the word? |
| Aramina | IQ |
| Willow | Is not as good as her, because she's really smart but I'm not, sorry. |

Compounding the academic aspirations enmeshed in broader migration experiences, Vietnamese student identities have also been inculcated in wider popular discourses and narratives of 'ethnicised' schooling produced within the context of wider education policy frameworks that are not only Australian, but are state-based and particularly manifested in Sydney (Ho, 2019, 2020; Watkins et al., 2017; Watkins & Noble, 2008, 2013).

These Asian subjectivities were reinforced here in the discussion about NAPLAN. Parental expectations and pressures regarding the mooted prerequisite attachment to the HSC ATAR were immediately framed as a consequence of being Asian. Yet while students frame the high expectations as a cultural artefact, the group was somewhat reticent both about its a/effects, and the notion that academic success would be a default, natural outcome of their identity:

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| Cara | I think it's more like when they heard about, well if you don't get a good mark on NAPLAN, you don't get your HSC. |
| Antoine | Oh, right |
| Cara | Because we're all like, Asian background, like most of our parents want us to do well, and like do well for the HSC as well. So, if we don't do NAPLAN, then of course, it's going to add a lot of pressure. |
| Antoine | So, that's where your parents sort of started coming in and going, 'Okay, you really have to do well now'. You know, it means more than just sitting today and doing the test, this has an effect on your future, is that – [agreeing nods from the group] yeah, that's something you sort of picked up on? |
| Students | Yeah. |

As the conversation went on, Liam explained how this was

> kind of like a stereotype, because like, you do hear that stereotype that aw, Asians are smart, and all this stuff then, right? But part of it – some of it is kind of true, because Asian parents have high expectations of you doing well,

> and that affects their children and everything, for them to do well. So, well I think that's where that stereotype comes from.

Yet because this had built into a stereotype, students felt it worked to mask or downplay family and personal investments and mobilisations. While parental expectations appeared to be constructed as aspirational investment towards academic achievement, the expectations of others appeared to be more akin assumptions. Through the recurring attention to parental expectations, students sought to recognise that successes were achieved through the efforts they exerted – and were expected to exert – rather than an innate, natural intelligence. A culture of academic success was one that was practiced and instilled.

Although this brought the CLS students together through shared experience of 'culture', the stereotype also had other potential a/effects. Regardless of who established the expectations to do well, it "could pressure them", Maia said, "Like, if they think you're smart, they expect you to always be smart, and sometimes that could be pressuring". Continuing, Anh discussed how it could raise antagonisms with peers: "they feel threatened by you, because they think you're smart, because they want to be the smartest in the class". High expectations were also framed as being different to those experienced by other non-Vietnamese or Asian peers:

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| Liam | And like, compared to my other friends, they're all like, their parents are all chilled, like, 'Oh, yeah, you get a C, it's okay', and all that – so… |
| Chess | It's not okay! … [if parents found out she got a C], they will scold me or lecture me". |

As such expectations and the ‘Asian’ stereotype worked to “both self- and other-define” (Cruickshank, 2015, p. 91) as different to ‘non-Asian’ friends, and peers who might feel antagonistic towards them within competitive schooling cultures.

Despite the pressures, students recognised wider family practices that helped encourage them towards ‘doing well’, reinforcing the familial conditions that propel students and families to engage in the performative aspects of schooling, as Cara discusses:

> Because my parents always push me to do well. So, my grandparents from my mother side– whenever I do– because my grandmothers with us because whenever my parents go work and then I go to school during the … days, my grandma would already be at home to look after my brother. And then my grandpa would come to our house and also help out. So, whenever I kind of do well in school, because we … for … we normally get letters each term to tell which subjects your child is exceeding in. So, when my grandma first found out about that, they would give me money to help me – push me to do well in school.

Certainly, Cara’s story of encouragement demonstrates the performative on top of the performative when her grandmother gives her money for academic achievement. Yet it also highlights the role of the spatial and temporal conditions of family life that establish the importance of such practices. While her parents ‘always push her to do well’, care-work is undertaken by her grandmother while her parents work, and her grandfather also joins in to support the family. The making of family and of future opportunity is intergenerational and borne out of the mix of paid and unpaid labour.

### 7.2.3 School and individual performativities

While the relief of not having NAPLAN go towards ATAR eligibility was prevalent among Vietnamese CLS students, it was also reflected in Hanaa's response in the Persian CLS: "I got like good bands for that. I was proud of that but it – I guess I wasn't too worried because it didn't go like towards HSC anymore, so yeah". Her response indicates that knowledge of the policy changes helped her go into the tests with insecurities eased somewhat. The pressure of high-stakes consequences had been reduced, and thus allowed her to get better marks. Nonetheless, it was clear that doing well in such tests was understood as an important achievement, particularly as her school – a comprehensive single-sex public school on Sydney's north shore – placed pressure on her year group to perform well in similar ways to several students from the Vietnamese CLS. Hanaa, however, demonstrates that she also understands that the pressure to perform well comes also from demands for the school to present and promote itself through NAPLAN measures and outputs: "yeah because my school's like really competitive right, so they always try to do like better than other schools, so". As the following discussion indicates, Hanaa recognises this pressure as coming from both within and outside the school, where its teachers and leadership appear to be at once willing and unwilling participants in the marketisation and representations of school quality through test results:

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| Hanaa | Yeah so, it's like stress on them and stress on us when they try to push us to sound smarter, I guess, yeah. |
| Antoine | So, they look at NAPLAN and the results that come out and get published as important reflection of the school? |
| Hanaa | Yeah. |
| Antoine | Would that be a way of putting it? |

Hanaa Standing out, yeah.

While the "push … to *sound* smarter" might give the performativity game away to Hanaa, there are still insecurities and pressures that students may experience that are more than just about personal performativity: the public pressures experienced by teachers and schools are re-exerted onto them, furthering personal troubles. A similar understanding of NAPLAN was demonstrated in the Assyrian CLS group, where the test was understood as a ranking instrument:

Lionel What I heard from the teacher, what they actually do is, with all the NAPLAN results they use it as competition, this school got this average in NAPLAN, this schools the top, they use it for competition-

Aramina They do.

The discussion amongst students in the Assyrian CLS group reinforces and further elaborates on students' recognition for and their interplay with the performance and audit cultures of their schooling. Within this context, Aramina reveals that she did not feel much pressure from her school or teachers to do well in the tests because their approach was a supportive one. Practice tests and examples were still provided in classes and "for us to do in our own time", but rather than telling her cohort that they "have to do really, really well" they were encouraged to not worry and try their best. Aramina feels that this approach works better than being told to "'Go in there and do well' [because] you sit there and you're so stressed that you don't really do well". Despite the psychological positive reinforcement that Aramina frames as her school's approach, the broader competitive culture that, as discussed earlier, is engendered among students is revealed as a personal characteristic that she and her peers nonetheless deploy in NAPLAN: "But all the

girls in my school are quite competitive, so no matter what, we'd all go in there and try".

Competition is prevalent among her peers, but it is also front of mind in terms of Aramina's position among the national Year 9 cohort. This is disclosed in her strategic considerations of how to approach the test's tasks themselves. While Willow revealed that her response to the persuasive writing task built off one of the idea prompts of self-driving cars but "with a twist", Aramina explained that "I didn't want to take one of the ideas on the page because I don't want to be compared to so many people who would do that. So I made up my own, I did synthetic organs". Aramina's readiness to prepare well and strategise for the tests in competition and comparison with peers, appears at one point tempered by her reflection on the utility and purpose of NAPLAN. She contends that NAPLAN is being misused to create comparisons between schools, taking the tests away from their intended purpose of understanding how schools are doing in teaching their students. The discussion reveals a considered understanding of some of the dynamics of the broader schooling culture students are currently in. She reasons, however, that the cause of this is "not by institutions it's more by the people sitting it and by parents". Her considerations provide a legitimacy for the audit cultures surrounding education policy, "because there has to be some way for the Government to know how they're doing... And I feel like no matter what tests they bring in it'll be like this". Moreover, they also reveal how contemporary policy imperatives for schooling and education have been naturalised by many students who have grown up through them and know no other discourse.

What at first sounds like an interjected diversion into a different topic, Willow presents another mode of understanding the impacts of NAPLAN and the culture of competition and (self-)evaluation it has engendered, when she explains that she

didn’t finish the maths test. Willow had taken her time but failed to complete seven of the ten maths pages. While we discussed NAPLAN as a group, Willow explained that she felt lots of pressure, particularly from her maths teacher who according to Willow reflected Aramina’s earlier thoughts on encouragement and used warnings of dropping down maths classes to push her cohort to do well:

> Well mostly my maths teachers, my English teacher’s like, ‘Oh I don’t care about your maths just do well in English.’ And, and she did help me lots, so but my math teacher she’s just like, ‘You have to do it, if you don’t get something good in NAPLAN, you’ll have to go in a lower class’. I’m already in the lowest class for math anyway so-

*So*, attempting to ‘get something good’ was inherently of little value to Willow, especially in a field that she sees as having no connection to herself and her future path in music: “Do you need the radius of a circle to be a rapper? No. ... You don't need algebra to be a rapper. You can't do algebra while writing songs”. At least up to this time in our discussions, Willow was wholly invested in her music and photography electives through which she developed her construction of herself as a student, as well as her wider constructions of her present and future self. As I examine further in future sections, Willow provides several pertinent critiques of her schooling related to her school’s presentations of the ‘good’ student and its priorities about what is important in life. Her rejection of the sort of high stakes schooling that has been discussed throughout this section is countenanced to some degree by an apparent solace she finds through the music rooms and her relationship with her music teacher:

> I’m a musical monitor, I take care of the music rooms, if the juniors need help with their music, I’m an expert so I help them. I take care of the rooms during

> recess and lunch; I help people book rooms, just the usual. … I'm basically, I'm basically my music teacher's daughter, I'm always in the music rooms at school.

In these discussions, NAPLAN – and the backtracked attempt to link results to the HSC and students' ATARs – engendered a specific awareness and critical engagement in students about valuing success in relation to external measures. Students found themselves within a range of performative demands which for several, not only brought on additional pressures and a sense of 'ontological insecurity' related to their own performance and how these may affect future, post-school opportunities, but also a consciousness about their role in the performance and public image of their schools. As I shall now turn focus to, the narratives of future selves that students construct further emphasise these "countervailing neoliberal logics of meritocracy and individualism" (Allen, 2016, p. 813). While NAPLAN acted as a definable mechanism against which students could form critique, the diffuseness of such logics will be explored in their naturalness and inescapability. That is, as students construct their identities and comprehend their future opportunities, limited spaces and opportunities appear to arise for them to talk and think about such social relations in any other way.

## 7.3 Visions of the future and the onus of making it

During our second meeting, as part of our reflections on previous discussions about aspirations, I asked students to think about what they envisaged their lives to be like in ten years' time: "where do you imagine yourself to be in ten years, what are you doing, or hoping to be doing, at that point in time in your life?" Students articulated visions that would see them having completed or nearing the end of their tertiary studies, working in some capacity, and living away from home independently

and/or with a partner. The sort of ideas and images described in many of these discussions reflected a sense that an adult future held the chance to pursue opportunities for greater independence and personal growth.

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| Darien | It looks like just finishing law school or almost finishing med school, living by myself; just about it, just living by myself, almost finished school, have a regular part-time job. … |
| Hanaa | Either studying or training police. This might sound stupid, but maybe with a partner and my own house with two dogs. |

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| Maia | Seeing the world. So, like, my future career or something like that will either be police related or travelling related career, because I'm interested in those two… So, it's like I want to study them all, so I can go towards police related careers. |
| Cara | Well, mine was basically, just like, probably just still going for a uni degree. I think I might do two courses, which is law and business, and then I just see, maybe I might get a part-time job, and I could do stuff to get a good resume… I've taken time off to go to different places with friends and going on holidays. |

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| Aramina | Uni, studying medicine, hospital part-time because I'd be at that stage, I'd like to stay in Sydney because I'm very close to my family, I don't imagine myself living without them. Maybe dating I don't think I'd want to be married by then because I'd want to more focus on career before any of that but that's me- |

One student who's imagined future-self differed from those of other students was Liam from the Vietnamese CLS. While peers discussed and reflected upon desired educational pathways and careers, and constructed images of the future that circulated around the material outcomes of their study and work, Liam provides a response that appears to reject the necessities of having specific future plans:

> At this very moment I'm not really thinking about the future. I just want to enjoy time now. So I haven't really thought about which university I want to go to, what jobs I want. But all I know is that I want to repay my father and my mother for taking care of me, so being able to support them again is important to me.

