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# Influence of home and school environments on the academic performance of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian students studying at an academically-oriented high school in Perth, Western Australia

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# Influence of Home and School Environments on the Academic Performance of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian Students Studying at an Academically-Oriented High School in Perth, Western Australia.

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Dedicated to the beloved uncle of our children **Dr. Raghubar Singh** who has been a great inspiration for me and our children to pursue education.

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# ABSTRACT

Although minority status has been associated with low academic achievement, the "high Asian achieving syndrome" remains as one of the unresolved sociological puzzles. Consistent evidence suggests that regardless of the family status, children from the Asian migrant families, settled in the industrialised countries, tend to perform academically better than their counterparts from the dominant group. This disparity is attributed to a number of factors, which taken separately, do not address this complex issue. In Australia little research has been done to compare the home environment and school experiences of children coming from Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families even though the number of children from the Southeast Asian region has steadily increased.

This thesis investigates the influence of home and school on the academic performance of high school students coming from Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families who resided in a predominantly middle class suburb and their children attended one particular state school in Perth, Western Australia. By studying children in their homes and classrooms I have attempted in this ethnographic study to construct some theoretically coherent explanations to understand the disparity in academic performance of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian high school students. In order to capture what teachers, parents, and children *say* and *do* as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world this study explores how macro and micro processes are linked to children's academic performance. As this study aims to understand social events from each individual's point of view it assumes

that human behaviour is the result of indispensable and continuous interactions between persons and the situations they encounter.

The findings of this study, with no claim to generalise beyond these families, suggest that the reason why Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian children have different educational outcomes is that these families socialise their children differently. From this study emerge two different models: and academic oriented Chinese-Australian model and a sports oriented Anglo-Australian model. At the start of high school there was no marked difference in ability and performance based on ethnicity. By the time they completed lower secondary school all Chinese-Australian students had improved in English and enrolled in a normal stream in English. Except for one student, they had selected TEE subjects with a university education as their main goal. At this stage, Anglo-Australians, with the exception of two students (who had selected TEE subjects), had decided to study either a mixture of TEE and TAFE subjects or easier TEE subjects. At the end of Year 12 all Chinese-Australian, except for one, had qualified to study at university. From Anglo-Australian group, only two students had qualified to study at university. This pattern of performance is consistent with the high Asian achieving syndrome and lack lustre performance of Anglo-Australian students. However, this study serves some sober reminder about the narrow focus by Chinese-Australians and lack of effort by Anglo-Australian students.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

**The problem**

In spite of a large body of research on the inequality of educational achievement of children from different socio-cultural backgrounds, it is not conclusively demonstrated how some families cognitively socialise their children better than the others. More importantly, why some ethnic minority children out-perform their counterparts from the majority groups requires adequate explanation. The Coleman Report (1966) on the Equality of Educational Opportunity (see Chapter Three) made three important claims. First, with the exception of the so-called Oriental (Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos) and Jewish , students from the minority groups performed at lower levels than Anglo-American children. Second, the socioeconomic status of the child's family had the most profound effect on his/her academic performance at high school level. Third, it is the family, rather than the school, that makes the difference in the child's performance. The Coleman Report not only investigated the family environments of children coming from different ethnic backgrounds but also revived interest in ethnicity, migrant adaptation and assimilation, a topic which had peaked in the 1920s (e.g., Thomas and Znaniecki, 1927; Wirth, 1928). Studies undertaken by Lesser et al. (1965), Stodolosky and Lesser (1967) and Lesser (1976) found ethnicity to be a potent factor to affect children's academic performance. From his cross-cultural study Lesser posited: "Some regular relations existed between a person's cultural background and

the types of intellectual strengths and weaknesses that s/he displays and the regularities

seem to persist as students advance academically" (1976, p. 152).

Australian studies undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s argued that immigrant students

were an under-privileged group deserving special compensatory attention because a large

percentage of them performed at lower levels than expected (deLemos, 1975; Burke and

Keeves, 1977; deLemos and Martin, 1976). One explanation for this phenomenon was that

the majority of them were from working class non-English speaking immigrant families

from Southern Europe. Traditionally, schools in Australia have subscribed to a monolithic

and homogeneous Anglo-Celtic-Australian[1] ethos. Differences in cultural background have

been ignored. An underlying question for a number of the Australian reports in the 1970s

(e.g., Australian Schools Commission, 1975; Report for the Triennium, 1976-78; the

Galbally Report, 1978) was: has the school system, by ignoring the different backgrounds

of children it is meant to serve, made it more difficult for them to cope, let alone succeed?

Smolicz and Wiseman (1971) argued that the various factors that operate within the

Australian educational system handicap the children from migrant families. Instead of

accommodating immigrant groups by giving their languages and cultures respect and

recognition, the distinctiveness of the minority groups is ignored (Fitzgerald, 1976). Martin

(1972) called it a *process of devaluation* that is due to the lack of interest in the recognition

of different cultures (Smolicz and Wiseman, 1971). Some newcomers managed to succeed

but many others failed.

In more recent years there has been a steady increase in the number of immigrants from the Southeast Asian region who are not only racially different but their cultural values differ from the values of Anglo-Australians. Not a great deal of research has been done on the ways Chinese values interact with Western values. However, in a number of studies, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, it has been demonstrated that children of migrant families from East and Southeast Asian countries are out-performing their counterparts from the mainstream society. It is perhaps this evidence that has led the critics of the doctrine of multiculturalism in Australia (Birrell and Seitz, 1986; Birrell, 1987) to argue that not all children from the migrant families in Australia are an under-privileged problem category, deserving special attention. They argue that once the language-related learning difficulties are overcome children from migrant families tend to perform academically better than those from the Anglo-Australian majority.

In Australia little research has been undertaken to compare the home and school environments of children from Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families even though the number of children from the Southeast Asian region is steadily increasing. Each year, Australia-wide, children from Chinese migrant families hit the headlines for their high academic performance. In most Australian universities there is a high representation of Chinese-Australian students graduating from the faculties of medicine, dentistry, commerce and accounting. Instead of relying on anecdotal evidence and mere speculation educationists need to undertake comprehensive studies to identify the factors that motivate

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[1] Until the middle of this century most migrants to Australia came from England and Ireland. Four families included in this study have Irish and English ancestry. Thus, an appropriate term to use for these

or dissuade teenagers from different cultural backgrounds to take their school work seriously. Social scientists find it hard to understand the paradox: on the one hand Chinese-Australian parents and their children face language-related and racial problems, yet their children frequently out-perform their Australian counterparts studying in the same schools. An equally unresolved issue is how Chinese-Australian parents retain their cultural values in their children while motivating them to work hard in school work. By contrast, prima facie evidence suggests that many Anglo-Australian children do not take their school work seriously.

Programs like students at risk, focus classes, remedial maths, managing behavioural problems hardly ever involve so-called "Asian children". TAFE colleges have swelled in recent years with Anglo-Australian non-university bound students who want to train for various trades and technical and vocational jobs. At the same time, recent Australian surveys (e.g. Parr and Mok, 1995) showed that Asian-born children place far greater emphasis on the value of university education and that a significantly higher proportion of them aspires to university degrees. So how do we account for these apparent differences between Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian parents when it comes to the education of their children? What type of home environment is the most conducive for learning? How does the match or mis-match between home and school values affect the academic performance of children from different socio-cultural groups? To address such questions and to account for inequalities in children's educational attainments there is a need for a more intensive qualitative research. This study aims to address the above issues.

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families is Anglo-Celtic-Australian. For convenience I will be using Anglo-Australian.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study sets out to investigate the way home-school links influence the academic performance of high school students coming from Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families residing in a predominantly middle class suburb of Perth, Western Australia and attending one particular school.  By studying children in their homes and classrooms, I have tried to discover some theoretically coherent explanations to describe the relationship between home and school and its consequent effects on academic performance.  In this respect, the entire classroom context and the family context are taken into joint account because the contextual richness and operation of multiple interacting factors are essential to understand the meanings which children make from their interactions with parents and teachers.

The pseudonym for the suburb in question is Southside and for the high school, Paramount.  The study is essentially an ethnographic one, focused at the micro level of home, classroom and school, but it also investigates the influence of ethnicity at a macro level.  And, to my knowledge, this is a new departure in the sociology of education in Australia.  This was confirmed by Professor Marjoribanks in private communication[2].

As this research gradually explored the complex macro and micro processes of home and school and the effects of home-school links on children's academic performances, I felt

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[2] At a recent Australian Association of Research in Education conference held in Adelaide (November, 1998) I had an opportunity to meet Professor Kevin Marjoribanks, the most prolific writer on the home environment in the Australian context. To the best of his knowledge no study has been undertaken in Australia to study the home and school environments of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian teenagers.

it was increasingly necessary to use a methodology that incorporated the existential experience of children in their homes and school.

I have endeavoured to understand the social events from each individual's point of view. This thesis aims to capture what teachers, parents and children say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world. It focuses on those aspects of home and classroom environments that are most powerful in shaping children's attitudes and have meaning for them in their natural settings. In short, it adopts an interpretive approach, which in the words of Marjoribanks is appropriate to "investigate the processes by which individual members of the families and classrooms define and manage their every day lives" (1991, p.271). In this study I want to argue that it is the meanings in context that affect the development of children's self-evaluations and achievement expectations. Indeed, a basic assumption of this study is that human behaviour is the result of indispensable and continuous interactions between persons and the situations they encounter. "To know merely the fact that feelings, thoughts or actions exist is not enough without also knowing the framework within which these behaviours fit" (Wilson, 1977, p. 249).

**Theory, model and method: An overview**

In this study classroom observations looked at three main things: (i) the task structure—the variety of tasks, and differences in sequence and pace of tasks for different students; (ii) feedback and evaluation procedures used by teachers, and (iii) the motivational strategies teachers use and the quality of teacher-pupil interaction. As for

observations in the home setting, these concentrated at the outset on the family socialisation

processes, parental belief systems, parents' domestic routines and living patterns, parental

aspirations for their children and their involvement with them, provision of educational

resources, cultural capital in the home and family. Figure 1 encapsulates the adopted model

of the study.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the bio-ecological model of

development proposed by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) which argues that adolescents'

outcomes are related to "proximal processes", which are the enduring forms of interaction

that occur in immediate settings such as families and schools, and to "distal contexts" in

which these immediate settings are embedded. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci suggest that if the

analyses are undertaken within a bio-ecological framework then it is likely that our

understanding of the relationships between social contexts of family environments and

children's development will be enhanced. Thus, following this advice, by incorporating

both (1) cultural macro level explanations (Gibson, 1988; Ogbu, 1983, 1987; Ogbu and

Matute-Bianchi, 1986) and (2) micro level interactions with instructional activities

(Erickson, 1987; Moll and Diaz, 1987; Trueba, 1986, 1988) I have explored in this field-

based study a new conceptual model by which to compare the academic performance of

students from Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families. By adopting variants of

the ethnographic method to obtain accounts of why students perform certain acts and what

social meanings they give to the actions of themselves and others, and discover how

individual members of the families, classrooms, teachers and students define and manage

their everyday world, my study aims to enhance our knowledge of the relationship between

home and school, and its consequent effects on children's academic performance.

**MACRO LEVEL**
STRUCTURAL FACTORS

**MICRO LEVEL**

CULTURAL PROCESSES

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

**Socioeconomic Status**

Middle Class
Working Class

**Ethnicity**

Chinese
Anglo-Celtic

**Home Environment**

Family Circumstances
Living Patterns
Child Rearing Practices
Family Interaction
Family Interests
Family Social Network
Native Theory to Success
Educational Resources
Intellectuality
Parental Expectations
Press on Academic Success
Press on Ethculture
Children's Aspirations

**School Environment**

Characteristics of Pupils
Characteristics of Teachers
Teaching Styles and Pupils'
Responses
Pupils' Work habits
Pupils' Attitude to School work
Classroom Interaction Teacher-
Pupils Chinese-Anglo-Celtic
Teacher
Expectations/Evaluation
Task Structure
Pupils' Efforts/Ability

Academic Performance
Tertiary Education
Aspirations

INTERACTIONAL PROCESSES

Figure 1:   A Proposed Conceptual Interactive Model of Home-School Link and Educational Outcomes of High School
Students of Chinese and Anglo-Celtic Australian Background

A specific contribution of this research to the field is the idea that in order to understand the academic performance of students it is necessary to stress the phenomenological experiences of children in their homes and school. Children are regarded as the active processors of information rather than passive recipients of inputs. Their academic outcomes might therefore be more highly related to their own perceptions of parenting than to what parents themselves think that they are doing in the home (Wentzel, 1994, p. 264). Incidentally, although I was aware of the possible importance of peer group pressure, due to lack of resources and time, this factor was excluded. Also, in this research I concentrated on academic teaching at school. Using Hammersley's (1992) term "subjects on the periphery", non-academic disciplines on the curriculum were given less consideration than the more academic ones, though teachers of physical education were interviewed extensively. This decision to concentrate on academic subjects coincided with the "central value system" (Ball, 1981) of the school itself, even though at the time of research Paramount senior high school was noted as much for its sports as for its academic excellence.

As this study aimed to understand the experiences of teenagers in their homes and school, I decided to employ some ethnographic techniques, since these are well-suited to capturing something about teaching and learning in action and in the sort of detail not possible with other methods of research. Such techniques allowed me to record the behaviour of parents, children and teachers in home and school settings. For this research the daily routine was a key to understanding the essential characteristics of interactions between teachers and students and between parents and children. Thus, the decision to rely

heavily on the qualitative methodology was not only a consequence of a methodological or philosophical commitments per se (Hammersley, 1992, p. 172), but because I judged it the best-suited approach to gaining a deep and rich understanding of actual behaviour. By observing the actual behaviour of participants in social settings, these qualitative methods allowed me to obtain insights into parents' belief systems and their native theories of success. Likewise, the thoughts of teachers and students, and the ideas and nuances of behaviour of the family that would have been hard to encapsulate employing methodologies other than qualitative ones.

Finally, it would help the reader to bear in mind at this stage that this study was guided by the following key questions:

1. How do Anglo-Australian and Chinese-Australian parents define school success?

2. What types of learning experiences are provided, and what types of strategies adopted, by parents of more and less successful children in the sample groups?

3. How does the family influence students' self-expectations and adaptation to the school?

4. How does the match or mismatch of cultures of the home and school influence school experiences and academic performance of the children from these different socio-cultural backgrounds?

5. What strategies do the children from different socio-cultural backgrounds adopt to meet the demands of their school experiences?

I shall have much more to say about theory and methods in the next chapter.

## Rationale of this Study

The significance of this study is that it aims to combine disciplined observation with a comprehensive interpretation of children's experiences in their complex interrelations. By observing the face-to-face interactions over a prolonged period of three years, and by spending time with the informants whose opinions are valued, the contribution of this research to the body of knowledge is to provide rich qualitative data about the everyday realities of these teenagers in their homes and the school they attend. And because the focus is to understand the way parents, teachers and children "construct reality" (Berger and Luckman, 1967) or "define their situations" (Wood, 1986), this study should have a special appeal for parents as well as for teachers. Let me elaborate, before proceeding, a little about myself and my motivations for undertaking this study, as well as about the school.

Extensive and detailed research carried out in a series of studies in Victoria (Taft, Strong and Fensham, 1971; Taft, 1975, 1975), revealed a marked variety in educational aspirations for, and eventual participation in, post-secondary education across different immigrant groups. Connell et al. (1975) found Italian and Maltese students valued education least and only Germans and Asians valued it more highly than did the Anglo-Australians. Greeks, Yugoslavs and Poles were inclined to emphasise the more utilitarian aspects of education. Connell et al. (1975) also claimed that although these differences sometimes related to socio-economic variables and to the language spoken at home, they often seemed to reflect genuine cultural differences.

In a longitudinal study Meade (1983) provided evidence that the educational aspirations of students from families with non-English speaking backgrounds were higher

than those of other students. Meanwhile, an extensive review by Sturman (1985) of the Australian studies has confirmed the previous evidence, which indicates that adolescents from non-English backgrounds have relatively higher educational aspirations and stayed at school longer than their Anglo-Australian counterparts.

A similar situation has been reported in the United States (Coleman Report, 1966) and the United Kingdom (Swann Report, 1985). Research studies from the United States (Stevenson and Stigler, 1991) and the United Kingdom (Gibson, 1987) also have produced compelling evidence to suggest that, other than in English, most Asian students perform better than their majority counterparts.

**Putting myself into Context**

I would now like to explain why I began this study and where I come from. Born of a farmer's family in a sleepy village, 80 kilometres north west of New Delhi, I experienced cultural deprivation and the injustice of the caste system in India from early in my life. My parents were illiterate like nearly everyone else in the village. When I started primary school in the late 1940s, not more than thirty per cent of school age children attended. I remember vividly when I was in grade five there were only six girls and five "Harijan" boys or "untouchables" (now called "Dalits") at the primary school. Their parents did not allow Harijan girls to attend school, nor were they encouraged by high caste Hindus to do so. At that time the most widely held belief in rural India was "Education corrupts women. Their job is to stay home and raise children". Harijan parents wanted their sons to attend school

but they could not afford it, mainly because child labour was needed to supplement the family income.

How I managed to achieve a high level of education from such a culturally barren background is a mystery for me, though in terms of family ownership of land and birth in a high caste family (Khastryas—warriors and farmers) as indicated by my name (brave like lion in the battlefield), I was more privileged than many. However, in terms of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1973; Coleman, 1988) and the educational resources of my family, we were educationally barren. No one in my village of 4000 people in the 1950s achieved a schooling beyond grade eight. And no one from my family even attended school. The economic hardships of my parents, due to crop failures from floods and famines, and my own weak health which made me ill-suited to tough physical labour, consequently inspired me to work hard at school. As my father used to tell me: "You cannot be a good farmer. You are very weak. It will be good if you become a babuji- a clerk in an office with neat clothes". So somehow I overcame these immense problems and succeeded in achieving a good education.

Years later a five years teaching assignment in Ethiopia made me even more sympathetic to the problems faced by poverty-stricken high school students. In Ethiopia sixteen-to eighteen-year-olds coming to my school without shoes, barely a shirt on their bodies, unable to buy notebooks and food, but diligent and keen to learn and seeking pathways up the social ladder through education, reminded me of the plight of the children from outcaste and low caste families back in India. Later in my life I became firmly convinced that the Indian caste system and Ethiopian feudal system worked against the

interests of children coming from the bottom end of the social strata. The opportunities to succeed in life are denied them by sheer poverty and birth into low caste or Dalit families.

In 1972 I emigrated to Australia from India to achieve three goals: earn a higher degree, make some quick money, and provide good education for my children. Initially, I had no desire to stay permanently in Australia. On my arrival in Western Australia, I taught for three years in a remote country town in the wheat-belt and fifteen years later in another wheat-belt country town. This teaching experience in remote country schools provided further insights into the hardships country children have to face in their pursuit of education. In some cases each day children have to travel up to 60-70 kilometres to attend high school. Many of them come from families with barely any educational resources in their homes. The plight of the Aboriginal children is even worse. Although isolation and school's lack of resources are the major disadvantages country children suffer from, the community and home environment of these children also do not encourage further studies. I found the Anglo-Australian male child from a farmer's family was typically more inclined to stay on the farm and enjoy sports than to aspire to tertiary studies. Girls from similar families, however, were more inclined to pursue tertiary studies and take a job in the city. In one assignment as an acting deputy principal of a district high school, in 1989, I was incharge of the welfare of Aboriginal children at the school. In this job I found a high rate of Aboriginal absenteeism, dislike for schoolwork, hostility towards teachers and liking for sports. In the town, the most common places an Aboriginal child was noticeable were the delicatessen and fast food shop; and the adults frequented the TAB (gambling place) and the local hotels. That at least, was my impression. Out of eighteen Year-10 students, six non-Aboriginals dropped out of school after Year 10 and stayed on the farm, four enrolled

at an agricultural college, three (two females, and one male) enrolled at a senior high school. Meanwhile, one Aboriginal student was selected to play Australian Rules football, and a female Aboriginal student got an athletics scholarship. The remaining three Aboriginals went on social welfare.

For four years between 1984-1988, I studied as a part-time student for a Master's of Education degree at the University of Western Australia. This degree was completed by research work, the title of the dissertation being: *An Ethnographic Study of the Influence of Home Environment on Ethnic Children's Academic Performance.* In this study I investigated the home environment of nine families from three ethnic groups: Indians, Vietnamese and Italians. The study revealed (a) that all of these children had a university degree as their goal; and (b) more than socio-economic status and ethnicity per se, the home environment of each family played a more important role in influencing children's educational aspirations. However, the case study of one Vietnamese refugee family made a very strong impression on me. The Long family (Malik, 1988) had escaped Vietnam at mid-night in a leaking and over-loaded refugee boat. Then having defied almost unsurmountable odds in daredevil circumstances, on arriving in Australia it suffered poverty, unemployment, language barriers, and racial taunts. In 1986, the second-born child from this family, who four years earlier could hardly speak a word in English, ranked 10th on the merit list of the Tertiary Admittance Examination and later went on to win the Murdoch Scholarship for being the top ranking student in engineering with honours from the University of Western Australia. From the same university he then completed a Doctor of Philosophy in 1993. Outstanding achievements like this by children from Southeast Asia have become a regular feature of the Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE) each year in

Western Australia. This, the achievements of my own four children, and the impressive achievements of other children from Indian immigrant families inspired me to undertake this study.

My daughter did a degree in medicine, another daughter and son did double degrees in law and commerce, and the last-born daughter did a double degree in engineering and commerce. At the time of the graduation of my children I also noticed children from Asian backgrounds were over-represented in completing professional degrees. Moreover, when on one occasion the Governor of Western Australia was invited to award merit certificates to the outstanding students of Year 12 at Paramount Senior High School, he found that out of 15 students to receive such awards 10 were from families of Southeast Asian countries. He commented: "I hope you do not go back to your own countries. I noticed on the occasion of convocation at the University of Western Australia, Asians are doing remarkably well in commerce, medicine and engineering, but they don't participate in Aussies Rules (football)."

This short overview of my life-history, my high school teaching experience in three countries, and my earlier ethnographic study of migrant families have all provided a grounding for my interest in small scale ethnographic case studies. Although I had trained in quantitative research methods, and was familiar with the sociological theories of stratification and social mobility, I had no experience in qualitative research, until in 1984, Dr. Trevor Williams, Deputy Director of Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER), came to Perth to present a paper at a conference. He had been the examiner of my M.Ed. thesis when I was a student at Murdoch University, and I had just written the

research proposal for my second Master of Education degree in the University of Western Australia. It was after reading this research proposal that Dr. Williams suggested I should undertake a study of the home environment of ethnic families using a qualitative mode of inquiry. By then I had also read a number of articles and the books on family learning environments by Marjoribanks (1972, 1974, 1979, 1980) in which he wrote:

> In future research on the relations between family environments and children's development, measurements of both environments and behaviour can be further improved (by) conducting ethnographic studies (1979, p. 201).

Thus I was drawn to qualitative research and the influence of ethnicity on the education of children. It was during this time too, that I started to observe the amount of time Vietnamese and Indian children spent at home doing school work and how in university libraries, Southeast Asian children studied until closing time. Quite often, I found that late at night most of the students still in these libraries were Asians. It was at this time I also read the books like Henry's *Pathways to Madness* (1968), Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1955), Bott's *Family and Social Networks* (1968), Rist's *Invisible Children* (1967), and Clark's *Families and Achievement* (1983). It was after reading these books that I started questioning the soundness of cross-sectional and survey type quantitative methods for studying the learning environment of children.

Before I embarked on the present study I attended a number of seminars, lectures and in-service courses on qualitative research methodology. I also read extensively in the literature on qualitative research in the area of education.

## Paramount Senior High School

Paramount in Southside! The very name is associated with academic excellence. And it is also the place where I have been teaching for many years and conducted this study. The school is sandwiched between two environments: a predominantly middle class residential one on three sides and a light industrial area on the other. At a walking distance from the school are a medium-size shopping centre, sports complex, cinema and other cultural and recreational facilities. In 1979 the Education Department of Western Australia instituted four new high schools, all in the outer suburbs of Perth; Paramount in Southside was one of them. Conveniently located next to the freeway and a highway, Southside at once attracted small-sized factories, and ten years later another light industrial area was established on the eastern side. In a short time, the in-filling process was such that by the end of the 1980s there was virtually no vacant land left. Many young families, mostly Anglo-Australians, had settled in this area because of the low price of land. Three new state schools and one private school had been established to cater for the educational need of the growing community. Paramount Senior High, with its emphasis on team teaching, informal student/teacher relations and no school uniform was fast regarded as an innovative school, and got extensive publicity. But it was not long before the image of the school fell in the eyes of the community. A very senior teacher who has been at Paramount since the day it started, wrote in the school magazine:

> *Originally, Paramount SHS was designed on a flexible open plan. Parents were involved in the decision-making process. Students were encouraged to address their teachers on first name basis in order to foster a good relationship between staff and students. After a few years Paramount reverted to being a conventional high school.*

Three factors contributed to this. First, another senior high school in the neighbourhood with a conservative approach produced better academic results and insisted upon school uniforms. Second, Paramount High failed to demonstrate generally that its innovative approaches produced better students. Third, the local community demanded more discipline. In fact, my later interviews with senior teachers and deputy principals would also suggest that the innovative programs of Paramount were unsuccessful because teachers themselves were really no more innovative than other teachers around the state were. Instead, the majority were teaching there mainly out of convenience.

Six years later with the appointment of a new principal sweeping new changes were made. Team teaching in the open area was abolished. School uniforms were introduced. Students were no longer allowed to address teachers by their Christian names. And at the state level the "Better Schools Report" recommended devolution of authority, and principals were given more authority to run the schools. At the annual general meeting in 1993, the principal boasted to have thriving relationships with the local community:

*The parents own kids and the parents own the school... We should be an extension of home values.... We have an agreement that we are experts at the teaching but the school ethos and morals are their (parents) bidding... I was new and dead keen on better schools. I divorced the Education Department. We encourage students to ask questions. At Paramount teachers had become umpires, directing discussions rather than dominating.*

Many senior teachers had a different view. Nevertheless, they agreed Paramount was one of the better state schools, and in a short time it became the most publicised school in Western Australia. As its academic reputation started to spread in Southeast Asian countries through Chinese real estate agents in Perth, a steady stream of immigrants from

this region changed the demographic composition of Southside, much to the discomfort of its vibrant and thriving middle class Anglo-Australian community. In due course, many families from the Southeast Asian countries settled in Southside in order to enrol their children at Paramount, and soon the common belief in Southside was that with the influx of students from "Asian"[3] migrant families the academic curve of Paramount had lifted. The high level of academic achievement of "Asian kids" became a common topic of discussion in the staff room. Academic prowess and the availability of English as a Second Language (ESL) attracted large numbers of South and Southeast Asians to Paramount. The multicultural composition of Paramount was soon reflected in its annual celebration of multiculturalism. Along with its academic reputation Paramount became noted for computing studies, basketball, and its orientation towards technology, although a majority of the staff were unsure and uncomfortable with the word "technology".

In 1993 the Department of Education of Western Australia rated Paramount very highly. Again in 1995 and 1996 it was rated as one of the top state schools of Western Australia, although the principal always rated it the best. Measured by its Tertiary Entrance Examination results and excellence in sports, Paramount was certainly the most talked about state school by the later part of the 1990s. By 1997 it stood out as one of the leading schools in Western Australia. The principal attributed its impressive results to capable and devoted teachers willing to give time and support whenever asked; to thorough and on-going academic counselling; to an emphasis on correct study methods; a culture in which

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[3] Students from Southeast Asian migrant families are called by teachers and Anglo-Australian students "Asians" or "Chinese".

everybody is valued; and to students where families valued education. In the same year, as on previous occasions, Paramount stood out in sports at national and state level, winning the "A grade" athletics carnival and state championships in basketball. Guidance for work experience, career advice, having coordinators of upper school, all aimed at improving the life chances of students. A recent head boy summed up the view of the student community: "It was more of a friendship with our teachers.... There was a real family spirit between staff and students.... Staff were always available and very supportive." Consequently, the student population shot up to over 1800 with about 140 teachers. In 1995 out of 1800 students 620 were in Year 11 and Year 12, indicating that a large number of them stayed at school after the compulsory schooling age. The school record indicated that in the same year about thirty five per cent of students enrolled in university courses; fifty five per cent studied at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and ten per cent dropped out either at the end of Year 11 or Year 12. The demographic composition of the school has shown a strong multicultural dimension, with a sizeable number of students from Southeast Asia, some Aboriginals and a few from the African continent. As the number of students from the non-English speaking countries grew so did the department teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Equally important was the fact that in the 1990s most teachers were very experienced, with the average age above 40.

Although the reputation of Paramount Senior High was very high in the local community at the time of this study, internal politics of the school were marred by the polarisation of staff into two opposing groups plus a neutral group mainly consisting of full time and part time female teachers. Devolution of authority meant the principal was given more power to run the school and delegate different teachers various duties. As some

teachers perceived preferential treatment by the principal, such a move antagonised a number of teachers who eventually took a strong stand against the policies of the principal. For instance, some saw the principal's aim to make Paramount SHS into a "super school" detrimental to students' interests and they urged parents to "wake up to reality". Acrimonious debates between the two opposing camps became frequent affairs. At one stage the bickering between the two became so strong the Education Department had to intervene. A few teachers were transferred and the policies initiated by the principal came under close scrutiny. At the height of this tension, which coincided with my fieldwork, I tended to keep a low profile which annoyed at least one very senior staff member who asked: "What bloody happened to you Ranbir? You used to make a lot of noise at the meetings, now you hardly say anything? Have you been sucked in by the boss?"

Another feature of Paramount at this time was the emphasis on multicultural activities, which were as popular with Anglo-Australian parents as with parents from non-English speaking countries. The school ethos was "We must feel comfortable with each other". Although students were not streamed on the basis of their academic performance, there were several programs, that catered for the needs of students at various level of performance. Focus classes for students weak in English, remedial maths classes, ESL for students with non-English speaking background, extended courses in computing, drama, dance, sports, and an extension course for students who were (albeit crudely) classified as 'gifted and talented' and a strong students council featured quite prominently. At special assemblies students' performance in sports and academic subjects were rewarded frequently.

In a sense, for the Anglo-Australian families Paramount was a neighbourhood school whereas for the Chinese-Australian families it was a "magnet school" (to borrow the term from Lee and Vandell, 1996) because these families had bought their homes on account of the academic reputation of the school. On average, in each class there were six to seven students from Chinese-Australian families.

It must be emphasised that I am not claiming Paramount High is somehow 'representative' of other secondary schools in Perth, let alone those in other parts of Western Australia or Australia generally. Indeed, it is no more a 'sample' school than are the students themselves a representative 'sample' of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian students. However, it may well represent a school in a well-established middle class suburb, measured in terms of high parental involvement, high representation by parents at school meetings, low rate of student's absenteeism and parents education and occupation.

**Thesis Outline**

The remainder of this thesis comprises the following. Chapter Two looks closely at theory and methodology. It is divided into two parts: the first part discusses the relevance of symbolic interactionism, discussion of qualitative and quantitative paradigms and ethnographic research methods; the second part outlines the specific methodology used in this study. Chapter Three reviews the relevant literature on the influence of home and school environments on the teenagers' academic performance and their occupational aspirations. And since this study was conducted in two field settings, the literature on home

and school has been discussed in two separate sections. Chapter Four looks into ethnic values and educational outcomes with specific reference to the "Asian high achieving syndrome." Specifically, this chapter provides a critique of the different theories put forward to explain the self-motivation of so-called "Asian" teenagers and the relative lack of it in their "Western" counterparts. Chapters Five and Six supply descriptive accounts of the home lives of children from four Chinese-Australian and four Anglo-Australian families. In these two chapters I have attempted to give the reader a feel for "what is going on" in these families and how "what is going on" is shaping the attitudes of children towards their schooling. Chapter Seven too provides ethnographic evidence—in this case regarding the school life of these children. The main aim of this chapter is (1) to understand the influence of home on school behaviour; (2) to consider the influence of a hidden curricula of school on children; and (3) to discover how teenagers construct reality through their interaction with teachers and their peers. Chapter Eight consists of a cross-cultural comparison of the actual academic and sporting performance of these children. Two different models, that emerge from this study are then discussed. Chapter Nine summarises the main findings and then presents a theoretical explanation to account for different pathways selected by Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian teenagers. In the light of this evidence various theories posited in Chapters Three and Four are evaluated and the concepts of 'migrant advantage' and 'disadvantage' discussed. As this study takes into account children from only eight families, no claim to generalise the findings is made, although some suggestions for future direction for teachers, parents and educationists are made.

# CHAPTER TWO

# THEORY AND METHODS

## Theory and Methodology: General Considerations

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part deals with an overview of the origin of quantitative and qualitative paradigms as well as the application of the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism used in educational research. In the second part I describe the particulars of qualitative methodology as used in conducting this research.

To answer the question, 'how do we know what we know'? social scientists have adopted diverging epistemological lines, divided along two philosophical traditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. British empiricism, with its emphasis on realist doctrines, led to a 'confirmatory model of inquiry' or a quantitative paradigm (Biddle and Anderson, 1986). German rationalism, with its emphasis on idealism, led to an interpretive inquiry or qualitative paradigm.

The British empiricist tradition focused on the relationship between the external world and the process of knowing. The central argument of this school of thought was summed up in the writings of Locke who argued that the mind at birth, is a *tabula rasa*—a blank slate upon which experiences are gradually impressed. From the British empiricist tradition emerged the logico-positivistic school of thought which holds that reality exists independent of us, whether or not we are aware of it. The question of *what is* can be kept separate from the epistemological questions about how we come to know *what is*. In other

words, the activity of investigation does not affect what is being investigated. Logico-positivistic theorists, therefore, presuppose an independent reality. They argue that researchers should aim at eliminating all biases and preconceptions, and should not be involved emotionally with the subjects. Their aim should be to discover *what is* rather than *what should be.*

Growing out of realism, the quantitative paradigm employs a lock-step model of logico-deductive reasoning from theory to propositions; this involves concept formulation, operational definition, measurement of operational definitions, data collection, hypothesis testing, and data analysis, drawing conclusions and reporting the results. The purpose of quantitative research is to make objective descriptions of a limited set of phenomena and also to determine whether the phenomena can be controlled through certain interventions and manipulations. Historically, quantitative techniques have been used in physical sciences such as mathematics, physics and chemistry that lend them well to quantification. It was John Stuart Mill (1843-1906) who urged the social scientists to emulate the quantitative approach to research if they wanted the early maturation of *softer* subjects. Many social scientists took Mill's counsel quite seriously and considerable research in the field of education and sociology has been conducted by employing quantitative approaches. Consequently, there is a widespread belief that only quantitative data are ultimately valid or of high quality (Sechrest, 1992).

The counter movement to the British realism or positivism was the German school of idealists who argued that while physical sciences deal with inanimate objects that can be seen as existing outside us, in social sciences the researcher deals with humans who have

their emotions and values. The idealists stipulated that the relationship between the researcher and the researched cannot be separated; that the complexity of the social world changes over time; and that cultural differences between people make it impossible to discover laws as in physical sciences. Therefore, they should concentrate on interpretive understanding- *verstehen*[4]. Weber argued that meanings could only be understood in context, although he acknowledged that hypotheses could be checked empirically. The idealists posit that social reality is far too complex and, therefore, it is not possible to have a definitive, and objective science for all society that will eventually produce a system of laws.

## Symbolic Interactionism

During the 1930s and 1940s the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago developed Symbolic Interactionism, a style of research that in part was a reaction to positivist models. From Deweyian pragmatism, Watsonian psychological behaviourism, and Simmelian sociology Harold Blumer (1969), argued that reality does not exist *out there* in the real world, but where people intervene in the world and interpret what is occurring there. People define the social and physical object they encounter in the world according to their use for them.

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[4] The German word for understanding is Verstehen. Weber argued that sociologists had an advantage over natural scientists because the former had the ability to understand social phenomena while the latter could not gain a similar understanding of the behaviour of an atom or chemical compound. For Weber verstehen involved systematic and rigorous research rather than simply getting a feeling for a text or social phenomenon. It is generally believed that Weber did not use Verstehen to understand actors but rather to understand the larger culture in which actors exist and which contains their thoughts and actions.

Blumer's concept of symbolic interactionism rests on three premises. First, that humans act on the basis of meanings that things have for them. Second, that meaning is derived from the social interaction between a person and others. Third, those meanings are modified through an interpersonal process. Humans are thus assumed to be capable of engaging in *minded* self-reflexive behaviour. They are capable of shaping and guiding their own behaviour and that of others. Human interaction is seen as an emergent, negotiated and often unpredictable concern. Interaction is symbolic because it involves the manipulation of symbols, words, meanings and languages.

The single most important work in symbolic interactionism is George Herbert Mead's *Mind, Self and Society (1934)*. Defining mind as an internal conversation with one's self through the use of significant symbols, Mead argued, meaning comes originally not from the mind but from the social situation, and that meaning is present in the social act before the emergence of its consciousness. An act is meaningful if a gesture indicates to one actor the resultant behaviour of the other. In his theory of "I-me", Mead (1934) argued that the self finds *itself* as the object of the others. The *reflective self* is a dialogue between the subject *I* and the social object *me*. Pivotal to this view is Mead's belief that it is by putting ourselves in the place of others that we can better understand the meanings of what the other says and does. Individuals negotiate the world by perceiving objects and making indications to one's *Self.*

The central principle of symbolic interactionism is that we as ordinary actors and as social scientists understand *what is going* on only if we understand what the actors themselves believe about their world. Blumer argued that social researchers had to take on

board the fact that social life was indeed constructed out of complex sets of social interactions, which made it necessary to focus on actors' meanings and motivations as to the cause and effects of events in the social world. For Blumer, the cornerstone of symbolic interactionism was a "common set of symbols and understandings possessed by people in a group" (Blumer, 1969, p.159). He saw symbolic interactionism as essentially a social-psychological perspective with its primary foci on the individual with a self and on his/her social behaviour. Symbols, such as language, enable people to give meanings to objects, and it is this attribution of meanings and this process of interpretation that makes them distinctively human and social. Action is seen as resulting from a continuous process of meaning construction. This process takes place in a social context, each individual aligning his/her action to that of others by taking the role of others in his/her imagination and by making indication to himself/herself about the others' likely responses (ibid).

Symbolic interactionism assumes that social reality is a social production; that is, interacting individuals produce and define their own definition of a situation. As W.I. Thomas put it: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (1928, p. 572). On the basis of their own interpretation of the situation "humans are capable of forming new meanings" (Manis and Meltzer, 1978, p. 7). Thus, the adherents of symbolic interactionism have identified three critical points: (a) a focus on the interaction between the actor and the world; (b) a view of the actor and the world as a dynamic structure; and (c) an actor's ability to interpret the social world. In the process of social interaction, people are symbolically communicating meanings to the others involved, and for their part the others are interpreting those symbols and orienting their responding action on the basis of their interpretation.

Adherents of symbolic nteractionism deliberately concern themselves with subjectivity i.e. subjective meanings and experiences of individuals. They tend to concentrate on processes rather than structures in social life. To investigate the social world, they, therefore, prefer a qualitative mode of inquiry. They maintain that careful description of human interaction should be the main goal of social science and that social scientists should move from the mechanical models of causation so characteristic of the natural sciences, to processual models. Data should be gathered through observing people in real situations. Research on people should take into account the real settings, though description should be systematic and as objective as possible. Against all this, symbolic interactionism has attracted a host of criticism from a wide range of social scientists.

First, some critics of this approach argue that symbolic interactionism has given up too readily on conventional scientific techniques. They say that science and subjectivity are *not* mutually exclusive. "Just because the contents of conscientiousness are not quantitative, does not mean that their exterior expression cannot be coded, classified or even counted" (Weinstein and Tanur, 1976, p. 105). Second, the Median concepts such as mind, self, I, and me are vague and difficult to operationalise (Kuhn, 1964; Meltzer, Petras and Reynold, 1975) in such a way that propositions can be generated (Stryker, 1980). Third, for some critics symbolic interactionism is not sufficiently microscopic; they say it ignores the importance of such factors as the unconscious and emotions (Stryker, 1980; Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds, 1975). Fourth, symbolic interactionism has been criticised for ignoring such psychological factors as needs, motives, intentions and aspirations. Instead, symbolic interactionists have focused on meanings, symbols, actions and interaction. They ignore psychological factors that might be impelling the actor. Symbolic

interactionists are accused of making a *fetish* out of everyday life which, in turn, has led

them to over-emphasise the immediate situation (Meltzer, Peters, and Reynolds, 1975, p.

85). Fifth, and perhaps most critically, "the micro focus of symbolic interactionism serves

to minimise or deny the facts of social structure and the impact of the macro organisational

features of society on behaviour" (Stryker, 1980, p. 146). Ritzer (1983, p. 322) has

suggested that to become a more adequate sociological theory symbolic interactionism must

focus on both smaller scale and larger scale phenomena. As it is, "there is nothing inherent

in the perspective that precludes the analysis of social organisations and social structure"

(Maines, 1977, p. 235).

To bridge this gap, Stryker (1980, p.53) recommends an integrative goal for symbolic

interactionism that should enable us to move from the level of the person to that of large-

scale social structure and back again, for which there must exist a conceptual framework

facilitating movement across the levels of organisation and person. His modified version of

symbolic interactionism can be summed up as follows: People act within the "framework"

of larger social structures where they recognise one another as occupants of positions and

learn through interaction with others how to classify the world as well as how they behave

toward it. In social structures the most important things people learn are the symbols used

to designate social positions. Positions are conceived of in structural terms and roles as

shared behavioural expectations attached to social positions. In the context of larger social

structures people apply positional designations to themselves, which become part of the

self, that is to say, internalised expectations with regard to their own behaviour. In their

interactions, people define the situation by applying labels to it, to other participants, to

themselves, and to particular features of the situation. The actors then use these definitions

to organise their behaviour. By this view, social behaviour is not determined by social meanings, although it is constrained by them. People do not simply take roles, rather they bring an active, creative orientation to their roles. Social structures also serve to limit the degree to which roles are "made" rather than just "taken". Some structures permit more creativity than others do. The possibilities of role-making make various social changes possible. These changes can occur in social definitions and their cumulative effect can be alterations in the larger social structures.

Although Stryker has made a good headway towards a more adequate theory of symbolic interactionism, he has not said much about larger social structures per se. He suggests we need to incorporate structural factors such as class, status and power into symbolic interactionism.

### Qualitative Paradigm used in Educational Research

Most research in education uptil now has been conducted by employing a quantitative paradigm of research, perhaps because its adherents have maintained that statistical analysis is the bedrock of research (Sellitz et al., 1964). The purpose of such research is to make objective descriptions of a limited set of phenomena and to determine whether the phenomena can be controlled through certain manipulations. However, from Schultz's phenomenology[5] and Mead's symbolic interactionism has emerged an interpretive mode of

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[5] *The Phenomenology of the Social World (1932/1967)* is Schutz's most important book. He makes a distinction between the subjective and objective meaning of context. The former is not amenable to scientific study because it is too idiosyncratic. The latter exists in culture as a whole and shared by actors. Since they

inquiry with a commitment to understanding human social phenomena from the perspective of the actors.

Qualitative paradigm is an umbrella term, which subscribes to a phenomenological, inductive, holistic, subjective process-oriented and social anthropological worldview. There is a tendency among social scientists to use terms like qualitative, interpretive, case study, ethnographic and phenomenology, interchangeably (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Erickson, 1979; Reichardt and Cook, 1979; Spindler, 1982; Wilcox, 1982; Wilson, 1977; Wolcott, 1973). For instance, Taylor and Bogdan (1984) have argued that phenomenology, ethnography and ethnomethodology are essentially the same thing. Jacob (1988) reminds us that although all of the above have emerged in reaction to the dominant positivistic approach and although they have many common elements, there is sufficient diversity to make a single set of criteria of rigour inadequate. As a discussion of these various types of qualitative methodologies is not the purpose of this chapter, it is sufficient to reiterate that research conducted by employing these diverse terms is conducted in natural settings with the researcher as the key research instrument. The emphasis is always on *thick description*[6] with the main focus on social processes rather than outcomes. Qualitative methodology is an "inductive approach to data analysis, extracting

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have an objective existence, they can be studied scientifically by the sociologists. Schutz was critical of Weber for failing to differentiate between subjective and objective meaning.

[6] The concept of thick description, first used by Geertz (1973), means contextually rich and holistic accounts of social interaction and meaning. Thick description captures the interpretations persons bring to the events that have been recorded. It reports the interpretations as they unfold during the interaction. Thick description takes the reader to the heart of the experience that is being interpreted. In thick description the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of the interacting individuals are heard (Denzin, 1989, p.83). Essential to thick description is the data that may be collected by the researcher "not be limited by potential bias, theoretical framework or the setting" (Lutz, 1981, p. 57).

its concepts from the mass of particular detail that constitutes the data base" (Schofield and Anderson, 1987, p. 256). Qualitative methods are sometimes said to be high on internal validity, but low on reliability (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982).

An extreme position on interpretive inquiry is that there is no external reality independent of the consciousness of the perceiver. Knowledge is not discovered but constructed by an active mind. Qualitative inquiry aims to understand the inner perspective and meaning of actions and events of those being studied. One of the most important aspects of qualitative research is its concern with *context* and experience as it is 'lived', 'felt' or 'undergone' (Sherman, Webb and Andrews, 1983, p. 25). A qualitative design is holistic and looks at relationships within a system or culture in order to understand a given social setting rather than making predictions about it. To understand a setting well, the researcher as the key instrument of observation stays there over a period of time and enjoys protracted face-to-face interaction with the people being researched.

Qualitative inquiry often uses *concretising concepts* (Bruyn, 1968, p.28)—particular symbols in the culture or group being studied. Metaphors, analogies, and other devices are often used to convey the meaning of such symbols and how the researcher comes to understand their meaning. Qualitative research also uses *sensitising concepts*—a term coined by Blumer (1969) to refer to concepts that give a sense of reference or general orientation to a phenomenon rather than precise definition. Both concretising and sensitising concepts give rise to what Geertz (1973) calls *thick description* which emphasises understanding the social world from the point of view of the participants. Data collection techniques include interviewing, participant observation, examination of personal

documents and other printed material. Procedures for data gathering are subject to on-going

revision in the field situation. The main concern is with description and interpretation.

Hypotheses are generally developed during the research, rather than *a priori*. Analysis is

presented for the most part in narrative rather than numerical form.

A qualitative mode of inquiry emphasises the irreplicability of the research process

and product. Every human experience is viewed as unique, and truth is viewed as relative.

The plausibility, rather than scientific objectivity, of research is achieved when the

researcher communicates the richness and diversity of human experience in an engaging

manner. However, some theorists like Geertz, argue ethnographic or anthropological

research combine science and art and is thus a "blurred genre"

Qualitatively inclined researchers rarely assign numerical values to their observations

but prefer instead to record their data in the language of their subjects. The actual words of

the subjects are thought to be critical to the process of conveying the meaning systems of

the participants, which eventually become the interpreted results of the research.

Qualitative research is usually focused on the words and actions of people that occur in

specific contexts. Qualitative researchers believe that a person's behaviour has to be

understood in context; and that context cannot be ignored or held constant. Huberman and

Miles have rightly pointed out:

> To focus solely on individual behaviour without attending to contexts amounts to
> context-stripping with attendant risks of misunderstanding the meaning of events...
> contexts drive the way we understand the meaning of events (1984,p.92).

Methodological debates between qualitative and quantitative researchers have

continued to the present day. A common belief among some social scientists still prevalent

is that qualitative research is used to familiarise oneself with the setting before the serious sampling and counting begins. In fact, some people say social scientists are divided into two opposing camps: the purists and the pragmatists (Rossman and Wilson, 1985). The purists believe that the two methods are incompatible because they are based on paradigms that make different assumptions about the world and what constitutes valid research (Guba, 1978). For purists, method represents a 'logic of justification' that begins with first principles about the truth, reality and the relationship of the investigator to the investigated and proceeds from there to different research objectives (Smith and Heshusius, 1986). Thus, there is a logical relationship between the principles inherent in the paradigm and the methods chosen; methods are derived from first principles.

Pragmatists, on the other hand, see methods as data collection techniques, and for them the attributes of a paradigm are not inherently linked to either qualitative or quantitative methods. They advocate combining the main attributes of quantitative and qualitative paradigms (Reichardt and Cook, 1979). For this reason an increasing number of social scientists, including this author, are advocating to end the "fruitless and destructive paradigm wars" (Gage, 1989) because "the process of inquiry in science is the same whatever method is used and the retreat into paradigms effectively stultifies debate and hampers progress" (Hammersley, 1992, p.82).

When two approaches are combined qualitative research can discover a vast range of research styles and can arguably be coopted back into the positivistic tradition (Silverman, 1993). No research paradigm has a monopoly on quality. Every method of data collection can only achieve an approximation of knowledge. Each provides a different and usually

valid glimpse of reality and all are limited when used alone (Warwick, 1973, 190). Abbott-

Chapman serves a reminder:

> If our qualitative data are to become more than inchoate description and our
> quantitative data are to become more than arid lists of statistics we must engage all
> our analysis in the continuous interactive enterprise which will shape its meaning
> (1993, p. 60).

However, even though there may be obvious advantages in combining the two

approaches, the procedures for combining them are not well developed. There is very little

available guidance, for example, on how to combine these approaches and use them jointly.

In education so far only a limited progress has been made to combine the two approaches in

the same study. Once the appropriate mechanism to combine the two approaches is devised

dividends can be very rewarding. For instance, in their mainly a quantitative study Fraser

and Tobin (1991) combined the two approaches to study classroom learning environments

and found that the complementarity of qualitative observational data and quantitative

classroom environment added to the richness of the database as a whole. This in itself

indicates that a confluence of qualitative and quantitative research is a desirable future

direction for research on learning environments.

## Ethnographic Methods: General Considerations

With its roots in anthropology, ethnography literally means writing about the culture

of people. Ethnography presents the anthropologist's interpretation of the reality of human

action and aims to describe culture in context. During the past thirty years ethnography and

other qualitative methods have moved from a marginal position towards a much more

central place. As a "science of cultural description" (Wolcott, 1975) ethnography is best suited to answer the question "What is going on here" (Geertz, 1973). It attempts to be holistic—covering as much territory as possible about a culture or a sub-culture—in order to grasp the native's point of view, his/her relation to life and to realise his/her vision of his/her world (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25). Ethnography is concerned with experience as it is lived, felt or undergone and it is concerned with phenomenological consciousness (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

For some anthropologists the analytic description of people, which ethnography aims at must closely, resemble the original reality. "The resemblance must be good enough that the natives are able to recognise in it familiar features of their own culture" (Werner and Schoeple, 1987, p. 24). Ethnographies recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artefacts, folk knowledge and behaviours of groups of people (LeCompte and Goetz, 1984, p. 2). Ethnography is a deliberate inquiry process guided by a "point of view" (Malinowski, 1922, p.25) which, in Geertz's words, aims at "thick description in which a wink can be distinguished from a twitch or a parody of a wink from a wink itself" (Geertz, 1973, p.10). The concept of thick description, according to Geertz (ibid), involves the frames of interpretation within which behaviour is classified and meaning is attributed to it. A thorough description of the context or setting within which the inquiry takes place and a thorough description of the transaction or processes observed in that context that are relevant to the problem are therefore the two items involved in thick description.

Thick description captures the interpretations persons bring to the events that have been recorded. It reports these interpretations as they unfold during the interaction. The

thinner the description the more a study is stripped of multi-layered social meaning. An ethnographer, therefore, aims at combining the view of an insider with that of an outsider to describe the social situations in social settings. "The resulting description is deeper and fuller than that of the ordinary outsider and broader and less culture-bound than that of the ordinary insider" (Spindler, 1982, p.462). It combines what Geertz calls "experience-near" and "experience distant" perspectives (ibid). Thus, ethnography is a holistic, thick description of the interactive processes involving the discovery of important and recurring variables in the society as they relate to one another, under specified conditions, and as they affect or produce certain results and outcomes in the society (Lutz, 1981, p.52). In search for thick description and cultural interpretation ethnographers observe what people do (cultural artefacts) and listen to what people say (speech message). They accept as given the complex scene they encounter and take this totality as their database.

In an ethnographic study verbatim quotations, typical of the situation or event, are included. The extent to which they do so, however, varies very greatly. The participant observer spends a lengthy period of time in the field where s/he talks to the participants, as far as possible shares their daily routine, makes observations, identifies key informants and compiles his/her field recordings. The ethnographer makes no attempt to manipulate, control or eliminate variables. Indeed, the very concept of 'variable' hardly exists. The ethnographer attempts to set aside his/her own preconceptions or stereotypes about what is going on and instead tries to explore the setting as it is viewed and constructed by its participants. He/she attempts to make the familiar strange in order to understand why things take place as they do; attempting to look at the relationship between the setting and the context; and, over time, reducing the breadth of holistic inquiry systematically to give

more concentrated attention to the emerging issues. However, Wolcott (1985) argues ethnography is not just a field technique; spending a length of time in the field does not necessarily ensure that the final product will be ethnographic. Ethnography, according to Wolcott, is not simply good description; and ethnography is not just created through gaining and maintaining rapport with subjects. Wolcott sums up the main requirement of a good ethnography:

> It must be oriented to cultural interpretation, which is not a requirement; it is the essence of the ethnographic endeavour. When the concern for cultural interpretation is not evident in an observer's account, the account is *not* ethnographic regardless of how adequate, sensitive, thorough or insightful it may be (1985, pp. 189-90).

Thus, the core concept in ethnography is *culture* and an ethnographer's task is not simply to chronicle particular events. He/she must look beneath the events to understand how people cope with such events and manipulate the likelihood of their occurrence. "Culture as an explicit statement of how the members of a particular social group act and believe they should act, does not exist until someone acting in the role of ethnographer puts it there" (Wolcott, 1985, p.193). Any qualitative study, which applies qualitative methods, therefore, does not count as ethnography unless it takes *cultural interpretation* into account. Instead, such studies have an *ethnographic intent* (Wolcott, 1985).

Ethnography provides an empirical database; it obtains its strength through immersion of the researcher in the ways of living of the group. This immersion allows perception of the interdependence of parts and also permits frequent returns to the data. The descriptive power, the ability to incorporate in data the form, function and context of the behaviour of a specific social group, and retention of the data for considered and repetitive analyses are

the major strengths of ethnography. Ethnographic data can also help provide the context for expanded interpretations of studies done by other researchers. Participant observation and conversational interviewing, the two principal methods of doing ethnographic studies, are discussed in the remainder of this section.

**Participant observation: General considerations**

Participant observation, the mainstay of an ethnographic or anthropological study, is based on the principle that only by participating and sharing in the lives of a group can one achieve a real understanding of *what is going on there* (Geertz, 1973). A shared belief among ethnographers is that cultural description requires a long period of intimate study. Indeed, a sign that ethnography is proceeding well is that the researcher is acceptable to the participants themselves (Mehan, 1982, p.61). Although for anthropologists participant observation is the mainstay of data collection, in sociology the technique of participant observation was first used in the 1930s in the Department of Sociology of Chicago University. Polish-born Austrian anthropologist Malinowski (1922) used participant observation to study the exotic ways and customs of Trobriand islanders. Thomas and Znaniecki (1958 ) also used participant observation in their study of the problems of Polish immigrants to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. Schwartz and Schwartz defined participant observation as:

> A process in which the observer's presence in a social situation is maintained for the
> purpose of scientific investigation. The observer is in a face -to- face relationship
> with the observed and by participating with them in their natural settings he gathers
> data. Thus the observer is part of the context being observed, and he modifies and is
> influenced by this context (1955, p.343).

Participation observation is deliberately unstructured in its research design so as to maximise the discovery and verification of theoretical propositions. A central assumption of participation observation is that the investigator should share as intimately as possible in the life and activities of those under study. The reasons behind this assumption are as follows: Participant observation permits an easy entrance into the social situation by reducing the resistance of the group members; decreases the extent to which the investigator disturbs the natural situation and permits the investigator to experience and observe the group's norms, values, conflicts and pressures which over a long period of time can not be hidden from someone playing an in-group role (Hargreaves, 1967). Participant observation also provides the opportunity for acquiring the status of *trusted person*. Through participant observation the researcher learns first-hand how the actions of people correspond to their words; "see patterns of behaviour; experience the unexpected, as well as the expected; and develop a quality of trust with his/her others that motivates them to tell the researcher what otherwise they might not" (Corrine and Peshkin, 1992, p.39).

Participant observation, it follows, is one of the most important methods currently available to the social scientist wishing to conduct an ethnographic study in natural settings such as home and school. Thus an ethnographic research is based on the assumption that by sharing as intimately as possible in the lives and activities of those under study, the observer will not only be able to collect information from the *emic* or insider's perspective, but also make sense of all the data from an *etic* or external social scientific perspective.

As stated above, shared belief of ethnographers is that cultural description requires a long period of intimate study of the context and people. Therefore, so long as the

participant observer is aware of the hazard of personal involvement and remains unchanged and detached, s/he should be "able accurately to find the actual meanings contained in any group s/he studies" (Bruyn, 1966, p. 21). However, learning and sharing the meanings inherent in another person's symbolic world may create problems. In the process of observation the researcher changes the situation as well as s/he himself/herself is changed. A participant observer puts himself/herself in a position to observe behaviour in its natural setting, and to elicit from the people observed the structure of meaning which inform and texture behaviour (Wilcox, 1982). Through participant observation, the researcher is able to discover the cultural knowledge possessed by people as *natives,* as well as the ways in which this cultural knowledge is used in social interaction (Spindler, 1982).

Direct participation on the part of the observer in the symbolic world of those under study involves learning their language, their rules of etiquette, eating habits and their work patterns. But there is the risk of fully adopting the culture of the subject-known as *going native.* It may lead to defending the values of those studied, rather than actually studying them. Consequently, it is recommended that to guard against this radical shift in perspective, field workers keep day to day field notes of their own reactions and attempt to record shifts in their own perceptions.

Vidich (1960) has said that in working with people of different backgrounds we should attempt to make the strange familiar so as to understand them, whereas working with one's own people we must reverse the process and make the familiar strange.

Although the technique of participant observation is the mainstay to conduct an ethnographic study, it is not an easy task to be participant observer at the same time as

researcher. Anthropologist Vidich (1960, p.356) goes so far as to say it is a strategy of having one's cake and eating it too. That is, one can not do both at the same time. The role of the participant and role of observer are essentially complementary and mutually exclusive; the more perfectly you activate one, the less perfectly you activate the other. It is the kind of data to be gathered, Vidich suggested, rather than any standard practice, which determines how *native* the researcher should go. Endorsing Vidich, Hammersley spells the issue out further:

> The participant observer can not be neutral, uncommitted and value free in his research. He is not an observer on the sidelines, watching what goes on in a clinical sense.... He both acts on, and is acted upon by the environment. But he must try to combine a deep personal involvement and a measure of detachment. Without the latter, he runs the risk of going native. Diligently keeping 'field notes' and a generally reflective attitude which should alert him to shifts in his own views, will guard against this (1977, pp. 41-42).

Central to the method of participant observation is the fact that changes will occur in the observer; what is important, is that these changes be recorded. As Gussow (1964, p.231) noted: "Ordinarily, in good fieldwork researchers are not greatly concerned about whether they have disturbed the natural field or not, provided that they can analyse how they affected it structurally". I come now to the second principal method of fieldwork.

**The conversational interview: General principles**

Interviewing comprises the second major category of fieldwork technique. In qualitative research, information collected through participant observation is complemented with the information collected by interviewing. While structured interviews are in common usage in quantitative studies, unstructured or semi-structured interviews are more typical in

ethnographic fieldwork. Above all, they are designed to create an atmosphere where the individual feels able to relate subjective and often highly personal material to the researcher. Semi-structured interviews also allow for the introduction of new material into the discussion, which had not been thought before hand, but arose during the course of the interview. They allow the researcher greater scope in asking questions out of sequence, which the interviewees can then answer in their own way.

Conversational interviews are natural extensions of the social relationships established in the course of participant observation. Open-ended and in-depth interviews are repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants, directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p. 77). They often result in informants inviting the researcher to participate in activities they might not otherwise have been able to access, as well as teaching the researcher about events informants feel will be of interest. "It is in this way that the researcher becomes conversant with everything from routine activities to momentous events, together with the role that gossip plays in the everyday lives of the people who are studied" (Burgess, 1985, p.80).

The rationale behind ethnographic interviewing is that the only person who understands the social reality in which s/he lives is the person himself or herself. No structure imposed by the interviewer can encapsulate all the subtleties of personal interpretation. Less structuredConversational interviews can help develop rapport; and allow the informant's own perspective. They can also allow informants to use language

natural to them; and, most importantly, they join informant researcher on a more or less equal basis.

In a longitudinal study, unstructured interviewing is particularly useful. Being on the scene facilitates eliciting information from people who may otherwise be reluctant to provide a structured interview (Wolcott, 1988), as well as access to events and activities that occur in the researcher's absence. In such face-to-face interactions the interviewer gets feedback from respondents, which is used to alter the line of questioning to get a better *definition of the situation*. In other words, the respondent knows his/her own life history, the ins and outs of the cultural milieu of which s/he is a part, s/he has an *ethnographic context* in which s/he decides both what to say to the interviewer, and the precise meaning and significance of what s/he is saying; the interviewer does not. Cicourel (1974) recommended that during an interview a respondent be asked a series of detailed ethnographic questions about the main issues covered in an interview, in a manner "similar to a lawyer cross-examining a witness and evoking details from him. In this way the interviewer may acquire this elusive ethnographic context and be better able to interpret the significance of a respondent's remarks" (Cicourel, 1974, p.152). How many contemporary anthropologists would agree with this stern advice, however, is open to question.

Interviewing key informants also is a common practice among ethnographers. The key informant is an individual in whom one invests a disproportionate amount of time because she/he appears to be particularly well informed, articulate, approachable or available. The key informant can also be helpful in how to gain rapport with other people including family members and peer groups.

To sum up, participant observation and less structured interviewing are the two fundamental tools in doing ethnographic studies. "In the participant observer role, ethnographers let the field setting parade before them. In the interview role, ethnographers take a critical step in research that can never be reversed-they ask" (Wolcott, 1988, p.195). Using these two techniques the researcher aims to "penetrate the experiences of others, empathise with others, become like them" (Woods, 1986, p.89). Together with key informant interviewing and document analysis, participant observation and conversational interviewing are powerful tools for the qualitative researcher. The second part of this chapter deals with how this methodology was adopted specifically for this study; a study in which symbolic interactionism supplies the guiding framework. This interpretive methodology then allowed me to both observe and participate in the life events of individuals at home, in school, and in the classroom in particular.

## Methodology of this study: The particulars

In this study I have utilised the qualitative methodology of symbolic interactionand the data has been collected through participant observation, conversational interviewing and document analysis. Such a qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate to capture what teachers, parents and children said and did as a product of how they interpreted the complexity of their world. The concepts and hypotheses which symbolic interactionism generates, seemed particularly useful in exploring school counter-culture, the negative effects of teachers' labelling, and the ways learning is defined, redefined and negotiated in subtle ways by parents, children and teachers.

## The teacher as researcher

The first thing, which I want to say about the methodology in this research, is that I gathered my data as a teacher-cum-researcher. That is, during the entire duration of this study I was a teacher myself at Paramount Senior High School. All the participating students were in my geography and social studies classes, for a period of between one-two years. My data gathering techniques and access to the families were considerably influenced by this role. I confess that as a teacher there was a tendency for observation to be slanted towards a justification of a style of teaching normally used. As observer and instrument to observe and collect data, there was an element of subjectivity in what I did. Throughout the research period I was profoundly aware that it would raise doubts about the reliability and validity of my conclusions.

Although as a "teacher-cum-researcher" I had the advantage of access to students' records, and could observe their behaviour in and out of classrooms, I found it a hard act to be a researcher and teacher, and at the same time to be an "interested friend" (Ball, 1985).

In an ethnographic study a "teacher-researcher's" primary role is that of observer and outsider, whereas for the teacher alone the first established role is that of authority in the classroom. As a teacher my first job was to teach. However, students, their parents and other teachers were my informants and subject of study. What is more, the children who were subjects, and their parents knew I was studying them. They were observers as well observing me as much as I observed of them; thus, influencing each other.

As a "teacher-cum-researcher, my biggest problem arose out of my efforts to become an observer with a non-judgmental, distanced viewpoint (Woods, 1986, p. 56) for I was aware of the problems generated by my involvement in and commitment to what Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p.2) call the "familiar territory". As a "teacher-researcher", I frequently stepped aside, albeit not always with a great deal of success, from the role of a teacher, and reflected on my beliefs and prejudices in order to examine other people's perspectives. For instance, my six months long service provided an excellent opportunity to stay away from the role of a teacher and to look at the school as an outsider.

Nonetheless, I must confess that it was difficult to obtain the necessary distance because I was so accustomed to being in control. After teaching in high schools for 27 years it was not just hard, but impossible, to entirely relinquish this role. On many occasions I faced the dilemma between choosing to let things 'happen' or allowing them to naturally develop.

To begin with, I was in a position to understand the apparent trivia in classrooms. In the dayp-to-day routine I could see which students deviated and why. Also, I had an easy access to other teachers' classrooms, which entitled me to observe the routines, and teachers' interactions. And, as a classroom teacher at Paramount SHS, I had the right, as well as professional imperative, to talk to and question students, but I found this backyard research fraught with ethical dilemmas. As an established insider, succumbing to the temptation being a covert observer, I felt some anxiety, over my role. On my visits to the homes of children, their parents frequently asked about the progress and behaviour of their children and invariably I talked either in a round-about way or painted a better picture of

things, just in order to maintain good rapport with the children. Or there again, as a staff member previously actively involved in matters relating to the operation of the school, there were occasions when acrimonious arguments erupted in the staff meetings when I felt strongly about issues and staff were polarised. It was at this stage that I took the political decision to remain neutral or keep a low profile in my drive to maintain rapport with the staff and the administration. I must hasten to add that I could not 'sit on the fence' on every issue.

My biggest ethical dilemma came in getting children to talk about their parents and teachers, even though I never put any undue pressure on them to do so. In the beginning some students tried to lie for the sheer fun of it, and some tried to pull my leg. But when we developed trust and closeness, a productive dialogue developed. After initial hesitation, the students started to talk about the restrictions their parents imposed on them, about the ways they deceived their parents, and their impressions of their teachers; not to mention how some watched blue movies while their parents were away, how others smoked "bong" (marijuana) and "boozed" in groups, and recalled what types of languages they used for their different teachers. All this provided valuable insight into accounts of the events, but much of it could not be recorded on ethical grounds.

I felt uneasy hearing derogatory comments about my colleagues, and felt sorry for some parents whose best intentions for their children were swept away by the tidal waves of their children's peer pressure. Sometimes I wanted to impart information about the students to their teachers and parents, but I realised doing so would have defeated the purpose of my research, which was to identify and characterise the informal culture of the students.

However, I never probed the private lives of parents, teachers and students, but, instead, concentrated on those issues which related to education.

**Selecting the students**

The participating families in this study are not treated as "samples" in the strict sense of the word. They are simply examples of working class and middle class Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families residing in a predominantly middle class suburb of Perth metropolitan area.

From both ethnic groups I wanted to select students with the following characteristics. First, children from the intact nuclear families living with their biological parents (to gauge the influence of parents). Second, families with a male and female child studying at Paramount Senior High (to find out if parents have different expectations from their son and daughter). Third, Anglo-Australian families with British ancestry and Chinese-Australian families with Chinese ancestry, who migrated to Australia from the same Southeast Asian country (for cross-cultural comparison). Fourth, Chinese-Australian families who had migrated to Australia in recent years; and Anglo-Australian families who were at least second generation Australians. Fifth, families with parents employed in similar jobs and with similar qualifications (to match the families on the basis of socioeconomic status). I wanted to study students for about three years so I targeted those families, which had at least one child in either Year 8 or 9 in 1993. There were two main reasons for selecting students from Year 9. First, I had been teaching two classes of Year 9 in this school in 1993 and was assured of continuity with the same classes in 1994. In each class there were

at least six Chinese-Australian children which made easy my task of gaining first-hand knowledge of students' work habits, adjustment in class, interactions with their Anglo-Australian counterparts, and academic performance. Second, by selecting students from Year 8 or 9 and following them for three years, I could get a fairly good idea of their educational and occupational aspirations.

Although it took more than four months to select the students who would cooperate in the study, I had earlier started making my observations about the work habits and attitude towards studies of the Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian students in my class. In general, I had noticed that Chinese-Australian students were more studious, more obedient, caused fewer behavioural problems, and were keener to obtain higher marks than were their Anglo-Australian counterparts. But not all Chinese-Australian children, assessed by the grades they achieved, were academically bright. In fact, most of them were in English as Second Language (ESL) classes and they were very shy. Their quietness in class meant I had very slight interaction with them. Except for one, their performance in class was fairly ordinary. Certainly they were not included in this study on the basis of their better academic performance.

Before I selected the students I started to show extra interest in the Chinese-Australian students in my classes. After two weeks of talking to them at school, mostly at the end of my social studies lessons, I learnt about their parents' jobs, their time of arrival in Australia, their parents' interests and the number of siblings in the family. A similar approach was adopted with the Anglo-Australian children, although it was relatively easier to talk to them as they were more ready to talk about their home situations. This approach

allowed me to make up my mind about the research students I wanted to include in this study, and it was at this stage I contacted the school principal to get his consent, which he duly gave.

After talking to the principal I started to negotiate with the likely research students I wanted to be included in the study. I spoke to each student telling him or her I was studying for a higher degree for which I had to write a big report. I explained I was investigating the quality of educational resources parents provide to their children, and the type of education parents wanted their children to achieve, and that to do this I would need visit their home if their parents allowed me. However, I encountered a number of problems in finding the families prepared to cooperate on a long-term basis. Initially, I had contacted sixteen students; nine Chinese-Australians and seven Anglo-Australians. Three Anglo-Australian children were very keen to participate but when they talked to their parents the latter declined to cooperate. I came to know later, these parents were experiencing marital problems and did not want an outsider visiting them regularly. One student, experiencing behavioural problem at school, felt threatened by the fact I might discuss his behaviour with his parents.

Those who eventually agreed to participate were happy children in my class. As one student said, "If you like to know what I do at home, why don't you come to my home? I talk about you to my parents. They will be happy to meet you". It took a little longer to convince the Chinese-Australian families. Two Chinese-Australian students, who were very studious and avoided mixing with Anglo-Australian students, did not want me to visit them in their homes. "I am too busy. At the weekend I go to the Chinese school and my

maths tutor comes to teach me", said one. "Mum and Dad are too busy with their business. At the weekend my tutor in maths and English comes to teach me", said the other. After a few days another student withdrew making an excuse, "My parents do not understand English very well". A fourth family withdrew after a few visits, giving no specific reason.

With this type of response from the Chinese-Australian families I started questioning my very ability to approach these families. I had the disadvantage of not knowing their language and I wasn't conversant with their customs and values. With the remaining Chinese-Australian families I adopted a policy I would like to call *Go Slow*. I picked up a few Chinese words of greeting, learned to bow to women, took my shoes off before I entered homes, and initiated conversation about Chinese tea, moon cake and other topics related to their customs. Fortunately, this approach *melted the ice* and gradually we started to feel comfortable in each other's company. One parent said, "It is good you are doing research on such an important topic.

I am glad you are doing it and not an Australian (white) because you are also a migrant and Chinese and Indian customs are very similar. You can appreciate the Chinese customs better so you are welcome". I said to myself, "I hope this is the way the other Chinese families think of me". I did not want any more families to pull out. In the end, the children listed in Table 1 were included.

It should be pointed out here that I was unable to find families with both a male and a female child studying at Paramount SHS. In some cases there were two female or male children, while in other families there was just a single child.

After this I had to overcome two more hurdles, both of which turned out to be more problematic than I had anticipated. First, I had to get written consent from parents, teachers, principal and students, and I found teachers more hesitant to cooperate than parents and their children. There were a number of reasons for this reluctance. To begin with, some of those experiencing problems managing their classes did not want me sitting in their classes over a long period. Second, with heavy teaching loads some felt they did not have the time to spare. Third, there was some professional jealousy. One teacher even complained about my timetable and arrangement of classes. Fortunately, my principal and the head of department supported me.

## Table 2-1: Descriptive Information About the Sample

(8 families, 13 target children: 7 males, 6 females)

| Family | ANGLO - CELTIC - AUSTRALIANS | | | | CHINESE - AUSTRALIANS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Smith | Morgan | Morrison | Marshall | Cheong | Goh | Tuan Kok | Kwang |
| Target Children | Krista Yr 9 | Ben Yr 9 | Clint Yr 11<br>Glenn Yr 9 | Chris Yr 11<br>Rachel Yr 9 | Victor Yr 9<br>Pearl Yr 7 | Chi Chen Yr 9<br>Tien Yr 11 | Lee Yr 9 | Hongzia Yr 9<br>Miran Yr 7 |
| Ordinal Position | Last born | Last born | First born<br>Second born | First born<br>Second born | First born<br>Second born | Second born<br>First born | First born<br>Second born | First born<br>Second born |
| Family Size | Parents<br>2 boys<br>1 girl | Parents<br>2 boys<br>1 girl | Parents<br>2 boys | Parents<br>2 boys<br>2 girls | Parents<br>1 boy<br>1 girl | Parents<br>1 boy<br>1 girl | Parents<br>3 boys | Parents<br>2 girls |
| Parents' Education | Father B.A.<br>Mother Yr 10. | Father Dip.<br>Mother B.A. | Father Yr 10<br>Apprenticeship<br>Mother Yr 10 | Father Yr 10<br>Mother Yr 10 | Father B.A.<br>Mother Yr 12 | Father B.A<br>Mother Dip. | Father Yr 12<br>Mother Yr 12 | Father Yr 12<br>Mother Yr 12 |
| Parents' Occupation | F: Chartered<br>Accountant<br>M: Housewife | F: Engineer<br><br>M: Primary<br>Teacher | F: Factory<br>Supervisor<br>M: Works at a<br>Shop | F: Aircraft<br>Fueler<br>M: Secretary | F: Accountant<br><br>M: Secretary | F: Computer<br>Technician<br>M: Nurse | F: Car<br>Salesman<br>M: Housewife | F: Porter<br><br>M: Factory<br>Worker |
| Number of years in Australia | Both parents<br>born in Australia | Both parents<br>born in Australia | Both parents<br>born in Australia | Both parents<br>born in Australia | Parents born in<br>Malaysia<br>Migrated 1988 | Parents born in<br>Malaysia<br>Migrated 1980 | Parents born in<br>Singapore<br>Migrated 1988 | Parents born in<br>Hong Kong<br>Migrated 1989 |
| Language Spoken at home | English | English | English | English | Mandarin | Mandarin | English and<br>Mandarin | Cantonese |

## Negotiating entry

In the early stage of negotiating with participants I withheld certain details lest they refuse to cooperate half way through. For example, I did not tell them that I would be observing their activities over a long period of time, keeping in mind a certain amount of deception is inevitable (Hargreaves, 1967, p. 199) and useful, and I withheld some details of my intentions from parents, teachers and children. I told parents and teachers I was interested in general issues like how parents related to children. All the participants were assured they would never be identified.

During my first few visits to the families I tried to put parents and their children at ease; data collection was secondary to getting to know them. At no stage in the fieldwork did I tell parents that this was a longitudinal study to investigate home learning environments. Early meetings with the families were arranged by phoning parents, mostly at the weekends, and took place after the evening meal. Sometimes the students were present while I was talking to their parents, other times they were not. Male students were interviewed mostly in their bedroom-cum-study, female students in the family room. These early visits lasted for an hour and a half to two hours. Initially, some children worried I might disclose information about their behaviour at school to their parents.

At school I spent several days convincing the principal and the heads of various departments about the purpose of my study. During recess, lunch time and the free periods of the teachers of the students selected, I started to talk to them informally about their students' attitudes to school work and their performance in different subjects; meanwhile I

myself was also teaching social studies to the same students. When teachers felt comfortable with the type of information I was interested in, I started to make arrangements to observe the students in their class.

For three months I did not interview the students at school, but I made an extra effort to meet them at recess and lunch time and initiated conversation about their interests, hobbies and types of activities they enjoyed most at school, at home and in the company of their friends. Such meetings proved to be very fruitful in terms of gaining the children's trust.

During my first visit to homes most parents treated me with formality. I sat with parents and their children in the lounge room and was greeted with tea or coffee. Mrs Morrison, the mother of Glenn and Clint, always served me tea in a cup put on a plate with some biscuits, and other Anglo-Australian families served tea in a mug, whereas all Chinese-Australian families were more formal and served Chinese delicacies. Here I was on centre stage, expected to do most of the talking, and they listened with the dedication of devotees in the temple. I talked about my background (which they found interesting), my family, and my children's successes, the purpose of my research, but at this stage I did not tell them that I would be visiting them for two years. To talk about my family my intention was to let them know that I had a wife and four children. About my children I said that the eldest born had finished studies and she was a doctor while the other three were still studying at the university for professional degrees. This information was processed differently by different parents. For example, some of the Anglo-Australian families whose children were not doing so well at school, may have felt a sense of inferiority. Thus one

parent who couldn't hide his feelings commented: "I don't know how you bloody Asians do it. We find it hard to motivate our children (in school work)". On the other hand, some Chinese-Australian parents said, "Tell us the secret how to make a doctor, an engineer and a lawyer from a child".

**Maintaining relationships**

Despite my relative success in gaining entry, the process of maintaining good relationships with participants caused me some initial anxiety. To gain trust and to develop rapport took about four months, but to attain that "intimate familiarity" which Lofland (1976, p.8) speaks about, I had to invent different devices for each family. In the early stages my clumsy approach and ignorance of cultural norms of the participating families (and teachers) was not very helpful. In some cases I was too quick to be friendly and in the case of one Chinese-Australian family I almost lost their cooperation. I reflected back on my approach, and reminded myself that to understand participants' thought processes and feelings, I must be sensitive to their ways of doing things. The field notes collected at this time helped me later to understand how I was viewed by parents.

In the early stage I concentrated on building rapport. My personal attributes and participants' judgment of me were undoubtedly crucial in cultivating good relations with both parents and children, especially as the latter knew them. Research students knew I was in close contact with their parents and teachers. Confidentiality was vital. The early interviews took place fortnightly. Initially, I asked about what was on their minds and of concern to them without forcing them to respond to my own specific interests. Knowing

what not to ask was just as important as knowing what to ask. But once they started asking

about the topics in which I was interested, I encouraged them to say more.

In the course of time most of these family encounters took on a give-and-take basis;

what anthropologists might call a reciprocal exchange or dialogic nature. In fact, many of

these exchanges were conducted very informally. For instance, Mrs Marshall, the mother

of Rachel and Chris, usually liked to talk to me while ironing her clothes or cooking; Mrs

Smith smoked whenever I talked with her, even though I am a hay fever sufferer; and Mrs

Kok was busy with her toddler whenever I visited.

At school, if students decided not to tell me about their hide-outs [the isolated corner

of the school oval] where some of them had their "bong party and smoked marijuana" I

respected their rights to privacy. I did not poke around and pressure them. Instead, I let

them choose their time to tell me the things when it suited them. When they were

convinced that I would keep my conversations confidential, they took me to their smokers'

corner at the far end of the school playground camouflaged by bush, and invited me to play

ping-pong with them. They talked freely about their impressions of different teachers.

Some of them were very critical of their parents. For example, one student said, "You will

not tell my parents (about my secret dating with my boy friend), otherwise they will ground

me. I know my mum. She is a real bitch".

Another strategy I used to gain an understanding of parents and families was to

participate in their leisure activities. Mr Cheong, Mr Goh and Mr Smith all liked to play

golf. On several occasions, I therefore went out to play golf with them. While with others

it was a game of tennis. Such occasions provided invaluable insights into their belief

systems. Another useful approach was to do some favours for parents. For instance, Glenn

was unhappy with his maths teacher. His mother asked me how she should go about to

shift Glenn to a different class. The Kwangs were very keen for Hongzia to study medicine.

They asked me what subjects she should select and what aggregate score was required to

enrol for medicine. When Krista ran away from home I consoled Mrs Smith. Although

such favours helped cement rapport with these families, some parents started to use me as a

contact person to get information about school. In such situations, instead of providing

information to them, I gave them the contact number of the teacher concerned. However, it

was not an easy thing to do. Some parents wanted more information. For instance, Mrs

Smith got into a bitter argument with the school principal. She sought my assistance to

lodge a complaint against him to the Education Department. When I politely told her that it

was not possible for me to do so, she refused to cooperate. Fortunately, by then I had

already collected the data from all the families

At school, I sometimes found myself in even more difficult situations, but here too

there was some scope for doing favours. With the devolution of authority at the school

level, the school principal had been given sweeping power to manage school funds and

delegate staff to various jobs. A large number of teachers were very resentful about the

ways some of their peers were handpicked by the principal to coordinate various

committees. Staff became divided into pro and anti-principal factions, and some remained

neutral. I myself decided, not always with success, to stay neutral. On certain occasions it

was very difficult to hide my real feelings and thus I was labelled as one of the 'anti-

principal' group. To get information from teachers, I avoided interviewing them during

their DOTT time (duties other than teaching), especially after being snapped at by one

senior teacher, who said, "Look mate I have a million things to do other than discuss the idiot (student) you want to talk about". In return for their time, I did yard supervision for a number of teachers. This they appreciated, and it also led me permitted to observe their classes.

As the time passed and rapport with families developed, I increasingly shared meals with them, joined them at barbecues, and invited them on an individual basis to my place. I learned a number of phrases and words in 'bahasa Malaysia' to greet the Chinese families with. With a few people, especially Mrs Smith and Mrs Kok, I spent an exceptional amount of time listening to their stories; clearly there was a large element of catharsis at work here. In the later stages of the research I selected my own times to visit parents in their homes and though much of the ensuing conversation was not always related to the research, and cost me a great deal of time, my patience paid off. As no tape recorder was ever used to record data I paid attention to what people said. Gradually, I shifted the focus from "a wide angle to narrow angle lens" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) while all the time looking for 'key words' and themes in people's speech, and left the setting as soon as I had observed as much as I could possibly remember.

**Data collecting**

To collect data for this study I used a number of standard ethnographic techniques. These included using questionnaires with open-ended answers; informal or conversational interviewing; limited participant observation; document analyses; noting key incidents and

using key informants; getting participants (students) to keep diaries of homework; and maintaining a fieldwork journal of my own.

### *Questionnaires with open-ended answers*

Although questionnaires did not constitute the major source of data collection in this research, to a limited degree they were used. The open-ended questionnaires were given to parents, teachers and students to find out what the participants thought in response to particular questions. These questionnaires were used in two ways. In the early stage of data collection, common questionnaires were given to the participants. The questions were based on the literature of home and school learning environments. However, as the rapport with the participants improved I started to prepare questionnaires after coming to know the setting well. At this stage I started to ask questions which assisted me to understand the individual circumstances of each family and teachers' and students' perspectives.

### *Conversational interviewing*

Conversational interviewing, the key data collection tool adopted in this study, was found particularly important at school, especially interviewing the teachers. It allowed me to develop interesting conversations with my colleagues about the relevant students and allowed me to probe the issues in a flow of natural conversation. Conversational interviews with parents, teachers and students allowed them to give their version of events in their own words, and encouraged them to talk about areas of relevance to them.

Initially, the time of interview with the families was arranged after their evening meals, and with teachers, during their free periods. However, as rapport with the

participants improved, the time and the setting of interviews started to vary. Most interviews with teachers took place in the main staff room, quite often on Friday afternoons after school hours. In return for their time and cooperation occasionally I did yard supervision for them. Sometimes I initiated conversation with teachers at lunchtime and extracted information from them in an informal way. Teachers loved to talk about the individual characteristics of their students as much as the students did about their teachers.

Relevant students were interviewed at two settings: home and school. During school time it was not convenient to arrange a specific time for interviews. At no stage were the students pulled out of their classes for interviews. However, I interviewed them during lunch and recess time and in some cases after school hours (with the permission of their parents). While at school the interviews were kept to about 20 minutes each time, there was no time limit in their homes. With their stereo or favourite television program on, they were quite comfortable to talk freely about their home and school experiences.

My interviews with parents were like interesting conversations. Although on each visit to the families, I had a set topic in mind for discussion I always started with a general topic and gradually guided conversation to the relevant topic. Such conversational interviews in the family lounge, pergola, and around the dining table were well-suited, because they allowed me to move backward and forward during the interviews and provided an opportunity to grasp the world view of parents about the education of their children. During conversational interviews the participants could relate their subjective and highly personal material with me. As a mother of two students commented: "It is nice to have a decent conversation with you... it feels like talking to a friend". Another parent said,

" Now you have started visiting us, you mix with our children and play with them. They can see the human side as well". Parents were interviewed separately, together and accompanied by their children. Informal interviews also took place while playing a game of tennis or golf with some of the parents. Most interviews with parents took place for two to two and half-hours on a weekly basis.

### *Participant observation*

Observing parents and their children in their homes demanded an attempt to make the strange familiar so as to understand them; whereas working and researching at the school I had to reverse the process in order to make the familiar strange. Thus, I used participant observation differently at home and school. My six months long service leave from Paramount Senior High helped me to look at the classrooms from a more detached point of view.

Although being a teacher-researcher at Paramount meant I was at the centre of many events, this also put me in a very difficult situation. Being an observer as well as a teacher at the same time demanded both detachment as well as personal involvement. My teaching commitment forced me to change the situation and teaching strategies to keep in mind the interest of the whole class, rather than the interest of the research cases. However, I had the advantage of observing the relevant students in different situations and occurrences in the class and I could place myself in situations, that were likely to yield the data in which I was interested. The following procedure was used to observe the research cases in my classes:

(1) I guarded myself against bringing the preconceived opinion about the research students, although it was hard especially when I had been collecting information about their behaviour from their parents, teachers and to a lesser degree from their peers. (2) I acquainted myself fully with the literature related to the problems faced by teacher-researchers. (3) In the class I always kept a logbook and recorded everything about the research cases and about myself by using code words, I wrote down the topic taught, the setting and the time of teaching, nature of interaction with students, and reflective notes on my teaching style and its effectiveness. Throughout the data-gathering phase I was aware of my position as a teacher, but one belonging to a minority group in relation to the Anglo-Australian families. Short notes were always scribbled when students were given an activity to complete in the class. These notes were amplified either during my free period or at the end of the day. Small details about students' behaviour such as "X farted to seek attention", "Y kept girlie magazine under his desk and kept on reading while pretending to read his textbook", "Z was busy writing a note to her boyfriend while constantly watching my movements", were regularly recorded.

I prepared the observation sheets to record the involvement level and deviancy level of students in class. In addition, on the other sheets I recorded their behaviour in class at intervals of five minutes (see the sheet in the appendix). Transcripts of the field notes were regularly analysed, and the information derived from them was used to try the same teaching strategies to confirm or disconfirm the emerging evidence or patterns. Different teaching strategies were used to see the behaviour of the students in different situations. The students were also observed in other academic subjects as well as in physical education. Between ten and twelve observations per subject were made. These

observations were recorded on the 10 minutes interval sheets. After observations, the relevant teachers were interviewed about the research cases.

In addition to observing the students in the classroom I was able to observe them during recess, lunch times and school assemblies. In fact, it was during the recess and lunchtime I found the research subjects, in the company of their friends, very open to talk about their private lives, likes and dislikes. As mentioned earlier, I did extra yard supervision to kill two birds with one stone: to repay the extra time teachers gave me to interview them, and to find more time to observe students. I prowled around the school buildings and the transportable rooms searching for and occasionally finding those "backstage" dens where they urinated, smoked, traded drugs, broke school rules, wrote venial signs against teachers. Although they never smoked or gambled while I participated in conversation with them, there were plenty of signs to suggest that they did so in the absence of the teacher. Ironically, it is here I started getting into the private world of the research subjects. They would make me promise "You are not going to discuss this with my parents". "You are not going to tell my X teacher that he is a dick head". They used many abusive terms for their teachers. As a teacher I found it hard to ignore this abusive language against my colleagues, but to get into the world of the teenagers I had to swallow it and sometimes take insults myself. One day Glenn wrote on the blackboard, "Mr Malik is a gay" (a happy man). A number of times Chris, Clint and Glenn invited me to join them in their fun activities, but since I was teaching at Paramount I did not risk participating in such activities. My age, background and position at the school prevented me from joining them in their fun parties. Another limitation on my research arose from my gender and Indian background. With boys I could discuss, to a limited degree, about their private lives

but with the girls I could not.  Initially, I felt at ease talking to male parents and uneasy with

female parents.

My role in the families was that of the cultural stranger and I could raise all sorts of

'stupid questions' with impunity (Ball 1985).  But in homes, the scope for participant

observation was well and truly very limited.  Considering the time constraints and my full-

time teaching load it was not possible to be physically present with each family every day.

After finding out the family interests, I participated in some activities of each family.  With

some families I took my family on a picnic, with others I shared dinners and with most of

them I participated in golf, tennis and table tennis.  I wangled invitations to go to places or

at times appeared unexpectedly.  I tried to visit the children in their homes at different times

to see what they were doing at various times.  Although these activities were not shared on

a regular basis, I found them immensely useful to comprehend the dispositions of parents

and to prepare interview questions more relevant to the individual families.

Each time I visited the families for an interview I made observations about the

quantity and quality of family interaction, quality of language used by parents and children,

eating and drinking habits, visitors to the families, use of educational resources, and

parents' concern and involvement in the education of their children.  After the visits to the

families, detailed field notes on observations and interviews were written.  What they said

and what I observed were compared.

## *Researcher's logbook and data recording*

I always kept a logbook with me to jot down the main points of my conversation with the participants. It became filled with descriptions of people, places, events, activities and conversations. The field logbook also became the source of ideas, reflections, hunches and notes about patterns that seemed to be emerging. It also became a source for exploring my own biases.

Although the logbook was my key data recording tool, I did not write the field notes during the time of interview. Not relying on my memory I did not leave long gaps between the time of observation and recording. After the visits to the families I left sufficient time to write detailed field notes on observations and interviews. What they said and what I observed were compared. Emerging insights from the data were recorded.

In-field notes were written brief and in code which only I could understand. Out-of-field notes were expanded soon after the in-field observation. Field notes included what I heard, saw, experienced, observed and thought in the course of data collection. All the minute details of the setting, situation and actors were written in the out-of-field diary along with analytic memos and 'observer's comments'. The logbook was kept secure on my study desk. During interviews, I made notes of dates, names, places, unexpected topics and hard-to-remember facts. A few times I tried to take verbatim notes during interviews but soon I found that writing everything down was distracting, made listening difficult and interfered with participation.

Field notes consisted of two types of materials: descriptive and reflective. Descriptive field notes captured a world-picture of setting, people, actions and conversations as observed. They were aimed to "capture the slice of life" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 119), encompassing portraits of the subjects to include their physical appearance, dress, mannerism, and a style of talking and acting. Reflective notes were more of a personal account of the course of inquiry. Essentially, in these notes emphasis was on speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions and prejudices. Such notes kept me aware of my relationship to the setting and about the evolution of the design and analysis. Also, they provided a time to reflect on issues raised in the settings and how they reflected on larger theoretical, methodological and substantiative issues.

In reflective notes or 'observer's comments' I reflected on my relations with the participants and how they affected the quality of data collection and rapport with the families. In these notes, I also recorded personal statements of my feelings, opinions and perceptions of participants. They included reflections on analysis, reflections on method and reflection on ethical dilemmas and captured more of my frame of mind, ideas and concerns. Important insights coming during data collection were recorded. Reflective notes gave me the lead questions for the next visit to a family, as well as provided a personal log to keep track of the development of my research, and to visualise how the research plan had been affected by the data collected and how I had been influenced by the data. After having been to the families a few times, I forced myself to read the data and wrote one or two page summaries of what I thought was emerging. In subsequent visits to the families my observations and interviews started to become more focused.

Another data collection technique, which I devised, was the homework diary. Each term, students were given a homework diary to write on a half-hourly basis the activities, which they did after school and before going to bed. While the majority of them gave a reasonably accurate account of what they did and completed the diary according to the instructions, some of them tended to postpone it to the next day. One student even postponed it for four days and filled it in on the last day (as his mother told me). Each term they were asked to write their homework diaries for three weeks (first, middle and last week of the term). In order to get reliable information I did some 'spot-checking' by paying surprise visits, and in some cases asking parents to remind their children to do the homework diary ["Have you done Mr Malik's homework diary?" became the catch phrase in some homes]. An analysis of data recorded from homework diaries gave useful "leads" to probe further about students' activities. During the same week when students wrote "homework diaries" I interviewed them on Sunday late afternoon to get an idea about their weekend activities. On Sunday visits, I inquired about the family activities as well as the visitors to the families.

**Data analysis**

Data analysis is a process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts field notes and other materials. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are ongoing processes because the investigator may not know what questions to ask until initial impressions and perceptions have been analysed. I followed the analysis in-the-field mode device as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) by doing "constant winnowing" (Wolcott, 1990), but the more intensive data analysis was done when I was

convinced that further data collection would offer "diminishing returns". Initially, I kept the questions at a substantive level for the purpose of guiding my data collection, and speculated in observer's comments and memos about the relation between substantive theory and formal theory. Substantive questions such as 'what is the nature of communication between parents and children in this home'? became a theoretical question like 'what is the nature of communication between parents and children'? Whenever something similar happened in different families [e.g., part-time work of the Anglo-Australian children and provision of home tutor for Chinese-Australian children] I recorded such events and found them particularly important in theory development.