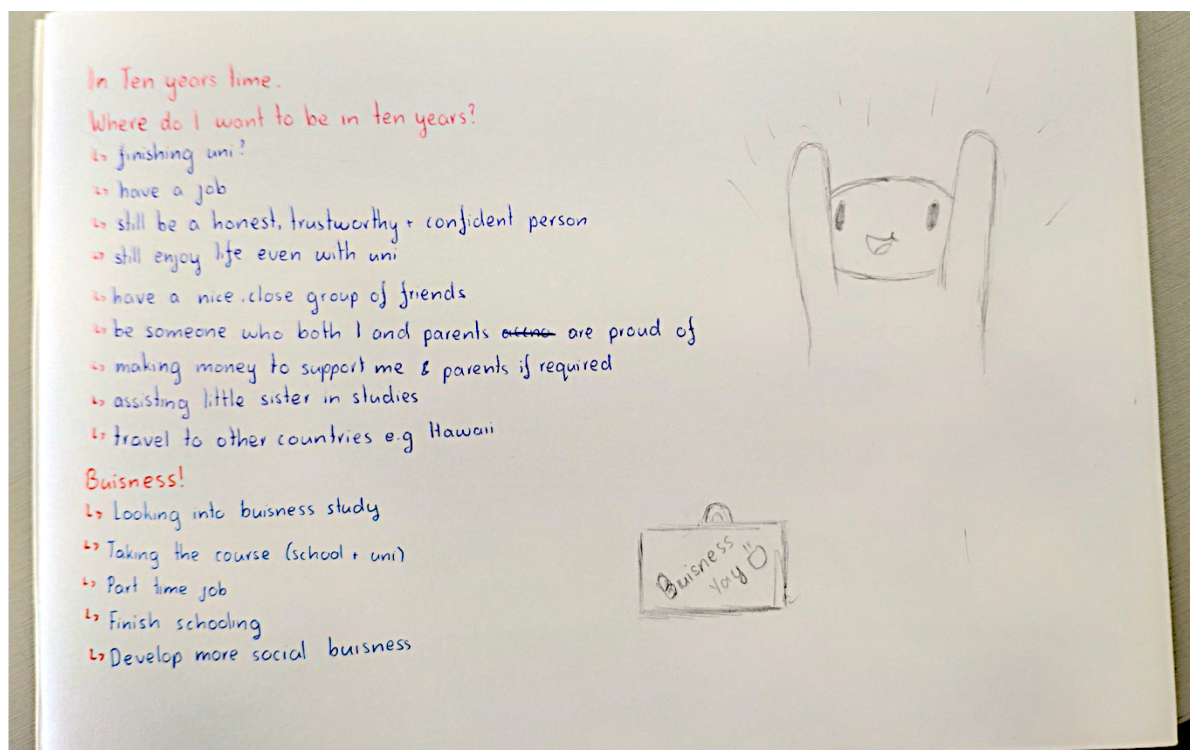
Rather than a future with no future, however, Liam's images of what may lay ahead appear to be more about tempering the performative pressures that expect him to be materially goal oriented. His thoughts circulate around enjoying the opportunities and experiences adolescence brings him in the present, and moving forward, making good on his parents' past and continuing efforts and sacrifices. In Chapter Five we saw that, like some other students, Liam suggests that his parents "didn't talk about [their migration experiences] too much", however he is nonetheless keenly aware of the hard work his father undertook to achieve a 'good life' for his family. Although he positions himself as someone who is not future-oriented, within his ideas about what his life will be in like in a decade's time, we can see he's understanding and appreciation of his parents' migration experiences, and as will recur throughout this section, the social and economic conditions this established in the past and present. Across our conversations, Liam demonstrates how he has given great thought and consideration to a future that is predicated heavily on the ethical and philosophical dimensions of self, and the type of person he

would like others to relationally recognise within his actions of making good on his parents' sacrifice. This is reflected in his artefact book list of 'Where do I want to be in ten years' in Figure 2, where a possibility of business – and developing a 'social business' – may act as a conduit to make good on supporting his parents and siblings, as well as substantiating the type of person he and his parents can be 'proud of'.

Liam's considerations of the future and his discussions about them appear distinct among other student participants. Yet a notable aspect of the discussions about 'ten years' time' across the CLS groups that can be seen in the short passages above was the ways students drew together various aspects of their possible lives into the descriptions. In our first meetings students did raise a range of aspirations, however these initial conversations tended both to fall towards a focus on study and career options, and silo different types of aspirations from one another.

**Figure 2**

*Liam's ideas for ten years' time*



Though this was not my initial intention, asking about aspirations elicited representations of what people want to *be* and *do*, which centred the discussions on desired careers and the possible educational pathways needed for their attainment. This time, the opportunity to consider what their future lives might look like broadened the discussion so that occupations became one (nonetheless important) part of many that made up their future selves. Picturing oneself as someone who was in their mid-20s allowed students to paint a bigger picture that not only included greater thought for the other possibilities that young adulthood might offer up for them, but also begins to highlight how students imagine these various aspects connecting and playing out together. Yet as the following sections elicit, these possible futures – and Liam's attempts to not focus on them – are implicated in contemporary doxic logics of adolescent mobilities and aspiration (Rodan & Huijsmans, 2021; Zipin et al., 2015). While some become troubled, others appear to embrace them more enthusiastically, but there is a general sense of acceptance that they represent the natural way society functions.

### 7.3.1 (Not being) Driven to distraction

The discussions prompted my interest in how students envisaged the interactions between these various parts of their future lives and how students interpreted the possible factors that may support or impede their ability to reach their imagined futures. One predominant theme that threaded its way through the different groups was students' own roles as agentic subjects in their own success or failure. 'Hard work' and 'getting a good job' were proffered as the type of things necessary to achieve goals by Chess and Maia. Similarly, Hanaa from the Persian CLS believed that getting "good marks is good for the uni study you want to do". Applying

oneself and working hard appear to be the key in achieving credentials that determine success.

Hanaa's CLS peer Darien provides a response that at once centres his own role in making the most of opportunities whilst relating them to changing circumstances over time and place:

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| Darien | I think there's way more opportunities in this age. My Mum was telling me the other day, she said 'these opportunities you get with resources like Google and your school and things that they offer way more than we would ever get', and that's definitely something that helps everyone grow. |
| Hanaa | Yeah, that's true. |

Darien and Hanaa recognise that opportunities might be differentially accessible, but this appears here in a generational and geographic manner. The 'you' quoted from his mother is deployed in its generalising form to represent people his age in Australia today who, through technology and schooling, share opportunities that were not available her generation and especially in Iran. The inspiration and obligation of opportunity are tightly wedded to the family migration and settlement narratives told in Chapter Five. It is noteworthy here, however, that while Darien's response appears to eschew more structural impediments, other conversations we had indicated that he recognises his privileged and privileging upper middle-class position living in Sydney's northern suburbs, with supportive parents with good occupations and incomes, and going to a 'great' local high school. Darien clearly recognises the context of class, particularly for migrant families, and what advantages this can bring. The hand of class and place that he has been dealt mean

that the capacity to reach aspirations is about his own ability to take up and make use of opportunities that have been afforded him.

One such opportunity provided through school to some students is the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme (see Petersen & O'Flynn, 2007). Both Cara and Darien raise this as something with the potential to open further opportunities in the future:

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| Cara | I think there was something, but I passed it up. So, do you know the Duke of Ed? The Duke of Edinburgh program, I was going to do it, but then um, I don't like going on heights, like doing activities … and I was like, I had the applications and everything already, and I was like, oh, this is good for my future. |
| Antoine | Can I ask why you sort of saw it as good for your future, this particular? |
| Cara | I don't know. My friends said that it gives you, well like a bonus on your HSC or something like that. Yeah, and she says, 'oh, it's good on your resume', so yeah. |

Cara's explanation of the Duke of Edinburgh program elicited that nodes of vicarious experience were evident through her friends' knowledge of the scheme. Yet they are not thickly produced to provide a clear and defined response as to its possible benefits or otherwise, or reasons why she thinks it is not appropriate for her. While she believes that there is great potential value to her future opportunities in completing it, there is a certain hesitancy and uncertainty, and she positions herself as not having the right attributes or capabilities in deciding against undertaking the scheme. These are delegitimising, affective dispositions of self-doubt that appear to impact the ways Cara establishes and enacts her aspirations. While her uncertainties concerning her initial career aspirations arose in our first focus group, we also see

elsewhere a feeling of frustration with the expectations of ‘how’ to be future oriented. In the following passage, this also ties into the responsibilising effects of ‘needing’ to have a plan – notably the consequences of not having a plan – that will continue to arise for students through this chapter:

> I think that people around me think that I don't really think about what I want to do want to do. So they keep saying like, ‘Oh you really need to start’. But then like, I actually am. Like I have it, I guess like kinda planned out. … but like, some people, like (my friend) she was like, ‘Oh why do you need to plan it out now? Because, just do whatever’. And I was like ‘You can become a hobo if you want’ [laughter in group], so-

Darien also believes that the Duke of Edinburgh program would be beneficial to future opportunities in several ways. In contrast however, he demonstrates a more assured understanding of how the experience could act as a means to his future ends, and linked this to other pursuits he was undertaking as examples of his future-oriented strategic reasoning:

> Yeah, I picked Duke of Ed because it’s good for your resume and when you achieve gold you get a couple of points for HSC as well which is really useful. And I got a job because in my job they offer this traineeship, like you can get a certificate from TAFE which is for retail which is really good as well and I do pick all these choices because of what it’ll bring to my future.

Darien also pointed to the opportunities to develop skills and experiences through the program, however, its value for future opportunities was clearly front of mind, “with the HSC and the certificate I can obtain and all the stuff, it shows the experience you have which is better for your future. For more job opportunities, for getting into schools, just better for you”. Similarly, his Persian CLS classmate Hanaa

shared that her involvement in three extracurricular clubs was taken up with a strategic consideration to improve her school reports and her chances of becoming a prefect in Year 12, though it also held value in what the present could provide affectively to the future, “because that’s a good memory to have in high school”.

In a similar vein to notions of hard work and good marks provided in other students’ responses, Aramina also provided an individuated account of what would assist in reaching her aspirations. “I think dedication and not getting distracted I feel that’s really important”, she explains. Yet as she continues to elaborate, the response highlights how she narrates a representation of herself that looks to emulate the archetypal ‘good student’ in contemporary discourses:

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| Aramina | …for example I said that I’d, at that point in my time want to be career oriented I feel like that would help me get to where I want to be. To be career oriented during those 10 years. |
| Antoine | What might be the potential distraction in a sense that you see that might? |
| Aramina | There’s a few, it would be- |
| Lionel | Video games. |
| Antoine | Possibly, no that’s- |
| Aramina | It could be just the want to travel or to take time off Uni or to get married and have kids, I feel like those are all potential distractions- |
| Willow | I like kids- |

| | |
|---|---|
| Aramina | And I feel like if I was to stay just on a work page at that point in my life, it would be a lot quicker for me to reach my goal than dragging it out. |
| Antoine | Do you see them as only distractions or are they just possible alternative paths as well? |
| Aramina | They're possible alternatives but I feel like to get where I want to get in 10 years' time, personally for me they'd be considered distraction, but I know 99% of my friends want to travel before Uni and during Uni and that's, that's fine but I feel, for my particular course, that I want to take it will be a bit of a distraction. |

Lionel's interjection casts to a contemporary and enduring moralism about the sorts of things that lead young adolescents astray from their schooling. Meanwhile, Willow's seems to convey a surprise that children would be positioned in such a way, a distraction. Aramina's explanation exemplifies the expectation of a happiness that will come by taking – and adhering strictly to – the right path (see Ahmed, 2010). She looks to set herself apart of not only her CLS peers, but '99% of my friends' by avoiding their interests and concerning herself with bigger priorities to gain and maintain a competitive career advantage. While other students in our CLS groups narrate images of diverse aspects of their lives in a decade's time, Aramina evokes the language of navigation by calling divergent imagined futures distractions to her 'particular course'. It is not that she does not wish for those other things for herself. Indeed, as the following passage from another conversation highlights, they are very much within her sights:

> I want to go straight to uni after I finish school, like I don't want to take a gap year because I'm a year younger for my year anyway, so I just want to get rid of uni as soon as possible and start my life really early on, cos then I'll have like 2 years ahead of like most people which I think is pretty good. And then, I really want to have a family, like I really want kids and, like family means a lot to me so.

As these conversations together demonstrate and reinforce however, Aramina constructs an image of being responsible/ised and highly aspirational through this 'particular course'. As Ahmed (2010) suggests, the promise of happiness is what lies ahead if we do the right thing and in the right way. Having her own family and children, and being able to travel are part of the imagined future, but they must come after she starts her life 'really early' if she is to achieve her aspirations: after the more utilitarian purposes of university are completed and she has attained the career she desires.

The notion of distraction was also a primary concept that other students raised when asked what may hinder them in reaching their imagined futures. These accounts differed in focus between each other, and to those of Aramina's above, however they nonetheless demonstrated how students internalised an individuated understanding of success and failure. In contrast with Aramina, Cara pointed to a sense of insecurity about her own abilities to maintain a course that would allow her to reach her envisioned future, which includes an occupation in law:

> I have a very low low low, like attention, so like, now I want to do something but like once I start doing it, after like a few times I get really bored of it, and I, get really sluggish and I don't want to do it. It's like this war or sport I play, so...

Positioning herself as someone who has very 'low attention' reveals similar forms of dissatisfaction that she raised about her passed-up Duke of Edinburgh opportunity, and also shares with other students who also disclosed anxiousness regarding NAPLAN explored earlier. This is further emphasised when I ask whether this perceived low attention is related to possibly losing interest in law in the future, or the study that would be needed. Cara says that both her "mindset to study a lot for my goal" and whether she would 'keep' this goal in the future are potentially at risk through her habit. Rather than viewing the uncertainty of maintaining interest in a particular path as something that opens opportunity to consider alternative paths and possibilities, the affective language of getting bored, being 'really sluggish' and the playing of a war or sport against herself suggest that Cara feels she is failing to live up to an expected, responsible student archetype that is certain about their goals and the steps necessary to achieve them.

Like Lionel's positioning of video games above, Hanaa raised concerns about teenagers being "really busy on their mobile phones these days" which resulted in them "losing time with family, getting distracted and not studying". She felt that more people were likely to become Youtubers and models because, she explained, most influencers in the media were those roles, "so I feel like we should have more people that do something good like medicine/lawyer/police stuff like that". Her perception here appeared to place a moral value on different types of work and on the abilities of young people to be 'distracted' by contemporary pursuits in popular media:

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| Antoine | So is there a sense that for a lot of people your age they look at the sort of people to aspire to, that might be, I don't if shallow is |

the right word, but they're missing out on bigger things in life in a sense?

Hanaa Yeah, kind of. There's one Instagram account I follow, he's a doctor, he's name is Dr Mike – do you know him? He's a YouTuber, a doctor and an Instagram influencer and I feel like that type of I don't know, way of doing life is good because he's a doctor off of online media things, but he also makes videos and he has this one cute dog, it's so beautiful.