In the initial stage, data was organised, sorted out and coded, and the information on particular topics was retrieved. Field notes were read carefully several times in order to see what features and issues consistently emerged, which topics appeared more than the others did, and on what topic data collection was still inadequate. Observer's comments on the field notes stimulated critical thinking about what was seen in the field. Memos were written to provide a time to reflect on issues and events in the setting. At the first stage of analysis the most relevant data were identified and selected from the informants' accounts of the events. From this regular review of the field notes, along with analysis of the substantive literature, specific "leads" were pursued in the next data collection session. When units and categorisation started to emerge I started to look for recurring regularities in the data.

Converging categories helped determine what things fitted together and which categories emerged from the data. At this stage of intensive analysis, categories were

fleshed out and made more robust by searching through the data for more and better units of relevant information. Intensive data analysis took place when information about each case was organised for the purpose of generating a theory "grounded" in the data. By developing categories, properties and tentative hypotheses through the process of "constant comparison" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the emerging core categories guided the theoretical construct for further data collection. At this final stage of the data analysis, hypotheses were refined and attention was focused on those explanations which best fitted the emerging theory.

**Ethical considerations**

As this study partly involved engagement in the personal lives of the participating families, ethical issues were inescapable. While my prime goal was to collect "rich" and "thick" data and to give participants' accounts of their situations as faithfully as possible, they were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. All names, including the name of Paramount Senior High School and the suburb where the school is located, are therefore fictitious. I have aimed throughout this text at striking a balance between gaining some access to events while remaining sensitive to the problems caused by that access. In this study the trust of students and teachers was gained through my position at the school, and my entry to the families facilitated by the students themselves and the school principal. The participating families, teachers and principal were given a broad idea of the purpose and nature of the study. As close relationships between the parents and myself was of vital importance, I endeavoured to respect their privacy and interests. Also, as this study explored sensitive and controversial issues concerning the home environment of children

from two contrasting cultural backgrounds, I avoided any race-related discussion and parents from one family did not know whom the other families were participating in this study.

Being a teacher-researcher at this school posed a number of dilemmas as I have already explained. So did the obvious catharsis some parents derived from conversations with me in the absence of their spouse. The favours asked by a parent which sometimes ran counter to my obligations as a teacher towards my peers was also problematic. In addition, many things have been deliberately left out because of the sensitivity of the material. In the end, suffice to say, the advice offered by Burgess to the effect that "researchers need regularly reflect on their work so as to develop their understanding of the ethical implications associated with social and educational investigations" (1989, p. 8).

# CHAPTER THREE

# HOME AND SCHOOL AS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

In this chapter I will critically review some literature related to home and school

settings where children spend a major part of their childhood and which have common

objective. Although home and school differ in many ways both, in principle, have a

common objective: to ensure the optimal development of children. To achieve this

objective parents provide for their children's physical and emotional needs and lay the

foundations for their school learning.

As a cornerstone of society, the family is the most influential institution in terms of

the development of human relationships. It is in the family that lives are structured and

interwoven, meanings are created, parent-child relationships developed, and a bond of

attachment grows. As Margaret Mead put it:

> The family is, as far as we know, the toughest institution we have. It is, in fact, the
> institution to which we owe our humanity. We know no other way of making human
> beings except by bringing up in a family (1953, p. 4).

Home plays a central role in the development of cognitive and non-cognitive

characteristics. In non-cognitive area such as the development of attitudes, self-concept and

achievement motivation, the role of the home is as crucial as in cognitive development

because from the pre-schooling years home can provide a stimulating environment that is rich in the range of experiences available. As the children grow, parents can assist them in their ability to abstract and decontexualise information when they engage in progressively more complex activities with their children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Before industrialisation, the family had a major influence in the life of the child, which worked in conjunction with other community institutions such as the church in preparing young people for adult life. Since the Industrial Revolution, family structure has undergone phenomenal changes from one in which nearly all men's work was within the household to one in which almost none is. Female participation rate in the work force has increased from 37.4% in 1983 to 42% in 1993 (ABS, 1994, p.100). More importantly, today most mothers work outside the home for a significant part of children's school years, thereby reducing the amount of time they can spend with their children.

In modern industrial society, the purposive social structure (e.g., professional associations and governments) has developed which is independent of primordial social structure (e.g., family, extended family and religious groups). Consequently, many of the activities have moved out of the households to other organisations, and such changes have had a profound effect on child rearing practices. The mutual dependence between parents and their children has been interrupted. As a consequence of such sweeping changes in society, the family has become a kind of backwater in society, cut off from the main stream (Coleman, 1990).

Schools are in a strong position to exert influence on their pupils, mainly because of their specialised functions and emphasis on scholastic tasks. Schools accept the obligation

of providing a suitable environment, staff and an appropriate curriculum corresponding to the needs, interests and problems of participants. Theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that close contact between home and school is desirable, because it improves the effectiveness of both of these agencies in their role of socialisation of children by means of mutual reinforcement (Hess and Holloway, 1982; Kellaghan et al, 1993). The congruence between home and school culture does have significant effects on child development and academic success. When home and school have a similar emphasis on motivation and learning, children are likely to do well. "Adolescents' aspirations are enhanced when positive perceptions of their academic interactions with parents and teachers are in harmony" (Marjoribanks, 1998, p. 193). Better-educated parents are likely to mirror the academic style of classrooms at home by praising and interacting with their children, modelling appropriate behaviour, and promoting initiative and independence. Children from such families are likely to learn, in their homes, to master teaching and learning processes that are similar to those that occur in school. Because these family interactional processes are adaptive in the classroom, children who learn them have an advantage over those who do not (Laosa, 1982). On the other hand, the characteristics developed at home do not support school learning, the resultant discontinuity experienced by children, when they go to school, will affect their scholastic performance.

There is reason to believe that environments associated with the group memberships teach different capabilities which have greater adaptation value in some environments than in others (Henderson, 1981). Ogbu (1982), discussed in Chapter Four, argued that discontinuity between migrant and African-American children's experiences at home and school accounted for children's poor performances in school. Ogbu's discontinuity

hypothesis is based on the premise that an environment fosters the development of the particular knowledge, skills, learning styles, and values that have adaptive value for individuals living in it. When people move from one setting to another, their success in meeting the demands of the new environment will depend on the extent to which they can apply the competencies developed in original environment. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that some minority groups are more successful in school than others, even if they face huge discontinuities between their home culture and the culture of the school. This hypothesis does not explain the variance in school achievement that one finds between homes. Another way of looking at school failure is to regard culture (or ethnicity or SES) as not being the only determinant of the basic elements of homes that promote creative development and facilitate school success (Good, 1986). Since homes in all circumstances play a major role in children's development, "it is worth attempting to identify the features of homes that seem to contribute most to children's scholastic development" (Kellaghan et al., 1993, p. 34). Hess and Holloway capture the essence of this argument:

> If we are right in suggesting that the effects of any given element of the home environment may depend on the nature of discontinuities and continuities between home and school and the social/motivational climate of the school, one should find that different family variables are effective in different cultures (1982, p.214).

Embedded in a context of ethnicity and social class, each family evolves its own unique emotional climate, processes and relationships. It is in the family environment that children receive informal education, encouragement, support and models of behaviour for formal educational pursuit. When children walk into the school building they bring with them the values, ambition, motivation and the expectations which parents set for them.

# Home Learning Environment

The early studies of the home environment started when Alstyne (1929) devised home environmental process variables and their specific process characteristics such as: (a) conversation of the child with adults; (b) other children in the home; (c) association with other children; (d) social atmosphere in the home; (e) responsibility for certain personal and household tasks; (f) parents' reading to the child; (g) parents' use of language; (h) careful response to the child's questions; (i) encouragement of the child to express himself/herself verbally; and (j) atmosphere of encouragement and approval. Leahy (1936) devised a home status profile (later called Minnesota Home Status Index) to measure home status based on occupational status, education of parents, economic status, cultural status, sociality and children's facilities. Some of the environmental elements incorporated by Alstyne and Leahy served as the key factors in locating the environmental variables in the subsequent studies undertaken by Dave (1963), Wolf (1964) and Marjoribanks (1980).

Broadly speaking, the home learning environment studies are classified into three categories: social status studies, home processes studies and ethnographic studies. Some of these studies from each category are reviewed in this section.

### Social status studies

Typically, the social status studies, undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s, focused on comparing the influence of home learning environment of children coming from the middle class and working class backgrounds. In a study administered in Aberdeen (Scotland) primary and secondary school children, Fraser (1959) attempted to relate the total effect of

home environment on children's scholastic performance. Taking into account the four

aspects of the home environment: cultural, material, attitudinal and the degree of

abnormality in the home (e.g., broken family), Fraser concluded:

> There is little doubt that if some account were taken of child's home background
> when trying to forecast his future scholastic success, this would add to the predictive
> efficiency of intelligence and other standardised tests (1959, p. 73).

Rosen (1956, 1959) developed the concept of *Achievement Syndrome* to study family

environment. He identified the learning environment of achievement-oriented families on

three inter-related components: achievement motivation, achievement value-orientations

and educational-vocational aspirations. According to Rosen, achievement motivation

provides the internal psychological impetus to excel in situations involving standard of

excellence, and it is generated by achievement training and independence training in the

family. Achievement value-orientations provide meaningful and affectively charged modes

of organising behaviour principles that guide human conduct. Educational-vocational

aspirations are important because unless children have high educational-vocational goals,

positive value-orientations and strong achievement may not be related to successful

achievement. Rosen's achievement syndrome has been widely used in order to assess the

family environments of children from different social status and ethnic groups.

Kahl (1961) studied the relationship between intelligence scores and the aspirations of

boys from lower middle class families. Using an intensive interview technique to collect

data from 24 boys and their parents, Kahl found that 15 of these boys had higher grades and

planned to go to college, while the others had lower grades and had no aspirations to go to

college. An interview with parents (of all boys) revealed that they perceived themselves as

the 'common man' class: between professional people and working class. However, fifteen families had a 'getting by' core value, reflecting a feeling that this way of life was not only to be accepted but preferred. They maintained that the competitive game to rise higher was not worth the effort. The remaining nine families adopted a value of 'getting ahead', indicating a feeling of the parent that they had not risen quite as high as they should have. 'Getting by' families encouraged boys to enjoy themselves while they were young but to stay in high school because a diploma was important in getting jobs. They were allowed to pick up their own curriculum according to their own taste. The possibility of going to college was rarely considered. Boys were bored with school and found their peer group to be a more important thing in life.

'Getting ahead families', on the other hand, encouraged high marks, paid attention to what was happening at school, stressed that good performance was necessary for occupational success, and suggested various occupations that would be good for their sons. The parents encouraged their sons to take school seriously and to aim for college. The boys from these families worked harder at school, thought more of the future, and believed that they could somehow manage to pay their way through college and reach the middle class. In this study Kahl generated an important explanatory variable for his analysis of the correlates of boys' college plans:

> An intelligent 'common man' boy was not college-oriented in high school unless he had a very special reason for so being. Behind all the reasons stood one pre-eminent force: parental pressure (Kahl, 1961, p. 360).

An important feature of the Kahl study is that it provides a sensitive example of educational research using an interpretive type of framework to enrich the findings from a large-scale statistical analysis.

In a number of investigations Kohn (1959, 1959), made a strong claim that the parent-child relationships of working class and middle class families, create status inheritance. Comparing the socialisation processes of middle class and working class families, Kohn found that the working class parents placed more emphasis on *conformity to external authority* and valued obedience, neatness, and cleanliness. By contrast, middle class parents emphasised values relating to *self-direction.* These parents valued the child's own motives and feelings, and stressed self-control and the development of their children's ability to shape the environment through their own efforts. Also they encouraged exploration, curiosity and control over impulses in the children. The differences in occupational circumstances are probably basic to the differences between middle class and working class parental values. Middle class occupations deal more with manipulation of inter-personal relations, ideas and symbols, while working class occupations deal more with the manipulation of things.

Kohn's findings have been verified in a series of tests in the United States and replicated successfully in Italy and other developed countries. From Kohn's findings emerges a *theory of status transmission,* which argues that the values and attitudes developed in children reflect their home background. It is assumed the values and attitudes learnt by children in their home influence their educational and occupational decisions and their ultimate destinations. The family not only transmits material benefits to enhance "life

chances" of its children, but passes on some of the more indefinable aspects of social class upon which its ideas of class are built (Musgrave, 1979, p. 71). Children from working-class backgrounds often lack the school readiness skills possessed by children from middle-class homes, and the gap in achievement widens with additional years of schooling. The initial disadvantages suffered by children at school are seen as due to the lack of opportunity during the preschool years to develop school-related skills at home (Goodnow and Hess, 1976).

During the 1960s and the early 1970s, family characteristics found to be associated with low achievement were widely interpreted to reflect *cultural deficit* in the socialisation of minority groups and poor families. It was assumed that the homes of lower socioeconomic status and poor minority group children generally failed to provide the kinds of experiences required for nourishing intellectual growth. Some studies assumed that children from certain social groups were bereft of a language that would allow them to learn in the classroom. Bernstein (1961), for instance, saw language as the pivotal factor in the socialisation of children in their homes. Working with middle class and working class boys in London, Bernstein developed his socio-linguistic theoretical framework which distinguished two meanings: universalistic (available to all) and particularistic (embedded in a particular context). According to Bernstein's framework, children from the middle class families are socialised in *elaborate* linguistic codes that orient them towards universalistic meanings. They learn to use an elaborated communication code, which orients the child early towards the significance of relatively context-independent meanings.

By contrast, the working class families are likely to promote a 'closed communication system' which is frequently associated with the possession of *restricted* code. According to Bernstein, these children lack certain kinds of language stimulation, which puts them at a disadvantage, because the middle class teachers scorn and denigrate the language patterns that are native to the working class families.

By using Bernstein's socio-linguistic framework to examine the relations between 163 Negro mothers' teaching and learning styles and information processing strategies of their 4-year old children from four social status groups ,Hess and Shipman (1965) found that the greatest difference between mothers from different social classes was related to patterns of language use. Middle class mothers gave protocols, that were consistently longer in language productivity and of greater quality (tendency to use abstract words and complex syntactic structures). The use of complex grammatical forms and the elaboration of them into complex sentences and clauses provided a highly elaborated (formal) code, which was used to manipulate the family learning environment symbolically. Hess and Shipman suggested that the elaborated code encouraged children to recognise the possibilities and subtleties inherent in language both for communication and carrying on high level cognitive procedures. In contrast, the effect of restricted (public) speech used by mothers of low socioeconomic status resulted in children having relatively under developed verbal and conceptual abilities.

From this study Hess and Shipman (1965) concluded that mothers from professional homes were better than mothers from manual occupation homes at verbally instructing their children to help them understand the tasks. They reasoned that people in manual

occupations are perceived to have relatively few options from which to choose in the major areas of their lives. In this position of weakness in the social structure, Hess and Shipman (1967, p.59) found parents are little inclined to encourage their children to consider alternatives, to develop criteria for choice, and to learn the basic elements of decision-making and anticipating future consequences of present actions.

Labov (1973), a critic of Bernstein's sociolinguistic framework, argued that any analysis by codes tends to take no account of the fact that language is used in interpersonal interaction in social contexts. According to Labov, the vernacular speech of every social group is based on similarly complex structures, and exhibits a similar integrity of patterns (Labov, 1969, 1972). He opposed Bernstein's socio-linguistic framework by making a strong claim that the non-standard English of the Negro children does not lack verbal stimulation. He attributed the reading failure of ghetto children in the United States to the influence of street culture, and not their use of non-standard English. Labov, therefore, claimed that the influence of the peer group of ghetto children is more powerful than the family. Educational psychologists know little about the language of the American Negro children and therefore the concept of verbal deprivation has no basis in social reality. In fact, he argued, Negro children in urban ghettos receive a great deal of verbal stimulation, hear more well formed sentences than middle class children and participate fully in highly verbal culture; they have the same basic vocabulary, possess the same capacity for conceptual learning, and use the same logic as anyone else who learns to speak and understand English. The notion of *verbal deprivation* is "particularly dangerous because it diverts attention from real defects of our educational system to imaginary defects of the child.... The school environment and school values are plainly not influencing the boys

firmly grounded in street culture" (Labov, 1972, 252). Labov argued that before we impose

a middle class verbal style upon children from other cultural groups, we should find out

how much of this is useful for the main work of analysing and generalising. Labov's work

reinforces the need to examine what language is brought to what situation and with what

intent. Aronowicz and Giroux capture the essence of this argument:

> White middle class linguistic forms, modes of style, and values represent honoured
> forms of cultural capital that are accorded a greater exchange rate in the circuits of
> power that define and legitimate the meaning of success in public schools. Students
> who represent cultural forms that rely on restricted linguistic codes, working class or
> oppositional modes of dress... who downplay the ethos of individualism... who
> espouse a form of solidarity... find themselves at a decided academic, social, and
> ideological disadvantage in most schools (1988, p. 192).

To sum up the studies discussed in the preceding pages, socioeconomic status is a

powerful factor in determining the school learning of students—their level of school

achievement, interest in school learning, and the number of years of schooling they will

receive. Measures of verbal interaction between mothers and children (Laosa, 1982; Hess

et al., 1984; Marjoribanks, 1980); expectations of the parents for achievement

(Marjoribanks, 1980; Hess et al., 1984); affective relationship between parents and children

(Sigel, 1982; Radin, 1971, 1972; Bradley and Caldwell, 1976); discipline and control

strategies (Baumrind, 1973; Hess et al. 1969; Hess and McDevitt, 1984) and parental

beliefs and attributions (Goodnow, 1984; Sigel et al. 1983; McGillicuddy-Delisi, 1982) are

found to be associated with children's achievement at school.

**The Wisconsin studies**

The Wisconsin studies, also known as *status attainment studies* started with the classic study of *The American Occupational Structure* (1967) by Blau and Duncan who viewed social mobility as a process of status attainment that develops over the life cycle of an individual. The theoretical framework of status attainment, developed by Blau and Duncan and expanded and refined by Sewell and associates (Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969; Sewell and Hauser, 1975), sought to explain the relationship between social origins and socioeconomic status. The Wisconsin model is probably the most influential life-cycle model of the factors that affect young people's educational attainment, occupational status and earnings. Using path analysis, Blau and Duncan found that SES accounted for 26% of the variance in education attainment, 33% in the first job, and 42% in the level of occupation. This study also claimed that the family into which a person is born exerts a significant influence on his/her chances of achieving any other status later in his/her career.

Sewell and associates investigated the mechanisms by which social origins influence educational attainment and people's place in social hierarchy. They could explain 47% of the variance in educational attainment and 33% in early occupational attainment. In a revised model (Sewell and Hauser, 1976) the Wisconsin Model could account for 54% of the variance in early occupational status attainment, 43% of the variance in educational attainment, and 8% in income variance. From this model Sewell and associates concluded that middle class parents communicate a set of values and general outlook on life that incorporates educational and occupational success, which in turn, produces higher actual achievement in school. Sewell and Hauser (1976, p. 13) found that by the age of high

school graduation "the advantage of high status over low status students in continuing some form of higher education is about two to one; and three to four years later, high status students often enjoy a four to one advantage in college graduation over low status students". In a more recent study, Hurn (1993, p. 132) noted that lower class students begin their school careers with measurable but not huge differences in skills compared with middle class students, but by the age of seventeen, these differences are consistently larger than they were at the age of five or six.

The robustness of the Wisconsin model has been tested with improved techniques in subsequent studies on men and women from a full range of the community. Since its publication more than 500 papers have attempted to replicate, explicate and extend the basic findings in a number of countries (Campbell, 1983). This social-psychological model provides a plausible causal argument to link stratification and mental ability inputs, through a set of social-psychological and behavioural mechanisms to educational and occupational attainments.

However, the Wisconsin model has been criticised for its over-emphasis on methodology and thereby losing sight of the main issues. "The concepts of the framework did not receive the same thorough attention as did the relationships among them" (Alexander and Cook, 1979, p.214). The Wisconsin model has used restricted family environment measures (e.g., SES, ethnicity and sex) to account for the status attainment of an individual. Therefore, "there is a need to go into the sources of family effects more deeply than has been the case with Wisconsin data" (Campbell, 1983, p. 56). Bielby (1981, p. 14) suggests that a critical re-examination of the accomplishments of status attainment

research is indeed in order because measures such as SES or social class do not tell us "what the environment is like, what people are living there, what they are doing, or how the activities taking place could affect the child" (Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1982, pp. 361-62). And, as this study demonstrates, occupation of Chinese-Australian families is not a true indicator of their social status in Australian context. It is the amount of social capital in the family that matters more than the occupation.

To sum up, there is general agreement among social scientists, that SES is associated with educational achievement but not so much agreement about the transmission processes involved and the degree to which other factors contribute to various measures of educational attainment. The most general and traditional form of model is what Eckland (1971) calls *the standard deprivation model* of social class and intelligence, which states that SES influences family environments, and both have an impact on the child's ability and attainment. The most consistent and frequently noted finding is that majority of children from the lower class and from some minority groups, perform less well than white middle class children on standardised measures of intelligence and achievement. In fact, the relationship between the family's socioeconomic status and children's cognitive ability and academic achievement has been called "one of the firmest facts in psychology" (Kagan, 1979, p. 229).

Socioeconomic status holds even when the powerful variables of ability and past achievement are controlled. Halsey (1966, p.286) found it to be the key variable in social determination of educational success. Influence of the family's socioeconomic status persists in the entire educational process from primary school to tertiary studies. Evidence

suggests that children from materially and culturally impoverished backgrounds are ill equipped to take advantage of what the school can offer.

The above studies claim that all children from higher SES are better equipped for school compared to their counterparts from the lower SES. They ignore the fact that families within any one SES group vary considerably in a variety of ways such as beliefs, values, attitudes, motivations and parent child interaction as well as in the performance of their children at school. A considerable proportion of fathers may be "underemployed" in the sense that they are successfully engaged in laundering, market gardening, or other jobs regarded by whites as lower class, but actually have the ability to succeed in higher grade or more complex jobs. This is of course speculative, and it could hardly be put to the test (Vernon, 1982, p.29).

**The Chicago studies - Bloom model**

Social status studies do not make it clear how social status is the guiding force between children's individual characteristics and school-related outcomes. These studies measured home environment by global variables (e.g., SES and ethnicity) which do not tell us in a concrete way how a particular child from a particular social stratum is treated by his/her parents, or what kinds of psychological processes are promoting or inhibiting success in education.

Bloom (1964) suggested that the environmental measures needed are the ones that can be clearly related to specific individual characteristics. Features of the environment should include the behaviour of the significant individuals in the environment, the presence and

use of specific rewards and punishments, the presence and clarity of models of behaviour

and the availability of particular facilities and materials. "What adults *do* in their

interactions with children in the home is the major determinant of these characteristics

rather than the economic levels of parents, their level of education, or other status

characteristics" (Bloom, 1976, p.2). Bloom hypothesised that the following characteristics

are likely to be related to school achievement:

(a) The meaning which education comes to have for one's personal advancement

and contribution to society.

(b) The level of education and value placed on education by the significant adults in

the individual's life.

(c) Aid and support available at crucial periods in school learning.

(d) The quality of language usage available in the immediate environment and the

extent to which school achievement is motivated and reinforced by parents or

significant adults in the individual's life.

Bloom defined environment in this way:

By environment we mean the conditions, forces, and external stimuli which impinge
upon the individual. These may be physical, social as well as intellectual forces and
conditions. We conceive of a range of environments from the most immediate social
interactions to the more remote cultural and institutional forces. We regard
environment as providing a network of forces, which surround, engulf and play on the
individual... The environment is a shaping and reinforcing force, which acts on the
individual (Bloom, 1964, p.187).

Research based on Bloom's theoretical construct has come to be known as

"Environmental Press Research". In a number of studies in Australia and overseas

Marjoribanks (1971, 1972, 1979, 1980, 1984, 1987, 1994, 1997, and 1998) has made the

most significant contribution in environmental press research. He developed an instrument (Marjoribanks, 1971) to measure the home learning environment of 11 year-old boys from Ontario in Canada. In this instrument Marjoribanks identified eight environmental forces: press for achievement, press for activeness, press for intellectuality, press for independence, press for ethlanguage, press for English, mother dominance and father dominance. In subsequent studies these variables were further refined and assumed to be the behavioural manifestations of the environmental forces. From his studies Marjoribanks found that an ideal-typical academically-oriented family operating in an English language social context, is the one that (a) expresses strong achievement orientations; (b) exerts strong press for English; (c) stresses press for independence; (d) has individualistic rather than collectivistic achievement-value orientations; (e) has high educational and occupational aspirations for the children.

Environmental press research has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the home learning environment of adolescents from middle and lower class as well as from different ethnic families. It draws attention to the theory of *cultural transmission*[7] which claims that (a) middle class families have the power to decide what type of school achievement will be rewarded by the society and (b) in relation to minority social groups they have greater means of creating learning environments associated with children's successful achievement.

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[7] The theory of cultural transmission is based on Weber's (1948) ideas that certain groups in society have more power than others to determine what is valued in the educational system at a particular time. The subordinated social groups are disadvantaged in relation to the criteria set by the dominant social groups. People of the dominant group monopolise the education system.

Environmental press research also found different socialisation processes within Anglo-Saxon Australian middle class and lower social status groups and a pervasive effect of ethnicity on learning environment. Thus, when investigating the relationship between sets of predictors and cognitive performance, argued Walberg and Marjoribanks (1976), correlational or causal relationships established for one group might not hold for other times, social classes, ethnic groups or countries. Research in the 1990s has distinguished more carefully between various minority groups and has avoided simplistic explanations, recognising that the reasons for any educational under-achievement or over-achievement are likely to be complex. The present social position of ethnic minorities in Australia and the educational opportunities of their children are strongly influenced by the history and character of immigration as well as the way immigrants have been received by the host society.

**Cultural-social capital thesis**

Recent research suggests that the range of students' background characteristics associated with academic achievement may be broader than those commonly placed under the rubric of socioeconomic status. For instance, Wenglinsky (1996) found that homework, valuing education and being involved in the school work, were all conducive to students' achievement above and beyond socioeconomic status for nationally representative samples of high school and middle school students in the United States. The "good home thesis" states that the environmental stimulation of the home is independent of its position on a scale of social or material advantage; rather, the processes of socialisation, the value

orientation of the family, and the level of parental involvement tend to be the most important predictors of success.

Bourdieu (1973) used the term *cultural capital*[8] *to* refer to ways of talking, acting, and modes of style, moving, socialising, forms of knowledge, language practices and values. For Bourdieu the most important element of cultural capital is the ethos or habitus which is acquired in tacit forms by most children in middle class families. He argued that such a system becomes the monopoly of those classes capable of transmitting through the family the instruments (habitus) for the reception of the school's messages (1973, p. 81). The culture of the elite is so near to that of the school, that children from the lower middle class can acquire only with great effort something which is a 'given' for the children of the cultivated classes (1974, p. 39). School tends to transmit the principles of that habitus, and transform cultural into scholastic capital, thereby distinguishing its character. Teachers communicate more easily with students who participate in elite status cultures, give them more attention and special assistance, and perceive them as more intelligent or gifted than students who lack cultural capital. He argues that school culture is close to that of the dominant group (1973, p. 80) and the habitus of the dominant group permeates every aspect of schooling. The school does not explicitly make this culture available to its pupils but implicitly demands it via its definitions of success.

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[8] Instead of using the word culture Bourdieu uses habitus which is a system of dispositions, which acts as a mediation between structures and practice (Bourdieu, 1973, p.71). He confines the term culture to its non-anthropological sense of the 'high' culture of French society. Habitus is used to denote the heritage and ethos of the various sub-groups within society as a whole and which is engendered through socialisation (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Bourdieu (1977) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) provided a subtle account of inequality by proposing cultural elements that mediate the relationship between economic structures, schooling and the lives of people. According to them, the families of each social class transmit distinctive cultural knowledge. As a consequence, children of the dominant class inherit substantially different cultural knowledge, skills, manners, norms, style of interaction, and linguistic facility than do the children of the lower class. Students from the dominant class, by virtue of a certain linguistic and cultural competence acquired through family socialisation, are provided the means of appropriating success in school. Bourdieu argued that schools contribute to the reproduction of inequality by devising a curriculum that rewards 'cultural capital' of the dominant classes, and systematically devalues that of the lower classes.

In an influential article Coleman (1988) offered a comprehensive account of how a family transforms various forms of capital from the parental generation into human capital in the children's generation. Coleman argued that family background had been erroneously considered as a single entity in many studies on achievement in school. Instead, he claimed that family background should be viewed from at least three dimensions: human capital (e.g., parental education), financial capital (e.g., family income) and social capital (e.g., parental involvement with their children's education within the family context).

A concept closely related to human capital is cultural capital, developed by Bourdieu (1977), which argues that high socioeconomic status families possess key cultural resources that provide educational advantages to children. For instance, high socioeconomic status families are more likely to visit museums and libraries and attend other cultural activities

that facilitate learning in school. The idea of cultural capital is usually employed as an explanatory variable in attempting to describe exactly how social class influence life outcomes.

Coleman and Hoffer (1987) extended cultural capital to social capital. Outcomes for children are strongly affected by the social capital possessed by their parents. They argued that the social capital of the family is the relations between children and parents and other members of the community. It consists of relationships among adult family members and children. In a later study Coleman (1990) included social networks and interactions and involvement with teachers, students and parents as social capital. Unique to the concept of social capital is the idea that, like financial or human capital, it represents a stock or account of potential assistance and network linkages, that are developed through a conscious or unconscious investment process and could be drawn upon when needed (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988).

The literature on social networks highlights the importance of individuals mobilising support and resources from a network of institutional agents who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly or to negotiate the transmission of institutional resources and opportunities. These agents include teachers, counsellors, social service workers and community leaders. It is through the social relationships established with these institutional agents that individuals, including parents, establish social capital and supportive ties to establish favourable conditions for engaging and advancing in the educational system.

According to Coleman's theory, social capital facilitates and enhances the conversion of other forms of family capital into children's human capital. The presence of some adult

members in the family is a necessary condition for providing social capital. But the key is intergenerational communication or simply providing 'care' for children. Social capital, therefore, is the capacity of a family or school to 'invest' a wealth of attention, advice, support, interest, values and care for children. Social capital in schools is indicated by a high degree of interconnectedness between students, parents and teachers. Family social capital is generated from the strength of relationships between parents and children. It is the amount and quality of intellectual interaction between parents and children that provide children with access to parents' economic and human capital. Coleman claimed, "If the human capital possessed by parents is not complemented by social capital embodied in family relations, it is irrelevant to the child's educational growth that the parent has a great deal or small amount of human capital" (1988, p. 110).

The concepts of cultural capital and social capital are usually employed as explanatory variables in attempting to describe exactly *how* social class influences life outcomes. When parents are centrally involved with their children, social capital leads to the formation of individuals with highly developed human capital. In a recent study Marjoribanks and Mboya (1997) found support for Coleman's theoretical orientation. They noted that when social capital is assessed by students' perceptions of their parents' goal orientations and support, it contributes significantly to the variation in adolescents' affective characteristics. It is the family cultural capital, that mediates, in part, the relationship between family social background and children's academic success (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988). Put together, Coleman and Bourdieu suggest that family environments might be defined by structural characteristics such as economic and human capital and by underlying processes such as social and cultural capital. An interesting aspect of

Bourdieu's work is the distinction he makes between two factions of the dominant class -
the propertied families who can rely on the inheritance of physical capital, and the newer
managerial and administrative cadres who must rely on the transmission of cultural capital.
Boudieu argued: "The most privileged section of the dominant classes from the point of
view of economic capital and power are not necessarily the most well off in terms of
cultural capital" (1977, p. 497).

**Ethnographic studies**

Ethnographic studies have contributed in the interpretive tradition to theories that
attempt to account for social inequality in three ways: (1) introducing cultural elements into
highly deterministic macro-theories; (2) injecting human agency into theories accounting
for social inequality; and (3) opening the 'black box' of schooling to examine the reflexive
relations between institutional practices and students' careers. Although not ethnographic
in a real sense, in their influential study Connell et al. (1982) attempted to get close to the
situation people found themselves in and talked to them at length about their experiences.
They investigated the way children from working class and ruling (middle) class families
related to their school. In this study the authors interviewed 100 students (50 boys and 50
girls) from two-parent families from Sydney and Adelaide. They also interviewed 196
parents, 118 teachers and 10 principals in order to gain a picture of interactive relationship
between students, their families and teachers. The findings of this study challenged the
premise that individuals are seen as determined or produced by the social structures,
including families, surrounding them. The study argued that a more accurate picture could
be gained by taking a closer look at what students, their families and teachers actually did,

how they interrelated and how those interrelationships changed over time. Connell et al. concluded:

> The closer we get to particular people, the more conscious we become of the extent to which their skills, interests, and outlooks are developed in response to circumstances in which they live, and cannot be understood if seen apart from that context (1982, p. 185).

In 1989 I completed an M.Ed. dissertation at the University of Western Australia. In this ethnographic study of high school students from nine ethnic families (Vietnamese, Indian, and Italian) residing in Perth, Western Australia, I investigated the influence of home environment on children's academic performance. Although the findings of this study cannot be generalised beyond the nine families, it provided some valuable insights and inspiration to undertake the present study. From this study I arrived at the following conclusions: (1) Individual circumstances of the family and parents' and their children's experiences in the host country were crucial to children's educational aspirations. (2) As a group, Vietnamese families were economically most hard pressed, parents were either unemployed or on casual jobs, and their children faced language and racial problems. But the Vietnamese parents were most concerned about the education of their children. Except for one child, all the children from Vietnamese families enrolled for tertiary studies. (3) In families where parents were too involved in economic pursuits and adopted authoritarian or coercive child rearing techniques, their children tended to perform poorly. (4) The most preferred careers for the Indian and Vietnamese families were medicine and engineering, whereas children from Italian families were more inclined towards doing a degree in economics or commerce.

In a word, environmental stimulation of the home was independent of its position on a scale of social or material advantage. The process of socialisation at home, the value orientation of the family, and the level of parental involvement tended to be the key predictors of success at school.

## School Learning Environment

Even though the interaction of teacher and pupils within the school arena is a central element, this area has not been well investigated, mainly because sociologists have held the view that the primary cause of high rate of failure of children from the working families was their culturally deprived home environment. Until the mid-1960s a commonly held belief among sociologists was that a substantial part of the difference in school performance of different students, could be attributed to differences in the quality of the school they attended. Not only did this argument seem intuitively obvious; it also had considerable impressionistic evidence to support it. In the United States Coleman et al. (1966) undertook a comprehensive survey to investigate the extent to which school achievement was related to pupils' ethnic and social background, and the possible influence of the *school factor* on learning environment. This study was designed to demonstrate that unequal school achievement by students from different social origins was a function of unequal educational opportunity.

In this large scale study, Coleman and associates aimed at a 5% sample of all pupils in America's public schools. The study included 4,000 primary and secondary schools, 60,000 teachers and 600,000 pupils. Three groups of variables were investigated: school

facilities and curriculum, teacher characteristics, and background and aspirations of pupils. All students (Puerto Rican, Hispanic, Afro-American, Orientals and white Americans) were tested at grades 1, 3, 6, 9 and 12. Their achievement was measured in verbal skills and mathematical skills. In higher grades they were tested also in practical knowledge, natural science and social sciences.

With its main focus on examining the role of the type of school attended and the role of the family on the academic achievement of children coming from different socio-cultural background, the Coleman Report showed unexpected results. It claimed that there was almost no relationship between measures of school quality and student achievement:

> Two points are clear: (1) these minority children have a serious educational deficiency at the start of the school, which is obviously not a result of school, and (2) they have a even more serious deficiency at the end of school which is obviously in part a result of school (Coleman et al., 1966, p. 524).

This study demonstrated that most African-American and white students attended different schools. According to 'measurable' characteristics (e.g., physical facilities, curricula, material resources and teachers) these schools were quite similar. The measured differences in school resources seemed to have little or no effect on the differences in students' performance on standardised tests. The only variable, that seemed to affect educational achievement, was the quality of peers. The study also showed that except for the Orientals (Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans), students from minority groups performed at a lower level. Put simply, Coleman Report found that it was families, not schools that made the difference.

By using more sophisticated statistical techniques Jencks (1972, 1979) reanalysed

Coleman's data and reiterated Coleman's conclusions. In a more recent study Hurn also

endorsed the findings of Coleman report.

> If there is one universally accepted finding in the study of schooling and its effects, it is that student ability and parental status have a powerful effect on student performance and test scores, independent of the characteristics of the school they attend. Students in affluent suburban schools tend to score higher on tests than most students in schools in disadvantaged neighbourhood ( Hurn, 1993, p. 31).

Nevertheless, since its publication the Coleman Report has been subject to an

enormous controversy. Critics (e.g., Foster, 1977, among others) alleged that the school

measures used by Coleman et al. were so constituted as probably not to capture some

significant effects of schools on academic achievement. Evidence from America (Purkey

and Smith, 1983), the United Kingdom (Rutter et al., 1979; Mortimore, 1988; and

Tomlinson, 1989) and Australia (Fitzgerald, 1976; Meade, 1982; Henry et al., 1988) has

challenged Coleman's conclusions. In fact, twenty years later Coleman and Hoffer (1987,

p.63) agreed that schools do make a difference.

In reaction to the Coleman report was the proliferation of school-effectiveness studies

which made closer investigations of various features of the school environment such as the

social environment of the school, the relations between teachers and principal, and teachers'

morale (Good and Brophy, 1986; Good and Weinstein, 1986). Although initially these

studies were conducted on small samples of schools and students, later research confirmed

the influence of these characteristics for nationally representative populations (Lee, Bryk

and Smith, 1993). School effectiveness research examined the question whether better

schools would significantly reduce the inequality of attainment between individuals or

between groups. It challenged the premise of Coleman and Jencks: a child's exam score could be predicted far more accurately from knowing the family background than from knowing which school s/he went to. Books like *Schools can make a Difference* (Brookover et al., 1979); *School Matters* (Mortimore et al., 1988) and *Fifteen Thousand Hours* (Rutter et al., 1979) brought home the message that schools do play an important role in the education of children.

The most notable feature of effective schools research is its attempt to break open the 'black box' of the school by studying characteristics related to the organisation, form and content of schools. With the effective schools movement factors like homework that is checked, class morale, the involvement of the family with homework, home situation, homework assignments, peer group pressure, and watching television have been found to relate to achievement. The ability of these school characteristics to influence achievement above and beyond socioeconomic status implies that schools can indeed make a difference for students, particularly in the case of students whose background would predict relatively low levels of achievement.

Smith and Tomlinson (1989) carried out a study in 20 multi-ethnic secondary schools to (a) measure differences between schools in terms of the outcomes they achieve after taking full account of differences in the attainment and background of children at the point of entry; (b) to understand the reasons for school differences and to describe processes underlying school success and (c), to describe the educational experience of children from racial-minority groups. This study, carried out in four local authority areas of England, showed that there were very important differences between urban comprehensive schools.

The level of achievement was radically higher in some schools than in others. In their study of the Australian secondary schools, Connell et al. (1982) also argued that the fact that ruling class parents prefer to send their children to private school, suggest that schools count somehow.

Effective schools research suggests that the social characteristics of schools and their policies do make a difference. The current move in Australia to a student outcome-based curriculum framework recognises that school can make a big difference in the outcome of students. Teachers are being held accountable for students' poor performance. The Outcome-based Curriculum Framework Report states:

> Focus on outcomes will enable the Curriculum Framework to be the driving force for curriculum in Western Australian schools. This approach represents a major shift away from a focus on educational inputs and time allocation towards one which emphasises the desired results of schooling (1997, p.3).

**Ethnographic studies of schooling**

Up until the 1970s psychologists and sociologists of education attributed differential school achievement to factors like ability and home background. Such studies assumed that human behaviour is directed and determined by forces beyond the control of an individual. Typically, they avoided an examination of schooling itself; even though in the everyday life of teenagers schools play an important role.

The interactionist perspective, coming in to prominence since the 1970s, has opened up the "black box" of the classroom. It argues that to understand human behaviour, subjective meaning of individuals should be taken into account. It provides insights into

the day-to-day life of children at school. The social roles of teachers and students are changeable because they may have a different definitions of their situation. Students may form subcultures and may develop patterns of behaviour, which may be punished by teachers and rewarded by their peers. What goes on inside a school is the result of teachers and pupils acting towards one another in the way they perceive the situation. Pupil groups are likely to form from children of different ability, social class, ethnicity and gender. They develop their own view of schooling, and perceive it in their own individual way. Viewing school differently is based on the idea that the "world out there" is not fixed but constructed by teachers and pupils from their own experience.

Adherents of an interactionist perspective (Delamont, 1983; Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1976; Ball, 1981; Hammersley, 1990), have conceptualised the classroom relationship of teacher and pupils as a joint act of give and take between them. This process of *negotiation*—an on-going process by which everyday realities of classroom are constantly defined and redefined—between teacher and pupils leads to the classroom interactions which have a bearing on pupils' performance (Delamont, 1983). Interactionists assume that all behaviour in school is the product of negotiation between various actors. Studies conducted in this tradition are based on the assumption that people's actions can be explained only by making reference to the context within which they take place. Thus these studies are concerned with how individuals acquire the cultural perspectives of their societies and display them in the course of their daily lives. There is considerable evidence to suggest that children are sensitive to any clues about their own performance and teachers'

attitudes towards them (Delamont, 1983; Morrison and McIntyre, 1975; Rosenthal and

Jacobson, 1968).

### *Teacher expectations*

The claim regarding the nature of the causal relationship between teachers'

expectations for the success or otherwise of an individual pupil and the actual level of

attainment experienced by that pupil lies at the heart of the continuing debate over the

teacher-expectancy effect. Teacher expectations are inferences that teachers make about the

future behaviour or academic achievement of their students, based on what they know about

these students now. And, teacher expectation effects are the effects on student outcomes

that occur because of the actions that teachers take in response to their expectations.

Teacher expectation is associated with the hypothesis that teachers create realities

commensurate with their perceptions of students (Braun, 1991, p. 241). The expectation

that a teacher has about a particular student's ability sometimes acts as a *self-fulfilling*

*prophecy*[9], bringing about the very level of academic attainment for that student that was

originally expected (Jamieson et al., 1987, p.461). Sometimes our expectations about

people cause us to treat them in ways that make them respond just as we expected they

would. It is not just the existence of an expectation that causes self-fulfilling prophecy; it is

the behaviour that the expectation produces. This behaviour then affects other people

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[9] Merton (1957) coined the term self-fulfilling prophecy. Self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when a false definition of the situation evokes a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true (Merton, 1957, p. 423). The concept of self-fulfilling prophecy is based on the proposition set forth by W.I. Thomas: If individuals define situations real, they are real in consequences. Once an expectation is held, an

making them more likely to act in the expected ways. The research in this area provides many perspectives that argue for the power of teacher's expectations on student performance, and the overwhelming effect of such beliefs in the total equation of school learning (Brophy, 1983).

A highly influential study entitled *Pygmalion in the classroom*, by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) generated enormous interest in the process by which pupils mirror teachers' expectations in their school performance. At Oak school in California, Rosenthal and Jacobson set out to test the hypothesis that individual pupils' performances were significantly influenced by their teachers' expectations of them. To test their hypothesis, Rosenthal and Jacobson manipulated teacher expectations for student achievement by claiming that a test had been developed to identify students who were about to bloom intellectually. Teachers were told that a particular group of students in each class were "bloomers". But the truth was that students had been selected randomly rather than on the basis of test scores. There was no real reason to expect unusual gains from them. However, interestingly enough, the bloomers did show greater gains than other students on achievement tests given at the end of the year. The authors reasoned that the expectations they had created had caused the teachers to treat the bloomers differently, so that they did make unusually high achievement gains that year. Rosenthal and Jacobson interpreted these results in terms of the self-fulfilling prophecy. As Shipman pointed out:

> It is the clues, symbols, and unintended as well as intended messages, that form a powerful influence over the most profound learning about the self that occurs in

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individual tends to act in ways that are consistent with the belief and eventually his/her actions may cause the expectation to be reality.

school. If the teachers do hold stereotypes of children, they are likely to get across even where there is no intention to label (1975, p. 107).

In the classroom, teachers' impressions of students can act as self-fulfilling prophecies. If teachers believe that certain students are bright and others are dull, they may teach in ways that help confirm these beliefs. Teachers will call on bright students more often and give more challenging work. By contrast, the students labelled as dull who otherwise are capable of the same achievement, may not fulfil their potential because they do not get opportunities to learn about or work on certain things. Given low expectations on the part of teachers and no attempt to verify their beliefs, reduced achievement by the students labelled as dull is an obvious corollary confirming teacher's expectations and hence self-fulfilling prophecy[10].

Brophy and Good (1970) demonstrated that teachers not only demanded higher performance from the children from whom they had developed higher expectations, but they were more prone to praise such performance when it occurred. The reverse was true of teachers' expectations from low expectation children. More working class children tend to achieve lower and they tend to be clustered in low achieving classes with low expectations from teachers, and with low achieving peers reinforcing their values. The result is that "working class kids get working class jobs" (Willis, 1977). By contrast, as Bloom (1976)

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[10] Rist (1970) in a study of kindergarten, first and second grade children in a poor, urban school confirms "self-fulfilling prophecy of teacher expectations. He noted that teacher made judgments about the academic potential of the children in her class by the eighth day of school, using criteria (e.g., physical appearance, interactive behaviour, use of language, family staus) that had nothing to do with academic ability or performance. The teacher ascribed highest status to those she deemed to be fast learners, giving this group preferential treatment and especially directing all her attention to them. In terms of self-fulfilling prophecy,

explains, high achieving children are placed with high achieving children and they receive feedback from teachers more frequently. Such a feedback on one task affects the level of enthusiasm and confidence on other tasks. The teacher formulates an opinion about students' general competence, and any subsequent performances tend to be evaluated in the light of this general view. Racial-minority and lower social class students tend to receive distorted pictures of their capabilities and performances.

Delpit (1988) set out to explore the challenges teachers face in multicultural societies, where the issues of ethnicity, social class and linguistic differences among children are involved. The cultural clash between students and school, present teachers with the necessity of being especially sensitive and responsive to a number of important factors that influence student success in school: differences in discourse styles, differences in interaction patterns and physical appearance of children. In this study Delpit noted the effects of stereotyping by teachers and how this could result in a child not receiving the appropriate instruction. For instance, Delpit discussed "the widespread belief that Asian-American children are the 'perfect' students, that they will do well regardless of the academic setting in which they are placed" (p.170). She pointed out how this resulted in many teachers overlooking the needs of the majority of Asian-American students. Ignorance of community norms stereotypes about certain ethnic or class groups, and the "labelling" of children were examined as practices among teachers that hurt children.