Hanaa's response indicates that though she may hold judgment about certain types of aspirations and careers aligned with social media, she could also see value in utilising the medium for purposes she valued. The elaboration also allows us to see 'distraction' as something somewhat more complicated than a vice teenagers have themselves to blame for by being on their mobile phones too much. While still present, the concern also expands to implicate the types and uses of social media and technology with which young people find themselves and through which they must navigate. Her example of Dr Mike appears as a call to those with capacity to make change to improve what is provided to young people like herself.

### 7.3.2 Jobs: experience and opportunity

Another aspect that had garnered interest among several students at the time of our meetings was the prospect of working in casual, after-school jobs. Employment has already been noted as being part of students' imagined futures, where the part-time work would be supplementing pursuits such as their final years of tertiary studies, living independently, and travelling and holidaying with friends and family. Students, however, were also readily interested in such work in the here-and-now and this appeared to be part of constructing an image of growing

independence that they wished to nurture. Several articulated that working would, or did, establish them as more independent from their parents, including not needing to ask for money to buy things that they would like, and being able to make purchases that would not expect their parents to make. Willow, for example, had worked at a fast-fashion women's wear chain at the end of Year 8 for "Christmas casuals - we actually get paid $40 an hour", while Darien was working in a popular fast-food chain with one eye on buying a car in Year 11. Between these two students, however, there are some differences with the uses of money. Where, as we shall see later in this chapter, Willow finds herself spending money she is earning in a way that delays her from purchasing an expensive microphone that will help her with her music interests, Darien appears to have already planned and put in place a longer-term, two-year goal in buying a car by the time he will be able to get his provisional license.

Along with the money and attendant independence it could spur, casual work was also seen to provide another, future-oriented, benefit: that of experience. This notion of experience was multifaceted. The first was that working would allow them to build experiences of working with, socialising, and serving a range of people – employers, colleagues, customers – that would provide a broader grounding in the world around them as well as enjoyment through working in something they liked and with new friends and peers. Through this, students would also build a repertoire of skills and knowledge that could be deployed to demonstrate experience to future employers. Associated with his earlier arguments about the necessity of holding a certificate to demonstrate employability (see Chapter Six), Lionel demonstrates in our first meeting the intersection between an interest in money and these forms of experience:

> I am on the school holidays going to work with my um, my dad and my step-mum at the shop, and I'll be, I'm getting paid $80 a day. And I, and I get to

talk to the customers. So that's experience like, 'Hello, how are you? What are you looking for?' And, I'll build that experience of what it's like to be working, you know, in retail.

Lionel also discussed how, at 12 years of age, he had gone to an outlet of a videogames chain and asked if he could get a job there "cause I want to be a gamer", but was told he was too young: "he goes 'two more years left'". Darien similarly weaves together the range of purposes explored above, but can articulate the range of opportunities in a way that indicate a greater understanding of how this is at once beneficial as an intrinsically purposeful pursuit among many others, and as a strategic endeavour that is opportunity-building in several regards:

> Yeah, I like to do this stuff because it's good for me, I like doing it, it's good for my future, it's good for what I want now, it's enjoyment; I play guitar, I do tennis, I do ice-skating from school, I go to work, I go to here [CLS], I do this and all the stuff I like it, it's enjoyable and it's good for my future as well which I understand and I'm glad I'm doing it. And for my job I wanted to get the job because in high school I was thinking about what I wanted to do and what this experience is and the money which I could use to buy a car in Year 11.

As such, casual work is – alongside a range of other extra-curricular activities in which most students involve themselves – part of the performativity of productivity and resume-building foreseen to help them gain advantage for future, aspiration-aligned employment opportunities. Casual work is thus seen as part of the process of supporting oneself towards one's imagined future.

The other aspect of experience that was derived from students' conversations about casual work was the notion that it would help build capacities to manage multiple and competing demands of school, study, work, and other extra-curricular

and social pursuits. There was interest in demonstrating, both to themselves and their parents, that they could manage these demands, and this was the point at which students saw parents assert claims over proceedings. Specifically, parental concern centres around being able to keep up with schoolwork and maintain grades, and having the time to do both school and work. As such, school grades become a de facto familial "mode of regulation", a performative yardstick with rewards and sanctions (Ball, 2003, p. 216). For several, the opportunity to work would be delayed, at least until the next year when they would be in Year 10. This pattern was striking across all Vietnamese CLS students, who were encouraged or told to wait, or had a different parameter for working established by parents. Liam, for example, explained that he had wanted to start looking for a job, but his parents wanted him to "just to go on studying and relaxing". I asked if he was still interested in the idea of pursuing this in the next couple of years while he was still in high school, and if his parents might continue to hold any concerns:

> I'm not too sure how they'd react to it if I started doing a job, and like being out of the house a lot more. Because like, at home I do a lot of stuff to like, help out the family, teach my little sister as well. So, like if I start doing that, it might affect them as well.

Following on from this, Anh explained that his mum told him that he would need to get good grades this year to work next, although "my dad said, 'oh, just work'. But my mum usually beats my dad in an argument".

Together, Liam and Anh reflect some of the ways that classed and gendered patterns intersect with culture to shape how parents mobilise investments in their children's futures. Liam's response is particularly telling for the way it presents the interplay between the mutual commitments each party has to one another. His father

and mother – a carpenter and tailor respectively – wish to ensure that his primary focus is on his education, but in Liam's construction, they are also positioned as wanting to keep certain that he has less to worry about, by relaxing, so that there are no other significant demands that may hold him back academically. In so doing, his parents are seen to value his education as a way that will foster academic experiences and upward mobility. Yet not having to worry about a job raises other worries for Liam. Though he has presented an interest in maintaining a focus on the present – while nonetheless imagining the sort of ethical and relational dispositions he would like to continue embodying in the future – through our second and into our third focus groups, Liam raises concerns that he is not future-oriented enough. More than once in our second focus he mentions feeling 'lost' about the future and the lack of planning he perceives himself making:

> For me, I'm a little bit lost when it comes to the future, because in the present, I'm just thinking about enjoying my younger life.. Because like, in my home when I'm with my family, I don't really get much of a, like my own decision, like most of them are made for me. So, I'm like, I'm not that good at making my own decisions, so that's what I'm trying to build on right now.

In entertaining the idea of taking up a job, Liam finds himself thrown in between his interests and a wish to build experiences, his concerns about the detrimental effects acting upon them may have for his family, and what he recognises as broader expectations placed on people his age.

Deviating briefly to the Assyrian CLS, Aramina's parents have also told her that school needs to be her priority. Yet while there is a shared prominence attributed to grades and education, this produces different effects and affects on Aramina. As she goes through Year 9, school maintains precedence above all else:

> My parents, my grandparents, my uncles, my aunties, in my whole family it's education is the top priority. So it's, 'our job is to work, your job is to be a fulltime student.' Doesn't matter about everything else, it's just that's your job.

With school positioned as a job, underperforming also has similar repercussions, because if "you bring home a bad grade and it's like, I don't want to go home today". I ask Aramina if the stories of her parents' academic and occupational success work to act as an inspiration or add pressure:

> Both, so there's the pressure from my parents because they're, you've got to be like us. And my dad was a bit of an exception because he had dyslexia but then when he found out about dyslexia, he was always top in the year as well. So it's that and then but it's also a bit of inspiration because it's, well if they did it I can do it so.

We can see in Aramina's response here that even though she acknowledges and dearly appreciates the inspiration her parents' success provides, this inspiration is also laced with the feeling of dissatisfied, 'bad perfectionism' (Keddie, 2016) where the anticipation of never quite having done good enough is ever-present: "I got 18 out of 20 for my essay and he goes, 'Where are the other 2 marks?' If I get 20 out of 20 he's like, 'Good I expected nothing less.' And I'm like-". Unlike the boys from the Vietnamese CLS, fulfilling the role of full-time student and foregoing notions of getting a casual job are about achieving future goals that align with intergenerational status preservation, and parents are themselves positioned – through their actions and by Aramina – as performative yardsticks alongside other measurements of schoolwork and comparisons with peers.

Among other students in the Vietnamese CLS, parents negotiated alternative opportunities that sought to balance their children's desires to work with the

importance placed on doing well at school. Maia had planned to find work but had recognised herself that "I'm kind of busy this year". So her parents suggested that given this was going to be her last year of Vietnamese school[38], "after you graduate, then you can work on Saturdays". For Cara, balance was found by offering a more flexible way to work:

> So, I was planning to get a job, but my parents say I should study, so they said I should work at my dad's place for just over the– like maybe a year, and then if I feel like I want to do something different, then I should.

Cara discussed how her father, an accountant, worked not far from home, "and it's near the shops, so it's good", however, she raised an uneasiness in the avenue to working her parents have provided her. For Cara, the situation does not feel the same as she envisages it would if she were to have a more formalised job outside the family, receiving a prescribed wage for the work she would be doing. At one level, this aligns with aspects of wishing to branch out and find greater independence for herself, where her experiences would be built away from her family and through new networks and relationships. At another, however, the uneasiness also stems from where her income would be coming from, "because it doesn't feel right that he's paying me". "Just get your dad's money," Maia jokes with her, but it feels wrong "taking your parents' money" who themselves work to earn that money.

For Darien at the Persian CLS, ensuring grades were maintained also played an important part in the rules of picking up a casual job. Darien constructs an image of the negotiation which primarily highlights an openness in the relationship between parents and child. The process allows him to approach them comfortably

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[38] Maia was in Year 6 at her Vietnamese CLS, the highest year of classes they offered to school students.

and confidently, coproducing the planning and establishment of parameters that will encourage successful outcomes:

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| Antoine | When you said to your parents, 'I'd like to get a job', did they raise anything with you to be wary of? |
| Darien | Well my parents are very good at pep talking, they're very good at working through situations and so when I first gave them this idea I proposed this idea to them, like 'Yeah, no worries, but you need to have all your school - you need to be on top of your school work, you need to show us you're responsible' and after I showed them this in a couple of months in November I went and applied and got the job and the key thing my Mum said to me is 'If your school grades go down you have to quit, school is above all; this is extra, it is good for you but it is still extra'. |

As I raised earlier, Darien explicitly frames the experience of casual work as something that has, and *will* have, wide-ranging benefits, yet one of the significant developments from our conversations, is how this pursuit of casual work reinforces within Darien a responsibilising effect in line with neoliberal discourses of citizenship. To contextualise this, however, requires a link to be made to another conversation. Discussed earlier, Hanaa had raised the distracting effects of contemporary media and technologies as a possible hindrance to attaining aspirations and imagined futures. She continued to establish that one of her uncertainties about the future was the effects and pressures placed on people to perform and act in particular ways through social media to fit socially normative expectations:

Hanaa I think online, I don't know if it's just me or if you guys know as well, nowadays people have to be a certain way, they have to look a certain way to fit in, they have to post certain things, they have to travel, they have to become a model to fit in; does anyone else feel that or is that just me?

Darien I don't get very pressured by people no matter how much they try, I don't feel very pressured, but I definitely see where you're coming from. A lot of people are like that that; they need to fit in by doing certain stuff like become-

Hanaa Like clothes, travelling to Bora Bora, it *has* to be Bora Bora, it can't be anywhere else.

As the conversation proceeds, I raise how I also see certain pressures and expectations placed on people to act in certain ways or do certain things through social media, and I also posit that these may flow on to the way employers might use social media and online spaces to check in on employees or see what type of person prospective employees are. I ask whether their schools have ever raised this with them in discussing employment, putting forward the feeling that

Antoine at a certain level for me, there's sort of this moral code that you have to fit into … that sort of infringes on people's freedoms in certain ways too.

Darien Yeah, when I got my job we had an introduction to what you can and can't post on social media because you work for that company and you represent them, you can't discourage the company and say it's bad because you work for them.

I ask if he has any concerns or is comfortable with this:

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| Darien | Yeah completely, because you’re working for them, you can't just say ‘yeah, this sucks but I have a job’. |
| Antoine | But at the same time, you work for them for only several hours a week. You are another person that’s not theirs to own outside of that time in a sense, should they be able to tell you what to do outside of those hours or is it more complicated? |
| Darien | Well that’s what I was thinking about, when they first told me this I was thinking outside those hours I'm just another person, I'm a customer, I do not have anything to do with them, I can eat their food, I can do whatever I want; but also you do represent them even if you’re not wearing the uniform or not doing that, you represent the company because they employ you, they teach you, they tell you what to do, they make job opportunities and you represent them either way just like how you represent the school when you’re outside school hours, you represent your teams or sporting teams, you represent the company as well. |
| Antoine | So there’s sort of an expectation that to some degree that has a role to play in how you present yourselves as well. |
| Darien | Definitely. |

While it is evident that Darien would not perceive it as such, a contradiction appears between his presentation of self as someone immune to social pressures and his readiness to create an image of himself as an archetypal employee-subject. Hochschild (2012) reminds us of the demands the service economy places on young

people by valorising and commodifying a range dispositions – deferential, capable of performing relational labour – that are deployed to satisfy the needs and wants of both employers and consumers. And as the lines between public and private spaces have blurred, so too the boundaries that limit where employers' demands can lay claim. Expectations and subjectivities of the good employee therefore permeate through lives outside the employer's walls. Though this is consequently reinforced by young workers' precarious and low-paid positions (Farrugia, 2020), Darien does not explicitly recognise precarity and low pay which might compel him to uphold the brand's image and expectations. Yet he feels obligated to his employer in a way that fails to recognise what is already established through waged compensation for his labour. Because of what they provide to him and other young people – "they employ you, they teach you, they tell you what to do, they make job opportunities" – a quasi-debt is owed, and it is paid through the representational subjectivities they call upon him to deploy. As such, (re)constituting the self towards successful citizenship under neoliberalism contains something paradoxical. Just as responsibilisation valorises students for leading entrepreneurial, productive, self-motivated, and self-determining lives, this repertoire of commodified qualities is refined in such a way so as to limit and define how they may actually be performed.