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those expected to do well did so, and those whom teachers deemed to be slow learners performed at the expected low level.

The continued research has produced a consensus that teacher expectations can and sometimes do affect teacher-student interaction and student outcomes, along with a recognition that the processes involved are more complex than originally believed (Brophy, 1983; Cooper and Good, 1983; Jones, 1986).

### The Manchester studies

The Manchester studies (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970) of English comprehensive schools provide examples of social class bias in ability grouping. These studies are the insightful sociological accounts of pupils' experience of schooling. As part of a coordinated research project based in the University of Manchester, Lacey studied a boys' grammar school (Hightown), Hargreaves a secondary modern (Lumley) and Ball, Beachside secondary school. These studies were concerned with the effects of streaming on pupil clique formation and pupil performance. Employing interactionism as the guiding theoretical framework and using anthropological techniques in the field of education, these studies showed the obvious effects of selection and allocation on the internal operation of schooling, the subsequent related development of pupil cliques and the effect of clique membership upon pupil performance, values and behaviour. They found the highest ability group contained a high concentration of students from the advantaged backgrounds.

Hargreaves showed how streaming produced two distinct subcultures: the pro-school academic one in the upper streams; and the delinquescent anti-school subculture in the lower streams. The dominant values in the former were those of the teachers and the formal culture of the school, while within the latter the dominant values were antithetical to those of the school. Hargreaves suggested that students' attitudes might well have had their

gestation within the home but they were compounded by the school's streaming practices compounded. While largely working class students attended the school, those worst off were concentrated in the lower streams. Hargreaves also argued that the school provoked the development of anti-school cultures, by placing young and inexperienced teachers with the more difficult lower stream cultures.

Lacey dealt with more middle class school clientele and found the development of quasi and anti-school cultures amongst those who were not succeeding. This study also showed that differentiation of students ensures the development of particular subcultures, which operates to reinforce the disadvantage of the already disadvantaged. Lacey argued that streaming reinforces the effects of differences in cultural resources between middle class and working class families. At the same time, however, he provided examples of anomalous cases where working class pupils have succeeded and middle class pupils have failed academically, claiming that this demonstrated the partial autonomy of schools from wider social forces.

The Manchester studies argued that teachers routinely differentiated between pupils on certain grounds, especially achievement and behaviour. Such differences were institutionalised and amplified by streaming systems, which grouped together pupils who shared similar experiences of academic success or failure. School, therefore, created the ideal conditions for the generation of subcultures. One subculture, centred on the high streams, accepted the official goals of the institution and strove towards academic success. Another subculture within the lower status classes rejected the school's value system and substituted an oppositional culture. These orientations were referred to as 'academic' and

'delinquescent' by Hargreaves (1967, p.162) and as 'pro-school' and 'anti-school' by Lacey (1970, p. 187).

Although the broad aim of the Manchester studies was to open the 'black box' of the classroom, they focused primarily on the polarisation of pupils into groups with contrasting attitudes to school values. These studies documented polarisation by showing that pupils in the top streams, and those treated as the best academically within each stream, were more strongly committed to school values than those in bottom streams, and/or those at the bottom of the stream. The latter group rejected school values and behaved accordingly. These studies argued that the two sub-cultures were linked to social class and the school streaming structure fostered them. Hammersley (1990) called it a *differentiation/polarisation model*, which attempts to explain why attitudes and behaviour of pupils in a school and within a social class are ranged along a dimension from pro-to-anti-school values. Hammersley (1985) used the Manchester studies as the basis for a 'rational reconstruction' of their findings into a theory of differentiation/ polarisation. According to this theory "if pupils are differentiated according to an academic-behavioural standard (e.g., streamed or banded), their attitudes to that standard will become polarised" (Hammersley, 1985, p.247).

**Other studies**

Willis (1977) studied a secondary school situated in a working class housing estate in an industrial town of Midlands in England. In this study he followed 12 working class boys for 18 months at school and a few months at work. He referred to these boys as 'lads' who

had formed a distinctive friendship group, counter school culture, which was opposed to the values espoused by the school. They had very little interest in schoolwork, attached no values to gaining academic qualifications, referred to the conformist pupils as "ear oles", resented the instructions from teachers and put in minimum effort in school work. They considered school as a boring place and the outside adult world such as smoking cigarettes, consuming alcohol and avoiding wearing school uniform as exciting. In their school diaries they rarely wrote their homework. Going out at night with friends and doing part time work were given particularly high priority. They emphasised and valued masculinity and devalued femininity and ethnicity. Also, they developed an oppositional culture at school, which affirmed their masculinity.

Willis's 'lads' were very anxious to leave the school at the earliest possible moment and looked forward to taking any full time job. They rejected the achievement ideology, subverted the authority of teachers and disrupted classes. They considered manual labour as more worthy than mental labour. Willis's study showed that lads were not persuaded to act as they did by the school; rather they actively created their own subculture and voluntarily chose to look for manual jobs. They learnt about the culture of the shop floor from their parents, and knew that most of the jobs likely to be available to them required little skill and their studies at school would not prepare them for their work. Their willing entry into the world of manual work ultimately trapped them in an exploitative situation. Willis claimed that the lads' rejection of the school was partly the result of their deep insights into the economic condition of their social class under capitalism. Their cultural outlook equated manual labour with success and mental labour with failure and it prevented them from seeing that their actions led to low-paying jobs. Blind to the connection between

schooling and mobility, they chose to join their brothers and fathers on the shop floor, a choice apparently made happily and without coercion. This identification of manual labour with masculinity ensured the lads' acceptance of their subordinate economic fate and the successful reproduction of the class structure.

In this study Willis tried to understand the experience of schooling from the perspective of the pupils. He argued that the resistant sub-culture whereby working class youth, by acting out their own anti-school and anti-intellectual values, were responsible for ending up in working class jobs. He maintained that through poor academic performance, low job ambition and motivation and rejection of authority, the youth counter-cultures disadvantaged themselves in the job market.

In the sociology of education Willis's study is considered very influential. It has provided the model on which most subsequent cultural studies in education are based. Willis has been criticised for generalising on society from such a small sample (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985).

Everhart (1983) studied life in school for seventh and eighth grade boys. In this study Everhart revealed the experience and meaning of school from the perspective of the student participants. From this study emerged a portrait of the group culture that students build for themselves and through which they interpret their place in school. In this study Everhart gives a rich description of Chris's (a student) group, for whom having friends in school was all-important. The knowledge that school offers the boys in Chris's group is not of much value to them. Much more important are the jokes, the humour, and the joking relationships that Everhart suggests form the basis of their regenerative knowledge. "By

being with friends, constructing humorous incidents in class, bugging the teachers - all constituted the daily routine of Chris and his group throughout the seventh and eighth grade" (Everhart, 1983, p.157). In this study Everhart showed how the cultural processes within the school "contribute to the reproduction of the larger social structure in which they occur" (p.157). "Students in general continually opposed the required activities when and where they could, given their understanding of what they opposed" (p.155). This study shows that while schools operate on certain premises about the value of the knowledge they have to offer the students in attendance, the students themselves resist many of the regularities of school life and develop for themselves an adolescent group culture that takes on a great importance in their daily lives, and through which they oppose the very lessons the school wants them to learn (p.163).

MacLeod (1987) studied two groups of high school boys in depressed socioeconomic circumstances. One group, predominantly black, was labelled the Brothers and the other, predominantly White, was labelled Hallway Hangers. Both lived in a depressed area, and attended the same school. The Hallway Hangers reacted in ways that were reminiscent of the lads in Willis' account: cutting classes, acting out in the few classes they attended, dropping out, smoking, drinking, using drugs and committing crimes. They took every opportunity to oppose the achievement ideology of the school. In contrast, Brothers conformed to school rules, studying hard, rejecting drugs, playing basketball and cultivating girl friends.

This study argues that the fact that two groups of students reacted differently to similar socioeconomic circumstances challenges economically and culturally deterministic

reproduction theories. The reaction of the Hallway Hangers vindicates Bourdieu's theory discussed earlier. The Brothers experienced the same habitus and were exposed to the so-called hidden curriculum of the school in the same manner, but responded to it by eagerly adopting the achievement ideology and maintaining high aspirations for success. MacLeod identified mediating factors to explain his findings. The Brothers thought that racial inequality had been curbed in the past twenty years and they believed in the equality of educational opportunity. The parents of the Brothers wanted their children to achieve professional careers. Toward that goal they exercised control over their sons and encouraged them to take their studies seriously.

In MacLeod's study ethnicity and family life serve as mediators between social class and attainment, leading to an acceptance of achievement ideology by the Brothers and a rejection of it by the Hallway Hangers. The Hallway Hangers and Brothers demonstrate clearly that individuals and groups respond to structures of domination in diverse and unpredictable ways. Mehan (1992) argued that if reproduction theory is to be rescued from its deterministic tendencies, then we must first broaden the theory to include social agency and also broaden the notion of social class to include cultural elements such as ethnicity, educational history, peer associations and family life. In the past some social scientists had the tendency to treat 'working class', 'blacks', 'Asians' as unitary undifferentiated groups.

Samuel's (1983) study of a group of Sydney 'problem girls' found that the girls engaged in distinctive class behaviour and resisted the traditional female role expected by their teachers. Surveys conducted in Australia of Year 10-12 students in the 1970s showed considerable resistance by students toward schooling. Taylor's (1986) study substantiated

Samuel's findings by claiming that youth sub-cultures whose values conflict with those of dominant values tend to oppose the school values.

Walker (1988) studied an inner-city working class all-male Australian school in Sydney. The purpose of this study was to understand the school from the perspective of the students. Walker followed a group of boys from Year 10 through to Year 12 and found that the boys were divided into four groups: the footballers, the Greeks, the 'three friends' and the handballers.

The footballers spent most time together in training and organised games for the school. Outside the school they spent big 'nights out' at dances, discos, pubs and clubs. The footballers were in constant competition with each other and they expressed this within a framework of either real or mock physical violence, jokes and insults, sexual machismo and the constant use of accusation of being homosexual. However, they had not totally turned their backs on academic achievement. Through sports the Aussies saw school as providing them with a sense of personal worth. Football could operate either as an alternative to the school, even as a form of employment in its own right, or as a vehicle for realising school-linked aspirations.

The Greeks, less closely-knit than the footballers, tended to form smaller groups but were united by their sense of Greekness. While the footballing group was largely sustained by the practice of playing football, the Greek group had a reference point in a more focused Greek community beyond the school. Their very status as relative outsiders *(wogs)* made them all the more determined to be successful and not to be looked down upon by Aussie *convicts*. The Greeks were the most successful in the Higher School Certificate

examination and in the levels they attained in their work. They saw school as a vehicle to success.

Greeks and footballers revolved around an aggressive masculinity. Sport became a reference point for establishing one's cultural identity as an Australian. The Greek students had to choose between soccer and rugby, between speaking Greek or English. Most of the Greek students actually operated with one foot in both camps, speaking both languages and playing rugby, while retaining a strong sense of their Greekness.

The 'three friends' had no interest in sports and despised the central role it played in the school culture. They could not relate to the very physical, occasionally violent forms of interaction prevalent in the other two groups. They were, therefore, often derided as 'poofs' and generally spurned, turning to the theatre as a basis for their identity outside the school.

Handballers were composed of strong but loosely connected friendships. They were less interested in roaming around and were regarded by the 'strong' groups as colourless and treated with indifference.

In this study Walker found traditional "Aussie" male sub-culture which placed high value on sports: Australian youths adoring rugby and footy, with Greek youths adoring soccer, and both groups showing their contemptuous attitude toward a small non-sporting culture. Walker's study provides some rich data on the role of ethnicity, as well as class and gender. This study found rugby and football to be a major factor around which a hierarchy of friendship groups, shaped by ethnicity and particular versions of masculinity, developed within the school. Football helped to achieve some sort of unity and school

spirit, which was felt by teachers to be a positive feature. But footballers' goals ran counter to the school's philosophy. From his study Walker concluded:

> We should not ignore the freedom of individuals to accept or reject, for their own reasons, what schools have to offer or even what they may try to enforce. A more dynamic account is needed of how schools contribute to the destinies of people who pass through them. While there may be certain correspondences, or similarities, between what goes on in schools, and what goes on elsewhere, to point out to these alone in explaining people's destinies is too limited an approach (1988, pp. 4-5).

Gillborn (1990) attempted to find out if the students at City Road school could be categorised into a pro-or-anti school model. He found it impossible to divide them into two categories. According to this study, although some students seemed to approximate the pro and anti school typologies, the complexity of their adaptations often led to striking contradictions between their general orientations and specific attitudes and types of behaviour. These contradictory elements were often of such a dramatic nature that the labels 'pro' and 'anti' school were simply not adequate.

More recently, Mac an Ghaill (1994) conducted an ethnographic study of 11-18 year-olds at Parnell coeducational school located in an inner-city working class industrial county in the United Kingdom. At this school students were from diverse ethnic parentage such as Asians, African Caribbeans and Irish. At Parnell, Mac an Ghaill noted, the friendship groups were based on ethnicity and were fluid and ill defined. Although he identified four gropus but two groups stood out: the Macho Lads and the Academic Achievers. All the Macho Lads were in the bottom sets of the subjects. Their orientations towards school began to crystallise during Year 9 when they met other male students with similar negative responses. They opposed the authority of teachers and rejected homework. 'Looking after

your mates', 'acting tough', 'having a laugh' and 'having a good time' were their key social practices. The Macho Lads rejected the official three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) and unofficial three Rs (reading, routines and regulations). They labelled the Academic Achievers as 'dickhead achievers'. "They were also a pivotal group within the school in creating a general ethos in which the academic/non-academic couplet was associated with a feminine/masculine division for a wider group of ordinary male students who were not overtly anti-school" (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 59).

The Academic Achievers consisted of a small group of male friends who had a positive orientation to the academic curriculum. They adopted a more traditional upwardly social mobile route via academic subject credentialism. This group consisted of a high proportion of Asian and white young men from a skilled working class background. However, they did not fit into a homogeneous pattern. Mac an Ghaill found that the school teachers tended to favour the Academic Achievers by giving them a number of material and social advantages such as more experienced teachers and access to specialist classrooms. Teachers had high and positive expectations of them. "These cumulative material and social conditions helped to shape an institutionally confident student masculinity that was highly valued by the teachers" (ibid, p.60).

To sum up, micro-ethnographic studies of classrooms have investigated the routine everyday processes of classroom life. The main concern of such studies is to understand the complex and subtle aspects of verbal and non-verbal behaviour or paralinguistic features which influence the nature of interaction in small groups, teachers' evaluations or perceptions of their pupils and pupils' perceptions of their teachers. Such exploration and

mutual evaluation between teachers and pupils goes on from the first encounter.  As Richer (1975, p. 388) noted, "What transpires in the classroom is likely, on a priori grounds alone, to be a more salient unit than the school in cognitive development."  While the teacher and student roles are asymmetrical in many ways, most recent conceptualisations about teachers and student assume students and teachers have mutual effects on each other.

In the next chapter I will discuss various viewpoints which have been put forward to demonstrate that even if there is some discontinuity between home and school culture of children from Southeast Asian migrant families, they tend to do well at school.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# ETHNIC VALUES, AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES:

# THE LITERATURE

## Introduction

A review of some ground breaking studies, discussed in Chapter Three, revealed that home and school are the two most powerful socialising agencies to influence and guide primary and secondary school students in their educational aspirations and achievements. Studies discussed in the previous chapter suggest that the home environment of children is mostly influenced by parents' socioeconomic status, ethnicity, the position of the family in the host society, and the circumstances and recency of immigration. In the post World War Two era there has been a massive influx of immigrants and refugees to countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. In the latter, with the abolition of the so-called White Australia Policy (1973) and end of the Vietnam War (1975), there has been an unusual upsurge of immigrants from the Southeast Asian region (See Chapters Five and Six).

Sociological studies undertaken mainly in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, argued that the "ethnic" status of children was associated with low educational achievements. These findings were endorsed by studies conducted in Australia, particularly of children coming from Southern Europe. However, in recent years an impressive academic performance of children from the Southeast Asian region to the Western World has captured the imagination of social scientists. This chapter analyses the literature on the

academic performance of children from the East and the Southeast Asian region settled in western countries, Australia included. However, before proceeding further I will define the terms "race" and "ethnicity" which are frequently used in this chapter.

**Ethnicity**

A "race" has been defined as a people who share biologically transmitted traits that members of a society deem socially significant (Macionis, 1997, p.320). It refers to the physical characteristics of people such as skin colour, hair texture and body habitus. Based on such criteria, some biologists of the nineteenth century identified three races: the Caucasian (light skin, fine hair); Negroid (dark skin and coarse, curly hair) and Mongoloid (yellow or brown skin, and distinctive eyelid fold). However, sociologists in the twentieth century claim that this kind of biological categorisation of people is misleading, because the mixing of people makes it impossible to clearly distinguish individuals and groups on such criteria. Concepts of race, nevertheless, may be important to the extent they inform peoples' actions. At this level race exists as a cultural construct whether it has a biological reality or not. As to "racism", this builds on the assumption that personality is somehow linked with hereditary characteristics which differ systematically between races, and in this way race may assume sociological importance even when it has no objective existence (Eskin, 1996, p.29). Racial differences are then used as markers for cultural, attitudinal or behavioural differences (Partington and McCudden, 1992, p. 14).

The word "ethnic" derives from the Greek *Ethnos* meaning nation or people. Later on, in the Old Testament, ethnic was applied to those less cultured or pagan people outside

the truly cultured or chosen. A group of people with a shared feeling of peoplehood who conceive of themselves as alike by virtue of common ancestry—real or fictitious—and who are so regarded by others, is one definition of an ethnic group (Shibutani and Kwan, 1965). Another is that it comprises people of common race, religion and national origins or "some combination of these categories (which) have a common social psychological referent, in that all of them serve to create, through historical circumstances, a sense of peoplehood for groups" (Gordon, 1978, pp.110-111). From a sociological point of view, an 'ethnic group' perceives itself and is perceived by others to be different in some combination of traits like language, religion, race and ancestral homeland with its related culture. A group that is different only by 'race' is not an ethnic group (Yinger, 1981, p. 250).

"Ethnicity" is surely a sense of an individual's membership in a group sharing a common ancestral heritage involving biological, cultural, social and psychological domains of life (Barth, 1969). The psychological dimension of ethnicity is perhaps the most important because if a person self-identifies as a member of a particular ethnic group then s/he is willing to be perceived and treated by others as a member of that group. Isajiw defined ethnicity as applying to "an involuntary group of people who share the same culture or to descendants of such people who identify themselves and/or are identified by others as belonging to the same involuntary group" (1974, p.122). Basically, 'ethnicity' is an extension of kinship and the sentiments of 'belonging' which apply to the same nature as those encountered between kin.

A notable feature of ethnicity is its irrationality (Weber, 1965). Appeals to ethnic sentiments need no justification other than common blood. They are couched in terms of

"our people" versus "them". At one time a man may feel his peoplehood on the basis of present or past national grouping, at another on the basis of common religious adherence, and at still another, on the basis of common racial identity. Common to all these objective bases, however, is the social-psychological element of a special sense of both ancestral and future-oriented identification with the group.

Price (1973) noted that in Australia only people with non-Anglo-Celtic origin are regarded as belonging to ethnic groups. Some American writers on ethnicity such as Novak (1971) tend to lump all white ethnic groups (e.g., Poles, Italians, Greeks and Slavs) together on the ground that they represent non-English speaking minorities. Lopota (1976), supported by others, points out that 'white ethnic' does not suggest cultural homogeneity. Within the same race people identify themselves differently on the basis of language, religion, sentiments and culture. Ethnicity tends to have more variability than race does. All people have an ethnicity (Partington and McCudden, 1992, p.13) and people may intentionally modify their ethnicity over time (Macionis, 1997, p. 321). For instance, some Italian immigrants in Australia gradually shed their cultural background.

**The Role of ethnicity in education**

Ethnic differences in educational attainment are most often related to cultural factors such as language competence and its relationship to educational attainment, the features of family life in different cultural groups that might promote or hinder students' educational aspirations, and the responses of teachers and schools to cultural diversity. Weber (1948) provided a sociological framework for studying relations between social groups and the

transmission of cultural capital. In this framework Weber suggested that the ideal of the cultivated person in a given society is the outcome of the power of the dominant social group to universalise its particular cultural ideal. Weber postulated that if certain social groups have the power to determine what is valued in the educational system at a particular time in history, then it is not surprising to find out that subordinated social groups are disadvantaged in relation to the criteria set by the dominant group. In relation to the subordinated social groups, according to Weber, the dominant social group possesses greater means of creating for their children family learning environments that are more strongly related to the acquisition of the valued achievement skills. Because of their situation in the power structure of the society, such families create social-psychological learning environments that are closely related to their children's successful school academic achievement.

Based on the Weberian theoretical construct, Ferguson (1954, 1956) developed a conceptual framework which states that the limits of ability that are achieved by an individual are related to *genetic potential* of the individual and also the learning environment in which a person develops. Mental ability is an attribute of behaviour which through learning attains a crude stability. Ferguson hypothesised that if different cultural groups are found to be characterised by different patterns of mental ability test scores, then the groups are also characterised by different learning environments.

An empirical support for Ferguson's hypothesis comes from studies undertaken by Lesser et al. (1965), Stodolsky and Lesser (1967) and Lesser (1976). Lesser et al. (1965) compared the scores of four ethnic groups in New York on four aptitude tests—verbal,

reasoning, number and spatial. These tests were given individually to 80 first grade children in each group: Chinese, Jewish, African-American and Puerto Rican. The distribution of scores in the total sample was normalised to a mean of 50. On this scale Chinese obtained 48, 54, 54, 54 in the four tests. That is, they were a little below average on verbal but above average on the other three factors. They were the highest group on reasoning and space. The Jewish children were much superior on verbal tests with a score of 59. African-American and Puerto Rican scores fell below 43 and 50, respectively. When all the groups were classified by social class, the working class in each ethnic group obtained a similar pattern of scores to the middle class, though at a lower level. In other words, the pattern displayed by the middle class Chinese children and duplicated at a lower level of performance by the lower class Chinese children, differed strikingly from the pattern specific to the Jewish children.

The Coleman Report on Equality of Educational Opportunity (discussed earlier) compared minority group students with Anglo-American students on a nonverbal intelligence test and a verbal achievement test. This study showed that the Orientals (Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos) were the highest scorers in both tests in grades 1 and 12.

In another study Flaugher and Rock (1972) tested 18000 high school juniors, including 4000 Orientals, in Los Angeles. Tests were chosen to represent four major ability factors—verbal (vocabulary), reasoning (letter groups), number (mathematics) and spatial (choosing a path). Results of this study were very much similar to the study of Lesser et al, (1965). In a later study, Lesser (1976, pp. 152-53) was convinced that "some regular relations existed between a person's cultural background and the types of intellectual

strengths and weaknesses that s/he displays, and these regularities seem to persist as students advance academically. This finding led Lesser (1976, p. 137) to hypothesise that people who share a common cultural background will also share, to a certain extent, common patterns of intellectual abilities, thinking styles and interests.

In Australia the most comprehensive study of the pattern of performance of ethnic children was undertaken by Marjoribanks (1979, 1980). In early studies Marjoribanks (1972c) attempted to test the original Lesser analysis and Ferguson's hypothesis. In his study of 11-year-old children from Anglo-Australian, Greek, and Southern Italian families Marjoribanks found that different ethnic groups created different learning home environments for their children, and that the latter exhibited varying patterns of performance on variables such as verbal, reasoning, number and spatial.

Anderson and Vervoorn (1983) summarised the findings of the Australian studies, which indicate that children from migrant families, irrespective of ethnic background, have higher educational aspirations across the board than Australian born children. But in terms of converting aspirations into achievement goals, Southern European migrants generally do not fare as well as others. They found ethnicity and migrant experiences to be the dominant determinants of whether or not aspirations were achieved. Children from working class migrant groups had limited success in relation to their level of aspirations when it came to actually entering a higher institution (Anderson and Vervoorn, 1983, p. 115). However, more recent evidence suggests that the participation rate in higher education of migrant children from non-English speaking backgrounds is actually slightly better than for English language speakers (Dobson, Birrell and Rapson, 1996). This study also showed that

students from Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean families, along with Eastern European language groups, were doing twice as well as English speaking groups and some four times better than Arabic, Italian, and Turkish speakers.

## Asian high achieving syndrome

The Asian 'model-student syndrome' still remains a sociological puzzle. How is it that Asian students, even in the face of major obstacles related to the structure of school programs, racism, home-school cultural differences and minority status, perform on par or better than their mainstream counterparts in western countries? How does this phenomenon arise? What are the main factors that contribute to the higher academic achievements of Asian children? Are all Asian students competent and well-adjusted? This chapter looks into the various explanations which have been directed to answer the above questions. However, before launching into a discussion on cognitive performance of the Asian children in the Western World, I endorse Takanishi's (1994, p. 351) and Ho's (1994, p. 286) statement that there is an enormous ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity in Southeast Asia. Many educators tend to lump all Asians together. Pang (1990) argued that there is a huge diversity in the Asian population just as there is in the European or so-called Anglo-Celtic categories. Recency of immigration, socio-historical circumstances of immigration, English language facility, educational and class status before entering the host country, are all sources of potential variation in cognitive socialisation and educational achievement in the country (Hing, 1993; Takaki, 1990). As half the participating families in this study are Chinese migrant families from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia I will

confine my discussion to them since, along with Japanese and South Koreans, they share at

one level a "common cultural heritage—the oldest with an unbroken Confucian heritage"

(Ho, 1994, p. 286). Indeed, Ho refers to these as Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC).

What makes the children from the CHCs behave 'better' and why also are they more docile

and attentive in classroom? Why do they behave differently from many other students in

the same class under the same teacher? A large number of studies have been undertaken to

compare the attitudes to schooling and actual academic performance of children from South

and Southeast Asian countries with those from Western countries.

Several studies, discussed in Chapter Three and in this chapter, suggest that stress on

achievement correlates with ethnicity and cuts across class lines to reduce the significance

of socioeconomic status factors. Although minority status is generally associated with low

academic performance, the striking academic success of Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and

Vietnamese is evidenced in a number of cross-cultural studies undertaken in the United

States of America (Flynn, 1991; Lee, 1960; Lynn, 1982; Lynn, 1987b; Lynn, Hampson and

Lee, 1988; Schneider et al., 1994; Stevenson and Stigler, 1991), the United Kingdom

(Gibson, 1988) , Holland (Pieke, 1991), Australia (Bullivant, 1987; Chan, 1988; Malik,

1988). In the Western World, the image of Asian 'whiz kids' (Brand, 1987) has captured

the attention of educators and entered the public consciousness. In the United States, policy

makers have referred to the Asian-Americans as "model minorities" and their children as

"model students" or "quiet Americans". American evidence of the post-war generation of

Chinese-Americans suggests that Chinese-Americans had a mean IQ of 98.5 with Anglo-

Americans set at 100 (Lynn, 1982). However, Chinese-American achievements in terms of

education, occupation and income suggest an estimated IQ about 21 points higher than their actual IQ. In other words, "they achieve far beyond what their mean IQ would lead us to expect" (Flynn, 1991, p.5).

The first study to reveal the high achievement levels of Japanese students was the international study of achievement in mathematics carried out in the mid 1960s (Husen, 1967). This study demonstrated that of all the 13 year olds from 12 advanced countries Japanese children obtained the highest mean scores. Similar data was collated in an international study of science achievement (Comber and Keeves, 1973) which showed Japanese children scored well above students from other countries. The mean score of Australian 14 year olds being 24.6 compared with 31.2 of the Japanese. A study undertaken in the 1960s (Weyl, 1966) found that in the United States, Chinese-Americans and Japanese-Americans had three to five times their proportionate share of college faculty, architects, scientists, engineers and physicians. They fell behind their white counterparts only where political connections counted and in the legal professions. Weyl called the Chinese and Japanese the "natural aristocracy".

A study by Flynn (1991) showed that between 1981 and 1987, Asian American high school students were over represented among the winners of American National Merit Scholarships, US Presidential Scholarships and Westinghouse Science Talent Search Scholars. Flynn also found that Asian students aimed to enrol at the most prestigious universities in the United States. Studies conducted on high school students from Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore studying in Western countries have also provided evidence that they are regularly among the highest scoring on standardised tests, nearly

always scoring higher than US students in maths. United States high school students score significantly lower than students from CHCs with the difference growing progressively larger through to senior grades (Biggs, *The Australian,* 16 October, 1996).

Cross-cultural studies have also documented that students of Asian origin academically out-perform Westerners whether at home or abroad. Asian-Americans performed significantly better than Euro-Americans on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, mathematics and science (Sue and Okasaki, 1990). The former were among the top performers in cross-national studies in both reading and maths (Stevenson and Lee, 1990; Stigler, Lee, Lucker and Stevenson, 1982). Vernon (1982, p. 271) found "Orientals" of all ages in any cultural setting scored higher relative to Euro-Americans on spatial, numerical, or non-verbal intelligence tests and less on verbal activities and achievements.

Stigler et al. (1982) compared the educational standards in reading and mathematics in Japan, the USA and Taiwan. In this study, conducted in the late 1970s, samples of 240 six year olds and 240 ten year olds from Sendai, Minneapolis and Taipei were drawn. These cities were chosen as representing typical large cities with very small minority populations in the respective countries. Results showed that both the Japanese and Taiwanese six year old children obtained higher average mean scores than in the USA. The results of the ten year olds showed that at this age the Japanese children were well ahead of both the Taiwanese and Americans: With the Taiwanese children showing higher grades than their counterparts in the USA.

Flynn (1991) compared the achievement pattern of Chinese and Japanese Americans with white Americans of the post-war generation. (Those who graduated from American

schools in the 1960s) Flynn calls them "the class of 1966". In primary school the class of 1966 had lower verbal IQs than whites and no higher nonverbal IQs. By high school, the Chinese and Japanese-Americans' over performance on achievement tests had become highly significant, equivalent to about five IQ points. Their over-performance was highest in analytic geometry and calculus, with a gap of 15 points. In 1980, when 32 years of age, the Chinese members of the class of 1966 had 50 per cent of their number in managerial, professional or technical occupations, the Japanese 46 per cent, and their white counterparts only 34 per cent. The path by which Chinese and Japanese over-achieved compared to white Americans began with achievement tests at school, passed through the Graduate Record exam, and into graduate or professional schools where it culminated in their occupational profile. Evidence from the USA also suggests that Chinese Americans are much more motivated at school work than Anglo-Americans despite their lower or at least no higher IQ levels, and are more motivated than Japanese Americans despite the same IQ. Japanese Americans, in turn, are more motivated than whites despite having no higher IQ.

Evidence from Australian studies gives a strong indication that children from migrant families in general (Connell et al., 1975; Issacs, 1979; Rosenthal and Morrison, 1978; Taft, 1975; Turney et al., 1978), and from Asian countries in particular, have high educational aspirations. Paar and Mok (1995) from Macquarie University conducted a survey of 2600 Year 11 students in state and public schools in Sydney. This survey reported that children born of Asian families residing in Australia were more likely to gain a university place than young people born in Australia. The survey also revealed that 91 per cent of students born in Hong Kong, 88 per cent born in Malaysia, and 86 per cent born in China aspired to attend university, in contrast to 46 per cent of those born in Australia and 40 per cent born

in New Zealand. Asian-born children also tended to perceive greater importance being placed on their going to university by their parents than did their Australian born, English speaking, and West European born counterparts.

In Western Australia, like in other Australian states, children from the Southeast Asian families, display an impressive performance in TEE results each year. Impressed by their positive attitude, hard working habits and sound performance, a principal of a state school that enrols a high component of Asian students said:

> Asians will be running this country in 30 years, there is no doubt in my mind. Most of them select TEE subjects and consider TAFE subjects as a stigma. Each year looking at the TEE results it is obvious that more than half of them are of ethnic origin. They respect their teachers as though they are just about the next thing to God (*The West Australian*, 12 January, 1997).

Even disadvantaged Chinese and Vietnamese with refugee status, and with limited resources and limited English proficiency, tend to perform well against incredible odds of poverty, language and racial discrimination (Malik, 1988).

Most recent evidence about the impressive participation rate in higher education by the disadvantaged Vietnamese group in Australia remains a puzzle. With a large number of Vietnamese residing in enclaves beset by problems of unemployment, crime, and low income industries like textiles, they are repeating the classic migrant success story in which the parental drive to succeed is transferred to the younger generation to offset apparently impassable obstacles (Dobson, Birrell, and Rapson, 1996, p.53).

Evidence from Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom supports the American findings about the impressive performance in maths and science of Chinese and other Asian

students. In Australian schools Asian students are considered to be exemplary students: quiet, diligent and highly motivated. Burke and Davis (1986) also noted that greater proportions of second generation students from non-English speaking Asian backgrounds were gaining more tertiary educational places than the Anglo-Australian students. In her doctoral thesis Chan (1988) found that Chinese overseas students studying in Australia were very committed to their own culture and very achievement-oriented. Pieke (1991, p. 167) reported similar findings in Holland. He found Chinese children were able to perform well regardless of factors that normally influenced performance of minority children negatively. "Despite the often considerable odds of language deficiency and cultural differences between home and school environments, Chinese children are able to compete on a par with, and often out-perform native Dutch children" (Pieke, 1991, p. 167).

Teachers' perceptions about Chinese children often are that they attend school faithfully, work hard at their studies, and stay out of trouble. Parents back up the efforts of teachers to encourage their children to do well at school. Teachers have a good image of Chinese students. Some of the explanations for the impressive performance by the Asian children are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

**Asians are smarter than Anglo-Celtics : The nature - nurture controversy**

Psychologists like Burt (1934), Cattell (1963), Eysenck (1969) and Jensen (1977) ascribe differences in intelligence, and hence in academic performance, to differential hereditary endowments. They argue that certain cultural groups are inherently unable to attain the higher level of cognitive development. For instance, Jensen , supported by others,

maintains that blacks are genetically inferior to the whites. The Jensen study conducted in the late 1960s, was built on the assumptions that (a) IQ tests are valid measures of intelligence; (b) intelligence is mainly inherited; (c) lower IQ test scores of African-Americans indicate that they are less educable than whites; (d) occupational level and income are dependent on intelligence and resultant academic achievement; and (e) that poverty, therefore, results from inherited deficiencies in the poor and not from unequal school employment opportunities.

Critics of the Jensen thesis argue that IQ test scores measure the cultural knowledge of children from middle and upper-class families, not intelligence. They say IQ scores offer no evidence to link intelligence with heredity. Others, such as Ogbu (1981), of whom more in a moment, argue that the reasons for the lower IQ scores of African-Americans are neither genetic nor psychological, but relate to the past experience of slavery and its consequent lingering segregation and discrimination.

In another argument against the natural endowment theorists, counter environmentalists (Binet, 1909; Stoddard, 1939; Wellman, 1940; Bloom, 1964; Moos, 1974; Bronfenbrenner, 1977) hold that intelligence tests are designed to gather evidence about an individual's performance on a variety of tasks. They argue that the quality of performance largely depends on a set of learned, that is to say cultural, responses. As these responses are learned, they are also open to further cultural modification.

Hebb (1949) and Anastasi (1958) adopted a middle of the road approach to what is now popularly known as the *nature-nurture or nature-culture* controversy. They suggest that the development of general intelligence is a function of both hereditary and

environmental factors. A number of psychologists (Loehlin et al., 1975; Jensen, 1977) showed that 65 per cent of variance in intelligence is accounted for by genetic factors, 23 per cent by environmental factors and 12 per cent by their covariance. Vernon (1979) argued that the protagonists of nature-nurture arguments tended to neglect the genetic-environment covariance which is quite substantial.

Hereditary differences in intelligence (Lynn, 1977; Sowell, 1978) and differences in cultural values (Mordkowitz and Ginsburg, 1987; Lee and Stigler, 1986) are the two main explanations used to account for the extraordinary performance of Asian children. Using American norms, Lynn (1982) measured the intelligence of Japanese and American children on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale (WISC-R) and claimed that the average IQ of Japanese children exceeded that of American children. "At 111 the mean IQ in Japan is the highest recorded[11] for a national population by a considerable order of magnitude" (Lynn, 1982, p. 223). Citing several IQ studies of Chinese-Americans, Jensen (1969) endorsed the view that Asian-Americans are smarter than Anglo-Americans. Jensen (1969) Lynn (1982) attribute the superior performance of Chinese and Japanese children to their smartness resulting from inherited conceptual and problem-solving skills. According to this view, such skills improve one's ability to grasp relationships and symbolic thinking. Superior academic achievement indicates superior underlying abilities to handle abstract concepts and problems. Rushton (1989) maintained that because Asians were trapped throughout the

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[11] A study undertaken by Hilger, Klett and Watson (1976) used a drawing test of intelligence and found a mean IQ of 138 for Japanese children from a village in the northern island of Hokkaido, but the validity of this figure has been challenged.

Ice Age between the Himalayas and the Arctic in a bitterly cold environment, they had to be unusually smart in order to survive. The future of world history has been determined because "the oriental populations of the Pacific Rim must be expected to ....outdistance the predominantly Caucasian population of North America and Western Europe" (Rushton, 1989, p.12). Lynn and Rushton argue that Confucian Heritage Culture of the Pacific Rim is more highly evolved than Caucasians.

Flynn (1984) and Lynn and Hampson (1986) contend that intelligence is increasing at quite a rapid rate in the economically advanced nations at the rate of 3 IQ points per decade. As Japanese tests were given later than the American tests, an adjustment needs to be made for this time interval. Also, 15 per cent of American children are black. The low mean IQ of the blacks reduces the American mean by 1.7 IQ points. Even if adjustments are made, Lynn (1988, p. 54) argued, Japanese superiority is genuine.

Such theories about the genetic superiority of Chinese and Japanese people, however, are now seriously challenged and discredited. For example, in an influential study Flynn (1991, p.5) found no conclusive evidence in favour of the claims for cognitive superiority of children of one culture (e.g., Japanese) over those from other cultures (e.g., European Americans).

Many social scientists now acknowledge that there is a variation in measured intelligence but reject the notion that people of one race are smarter than others. Thomas Sowell (1994, 1995), an African-American social scientist analysed (albeit in a somewhat controversial way) the IQ scores of various racial and ethnic categories in America, at the beginning of this century and then fifty years later. He argued that improved IQ scores over

this period were due to the superior environment and improved opportunities in America. Controlling for environmental factors, racial IQ differences fade. According to the Sowellian thesis Asians score high on tests not because they are smarter but because they have been raised to value learning and pursue excellence. African-Americans, on the other hand, perform poorly on intelligence tests because they carry a legacy of disadvantage and contend with a cultural environment that discourages self-confidence and achievement at school.

Social scientists admit that compared to Anglo Americans, Japanese in Japan do strikingly better on non-verbal tests—particularly those emphasising visuo-spatial abilities such as visualising shapes rotated in space—than on verbal tests (Stevenson and Stigler, 1993). Flynn(1982) acknowledged that Japanese in Japan and Chinese in China may have 1-5 point advantage in terms of overall IQ over white Americans, but that this advantage disappears when all three groups are raised in a more uniform environment. That is, after they (Chinese and Japanese) have been in America a generation or two, even that huge gap tends to disappear. Stigler and Stevenson also arrived at a similar conclusion. "The hypothesis that the academic weakness of American children is due to deficiencies in innate intellectual ability is without merit" (1991, p.50).

Lynn's (1982) claims to Chinese and Japanese genetic superiority referred to above, are no longer accepted. Moreover, Stevenson and Azuma (1983) found methodological problems in Lynn's cross-cultural comparisons of cognitive functioning of Asian and American children. They noted that in Lynn's study, the American sample consisted of rural as well as urban areas, but that the Japanese sample consisted mainly of city schools

containing high socioeconomic status children. Flynn (1982), Stevenson et al. (1986), Sue and Okazaki (1990) have also down played the claim of Chinese and Japanese genetic superiority. The unresolved debate between Flynn (1987) and Lynn (1987) has highlighted the methodological and conceptual problems in cross-cultural studies of intelligence and has revived the controversies regarding the meaning of intelligence, methods to estimate intelligence and validity instruments (Okazaki, 1995, p. 136).

**Ogbu's cultural thesis**

Some social scientists (Gibson, 1988; Matute-Bianchi, 1986, 1991; Ogbu, 1978, 1983, 1987, 1989, 1991; 1997; Suarez-Orozeo, 1989, 1991) have argued that differential achievement among minority categories are due to their historical experiences and perceptions of opportunities at a macro level. Ogbu has done extensive work in this area which is briefly discussed below.

From his two decades long research, conducted in a wide variety of settings in the United States, Ogbu (1994) argued that in different cultures children are socialised to acquire cognitive skills or pattern of intelligence that already exist in their culture because their culture requires it. Differences in intelligence, Ogbu posits, are due to cultural differences.

In his early cross-cultural study Ogbu (1978) examined the variability in school success and educational experiences of Asian-American (Chinese and Japanese) and Mexican-American students in Stockton (California). He noted that in the 1930s students from both categories were experiencing difficulties in school because of their limited

proficiency in English. In the 1940s language problems among Asian-American students had disappeared but persisted among Mexican-Americans. By the 1960s and 1970s Chinese-Americans did considerably better than African-Americans and Mexican-Americans in the same schools.

Based on this evidence, in subsequent studies, Ogbu developed a cultural thesis to account for the variability in school success of minority children. Pivotal to his cultural thesis is the argument that complex and interlocking forces that affect social adjustment and academic performance of minority children are not limited to those of the wider society, the school and classroom but also include those emanating from within the minority communities themselves. In his thesis Ogbu (1978) identified three types of minorities: (1) autonomous, (2) involuntary and (3) immigrants. People of the autonomous minority category possess a distinctive ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural identity, but socio-politically are not subordinate. As a minority, they have distinct cultural frames of reference, and perceive and interpret cultural differences between themselves and the dominant group. This type of minority is represented by Jews and Mormons in the United States.

The second type of minority comprise those who were originally brought into another country involuntarily through slavery or colonisation. Thereafter, these minorities were relegated to menial positions and denied true integration into mainstream society. African-Americans are an example of this group.

The third type of minority comprise those who move voluntarily to another country because they believe it will lead to greater economic well-being and better opportunities.

Although as immigrants these individuals often experience difficulties owing to linguistic and cultural differences, they do not tend to experience school failure. In fact, they are likely to take an instrumental attitude toward education rather than an oppositional one. Ogbu, supported by Gibson (1988), found that Chinese in the USA and Punjabi Indians in the USA and the UK tend to adapt their cultures to facilitate survival in the host society.

Most recent Southeast Asian immigrants to the Western countries, Australia included are the third type. They have migrated voluntarily. They perceive their primary social identity as different from the social identity of the dominant society. Initially, such immigrants tend to accept the dominant group's folk theory which purports that one gets a good job that pays well by getting a good education. They believe that they can get ahead through hard work, school success and individual ability. They base their educational goals on the idea of preparation for such jobs. Immigrants thus perceive the opportunity structure in the host society in sharp contrast to the opportunity "back home" in their country of origin. Their cultural frame of reference permits them to cross cultural and linguistic barriers.

Because their cultural frame of reference predated their emigration, such immigrants do not perceive their cultural frame of reference as oppositional to the cultural frame of reference of the dominant group in their host society. When they encounter discrimination they tend to rationalise it by saying it is because they do not speak the language of the host society. They do not perceive discrimination in the larger society and in schools as institutionalised or permanent. Even though the children of these minorities face problems in school, both in interpersonal and inter group relations and in academic teaching and

learning, they perceive their cultural differences as barriers to be overcome in order to achieve their long range goals. Also, they often have the idea of keeping their options open, for example, returning to their homeland or possibly re-emigrating to another country where they can benefit from the education of the host society (Ogbu, 1983).

Thus, voluntary minorities strive to participate in the cultural frame of reference of the dominant group without fear of losing their own culture, language or identity. They practice what Ogbu (1984) calls *the alternation model* or Gibson (1983) calls *accommodation without assimilation.*

Another facilitating factor, according to Ogbu (1991), is the *dual frame of reference* of voluntary immigrants in the host society. They compare themselves with the standard of their home country or with their peers back home or with other immigrants. By making such comparisons, they usually find plenty of evidence to show they have made significant improvements in their lives and found good prospects for their children. Many voluntary immigrants regard the public schools as offering an education far superior to what was available in their homeland. Even when these immigrants recognise, experience, and resent racial prejudice in public schools, they appear to respond in ways that do not discourage them from doing well at school. They overcome their initial problems, adjust socially, and do well academically, because the primary cultural differences make it easy for them to overcome the cultural/language discontinuities they encounter in school. Their ability to overcome the initial problems is also due to instrumental expectations that motivated them to emigrate and their trusting accommodative relationship with public schools.

From the positive dual frame of reference of the voluntary immigrants emerges a folk theory of getting ahead in the host society in which education plays a central role. The immigrants do not necessarily bring folk theory stressing success through education from their homeland. Rather they tend to develop this theory when they arrive in their host society. This theory contrasts with their experiences and perceptions of their homeland situation (Ogbu, 1991, p.12). The concept of folk theory of success enables Ogbu to analyse the interdependence between the macro power structure and the cultures of the minorities and the dominant group within a society on one hand, and differential educational achievement between these groups on the other hand. What connects the two together is the interpretation by a certain group of their own social position and the nature and role of the educational system: either reproduction of existing inequalities, or avenue of individual mobility (Ogbu, 1991, p.12).

Ogbu posits that most immigrants adopt schooling strategies that they think will enhance academic success and promote social adjustment. Children are encouraged and guided to develop good academic work habits and perseverance. Parents communicate to children instrumental messages about education by guiding and encouraging them to develop good academic work habits and insist they follow school rules of behaviour that enhance academic success. They believe that schooling is the primary avenue to higher paying and less physically strenuous jobs for their children. "Parents of immigrant children are more willing to work hard at low paying jobs and to endure the prejudice because from their perspective there will be a return from their investment" (Gibson, 1987, p.273). Thus, they tend to see the acquisition of academic learning and skills in the majority culture as an additional set of skills to be drawn upon as appropriate.