It is a notable conversation because it called to mind others I had with Darien's mother in our interview the previous year. As we see developing in Chapter Five and recognised by students elsewhere, the ability to provide opportunities to their children is established as a central driver for migration by Persian families. More specifically, however, Darien's mother constructs a social and family setting in which high academic and occupations aspirations and expectations were established, but heavily restricted the range of possible opportunities towards a narrow, prestigious few:

> It's very tough. It's very tough, and back there [in Iran], the medicine field is very popular because you earn good money in that, so- and the prestige, it's very prestigious…
>
> …
>
> … with all that brainwashing – I call it brainwashing because everyone was talking, 'Oh, you're really good, you're a top student … so you should be a doctor, you should be a doctor, you should be a doctor'.

The discursive repetition serves to emphasise the 'brainwashing' and the restrictive pathways she was being pressured to follow, the conditions she wishes to avoid for her children. Rather, she has sought to encourage the development of a broad set of interests that are reflected in the different aspirations Darien had discussed during our first meeting – "you need some joy in your life" – and this is also couched in reference to migration and culture:

> I told him that in Australia you still have a chance that even if you go to uni and you think that you can study something else that's more suiting you, you can, you still have a chance to change it.

Yet, in the discussions that highlight her involvement in the production of Darien's navigational capacities and aspirations, she also emphasises a wish for him to avoid the heavily performative, and the focus on the singular pathways which appear possible to avoid in Australia, but nonetheless present in people around her family:

> I think, I must say, yes, still people sometimes, even my kids here, sometimes they tell me, I want to be lawyer, I want to be – and I try to avoid to put any comments on that because I know that how harmful it is because they need to find, especially in a country like Australia, it doesn't really matter what they

study, it matters that they like their job and they can have a decent life with whatever they study as long as they work properly and they're– as long as they're appropriate, they can live good.

The notion of 'working properly' and making 'appropriate' choices of study direct towards certain acceptable behaviours that fit the "only thing" Darien's mother wants, for him to be educated in whatever he studies. It however appears difficult for these behaviours not to be inculcated in broader neoliberal notions of responsibilisation that students see as necessary for their futures.

### 7.3.3 Structural factors effecting imagined futures

Earlier parts of this study explored how students anticipated family and the influence of culture through parents and community to be prominent influences on their envisaged futures. Yet as we have seen here, when framing notions of 'successful' attainment, most students centred themselves in their own chances of reaching their aspirations. Throughout our discussions on life in 10 years' time, students did not appear troubled by other potential structural factors, although some recognised possibilities. Chess, for example, raised a prominent and enduring contemporary social debate, housing affordability, as something that may affect her future. She had pictured herself working in either a "police related or travel related career" in a decade's time, but she believed this wouldn't be happening in Sydney:

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| Chess | You keep hearing like, in Huntersville, the house prices are going up, so I probably won't buy a house, in Huntersville. I know I'm not going to live in Sydney because the housing is going to be so expensive. |
| Antoine | Yeah, and so, what are your – do you imagine yourself in that 10 years' time being somewhere else, as well? |

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| Chess | Yeah. |
| Antoine | Does it fit in with the travel and that sort of thing, or? |
| Chess | I- I might be moving a lot, due to travelling, but yeah, but I'm not going to live in Sydney. |
| Antoine | Oh, okay, yeah.  You haven't sort of pictured where, exactly, yeah. |
| Chess | Yeah, where exactly. |

Mobility as aspiration is shared with most other students who desire the opportunity to travel abroad. While most wish to travel to visit their parents' home countries, with several pointing to a desire to visit extended family, there are desires to 'experience' and 'see' different parts of the world – Maia, Miriam; meeting and 'talking to local people' – Chess; and wanting to watch favourite football teams –Anh, Lionel. These different interests in travel reflect what Hawkins (2014b, 2014a) posits as being part of a process of self-discovery and a desire for happiness, as well as being attached to notions of seeking independence and maturity that were also sought out of getting casual jobs. In this way, alongside mending relational ruptures caused by the tyranny of distance, travel appears to be implicated in normative youth subjectivities concerning mobility and space, and one's place in society.

Our group discussions about what life would look like in 10 years' time also revealed how this aspiration is interwoven with other aspirations for Chess and some other students including Willow, Lionel, and Anh. Travelling and working are concomitant because their desired futures see them living overseas or having travel as a requisite aspect of work. Unlike other students however, Chess also envisages mobility as necessity because she believes that purchasing a house in Sydney would

be an impossibility. Nonetheless, it is notable that rather than hinder opportunities to attain her career aspirations, these would shift geographically to occur in another as-yet-unknown place or places. The aspirations themselves remain achievable, and Chess demonstrates an understanding that to do so, she needs to remain cognisant of other factors that she believes are outside her control.

In a similar way, Darien too recognises that through the life course, financial factors will play a more prominent role that he must be aware of and prepare for:

> So in my commerce class we did this assignment which is about where you'll be after you finish high school, mid-life and retirement and we did a lot of study on this and my main thought is student loans for study, work I get a part-time job to fund my housing and food and all those utilities and living conditions and all that, just how to get all that money so you can live. So yeah, I feel like as time goes past, I feel like money will get a bit more difficult, but if you work really hard for it then you can support yourself.

Both Chess and Darien demonstrate a capacity to recognise, understand and overcome obstacles; a "capacity to improvise a script that is suitable for the context and the desired outcome of the play" (Bok, 2010, p. 176). Though whereas Chess forthrightly states that such factors will play a role in at least determining *where* her aspirations will be reached – if not hinder her likelihood of attaining them – Darien's response is one such example where he presents an optimistic image of himself as someone able to overcome obstacles that present themselves. This image is not one of simple confidence. Rather, he crafts it by calling attention to a repertoire of skills and perspectives that he has developed through his commerce class. It is important to recognise here how these reflect an expanding navigational capacity that his schooling affords him, and that have been supported by the types of conversations he

and his mother say take place within the family. It is one that allows him to both recognise the wider social and economic factors that he will face as he moves beyond school, and already plan strategically to work through them. Yet this is once again couched in a highly individuated, psychologised solution that Darien used to define the factors conducive to realising aspirations: overcoming such difficulties is presented as a choice and value to apply oneself by 'working really hard', just as students have suggested their parents did in migrating and settling in Australia.

Differing markedly from more individuated accounts of overcoming material obstacles was Liam who drew upon lived experience to tell of how factors beyond his control might hinder future outcomes. As we were discussing the Duke of Edinburgh and other pursuits that students interpreted as opportunities to support them in attaining their imagined futures in the Vietnamese CLS, Liam raised that "I used to go to scouts, and gone on camps and rock climbing and all that". It was something, he said, he enjoyed. Given this, and that he had said he 'used to go', I asked if it were a case of time and ability to commit that he had now stopped:

| | |
|---|---|
| Liam | Because like, I sort of lost interest in it, as well as like, we go camping a lot, and of course, we have to pay for like, a lot of things, and my family wasn't able to like, keep up with it, so I just thought it was better for me to stop it. |
| Antoine | Okay. Is it something that you look at, and has it been helpful doing scouts, do you think, as you've grown up, like has it been beneficial for you? |
| Liam | I think it's been very beneficial, because like, I got to know the outside world a little bit more, I sort of got to meet like, new people and everything. |

It is a short conversation, as other students then start to discuss the other type of similar activities that they are involved in, like youth clubs and sports, and at the time it did appear to sound like a discussion in a similar vein – one of response to questions about opportunities. Indeed, Liam certainly does see the Scouts as something that provided him significant opportunities to grow through experiences of meeting others and learning more about the environmental world and spaces outside of home, school, and his place in south-west Sydney. Liam however demonstrates a subtle, yet keen awareness of how such opportunities might be curtailed. While he does say he "sort of lost interest in it", this appears to be a way of narrating a personal feeling over the top of the material impacts of financial obstacles. It is something told to me and his peers, but sounds as if this may have been part of the conversations within his family. Recognising the costliness of regular camps, outings, and other activities, and how this may have put strain on his family's capacity to afford other things, Liam provides a loss of interest as a way to forego this pursuit. In disclosing this, he gives voice to the experience of having lost opportunities to support his imagined futures that little 'overcoming through hard work and perseverance' would remedy.

## 7.4 Conclusion: Life as project?

In Chapter Six, the exploration of navigational capacities revealed how students' capacity to fill their pathways with a range of thickly developed nodes of experience was relational to their social positionalities. Students like Aramina and Darien, whose family upbringing and schooling provided them with significant material advantage, could draw on a range of personal and vicarious experiences to explicitly link ends to means, to act as cartographer, in a way other students did not. This is not to say other students *lacked* aspiration, or the capacity to aspire. All

students drew upon diverse material, social and cultural resources in narrating aspirations, however understandings of the processes of attainment varied.

As we moved into this chapter, the focus shifted from navigational capacities specifically to one that examined the ways participants understood themselves as students, imagined their future selves, and interpreted the possibilities of aspiration achievement. While these findings therefore continue to attend to my first two research questions, further emphasis is placed on responding to my fourth, which asks how students adopt, (re)produce and/or resist wider narratives and practices about education and aspirations constituted through family, social networks, schools, and other sites of education. What is particularly noteworthy out of the conversations explored in this chapter is the relationship between navigational capacities and the adoption of dispositions that align with neoliberal discourses of the archetypal 'good' student: self-directing, calculating and responsible for one's own successes and failures. Darien and Aramina, for example, narrate images of responsibilised students who attribute successful navigation of their aspirational paths in largely individuated ways: remaining rationally focused on goals; being knowledgeable about and responsible for overcoming any possible obstacles; and enthusiastically adopting expected dispositions that are seen to be aligned with success and opportunity-making – whether in education or through other opportunities.

Students like Darien and Aramina, however, are not unquestioning of the discursive practices that construct their student and adolescent subjectivities. There are several examples where both engage critically, particularly around aspects of NAPLAN and in recognising differentiated opportunities and obstacles, however they (re)present themselves as largely unencumbered by any possibility of not reaching their imagined futures. Simultaneously, other students are also drawn into neoliberal normativities of studenthood and adolescence, and broader tensions of responsibility

are evident. All participating students want and are looking to demonstrate that they can take up greater responsibilities as an adolescent growing towards adulthood, negotiating and comprehending the world around them and their place in it. They are interested in participating in a wider range of activities and pursuits, and many are taking steps towards casual employment, as a means to broaden experiences. But in constructing these images of responsibility, broad structural contributors and impediments to aspiration navigation are not readily noticed in most students' own lives and they discursively accept that they must be self-determining. Rather, students were more likely to recognise their ethnicity in this context, whether as a reason for the performative cultures they were incited to participate in, or within the dis/agreements between parents and child about the ways they imagine themselves living out their future selves.

While students also engaged critically with aspects of the performativity regimes placed around them, these nonetheless led students to develop subjectivities and concepts of self that absorbed into the narratives of the neoliberal 'good' student, sometimes in terms of how they did not live up to this. Ultimately then, the language of performativity and responsibilisation appears inescapable: students often find themselves in a constant process of self-evaluation against discourses of personal responsibility and success that appear to become constitutive of their very selves. It is a process that can sometimes ferment dissatisfaction, particularly through a constant need of attaining better and perfect. While the conversations might thus reflect Walkerdine's (2003) argument that the "practices of subjectification produce a constantly failing subject" (p. 241), it is important to recognise how these conversations are entangled in broader narratives that not only see students preparing for the future, but also see them imagining it by attempting to make sense of their present and their past. By keeping this in mind, the complexity through

which coming to aspire takes shape, and through which aspirations are enacted takes centre stage. As I conclude the study in the following chapter, I bring together the themes and narratives that have weaved through these previous data chapters, and I consider the implications they raise for future policy and education practice, as well as for theoretical and conceptual thinking about aspirations more broadly.

# Chapter Eight – Conclusion

## 8.1 Introduction

In concluding her review of literature on rural American youth aspirations, Pamela MacBrayne (1987) left readers to reflect on several important philosophical and ethical considerations about our academic and policy attention to the role aspirations play in young people's lives. She asked:

> If the aspirations of all youth are high, should we be pleased that they are aiming so high, based on the assumption that high aspirations will create the strong motivation that will spur them on toward higher attainment? Or should we be concerned … that many will suffer when they encounter reality and find they cannot achieve their goals? … If aspirations are higher than expectations and expectations are higher than attainment, should we be trying to raise aspirations, or expectations, or attainment, or all three? And what is the relationship of these three to opportunity? If opportunities are not there, should we raise hopes or should we, instead, concentrate on removing the structural impediments that exist for some groups and provide expanded educational and occupational opportunities? Or should we do both? … And, if parents' aspirations for their children are not the same as those of school personnel or society at large, who's to say who's right? … And finally, is status attainment the ultimate goal of youth or should it be the goal of the occupational choice process? Perhaps happiness, quality of life, lifestyle and satisfaction are more appropriate ultimate goals.

Nearly forty years on, these questions continue to go to the core of aspirations research and policy-making. If anything, they have taken on renewed significance and meaning. Aspirations are no more "beyond the purview of governments" (Sellar,

2015, p. 210), but rather firmly part of the political apparatus through which people are prompted to demonstrate the appropriate aptitudes and attitudes towards self-improvement and mobility. From a young age, students are called and expected to be aspirational, and a framework of educational policies, cemented in Australia by the Bradley Review (2008), have sought to instil in them 'high' aspirations for tertiary education and normatively high-status occupations.

It is within this political context that this study was established, located among a diversifying body of research that questions the simplicity with which aspirations have been envisaged and consequently positioned as an a priori precursor to expectations, achievement, and subsequent outcomes. In exploring student aspirations through the conceptual framing and methodological process that I have assembled and drawn from, this study helps to broaden our understandings of how aspirations are formed and given life, most specially in the context of family migration experiences and diasporic practices, but simultaneously under wider political contexts.

In concluding this study, I first provide an overview of key findings, and then consider some of the limitations of the study and possibilities for continuing research. I then propose several implications for policy and practice, before turning to the conceptual and empirical contributions to the sociology of education field.

## 8.2 Key findings: Piecing together the research puzzle

This study began from the premise that rather than reflecting an 'individualist psychological register' (Zipin et al., 2015), aspirations represent hopes for the future borne out of personal and shared experiences, and interpretations of the past and present within the historical context of social, cultural, and material conditions. The exploratory nature of the research prompted the development of a 'research puzzle'

(Clandinin & Huber, 2010) that took such a premise into consideration within the context of migrant-background CLS participants, and was assembled with the following questions:

1. How are post-school aspirations understood and enacted by migrant-background students who attend Community Languages Schools?
2. What narratives do these students draw upon in shaping their aspirations?
3. In what ways are stories of family migration, ethnicity and culture deployed in constructing aspiration narratives?
4. How do students adopt, (re)produce and/or resist wider narratives about education and aspirations constituted through family, social networks, schools, and other sites of education?

Across the analysis of data through Chapters Five to Seven, a picture builds that runs counter to the notion that cohorts of young people 'lack' aspiration. The students in this study all hoped to attain good academic results and aspired to university or other forms of tertiary study, and they all held aspirations for occupations that would require further education as well. Despite different social, economic, and cultural experiences, students imagined futures that were open to a range of possibilities, and this included aspirations for other opportunities and experiences beyond study and work, including travel, family, and greater independence as young adults. Here, the benefit of the narrative form of inquiry allowed for the development and emergence of different aspirations and ideas about the future over time.

As the different themes and topics across those chapters already presents, a range of important factors go into what students understand their aspirations to be and how they envisage the process to attaining them. One such factor is what could be conceptualised as the ‘migration narrative’ that was shared broadly among students and participating parents, which involved (re)storying parents’ experiences of departure from their home country and eventual settlement in Australia. Reflecting similar conceptualisations in other migration and temporalities literature (Appadurai, 2003; Boccagni, 2017; Coates, 2006; Ho, 2019, 2020; Stanley, 2020), the migration narratives that participants told play several important roles. They first told of the experiences of departure and loss, but they also indicated social and material conditions and positionalities both prior to movement and through the processes of resettlement. While this itself helped to establish a basis upon which students’ aspirations were built, students’ understanding of place through their parents’ experiences further supported them. Migration narratives had been used as a teleological device that was deployed to give purpose to parental and family experiences of loss, sacrifice, and hard work, signposting actions and experiences that could be used by students in their efforts to attain their aspirations.

Appadurai’s (2004) conceptualisation of aspirations as a navigational capacity is important at this point. There were several elements that differentially filled students’ navigational maps, and even within the migration narratives students told, we could see different capacities to construct stories. This was less an issue of details said or left unsaid, but rather about the ways some students constructed links between the experiences of their parents and their own.

While the migration narrative established some nodes along the navigational map, others were produced through other various experiences – of one’s own and of other people – that took place across a range of academic, social, and cultural spaces.

It is here that we begin to see bigger differences in students' aspirations, not because some did not aspire as much as others, but because of differences in the understanding and knowledge of the necessary and possible paths towards attainment. In looking to interpret the map (de Certeau, 1984), students like Aramina and Darien, whose archives are replete with varied resources and opportunities to practice aspiration, possessed a different and confident experience and understanding of the world around them in comparison with Lionel, whose aspirations were constructed around the importance of gaining academic accreditation as a way of ensuring poverty avoidance. Indeed, when told of the potential costs of university study for an emerging aspiration to become a teacher, he held immediate concerns about his capacity to afford it.

Here, we also see the different capacities and motivations of parents to make investments – material, cultural, emotional – to support and produce a range of experiences and opportunities. It is within this context that participation in lessons at the CLS took place. There were varied cultural and diasporic aspirations built into the practices that students participated in, but parents also saw personal benefits for their children. These could be about expanding opportunities with an eye to future occupational possibilities, but they could also be caught up in broader politics of identity, where knowledge and understanding about one's past can work against forms of discrimination in wider society.

In the storying of parental efforts, investments also interact with their migration narratives, and the material and social conditions produced within. Anh's mother, for example, made considerable investments by enrolling her children in several extra-curricular activities to circumvent and avoid her own foreclosed aspirations and experiences of limited resources. Meanwhile, Darien's mother similarly encouraged and supported her sons' interests in a range of pursuits as a

way of fostering possibilities that were stringently restricted to her growing up in Iran. Lionel's grandparents on the other hand did not appear able to support him in the same way, however this should not be read as a lack of aspiration for their child in the way dominant parenting discourses might admonish, and they made great efforts to ensure a happy and safe upbringing, able to grow and learn through Assyrian school, and Assyrian church activities like bible studies classes.

Through both the interviews with parents and broader focus groups with students, parental efforts could be understood to play out along a Lareauian 'concerted cultivation'-'natural growth' nexus (Lareau, 2002, 2011), however they should not be read in the distinct, classed dichotomy that can be implied through such a framework. Just as Vincent and Maxwell (2016) find, the parenting work – and more conspicuously, mothering work (Arendell, 2000, 2001; Robertson et al., 2019) – of engaging children in extra-curricular activities was made instrumentally with an eye to the future, however this was entangled with desires to give children the opportunity to have diverse experiences of the world around them – most often, experiences unavailable to them. Further to this, such classed elements are also complicated by the ethnicised boundaries of group formations. A shared culture across different social classes allows for communities and their families to develop an 'ethnic capital' in spaces such as the CLS (Iqbal & Modood, 2023; Modood, 2004; Shah et al., 2010). Family investments can be interpreted as part of a wider network of efforts that at once provided support for in-group members, and social, educational and economic opportunities that intersect those of the wider socio-spatial setting, and thus seek to establish the community's 'terms of recognition' (Agius Vallejo, 2012; Appadurai, 2004; Shahrokni, 2015, 2017, 2018). Within contemporary political and education policy contexts however, such efforts had nonetheless become the expected way for parents to demonstrate themselves as

‘good’ parents (Ho, 2019, 2020; Vincent & Maxwell, 2016). Just as parents’ work appears to have become intensified as a means towards the preparation of future-oriented children, so to the work and expectations of young people themselves, producing different senses of un/certainty and anxiety among participants in pursuit of their aspirations. By the time students were moving through Years 8 and 9 and through this study, they had already formed an understanding of the importance of their academic performances and efforts in their future opportunities. Some students, for example, held multiple aspirations for possible avenues of study and careers, and while this reflected a sense of imagination and play about the possible, it also allowed students to evaluate their likelihood of attainment and thus strategically maximise opportunities. At times however, rather than play, this was constituted through the uncertainties and frustrations of not knowing whether the choices and ideas they had about their futures were the ‘right’ paths – in their own eyes and those of the people around them (see Ahmed, 2007, 2010). For others who were more confident about their particular (possible) paths of interest and the steps that needed to be taken, this appeared to produce a responsibilised orientation in which particular images of studenthood permeated the narratives.

The role of mainstream schooling became caught up in these developments as well. For a student like Aramina, for example, the aspirations that she had already mapped out as a cartographer of her future not only reflected the high social status and material advantage afforded by her parents’ occupation, but were reinforced within a highly competitive school culture where ‘everyone is talking about which university already’. For some other students this appeared at certain instances like NAPLAN testing, which fostered performative cultures that emphasised the imperative to do well and set high expectations that were established through evaluation of the self against others.

Indeed, the wider narrative that students had adopted in these and other academic experiences was of the neoliberal 'good' student: enterprising, future-oriented, self-directed (Keddie, 2016). This wasn't adopted without any critique or resistance, however it was the yardstick by which participants measured and valued themselves as students. Whether their own actions reflected this, or they saw themselves as inadequately capable of living up to it in various instances, it nonetheless permeated students' sense the self.

Within this study, this arose in two other important ways. First were students' imagined futures as young adults. These conversations gave students space to consider and discuss a wider range of aspirations than when asked more directly about what they aspired to do. Students imagined themselves living more independently whether alone or with friends, potentially having a partner or even a pet, traveling, finishing study nearing its completion, and working part-time or beginning a career. Yet while there was a more expansive range of aspirations and interests, when considering what might help or hinder their achievement, students placed significant onus on themselves, and there were only few instances recognising the possibility of wider structural and institutional impediments or influences. Students also tended to circle broader aspirations back to the importance of education and occupational attainment. This development is shared with other studies (Alloway & Dalley, 2009; Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Baird et al., 2012), reflective of most participants' beliefs in being the architect of their own successes and failures. Conceptually, it signifies how the promise of happiness (Ahmed, 2007, 2010) works to direct action, becoming open to us some time in the future if we do the right things in the right way.

The second way now circles us back, to the migration narratives and students' constructions of situated identities. Perhaps unintentionally, the stories that parents

told children, and that children (re)interpreted could work to buttress the ideals of the neoliberal good student. The circumstances of migration were often produced within broader social and political conditions that left migrants experiencing structural inequality, discrimination, and racism. These consequently gave rise to the narrative elements of hard work, sacrifice, and loss that students adopted and drew from in understanding their aspirations. Students understood the social and material conditions that shaped the contexts within which their parents worked hard, but those historical conditions entangled with contemporary social and political ones to establish a paradigm in which it was difficult to imagine and discursively construct alternative narratives. Here, it is worth underscoring that it is not the idea of 'working hard' that is of conceptual concern, but rather its deployment within an institutionalised culture that individuates hard work and 'success' through responsibilising and performative measures.

Alongside this, it is important to note that students tended to explain the reasons for high parental expectations as a cultural artefact. This was most prominent among Vietnamese students who, in what appeared to be an act of 'strategic essentialism', drew themselves into broader, transnational identities as Asians. This ties into an Australian context of 'Asian' academic excellence that has served to ethnicise perceptions of schooling (Ho, 2019, 2020; Watkins et al., 2017; Watkins & Noble, 2008, 2013). For others, the emphasis on the cultural as an explanation of high expectations was also evident, although this was more likely to reflect a broader positionality as migrants, even where, in the instances of both Darien and his mother, notions of social class were also produced. Alongside Darien in the Persian CLS, Hanaa also constructed an image of Iranians wanting not only high-status occupations, but for medicine almost exclusively. As she explained that

her mother had been encouraging her away from her aspirations of becoming a police officer, Hanaa spoke at first with a sense of frustration:

> It's just like if you look at it all Persians expect their kids to become doctors, and I want to be like the first Persian to be different because I like being different... It's like everything's about doctor there [in Iran].

Nonetheless, here too, Hanaa recognised that her mother's missed opportunities for study were what was leading her aspirations for her daughter, even if she herself understood that if they had come to Australia to seek freedoms not available in Iran, she should be free to pursue whatever career she wanted.

At various points throughout the findings, participants affectively demonstrated ambivalences, anxieties, and concerns about how they measured up as students, and about the expectations being placed upon them by parents, family, school, and even wider society, reflecting an affective orientation towards the 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011) that is sometimes proffered to them. Yet through this many felt much hope and optimism about their capacities to achieve their aspirations because their families' experiences and the contexts of their upbringing provided a reference point to direct efforts. Even if they sometimes felt they could not live up to that, most spoke very clearly about the support they continued to receive within the home, and even through other spaces and networks around them. Yet neoliberal notions of the good student, and of personal responsibility for success and failure left limited scope for imagining pathways to future selves through other frames.

## 8.3 Limitations and opportunities

This study provided the opportunity for a deep, qualitative exploration of students' aspirations, and the social, cultural, and historical conditions that shape them. The interpretations of data have provided important insights that, in the

theoretical and methodological spirit of narrative inquiry, are validated through saturation, verisimilitude, and fidelity.

Inherently however, whilst never the goal of narrative research, this study is always partial so that generalisability is limited. The stories unfolded within the contexts of particular spaces and times, namely with participants from the three CLSs across Sydney over the 15-month period of our focus groups and interviews. At a cursory level, undertaking a similar research framework with different participants and at different CLSs will allow for the intersection of different stories with other social and cultural contexts to be examined. More importantly, the CLS was intentionally chosen as a site for research because they are complementary places of education where families and diasporic communities are likely to demonstrate an interest in language and cultural maintenance as part of identity-making and aspirations (Nordstrom, 2016). This study contends that such a context also has bearing on students' and families' senses of belonging, and subsequently on their interpretation of their present and future lives. There are also important opportunities to undertake research on aspirations among staff and teachers at CLS, presenting an avenue to understand community aspirations, their experiences in participating at such sites of education, and even their interpretations of student aspirations both personal and oriented towards their wider senses of belonging.

These factors, however, should be understood as part of the storying process within narrative inquiry methodologies, just as the stories emerging and developing through this study identify differences alongside the shared across both CLS groups and individuals. Furthermore, we can imagine that based on the study's findings, migration stories can be formed by most young people whose parents migrated or sought refuge in another country. A neoliberal social and political context that we see participants interact with and respond to also runs further afield than the Sydney

basin. Future research can keep attentive to the role of migration narratives to further understand the different ways they are storied and deployed as part of the process of forming aspirations within such social and political contexts.

Similarly, the research methodology also presents limitations. Most prominently, this has occurred because research was undertaken within the set location of the CLS through focus groups and interviews with participants. This played a significantly important role in the co- and re-construction of stories, however this centres the prominence of the discursive within parameters of a single, set space. This too can be complemented by aspirations research that works in or across other and multiple sites – such as mainstream schooling; at home; among other peers, or in other social or public settings where participating youth visit. Similarly, CLS classes can also be utilised as sites of practice rather than as a location in which focus groups and interviews are held. These opportunities may also allow research to explore how aspirations emerge and are enacted through both regulated and more spontaneous practices, producing other forms of knowledge that can complement research produced in this study.

A final, potential limitation concerns the narrative form itself. In the crafting and re-assembling of participant stories into narratives, there are always choices. Choices about what gets included, what gets left behind. Choices that end up flattening certain differences in favour of the exemplification of others. Also drawn into this is the potential to seek neatness and completeness out of messy and never-quite-complete stories. This is particularly so through the focus group structure where the stories individuals tell intersect and become shared with the stories of others. The choices that I have made have certainly left other possible stories behind, and there is always potential for different interpretations drawing from different research traditions and interests, even within the narrative inquiry field. It is here

that the importance of narrative inquiry's interests in verisimilitude – where the reader interprets stories as 'conceivable experience' – comes into focus. My approach to research and interpretation has allowed for allowed me to acknowledge tension and ambiguity whilst weaving personal stories into broader ones, and thus, while I acknowledge the narratives are not truly complete, they nonetheless demonstrate complexity in students' lives.