Smolicz and Wiseman (1971, p. 8) referred to the phenomenon of high aspirations as *migrant drive.* It is a type of social mobility orientation in newly arrived families without property and influence in the country of settlement who have a great desire to remedy the deficiencies in the second generation through their children's excellence in academic and professional pursuits. The persistence of migrant drive is well-established in ethnic groups like the Jews, Chinese and Japanese in the USA. Recent studies (e.g., Flynn, 1991; Stevenson and Stigler, 1991) argued that migrant drive might be partly due to ethnocultural characteristics. However, the phenomenon of migrant drive is by no means universal, and it does not explain why some ethnic groups (e.g., Maltese, Turks and Latin Americans in Australia) do not appear to display the same drive.

Ogbu's cultural thesis has made a valuable contribution because it points to interpretive processes and their relationship with the political economy of the society of which minorities are a part. Nonetheless, the model has been criticised for being static and for failing to address some important questions. For example, it does not explain why different behaviours and levels of achievement occur among Chinese-Americans. Goto (1997) argued that individual behaviour is influenced by inter and intra group dynamics in a school setting. If cultural differences are the cause, why is it that some minorities do so much better than others, and even more striking , why do some minorities actually perform better in a minority situation than back home? Pieke (1991), for his part, argued that there does not exist an unambiguously formulated folk theory of success. Educational behaviour is highly complex and can only be understood from an interaction between the cultural logic, the power relations in the social environment where the behaviour is shaped, and the social and economic situation within this environment. Ogbu is also criticised for losing

sight of the process of teaching itself. For instance, McDermott and Gospodinoff (1981) pointed out that teaching and being taught entail communication. Teaching requires a relationship of trust between the teacher and the taught (Erickson, 1987). In the case of some minority pupils this trust does not exist, and they doubt whether majority education is in their best interest, and hence refuse to cooperate in the way the majority thinks best for them. Pieke (1991) suggests that if the insights offered by Erickson and Ogbu are combined, it will be possible to show how a group's low social position and its negative evaluation feed into concrete classroom behaviour. At a more general theoretical level a combination of the two theories may show how macro and micro level relations of power and knowledge, social structural reproduction and human agency are two sides of the same coin (Pieke, 1991).

Lee (1994) criticised Ogbu for using an umbrella term like Asians or Chinese. Although Lee supported Ogbu's assertion that perceptions regarding future opportunities and attitudes toward schooling are linked, he also asserted that experiences and attitudes of the various Asian American identity groups point to the complexity of Asian American achievement. Asian-Americans do not see themselves as being the same; they do not share a common attitude regarding future opportunities, and do not share a common attitude toward schooling.

Some social scientists attribute high academic achievement of Asian children in Western countries to selective immigration. Apart from various Indo-Chinese refugees, most recent Southeast Asian migrants to America (Hirschman and Wong, 1981) and Australia (Australian Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, 1995)

are educated and possess professional degrees. Before emigrating many were in professional jobs and had high educational expectations for their children. Immigrants from urban locations with modest social class advantages and Confucian values (discussed later in this chapter) may be better positioned to take advantage of available opportunities, including the sponsorship of schooling for their children. Even though many migrant parents are unable to get jobs in the professions commensurate with their qualifications and so settle for lower status self-employment instead (e.g., news agencies, restaurants, vegetable shops and grocery shops), they encourage and provide facilities for their children to get high grades. At school, children from such families then meet their teachers' expectations because they display middle class western values when it comes to learning.

As the Southeast and East Asian migrants, especially Chinese and Japanese, come from societies which value education, they find it easier to fit into the dominant upper and middle class Anglo-Celtic cultures of America and Australia which value an ambition to work hard and excel in education. In the host countries many Asian immigrants display a strong entrepreneurial spirit. This may be due to employment discrimination or due to their rational decision to take advantage of economic opportunities. Many of them tend to be small scale entrepreneurs in search of economic success and social acceptance (Light, 1984). Thus, in order to counter hostility from the host society, ethnic minority groups tend to form an *ethnic economy* ( ibid) which draws on kin-based economic entreprises, family ties and cultural traditions such as *rotating credit associations.*

Bonacich and Modell (1980, p.152) have argued that the ethnic economy provides opportunities for sponsorship of the next generation, that a frequent element of sponsorship

is investment in the education of children, and that the ethnic economy is a major factor behind the educational gains of Asian-American children in the decades prior to World War Two. Educational ambition for second-generation Japanese-Americans grew out of the ethnic economy. "By providing their children with higher education, Japanese-American parents hoped to secure a means for their children to enter the ranks of the independent professions, the pinnacle of the petit bourgeois world" (Bonacich and Modell, 1980, p. 152). In fact, the middleman ethnic economy paid off in the occupational advancement of both Chinese and Japanese in America, even though each experienced considerable occupational discrimination, and education was a channel for their children's social mobility.

American evidence further suggests that Asian Americans continue to be discriminated against in managerial administrative and high-paying blue collar jobs in construction, whole sale trades and manufacturing industries. Therefore, to avoid employment in low-paying jobs as labourers, unskilled and semi-skilled factory workers and service workers, they choose between self-employment in their own businesses and employment in professional and technical positions. For this reason, Asian parents demand good grades of their children as a strategy for combating potential occupational discrimination (ibid).

**Chinese cultural values**

Traditional Chinese culture is deeply influenced by the philosopher Confucius (K'ung Fu-tzu, 551-479 BC) who emphasised a strict code of moral conduct. Confucian thinking

on morality and by extension on knowledge, is that children must be taught the correct knowledge, and not to question it. Traditionally, Confucianism has emphasised literary education as a prerequisite for high status jobs or to be a member of the *literati*. Indeed, a literati aspired to a purely literary kind of intellectual or highly bookish literary education, which was the yardstick of officials' social prestige and basic qualifications to office[12]. Officials were recruited exclusively from the literati group, and the qualifications of candidates were judged in terms of the examinations they had passed. The system was used as the basis for establishing the social rank of individuals and families. Confucianism also infuses the traditional cultures of many neighbouring Southeast Asian countries where it enshrines a way of life. A central concept of Confucianism is *Jen,* meaning the subordination of individual self-interest to moral principle. In the family, each individual must display loyalty and consideration for others. Likewise, families must remain mindful of their duties toward the larger community. In this way, layer upon layer of moral obligation integrates society as a whole. Confucianism, therefore, is a model of disciplined living which emphasises goodness, concern for others and social harmony (Kaufman, 1976; Schmidt, 1980; McGuire, 1987). It places great importance upon rationality, future time orientation and prestige upon scholarship. To achieve these ends a man had to perfect himself by watchful and rational self-control and the repression of whatever irrational passions might cause poise to be shaken. The goals of a good man were health,

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[12] The Chinese imperial state as a theocracy considered the emperor as "Son of Heaven" and a principal intermediary between the divine order of things and that of society. Under the emperor were the mandarins who were a class of men with literary training whose appointment to office was based on the passing of a series of examinations. To get the position of mandarin a knowledge of the classics was required. The object was not to fit a candidate for particular technical requirements of a given office but to ensure that he was sufficiently cultivated gentleman to be worthy of the exalted position of a mandarin.

comfortable income, a long life and a good name after death. The ethical demands of Confucianism created a minimum of tension with the world and accepted man as inherently good.

In the Confucian Heritage Cultures a long tradition of emphasising cooperation and interpersonal harmony has shaped the relationships among parents, teachers and children. The Confucian ethic is related to the economic success of East Asian countries just as the Protestant ethic is related to the development of Western Capitalism (Weber, 1958). Confucian tradition perceives education as important for personal improvement.

Lee (1960) argued that in a given culture broad patterns of behaviour, or uniformities, are transmitted through social institutions. Family is the foremost social organisation which transmits such patterns. A common belief in CHCs is that education is the essence of life. The concepts, that everyone is educable, everyone can become a sage, and everyone is perfectible, forms the basic optimism and dynamism towards education in the Confucian tradition, which explains why education is viewed to be wholly significant in such a tradition (Wing On, 1996, p. 30).

Children from different cultures are socialised according to different beliefs, values, expectations and norms. Differences in socialisation practices and values lead to different concerns and expectations about achievement and success criteria (DeVos, 1973). As the welfare and integrity of the family are of great importance in Chinese culture, members of the family are expected to submerge personal behaviours and feelings to further the welfare of the family as a whole and its reputation (Sue and Sue ,1972). Children are first of all an asset to the family, a means to certain ends, namely, reproduction of the patrilineal descent

line, income producing, labour increasing the wealth and status of the family, and support in old age for their parents. The close family relationships, typical of the Chinese, are contrasted with most industrial western cultures which are more individualistic and independence-oriented, and the communication of achievement-oriented values and skills is facilitated by the family structure. Chinese form tight self-contained communities controlled by parental authority and strong social sanctions.

In the CHCs parents and elders are expected to transmit and implant the broad behaviour patterns of succeeding generations through example, conditioning, punishment and rewards. They teach the young (a) the content of culture (actual behaviour patterns), (b) the meaning of culture (what these patterns mean), (c) the organisation of culture (internalising the meanings and actions into a functional whole). CHCs are admired for their patience, tolerance, fatalism, honesty, diligence, integrity and humility. Thus the cultural thesis argues that they place a high premium on ambition, persistence and deferred gratification, and they exhibit strong desire for social mobility (Glazer, 1969; Rosen, 1959).

Confucianism sets the stage for cognitive socialisation by inculcating into the child's mind its representation of reality. The learning experiences that follow are in conformity with this representation. Traditional Chinese culture—as exemplified by family unity, respect for elders and those in authority, industry, high value on educational and personal discipline—is regarded as the primary cause of high academic achievements of the Chinese in America (Hsu, 1971; Sung, 1967). Confucian thinking is associated with the acquisition of knowledge and by extension with social mobility (Ho, 1994).

In Confucian-based cultures, the guiding principle governing socialisation is embodied in the ethic of filial piety which organises and stamps the child's learning experiences. Filial precepts include obeying and honouring one's parents, performing ceremonial duties of ancestral worship, taking care to avoid harm to one's body, and ensuring the continuity of the family name. Filial piety, respect for the elderly, subordination to father and parental care for children, even after they are grown up, are the attributes of the Confucian-based cultures. Politeness, respect for authority and parental wishes, diligence and personal achievement of long range goals are highly valued in these particular Asian cultures, and exert a pervasive influence on cognitive socialisation and the definition of teacher-student relationship. As Biggs points out:

> There is an emphasis on strictness of discipline and proper behaviour, rather than an expression of opinion, independence, self-mastery, creativity and all-around personal development (1994, p. 6).

Chinese motivation for achievement is firmly rooted in a collectivistic rather than an individualistic orientation. Nevertheless, collectivism rests upon individual achievement and family-oriented achievement. Ho observed:

> Chinese and Japanese children tend to be less happily vocal, less active, and less exploratory- a cluster of qualities indicative of a disposition toward quiet calmness.... This disposition is adaptive in the Confucian cultural context, characterised by its great demands of social control, intolerance of deviancy and pressure toward conformity (1994, pp 289-90).

Theories of Chinese success and attitudes about the values of formal education, therefore, have their roots in well-defined cultural processes. Education has become an internalised social aspiration, and this motivates parents to support and care for their children's education (Cheng, 1995, p. 7). The Chinese hold many views in common

regarding the value of formal education, reflected in folk sayings that often lace their conversations. Cultural folklore documents the value that Chinese place on scholarly endeavour and toil. Ancient Chinese scholars urged young students by saying, "If you are not diligent in your study when your hair is black, it will be too late to sigh about study when your hair is white"; "the sea of learning knows no bounds, only through diligence may its shore be reached".

Beliefs about the efficacy of effort appear in the writings of Confucius. Huang (1969) quoted Confucius's views on effort. Mental concentration (e.g., study as if you could not attain your aim and were afraid to lose it), need for persistence (e.g., being diligent in study means devoting one's effort to it for a long time), and primacy of effort are emphasised by parents and teachers. A Chinese belief is that the enemies of study are laziness, giving up quickly, and over-confidence. Among the many legends well-known to Chinese, Huang (1969) quoted three to illustrate respect for effort. Kuang Heng, a boy in a poor family who could not afford fuel for lights, bored a hole through a wall that his home had in common with a more affluent neighbour's to find light by which to study. Che Yin made light for his studies by carrying fire flies. Syn Kang studied by the light of the moon reflected off the snow. Given the cohesion of the Chinese family system, it therefore, seems reasonable to assume that these values are still preserved. Certainly some researchers seem to think so. Cleverly pointed out:

> Traditionally the Chinese have placed a high valuation on education ...(and) while modern schooling has been accompanied by far reaching attitudinal change, the Chinese people have not lightly discarded the patterns of thinking and action from their rich historical past whose values have permeated the new Marxist precept (1991, p. xii).

## Socialisation at home

More recent studies have started to look into the ways young children divide their time between home and school. East Asians have traditionally placed high value on education as a means for achieving upward mobility, social respect and self-improvement. And, even when they receive relatively low economic returns from additional schooling, they encourage their children to acquire further education beyond high school. This is because non-economic values such as self-improvement and upholding family honour are important.

Ho (1994) argued that the influence of Confucianism on cognitive socialisation works in two ways: on learning experiences and the representation of reality. The behaviour of the individual members of a family always reflects on the entire family. If a member of a family behaves in such a manner as to embarrass or shame himself/herself the entire family shares the shame or loss of face. Ideally, group aims are achieved by respect and obedience to authoritarian elders. The young are taught to repress their desires and inhibit aggression otherwise their parents are criticised for improper child rearing. True emotions are seldom displayed by the well-reared child (Lee, 1960).

Vernon (1982), another researcher who stressed the importance of cultural values, attributes the academic success of East Asian students to superior motivation and to personality characteristics such as docility and industriousness. Parents from these countries value education highly and expect exceptionally high grades from their children. They play an important role in creating test anxiety and achievement and their children please them by working hard and by achieving high grades.

Stevenson and Stigler (1991, p.129) found that the socialisation of Chinese and Japanese students follows a complex interpersonal process that transforms into an intra-personal one. Chinese and Japanese parents, Stevenson and Stigler argue, have gone much further than American parents in making their homes suitable for studying. Most students appear to see school as central to their lives; most Americans do not. As a result, these children spend vastly more time at home on school work than do American children, and their parents also support their children's efforts by organising the home environment to make it conducive to studying.

Cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that a notable characteristic of the lives of American children is a striking discontinuity between home and school. Americans accept the need for practice and drill to achieve excellence in sports, music or dance, but few parents and even fewer children, favour spending more time at home on academic activities. By contrast, because Chinese and Japanese families believe their children's primary responsibility is to apply themselves seriously to their school work, they arrange their home life so that it is conducive to academic activities. Chinese parents prefer creating an additional arena at home where children's learning at school is reinforced. Culturally transmitted values, beliefs and behaviours play an important role in the high academic performance of these children. The academic success and failure of children reflect on the family and close social group, which put pressure on them to succeed (Biggs, 1994, p.17). While parents believe that it is their duty to instil in their children the value of education and to protect their children's time by discouraging part-time jobs, children on their part identify their self-esteem with academic advancement and target themselves to professional courses.

Stevenson and Stigler (1986) observed that the child rearing practices of Chinese parents are characterised by a permissiveness in the first six or seven years of childhood, followed afterwards by absolute obedience. Most parents are by then ready to sacrifice economic and recreational comfort for the success of their children, and these practices result in the establishment of an unconditional basic trust and bond between parents (especially mothers) and their children. Asian parents make an important distinction between early and later childhood. Asian parents regard the first six years of life as the age of *innocence,* followed by an age of *reason.* The age of innocence is considered to be a time for indulgence by adults—a period of great freedom and an opportunity for exploration. Until their children are about six years old, Asian parents impose few demands or controls on them. The parents believe that this is a period when children should learn to relate to others and there is little pressure to learn academic skills. After the age of six or so, parents then become more demanding, setting their sights on the serious business of school. About the time children enter first grade, child rearing practices shift markedly, and parents and children begin to work diligently on what is defined as the primary task of later childhood and youth: getting a good education. After the age of six or so, parents then become more demanding, setting their sights on the serious business of school.

Investigating the child rearing practices of Mainland Chinese children, Huou (1991, p. 45) noted that fathers tended to be strict, spoke a few but sound words and by their strictness they inspired fear in their children. On the other hand, mothers instilled love in them through gentleness and tenderness. Children were not allowed whatever they wanted and they did not dare to misbehave. A strong social control mechanism taught to the young

is 'saving face '. Not to shame others and be caught in shaming situations is extremely important. Girls are encouraged to play games which minimise aggressive competition. Active and vigorous sports enjoyed by males in Western society are shunned even by boys. A modest physique carries higher status (Lee, 1960, p.138).

By contrast, Anglo American parents do not alter their child rearing practices so dramatically according to a child's age. Just when East Asian parents, noted Stevenson and Stigler (1986), are getting more involved in their children's academic life, American parents are beginning to abdicate many of their responsibilities to their children's teachers, even though they hold more strongly to the belief that they must begin early to further their children's intellectual development. In general, American parents think of the young child as a slate on which they had better begin to write as soon as possible if the child is to compete in the difficult outside world. But, ironically, just as Asian parents are gearing up to invest a large amount of time and energy in supporting their children's academic activities, American parents begin to pull back, satisfied that they have provided a foundation that will enable their children to take advantage of what the school will offer.

Stevenson and Stigler (1986) also found that Asian mothers were more intensively involved than American mothers in their children's education. They found that among 5th grade (ten year old) children, 58 per cent of Japanese mothers bought mathematics workbooks compared to 28 per cent in the USA. Further, only 1 per cent of American parents bought science workbooks, compared to 29 per cent in Japan. The priorities which American families assign to their household purchases send a clear message about what they value. In another study Stevenson and Stigler (1991) found that a child's desk was

rarely at the top of American parents' list whereas 95 per cent of Taipei parents and 98 per cent of Sendai parents had bought their fifth graders a desk, only 63 per cent of Minneapolis parents of fifth graders had done so. At school, Asian teachers assigned a larger amount of homework and children devoted significant portions of their time to get it done. The most frequently purchased workbooks in all cities were for reading and mathematics, but there was a startling difference in percentages of families purchasing science books: 2 per cent in Minneapolis, 52 per cent in Taipei and 41 per cent in Sendai. American children spent more time on organised sports than did children in the Asian cities. In Minneapolis, fifth graders played an average of over two hours a day after school. Children in Sendai played an average of an hour and a half and in Taipei half an hour. Children in Japan watched more television than the American children, and children in Taipei and Beijing watched more television than their Japanese counterparts. Children in China, Taiwan and Japan spent more time in reading for pleasure than their American counterparts. American children spent more time on household chores and part time jobs than their Asian counterparts.

To sum up, the studies quoted in this section have demonstrated that Asian parents tend to control their children's time more strictly than Anglo-parents do. They spend more time and money on computers and other educational resources for their children than Anglo-parents do. Also, more Asian parents teach their children reading, writing and simple arithmetic skills before children enter school at age five. Consequently, from an early age Asian children become accustomed to using their time diligently. Such strict control of children's behaviour is possible largely because East Asian culture emphasises the authority of parents, filial piety and obedience. The bond between parents and their children through parental sacrifice for their children, was consequently significant to

achieving good academic performance. With the close family ties and the strong authority of parents, the Asian parents are more successful than Anglo American parents in controlling their children's use of time. This quiet, industrious, disciplined and orderly behaviour is further rewarded at school by Western teachers.

## Socialisation at school

Evidence from the United States (Flynn, 1991; Stevenson and Stigler, 1991), China, Japan and Taiwan (Stevenson and Stigler, 1991) and Hong Kong (Biggs, 1991, 1994) suggests that Anglo-American children spend less time in academic activities, measured in terms of hours spent at school, and days spent in school each year than do their Chinese and Japanese counterparts. These studies also found that even during vacation, Chinese and Japanese students never really lose contact with their teachers and school mates. School activities merge into home activities quite naturally. Children are socialised to achieve academically.

A very common Chinese and Japanese belief is that effort, not intelligence, is the key to success. In accordance with the Confucian emphasis on mastery of a body of correct knowledge, CHC students are preoccupied with examinations and are syllabus-bound in their approach to study. Traditionally in China, children are socialised to take examinations with utmost seriousness, learning by rote rather than observation, analysis and comprehension (Ogbu, 1983). Public examinations, which have existed in China for a thousand years, were seen as the most efficient way of selecting personnel for officialdom. Entry to the examination was open to all and a symbol of pure meritocracy where hard work

was rewarded regardless of the family background of the examinee. As Cheng comments, "Examinations are the soul of the ethos about education in East Asian societies. They are not only a selection mechanism but regarded as training opportunities for competition, adaptation, endurance, and perseverance" (1995, p. 10). Because of the sacred quality of the written word in Confucianism, learning styles emphasise memorisation and repeated practice at the expense of understanding and discovery. One survey (Liu, 1984) found that most teachers in Taiwan still require pupils to memorise every lesson in Chinese language textbooks. This stress on repeated practice is reflected in the fact that Chinese school children spend an inordinate amount of time on homework. Another study (Gow et al. 1989) noted that in Hong Kong tertiary students (a) are pre-occupied with examinations; (b) strategically concentrate their efforts on materials covered by the syllabus; and (c) typically rely on handouts or notes taken in lectures and use texts and/or recommended readings only as supplements.

In line with the Confucian ideal of filial piety, teachers are still considered authority figures who are not to be questioned or challenged. The teacher's role is to impart knowledge: to instruct and not stimulate students. Typical teaching methods are formal, expository and teacher-initiated. Students are treated as passive recipients, not active seekers of knowledge. They soon learn an implicit behavioural rule of the classroom: avoid making mistakes and thus risk ridicule or shame. The safest strategy is to keep silent (Ho, 1994). In the classroom such students tend to be passive and compliant. They adopt a very low profile, rarely ask questions, or volunteer answers. Confucianism perceives the child-teacher relationship as an extension of the parent-child relationship. As documented in the

Three Character Classic written in the 13th century "rearing without education is the fault

of father; teaching without strictness is the negligence of the teacher" (Ho, 1994).

In a recent book, *The Chinese Learner*, Biggs (1996) drew attention to how good

learning is defined in Western countries and in Confucian Heritage Cultures. In the 'West',

good learning takes place when students engage tasks appropriately and use abstract

frameworks for conceptualising tasks. 'Good' students are reflective and independent, and

monitor their own progress (Biggs, 1987; Iran-Nejad, 1990). 'Good learning' takes place

(a) when there is a positive motivational context combined with warm emotional climate

and intrinsic interest on the part of the learner; and (b) when there is a high degree of

learner activity and interaction with other students and teachers; and (c) a well-structured

knowledge base (Biggs, 1994, p. 21).

As far as certain Western educational theory goes, in a good learning environment

there is a sense of collegiality among teachers, teaching methods are varied, content is

presented in meaningful contexts, classes are small (Bourke, 1986), and classroom

emotional climate is warm, firm and structured, but not authoritarian. Assessments here

address high level cognitive achievement and are conducted in a non-threatening way

(Crooks, 1988). In Confucian Heritage Cultures, on the other hand, classes are typically

large, teachers tend to be authoritarian and their methods are mostly expository with a sharp

focus on preparation for external examination. Examinations tend to address low levels of

cognitive goal, are highly competitive and exert stress on students (Biggs, 1991; Ho, 1991;

Morris, 1985). At the same time per capita expenditure on education is much less than in

the west, and support services such as counselling are correspondingly fewer (Biggs, 1994, p. 22).

My own experience with two visiting Indonesian teachers endorses the above claims. In 1991 two Indonesian secondary school teachers (20 from Indonesia were invited to Western Australia by Curtin University under a special program) were assigned to Paramount Senior High. They observed my teaching style and assessment procedure for two weeks and found it a novel experience to see students asking questions without hesitation. In November 1996 at a joint conference of the Australian Association of Educational Research and Educational Research Association, Singapore, I heard the Minister for Education of Singapore, in his opening remarks comment: "There is no evidence to suggest that class size makes a difference in student outcomes". This remark then became a major topic of discussion among the Western delegates but not the locals. At Paramount Senior High teachers follow the Teachers Union directive and do not accept more than 25 students in upper school classes and 32 students in lower school classes. In August 1997, twenty Japanese students, along with their English teacher and Principal, from an influential secondary school in Tokyo visited Paramount Senior High. In his conversation with the Principal of Paramount Senior High the visiting principal admitted that facilities for students at Paramount were far better than the average secondary school in Japan.

Paradoxically, then, the good learning conditions deemed necessary in Western societies are lacking in CHC educational systems. Classes are big, teaching is geared toward passing examinations, teachers tend to be authoritarian, students are prone to rote

learning, and parents do not frequently visit the school. Yet CHC students excel in studies. This disparity is even more pronounced when the academic performance of the overseas CHC students is compared with mainstream American students (Flynn, 1991; Sue and Okazaki, 1990).

Biggs (1996) argued that such outcomes cannot be achieved through rote learning. Superior performances in maths and science are attributed to the use of more sophisticated learning strategies. For instance, a comparative study of Singaporean and local Australian students (Volet and Renshaw, 1993) indicated that the former had higher cognitive goals and were more realistically able to match higher level goals with compatible learning contexts. They had more extensive help-seeking strategies and participated equally well in tutorial discussions. Other large scale studies in Hong Kong and Singapore (Biggs, 1990, 1991, 1994; Kember and Gow, 1991; Watkins, Regmi and Astilla, 1991) as well as in Australia (Biggs, 1987) indicate that CHC students report stronger preference for high level, meaning-based or deep learning strategies and an avoidance of rote-learning. Although in CHC countries there are large classes, examination pressure, and expository teaching, students actually prefer high level meaning-based learning strategies and their performance is associated with high level outcomes. Biggs (1993) explains this paradox by making a distinction between "deep memorising" and "surface memorising"[13]. The former is associated with repetitive learning to ensure accurate recall for, say, coping with examinations. In Confucian Heritage Cultures repetitive learning or 'deep memorising'

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[13] Because of the sacred quality of the written word in Confucianism, learning styles emphasise memorisation and repeated practice, at the expense of understanding and discovery.

appears to be common, because learning the thousands of characters used in writing requires it. Just as the Western belief is 'practice makes man perfect', the CHCs emphasise the role of repetition and effort involved in 'deep memorising'.

Biggs (1996) argued that East Asian students do not rely heavily on rote learning or 'surface memorising', and are not limited to passive and uncreative learning. The impressive achievements of CHC students, in fact, cannot be achieved through rote learning; CHC students adopt more meaning-oriented approaches than do Westerners. Teachers in East Asian countries actually adopt student-centred strategies, engage all students collectively in problem-solving and promote high-level cognitive thought processes. He argued that many researchers mistake the important principle of repetitive learning involved in 'deep memorising' for rote learning. Thus, where rote learning is a mechanical process without thought of meaning and a substitute for understanding, East Asian repetitive learning ensures accurate recall, involves proper understanding and is used by Asians in the process of thousands of scriptural characters.

In a comparative study in China and the USA, Gardner (1989) observed the teaching strategies of art and music teachers. He found American teachers believe in exploring first, and then developing skills, whereas Chinese teachers believe in skill development first and then being creative. In China, teaching proceeds by 'holding the hand' in order to create the desired product (Gardner, 1989).

Overwhelming evidence suggests that children in CHCs are socialised to be obedient, to conform and to persist. Therefore, they are *predisposed* to accept formal teaching before they even arrive at school. This *docility predisposition* includes willingness to persist, an

awareness of cognitive processes, and an acceptance of rules governing group participation, all of which are conducive to "a sense of diligence and receptiveness (which) fit uncomfortably into the more familiar American concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation" (Hess and Azuma, 1991, p.7).

To sum up, the high level of academic achievements of CHC children appears to be related to broad cultural factors derived from their traditional Chinese beliefs about human beings. Bolstered by a firm belief in the attainability of goals through hard work and aided by the involvement of the family in promoting children's progress in school, Chinese children devote themselves with great dedication to their school work (Chen, Lee and Stevenson, 1996, p.89). Genetic and cultural explanations to account for this performance are inadequate. An increasing number of the social scientists tend to argue that no single explanation can adequately account for the observed performance patterns. Also, the current thinking claims that Asians' high achievement is over-generalised. History and recency of immigration, immigrants' perceptions of opportunities and experience in the host country and their own cultural orientations, need to be studied to understand the *'High Asian Achieving Syndrome'*. In this study I have focused on understanding the parents' folk theories of success of their children and children's experiences in their homes and school.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# HOME ENVIRONMENT OF THE ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES

**Introduction**

This chapter focuses on sketching the life as 'lived' by parents and their children from four Anglo-Australian families, with an aim to the reader understanding the processes which have some bearing on educational and occupational aspirations of children from these families. In this chapter, as well as in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, I have used extensive field notes to give the reader a 'feel' of what children from these families say about their home and school life, and how their interactions with their parents and teachers influence their attitudes toward the value of education and other activities. An important assumption of this study is that parents' own experiences of schooling play an important role in the educational goals of their children. Thus, in the next few pages, I will detour to overview the events of the post-war era, especially the 1950s and 1960s, when the parents from these families were teenagers.

The 1950s and 1960s was a time of material prosperity and jobs were easily available in Australia. Arguably it was also hedonistic. The youth of that era are the parents of adolescents of today, and they have helped create a recreational and sports oriented culture. The 1950s was also a period of high intake of immigrants, and 'baby boom'. Measured on per capita income in 1956, Australia ranked fifth in the world compared to its tenth place in 1979 (Dwyer, Wilson and Woock, 1984, p. 108). A large number of working class young

people, who were old enough to leave school, got their first jobs: many males as apprentices and females as stenographers. Employment was also found in other service industries. Government policy encouraged consumerism. A typical suburban family aimed to own a house on a quarter of an acre, a garden in which they could potter around, a catalogue of family possessions such as a refrigerator, washing machine, stereo, television set, a family car and a serious commitment to regular holidays. For most Australians, living and working has been a fortunate experience. In his widely read book, The *Lucky Country,* Donald Horne (1963) argued that without much effort most Australians had enjoyed a good life. Family security, domestic convenience, motor access to bush and beach characterised Australian life style as healthy and peaceful. Relaxing in the sun, or on the beach or at the 'barbie' is a distinctive Australian inflection on the twin themes of leisure and consumerism (White, 1981, p. 167).

It was this extraordinary prosperity and stability of the 1950s and 1960s which arguably affirmed egalitarianism in Australia. The myth of egalitarianism was represented in such common descriptions of Australia as "England minus the upper class, the working man's paradise, a place where Jack is as good as his master and tall poppies are cut down, a land devoid of social classes and a country full of anti-authoritarian battlers" (Mackay, 1986, p. 125). The image of a classless society was equated with the idea of a single set of cultural practices, different groups eating the same food, drinking the same alcoholic beverages, enjoying the same leisure activities and standard example — a place where people from any social background sat up front with the taxi driver (Encel, 1970, p.50). This egalitarian ideal allowed middle class Australians to indulge their expectation of great

material prosperity; encouraged them to 'act rich'; supplied a materialistic underpinning to the ideal of social equality and resistance to authority, and restrained many Australians from wanting to appear flamboyant or successful (Withers, 1989). Theoretical impetus for egalitarianism comes from Bathers (1973, cited in Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 1987, p.58) who argued that items of everyday culture could be decoded for hidden meanings which often play an ideological role. The pub is the bastion of male chauvinism where values of egalitarianism and mateship are reproduced. Drinking serves to demonstrate not just cameraderie and mateship but also the prowess and autonomy of the Australian male who can consume liquor without getting drunk (Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 1987).

One easily identifiable symptom of the drive towards a classless society was the so-called *Tall Poppy Syndrome* which referred to a tendency for Australians to denigrate and humiliate those who achieved excellence, success or fame. Thus, comfortable with mediocrity, Australians strongly objected to anyone who succeeded because they implied some distancing from the pack (Mackay, 1993, p. 134).

Interest in sports is another element of Australian iconography. The stability and relative homogeneity of the wider economic and social sphere is most neatly mirrored in Australian sporting practices. Climate, natural facilities and an easy going life style have encouraged outdoor sports in Australia. For Australians, playing and watching sport gave life one of its principal meanings; sport was life, and the rest was a shadow. Sport is the ultimate Australian super religion, the one every Australian believes in passionately (Horne, 1982). It is the Australian environment and socialisation processes which explain why

some writers consider Australia the most sporting nation in the world (Twopenny, 1973). Loy et al. put it this way:

> If sport is not ranked highly in the leisure or career hierarchy of values held by parents, peers and teachers, if positive reinforcement for participating and competing in sport is not received from significant others and if opportunity sets are not created so that equipment, coaching and competition are available then it is unlikely that an individual exposed to this type of socialisation setting would ever become involved in sport, regardless of how great innate ability s/he may have (1978, pp. 217-18).

Considering the small size of Australia's population its performance in sports events is outstanding. Basing their study on Australians who won Olympic gold medals, Howell and Howell (1986, cited in Mackay, 1992) found that only a few of the gold medal winners came from outside the working class. In the 1992 Olympic games Australia won twenty seven medals, including eight gold medals and in 1996 with forty one medals it ranked tenth in the tally of medals. More recently in 1997, Australia won almost three-quarters of the medals at the Commonwealth games held in Kuala Lampur, Malaysia. Applauding this remarkable performance the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr John Howard, spoke on the television: "As Australians, we have always taken our sporting heroes to our hearts. We admire them for their passion and dedication, honour them for their triumphs and bask in their achievements." Similar remarks were made when the Prime Minister honoured the Australian cricket team which won the World Cup in 1999.

Another feature of Australian society is perhaps 'sports chatter' which is now much more important than sporting activity itself. Most Australians, while they talk to others about sport, are less likely to take time directly to participate as players. Chatter about sport gives the illusion of interest in sport. Much sports chatter is visual and comes via television

or video. The five television channels in Australia currently provide about 3800 hours of sports coverage each year. Australian Rules football has embraced the commercial world, and become part of a synergetic relationship in which the game is used to sell a whole range of products (Stoddart, 1986). Edgar, Earle and Fopp (1993, p.439) argue that leisure has emerged as a social institution and it is used to pattern and direct social behaviour in order to meet particular social needs and functions. Since the 1980s there has been a growing trend towards individual pursuit of leisure activities in the privacy of the home where people seek to satisfy their personal needs in whatever ways they find themselves most comfortable.

The Anglo-Australian families included in this study are of British ancestry. Their Australian national identity has been formed around a distinctive Anglo-Celtic ethnic core, as it has been for many others like them (Smith, 1991). The Australians who passed through adolescence and early adulthood during the buoyant and optimistic years of the 1950s and 1960s are sometimes labelled as the 'Me Generation' (Mackay, 1992), a label which reflects their aggressive obsession with personal gratification, personal freedom and personal power. They are the people who rebelled against what they perceived as the cultural boredom and moral strictures of the 1940s and 1950s. This is the generation which used blue denim jeans and the mini skirt as symbols of non-conforming to the expectations of an older and more formal generation.

The most distinctive characteristic of the Me Generation was 'doing your own thing' and it became a reference point and justification for many of the extraordinary changes in attitudes to marriage, parenthood, family life and work that followed. It is the people of the

Me Generation who were influential in forcing Australians to broaden their cultural focus and become more open to cosmopolitan influences in the Australian society. An assumption underlying this thesis is that Anglo-Australian families in this study, to a varying degree, exhibit many traits of the Me Generation.

# The Smith Family

## Background

The Smith family is typical of many Australian families who, until recently, spend several years in country towns when their children are young, but move to the city after saving enough money to buy a comfortable house and when the breadwinner is assured of a promotional job. Simon and Linda Smith and their three children—Philip (20), Paul (18) and Krista (14)—are a third generation Australian family of Irish ancestry. Catholic Simon and Anglican Linda met each other at basketball and squash courts. Impressed by Simon's sports prowess and his "killer instinct" Linda Smith married him even though she already had a two-year old, Philip, from an earlier relationship. Mr Smith's father was a foreman in a brewery and his mother stayed home as a housewife. Unlike his younger brother and two sisters, who dropped out of school after Year 10, Mr Smith pursued studies as a part-time student, and spreading his study over several years managed to acquire a degree in business administration which brought him quick promotion in his job. In 1994 Mr Smith became a chartered accountant in a reputable firm, earning an annual salary of $70,000. This job

demanded long hours of work and frequent trips to country towns and occasional inter-state trips.

Mrs Smith's father completed Year 3 and her mother Year 9. After leaving school Mrs Smith's father got a job at a petrol station and later developed an interest in repairing automobiles, working as a self-employed motor mechanic with his wife doing the book-keeping. Like her older sister and brother, Linda Smith did not take much interest in school work, and dropped out of school after Year 10. According to herself and her parents Linda was a difficult child, and as a teenager was described as a "handful" by her teachers. Linda told me:

*My teachers always hated my guts because I was cheeky. My school was notorious for teenage pregnancies and smoking. In my class, five girls got pregnant. I was one of them. When my parents came to know about my pregnancy they beat me up and called me a low-life slut... Dad is a heavy drinker. One day under the influence of alcohol, he grabbed me and hit my head against a wall.*

The Smiths bought their first home in 1992 in the suburb of Southside, after working for nineteen years in different country towns in the wheat belt of Western Australia. They selected Southside because their relations lived nearby. Their four bedroom, four year-old house with a lounge, gamesroom, modern kitchen and a swimming pool is located in a cul-de-sac with a sweeping view of the Darling Ranges to the east, and city skyline to the north. Expensive furniture, a billiard table, gazebo, barbecue equipment, a well-kept garden and family pets, a big collection of books on a wide range of subjects, a piano, two cars, and modern electrical appliances all symbolise the middle class status of the Smith family.

When I first contacted the family in the later half of 1993, Krista was studying in Year 9 at Paramount Senior High. Tall and slim, Krista was the only child living with her

parents. Twenty-year-old Philip had dropped out of school after Year 10 and began work as a farm labourer. Seventeen-year-old Paul, apparently the cleverest child in the family, had enrolled at a university in Melbourne to do a degree in accounting with a goal of getting 'the highest paid job in the field of accounting'. Both parents were very proud of his achievement as well as the goal he had set for himself, and half-jokingly, reminded Krista to follow Paul's example. Krista wanted to be a lawyer.

**Family Routine**

Moving from one country town to another for nineteen years the Smiths had developed a liking for the country life, and enjoyed sports and many other social activities in country towns. While her husband remained occupied with his job, Linda Smith actively participated in her children's school activities, but after shifting to Perth became confined to the house. In the morning she would drop Krista at the school and pick her up at 3 o'clock. During the day time she filled her hours doing gardening, visiting her relations, smoking, reading women's magazines, drinking coffee and watching television. In spite of applying for various types of jobs and being prepared to get a job of any type in Perth or outside the metropolitan area, she could not find work outside the home. By her own admission she was a 'bored housewife'.

Simon Smith left home around 7.30 a.m. and came home about 6.30 p.m. on most days, except on Fridays when he sometimes had a few drinks in the pub with colleagues. On Fridays, Mrs Smith did not cook. Instead the couple bought fast food. Much of the time Mr Smith and his wife did not see eye-to-eye, and arguments between them were

common. When this happened, Krista closed her door and stayed in her room. Similarly, when Krista and her mother argued, Mr Smith did not interfere. Simmering hostility in the family never ended.

### A Tangled web of strained relations

One of Mrs Smith's conditions for shifting to Perth was that the house should be purchased in her name. Instead it was purchased in the name of Mrs Smith and her husband. This demand had its base in the deep-seated mutual distrust which had developed between the Smiths long before shifting to Perth. On one occasion the couple had separated for eight months, during which time the children were in Mrs Smith's custody and she was determined that in case they separated again, she would have the custody of her children. My visit to the Smith family on Easter Sunday (1994) gave a fairly accurate picture of the dynamics of family interaction and the brewing tension.

> *On the Easter Sunday I pay a visit to the Smith family by appointment. Paul has come from Melbourne. Philip could not join the family. Mrs Smith has invited her parents for lunch. I reach their home at 10 a.m. Everyone is sitting in the gamesroom. It is the first time I see all members of the family together. In the centre of the room is the billiard table; on the left of it is the bar which is infrequently used. Mr Smith in his shorts, is sitting next to the door which opens on to the backyard swimming pool. Facing her husband at right angles, Mrs Smith is sitting next to the door which opens in the family room and the kitchen. At the entrance of the family room is a canary aviary. To the right hand side of the billiard table I am sitting flanked by grandfather on my right and grandmother on my left. Krista and Paul are playing billiards and challenging each other for a win. Everyone appears to be in a relaxed mood. The family dog keeps on greeting everyone. A white cat is sitting next to grandmother. Mrs Smith serves drinks and some nibbles. We all drink a cup of tea or coffee while grandfather drinks beer. After beating Krista in a game of billiards, Paul sits on his mother's chair. After serving drinks Mrs Smith approaches Paul and snarls at him: "Get off my chair." As Paul stands up, his father challenges him for another game of billiards. While they play, the grandparents decide to talk with me. "There is no discipline in schools now-a-days. Kids don't respect their parents. Why*

*don't teachers do something about it?" Before I say something he goes on: "If they (teachers) don't belt them how can they expect them to do the work? A clip behind their ear will do them the world of good. Spare the rod and spoil the child." Again, before I say something Mrs Smith looks at her parents and smiles at me as she says, "Yes Dad, I got plenty of it from you." Without hesitation grandmother says, "But you were not an easy child." Mrs Smith stares at her mother and bites her lips but says nothing. Conversation covers a range of topics. I gather Mrs Smith and her parents are strongly opposed to the free land rights for the Aboriginal people. Says Mrs Smith, "It is absurd to give free handouts to the Aboriginal people. They should buy the property the same way as others do. They are given brand new houses which they wreck. For any job and entry to courses they are given concession. You look into the eyes of the Aboriginal people and you can see hostility." In a two and half hour conversation on two other topics Mrs Smith forcefully argued about the excessive number of Chinese coming to Australia and Australians forgetting their real roots. While the others shared Mrs Smith's views she keeps on saying that the Asians have no right to take the place of Australian students in the Universities. She substantiates her claim, "You go to any University, the Chinese are everywhere. Look at Northbridge, it is full of Cheong, Wong and Duong (everyone laughs). We must remember that Britain is the mother country and the Queen is our monarch." Whenever Mr Smith participates in the conversation his wife snaps at him and refers to him as "Mr Smith". Every now and then they exchange serious facial expressions. During the game of billiards Mr Smith cuddles his daughter and gives a friendly smile to his son. As he does so, Mrs Smith bites her nails and smiles at me. I understand this to be her way of telling me that her husband is manipulating the children against her. When Krista puts on her mother's thongs the latter orders her to take them off immediately. After the game of billiards Mr Smith sits on a chair and starts biting his nails while resting his ankle on the knee of the other leg. At this stage I get the impression he is getting restless. I give the sheets to Krista to write about her half-hourly after-school activities. I return home without asking the questions about Krista's education. In such a tension-ridden house Krista's education and her interest as a teenager are certainly not the priority of parents.*

The above field notes revealed the tensions in the family, Mrs Smith's own upbringing when she was a teenager, and her stereotypical views about the people of non-English speaking backgrounds. I also got the impression that her domineering approach to handling Krista alienated her from her mother. Observations during the above meeting also revealed that parents interacted with their children differently. Krista and Paul did not like the authoritarian approach of their mother. When Mr Smith gave a cuddle to his daughter and a friendly smile to his son after the game of billiards Mrs Smith thought her husband

was manipulating them. This visit also revealed Mrs Smith's and her parents' views on child rearing techniques as well as their attitudes to other topics related to Australian society.

**Family tensions push Krista towards peer group**

Two weeks after the Easter visit I returned to the Smith family. This time my aim was to get more information from Mrs Smith about the work habits of her children.

*On a wintry day I visit the Smith family. After normal greetings and brief conversation about work related matters, I steer the discussion to Krista's attitude towards school work. Mrs Smith comments:*
*Let me tell you about Paul and Philip. Whenever they meet they always end up arguing with each other. Paul has got the same (personality) traits as his father. In the country town Krista was doing very well. She was very happy with her friends. At Paramount Senior High her half-Asian friend has a boy friend. She wags school. With this group Krista got involved in reading teenage girls' magazines, drinking and drugs. She closes her door and sleeps a lot. I thought she had been doing her studies until one day I found she was writing secret letters to her friends, telling them where to meet after school, what they were going to do at weekends and when they were going to have a party. Let me tell you what our little darling did. In 1993 before I left for England with my girl friend, one of her teachers confiscated a note. Krista wrote where she could get drugs from and when they should have a party at our place in my absence. (taking out of the drawer) Mrs Smith shows the note which reads: "Only 43 hours before Mum leaves for England. We can have a great party at my place. I know these guys who supply drinks (alcohol), smoke and the real thing (drugs). I have contacted some boys to join us. We can have a great time as we did in the park." Mrs Smith continues: I was in disbelief and would not have believed if it were not Krista's writing". I said, "Bingo (a favourite expression), you are grounded young lady".*
*R.M: What did she do in the park?*
*Mrs Smith: One day Krista and her friends went to McDonalds for dinner. We thought she was in the company of good friends. We didn't suspect anything and allowed her to go. That night Krista, her friends and two boys went to the park. They had a bottle of whisky. Later on Krista told us that she took only a small quantity and had smoked. But the whole night she was up vomiting. She must have taken quite a bit to be that sick. It is hard to separate her from her friends. We cannot ground her for ever.*

The glamorous city life, tension-ridden home, high handed approach of Mrs Smith and an indifferent attitude of Mr Smith meant Krista started to find ways to socialise with her peer group. Parental bouts about money-related problems effectively prevented any systematic home management and communication between parents about Krista's education was minimal. An air of tension could be sensed whenever Krista and her parents were together. And this was obvious on most of my visits to the family.

On one occasion, when husband and wife were at home, my visit to the family turned out to be an embarrassing experience. Two weeks earlier I had invited Mr Smith and his wife to see an Indian classic dance performed at Paramount Senior High, their second visit to the school in as many years. They appreciated it. At this time I had said to Mr Smith that one day I would like to meet him at his residence to ask him about Krista's work habits. So on ANZAC Day I made an arrangement to see him by appointment. I stayed at the Smith's residence for about forty minutes. During this time Mr Smith was business-like in talking about Krista's education. Mrs Smith was listening to our conversation from the adjoining room. During this time, with some reservations, he talked about Krista's work habits which he labelled as 'erratic' and her part-time work which he thought was a good idea because "it keeps her out of mischief and allows her to learn responsible behaviour". Krista, listening from her bedroom, joined us and said, "I started to work because I needed more pocket money. Now I work even during the holidays. I work even on Saturday. I don't have much fun". As Mrs Smith joined the conversation she immediately accused her husband of not taking interest in Krista's education. Looking at the belligerent expressions on the faces of Mrs Smith and her husband I felt uncomfortable and decided to leave their house before the argument between them took a serious turn. The following day Krista told

me, "Mum and Dad kept on fighting for a long time. I'm sick of it. I can't concentrate on my studies. When they start arguing I close my door."