## 8.4 Contributions to the field

As I outline in early chapters, this study has sought to add broader analytical attention to the aspirations of students from migrant backgrounds. While research on the academic and occupational aspirations and expectations of migrant-background and ethnic minority has been of interest to academics at least since the 'coming-of-age' of Australia's post-war migrant youth, only in more recent times has a body of qualitative literature grown. Within the context of post-Bradley education reforms, this research continues to constitute a small component of broader studies and reports on aspirations, and as such, my study adds to further our understanding of the context and role of migrancy and cultural identities to aspiration-making.

Along with the conclusions this research has provided, its contributions develop from several strands. One important aspect is that it draws upon a conceptual and methodological framework that, to my knowledge, differs from extent literature, demonstrating the utility of bringing together different conceptual tools to an approach that recognises narrative inquiry as both theory and method. I share with many an interest in Appadurai's (2004) conceptualisation of aspirations as a 'cultural capacity'. As shown in Chapter Three, this has been central to prominent post-Bradley aspirations literature. Rather than considering aspirations on a spectrum from 'low' to 'high', with certain actions and dispositions expected to

demonstrate one's own aspirational qualities, this allows us to begin seeing aspirations as part of our "collective social imagination of where we 'fit' in relation to others" (Gale & Parker, 2013, p. 10). To more fully attend to this understanding, however, required a framework, a concept-cluster, that could bring together three important factors: a temporal understanding of the ways aspirations may develop over time; a sense of spatiality that incorporate the role of migration and belonging; and attention to affective orientations that shape the way students and families interpreted and responded to broader narratives of aspiration. The findings discussed earlier in this chapter highlight how the conceptual frames were drawn upon to interpret participant narratives. Together, these concepts have allowed the study to demonstrate the complex interplay between individuated responsibilities and collectivised cultural identities across time and space in the formation of aspirational subjects under contemporary, neoliberal conditions. Supporting the conceptual framework that recognised temporal, spatial, and affective orientations, I also utilised a narrative methodology because such a theory also centres such interests through its commonplaces: the 'three dimensional' research space (Clandinin et al., 2016) involving sociality, temporality, and space. Undertaking research over a 15-month period afforded the study the capacity to explore different developments in students' lives, and changes to their aspirations. While other longitudinal research has examined aspiration changes over time, the quantitative nature of most studies misses the capacity narrative inquiry provides to tease out participants' reasons for changes, as well as the social contexts in which those changes – and reasons – take place. Such a context to aspirations research opens the space for conceptual contributions related to understanding affective dispositions and responses, as well as the situatedness of belonging and place.

The extended nature also meant that the study could examine the influence of recent experiences of various phenomena. For example, the first focus group took place after students had made their Year 9 elective subject choices, and I could therefore discuss not only their choices and reasons, but the processes they undertook in making those choices with their schools, and the varied practices and discussions that took place with parents and family in making decisions. By our second focus group, NAPLAN tests had taken place in Year 9, so that not only did we talk about their Year 9 experiences in relation to the elective choices made last year, but also the role of NAPLAN tests in their schooling which allowed an analysis of its wider connections to studenthood and success.

The time over which the study took place further allowed for a deeper exploration of the role of family stories – in this context, most notably stories of migration and resettlement – in forming multiple personal and collective aspirations. It demonstrates the utility of temporality as a process over which studies are undertaken. It also, however, demonstrates the conceptual utility of bringing together temporality, affect, and spatiality as a way to explore aspiration: the past is storied deliberatively with an orientation towards the future; the stories take place over places that evoke varying senses of belonging; and they also provoke affective responses in navigation across and towards various nodes and destinations.

The study also offers practical knowledge to the field of aspirations research both broadly and more specific to young people from migrant and minority backgrounds. It demonstrates students holding a range of aspirations and hopes for the future – both personal and collective – but importantly, it also examined how students brought these together and the steps they envisaged would make this possible. The research also shows how even though most students held normatively ‘high’ aspirations for university or other further education, there were important

differences in the ways that students understood likely or necessary steps to attainment, and subsequently prepared themselves for that. These differences appear reflective of different social and material positionalities. Nonetheless, student aspirations developed out of a mix of strong parental and family support and expectations, and the contemporary historical moment where tertiary studies have almost become a necessity. Parental expectations themselves were reflective of a very broad migrant positionality. Most parents experienced material and social loss – though differentially – in the migration process, and experienced different conditions of settlement. Their hopes for their children to have qualitatively better lives than theirs appear to develop out of the varying influences of social and educational advantage prior to migration; resettlement that positions their new country in anticipation of social and material improvement; and a social and political context in which they perceive education as the best opportunity for intergenerational mobility. Importantly however, the narrative form demonstrated the complexity and divergence of experiences and responses that are entangled in these broad, overarching factors.

While other research has also explored the aspirations of young people from migrant and minority backgrounds, this study contributes to this literature by locating the research within the context of CLS participation, and by taking further interest in the interplay between diverse aspirations. Other research has also taken interest in the role of CLS to form belonging, the promotion of cultural maintenance, and as a vehicle for enhancing cultural and ethnic capital (Cardona et al., 2008; Cruickshank, 2015; Nordstrom, 2016, 2016, 2022; Tsolidis, 2008, 2012; Tsolidis & Kostogriz, 2008). Within this study, these aspects are brought into contact with other social, spatial, and historical contexts to consider their interplay with students' images of the future and their ideas for making it there. Although the CLS is not a

dominant focus in this research, the study contributes to our understanding of the role this 'in-between' educational space performs in students' and families' lives.

## 8.5 Implications

Several important implications and considerations arise from this study for policy and practice in both education and research. First, this study shares with other literature calls for a reformulation of higher education target equity groups (see, e.g., Patfield, 2018). The NESB category is inadequate to the point of redundancy. The 'over-representation' of students under this category in universities is longstanding, while the category represents only a small subset of students who come from migrant and minority backgrounds. Such students not fitting the NESB are not necessarily captured by other target groups like LSES. While a first-in-family category may represent several students in this study, educational pathways would be better supported by one that also recognises the distinct and diverse conditions and navigational capacities that emerge through migration and resettlement. This would also provide more relevant information than NESB status, upon which programs and research could be developed.

The research points to further support for careers and further education guidance within schools that helps students understand a range of related occupations. The focus would be, as Gore et al. (2015) suggest, more on the reasons for interest in particular careers, rather than on selecting a career, which can then open students to a range of options with similar meaningful benefits to their broader aspirations. The introduction of such guidance from Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8) may support students' decision-making for Year 9 subject electives during Year 8. Despite some perceptions – both from participants and more broadly – that the significance of Year 9 electives has diminished, related experiences within this study suggest that

they continue to play an important role in helping students form their ideas about their pathways. This can be integrated with widening participation programs by universities and other tertiary providers such as TAFEs, where the driving principles go beyond 'awareness' raising towards ones that focus on the range of possible options students might be interested in, the various steps towards entry and participation, and the prospects of employment within local and wider contexts.

Support for such additional and earlier guidance is given with caution. There are always risks that fostering earlier explicit attention to occupational pathways becomes embedded in – and acts as a producer of – heightened performative and responsibilising school cultures. It is important here that students' broader aspirations for the future are not just recognised but put at the forefront. Schools are called, even by education policy (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2023), to act as sites for the generation of active and participatory citizenship. Therefore, more collective aspirations can be promoted across students' different and situated identities and senses of belonging – even though the work of teachers in this space also appears fraught (Black, 2015). This can also work to resist normative definitions of educational and occupational aspirations as 'low' and 'high', which often works to further marginalise students and families on the periphery. It is in this light that careers counselling provided in secondary schools could look to move beyond a focus on careers, to one that incorporates capacities to explore broader aspirations and the potential for students' interests and hopes to be attained by different means – whether that be through various modes of participation in civic and community organisations, and students' interests in (global) mobility. This thesis provides a foundation for future research to explore alternative approaches that schools could take in talking to students about their

futures, as well as pedagogies that centre orientations to the future that challenge the fermentation of consumer-citizen subjectivities.

Alongside this, it would prove remiss to consider implications from aspirations research that only points to possibilities within the space of education. Aspirations are a 'cultural capacity' (Appadurai, 2004) that require an adequate level of material and financial security from which to be practiced. Harking back to MacBrayne's passage at the beginning of this chapter, it would be a cruel game – played all too often – to call upon youth and their families to be aspirational, to aim 'high' as it were, but to expect many to do so with little of the supporting structures that peers possess. Through the various and varied experiences and stories participants told, this study argues that it is necessary for governments to address social, cultural, and financial obstacles that have become institutionalised within contemporary society. In tandem with the previously discussed priorities concerning pathways, this would be of more direct benefit than seeking to 'raise' aspirations.

A final consideration is one related to research: the role of the study in students' formations of ideas and aspirations. Narrative inquiry reminds us that not only is the researcher involved in their own study, but that the study becomes entangled in the experiences participants tell and are, in the moment, forming. It is difficult to establish with certainty whether participating in this study, with its discussions about aspirations and imagined futures, heightened students' attentiveness towards a perception of needing to be 'on top of' such things, or if such discussions produced positionalities in which students felt compelled to compare themselves with others – whether with their peers in their CLS group or more broadly. Regardless, it is an interesting tension for research concerned with the signification of aspirations in contemporary policy and politics that it may be implicated in reproducing it. At the conclusion of our last focus groups, several

students spoke of enjoying participating in the study. For Hanaa, being able to talk through her thoughts, concerns, and interests in a way that she did not really feel possible with other adults was “kind of therapeutic”, symbolically connecting narrative work to its long history in that field. Meanwhile, some students from the Vietnamese CLS commented that being asked to story their experiences and possible futures created spaces for them to reflect on various aspects of schooling and what lay ahead in ways they had not done so before. Liam, whose story we see at different points throughout the study but particularly in Chapter Seven, was most prominent in raising this. It is notable that during that same final meeting, he had traced together an interest in possible work that would bring together his interest in business studies, the bonds he holds with his family, and his perceived benefits of learning Vietnamese (providing more opportunities than for Australians who speak only one language):

> My family’s doing overseas homestay. One of the kids, their family had a big business in the Vietnam area selling fish and everything, but they want to link it to Australia, or Sydney but they didn’t really have anyone to do it with. So, they gave my mum the opportunity to, but she can’t really organise it that well. So, I’m hoping that if the offer is still up, I’ll be able to take it and help.

Here, I wish to reiterate my appreciation to the participants, including the CLS principals, the parents, and particularly the students who gave their time and their stories for this study.

## 8.6 Conclusion: Making good

In our last meeting, while discussing the role that the Vietnamese CLS students saw their culture playing in their lives and possible futures, Maia reintroduced the importance of her parents’ migration experiences:

> They both want the same thing. And the reason they push me to do well in school is because they know how hard it is to not do well. My dad had nothing when he came over to here. My mum– all she was doing was raising us pretty much. So, she knows how tough it can be if you have nothing. So they don't want the same for me, so that's why they're pushing me to do well in school because school just– doing well in school will lead to a good uni degree which will give me all opportunities, a high chance to get a good job and everything.

Maia demonstrates an understanding of social conditions her parents experienced, with their high expectations grounded in the migration narratives she had told a year earlier. Here, in many senses, was the opportunity bargain (P. Brown et al., 2010) between parent and child that most students readily articulated, reinforcing in them a quasi-moral imperative to make good on the difficulties their parents experienced through migration and resettlement. There is here an acknowledgement of practices that families undertook to build qualitatively and materially better lives for them, but at once, also evident are the competitive and performative elements that will lead to a good life later on.

Within that performative and responsibilising language however, this call to make good can be understood within a broader opportunity bargain. For it is here that the politics of aspiration has worked, promising those that aspire in the right way, to the right things, economic prosperity and social mobility. It produces a belief that, Maia contends, "doing well in school will lead to a good uni degree which will give me all opportunities, a high chance to get a good job and everything" else that comes from it.

By the time of publication, the students in this study would have all made the next steps into their post-school journeys. Whether they have all made those steps in

the navigational direction towards the academic and occupational aspirations they discussed in our focus groups is not to be known. Yet what is clearer is that they are doing so at a time of significant churn and upheaval in not only the tertiary education space, but more broadly the economy, and our social settings and services. Over recent years, university entrant numbers have been in decline, accelerated in the last couple by a combination of significantly higher enrolment fees across several fields, and a cost of living crisis that has made alternative occupations that do not require university qualifications but with potentially higher remuneration – at least in the immediate future – more attractive (Hare, 2022, 2023; Ross, 2023). It would appear that more young people are interpreting the promises made to them through the opportunity bargain as undeliverable.

Within the context of this study, however, the picture might be harder to discern. The students have their family migration narratives from which to draw, supported further by situated identities that are formed from a range of practices that develop relationally over non-linear experiences of time and place, even if social and material conditions make the chances of attainment more favourable for some than others. Our concern then might not be about whether they have continued to make good, just as our focus should not be on whether we raise aspirations. Rather, reflecting the questions that opened this chapter, our concerns could focus on how we can allow making good, entailing students' holistic and collective imagined futures, to be reimagined in more socially and culturally responsive ways.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Information for the CLS Principal

**Australian Catholic University Limited**
**ABN 15 050 192 660**
**Strathfield Campus (Mount Saint Mary)**
**25A Barker Road Strathfield**
**New South Wales 2135 Australia**
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### Information for the Principal

**Dear Principal**

I, Antoine Mangion, would like to invite students enrolled at community languages schools (CLSs) to take part in a study being conducted as part of a doctoral research degree at Australian Catholic University. The study explores how students from migrant background, and their families, aspire to and experience the transition from secondary education into post-secondary education and/or work.

**PROJECT TITLE:**
**Exploring the post-school aspirations of migrant background students**

| | |
|---|---|
| **STUDENT RESEARCHER:** | **Mr Antoine Mangion** |
| **PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR and PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** | **Dr Amy McPherson** |
| **CO-SUPERVISOR:** | **Prof Lauren Stephenson** |

***What is the project about?***

The research project investigates the future aspirations of students attending a CLS. The research intends to better understand how aspirations are shaped and influenced by social and cultural factors including the role of family, schools and wider society. It aims to improve understandings of how cultural and language transmission and family stories of migration help young people and their parents/caregivers in make their way from secondary to post-secondary education and/or employment. Furthermore, this research aims to help better understand how alternative and complementary sites of education support students' aspirations, and what supports various community groups may seek in supporting such endeavours.

***Who is undertaking the project?***
This project is being conducted by Antoine Mangion, a PhD student at Australian Catholic University who is studying under the supervision of the Principal Investigator Dr Amy McPherson and Prof Lauren Stephenson.

Dr Amy McPherson is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Education and Arts, School of Education (NSW) at Australian Catholic University. She has worked on national projects on the issue of educational equity in the field of education studies in Australia. Prof Lauren Stephenson is a Professor in the Faculty of Education and Arts at Australian Catholic University. Professor Stephenson specialises in the area of narrative methods in the field of education research and has conducted projects both in Australia and internationally.

***Who will the participants be?***
This project seeks the participation of a minimum of three students and a maximum of six students from Year 8 attending your CLS. Interest in younger students' aspirations looks to recognise how these aspirations begin to form from a much earlier age, according to what students see as possible as they build upon prior social and schooling experiences. Furthermore, contemporary research has also shown how younger students form firm beliefs about possible futures – that their aspirations are not just fantasy, or unrealistic. It should also be remembered that students are called upon to consider academic choices and options that will shape their future opportunities all throughout their education.

The parents/primary caregivers of participating students will also be sought to participate in a focus group together. Involving parents at this phase of the study is intended to develop a greater depth to background aspects of culture, migration and family and social relationships. Their involvement is also intended to provide a lens for interpreting intergenerational dynamics, particularly around issues connected with aspirations, beliefs and values of education and post-education life courses. As part of an extended process of receiving consent from participants, this focus group will also allow parents to feel comfortable with the involvement of their children in the research project.

***Are there any risks to students associated with participating in this project?***
There is no foreseeable risk in participating in this research. If, however, students do find that they become distressed at any stage during the research, students will be supported through the policies established in your school. The NSW DEC's Student Welfare and Good Discipline policy and the counselling services provided through students' weekday schools may also provide additional avenues of support.

***What will students be asked to do?***
Students are requested to participate in up to three focus groups with other students from their CLS. It is proposed that the focus groups will take place at the CLS's centre. The first focus group is intended to take place between August and September 2017, however the day and time will be one that is suitable for the school and participants. The second and third focus groups will occur around November-December 2017 and March-April 2018 respectively. Focus groups will be audio recorded and then transcribed. These transcriptions will be used for the purposes of the research. (Further details of how the data will be handled is explained below – '*Will anyone else know the results of the project?*')

The focus groups will take place **between August 2017 and April 2018**. These focus groups will include discussions covering aspects including students' experiences of schooling and education; family and community relationships; parents'/caregivers' relationship with their child's school; and students' interests and hopes for the future beyond high school. By interviewing students across a school year,

we are able to explore how their aspirations may shift, change, or solidify in light of significant developments within their lives, and how they give significance to these developments and experiences. Given that the study intends to include younger secondary school students, artefacts – such as photographs, mementos and keepsakes, class work and documents from weekday and CLS – may be used as a suitable way to help generate and support students' stories. This can also help overcome the (real and perceived) power imbalances that may arise in traditional interview formats, particularly when there are age, language and cultural differences between the researcher and participants.

***Is there any involvement in the project by CLS staff?***
The student researcher would like the opportunity to visit the CLS centre to conduct the focus groups with participating students. The school centre is proposed as the site for the focus groups because it is the central meeting place for all participating students and parents. Focus groups will be undertaken with prior knowledge and consent of the school. The student researcher may also ask for school or class documents – activities, information letters etc. – that may assist with the focus group research. The responsible supervisor or teacher would be under no obligation to provide such documents should they feel that it is not appropriate to do so.

***How much time will the project take?***
It is envisaged that focus groups will take between 60 to 90 minutes each. Supervisors and teachers may be asked to assist the student researcher in ways discussed under the prior question (*Is there any involvement in the project by CLS staff?*) but it is not envisaged that such assistance would require any significant amount of their time.

***What are the benefits of the research project?***
Participation in this project will help to inform understandings about how social and cultural backgrounds, along with schools, the wider community and governments, shape young people's interests, hopes and intentions for their future. It is hoped that this will help inform better practices within schools and in government policy to better support students in attaining their goals. It is also hoped that this project will be beneficial to CLSs, so that administrators, teachers, and ethnic and language communities are better informed of how students experience these learning settings, and the role such settings play in shaping students' identities and projections of future selves.

This project may also benefit participating students and their families more directly. By participating, students and their parents have the opportunity to consider in depth their interests and possible futures and what opportunities or avenues they have to achieve these. Furthermore, students will have access to members of the research team who may be able to provide informed, objective recommendations to information that can help them and their families in making better informed decisions about such opportunities.

***Can students withdraw from the study?***
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants are not under any obligation to participate. If students agree to participate, they can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. Due to the nature of focus group research, however, any information provided in previous focus groups prior to withdrawal cannot be removed from the data.

***Will anyone else know the results of the project?***
The results from the study may be summarised and appear in publications or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify the participants or the CLS in any way. Results from this project will be published in academic papers and peer reviewed academic journals by members of the research team. A summary report will also be provided to the CLS and participants. This will only

include combined data and provide general recommendations and will not include any identifiable information about participants or the schools involved.

The focus groups will be audio recorded and then the recordings will be transcribed. Once the recordings have been transcribed and transcriptions checked for accuracy, the recordings will be deleted. The data will be identifiable only to the researchers involved, and the transcripts from the recorded interviews will be made anonymous and given numeric codes. All names will be replaced with pseudonyms and any identifying information removed from the transcripts. No directly identifying information will be published in reports and publications produced from the research.

***Will I be able to find out the results of the project?***
A summary report of general findings will be provided to all participants. The report will be written in such a way that no individual participant or school will be identifiable.

***Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?***
Any questions regarding this project should be directed to Antoine Mangion on 0405 233 144 or Antoine.Mangion@myacu.edu.au or Dr Amy McPherson on 02 97014158 or http://Amy.McPherson@acu.edu.au.
***What if I have a complaint or any concerns?***
The study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number **2017-40H**). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may contact the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee, care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research):

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

***How do I provide consent?***
You can provide consent for the students from your school to participating in this research by posting a signed consent form in the stamped, self-addressed envelope included in this pack. Students will also be asked to provide assent to participate in this research. Parents/caregivers will also be asked to provide consent.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Amy McPherson** **Mr Antoine Mangion**

# Appendix B: Principal Consent Form

**Australian Catholic University Limited**
**ABN 15 050 192 660**
**Strathfield Campus (Mount Saint Mary)**
**25A Barker Road Strathfield**
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## PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

*Participant Copy*

**TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploring the post-school aspirations of migrant background students**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR and STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Dr Amy McPherson and Mr Antoine Mangion**

I ..........................................................................................................., Principal of …………………………………..……………….., give permission for students enrolled at this community language school to participate in the above research project. I acknowledge that participants' involvement will include participating in up to three audio recorded focus groups, taking place at the community languages school centre. I understand that their participation is voluntary, and that any student may decline to participate or withdraw their assent at any time without providing an explanation and without incurring any adverse consequences. I acknowledge that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify participants or the school in any way.

NAME OF PRINCIPAL: ………………………………………………… (block letters)

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: ………………………............................

EMAIL ADDRESS: …………………………………………………………….

SIGNATURE: ......................................................................................... DATE: ………………….

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:..........................DATE: ………………………..

# Appendix C: Participant Information Letter – Parent/Caregiver

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER
## PARENT/CAREGIVER

**PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the post-school aspirations of migrant background students**

**STUDENT RESEARCHER: Antoine Mangion**
**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Dr Amy McPherson**

Dear Parent/Caregiver

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

***What is the project about?***
This project researches the future hopes and ambitions of students attending Community Languages Schools. The goals of this research are to better understand how aspirations are shaped by things like family, cultural background, schools and wider society, and how young people and their parents/caregivers make decisions.

***Who is undertaking the project?***
This project is being conducted by Antoine Mangion, a PhD student at Australian Catholic University, under the supervision of Dr Amy McPherson.

Dr Amy McPherson is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Education and Arts, School of Education (NSW) at the Australian Catholic University. She has worked on national projects on the issue of educational equity in the field of education studies in Australia.

***Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?***
There is no foreseeable risk in participating in this research but if you do find that you become distressed at any stage during the research, you will be supported through the policies established in your community languages school. The NSW DEC's Student Welfare and Good Discipline policy and the counselling services provided through students' weekday schools may also provide additional avenues of support.

***What will I be asked to do?***
You are asked to take part in one focus group of approximately one hour with other parents/primary caregivers of students attending the same community language school as your child. Your child will participate in three focus groups with other students from his/her community language school. The focus groups will be in a conversational style, and in your child's focus groups they may be asked to bring things like photos or school work along to some of them.

The focus groups will take place **between August 2017 and April 2018**. Your focus group and the first of your child's focus groups are intended to take place between August and September 2017, however the day and time will be one that is suitable for the school and participants. The second and third of

your child's focus groups will occur around November-December 2017 and March-April 2018 respectively. The focus groups will be held at your community language school centre. Although you are not required to participate in this study in order for your child to participate, your participation would be highly preferred by the research team.

The focus groups will be audio recorded and then transcribed. These transcriptions will be used for the purposes of the research. The interviews will cover aspects including your and your child's experiences of school and education; family and community relationships; your and your family's relationship with your child's school; involvement in work; and how decisions about your child's future opportunities are made, including plans and hopes around going on with further study and/or going into work.

***How much time will the project take?***

**One 60-minute focus group with you and other parents/primary caregivers of other participating students from the same community language school as your child. Three 60 to 90-minute focus groups for your child.**

***What are the benefits of the research project?***

Your participation in this project will help to inform how young people's backgrounds shape their interests and hopes for their future. It is hoped that this will help schools and governments to better support students in reaching their education and work goals.

This project may also benefit your child by giving you access to members of the research team who can provide informed, objective recommendations to information websites and government agencies that can help you in making decisions about possible academic and employment options. It will also give you and your child an opportunity to consider in detail and discuss with others their interests and your hopes for their future and what paths you might consider in supporting them.

***Can I withdraw from the study?***

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you choose not to participate or choose to withdraw at any time, there will be no negative effects on your child's involvement at his/her community languages school. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Due to the nature of focus groups however, if you wish to withdraw from the study, any information you have provided up to that point cannot be removed from the data already collected.

***Will anyone else know the results of the project?***

The results from this study will be used as part of the student researcher's PhD research. All results will be published in such a way that does not identify anyone participating. The results may be summarised and appear in publications or published in academic papers by members of the research team. They may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify participants in any way.

A summary report will also be provided to participants and to your child's community languages school. All reports will only include combined data and provide general information or recommendations. They will not include any identifiable information about participants.

The focus groups will be audio recorded and then the recordings will be transcribed. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the recordings will be deleted. The data will be identifiable only to the researchers involved, however the transcripts from the recorded interviews will be made anonymous and given numeric codes. All names will be replaced with pseudonyms and any identifying

information removed from the transcripts. No directly identifying information will be published in reports and publications produced from the research. After the focus group, you will also have the opportunity for one-on-one contact with the researcher to clarify anything that was discussed if you wish to do so.

***Will I be able to find out the results of the project?***
A summary report of general findings will be posted or emailed individually to participants. The report will be written in such a way that no individual participant or school will be identifiable.

***Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?***
Any questions regarding this project should be directed to Antoine Mangion on 0405 233 144, or Antoine.Mangion@myacu.edu.au, or Dr Amy McPherson on 02 9701 4158 or Amy.McPherson@acu.edu.au.

***What if I have a complaint or any concerns?***
The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number 2017-40H). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may contact the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.:02 9739 2519
Fax:02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

***I want to participate! How do I sign up?***
If you want to participate in this project please contact Antoine Mangion by emailing your signed consent form to antoine.mangion@myacu.edu.au, or posting it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope included in this pack.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Amy McPherson** **Mr Antoine Mangion**

# Appendix D: Parent/Caregiver Consent Form

**Australian Catholic University Limited**
**ABN 15 050 192 660**
**Strathfield Campus (Mount Saint Mary)**
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## PARENT / CAREGIVER CONSENT FORM

**TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploring the post-school aspirations of migrant background students**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR and STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Dr Amy McPherson and Mr Antoine Mangion**

I *.................................................. (the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants (Parents/Caregivers). Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in an audio recorded focus group, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

I understand that I am being requested to participate in this project in the following ways:

a) by participating in a digitally recorded focus group of approximately 1 hour. *The focus group will involve other parents/primary care givers of children attending the community language school that your child attends.*
☐ Agree ☐ Disagree

b) by consenting that my child can participate in this research project. *Their participation will include up to three focus group sessions involving your child and other children from her/his community language school.*
☐ Agree ☐ Disagree

NAME OF PARTICIPANT (PARENT): ..........................................................................................

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: ......................................................................................................

SIGNATURE

.........................................................................................................................................................

DATE ..................................

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR):........................................

DATE:………………………..

# Appendix E: Participant Information Letter - Student

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER
## STUDENT

**PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the post-school aspirations of migrant background students**

**STUDENT RESEARCHER: Antoine Mangion**
**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Amy McPherson**

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

***What is the project about?***
This project researches the future hopes and ambitions of students a language class at community languages schools. The goals of this research are to better understand how aspirations are shaped by things like family, cultural background, schools and wider society, and how young people and their parents/caregivers make decisions.