I found it very difficult to have a smooth conversation with Mr and Mrs Smith when they were together. In fact, I was caught in a Catch-22 situation. If I visited the family when everyone was at home Mrs Smith ended up arguing with her husband and denigrating him. Towards the end of 1994 I invited Mr Smith for my second game of golf with him. My main intention was to find out about his views on Krista's education. After the game we sat in the corner of the club house for a drink. He gave the following information:

> *R. M.: I believe you are very busy in your job. What type of work does it involve?*
> *Smith: I am a chartered accountatnt in a firm which employs 40 chartered accountants and 250 accountants.*
> *R.M.: How do you spend your weekends?*
> *Smith: Mostly in winter I go to watch Aussie Rules football or visit my parents. On Saturday we go shopping. On Sunday sometime we go for a drive or visit our relations.*
> *R.M: In your job you work for long hours. How does it affect your family life?*
> *Smith: I sort of feel guilty that I do not find much time to spend with my family. Even when our children were young I couldn't spend much time with them. Linda looked after them and did the running around to take them to different places. No, I couldn't spend much time with them except sometimes taking them to basketball and helping Paul in his accounting (while he was doing TEE).*
> *R.M: What does your wife think of your long hours of work?*
> *Smith: (he starts thinking) Linda is a strong-willed woman. Sometime we look at things from a different angle and we do not agree. (He hesitates to talk about his relation with his wife. I do not pursue it any further).*
> *R.M: How has a change from a country school to city school affected Krista?*
> *Smith: I am not happy with peer pressure on Krista. She is going through a difficult time.*
> *R.M: What do you mean difficult time?*
> *Smith: She tries a few things behind our back like saying that she is going to the shop with her friends but she goes with boys to the city. Linda's approach does not seem to be making much difference.*
> *R.M: What do you mean by Linda's approach?*
> *Smith: Whenever Linda finds Krista doing something sneaky she grounds her for weeks. If I interfere argument starts between me and Linda. So I leave it up to her to handle Krista.*

*R.M: How much education would you like your children to receive?*
*Smith: It is up to them to decide. Of course it is good idea if Krista goes to university. But I won't be disappointed if she didn't. I'm quite happy if she chooses some TAFE course. My oldest son was never interested in studies. We didn't push him. My second son showed interest in studies. We didn't stop him.*

At this stage Krista was doing well in her studies, contrary to what Mrs Smith had told me, but she was very keen to socialise with her friends. Generally, she did not truant from classes although occasionally, after school hours, she socialised with her friends at the nearby shopping centre. Mr Smith, on his part, decided not to interfere when his wife took a punitive stand against Krista. I speculated Mrs Smith feared if Krista went with boys she would indulge in sexual encounters. Krista described her home life:

*Mum is unfair. She criticises me for whatever I do. She always wants things her ways. She does not like any of my boy friends and finds fault with everyone. Mum and Dad argue with each other all the time. Dad does not communicate with Mum. I don't get enough pocket money. So I decided to do part-time work from 3.30 to 6.30 and half day on Sunday. During holidays I work every day. I don't have much fun. Mum does not allow me to socialise with my friends. She grounds me often. Dad does not say anything. If he does, Mum starts arguing. I study better when I have some fun but Mum does not understand my problems.*

As the tension between Krista and her mother and between parents had intensified in 1994 I decided to talk to Krista at school during recess and lunch time. I asked her how she felt about being grounded, and how the arguments between her parents affected her studies. At one stage she was in tears and asked me to tell her mother that "going with friends does not mean that I'm not interested in my studies." Instead of understanding Krista's problems, mainly resulting from parental bouts, Mrs Smith put the blame squarely on Krista.

The on-going arguments between parents, lack of planning for Krista's education, and Krista's desire to socialise with friends made it very difficult for her to use the educational resources to her maximum advantage. She often said, "How can I study at home when my bossy Mum treats me like a baby and my parents argue all the time? My home life is boring. My best time is when I am with my friends."

## Krista Acts

In the middle of 1994 Krista started to work part-time (15-20 hours a week) as a dental assistant. Monetarily she was no longer dependent on her parents. At this stage she started to be more assertive in her demand to go out with friends, but Mrs Smith wouldn't allow her, and Mr Smith preferred not to intervene. Before her sixteenth birthday she had hinted that she would like to live independently. Even though Mrs Smith was genuinely interested in Krista's studies, her high-handed approach had alienated the latter from her mother. In 1995 Krista had started her upper schooling (Year 11). I visited the family to find out how she was coping with her upper school course.

*R.M: How is school, Krista?*
*Krista: It is good but this year I don't like my teachers. I've been lazy and disorganised. My maths teacher was surprised when I got 81 percent marks. He thinks I'm not interested in studies. But now I've got good marks in maths he will change his mind. In economics I'm not doing well. In accounting I got 91 percent but she is the worst teacher I've ever had. She does not explain. I don't know how I should go about it. My accounting teacher becomes very angry if I ask questions.*
*Mrs Smith (in angry tone):Krista if you don't understand you should ask her again.*
*Krista: I do sometimes. "Can you explain again? I don't understand."*
*Mrs Smith: You don't say, "Can you explain?" You ask politely and say "please."*
*Krista: (staring back at her mother and in a tone of rebuttal) I'm not rude. I ask her politely.*
*Mrs Smith: (grinding her teeth) I know you young lady. You're rude to me and you can be rude to your teachers.*

Mother and daughter stared at each other. There was an uneasy silence for half a minute. I gave Krista the half-hourly worksheets to complete for a week. After a brief talk I left the Smiths' residence. I wrote in my observer's comments.

> *I know from my own observations at school Krista is not rude but talkative when a teacher explains. She easily gets distracted. She is the type of student who does not ignore her studies but takes it lightly. How long is this brewing hostility going to last? A number of times Krista has told me that she is sick of being grounded and being treated like a baby. She has made a good start in some subjects but faces problems in economics. Her parents are not doing anything about it. Mrs Smith takes Krista to task and labels her "rude". Earlier Mrs Smith had revealed that when she was in high school she was a problem child for her teachers.*

In fact, by 1995 Krista had slowed down communicating with her parents and arguments between her parents had become more frequent. On one occasion, Mrs Smith warned Krista: *"You can walk in my shadow. You cannot step in my shoes, young lady. This is my house and you are living in it. There are rules in the house and you follow them child. I trusted you but you acted smart. You are grounded."* However, by now (early 1995) Krista had already made up her mind and started to look for the ways to let her parents know that she was not happy with her home life. Two weeks before her sixteenth birthday Krista asked her friend if she could stay with her.

During this period I observed Krista's behaviour in school. She looked very subdued and withdrawn from her friends. Teachers commented that she was not completing the homework. One teacher commented: "Suddenly she has gone quiet which is unusual for her." One day in the school ground she told me, "I am sick to death of being grounded for small things." Mrs Smith told me that she was having more confrontations with her husband in 1995. At this stage, to keep their marriage together the couple had decided to

consult a marriage counsellor and a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist advised Mrs Smith to
learn from the example of the cohesive Chinese families and the care they take to keep their
marriage intact. Mrs Smith blasted him, "If their system is so good why do they come to
Australia?" She stopped going to the marriage counsellor and to the psychiatrist. During a
home visit Mrs Smith told me about her encounter with Krista:

> *Last night my parents stayed for tea (the evening meal). They stayed until 10.30.
> While we were in the family room Krista went in her room to catch up with her
> studies. After my parents left I went to her room. She was playing computer games.
> I said, "Krista you are supposed to be studying." She said, "I don't have much
> homework to do". At 11 she started to do her studies. I switched off the lights and
> said, "You go to bed young lady. You had plenty of time to catch up with studies."
> She did not like it. I cannot trust her on the phone at night while I am asleep. She
> snaps at me, I snap at her.*

**Krista starts her own life**

In April 1995 Krista ran away from home. From her undisclosed hideout she phoned
to say that she would not return home unless her parents stopped arguing, she was allowed
to go out with her friends, and Mum treated her fairly. Coincidently, the day Krista ran
away from home I visited the Smith family in the afternoon to find out why Krista had been
absent that day. My eye-witness account revealed Krista's deep-seated anger and desire to
live independently.

> *While I wait for Mrs Smith to open the door I hear her screaming. I think Krista and
> her mother are arguing. Mrs Smith rushes to open the door and runs back to attend
> the phone. "Krista has run away from home this morning", Mrs Smith tells me in a
> trembling voice. She is shaking badly while she talks to Krista on phone: "Krista,
> sweet heart come home. I love you. I promise I will do whatever you want me to do.
> Tell me where are you hiding? My heart is bleeding for you. Krista please come
> home. Dad and I will come together to take you". Krista puts the phone down.
> Sobbing Mrs Smith is shaking and sweating. I try to comfort her. She ignores
> whatever I say to her. "I want my daughter back home." Phone rings again. "Mum*

*I'm not coming home. I've had a gutful of you. I don't trust what you say. My decision is final", Krista screams on phone. Mrs Smith tries to assure Krista that she will allow her to go to the parties and stay with her father if they separate. She pleads, "Look what you have done to your mother. I always loved you and I still love you." Mrs Smith keeps on repeating the same promises in the sweetest words I have ever heard from her. Krista phones and as her mother picks up Krista hangs up again. I make a cup of coffee for Mrs Smith and give her tissues to wipe her streaming tears. On the phone Mrs Smith informs her parents, her brother and her husband about Krista's disappearance. Her husband tells her that he will be home soon. Mrs Smith tells me that last night there was an argument in the house and Krista said to me, "You hate me." I told her, "I don't hate you but I hate some of the things you do." She wanted to go to her friend's party but I did not allow her. Earlier when she had gone to the shop I searched her bag and found this note (Mrs Smith shows me the note) in her bag. The note reads: "Krista go for Eric. He is spunky." All I told her was that she should not step in my shoes and should not come (interfere) between me and my husband. My husband did not say anything to her. I think there is a secret deal between Krista and him ( April 6, 1995, 3.30 p.m. - 5.30 p.m.).*

The Smiths reported their missing daughter to the police. Krista was hiding with her friends from where she talked to her grandparents who convinced her to stay with them. When Mr Smith came to know about Krista's hiding with her grandparents he kept it a secret from Mrs Smith for a few days. Krista had dropped out of school and had started to live independently.

In 1996 she returned to school to complete her Year 12 with TEE subjects. Towards the end of 1997 the Smiths separated. Mrs Smith did not get the custody of her children. I lost contact with the family in the beginning of 1996. From school records I found that in 1997 Krista had obtained an impressive score of 364/510 in TEE and had enrolled at university to do a degree in commerce. Krista made her way to university in spite of the unabated tension in the family. I wonder how much talent goes astray because of the lack of social capital in the families. I believe that given a good understanding between parents and recognition of Krista's needs she would have achieved her career path to be a lawyer,

an important reason for the family to shift to Perth and to enrol Krista at Paramount Senior High School.

# The Morrison Family

## Background

Love of the beach, sports, beer, outdoor life, having a friend of the opposite sex and a part-time job at an early age, and owning a house on a big-sized block are some of the attributes of the Australian culture. The Morrison family represents most of these values. Don Morrison is in his early forties and his wife Maureen in her late thirties. Both are tall and slim second generation Australians of English ancestry. Partly bald, bespectacled, Don bears wrinkles on his face and shows signs of physical strain. He enjoys talking about fishing and sports but finds himself lost when forced to talk about academic matters. Maureen, a keen gardener, says often "I suppose I have green fingers. I don't mind getting dirty (while doing gardening)." Morrisons' two sons, Clint (16) and Glenn (14) bear a remarkable resemblance to their parents and, like them, they are very keen on sports, surfing and the outdoor life.

As teenagers, Maureen and Don met each other on a basketball court. Love of sports and beach became the binding force for the couple to marry. Maureen's father was a tool maker and retired as a foreman of a power station. Her mother stayed home. Like her older sister, Maureen dropped out of high school after Year 10 because 'I was no good at studies'. After Year 10, like his older brother, Don dropped out of school and started to work in a

glass factory as a labourer where, with experience, he became a foreman. His younger

sister also dropped out of school after Year 10.

When I first contacted the Morrisons in July 1993, Don's annual income was

$35,000, supplemented by the part-time job of his wife who earned about $12,000 per

annum from the work which she did at Don's parents' business by selling garments for

extra-large people. The Morrisons bought their first home in Southside eighteen years ago

but after the birth of their two sons decided to build a bigger house close to school and

sports facilities. Their present four-bedroom house was ideally located in a quiet street

within walking distance to a primary school, Paramount Senior High, sports complex and a

shopping centre. A well-maintained garden, indoor games in the pergola and family room

were indicative of family life style and family interest which were sports and leisure

activities oriented. Their backyard was the show piece of the house. Exotic shrubs and

ferns, lush green lawn, and a big pergola offered a relaxing garden environment. In the

pergola there was a table tennis, dart board, barbecue and a cage where a family pet cokatoo

was trained to imitate the human voice. During summer, folding chairs were extensively

used when family members and frequently family relations enjoyed beer, barbecue and

indoor games. Quite often Clint and Glenn practiced on the basketball ring in the drive

way. The interior of the house was fully furnished with moderately expensive furniture.

The family room contained a small-sized pool table, sofa, heater, colour television, video

and a good collection of quality books on various subjects, mainly on sports and fishing.

The kitchen was equipped with all the kitchen wares which an average house holder in

Australia enjoys. Mr Morrison drove the utility van provided by the factory where he

worked.  The family station wagon had a tow bar to pull the caravan when the family went

for holidays at Christmas and Easter time.


**Family Routine**

Mr Morrison worked almost from dawn to dusk from Monday to Friday and half day

on Saturday.  Not only did he work long hours, his work in a noisy glass factory was

physically tiring.  Mrs Morrison told me: "He works in a noisy factory and complains about

back pain.  He comes home to sleep.  If he had extra time he would not know what to do

with it."  Most of the time he came home so exhausted that he could hardly find time to talk

to his sons about their school work, even though the family members ate most of their

evening meals together.  While Mr Morrison remained busy in his monotonously repetitive

work his wife did part-time work for four days a week.  After school Clint and Glenn either

spent time watching television or playing sports or doing part-time work with the full

encouragement of their parents.

At weekends most of the time parents and children had their own routine: parents

going to the restaurant or to their relations, and children spending time with their friends.

On Sundays if Clint and Glenn were home and parents were not busy with grandparents, the

most common family pastime was watching sports on television.  After school, Clint and

Glenn either spent time watching television or playing sports, or doing part-time work.  At

weekends either they went to their friends' places or to the city for recreation.  Extracts

from an interview with Glenn given below are typical of the weekend routine of the

Morrison family:

*After school I stayed with me mates, cos we wanted to have a good time, you know what I mean. The whole night we watched horror movies, played video games. We slept one hour. On Saturday we went to the local shopping centre and ate fish n chips in the park. Got ready for job interview (part-time work at McDonalds). Came home to watch TV. Went to sell newspapers from 7 to 11. Watched TV until 1 (a.m.). Got up at 10.30. On Sunday watched TV the whole day—Glenn, 13-16 May, 1994.*

On the same weekend Clint described his routine:

*It is against my religion to study on Friday after school (laughs). I went to do my part-time work (pushing trolleys at a nearby shopping centre) from 4 to 6.30. Watched TV until 11. On Saturday got up at 8 and watched TV for an hour. Went to the shop for a couple of hours and bought a CD for my stereo. Watched TV for a couple of hours. Went for driving lesson. After dinner went to my mate's house to watch videos. Came home at 1 (a.m.). On Sunday got up at 4.30 (a.m.) and went surfing with my mates until 1 p.m.(five of them, all doing TAFE subjects). From 2 to 4 (p.m.) helped Dad doing gardening. From 5.30 to 7.30 went to play basketball. Dad came to watch me play. From 8.30 to 10 listened to my stereo.*

The same weekend the parents went to dinner at a restaurant and on Sunday had a barbecue lunch and invited grandmother. Subsequent visits to the family confirmed that weekends were the time to socialise with friends, doing part-time work and playing sports.

Each year Mr Morrison took four weeks of annual leave at Christmas time and took his family to a coastal country town where they stayed in a caravan and enjoyed swimming, fishing, scuba diving, and bush walking. Apart from a few days at Easter time, Mr Morrison rarely got time to spend with his children. Mrs Morrison kept the work books of her sons when they were in grade 2. Happily, she gave me these work books to read. Glenn wrote in his work book:

*Dear diary*
*Some ferns (friends) of ours have cum (come) from England to see us (5.5.86).*
*On Sunday in the morning I was playing on the yelley (yellow) sand. After that I went to Naners (nana) for barbi and swim (19.5.86).*

*On Saturday me Brett, Jhon and Nabby wnt (went) Fremantle and we wnt to
Timezone and we plad (played) socka (soccer). (Mrs Morrison ticks but makes no
correction). I wnt to a farm and a few days before a caf (calf) was born his name was
comet cos he was born wen (when) you cood (could) see Hales Comet
On holidays I am going to Busselton and I will be going to a reef. I will swim with
Dad. I will have fun. Dad will do scuba diving (27.8.86).
On Sunday I wnt to church after I wnt home and had some lunch then I wnt to
another church for the larst (last) day of this turm (term) (18.9.86) (unedited).*

Glenn's diary indicates that not only was he weak in English from early childhood but his parents made no effort to overcome this weakness. The parents' love of the outdoor life was a striking feature of the Morrison family. It was on rare occasions, Mr Morrison was able to sit down and spend a significant amount of time with Clint and Glenn to discuss their school-related matters. On Sundays, if the boys were home and parents were not busy with grandparents, the most common family activity was to watch sports on television. While Mr Morrison remained occupied with his work, his wife did part-time work for four days. She spent her spare time in attending the garden where her husband occasionally assisted her.

**Interest in Sports**

Interest in sports was reflected in every facet of the daily routine of the Morrison family. Whenever Mr Morrison got time he loved to go to the beach for fishing, swimming and scuba diving. Clint and Glenn loved surfing. From a very early age the parents inculcated their children's interest in sports and spent their spare time in sports related activities. All of their extra curricular activities were related to sports and recreation. Extracts from field notes taken after my second visit to the family capture the magnitude of family interest in sports and recreation related activities.

*It is Saturday afternoon, November 10, 1994. A nice crisp spring day. The West
Coast Eagles are playing their semi-final Aussies Rules football against a team from
Victoria. At 1.30 I reach the Morrison residence. As I ring the door bell Mrs
Morrison opens the door and greets me with a broad smile. "Come in and join us to
watch Aussie Rules footy. It is very exciting". In the lounge Don Morrison, Mrs
Morrison's mother, Clint and Glenn and some family friends are glued to the
television. Male members are in their shorts and females are in denim jeans. Mr
Morrison offers me a seat on the sofa next to him and introduces me to his friends
who are more interested in the game than knowing about me as a researcher or a
school teacher. As the men are drinking beer Mr Morrison offers me one. I accept
the offer. Glenn and Clint smile at me as I have a sip of beer. At school they keep on
asking me if I drink beer; now they have got the answer. For forty minutes the
excitement of the match is so captivating that all of them are virtually screaming as
one of the local heroes kicks a goal. Jeering and booing follow as the opponents kick
a goal. Although I am not a footy fan, unlike my son, I take the side of the local
heroes. At the end of the game which the West Coast Eagles win by a narrow margin,
everyone starts giving expert analysis of the performance of individual players.
Female members listen to the conversation with a great deal of interest. I find myself
totally lost as I hardly understand the game. After a little while the friends leave the
house and Clint and Glenn go to their drive-way to practice basketball shooting. Mr
Morrison joins as well. Glenn and Clint persuade me to try to shoot goals. Clint,
who is a member of the school basketball team, demonstrates his shooting skills. Mr
Morrison comes to watch Clint shooting the goals. After a cup of tea I leave the
house as the family gets ready for a barbecue.*

Whenever I visited the family, I found them either gardening, or playing one indoor

sport or another. Glenn and Clint had mirrored their parents in sports and recreational

activities because parental involvement with their children was mostly in sports activities.

In fact, the parents were proud their sons were doing so well in sports. Mrs Morrison told

me that since grade one, she and quite often her husband, took the boys to sports activities.

At high school level Glenn and Clint made friends with boys who were mainly interested in

sports. In basketball Clint was identified as a talented player and was included in the school

team which won the national trophy. With increased interest in sports, socialisation with

academically low achieving friends, increased interest in part-time work, Clint studied

TAFE subjects in Year 12. Like his older brother, Glenn also showed his talents in sports and manual arts, although he did not excel as much as Clint did.

**"There are books but they don't read"**

Although the family room contained more recreational items than educational resources, there was a big bookshelf containing books mainly given as presents by grandparents. A set of encyclopedia, set of child craft, two big dictionaries, two atlases, a big book of general knowledge, three books on fishing and water sports like surfing and a number of books on short stories on adventurism were kept next to the television. On my third visit to the family Mrs Morrison took me through her sons' bedrooms. With some hesitation, Glenn said, "Wait for a few minutes. You come in when I am ready." While we waited Mrs Morrison jestfully said, "He might be hiding some girlie magazines." Extracts from the field notes given below describe the study area of both boys:

> *In Glenn's bedroom/study sand shoes are lying on his small study desk. A pair of unwashed jeans, T-shirts and a towel are lying on the carpet. His bed is a double-decker (which he used to share with his older brother when they were in primary school). Lying on his bed is a small stereo and a number of tapes. On one side of his bed is a big attacking knife. Walls are covered with girlie pictures, Aussie Rules football and basketball heroes and surfing posters. Most books are related to comics, cartoons and sports magazines. Glenn closes the door and plays his favourite music. In these songs there are a lot of swearing words. When words like fuck are repeated he laughs and looks for my reaction to it. I respond with a smile. After twenty minutes I go to Clint's bedroom which is no different from Glenn's except that he has about 15 small bottles of whisky. Some of the bottles are empty. Clint tells me that he collects miniature bottles of whisky as his hobby. When I come out of their bedrooms Mrs Morrison asks (with a smile), "Have you seen bedrooms like these in other families?" (June 9, 1994)*

To get a realistic picture of Clint's and Glenn's work habits and study rooms, I interviewed them in their own rooms a number of times where they felt comfortable talking

to me. Each time their bedrooms were as messy as I saw on my first visit. Most books were kept in the family room and a family computer was installed in the spare room. There were two computers which were used purely for games. Books were rarely used. "They hardly use these books. They are interested only in reading books on surfing and fishing like Don", Mrs Morrison told me on a number of occasions. In 1996 she had shifted the books into the spare room because "boys were not interested in using the atlas, dictionary and encyclopedia." Instead, in the family room they had installed the billiard table "which involved everyone." Regarding their work habits, Mrs Morrison expressed her disappointment:

> They don't spend a great deal of their time on studies. They work with radio and television on. They complain that homework is boring. They do not keep the homework diary. I do not know what homework they have to catch up with. Glenn is more disorganised than Clint. For Glenn 'near enough is good enough'. Mostly they read comic books. I tell them, 'why don't you look over your notes or just read through your file'? Glenn's file is very messy. If I ask them to borrow the books from the library. They don't. In a year they may go to the library two or three times.

What Mrs Morrison told me about the work habits of Glenn and Clint was confirmed by my own observations. In more than two years of home visits, sometimes surprise visits, I never found Clint and Glenn doing school work. Even though there were two computers at home Glenn never typed his assignments on the computer.

### "I like to help them but don't know how"

At home there were no academic models for the boys. They seldom discussed their grades with their parents. As a teacher at Paramount I knew that teachers gave homework on a regular basis but Glenn and Clint did minimal and then only when teachers forced

them. Other times they were happy to forget about it. I never found them doing homework or reading at home. The boys' parents, concerned about the education of their children, had provided them with high quality educational resources and quiet study rooms. However, their personal involvement in their children's education was negligible. Because of lack of control over her sons, Mrs Morrison was not able to sit down with them to discuss schooling and career plans. She was very keen to get her sons interested in studies but did not know how to do it. She explained:

> *I want to help them in their homework but I don't know how to do it. They are in a higher grade than I went to. When they were small kids they used to listen to what I told them but now they don't listen. From grade 1 Glenn had bad experiences with his teachers. He gets into arguments frequently. He is very aggressive and has a negative attitude towards work. If I ask him to do a job around the house either he wouldn't do it or he would delay it and would require a few reminders. His typical response is: Always Glenn and never Clint. He lacks self-confidence. We don't know what to do with him. He has developed a complex because his older brother did everything right but Glenn didn't. He is short-tempered and out-spoken.*

Mrs Morrison maintained contact with the school through the Parents and Teachers Association but seldom directly communicated with her children's teachers. She did not attempt to find out what specific teaching strategies she should use at home to complement the school's efforts. Homework was only intermittently and unsuccessfully performed. Both boys lacked confidence in their academic ability and their parents did not know how to help. They seldom discussed their grades, homework assignments or any other aspect of school with their parents. Mrs Morrison never checked their homework or school-related activities. While Mr Morrison made decisions affecting finance and some family activities such as weekend excursions and recreation-related activities, he was quite happy to let his wife deal with their children. In spite of the parents' concern about their sons' education

they were unable to exercise the necessary control for helping them. Mrs Morrison was not able to sit down with her sons to discuss schooling and career plans. She explained:

> They get cross with me sometimes. Last week Clint wanted to go to a party. We said, "You have an important exam coming up in two days. Stay home and study." He refused to stay. Don got angry with him. Clint said that he would come home early. There was a big argument. Clint still went with his friends. I try to make them realise the importance of study and homework now so that in future they will have a good education behind them. I put the TV on to watch news, current affairs and documentaries but they like to watch programs like sports and pop music or late movies. The older they grow the harder it is to control them. They argue with each other a lot and can't keep their rooms tidy, let alone help in the house. Quite often they tend to fight and argue with each other and constantly throw verbal jabs at each other. I allow them to watch TV as long as they want because I would rather them relax and feel happy at home than wander around the district because they are bored. Sometimes Don lets them drink light (low alcohol) beer at home so that they don't drink with their friends.

Mrs Morrison made sporadic efforts to help her children. She attended school meetings in order to be an effective parent. Mrs Morrison told me about her frustrations:

> Don and I want them to do well at school but we are not sure how to guide them to study. Because they are in higher grades than us, we find it hard to help them. I have attended the parent meetings and used the ideas on them but nothing seems to be working. Let me tell you something. I went to a meeting at school. This meeting was arranged by the school chaplain and the guidance officer. They wanted to speak about effective parenting. I was interested in this meeting because I wanted to know how to handle them (Glenn and Clint). At this meeting when Clint's English teacher came to know that I was his mother she sort of couldn't believe it. She said, "How come you (who are so good) have a son like Clint?" I was embarrassed. I said to myself, "If this is what the teachers think of Clint what do they think of Glenn who has got under the skin of the social studies and maths teachers.

With the low level of education of the parents, the family's orientation to sports and leisure activities, and Mr Morrison's physically tiring job there were simply no academic models in this family and its social network. Apart from verbal encouragement, Clint and Glenn did not receive any academic assistance from the members of their family. The

parents had little control over their children's study time, and were as uncertain about their children's future ambitions as the children themselves. Consistent with other aspects of the family life pattern, there was no steady disciplined commitment to educational achievement. For instance, Clint was a basketball scholarship student and was selected to go to Sydney to participate in interstate competition. His parents raised funds by organising various activities but when he decided to change from TEE subjects to TAFE subjects after Year 11, without hesitation told him: "This is the way to go." A year later, Clint enrolled at a TAFE college for an occupational therapy aide course. Mrs Morrison said, "If Glenn could do some course at TAFE college I would be happy, but it doesn't look as though he will make it." At the end of Year 12 Glenn had started working full time at a fast-food shop. One day when I was at the Morrisons' residence Glenn returned from a country trip. He was very tired and did not want to go at night to sell the newspapers. Mrs Morrison said to him, "Think of the pay cheque Glenn. Money will be handy." It was obvious that Clint's and Glenn's parents were very keen for their sons to be self-supportive at the earliest.

### "We expect them to do more studies than we did"

The Morrisons wanted their children to pursue studies at university, but did not have any specific teaching strategies to motivate them in pursuing academic subjects. From primary school age both parents let their children decide what they wanted to study. Both of them had been identified as low achievers but at no stage did the parents make any concerted effort to instil higher academic expectations. The boys seldom talked to their parents about school work. While eating evening meals together if the parents asked "how is school?" in a subdued tone a typical answer was short and abrupt: "It is okay."

Occasionally, when Mrs Morrison asked them to show her their files, either they tended to ignore her or reluctantly let her have a look. She knew that Glenn's file was messy and he did not always complete the homework, but she did not take any action. If she forced them to do their homework, not always supported by Mr Morrison, they went to their rooms to pretend to work. "And, I know how much work Glenn would do with his loud stereo and closed door", Mrs Morrison told me. Left by herself to handle the boys, she found it a losing battle.

Clint started high schooling as an average student in most subjects. Academically, he performed well until Year 11 when he began to find it difficult coping with the demands of upper school. Socially, he endeared himself with his peers and became a peer group leader. Glenn, on the other hand, started high schooling as a below average student in most subjects. In maths he remained a remedial student and in English he was in a focus class (for students with reading and writing difficulties). His level and pattern of performance did not change for three years. While he was in Year 10 his parents were not sure whether he would enrol in Year 11. In selecting subjects for upper school there was hardly any input on the part of his parents. They were satisfied with the fact Glenn decided to continue schooling after Year 10. University education was not a goal for Clint and Glenn. However, the desire of the boys to go to TAFE suggests that they realised that schooling was important in some ways and that they wanted to graduate. The boys made some effort to do school work but the home was not an effective place to promote these efforts. The Morrisons had an uncertain image of the kind of future that they wanted for their children. For their part, Glenn and Clint had mirrored their parents' higher values for sports and

recreational activities. Clint had enrolled at a TAFE college as a part-time student to become a physiotheraphy aide. Glenn had started working full time at a fast food outlet.

# The Morgan Family

## Background

Paul Morgan, a tall, medium-built man with receding hairline, is in his late forties. His wife Nancy is slim, medium height and in her mid-forties. Both are second generation Australians with English ancestry. Paul is a project engineer at an industrial plant earning an annual salary of $48,000. His wife is a primary school teacher on an annual salary of $31,000. They have three children: Shane a gifted athlete and academically oriented; Anne a good athlete and mediocre student; and Ben a fine athlete and below average student. The Morgans had been living in Southside for more than two decades, although only recently had shifted to the present house which was across the road from Paramount Senior High School. The house was well-located in terms of facilities such as school, sports complex, church, and a medium-sized shopping centre. An excellent handyman, Paul Morgan built a pergola and water fountain and landscaped the backyard. When their children were young, their parents spent plenty of time playing with them and enjoying barbecues and family gatherings. The well maintained front yard, with a wide variety of roses, was a showpiece. A fast pace, competitiveness, and a lot of talk about sports were some of the features of Morgan family life.

Happily married for twenty four years Nancy Morgan, a primary school teacher described her married life as bliss. "We are fortunate to be a romantic couple who really understand one another. I fell in love with Paul when I saw him playing basketball. He was a lady's man", Mrs Morgan boasted. After completing Year 12 with average marks, Paul Morgan started to work with Telecom and at the same time enrolled for part-time studies to do a diploma in drafting. His father, who worked in the telecommunication industry until he retired, motivated him to do well at school while keeping him keenly interested in sports. Paul's other three brothers did not continue schooling after Year 10. For two years, Paul was conscripted for national service. As a young man Paul Morgan was a fine athlete, excellent player of squash, basketball and Aussie Rules football. A colleague of mine who studied with Paul described him "as an average student, sports hero. Girls used to compete with each other to have a date with him."

When I first contacted the Morgan family in late 1993, Shane had been studying for a degree in occupational therapy, and Anne for a diploma in primary school teaching. Ben was in Year 9 at Paramount Senior High School. Although Ben had taken his older brother as a role-model, his parents were worried because he was not putting enough effort in to his school work.

**Family Routine**

It took ten minutes for Ben to walk to his home from school. A normal routine for Ben after school was either to play with a neighbour's son or train for basketball in summer and Aussie Rules football in winter. Ben returned home by 6 p.m. In the kitchen everyone

shared the responsibility of household chores. In the family room television was put on while parents started preparing the evening meal. As a matter of routine, all family members ate their evening meals together in a relaxed atmosphere. At the time of evening meals discussion revolved around children's school work, their performance in sports, and parents' experience at work. After meals, on a roster basis, everyone helped in the household chores and watched television for an hour or so. A distinctive feature of the Morgan family was that the family room, facing the kitchen on one side, and the outside sitting area on the other side, was a place for lengthy conversations, family socialisation and relaxation. Especially, before and after the evening meals all members of the family gathered for a conversation, watching news or any current affairs topic. During winter if there was a big game of football, all family members congregated around the television. It was here they discussed their day to day experiences and sports-related topics. After such discussions Ben liked to prolong his television viewing but his parents sent him to his room to study. After paying a few visits to the family after their evening meals I summed up Ben's interaction with his parents:

> *Mrs Morgan serves reminders to Ben to go to his room to do his studies. Ben ignores her. She serves another reminder. Ben's standard response is: I am going Mum (agitated). She tells her husband, "Paul you tell him" (to do his homework). In a stern voice Paul tells Ben to go to his room to study. Reluctantly, Ben goes to his room. Half an hour later parents check (whether or not he is studying). More often than not, they find him half asleep, lying on his bed with a book on his chest.*

Although Shane and Anne lived in the same house, most of the time they made their own arrangements to spend time in the company of their separate friends. At weekends, their parents loved to eat out, followed by some cultural event or movie show. Left on his own, Ben made arrangements either to visit his friends or invite them to his house.

Together they hired a video movie and watched it at home. It was not uncommon for Ben to spend an entire weekend in sports and recreational activities without doing any school work. His parents organised their weekend time very carefully. Mr Morgan spent several hours in gardening, visiting his own or his wife's parents, coaching the baseball team and watching his sons' sports activities. Mrs Morgan tended to spend a considerable amount of time helping her daughter study because she wanted to be a primary school teacher. Vacations were generally an extension of the weekend activities. At Christmas time, when the children were younger, their parents used to take them to coastal country towns. These days, the Morgans spend less time with their children on family vacations. I monitored Ben's weekend and weekdays activities. They were summed up by Ben:

> *At three I came home. Watched TV. At four I went to footy training until six. Dad came to see me train. After dinner we had a family conversation, mostly about sports because we all love sports. After (on Saturday) breakfast I helped around the house. At 10.30 went next door and played computer games with my friend. After lunch went with Dad to the beach surfing and swimming. Came back at 4.15. Talked about surfing for half an hour. Mum and Dad went out and I invited my friend to watch video at my place. On Sunday got up at 9 and watched the video again. At mid-day my friend went home. I went to play footy. Mum and Dad came to see me playing. I came home and watched footy with Dad on television.*

Training twice a week and playing on Saturday, sometimes Sunday as well, was a set routine. In the middle of 1994 Ben got part-time work for 8-10 hours a week and found a girl friend.

**As many trophies in the house as books**

As both parents were in professional jobs, educational resources had been accumulated from the time when parents themselves were studying at high school. As

Shane turned out to be exceptionally good in his studies and sports, his parents and

grandparents rewarded him with more books related to school work. On my first visit to the

family I looked through the bedrooms of the children. Here is an extract from my field

notes:

> *Accompanied by Mrs Morgan I peep into Anne's room. Pinkish colour dominates on the bed and window drops. Medium-sized study desk, chair and bookshelf, table lamp and a heater are the main contents in the room. Teddy bear on the pillow and a few posters of pop stars on the walls decorate the room. Shane's room is slightly bigger. Behind the study desk is a big bookshelf. Three shelves are filled with trophies of various sizes and shapes which Shane has won mainly as a star Aussie Rules football player. In this untidy room books are everywhere. Mrs Morgan takes me to Ben's room and says humorously, "Get ready for a culture shock." Standing behind us her husband comments, "Boys tend to be messy." While I talk to Ben he closes the door. I sit on the mattress which is lying on the floor (Ben's friend stayed with him at the weekend). Ben lies on his bed with his shoes on. The bed cover is faded and dirty looking. In one corner there is a baseball bat, basketball and two cricket balls, three Aussie Rules footballs, two soccer balls, dumbbells, and pliers. In one corner of the room he has put twenty hats with ensigns of sports heroes. On one shelf he has put 12 trophies which he has won in baseball and basketball. On another shelf there are three toy cars, souvenirs, golf glove and a teddy bear. Walls are covered with posters of surfing, basketball heroes and the West Coast Eagles football team.*

> *Small study desk and a wooden chair are dwarfed by sports related material. I count fifty books, a medium-size dictionary, atlas, the Guinness Book of Records. Most books are given by grandparents on special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas. Books like Here is more, tell me why; Black Beauty Hi Fella; Best Story Book Ever; Wild with Harry Butler are some of the eye catching titles.*

Besides these resources, in the family room there was a set of encyclopedias, a big

atlas, dictionary, and books on a wide range of topics. Books on fishing, cooking, and

sports out-numbered the other books. In the other corner of the family was a computer

which Ben's brother and sister used to type their assignments. Ben rarely typed his

assignments.

**"Paul (Morgan) encouraged them to play sports"**

From early childhood the Morgans were closely involved in their children's educational and sports activities. Mrs Morgan told me that before Ben started to go to school she used to read books to him and when he started to go to school she made sure that he read his book to her. Mr Morgan, a good athlete in his youth, encouraged Ben to play hockey, cricket and football. Mrs Morgan told me:

> *All our children are naturally talented in sports but Paul (husband) has got a lot to do with it. As a young man he played a lot of sports and now he is doing a lot of coaching. When Shane started primary school Paul encouraged him to play hockey, cricket and Aussie Rules football. On Saturday and Sunday Paul spends a lot of time in Ben's sports activities. When the children were young he used to spend all his spare time playing with them.*

Ben had three people to encourage him in sports. His grandmother encouraged him to play golf; his father invested an enormous time and energy to encourage Ben in different sports; and Ben emulated his older brother who excelled at Aussie Rules football. In fact, Ben's older brother Shane and his older sister Anne did very well in studies as well as in sports. Anne represented her school for four years in netball and Shane was selected in Western Australia's premier football team. "Ben likes to follow his brother's footsteps but in studies he is not up there", Mrs Morgan told me. Ben might not be where his parents wanted him to be in studies but he was well on track to follow his brother and father in sports. And, this appeared to be related to his parents' sporadic involvement in his academic work, as against their relentless interest in his sports activities. All of Ben's peers were very sports-oriented. Consequently, he was primarily interested in sports and athletics while schooling was perceived as a secondary goal.

In September 1994 Ben decided to study TEE subjects in Year 11 and 12. His parents took a great deal of interest. Mr Morgan explained:

> *He has had to make subject choices for upper school this term and this has generated a great deal of discussion in the house. I think Ben has only just reached the stage where he sees a direct correlation between his schooling and his future life or career, a little late compared to some but let us hope it's not too late nor too temporary.*

A few weeks later on my visit to the family Mrs Morgan gave similar information:

> *Paul and I had a good talk to him a few times. We said that if he wanted to do TEE he must work a lot harder. We did not like to push him too hard in case he did not have the ability. In science he got D (grade) which he has never done in any subject before. Although Ben is lazy, he likes to join in conversations. Most of the time we talk about their sports and education.*

In 1995 Ben had enrolled in Year 11. His commitment to sports remained the same. He had been doing part-time work as usual, although the amount of time he spent on studies had slightly increased. In a mid-semester interim report Ben's maths, physics and chemistry teachers commented that he was not doing well. At this time I visited the family to find out if the parents were aware of the difficulties Ben was facing, and if they had any strategies to help him cope with the demands of upper school. Mrs Morgan told me:

> *Last week we had a good talk with Ben. I wonder if he is capable of handling these subjects. This year he has taken two major decisions: He has broken off with his girl friend. He was selected by the Australian Institute of Sports (AIS) for baseball. We told him: "You decide what you want to do. If you can handle the commitment of AIS (training five times a week and playing at the weekend) without ignoring your studies you can do both." Paul told him that his studies should take priority. He also told him that if his first semester report does not improve he will have to give up his part-time job or stop playing football in winter. But Ben loves football and he likes his part-time job. He has promised to work hard. After 7 p.m. we send him to his room to study. From 7 to 9.30 is study time for him. What he does in his room we don't know. If I or Paul check up on him. he will say, "Don't you trust me?" Paul will say, "I wanted to find out if you need any help". Ben's response will be: "I will call you if I need help." He is the type of boy who is not academically-oriented. If we tell him to work up to 9.30, he will not work up to 9.35. He is good with his hands and is*

*doing well in woodwork. In fact, I will be quite happy if he does TAFE but Paul thinks that he should do TEE. He is taking subjects which he does not seem to be handling well. He likes to do these subjects but does not have the commitment.*

Although Ben lacked commitment in studies, his commitment to sports was phenomenal. On three occasions I found him day-dreaming about sports. And even though his parents wanted him to take his studies seriously, their interest and encouragement in sports was relentless. Even in Year 12 Ben's commitment in sports remained unabated. When Ben was in Year 12 Mr Morgan had taken out family membership at a private golf course. And even close to the crucial mock TEE and the final exam Ben played golf regularly with his father. This was in addition to Ben's full commitment to baseball, football and part-time work.

In 1995 (Year 11) Ben failed maths and chemistry and performed very poorly in physics. The parents were fully aware of his weakness in these subjects but did not provide any extra help such as hiring a private tutor. Instead, they encouraged him to take easier subjects in Year 12 . Some of the subjects were non-TEE. In 1996 he was uncertain about going to university but saw a distinct possibility of playing baseball at the state or national level. At this time Ben's parents realised their son would not make university.

Even though Ben's parents had high academic expectations of their son, he did not pursue his studies with the commitment to qualify him as an educationally successful student. Sporadic, piecemeal and inconsistent familial effort contributed to his lack-lustre academic success. In 1996 Ben failed most of TEE subjects. With an aggregate of 201/510 he could not enrol at a university, but he was selected by the Australian Institute of Sports

to play baseball. Ben's achievement in sports may be attributed to his father whom Ben considered a "great guy" and who encouraged him to take sports seriously.

# The Marshall Family

## Background

Mike and Susan Marshall and their four children are a third generation Anglo-Australian family of British ancestry. The parents are in their forties, Mike being three years older than his wife. Stocky, sun-tanned and rugged-looking, Mike always worked on blue-collar jobs. His wife is tall, slim and fair-complexioned and worked as a part-time secretary to a physiotherapist. When I contacted the Marshall family in August 1993 Mike was a shift worker at the domestic airport fuelling aircraft while Susan was working four days a week. At this time all four children were still at school, Chris was in Year 11 and Rachel was in Year 9. The other two children, Felicity (8) and Mark (6) were in primary school.

Mike's ambition in life to be a mechanical engineer remained unfulfilled because of the untimely death of his father, who died in a copper mine in the town of Ravensthorpe, 560 kilometers to the southeast of Perth. At that time Mike was in Year 10. Circumstances forced him to drop out of school as he had to take the responsibility to support his mother and two younger brothers. A man of tough physical and mental strength, Mike Marshall accepted the economic responsibility of the family by necessity but apparently without rancour. His belief in hard work and life experience gave him a lot of self-confidence. He

lived by the skill and strength of his hands. He enjoyed physical activity and related to the physical world through the manipulation of tools and materials. Mike's practical skills in extending, repairing and maintaining the house received the admiration of the entire family. In the early stage of his life he worked even at weekends and took little time out for relaxation. He designed his 'dream backyard' with a swimming pool, barbecue facilities, table tennis, and other facilities to the liking of his children and wife.

Mrs Marshall was an organised woman who spent her time in cooking, washing and ironing the clothes. Just as her secretarial job required keeping the correct and methodical account of documents, so she displayed neatness and orderliness at home. She cooked food for a few days and put it in the refrigerator so that she did not have to cook every day. As Mr Marshall worked on different shifts each week he could not be always present with the family at evening meals.

Initially, the Marshalls built a small house in Southside. Being a handyman Mr Marshall extended his house as the number of children increased. Ideally situated next to the primary school, Paramount Senior High, the sports complex, library, shopping centre and other amenities, the prominent feature of the Marshall home was its well-kept garden with swimming pool and pergola. The kitchen was replete with modern gadgetry. Even though there were four children in the family, the house was kept meticulously clean. Mrs Marshall had devised an incentive to give $3 per week to the younger children and $7 to the older children as a reward for keeping their rooms neat and tidy. This incentive, however, did not work for Chris whose room was very untidy. "Nothing works on him. Sometime I feel like wringing his neck", said Mrs Marshall who often vented her frustration on Chris.

With shoulder-length hair, Chris was a disappointment to his parents because he did not conform to their advice. He had been achieving C and D grades. Well-groomed Rachel was 'the perfect child' helping her parents in household chores as well as achieving mostly A grades. She sought to please her parents at all times and never displayed behaviours or impulses that would be disapproved of by her parents. Rachel was proud of her parents for all the things they had organised for her from annual vacations at country coastal towns to weekend activities. At the weekend and in after-school hours she gave priority to her school work. Her ambition was either to be a lawyer or a Japanese-English interpreter.

Chris was less enthusiastic about school and family activities. His preferred activities at school during recess and home were to socialise with his peers, none of whom was academically-oriented. During his after-school hours he watched television, listened to his stereo and went surfing, which was his main passion in life. Part-time work had given him the taste of economic freedom and his parents found it hard to motivate him in his school work.

**Family routine**

Susan Marshall worked four days a week and her husband worked on different shifts. Chris had started doing part-time work when he was in Year 9. Rachel had started doing baby-sitting in Year 8. Most of the time when the children returned home there was no one at home. If Mr Marshall was at home either he was sleeping (being a shift worker) or pottering around in the backyard. On a regular basis at Christmas time and at Easter time the whole family went to a coastal country town, 200 kilometers south of Perth. During this

time other relations in country towns joined them. Swimming, drinking, bush walking and

socialising with friends were the main pastime activities during such family trips. For this

purpose the parents had bought a big caravan and a four wheel drive. In Year 11 Chris

spent most of his spare time socialising with his friends, surfing and doing part-time work

for longer hours. About Chris's daily and weekend routine I noted:

> *Chris has gone to work. Most of the days of the week he works for two to three hours.*
> *On Saturdays he works for four hours. Straight after work he either goes to Perth or*
> *Fremantle and spends several hours with his friends on gambling machines. He buys*
> *fast-food and is hardly ever home. Half of the money he spends on himself and the*
> *rest he is saving in order to buy a car. Although he is unbridled, he is amicable, not*
> *surly or insolent.*

Chris's parents were very unhappy with his untidy bedroom. Mr Marshall took me to

Chris's bedroom. I noticed untidy clothes and two pairs of shoes were scattered in different

parts of the room. On the walls were the posters of surfing, basketball heroes and half-

naked girls. On his study desk was a small television. On the chair was a stereo and next to

it were a number of discs. Mr Marshall couldn't hide his displeasure about Chris's life

style when he commented:

> *Look at this shit everywhere. Dirty clothes and shoes are lying on his bed. Posters of*
> *girls on the wall, filth written on his school bag. How can he study? We have tried*
> *everything but nothing works on him. We gave up.*

By contrast, Rachel's room was immaculately clean. Pinkish coloured curtains, bed

cover and teddy bear stood out. In the bookshelf was a collection of thirty books and

children's encyclopedias. On a small study desk was a table lamp and a number of books,

mostly related to school work. Shoes were kept in one corner and a school bag in another.

The door of a cupboard and walls were decorated with the posters of pop singers; Michael

Jackson stood out. A stereo was kept on a small table. In the family room there was a computer about which Mrs Marshall told me, "Rachel uses it to type her assignments. Chris never touches it. The younger children use it to play computer games."

## Chris is never home

The Marshalls believed in giving their children some freedom as they grew up. Until Year 9 Rachel was not encouraged to go out often with her friends, but in Year 10 they encouraged her to join a youth group which met on Fridays. The freedom to go out with friends was given to Chris at an earlier age when he started to attend high school. By Year 10 Chris had become so much peer-oriented that the parents could not control his outings with his friends. In a lengthy interview Mrs Marshall talked about her frustration with Chris:

> *Chris is not doing enough study. Most of his time goes in eating, sleeping, listening to music and visiting his friends. In Year 8 he started (school) well. Most of the time he was getting C and B grades. When he was in Year 9 he improved somewhat, especially in home economics and physical education. In Year 10 two things happened. He started getting interested in girls and got part-time work. He also started to spend more time surfing with his mates. Now he belongs to a gang of students, I mean a group of his mates he mostly hangs around with. Some of them are older than him. During holidays and sometimes at weekends they go to non-drinking night clubs. He is an honest child. So far he tells us everything he does. He has tasted alcohol, cigarette and possibly marijuana but he does not like it. He has not been involved in any gang fights. We tell him to keep away from fights. So far he has listened to us. I have told him that if he wants to drink I can buy alcohol for him but he should not come home drunk. Even during the exam period he kept on working on his part-time work. Of course we didn't say anything. He did not stop socialising with his friends during the exam period. There is nothing we can do about him. He is on a totally different planet. He is only interested in girls, surf, nightlife and his mates.*

Mrs Marshall's anguish about Chris became quite obvious when I visited her one afternoon. Rachel was helping her mother in doing the dishes. Mrs Marshall was ironing the clothes. Two younger children were playing with some electronic toys in the family room. Mr Marshall was asleep. Mrs Marshall told me:

> *Chris has gone to work. Every afternoon he works for three hours and for four hours on Saturday. He is saving money to buy a car for himself to be independent. He has decided not to do TEE. Instead, he wants to go to TAFE to do the hospitality course. All his friends have either left school and those who are still at school do not want to continue studies. He has a couple of girl friends. All his friends have long hair and he likes to look like them. With long hair he looks gross. Sometimes I feel I should do something about him. I feel very bitter (she grinds her teeth and shows her fist). He gets on my nerves. He goes to discos and nightclubs. He likes surfing. Most of the time he goes his own way. When he was in primary school he was hyperactive. All of his teachers were fed up with him. I tried to help him but he never settled.*

Chris for his part did not pay much attention to the "nagging behaviour" of his parents. He told me:

> *I know I am not tidy but my Mum goes mad for very small things. I don't get along with her. Why can't my parents accept me as Chris? I am not a square like my sister. To me there is more fun in the company of my mates than putting my head in school work which I don't enjoy. I want to be a chef.*

### "Surfing is a great life"

From early childhood Chris and Rachel were socialised to play sports and enjoy outdoor life. Chris participated with keen interest in baseball, basketball and hockey. Rachel started to play netball which she continued until Year 12. The Marshalls loved the outdoor life and each Christmas holiday and Easter time they went to coastal towns for fishing and water sports. Their children developed similar interests. The most common activities Rachel and Chris shared with their parents related to sports and recreation. When

not at school or home Chris spent all of his time with his mates playing sports. He wrote

this account of one weekend routine in his home diary:

> *Straight after school I went to my girl friend's place and then to my friend's place*
> *until 10.30. On Saturday, I got up at 5 and went surfing. Returned home at 10 and*
> *went to my part- time work for four hours. Came home and listened to stereo for two*
> *and a half hours. At 5.30 went to my girl friend's place to watch a video about*
> *surfing. Did some study from 5.30 to 6.30. When I come home from surfing I am*
> *buggered mate. I am so tired that I don't like doing any work. I go to my room and*
> *lock myself in and sleep for 10 hours. You feel so good man (stretches himself) when*
> *you get up. Surfing is a great sport.*

By contrast, Rachel always spent her weekends helping her parents in household

chores and catching up with school work, occasionally spending some time with her

friends. She explained:

> *Friday I did baby sitting from 3 to 5.30. Went to Sizzlers (fast food) with my friends*
> *(all girls) until 9. Went to my friend's place until midnight. Mum picked me up. On*
> *Saturday got up at 7.30 and watched television for half an hour. Went shopping in*
> *the city with the whole family. Chris never comes with us. Came back at 3 in the*
> *afternoon. For two hours I wrote a speech for debating. Had dinner and watched*
> *television from 7 to 9.30. Went to bed at 10. On Sunday I got up at 7. Watched*
> *television for 3 hours with younger brother and sister. Played with them for an hour.*
> *Practiced my debate speech. In the afternoon I did homework in maths, science and*
> *English.*

### "Books do not interest Chris"

Considering their own modest education, the Marshalls' aspirations for their

children's education were high and included sending them to university. Mr Marshall

regretted that he could not pursue his own studies as far as university. Both Mr and Mrs

Marshall felt strongly that their children should not miss out on a good education, however

neither was sure what course of action they should follow to help them. At one point, in

Year 11 they offered Chris the incentive of a car if he worked hard at his school work. But Chris could never motivate himself.

The Marshalls wanted their children to do well at school and had provided all the facilities such as a quiet study room, computer and desks. They were genuinely interested in their children's good performance because they themselves missed out on the opportunity to have a good education. Occasionally I saw Mr Marshall spending time helping his other children in their school work, but the parents had given up on Chris. As they had done part-time work while they were students they were quite happy for Chris and Rachel now to do the same. They did not object to Chris having a girl friend when he was in Year 10 and when Rachel was in Year 10 they encouraged her also to look for a boy friend. When occasionally Chris came home with his friends' girl friends Mr Marshall told me, "It was not like this in our time. It is good to have more than one boy friend and a girl friend." In Year 10 Chris failed maths. His parents provided a tutor but according to Mr Marshall:

> *When Chris got the tutor to help him, he stopped paying attention to the teacher in class. He started to rely on the tutor to do all the work for him. So instead of helping him it spoiled him. We stopped the assistance from the tutor. He failed maths. What upsets us most is that he is not dumb but he does not take interest in his (school) work. All of his teachers say that. If he works half as much as Rachel does he can do well. But he is lazy and disorganised.*

**"Let them decide what they want to do"**

Although the Marshalls were very keen for their children to pursue studies beyond high school, they had no plan for any particular career paths. "We will be quite happy with whatever career they choose" was their standard answer. Towards the end of Year 10 when Rachel and Chris had to select their subjects for Year 11 and 12 the Marshalls told them,

"Select what you enjoy doing. There is no need to put yourself under unnecessary stress."

Rachel's decision was mainly based on advice from her teachers and her own interest. My

observations and interviews with the Marshalls nevertheless reveal their keenness for the

higher education of their children.

*R.M.: How much education would you like Chris and Rachel to receive?*
*Mr Marshall: (pause, looking at his wife) We really never gave it a thought. Chris is*
*in Year 11. We want him to decide. Rachel is in Year 9. She is too young to decide.*
*Mrs Marshall: And, whatever they decide we want them to do well in.*
*R.M.: On my previous visit you told me that it is for Chris to decide what he wants to*
*do in his life. Does it mean that you do not give him any guidance?*
*Mr Marshall: Susan and I did not receive university education. We do not want our*
*children to miss out. But we do not want to force anything on them. Our job is to*
*provide them a good home and anything which they want for their studies but Chris*
*and Rachel should choose courses which interest them.*
*R.M.: What is a good home?*
*Mr Marshall: A good home is a caring home. Parents should look after their*
*children and provide them with the facilities for their studies.*
*Mrs Marshall: All our children have their own rooms. We provide them with the*
*books they need. I read the school newsletter which tells us what is happening in*
*school. We encourage them to enjoy sports.*
*R.M.: Do Rachel and Chris bring news letters home?*
*Mrs Marshall: Rachel is reliable. She keeps us informed about everything in school*
*(pause and rolls her eyes). Chris is a different story. He is careless and messy. We*
*talk to him (about school work) but nothing works on him. When he was in primary*
*school he was hyperactive. All of his teachers were fed up with him. I tried to help*
*him but he never settled.*
*R.M.: How did Chris start high school?*
*Mr Marshall: He started well in Year 8. Most of the time he was getting C and B*
*grades. In Year 9 he was doing well in home economics and physical education,*
*getting A grades. In Year 10 two things happened. He started getting interested in*
*girls and got part-time work. Also, he started to spend more time surfing with his*
*mates.*
*R.M.: What about Rachel?*
*Mr. Marshall: She started very well. All of her teachers were pleased with her work*
*and behaviour. In most subjects she got A grades.*
*Mrs Marshall: She is different from Chris. I met her teachers a few times. They say*
*she is a pleasure to teach, and, I know at home she helps me. She helps Mark and*
*Felicity (younger siblings). She keeps her room tidy. She keeps her homework diary*
*and always does home work. None of these things apply to Chris. He lives on a*
*different planet.*
*R.M.: Why do you think both are so different?*

*Mr Marshall: That beats me, to tell you the truth. You are a teacher you tell us. We don't treat our children differently. Perhaps boys are different from girls. Or maybe Chris started to mix with the wrong crowd (Mrs Marshall endorses what her husband says).*

*R.M.: Do you think part-time work and his girlfriend would have affected his performance?*

*Mrs Marshall: I don't think it matters much. We know some other kids of Chris's age are doing part-time work. They have girlfriends. They are doing okay in studies.*

*Mr Marshall: In fact, part-time work teaches him to act responsibly. His girlfriend is a good lass. She knuckles him down. It is his careless habits and lack of motivation which are the problems.*

*R.M.: What have you done to motivate Chris to do school work?*

*Mr. Marshall: We tell him that good education is very important thing in life. As you have seen there is a set of encyclopedias, dictionaries and books on different subjects at home. The local library is in walking distance. Rachel uses these books and she borrows books from the library, but Chris does not.*

As seen in this interview the Marshalls did not think part-time work and a friend of the opposite sex distracted their children from school work. In fact, when Chris and Rachel were in Year 10 their parents encouraged them to look for part-time work and the companionship of the opposite sex. Both children were allowed to go to youth clubs and disco parties on Friday nights. The Marshalls considered such outings as normal for their teenagers.

When Chris failed to enrol at TAFE college or tertiary studies he decided to repeat Year 12 but dropped out after a few months. I asked Mrs Marshall how she felt about Chris's inability to reach her expectations. A bit annoyed about my question, Mrs Marshall said:

*We don't believe Chris is a low achiever. He is happy and content and is enjoying his life, and so in our eyes he is a high achiever. If he feels this way about life, perhaps he has achieved much more than many others. We are pleased with both of our children's achievements, as they are happy and friendly young adults. It is their individual choices which have affected their achievements. We let Chris make his*

*choice to continue his studies. We were content with his decision as long as it pleased him.*

Even though the Marshalls wanted their children to study at university, they left it up to them to decide which subjects they wanted to study. Their input was sporadic. In Year 11, Chris did better than he thought he would. He got C grade in three subjects and D grade in three other subjects. Inspired by these grades he decided to keep studying TEE subjects which he had selected in Year 11. In Year 12 in semester one (1994) he failed most subjects. In semester two he started to question his ability to succeed in TEE and failed all subjects. The following year Chris decided to repeat Year 12 but dropped out after two months and found a job as a fruit-picker in a coastal town where he could enjoy surfing. Poor performance at school had made Chris critical of school. Whenever he was at home he spent most of his time sleeping. His parents had very little control over his activities. There was almost no indication of order and routine in Chris's living patterns. His parents attempted to provide him academic assistance but not with a great deal of success.

By contrast, Rachel was doing well at school and living up to the expectations of her parents as the 'best child in the family'. She passed Year 10 with excellent grades and decided to select six TEE subjects. In Year 11 she experienced difficulty in maths and chemistry. Her parents advised her to drop these subjects and take easier ones in Year 12. She passed TEE with a resounding success: 404/510. Why is Rachel a high achiever and Chris a low achiever? Both of them entered high school with more or less similar grades from primary school. Part of the answer to this puzzle was found when I observed the after-school activities of Chris and Rachel, the former socialising with friends and the latter staying home and doing her school work. Mrs Marshall explained: "All he is interested in

is the hospitality course. He is good at talking to people but not so good with his hands. Books put him to sleep. Surf magazines wake him up. Rachel is different. She listens to us and does everything right."

## Summary

To varying degrees the parents in these four families share most of the attributes of Australian life style discussed in the introductory section of this chapter. Now in their fifties or late forties, these parents were teenagers in the 1960s, an era of Australian material prosperity. Attaching importance to the 'sacred weekend' (Biddle, 1966), serious commitment to an annual holiday in the bush or a coastal town, commitment to leisure and sports activities, an aggressive obsession with personal gratification, personal freedom, doing your own things and a hedonistic attitude (Mackay, 1993, p.235) are some of the common features which have contributed to the lack of commitment to the school work of teenagers from these families. All four sets of parents may be seen to have worked out how to gratify their needs through sports and short term gains in ways similar to those alluded to in recent studies related to the Australian life style (Mackay, 1994; White, 1981). Although parental methods of child care, training, discipline and attitudes towards the education of their children vary from one family to the other, they exhibit a number of things in common.

(1) For three generations education has not been central to the lives of these families. Most grandparents dropped out of school before completing junior high school; some parents completed junior high school, while some pursued studies further; and all children

from these families completed Year 12. Admittedly, in terms of the number of years spent at school these children have done better than their parents. However, in most cases the parents succeeded in gaining economic security without pursuing higher education, Mr Smith and the Morgans being the only exceptions. As teenagers these parents did part-time work while studying at high school. Economic independence and taste of money instigated them to satisfy their short term gratification as well as provided an opportunity to experience the world of work at an early age. By the time these parents reached the age of twenty, they had bought their own cars, had selected their life companions and most had started living independently. Perhaps, it is this personal experience which motivated these parents to encourage their children to take part-time work and enjoy sports. Parental beliefs in the virtue of part-time work is encapsulated in comments like "it makes them act responsibly and makes them independent"; "if you do not try (to get a part-time job now) you will not get it later (because you will be too old); "they like doing part-time work because their mates do it".

Even though these parents encouraged their children to do part-time work they did not want them to ignore their studies. In fact, they wanted them to complete Year 12 and pursue some course thereafter. Yet, without pursuing tertiary studies the Marshalls and the Morrisons had succeeded in enjoying the material benefits similar to the ones enjoyed by middle class families such as the Morgans and the Smiths, and at the same time kept their commitment to leisure and sports activities. Their children have adopted a similar approach to life. Krista's flight to independent living; Chris's commitment to surf and fun with girls; Clint's admission that it is against his religion to study on Friday night; and each teenager's commitment to part-time work with a goal to own their own cars to give them the

opportunities to do their own thing, are some of the attributes of 'Me Generation' which are ingrained in the thinking of these children.

(2) The most striking common feature of these families is their interest in sports, recreation and an outdoor life. Almost religiously, they encouraged their children to play and enjoy sports from the age of five. This encouragement continued right through high school. From an early age, these parents were physically and emotionally involved in the sports-related activities of their children. They enrolled them in organised sport clubs and invested far more time and money in these things than in the educational goals of their children. In fact, at weekends, watching their children playing sports, buying fast food, and watching sports on television together, were the most common activities in these families. Interest in sports so dominated the psyche and routine that when it came to public and annual holidays there was almost no semblance of difference in behaviour apart from changes in location. The Morgans and Morrisons were the most keen on sports, investing all their spare time in the sports-related activities of their children. And, to their delight their investment in sports paid off. Ben Morgan was selected in the Australian Institute of Sports to play baseball, while Clint represented his school in basketball and won a national trophy. The children from all of these families played team sports at Paramount Senior High and in local teams. Between them they had won a number of awards and trophies in sports. Socially, they were very lively, but academically they were very mediocre with the exception of Rachel Marshall.

(3) All the parents provided quiet study areas, an abundance of educational resources and wanted their children to take school work seriously. When these children were young

all their parents used to read books to them. When they were in primary school, the mothers made themselves available to their children on their return from school. However, when their children started to go to high school there was a gradual parental withdrawal from the study programs of their children. Most of these children, therefore, spent more time in the company of their friends, watching television and playing sports. When it came to helping children in their school work the parents were either not sure how to help them (e.g., the Morrisons) or they had lost control over them (e.g., Krista Smith and Chris Marshall). If parents were in a position to help (e.g., Morgans) their efforts were inconsistent. When their children were in Year 11 and 12, the parents were aware of the problems their children were facing but made no effort to provide extra help such as employing a home tutor. About the career paths of their children these parents were complacent and content with whatever choice they made for themselves. An exceptionally bright student like Rachel dropped higher maths and chemistry at the end of Year 11 and opted to study drama and a non-TEE subject. Her parents' response was: 'Why should you kill yourself with maths if you don't need it in your career?' When Clint dropped TEE subjects and decided to study non-TEE ones in Year 12, Mr Morrison said, 'This is the way to go'. About Krista, Mr Smith said, 'I won't be disappointed if Krista doesn't pursue her studies at university'. The Morgans wanted Ben to select subjects 'which you could handle' but their encouragement of sports was relentless.

To sum up, inspite of the high educational expectations for their children, actual parental involvement was very low and reflected in their daily and weekly routines which were more oriented toward leisure and relaxation than involvement in their children's study programs. The Morrisons raised money to send Clint to Singapore to play basketball; the

Smiths sent Krista to Singapore for holidays; the Morgans took Ben to Bali for holidays and sent him to sports camp in Melbourne. But none of the parents provided home tutors to help their children at some critical stage of their study schedule. In fact, a 'killer instinct' in sports and a laid back attitude to studies sums up the approach of parents in these four families. In Chapters Eight and Nine we shall examine in more detail the influences of home and school.

# CHAPTER SIX

# CHINESE- AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES

In order for the reader to understand the influence of home environment on children's attitudes towards school and on their academic performance, in this chapter I focus on the lives of children from four Chinese-Australian families. I start this chapter with an overview of the history and reason for Chinese immigration to Western countries in general and Australia in particular. This overview will help the reader understand the rationale for 'migrant drive', that is, cultural values, and experiences which are assumed to be associated with "Asian high achieving syndrome".

In the literature review I alluded to the fact that in recent years immigrants to Australia from Southeast Asia have been selected on a skills basis. I also indicated that people, in general, have decided to emigrate because they were experiencing socio-political or financial problems in their native countries and have emigrated to those countries which they perceive to offer better job opportunities for them, and for their children. Coming to a new country with certain goals to achieve, such immigrants would be prepared to make adjustments in their life style. As they experience problems (e.g., in relation to racial discrimination and language) they would tend to devise strategies and develop their folk theory, based on their cultural background as well as their experiences in the host country, to succeed.

# History of Chinese Migration to the Western World

Ethnically one of the most diverse people in the world, the Chinese are said to be amongst the first people to live in towns, develop agriculture and record their history and culture in a sophisticated calligraphy.  Many Western writers have regarded their civilisation as one of the most ancient, exotic and mysterious.  However, accounts of the early traders and Western missionaries also presented Chinese civilisation as primitive and associated with ancestor worship, female infanticide, opium smoking and binding women's feet (Stoessinger, 1970).

A series of natural disasters in the 1840s and 1850s forced hundreds of thousands of Chinese from the Pearl river delta in Canton and the southern provinces of Kwangtung, Kwangsi and Fukien to look for work in California and later, in the 1890s, in Australia as gold miners, farm workers, domestic servants and bonded coolies.  Most were single males who left families behind.  During the colonial period in Malay in the early part of the twentieth century the British introduced a policy of importing Chinese labourers to work in tin mines and plantations while most Malays worked as peasants.  A large number of Chinese also gravitated to Hong Kong mainly as contract labourers and voluntary immigrants.  Later on the Chinese "became the backbone of Malaysia's economy" (Suryadinatu, 1993).

In Australia Chinese immigrants, as in California, were subject to racial hostility.  In the 1850s cheap labour was needed, and a large number of Chinese migrants came to

Australia. In the 1880s the Chinese population in Australia had risen to 50,000. This swelling number of Chinese in the Australian colonies led to the development of *sinophobia* (Vernon, 1982) of the same magnitude as in California. Chinese migrants were labelled as "Pagans" and "Yellow Demons". The myth of the yellow peril was built up to suggest that the admission of more Chinese into Australia would spell disaster (Hornadge, 1971). In the latter part of the 1890s the Victorian government had imposed a poll tax of 10 pounds on every new Chinese arrival. In 1901, the Immigration Restriction Act, which laid the foundation of "White Australia Policy" (abolished in 1973), was mainly directed against Asians and other coloured migrants of whom the Chinese formed the majority, and against whom acts of hostility were directed. Bullivant (1984, p. 42) argued that because the Chinese were regarded as keen competitors in the goldfields, a series of sensitive legislation and capitation taxes were passed to squeeze them out of competition. Discriminatory measures against the Chinese served a wider ulterior motive for the politicians of that time who used the notion of "White Australia" to bolster national consciousness. Jayasuriya put it more succinctly:

> No doubt the economic competition faced by the native Australian settlers was a powerful factor which generated hostility and racial antagonism but these were overlaid by the biological, social and cultural factors such as the visible differences arising from the skin colour, physical appearances as well as values, customs markedly at variance with the host society, implied a threat of racial purity (1989, p. 2).

Anglo-Celtic conformist views were well-reflected in the writing of Willard (1923) who argued that a united Australian society meant not only that members could intermarry and associate without degradation on either side, but implied an aspiration towards the ideal of people possessing the same general cast of character, tone of thought, and constitutional

training and traditions. In the face of harsh treatment the majority of Chinese were forcibly

repatriated. For seven decades the White Australia Policy dominated Australian domestic

policies as well as external relations and "confirmed the impression of Australia as a white

outpost driven by fear and anxiety to defend its shores from hordes of aliens on its

doorsteps" (Jayasuriya, 1991, p.3). Social scientists,(e.g. Bullivant, 1984), therefore,

maintain that this discriminatory policy represents a fine example of Anglo-Celtic ethnic

hegemony. The majority group denied the minority groups their life chances and then

legitimised their action by humiliating the minority group.

It is interesting to note that in recent times (late 1990's sympathisers of Pauline

Hanson's party, One Nation, blame Asians for Australian high unemployment and

organised crime. Asian migrants are accused of contributing to disharmony and threatening

to social stability because, according to the racist ideology, they fail to integrate with the

wider society.

In recent years (1980's and 1990's) three factors led to an increased Australian intake

of the immigrants from the Southeast Asian region. First, improved economic conditions,

near zero birth rate, and a lack of exportable skills in Europe indicated that Europeans were

unlikely bidders for immigrant places in Australia. Second, the rate of unemployment in

Australia had been higher in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs, which were generally filled by

European immigrants. Thus, Australia revised its immigration policy, and to boost the

ailing economy preference was given to immigrants who could provide the necessary skills

and financial investment in Australia. This gap was thus filled from an intake of skilled and

business migrants from the Southeast Asian region, especially Malaysia, Singapore and

Hong Kong. Third, the political situation in Malaysia in the 1960s and later in Hong Kong forced the ethnic Chinese to look for places to enhance life chances for their children and to enjoy, presumably, a better life style in other countries. During the British rule in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong the local elites had developed a predisposition for the British system of education, especially an education with an English medium of instruction. Such a system of education became popular in Malaysia and Hong Kong. English schools in Malaysia were popular among the non-Malays because they provided access to white collar jobs.

With the growing number of immigrants from southern China and southern India into Malay in the early part of the twentieth century and the increasingly larger role played by them in the social and economic activity in Malaya, which became a federation of Malaysia after independence in 1957, the Malays became increasingly worried about their own socio-economic position. In post-independence Malaysia sweeping policy changes in favour of Malays, so-called Bumiputras or "Sons of the soil", were introduced. This alienated other ethnic groups. Restrictions on entry to post-secondary educational institutions triggered the emigration of non-Malays in general and students in particular. Australia was among the countries they selected. In Australia, overseas students have become identified as a lucrative source of foreign exchange and potential source of immigrants (e.g., Goh and Cheong families in this study). For instance, in 1998 Australia earned 2.3 billion dollars from fee-paying overseas students and nearly 50% of the overseas students in Australia are ethnic Chinese from Malaysia (*The West Australian*, 11 September, 1998). Australian literature on student motivations for studying in Australia indicated that established family networks, the influence of popular culture, the physical proximity of Australia, international

recognition of Australian qualifications, the possibility of obtaining permanent residence in Australia, superior educational facilities and relatively inexpensive travel costs were the main reasons (Kwak, 1972; Leong, 1972; Thampitakbul, 1972; Redford et al., 1984).

Apart from the refugees from Indo-China since 1975, recent immigrants from Southeast Asia are largely middle class families who migrated in either the business or professional category. Chinese-Australian families included in this study came as skilled migrants who emigrated to Australia after the abolition of the White Australia policy, in 1973. With it's abolition the intake of immigrants from non-English speaking countries increased dramatically, so much so that from 1978 to 1980 the Asian intake was higher than from the UK/Ireland. In fact, since 1983 to the present, Asian migrants' numbers have continued to surpass those from UK/Ireland and other parts of Europe. The Asian component of immigration increased from 29.4% in 1978-79 to 36.3% in 1983-84, as against 19.5% from UK/Ireland, and 15.5% from continental Europe (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1984). These figures were the basis of a much heated immigration debate in 1984 led by Professor Blainey who commented, "We are letting in too many Vietnamese and Chinese too quickly... well ahead of public opinion" (Blainey, The West Australian, 25 July, 1984). Similar concerns were expressed by John Howard in the 1980's and in the now-infamous 1996 speech of the independent member of Federal Parliament, Mrs Pauline Hanson who reignited the anti-Asian feelings when she said:

> They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and don't assimilate. There are Chinese triad groups that are going around to schools and intimidating kids and extorting money out of them... Eighty per cent of heroin comes from the Asian countries.... My fear is that if we keep going the way we are going.... The yellow race will rule the world because they have a different culture. A different way of life. In

some of those countries they don't believe in democracy. It is frightening (*The West Australian,* 11 September 1996).

# The Kwang Family

## Background

During the 1980s two major social and political developments in Hong Kong and Australia encouraged thousands of people from Hong Kong to migrate to Australia. With the agreement between Great Britain and China to hand over Hong Kong to the latter in July 1997, large numbers of businessmen from Hong Kong, unsure of the ramifications of the Chinese take-over, started to look for safer places for investment in the "West". To take advantage of capital flow from Hong Kong, the Australian government made special provision for "business migrants" to enter Australia, even if they did not have the essential skills required by the Immigration Department of Australia.

Concurrently, in countries like Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, together known as the "Tiger Economies", there was an unprecedented economic growth that led to a rapid increase in the living standards of people. Consequently, demand for tertiary education increased in these countries at such a rapid rate that the existing universities could not cope. Migrants like the Kwang family, with high educational aspirations for their children and fearful of the consequences of the Chinese take-over of Hong Kong, looked to Australia. With their ancestry from mainland China, Yu Chi (41) and Florence Kwang (39), and two daughters Hongzia (9) and Miran (7) emigrated to Australia from Hong Kong in 1988. The Kwangs looked to Australia just as their parents

had looked to Hong Kong in the 1950s when they lived in the poverty-stricken Southern

China. Yu Chi Kwang talked about his early life in Hong Kong:

> *My parents worked all year round. They worked from early morning until sunset. ...*
> *They sent me to a better school and expected me to learn hard under strict school*
> *discipline. They used to tell me if I didn't work hard at studies I would find it difficult*
> *to get a job. I took their advice but I wasn't a clever student. In primary school I*
> *had only one English book. In high school teachers taught in English but I was no*
> *good in English. I gave up and ended up with poor results. I helped my parents*
> *because they were very poor. I started to do part-time work at the age of sixteen. My*
> *younger sister and brother got a good education. My sister did a diploma in teaching*
> *and migrated to Canada with her husband. My brother did a diploma in engineering.*
> *He got a job in a ship building company in Sydney, which also had a branch in Hong*
> *Kong. I started to live away from my parents at the age of 20 when my younger*
> *brothers and sister had finished their studies.*

Florence Kwang, with the help of her daughter as interpreter, talked about her

background:

> *In 1949 my father was imprisoned in China. He joined us sometime later. My*
> *mother worked all day long in Church cleaning and doing baby-sitting. When I was a*
> *small child my parents used to leave me alone until very late at night after they*
> *finished work. My mother wanted me to be very educated and asked me to work hard*
> *at school. She used to tell me if I didn't work hard I would be a labourer like her.*
> *My mother never went to school. I listened to her but I found it hard to understand*
> *my subjects at school. My mother was busy supporting a family of five children. I am*
> *the eldest child, so I used to look after my younger brothers and sisters until I got*
> *married. My mother and father used to argue a lot with each other because there*
> *was not enough money. I think for uneducated persons it is hard to have a good*
> *future.*

**My daughters could not be sure to get a place in university in Hong Kong**

After their retirement, Florence Kwang's parents decided to migrate to Australia in

1986. With the money, which they brought with them, they purchased a house, car and

other household items, and operated a bank account, which would allow them to live off the

interest. Before making a final decision to migrate Yu Chi and Florence visited Perth twice.

Yu Chi explained the reasons for emigrating:

> *We liked the open space [in Australia], fresh air, fresh and cheap food. In Hong Kong there are only two universities. There is so much competition for education. My daughters could not be sure of a place at the university even if they could get good marks. You have to be very very smart (his emphasis) to get a place in the university in Hong Kong. In Australia there are so many universities and competition is not so much. Also, in 1997 Hong Kong will become part of China. It is not good for business. We wanted to get out before China took over.*

After arriving in Perth, the Kwang family stayed with Mrs Kwang's parents in a predominantly working class suburb of St. James from where they inquired about various schools and suburbs of Perth. Through their Chinese social network and Chinese real estate agents they came to know that because of the academic reputation of Paramount Senior High School and the affordability of newly released land in Southside, many families from the Southeast Asian countries were settling there. In 1991 the Kwang family built their house in Southside. On the same street Mrs Kwang's parents and her sister also bought their houses.

In a rather new and quiet street the Kwang home was of medium size with three bedrooms, a study, family room, lounge, formal dining area and a spacious kitchen. The house was fitted with all modern amenities. In the carport were two medium size well-maintained cars. A well kept front yard garden with roses and cocos palm trees and a small patch to grow leafy vegetables in the backyard gave a tidy facade to the house. Both parents were at pains to keep the house neat and tidy. No one was allowed to enter the house with shoes on.

This small stretch of Southside where the Kwang family resided had a number of the families from Southeast Asia. Located very close to a small industrial area, this part of Southside was served by a busy road. Most houses were less than ten years old with a heavy concentration of migrants from Southeast Asian countries. Three other Chinese Australian families included in this study lived in this part of Southside.

**Confronting the problems in the host country**

When the family was first contacted, in mid-1993, Hongzia was in Year 9 at Paramount Senior High and Miran in Year 7 at a nearby primary school. Yu Chi Kwang was working as a porter on a shift work basis in a city hotel and his wife in a garment-making factory in the city. Earlier the Kwang family, taking advantage of the cheap labour of Mrs Kwang's parents and her sister, had unsuccessfully run a restaurant in Northbridge, the China town of Perth. Yu Chi Kwang also tried his luck by giving driving lessons to the Chinese speaking migrants during the daytime and working as a porter during nighttime. Suffering from acute hay fever, Yu Chi Kwang found the pressure of two jobs too much. Then in May 1994 Yu Chi was diagnosed as suffering from the liver cancer which would eventually take his life in 1996. From this point the family would have to live on social welfare because Mrs Kwang had to give up her job in order to look after her ailing husband. Tragedy had changed their family routine dramatically and life became a grim struggle. When the family was intact, all members of the family ate their dinner together except when Mr Kwang was on shift work.

Mr Kwang was very particular about cleanliness in the house and took the main responsibility to make rules in the house. Mrs Kwang worked for long hours, leaving home at 7 a.m. and returning at 6 p.m. Excerpts from interviews with Yu Chi Kwang give in an insight into the struggle the family endured.

> *Mr Kwang: We are quite happy about the school progress of our daughters, even though they faced a lot of problems in primary school. If they keep on studying as hard [as they are now] we don't have any complaint. After our daughters finish their education and get married [to Chinese boys] my wife and I would like to go back to Hong Kong.*
> *R. M.: You said earlier that you liked the fresh air and open space in Australia. Why do you think of going back to live in Hong Kong?*
> *Mr Kwang: We came here to get Australian citizenship, to start some business and to provide higher education to our daughters. In Australia it is hard to make living on a small business. We have got the Australian citizenship. I am earning the same salary which I earned 14 years ago. I get $265 per week. My wife earns about the same. She works the whole day for five days a week. With this salary in Hong Kong I could not have afforded the quality of education which my daughters are getting in Australia. ... We have got some relations here. It makes it easy (to live here). There is no social life in Australia. Some Australians are racist. One day a lady at the shopping centre looked at me and I could tell from her eyes that she hated me. Some Australians really do not like the Asians but we ignore them. In Hong Kong you look through the window and you see people all the time [Removing the curtain and looking through the lounge window] there is no one on the street.*

Hongzia and Miran were in Year 5 and 3, respectively, when they commenced their primary schooling in Perth. They likened their early experiences in schools to a nightmare. Miran gave a graphic account of her experiences in the essay she wrote for an ESL assignment under the heading "Bullies in Australia"

> *My early days in Australia were the hardest days to live in my whole life. I didn't speak or understand English. I didn't know what to do at school. I was teased for being an Asian. Words like 'Ching Chong' or 'Canton' were said in front of my face. Although I didn't know what they meant, I knew it wasn't a nice thing to say. I couldn't make friends because I couldn't communicate with others. I not only had problems with speaking English, but also understanding the Australian accent. There was also a really funny memory that couldn't be forgotten.*
> *It was on my tenth day in the school. I was in grade three. The first friend I made was Kylie Bennett (pseudonym). At recess she brought me to the canteen. She was*

*going to buy two pieces of toast. The canteen lady gave her the first toast then Kylie turned around to me and gave it to me to hold it for her. But I didn't understand what she was talking about so I just stuffed it in my mouth. When Kylie turned around and asked me where her toast was, I couldn't say nothing but point out to my stomach. She was so angry that she took me to our teacher after recess. The teacher asked me why I ate Kylie's toast. I didn't know what to say. Anyway I got told off. I went to the toilet and cried in silence not to let anybody know that I was crying just because of a piece of toast. Kylie and her friends kept on teasing me.*

*I would describe my life (in school) as unenjoyable. When I came to Australia I could say absolutely nothing but 'yes' and 'no' in English. It made the beginning of life in Australia really, really hard. I'd hated school at that time, however, I didn't tell my parents. I just kept the problem in my heart by not telling one person at all. I had to fight against other people who teased me and kept the tears to myself, just to show that they could not change my life. One year later I felt better because I could communicate with others more. If they swore at me, I could sware [swear] back at them. I didn't let anyone hurt my feelings any more. In grade four my teacher was the meanest teacher in the whole school. She was racist. Whatever I said she criticised me. If I didn't put my hand up she said, "Don't you know the answer Miran"? My grades were still very low. My parents were worried but they couldn't do anything about it.*

In spite of the problems Miran and Hongzia faced in the early stages of schooling in Australia they were determined not to be put down. In fact, they were doggedly determined to succeed. Their parents helped them overcome these problems.

### Children should be raised in strict discipline

The most striking feature of the Kwang family was an adherence to the Chinese values and high commitment to the education of their daughters. Chinese values were reflected in practically every facet of their life-style. Chinese tea, noodles, Chinese music and Chinese movies and family conversation in Cantonese typified the family life style. Most of the artefacts in the house were Chinese: embodied in the statue of Confucius in the parents' bedroom and in the family lounge. For three years, during my visits to the family, I did not see a single non-Chinese visitor to the family. The family social network (including

the family doctor) consisted of Chinese, mostly from Hong Kong. Hongzia and Miran were

not allowed to visit their friends after school hours, although in 1995 Hongzia had found a

clever Chinese boy friend. Outside their work place the parents had no contact with Anglo-

Australians. The rationale for all this was given by Yu Chi Kwang: "The girls watch

television, listen to music and read English news papers, and at school they talk in English.

To maintain our culture we tell them to talk in Cantonese at home". Consequently, both

girls spoke fluent Cantonese and had accepted their parents' emphasis on adhering to the

Chinese values.

Hongzia described her parents as very strict but caring and lovable:

*My Mum is strict at home about cleanliness. She is serious about things at times.
She reckons that we have to share work in the house and keep our own rooms clean
at least. She can be furious and aggressive, if we did something terrible... She beat us
with either bare hands or a stick if we did something terribly wrong. Usually, we will
get scolded at and if serious, we will get beaten up. For example, if we leave a whole
pile of food scraps in the lounge area, we might be told to clean it up within certain
minutes or time, otherwise no television or go to bed straight after.... My Dad is also
very strict about cleanliness at home. He is nice to us all the time. He does most of
the cleaning at home. He is furious at few times. He jokes and talks about things to
make us happy. He never beats us because he said that he would accidentally kill us
if he did.*

After finding out from Hongzia how her parents treated them at home I had a series of

interviews with Mr Kwang (because of the language problem it was hard to interview Mrs

Kwang). Excerpts from the interview with Mr Kwang capture the essence of their child

rearing practices and their view of success. After a brief talk about his health, I told Mr

Kwang that I would like to know about his views on how children should be raised:

*Mr Kwang: Children should be raised under the supervision of parents. We should
always tell them the right from wrong, every time when they make a mistake. We*

*educate them immediately. If they commit big mistake, we do not even beat them but tell the result of their actions.*

*R. M: How do you think children should be disciplined?*

*Mr Kwang: Discipline and educate them both are important. If you only hit them and without telling them the mistake they will not be happy and they do not improve. The feedback will be worse. They may commit [the mistake] again. Always bring up the mistakes and discuss with them until they can get a clear picture and [say] they will not do it again.*

*R. M: Are you succeeding in your techniques to bring up your daughters the way you like?*

*Mr Kwang: I will say mostly yes. In studies they are doing O.K. They speak Cantonese at home, they like Chinese food and Chinese movies. But they are also catching some Australian habits like questioning our authority. In Hong Kong children do not talk back even if parents are wrong. [When I was a child] my parents scolded and beat me with stick every time if I had a poor school report. ... They didn't allow me to go out at night and always asked me to study at home. No chattering on phone. I had to obey them. But I couldn't catch up with my subjects. So I felt boring and pretended studying. I worked harder because my parents would punish me if I didn't get good school report.*

Although both parents were authoritarian in their child-rearing practices and occasionally used physical punishment to discipline their daughters, as their own parents had, they also did a lot of talking to convince their daughters that they should retain such cultural values as being respectful to elders, sharing domestic responsibilities, and working hard at studies. Even when the parents were unemployed, they did not encourage their daughters to take up some part-time work. The parents firmly believed children should be guided by them and constantly watched in case they "picked up the wrong habits".

### "With hard work you can achieve anything in life"

At the dining table Mr Kwang regularly gave what Hongzia called "mini lectures" to remind his daughters that with "hard work you can achieve anything in life". The parents' native theory to success appeared to be rooted in their experience of poverty and their belief

in the virtues of Confucianism. Excerpts taken from interviews at various times with Mr Kwang encapsulate his theory of how to succeed in life.

> *We always tell them about some successful people like Paul Yuk Kwang in Hong Kong. Successful people are highly educated and try their best to study hard. Hard working and educated people are always those who have better chance to succeed in life. We tell our daughters that to be successful in life they must work hard at schoolwork ... I reckon people are born lazy. They are only pieces of white papers and parents paint them colourfully. We educated our daughters from when they were as young as 4 or 5 years old. ... Even if we are busy, study of our daughters and their school assignments are always the first priority. At home we have provided them all the necessary facilities like computer, books, encyclopedia and atlas. We talk to them quite often about the value of education.*

Initially, the parents forced their daughters to devote all their time to complete schoolwork at home and provided them moral support and resources to take schoolwork seriously.


**"In primary school our parents asked us to study, study and more study"**

Hongzia and Miran told me that when they were in primary school their parents always pressed them to practise schoolwork. Their parents restricted their time watching TV, even during holidays, and did not ask them to do house chores. They kept advising their daughters that once they overcame the language-related problems they would make sound progress in the other subjects as well. However, no special effort was made to overcome problems in English. Paradoxically, their parents were very concerned about their daughters' weakness in English and they knew that if they allowed their daughters to make friends with Anglo-Australian children and watch English movies on TV they could improve these deficiencies. But at the same time, the parents were worried about the social

influence of Anglo-Australian children on their daughters. At home everyone spoke Cantonese. Mr Kwang told me:

> *While we want them (daughters) to do well at studies, we do not want them to lose their culture.... Our parents were poor and could not provide us good education.... We do not want it to happen to our daughters.... Educated person is better than uneducated.... Effort and ability are both important for success in life but effort is more important....   Parents have more responsibility for the education of their children than teachers do.*

The parents' involvement in the homework activities of their daughters remained paramount in their daily routine, even though they did not have tertiary qualifications. Financial sacrifice in the provision of educational resources could be assessed by the fact that during Mr Kwang's illness Mrs Kwang also gave up her job to look after her ailing husband, but Hongzia was being coached by a paid tutor at home.  In fact, the entire home curriculum revolved around helping and facilitating their daughters in their school related activities.

At weekends, Mrs Kwang took her daughters to the Chinese school.  Both girls were encouraged to visit the local libraries and they made such visits frequently.  However, there was not so much direct parental involvement in helping their daughters at high school, especially when they were in Year 11 and 12.  The parents rarely visited their daughters' school and did not check their daily schoolwork.  They knew that their daughters could not be as good in English as Anglo-Australian children were, but they kept on encouraging them to read more English books, watch news on television and to ask their teachers about the problems in English.

Indirect parental involvement in their daughters' education, by contrast, was considerable. At the dining table most conversations were about the value of education. Both parents told their daughters about their experiences of poverty and hard life. Continually, they kept on reminding them:

> *Chinese kids are smart.... We care for you. We came here to give you good education.... Look at their (family friends) children how well behaved and smart they are.... With hard work you can achieve anything in life.*

I got good insight into the parents' commitment to the education of their daughters when I first met Mr Kwang. He told me:

> *We have come to Australia for the education of our daughters.... I want them to become doctors.*

A year later on a balmy autumn day when I visited the Kwang family Mr Kwang gave more information about his views on the education of his daughters.

> *R. M: (looking at Mrs. Kwang) You must be very proud of your daughters' performance at school.*
> *Mrs Kwang: [with a nervous smile looks at Hongzia who immediately translates in Cantonese and tells that Mum cannot speak good English] acknowledges by shaking her head with a smile.*
> *Mr Kwang: Most Chinese parents want their children to work hard in schoolwork. You know in Hong Kong children go to school early in the morning. After school parents take them for tutoring and other things like swimming and music. Teachers give a lot of homework. On Saturday they go to school for half a day.*

> *R. M: Why do you want your daughters to be doctors?*

> *Mr Kwang: [A little puzzled] Doctor is a good profession. Our family doctor is Chinese. He is from Hong Kong. His son goes to a private school and he wants to be a doctor. Doctors make a lot of money [smiles]. Your daughter is a doctor. Today we want you to tell us what subjects are best for Hongzia for Year 11. We are preparing her for medicine [looks with a big smile at both of his daughters sitting next to him].*

For the next twenty minutes I played the role of an adviser, a teacher and researcher! It helped build rapport. I explained what subjects Hongzia could select in Year 11 to help her get into medicine. I explained on a piece of paper, which they kept with them, the procedure of assessment by the Secondary Education Authority. On this occasion I got an insight into parents' eagerness to learn about the procedure of subject selection and assessment. They kept on asking question after question till they were satisfied. Mr Kwang said I should join them one day for a meal because "you have given good information and my daughter always says you are a good teacher. We like you".

Subsequent observations and interviews with Hongzia and Miran further revealed their parents' concern about education. Hongzia told me:

> *They tell us all the time to take schoolwork seriously. They tell us educated man is better than uneducated... Mum comes tired from work. If we have a test, Mum says you do your studies for your sake I will do the house chores. Our parents cannot help us in our schoolwork. They do not understand the system. They always tell us if we have any problem we must ask our teachers. If I have an assignment to do they take us to the library to get some books. Before we were not allowed to watch too much television. They expected us to study all the time. Now they know we are studying hard, so they allow us to watch more television... Now (grade 11, 1995) I work so hard Dad says don't give yourself to too much pressure. My doctor says I should relax also.*

**"To make your Dad happy you should get a good report"**

Towards the end of 1994 the doctor had told Mrs Kwang that her husband was not going to live for long. I wanted to know how Mr Kwang's illness had affected the family. In my conversation with Miran I could fathom her determination in the face of tragic circumstances.

Emotion-charged Miran gave a similar account:

*After Dad became ill there is no fun in the house. Everyone is sad. For a long time they did not tell me what was wrong with Dad. My Mum is always very sad. One day she embraced me and said, "Do you know your Dad wants both of you to work hard and to be doctor"?... So far I have got three A's and one B which I am pretty pleased about. But I just kept asking myself, "Why can't I get four A's"? And I know I just needed two more marks to achieve an A grade for science. This is what I'm very very mad about. I tell my parents I will do better next semester.*

A few months later Mr. Kwang died. To pay homage to their deceased Dad, Hongzia and Miran had pledged to fulfil his dying wish. In 1997, Hongzia passed TEE with 398/510 marks and had enrolled at the University of Western Australia. It was a great achievement but she thought that she brought shame to the family because she could not get into medicine. She worked hard and got A grades in B. Sc. first year which entitled her to do a degree in dentistry. Meanwhile, Miran had passed TEE in 1998 and hoped to enrol in the university to do a degree in pharmacy. With an aggregate score of 364/510 in TEE she had enrolled at the university in 1999 to study for a degree in optometry.