***Who is undertaking the project?***
This project is being conducted by Antoine Mangion, a PhD student at Australian Catholic University, under the supervision of Dr Amy McPherson.

Dr Amy McPherson is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Education and Arts, School of Education (NSW) at the Australian Catholic University. She has worked on national projects on the issue of educational equity in the field of education studies in Australia.

***Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?***
There is no foreseeable risk in participating in this research but if you do find that you become distressed at any stage during the research, you will be supported through the policies established in your community languages school. The NSW DEC's Student Welfare and Good Discipline policy and the counselling services provided through students' weekday schools may also provide additional avenues of support.

***What will I be asked to do?***
You are asked to take part in up to three focus groups of approximately 60 to 90 minutes each. The focus groups will involve other students from your community language school and class, and you may be asked to bring things like photos or school work along to some of them.

The focus groups will take place **between August 2017 and April 2018**. The first focus group is intended to take place between August and September 2017, however the day and time will be one that is suitable for the school and participants. The second and third focus groups will occur around November-December 2017 and March-April 2018 respectively. The focus groups will be held at your community language school centre.

The focus groups will be audio recorded and then transcribed. These transcriptions will be used for the purposes of the research. The focus groups will cover such things like your experiences of school; family and community relationships; your and your family's relationship with your school; and how decisions about your possible future opportunities in education and employment are considered and discussed.

***How much time will the project take?***
Three focus groups of 60 to 90 minutes each including other students from your community language school.

***What are the benefits of the research project?***
Your participation in this project will help to better understand how young people's backgrounds shape their interests and hopes for their future. It is hoped that this will help schools, including community language schools, to better support students in reaching their goals.

This project may also benefit you by giving you access to a member of the research team who can provide informed, objective recommendations to information that can help you in making decisions about your future. It will also give you an opportunity to consider and discuss with others your interests and hopes for the future and what paths you might consider in reaching these.

***Can I withdraw from the study?***
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate and if you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Due to the nature of focus groups however, if you wish to withdraw from the study, any information you have provided up to that point cannot be removed from the data already collected.

***Will anyone else know the results of the project?***
The results from this study will be used as part of the Antoine Mangion's PhD research. All results will be published in such a way that does not identify anyone participating. The results may also be summarised and appear in publications or published in academic papers by members of the research team. They may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify participants in any way.

A summary report will also be provided to participants and to your community language school. All reports will only include combined data and provide general recommendations. They will not include any identifiable information about participants.

The data from focus groups will be recorded and then transcribed. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the recordings will be deleted. The data will be identifiable only to the researchers involved, however the transcripts from the recorded interviews will be made anonymous and given numeric codes. All names will be replaced with pseudonyms and any identifying information removed from the transcripts. No directly identifying information will be published in reports and publications produced from the research. After focus groups, you will also have the opportunity for one-on-one contact with the researcher to clarify anything that was discussed if you wish to do so.

***Will I be able to find out the results of the project?***
A summary report of general findings will be posted or emailed to you. The report will not identify participants or schools involved in the project.

***Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?***

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to Antoine Mangion on 0405 233 144, or Antoine.Mangion@myacu.edu.au, or Dr Amy McPherson on 02 9701 4158, or Amy.McPherson@acu.edu.au.

***What if I have a complaint or any concerns?***

The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number **2017-40H**). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may contact the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

***I want to participate! How do I sign up?***

If you want to participate in this project please contact Antoine Mangion by emailing your signed consent form to antoine.mangion@myacu.edu.au, or posting it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope included in this pack.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Amy McPherson** **Mr Antoine Mangion**

# Appendix F: Student Assent Form

**Australian Catholic University Limited**
**ABN 15 050 192 660**
**Strathfield Campus (Mount Saint Mary)**
**25A Barker Road Strathfield**
**New South Wales 2135 Australia**
**Locked Bag 2002 Strathfield**
**New South Wales 2135 Australia**
**Telephone 02 9701 4251**
**Facsimile 02 9701 4204**
**www.acu.edu.au**

## STUDENT ASSENT FORM

**TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploring the post-school aspirations of migrant background students**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR and STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Dr Amy McPherson and Mr Antoine Mangion**

I *................................................... (the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants (Students). My parents know about this study too. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in up to three 60-90 minute, audio recorded focus groups, together with other students from my language school. I realise that I do not have to be in this study if I do not want to be. I understand I can decide to stop after we begin without adverse consequences. I agree that research data about what was learned in this study may be published or may be provided to other researchers. This data will not include my name or that I was part of the study.

*If you decide you want to be in this study, please tick the 'Agree' box and sign your name.*

a) I agree to participate in up to three audio recorded focus groups of approximately 60-90 minutes together with other students from my community language school led by a member of the research team.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ...........................................................................................

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: ......................................................................................

SIGNATURE

.......................................................................................................................................

DATE ................................

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR):.......................................

DATE: ………………………..

# Appendix G: Student Information Question Sheet

Name:

______________________________________________

Preferred name for this study (suggest a pseudonym):

______________________________________________

Where do you live (suburb)?

______________________________________________

What school do you go to?

______________________________________________

Have you gone to any other high school before your current school? If so, where and for how long?

______________________________________________

Parents' and/or Primary Caregivers' names:

______________________________________________

Approximately, in what year/s or age did your parents/caregivers arrive in Australia?

______________________________________________

What do your parents/caregivers do for work?

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

What is the highest academic level they have reached?

| **Parent/Caregiver One**<br>____________________ | **Parent/Caregiver Two**<br>____________________ |
|---|---|
| University (Postgraduate)<br>University (Undergraduate)<br>TAFE or similar certificate/qualification<br>Year 12 or equivalent<br>Year 10 or equivalent<br>Year 9 or under | University (Postgraduate)<br>University (Undergraduate)<br>TAFE or similar certificate/qualification<br>Year 12 or equivalent<br>Year 10 or equivalent<br>Year 9 or under |

# Appendix H: Student Contextual Information

**Table 2: Assyrian CLS**

Location: Fairfield LGA

| | Aramina | Lionel | Miriam* | Willow |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Residence LGA | Strathfield | Fairfield | Fairfield | Penrith |
| Secondary School Sector & LGA | Private Burwood | Public Fairfield | Catholic Fairfield | Catholic Penrith |
| Parent/Caregiver Birthplace | Iran | Grandfather: Iraq (lived in Lebanon)<br>Grandmother: Syria | Iraq | Mother: Iraq |
| Parent Arrival in Australia | Late 1980s | 1960s | 1990s | Mother: Aged 15 1990s |
| Parent Education and/or Occupation | Both: University Post-Grad Lawyers | Grandmother: No school Bridal factory<br>Grandfather: Year 9 equiv Retired | Mother: TAFE (incomplete high school) Stay-at-home<br>Father: Technician | Mother: TAFE Stay-at-home<br>Stepfather: University Psychology and house painting |

*Miriam discontinued after 1st focus group. She had discontinued CLS at the end of that year.

**Table 3: Persian CLS**

Location: Parramatta LGA

| | **Darien** | **Hanaa** |
|---|---|---|
| Residence LGA | Ku-ring-gai | Parramatta |
| Secondary School Sector & LGA | Public<br>Ku-ring-gai | Public<br>Hornsby |
| Parent/Caregiver Birthplace | Iran | Iran |
| Parent Arrival in Australia | 2008<br>with Darien aged 4 | 2011<br>With Hanaa aged 6 |
| Parent Education and/or Occupation | Mother:<br>University<br>Finance - Pharmaceuticals<br><br>Father:<br>University<br>Business Owner | Mother:<br>Currently at TAFE<br>(incomplete University in Iran)<br>Restaurant Desserts Baker<br><br>Father:<br>Technical College<br>Electrician |

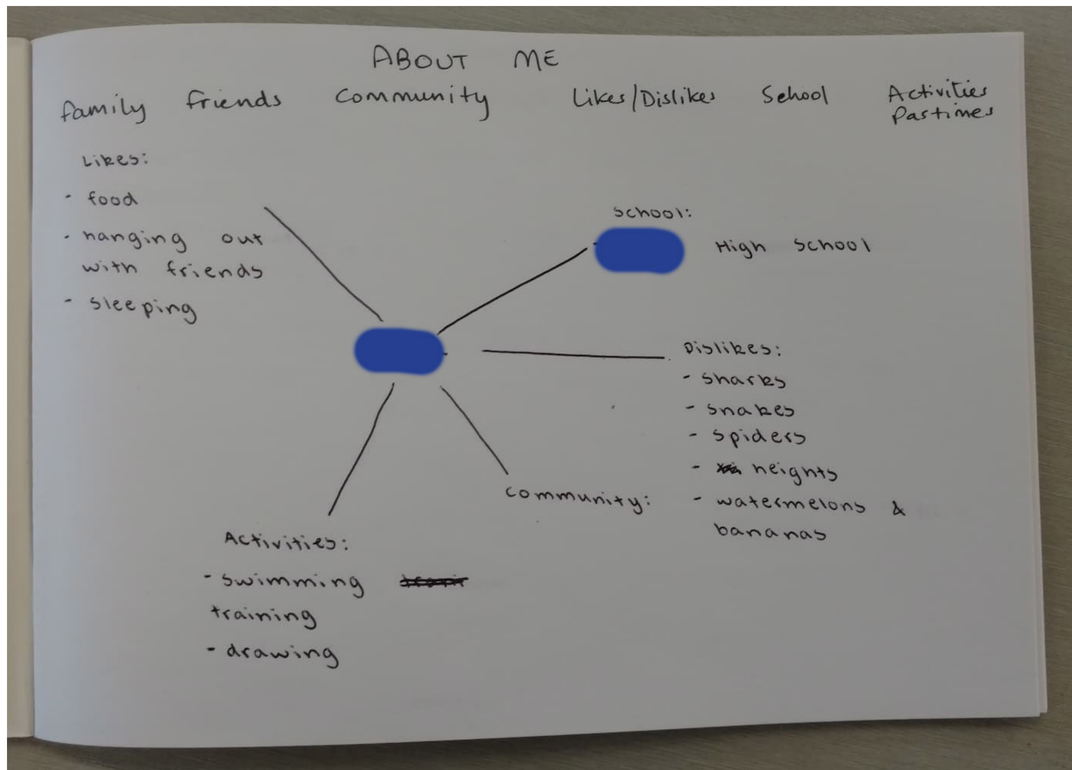
## Table 4: Vietnamese CLS

Location: Canterbury-Bankstown LGA

| | Anh | Cara | Chess | Liam | Maia |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Residence LGA | Canterbury-Bankstown | Canterbury-Bankstown | Canterbury-Bankstown | Canterbury-Bankstown | Canterbury-Bankstown |
| Secondary School Sector & LGA | Public Strathfield (out-of-area) | Public semi-selective Liverpool | Private selective Fairfield (commenced Year 9)<br><br>Years 7-8: Public semi-selective Liverpool | Public semi-selective Canterbury-Bankstown | Public semi-selective Canterbury-Bankstown |
| Parent/Caregiver Birthplace | Vietnam | Vietnam | Vietnam | Vietnam | Vietnam |
| Parent Arrival in Australia | Mother: 1983<br>Father: 1985 | When in Year 11/12 | 1988 | ~1985 | Mother:1995<br>Father: 1992 |
| Parent Education and/or Occupation | Mother: TAFE Stay-at-home formerly Dental Assistant<br><br>Father: TAFE Electrician | Mother: TAFE Nursing<br><br>Father: TAFE Accountant | Mother: University Owns a Salon<br><br>Father: University Post-Grad IT | Mother: Year 12 Tailor<br><br>Father: Carpenter | Mother: TAFE Accountant<br><br>Father: TAFE Engineering |

# Appendix I: Artefact Book Template

About Me



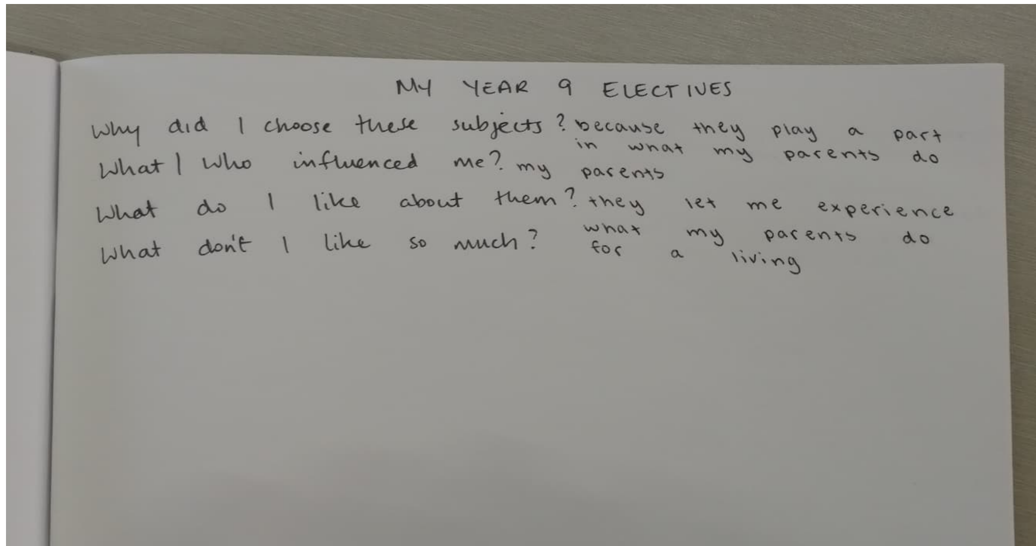

My Aspirations

MY ASPIRATIONS

Future Goals - What do I want to do/be when I'm older?

- I would want to travel to places I have never been to
- I would like to be an arcitect when I'm older
- I would like to make my parents and grand parents proud

My Year 9 Electives




In 10 Years' Time