# The Cheong Family

## Background

Kwan Wen Cheong comes from a large Chinese family of nine brothers and two sisters. His ancestors migrated in the early part of the century from the Southeastern part of mainland China and settled in Penang, the second largest city of Malaysia today with a predominantly Chinese population (57%). Mr Cheong's parents owned a small grocery shop in Penang. The economic hardship of his parents and the burden of a large family

inspired Mr Cheong (first-born) to work hard at studies and help his parents by securing a well-paid job. As he put it: "My life ambition was to be a doctor but because of the lack of capital resources and later low marks in matriculation, I settled to do a B.A. degree in commerce with accounting from the University of Western Australia". After completing this degree, Mr Cheong returned to Malaysia in 1972 where he worked for two years in the Stock Exchange Market in Kuala Lampur. In 1974 he started to work as a self-employed accountant in Penang. Hard work and entrepreneurial skills paid off. In four years he had expanded his business so much that he could employ ten people, mostly his family members and relations because "Chinese like to have their own family business".

In 1975 Mr Cheong married Melang who comes from a family of three brothers and two sisters. Melang's parents, like her husband's, had little schooling and they also migrated from Mainland China. In Penang they owned a coffee shop. After their marriage the couple visited Perth twice: for their honeymoon in 1975 and on a refresher course for Mr Cheong in 1980.

**"Australia is the place for our Children"**

During their visits to Australia, the life style, climate and educational opportunities impressed the Cheongs as a place to bring up their children. Mr Cheong told me why he decided to emigrate:

> *When I came as a student in 1970 I said to myself: Perth is the place to settle. Nice open space and the fresh air are better than the hot-humid climate of Malaysia. On our second visit to Perth my wife liked Perth. I proposed to her that either before or after retirement we must come to Perth.... There was another reason as well for us to migrate to Australia. Victor was experiencing problems in lower primary school. When he was in grade three he had to study three languages: Chinese, English and*

*Bahasa Malaysia. He could not take the pressure, even though we employed a private tutor for him. I proposed to my wife that before he got worse in studies better we moved to Perth. She agreed. In October 1987 when I came to Perth to attend a refresher's course I did a bit of research on the quality of high schools, prices of the houses and the socio-economic status of different suburbs of Perth. I told the real estate agent that I wanted to buy a house in a middle class suburb and close to a good primary and high school. He showed me this house. I put an offer of $80,000, which was accepted.*

When the Cheong family migrated to Australia in February 1988 Victor was in grade four and Pearl in grade one at Southend primary school. With the proceeds from the sale of property in Penang, Mr Cheong bought a car and put a deposit of $50,000 on his house. Even though Mr Cheong was familiar with the life-style in Australia and had a few friends, he faced some initial problems. He could not get a job immediately. In collaboration with his brother-in-law (who later settled in the Eastern States) and another Chinese friend, he opened a Chinese restaurant in the inner-city area of Northbridge which was already noted for its restaurants. After six months Mr Cheong pulled out of it because it demanded full-time commitment and yielded little profit in return. Instead, he started to work as a certified practicing accountant (CPA) in partnership with another man of Chinese-Malaysian origin. A year later his wife also got a part-time job to do book keeping at a Chinese friend's accountancy business. Mrs Cheong took up this job because it allowed her to work during the hours when Victor and Pearl were at school and she was back home when they arrived from the school.

**Family Routine**

When I first contacted the Cheong family in July 1993, well groomed and chubby Victor was in Year 9 [he was in my social studies class] and Pearl in Year 6. In my first

conversation on the phone with Mr Cheong I got some idea of the family routine. Initially sceptical of my motives, once Mr Cheong was satisfied that my project was legitimate and of some significance, he proved very cooperative. He told me:

> *We are a very busy family. I work from 8 to 6. My wife works from 8 to 4. On Saturday I play golf. Sometimes I go to play on Sundays as well. There is always some work from the office, which I catch up at the weekends. My wife remains busy with children and the household chores. However, your research sounds an interesting topic. We will try to accommodate you.*

Mr Cheong worked five days a week and quite often spent extra hours in his office attending clients. Mrs Cheong remained occupied doing book keeping and supervising her children's homework. Mrs Cheong worked part-time but was always home before her children returned home from school. After two lengthy visits to the family and having played four rounds of golf with Mr Cheong [one with the whole family], I acquired a good insight into the family routine and parents' concern for the education of their children. Extracts from my home observations and interviews with the Cheong family reveal how family routine was centred almost exclusively around the interest of their children.

> *Three days a week (Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday) Victor and Pearl go for swimming lessons, a routine set for them before the family migrated to Australia. Victor is privately tutored in maths (to achieve excellence) and English (to improve) twice a week for one hour in each subject. The maths tutor is a Chinese medical student who by example of success is inspirational as well as cheaper. Pearl is a voracious reader of English books. About Pearl, Mr Cheong tells (half jokingly) "if she had a choice between sleep and reading she would choose reading...." One librarian humorously said to Pearl: "You have read every book in the library." Her parents frequently remind her to reduce her reading time. Pearl also gets private tutoring in maths (for excellence). Every Saturday Pearl and Victor attend Mandarin classes for two hours, which are organised by the Chinese community. Saturday afternoons the whole family goes to play golf, followed by meals at a Chinese restaurant. At least once a week children go to the local library to borrow books.*

Painstakingly, these parents had organised their children's every single after-school hours activity. They had put their children in a set routine. On weekdays from 3.15 p.m. to 6 p.m. they were expected to complete their homework. From 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. for three days a week they were taken for swimming. After 8.30 p.m. they were not allowed to watch television. Yet in spite of this tight and regimented schedule the children held them in high esteem. A fitness fanatic, Mr Cheong had oriented his family to swimming, golf, and jogging. Victor described his typical weekend routine in the homework diary for me:

> *From 3.15 to 4.15 I did my homework. Watched TV for an hour. Then I went jogging with my Dad around 5.45. After dinner I helped doing dish. At around 7.50 I read my Chinese with my Mum and then watched TV till 9.30. Saturday morning I attended Chinese school. From 1 to 2 I had my tutorial in maths. Then I went to play golf with my Dad. I finished my homework before dinner. Then I watched a basketball game (on TV). I went to bed at 10.45. On Sunday I went to Kung-Fu with my other two Chinese friends. After lunch I did my social studies homework. At 4 my Mum took me to golf practice range where my Dad was already there. We went to the city for dinner at our favourite Chinese restaurant. Before going to bed I finished my good copy of social studies assignment. I watched TV for a short time before going to bed.*

Remarkably, there was very little alteration in this routine over a period of three years, except for the amount of time spent on swimming and playing golf was curtailed when Victor reached Year 12. Quite often I found Mrs Cheong sitting with her children and reading Chinese novels while they completed their homework. It was at the dining table Mr Cheong instilled the Chinese values and on a regular basis cautioned his children about the 'ills of the Western culture'. Unquestioned obedience to parents and adherence to the daily routine with almost clock accuracy were the features of Pearl and Victor. I observed:

> *When Mr Cheog talks to his children they listen to him with their heads down and with no eye contact. Most days for about 20 minutes both children help their parents in household chores after dinner. During the weekdays after 8 pm. children are not allowed to watch television. Pearl goes to her favourite hobby (reading) and Victor*

*goes to his parents' bedroom [which has a bigger study desk and computer] to do his schoolwork. Around 10 pm. both children go to bed.*


### "They (children) do not have a choice"

By controlling their children's after-school and weekend time, the parents monitored the outside influence on their children. Victor and Pearl told me that the rules "are a bit strict" and that they partially accepted the rationale given by the parents. Even while in the home, the children's activities were outlined and most time was spent in doing something which parents considered purposeful. Enjoying a fair degree of autonomy, Mrs Cheong, like her husband, was exacting and demanding. Neither parent believed in being soft towards their children. Victor followed in his father's tradition by avoiding what his father called "negative influence of street kids". Consequently, Victor grew into a well-adjusted adolescent who displayed considerable maturity [see teachers' comments in the next chapter]. I got an insight into the parents' theory to discipline and control their children when Mr Cheong, after a game of golf, invited me to his house after dinner.

*I reach Cheongs' residence at 7.30. Victor and Pearl are watching television. Mr Cheong and his wife are in their moderately furnished lounge. In one corner of the lounge is a bar where a few bottles of whisky and wine are kept. In another corner there are two putters and a few golf balls which, I am told, are sparingly used for practice. Stereo and bookshelf are put in another corner. There are a number of books about Chinese culture. On the walls there are Chinese paintings with writings in Chinese. As I make myself comfortable in the light red colour leather sofa, Mrs Cheong sitting in front of Mr Cheong and me next to me, Mr Cheong starts with the episode on the golf course. After a brief conversation about golf I steer the conversation about the education of Pearl and Victor.*

*Mrs Cheong prepares Chinese tea and brings moon cake. Mr Cheong starts: "I am glad to know that you are doing research on such a fascinating topic. It is about time Australians learn about the Asian culture. How come Australians allow their 15-year-olds to start their own lives? Instead of asking my children to do part time work*

*I will work for longer hours and provide them tutors in maths and English... Instead of going to the pub I will like to take my children to play golf... Chinese parents not only encourage their children to work hard in their schoolwork but they are all the time behind them.... You know why the Asians do well in studies? It is because of the culture. Asian families are more cohesive. Children respect their elders and teachers. Family members stay together and help each other. In Australia, parents, I mean many of them, don't care for their children after the age of 15. Children go their own way. Parents don't bother because they don't want to be disturbed. You know the Australians have wrong ideas about education. They think pressure should not be applied on the child. They are wrong. We do our best under pressure. If there is no pressure children do not work hard. Here teachers do not give enough homework. Children at the age of sixteen go on dole. How ridiculous it is. Where is the responsibility of parents? What are they for? I will not allow my children to drop out of studies and go on dole. Unions and dole are buggering this country.*

The above conversation with Mr Cheong revealed that he liked to avail of the opportunities in Australia but at the same time guarded his children against what he would like to call the "ills of the Australian society".

**Parental involvement: "We are always with them"**

Mrs Cheong's considerable energy was effectively channelled into a variety of action modalities, which included book keeping and supervising her children's schoolwork. Both parents wasted no opportunity to instruct their children in responsibility. Their children, in turn, confirmed their parents' insistence upon managing time. The central chord of the Cheong family's ideology was the importance of companionship and sharing. Closely related to the cooperation theme was the value placed on the children's learning to do things for themselves.

Most activities in the family revolved around their children and both parents planned their time for the benefit of their children. Mr Cheong sought to constantly improve the

family circumstances and both parents set high standards for their children. The parents generally used the management of time as a training ground for imbuing their children with responsibility. The parents worked with their children to establish a commitment to study. They constantly invested in educational resources and reminded their children that sacrifice of time on personal comforts was worth their efforts to enjoy a better life later. Mrs Cheong had her own car to take Victor and Pearl to friends' places, libraries and swimming. In fact, she was the architect of all family activities.

By controlling where their children went and when they went, the Cheongs had influenced what and with whom they did things. Through this socialisation, both children had come to sense what the family was, and what they should and might do in it. To Victor and Pearl, what they should not do was expressed just as much as what they should do. They were well aware that their parents meant what they said. What their parents said about the values of Chinese culture and support for their children were closely related to their other child rearing practices. They knew they had to follow their parents' advice to the letter. "They have no choice. They have to do it", Mrs Cheong told me. Once when I asked Victor about the tight schedule his parents had set, his curt reply was "We have no choice. We just do it." And although both parents shared the responsibility in bringing up their children, Mrs Cheong assumed the major part. Victor and Pearl repeatedly and persistently were reminded of their responsibility to respect the wishes of their parents. They knew what behaviour was acceptable. Through constant parental guidance they had developed moral codes and always did what they were told.

Victor followed in his father's tradition by avoiding the 'negative influence of the Aussie kids'. After school hours neither child had any contact with Anglo-Australian children. Family visits were always restricted to other Chinese families. Consequently, the influence of mass media and the Australian peer group was minimal. Victor and Pearl were more influenced by family than by their Chinese or Australian peers.

## "My parents tell me study is the foundation of my future"

A distinctive feature of the Cheong home environment was that Mr Cheong guided the family activities. Both parents held similar views about their children's education and their social and recreational activities. After-school and after-work family activities were well structured and revolved around three areas: their children's education, family sports and, to a lesser extent, involvement in the activities of the Chinese community. Teaching-learning situations at home, for instance, were tightly controlled, in fact, more than in any other family included in this study. The Cheongs' commitment to the education of their children was summed up in the excerpt from an interview:

*R. M: Your son and daughter are already doing so well in maths and English, why do you employ a home tutor?*
*Mr Cheong: Maths and English are very important. In maths they must get above 90% marks. Private tutor helps. You will find most Chinese families value maths.*
*R.M: Earlier you said that you like to protect your children from the "street culture". What do you mean by that?*
*Mr Cheong: (Pointing to the window of the lounge) In this park here so many children come to smoke. Most of them are from Paramount Senior High. They bring bottles of beer. I tell my children "look at these kids. Where are their parents? Maybe in the pub". We tell our children to beware of such kids.*
*R.M: Many of the Anglo-Australian children like to go out with their friends and invite them to their place. I have never seen your children with their friends after school.*

*Mr Cheong: We have put our children in a routine. They must finish their schoolwork before anything else. On Saturday they attend Chinese language class. We take them to restaurants, swimming and to play golf. Yes, they have got some friends.*

In a separate interview Victor told me:

*My parents tell me to study and work hard. They always ask my sister and me when our test or exam is. Most of the time I finish my homework before I watch TV When I have an exam I always go to my parents' room to study so they know I have an exam and won't disturb me.... When my sister or I get bad result they always tell us to study very hard. They restrict our watching of television but when we get good marks they are very happy and proud, and tell us to keep it up. My parents are always aware of everything about us. If there is something on the television which parents do not approve of they tell us not to watch.*

A year later Victor and Pearl gave a similar account of their home life; when in Year 10, Victor decided to choose his subjects for upper school, parental guidance was strong. Victor selected subjects, which led him in the same career as his father. The rationale for selecting Japanese, commerce, accounting and economics given by Mr Cheong was this: "With the advantage of three languages and commerce, accounting and economics, Victor will be well placed to get a good job anywhere in Southeast Asia, if things do not work out in Australia. There are more job opportunities in Southeast Asia". In 1997 Pearl reached Year 10. She also selected similar subjects to Victor, except for the addition of English literature. Pearl wanted to study law and commerce at the University of Western Australia. In 1997 with a TEE score of 368/510 Victor enrolled at Curtin University to do a degree in commerce. He also started part-time work with his father and began playing golf with his father at a private club. Mr Cheong, who wanted Victor to be a doctor, had changed his mind because with a degree in commerce and accounting, his son could join him in his business. In 1999 Pearl obtained 360/510 marks in TEE and had enrolled at university to do a degree in accounting and commerce.

# The Kok Family

**Background**

Tuan Kok had travelled Europe, North America, Oceania and the Southeast Asian region over a period of twelve years as a steward with Singapore Airlines. He had also taken his young family on several overseas trips for holidays. As a young adult Tuan Kok had developed a strong dislike for the highly regimented life in Singapore. He found its socio-political system as oppressive as its hot and humid climate. On his first visit to Perth in 1988 he was therefore captivated by the "pollution-free air and openness" of the city. On the first visit to his family Mr Kok told me:

> *I said to myself, "This is the place for me and for my children." I had the desire to come to Australia. I had the money also. But I did not have the right education...I liked the easy-going life style in Australia. I made up my mind to emigrate to Australia. I did not have the professional qualifications. So I was not sure to get immigration.... However, I applied and was pleased to know that within two months my application was successful. Immediately we decided to sell our apartment and other property.*

In December 1990 Tuan Kok (41), his wife Hwang (37), and sons Lee (11) and Yoo (7) arrived in Perth. A Singaporean friend advised them that in Southside, Paramount Senior High School had a good academic reputation and that many immigrants from Southeast Asian countries had bought houses in the suburb mainly because of this. With the proceeds from the sale of his property Tuan Kok immediately fulfilled his two long-suppressed dreams: a spacious home with swimming pool and two new cars (being fond of cars he enjoys owning an Alpha Romeo). On my third visit to the family Tuan Kok said:

*I don't like Singapore. In Singapore the moment you turn 13 (years of age) you have to have an ID number which remains on all your records including passport, driving licence, and tax form. That is why it is so easy to catch criminals there. Life in Singapore is very stressful and competitive. You work all the time. Everyone is running after money and education. Children at the age of five start getting tutors. There is no social and family life. There are too many public campaigns like courtesy campaign, no-litter campaign. People are forced to do the things they don't believe in. In Singapore you must do better than your best. If you get 90% marks no one likes you. Parents hit their children for not getting 100% marks. The best students are those who get more than 90% marks in three languages. If you are in a mono-language school, then even teachers think you are stupid... Late bloomers are ignored in the race for competition. Children start school at 7 and come home late in the afternoon. Most of them have a private tutor. They have a lot of homework to catch up. They don't have a family life. Many children suffer from depression.*

Mr Kok could not stand competitiveness and the stressful life in Singapore. At my later visit to the Kok family Mr Kok added:

*Even though I was born in Singapore and I have problems in Australia I am not keen to waste my money visiting Singapore. A lot of our relations keep visiting us. They tell us all about it. If the Australian government allows so many people from Singapore will like to emigrate to Australia. People in Singapore have money but they have nowhere to go.*

After their arrival in Perth Mr Kok sponsored his brother who bought a house in the same suburb. Meanwhile each year relations visit for holidays to "escape from the concrete jungle of Singapore". Most of the time during my fieldwork, I found some visitors from Singapore staying with the Kok family.

### Family routine

With her own car, Mrs Kok was a housewife who ferried her children to various places such as school, swimming pool, libraries and the shops. Mr Tuan Kok remained busy in his job as a salesman of second hand cars. Most days he went to work at 7.30 a.m.

and did not return until 6.30. On Saturdays he worked half a day. Lee Kok (son) provided

the following account of his daily life with his family:

> *My Dad will always leave for work at 7 o'clock in the morning and return at 6.30*
> *p.m. in the evening. While that is happening my brother and I will be at school. My*
> *mother stays home and looks after my youngest brother. She takes us and brings*
> *back from the school.... When I come from school I will have a bath, change and*
> *study, normally I do some exercise first. When Dad comes home we eat our dinner*
> *together. After meals we go about our own business. My brother and I both do our*
> *own homework and self study.... On weekends, we would go out to eat at a Chinese*
> *restaurant, maybe once a fortnight.... We get visitors from Singapore quite often.*
> *When they are here we spend a lot of time with them.*

Remarkably, this family routine remained unchanged over a period of three years. Mr

Kok spent most of his weekend time in the maintenance of house and cleaning his cars.

Given the choice, Yoo would spend most of his spare time playing computer games and Lee

would watch television for long hours.

**Educational resources**

Parental investment on educational resources was enormous. The house looked like a

miniature library. It contained a wide range of books and a set of encyclopedia. The family

room contained a big screen TV, stereo, two computers and electronic toys that occupied

the children almost all the time. Here family members interacted with each other most

frequently. Walls were decorated with framed pictures of luxury cars, aeroplanes and

Chinese artefacts. Although there was an abundance of educational resources in the house,

Lee and Yoo used hardware (TV, computer games and CDs) more often than they read the

books. And this was a matter of concern for their parents.

### Bullying at school and discrimination on job

The Koks were "over the moon" when they first got the news that they had been granted permanent residence status in Australia. However, for the Kok family problems started as soon as Lee started schooling and Tuan Kok started to work to support his family. He could not get a job with the airlines. Instead, he picked up jobs in areas in which he wasn't qualified. Mr Kok told me:

> *For eleven months I worked with Kentucky Fried Chicken. I worked six days a week on different shifts. I got fed up with the job. So I resigned. For ten months I did not work.... Then I took up a course as a car sales person and got a job. My boss was so happy with my sincerity and hard work that he gave a similar job to one other person from Singapore.... But after sometime I found my Australian boss was discriminatory. He would ask me to do all the dirty and hard work and would give more chances to an Australian to sell new cars. So I changed my job to another car yard.*

While Tuan Kok experienced racial discrimination at work Lee was bullied at primary school as well as at secondary school. Lee talked about his shattered dream:

> *I was eleven when my family came to Australia. I was excited to live in a new country. At that time, in Singapore, I was very sick because of the stress from too much homework and as all my life at that time I was to study almost three quarters of the day and get good grades. There were many exams and tests. I felt confused...I was taught to study beyond my age. I felt if I didn't study during my free time, I would be losing out on something. My life had been nothing but studying. The only time I felt happy to enjoy myself was when the school holidays were around. When I started school in Perth I found education very relaxed. You could talk to the teacher without any fear. Homework is very little since the responsibility is left entirely to the student in terms of home study... I faced problems like trying to adjust myself because I had no social life and didn't understand people (students) and they didn't understand my situation. So I got bullied a lot and many people spread rumours about me around the neighbourhood. I was also facing culture shock. At school, there was a boy, Ken Lawry (pseudonym) who was a rough person. He sure gave me a hard time. He used to taunt me. When he had finished insulting me, he would hit me several times and then call some of his mates to hurt me physically as well as pass on remarks like "Gook, go back to your little bamboo hut in Singapore and stink there." They would gather about me and start pushing me around from one person to another. And being new to the place and with very little understanding of it I*

*couldn't understand why they were doing this. They were many and they had bigger friends in the high school. They wanted to beat me up. Now I wonder why they were doing this, because absolutely I was no match for them in fighting. I could see no reason why they wanted to pick on me. Could it be just for fun? I really don't know. For many weeks I did not tell my parents. One day my Mum saw me crying in my room. I told her about this boy. When I eventually started high school they came to the same school and harassed me more. One day this kid, Ken Lawry, challenged me to fight. I did not want to fight but he blocked my way and pushed me. I hit him. He started to fight. I hit him on his jaw. He started to bleed. After that many of his mates started to pick on me.*

A year later Lee Kok gave me more information about his experiences at school.

*Well, as time passed I felt more adjusted to the place. I started to mix around with other Asians who had been in Australia for quite some time. I had an awakening inside me. But before this I had to see a psychiatrist for a few months. I was in hospital for three weeks.*

After a year Lee was unsure whether he really would like to stay in Australia with his parents or go back to Singapore to stay with his relations. One lunchtime at school, Lee said to me:

*Only 300 more days in prison. I used to like Australia but after what I have gone through in school I feel it is not my country. With my Chinese face and skin people don't accept me. And I know Dad is also having a bad time on his job. Some employers are racist. Some Australians are very nice but those who have not been outside Australia are narrow-minded.*

What Lee had told me was confirmed by my own observations in school. In 1993 (just before I embarked on this study) Lee was in Year 9 and I was his social studies teacher. In November 1993 he agreed to be included in my research project. I had started to observe him in my class. One day a strongly built Anglo-Australian student pushed Lee. I saw but said nothing. Next day I noticed the same boy deliberately hit Lee at the end of the period but the latter stared at him. I interfered and warned the boy not to do so again. A

few days later, the same boy deliberately stepped on Lee's bag. Fortunately, Lee's

calculator was not broken. I detained the boy and asked him why he stepped on Lee's bag.

"I don't like him", he said without hesitation. I sent the boy to the deputy principal for

disciplinary action and asked Lee why he thought this boy picked on him. He told me this

boy was the same who previously bullied him and that he hit him back. At this point I

decided to ask Lee's parents if they were aware of Lee's problems at school. Subsequent

conversation not only eased my entry into the family but it brought forth an emotion-

charged account from Mrs Kok. Extracts from my field notes sum up what the parents and

Lee had gone through:

> *In Year 8 Lee was referred for psychiatry treatment. He was in hospital for three weeks. Some Australian children who harassed him in primary school picked on him. The same kids who harassed him in primary school. They used to tell him to go to his 'little hut' in Singapore, and a lot of other bad things, which Lee did not tell us. First he would not tell us anything but would come home and hide in his room. He would cry and say 'Why did you bring me here? I want to go back to Singapore'. [Her voice sinks and tears start to stream]. They challenged him to fight. Sometimes they put a nail in the tyre of his bike. His bike was stolen. He became so upset that he did not like to go to school. We told him not to take any notice of the Aussie kids, but they would not leave him alone. When we told him to hit back, he got into even more trouble. Some teachers blamed him saying he was part of the trouble. [She wipes her tears]. Then, he started to have nightmares. He would look at the wall and run to me and say 'This wall is falling on me'. He would sit in front of his food and not eat. He started to day dream [Now she can no longer speak and constantly wipes her tears]. When Lee was behaving like this my husband was having problem with his employer. He was trying to establish himself. He did not show much patience with Lee. My husband is very regimental because his father was the same with him. Sometimes my husband got upset as well. He [husband] was glad to get out of Singapore. He was glad to find a job and buy a house. We were very glad to give our children a good chance to have good education. But when Lee started to have problems like this, we did not know what to do. When Lee came out of the hospital my husband and I met the school psychologist, the guidance officer and the school chaplain. They are nice ladies. The school chaplain suggested that Lee should join the Christian Youth Group and Mega Life [activities and songs by the Christian Group]. The guidance officer encouraged Lee to think positive. Slowly, Lee started to come out of it when he joined Mega life.*

The school psychologist told Lee's teachers to watch out for bullying. Mr Kok spent money on a home gymnasium: " I don't want my children to suffer. I don't want them to pick up fighting. But they must learn to defend themselves and fight for their rights. I have bought muscle building equipment and tell them to be physically strong", Mr Kok told me.

Mrs Kok found inner strength in religious activities and encouraged Lee to participate in youth camps organised by the church. It provided an opportunity for Lee to adjust better to non-Chinese children. Frequent visits from relatives in Singapore provided an emotional and psychological support for Lee. And so that Yoo did not suffer the same way as Lee had, his parents enrolled him in a private school even though they were not really in position to pay extra fees. At the end of 1994, they changed their residence. Rejuvenated, Lee quickly turned into a strong muscular lad. A year later he told me:

> *Mr Malik I really want to be assaulted. If they assault me now they will be very sorry. I will break their arms and give them black eyes. Now I am turned sixteen. I am much stronger now. Most of the kids who used to hassle me have already dropped out of school. One is pushing the trolleys at a shopping centre. In every way I am normal and maybe a bit better in certain respects, and most importantly I have a social life. I owe all this to my parents who sacrificed so much for me. My parents gave me the strength to face the Aussie kids.*

**Parental involvement**

While Tuan Kok remained busy in his frequently changing and unstable jobs, Mrs Kok spent all her time in her children's school-related activities. When Lee was in year 10 the Koks got him a home tutor in maths because he was finding it difficult to concentrate at school, and realising he was not destined for university, encouraged him to select non-TEE subjects for his upper school study program. It was at this point I had another opportunity

to observe the parents' deep concern for the education of their children. During a home

visit towards the end of 1994 I visited the family to interview Mrs Kok. An extract from

the observation and interview with Mrs Kok is given below:

> *I visited the family by appointment. Mr Kok was at work. At home were Mrs Kok and their three sons. After a brief general talk with Yoo and Lee I shared coffee with Mrs Kok. The conversation lasted for two hours (10 to mid-day). During this time Yoo was busy playing computer games and Lee was watching television. Toddler, Andrick, (aged two) kept Mrs Kok busy with educational toys, which were put on a mattress in the family room. She kept on talking to me while at the same time rearranging the toys which Andrick kept on playing and throwing. She sought my advice about the study program of her children.*
>
> *Mrs Kok: Mr Malik as you know Lee had a bad experience at school. We have gone through hell. We came to Australia for the education of our children and to have a good life here. My husband is trying to establish himself. We do not want Yoo to be put down by the Aussie kids. Can you suggest some ways to enrol Yoo at Paramount Senior High School? As you know we are outside the catchment area of Paramount.*
>
> *R. M: Why do you want to enrol Yoo at Paramount when the nearby high school has equally good academic reputation?*
>
> *Mrs Kok: But Paramount has better record of TEE results. Also, Lee has now overcome his problems. He is much stronger and kids don't pick on him any more. If Yoo is in the same school he will have Lee's protection [against the bullies].*
>
> *R. M: How much education would you like Yoo to achieve?*
>
> *Mrs Kok: We are very disappointed about what has happened to Lee. We will not be satisfied if our other two sons do not aim for a university degree. Lee faced language problems and had to adjust in Australia. Yoo started in Year 2 and Andrick was born here. For them language is not the problem. Yoo is doing very well in grade seven. I spend all my time looking after our children, taking them to school, libraries and other places of interest. We have employed private tutors in maths for Yoo and Lee.*

In 1995 Lee enrolled in Year 11 to study subjects leading to TAFE studies. Yoo had

started high school but due to boundary restrictions he could not enrol at Paramount

because by then the Koks had changed their residence. To Yoo, his parents had given an

incentive of a trip to Singapore if he got A grades in all subjects. At the end of 1995 he was

in the top 5% of students and had secured A grades in all subjects. Yoo visited Singapore.

At the end of 1996 Lee had completed Year 12 and enrolled at a TAFE college to obtain a

certificate in horticulture. In 1997 Yoo selected all TEE subjects to study for a degree in commerce either at Murdoch University or the University of Western Australia.

# The Goh Family

## Background

With the introduction of the Bumiputra policy in Malaysia in the 1960s, students of Chinese and Indian origins found themselves disadvantaged because a large proportion of university places were reserved for Malay students. Because of its geographical proximity and high quality education and inexpensive university education, Australia attracted a significant number of Chinese students, including Ming-Sen Goh and Yan Form. Coming from a large poverty-stricken family, and with English language difficulties Ming-Sen was proud of his achievement to get a degree in electrical engineering from Western Australian Institute of Technology (now Curtin University). Unlike Ming-Sen, whom she met in Perth and later decided to marry, Yan Form came from a smaller family, and studied at a convent school in Kuala Lampur. During her studies in Perth for a diploma in nursing she did not face any language problems. After completing their studies the couple returned to Malaysia with the desire to return to Perth as permanent residents.

In Malaysia, Ming-Sen's and Yan Form's high qualifications counted for nothing because Malays were given preference. Worried about the life chances of their children in Malaysia the couple decided to emigrate to Australia. Mrs Goh had other reasons. She had been educated with an English language medium of instruction at a convent school and was

socialised in a family, that was exposed to the Western life style. After her marriage she

found it very difficult to live in her husband's big traditional Chinese family. Thus she

encouraged her husband to move to Australia.

### "Chinese people like to be their own boss"

With their two children, Tein (5) and Chi Chen (2), the Gohs emigrated to Australia

in 1980. With their Australian qualifications and proceeds from the sale of their property

they faced minimal hardships. Partly because of her fluency in English and good

communication skills, and partly because of the shortage of nurses, Yan Form got a nursing

job within two weeks of her arrival in Australia. After working in 'odd jobs' for six months

Ming-Sen got a job as a computer technician at a tertiary institution where he worked for

twelve years. In 1994 Ming-Sen made a big decision when he resigned from his job and

persuaded his wife to do the same. After resigning from a well-paid job (combined income

of $80,000) Ming Sen experimented with a number of jobs in an "ethnic economy"

(discussed earlier) such as selling spices at weekends at the vegetable markets; starting a

poultry farm in Kuala Lampur (through his brother based in Kuala Lampur), and working as

a travel agent. He gave somewhat conflicting explanations for his change of jobs. "My

Australian boss does not like the Chinese people. For 12 years I remained on the same

salary... I thought I could get more money by getting into the import and export business...

Chinese people like to be their own bosses. I liked to start my own business so I asked my

wife to help me." Eventually, by the beginning of 1995 the Gohs had bought a newsagency

as a family business. Even though monetarily the family was worse off and they were

working for longer hours, the Gohs were happy because now they were the boss of their

own business. For five years the Goh family lived in a predominantly working class suburb. In 1986 they built a house on the fringe of Southside in the catchment area of Paramount Senior High School. The academic reputation of Paramount Senior was the main reason the family moved to Southside. Located in a quiet cul-de-sac, the Goh house was well furnished with a mix of modern consumer durables and Chinese antiques and artefacts.

**Family routine**

Even though the Gohs had a big collection of Chinese artefacts and literature they also shared a number of Australian values. Unlike the Kwangs and the Koks, the Goh family did not insist on taking shoes off before entering the house. In spite of most of the family network consisting of Chinese people from Singapore and Malaysia, Chi Chen and Tein had Anglo-Australian friends, which their parents felt comfortable about.

At home the Gohs communicated with each other both in Chinese and English, and their children always spoke to their parents in English. Family acculturation in the host society was also evident in daily and holidays routines. Coming from work it was not unusual for the Gohs to sit in the lounge with a beer and put on some relaxing Western music while Tein played her stereo loud in her room and Chi Chen played computer games with his Australian friends.

During summer and Easter breaks the Gohs sometimes took their children to country coastal towns to enjoy fishing and the beach. Moreover, Mrs Goh expressed no objection to

children marrying Australians, even though her preference was for Chinese partners. Mr Goh also had similar views. Chi Chen told me:

> *Probably my two best friends are James and Peter (non-Chinese). Peter is in Year 11 and wants to be an architect. I met him through Kung-Fu training. He became my Lion-Dance partner and a good friend. He likes to surf and roller-blade. He also plays guitar and usually takes me to the beach and we surf. James likes scuba diving and cliff jumping. Usually we study together, and play computer games. They are good students.*

Likewise, Tein's best friends were non-Chinese. They all wanted to study at university for professional degrees. Tein socialised with them to see movies and go ice-skating.

Although the Goh parents put no restrictions on their children's mixing with Anglo-Australian children, most family activities related essentially to Chinese things. On Saturdays Ming-Sen taught Tai Chi from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Chi Chen attended Chinese language classes and Kung-Fu, and Tein learnt Chinese dance. At home they conversed with their grandmother in Chinese. There was a big collection of Chinese movies and Chinese books, which their children used sparingly. A year later (1995) Chi Chen became interested in the Lion Dance. The family frequently dined at Chinese restaurants.

When the Gohs got jobs they sponsored Mr Goh's mother to come to Australia. She then helped in the household chores and looked after Tein and Chi Chen. Most of the time Mrs Goh came home around 4 p.m. Although the parents monitored their children's television watching time, they also encouraged them to watch selected television programs. Family discussions on current topics took place on a regular basis.

**"We are not fussy about our children mixing with Aussie kids"**

The Gohs' first home was located in a low socio-economic area. During that time they did not allow their children to mix with the Australian children. As a reflective child, Chi Chen told me:

> *My parents always guarded us against foul language. They used to tell us that in this area there are many bad families. They don't have control over their children. In these families there are lots of fights. We are Chinese. Chinese children must respect their parents and elderly people in the family. They used to say the things like, "We are soon going to move to a better area where there will be lots of good Chinese kids. My mother used to say, "be careful of the street culture", although I did not know what she meant.*

Although Tein occasionally talked back to her mother, both parents were relaxed with their children. Of the four families the Gohs were the most liberal in their outlook, allowing their children to mix most freely with the Anglo-Australian children. Mrs Goh told me:

> *We are not so fussy about our children mixing with Aussie kids, but we keep an eye on them. After her TEE, Tein has started to mix with boys more freely. I tell my husband that she has to stand on her own two feet. We have become a bit more liberal. She goes with a Chinese boy, not as boy friend, but a Platonic love. He comes to our house. He studies at Canning College where Tein is repeating Year 12. Sometimes Tein talks to this boy on phone for more than an hour. My husband then gets annoyed and yells at her. Chi Chen too is a devil. He loves girls, but to him study always comes first.*

When I asked Chi Chen about parental restrictions his prompt answer was, "No restrictions; actually I have more freedom than many of the Chinese children I know of. I always complete my homework and sometimes then I go out until late in the evening. My parents trust me".

**Family room is a miniature library**

In terms of cultural capital and artefacts the house had a big collection of Chinese souvenirs, Chinese books, a big drum, and a model of a lion. On the walls were a number of pictures of Confucius with writings in Chinese language. Next to the television and video there were a number of Chinese movies. The family room was stocked with a large number of books on a wide range of subjects, two big dictionaries, atlases, a set of encyclopedia, general knowledge books and books of short stories on the Chinese culture. A white board, two computers and other electrical appliances were kept in the family room-cum-lounge. In addition to a big television set in the lounge, Chi Chen had a small television set in his bedroom.

**"We are not very pushy parents but we talk to them about the value of education"**

High parental commitment to the education of their children was reflected in each facet of family life. Investment in educational resources and parental involvement in their children's education and ethnic culture were the striking features of the Goh family. In a number of interviews with both parents I found that their interest in their children's education was strong and persuasive rather than "too pushy". Parents saw education as the principal means of status attainment. At home they devised a reward system for their children. For instance, Chi Chen told me that his parents had set a reward for him if he got an A grade in every subject and even higher rewards if he got above 90% marks. Excerpts

from interviews with the parents encapsulated their concern for the education of their

children.

> *R. M: What are the main goals you have set for your children?*
> *Mrs Goh: To give good education and to ensure that they keep some Chinese values.*
> *R. M: Which Chinese values do you like your children to preserve?*
> *Mr Goh: (smiling) You know family is very important to us. They must respect the elderly people. They should work hard in their school work.*
> *Mrs Goh: We don't mind them to mix with the Australian kids, but they must not mix with the wrong crowd.*
> *R. M: What do you mean by wrong crowd?*
> *Mrs Goh: The kids who roam around the streets with no aims, vandalising the public places. Mostly these are the Australian (white) kids. There are some spoiled Chinese kids too. Some Chinese kids become Australian kids too soon. They are neither Australians nor Chinese. Parents of these kids are very worried.*
> *R. M: How do you stop your children from mixing with the wrong crowd?*
> *Mrs Goh: To be quite honest with you it is not easy. Chi Chen has more Aussie friends than Chinese friends. Fortunately, they are good in studies. We know Chi Chen goes to their homes and they visit him. We don't mind. But with Tein we are stricter. We don't allow her to go out very often.*
> *R. M: How much education would you like your children to achieve?*
> *Mr Goh: Tein is lazy like her Dad (smiles). If she cannot go to university she must study for some secretarial course at TAFE college. Chi Chen is smart. He must get a university degree. We like him to study medicine.*
> *R. M: How do you motivate your children to achieve the goals you have set for them.*
> *Mrs Goh: We are not very pushy parents. We talk to them about the value of education. We tell them how lucky they are to get all the facilities and our support for their education.*
> *Mr Goh: One day I took Chi Chen to the university library to show to him how hard working the Chinese children are (2 January, 1994).*

In response to the question, "What do you intend to do in your life"? Tein and Chi Chen told me that they wanted to pursue studies at university. Tein wanted to be an accountant or to find a job in hotel management [hospitality industry]. Chi Chen was very keen to be an architect but his Dad told him that there were not many job opportunities for architects. So he had decided to study physics at the university of Western Australia.

I visited the family a month later. Tein had got her TEE results. She secured 263.3/510 marks and was unable to secure a place in a university course. In a philosophical tone Mr Goh said, "It is not the end of the world. She can do a secretarial or accounting course at TAFE". Tein insisted to repeat Year 12 in order to improve her TEE score. Mrs Goh said, "If you want to repeat you will have to get a minimum of 80% marks. I will nag you. I don't care what you say. I want 80% marks".

In November 1994 I checked Tein's and Chi Chen's school progress. In school-based assessment she had secured 83% marks. However, her exam scores were, by parents' standard, low: English B grade (65%) maths C grade (61%) accounting, C grade (59%), economics, C grade (49%), geography, C grade (51%). By contrast, Chi Chen had got A grades in each subject and had selected six challenging TEE subjects to study for his TEE. A few weeks before Tein's final TEE I observed both children's study pattern at their home. They had taken studies as their top priority. Excerpts from the field notes revealed that they had internalised their parents' expectations.

*Now Tein goes to study at night in Murdoch University library. All her friends are Chinese. Quite often I see her in the library up to 10.30 p.m. Sometimes I see her on Sundays as well. Parents tell me that they are quite satisfied with her efforts. Chi Chen has become very involved in Lion Dance. All the members of the Lion Dance are university students studying medicine, engineering, commerce and accounting. In an interview with Mr Goh I come to know that Chi Chen is greatly influenced by his friends who perform Lion Dance. His two best friends are studying medicine. Mr Goh tells me that Chi Chen has changed his mind. He wants to study medicine. Two weeks before exam Chi Chen had increased his study time not because parents had told him to do so. He tells me [and I confirm through school record] that in maths he got 95% marks. Next time he wants to secure 100%. He wants to beat the top student. Parents do not expect any house hold chores from their children nor do they expect them to help them in their news agency business.*

In January 1995 Tein had got her TEE results. She secured 295/510 marks and had

managed to get into a business course at Edith Cowan University. At this stage I wanted to

find out why Chi Chen had become an outstanding student and Tein was a mediocre one.

Mrs. Goh told me:

> *Chi Chen will do his homework first. When he studies he concentrates. He will*
> *always try his best to produce good work. About his school work we do not have to*
> *remind him. He tries to look for information from different sources. When Chi Chen*
> *settles on work he concentrates. He gets annoyed with himself if he cannot complete*
> *the work. He is more methodical (than Tein). He asks for our opinion, consults*
> *different books and aims at doing good work. He is much easier to get through.*
> *Once he starts doing something he does not give up until he is fully satisfied. Tein is*
> *lazy. Sometimes she pretends to be studying but in actual fact she does not*
> *concentrate. If the homework is given to her she finishes but she does it in bits and*
> *pieces. She needs many reminders to settle on her work. In her room she pretends to*
> *study but she falls asleep. If I keep on nagging she listens with one ear and throws*
> *with the other. Sometimes she argues and talks back (12 December 1994).*

**Parental involvement**

At weekends the Goh parents always involved their children in activities like

attending Chinese school on Saturday, Chinese dance, lion dance, Tai Chi. In fact, Ming-

Sen was an instructor of Tai Chi. The parents did weekend activities as a family rather than

following their individual pursuits. At the same time children were provided all the fun

games like skate boards, bicycles, and a basketball practice ring. In the Goh family the

parents' main strategy was to put their children in the company of high achieving Chinese-

Australian children and frequently reminding them of some role models. Motivated by

parents and extended by the competitive peer group, Tein successfully enrolled at university

and Chi Chen became the second top student in Year 11 (1995). Chi Chen described his

parents' involvement:

*My parents bought a new set of World book Encyclopedia and Science Encyclopedia. It encourages me a lot to read and study more. They encourage me to go to the library more often and they always remind me to revise over my day's work or finish all my homework. They have bought a computer with a word processor of the best sort.... My parents only usually talk to me about school work.... Mainly only close friends and parents influence me.*

The parents gave a lot of attention to cultivate good work habits for Chi Chen and Tein from a very young age. Even though Chi Chen had been an outstanding student in high school, his parents always hired a private tutor in maths. Tein was provided a tutor in maths and English. Reading and teaching sessions at home were quite common. As a teenager Chi Chen possessed the insight and judgment necessary to carry on a smooth familial relationship. Independence and excellence in studies were the characteristics Chi Chen was currently enjoying. With an abundance of educational resources and strong socialisation into academic activities, Chi Chen had a high degree of self-motivation and direction. In Year 11 as a positive thinker he believed that he could attain high grades to go for medicine. In mid-semester exam of Year 12 with an aggregate score of 88% Chi Chen was well on the course to achieve his goal. And to the surprise of his parents and teachers he was doing it quite comfortably with no sign of stress.

In 1996 Chi Chen, predictably, obtained 457/510 marks in TEE. He was eligible to select any course of his choice but decided not to study medicine. Instead, he enrolled to do a degree in environmental engineering at the University of Western Australia. In 1997 he had obtained A grades in all the units.

# Summary

Stories gathered from parents and children reveal that although each family created a unique learning environment, there are some common strands, such as the issue of parental concern for the education of their children. Reasons to emigrate, parents' experience in their native as well as host country, and children's perceptions of their parents' financial as well as psychological sacrifice appear to be the main factors which have influenced children's positive attitude toward schooling.

In their childhood these parents experienced a period of colonialism and economic hardships which they had to go through in order to achieve their education. Also, they realised the importance of Western-style of education, which was introduced by the colonisers. When their countries got independence the national policies and local politics favoured certain groups of people and these families realised that the life chances of their children would be blocked. For instance, the national policy of Malaysia in favour of Bumiputras, and the handover of Hong Kong to China, motivated the Gohs, and Cheongs from Malaysia and the Kwangs from Hong Kong to emigrate to Australia. Restrictions on personal freedom and the oppressive climate of Singapore were the reasons given by the Koks to emigrate to Australia.

Australia, on the other hand, lured these families. Without any exception, parents in these families stated that freedom of expression, more educational opportunities for their children, and the relaxed life-style in Australia motivated them to emigrate. In fact, before these families decided to emigrate they had visited Australia a few times. Mr Cheong and Mr and Mrs Goh had spent a few years as students in Australia. They were fully aware of

the racial and language related problems they and their children would encounter if they decided to emigrate. But they rationalised that benefits would outweigh the problems in the host country.

Children from these families had a clear disadvantage in English and faced social adjustment problems at the start of schooling in Australia but had the advantage of very supportive parents who wanted them to excel academically. Supportive and demanding homes were beneficial to them in a number of ways. First, their parents held the notion that with hard work in school work their children could excel in studies and aspire to professional degrees, leading the way to better paid jobs. Compared to their native countries parents realised that Australia was a fairer society with less competition. Their parents believed that with Australian qualifications their children could get better jobs in their native countries in case they had to go back. Perhaps, parents were led by this belief to encourage their children to go for more technical jobs with international demands. Such technical jobs demanded less oral skills, which could benefit them in securing jobs in the English speaking countries.

Second, parents brought with them substantial financial capital which enabled them to buy a house in a predominantly middle class suburb, to equip the house with modern amenities, and to invest in the educational resources of their children. This financial capital matched cultural capital. That is, parents were predisposed to the value of education and the virtue of hard work. In their daily interactions with their children parents socialised them to take school work seriously.

Third, it appears that the experiences of these families in the host society and their children's perceptions of their parents' frustration hardened their belief in the value of education. Parents found it hard to get suitable jobs commensurate with their qualifications and experience. So they settled on the types of jobs they would have hesitated to do in their native countries or they became self-employed. Their children encountered problems at school. But these parents invested time and money in the provision of educational resources for their children. They helped their children in three ways. First, by providing educational resources they made their intentions clear that education was important. Second, during the period of adjustment the parents gave moral support to their children and protected them from what they called the 'bad habits of the Aussie kids'. A major concern of these families was that their children were losing the 'Chinese values' such as not to question parents' authority. Third, they kept their children mainly under the influence of their social network by encouraging them to participate in various activities organised by the Chinese community.

Characteristically, these activities included attending Chinese language classes, Lion Dance, Kung-Fu, Tai Chi, swimming, playing golf, dining at Chinese restaurants, playing computer games, visiting Chinese families and watching Chinese movies. The parents themselves sacrificed their own comforts and interests for the education of their children. Time spent together helped their children in two ways: they were more influenced by their parents rather than by their peers; the parents succeeded in socialising their children in Chinese values. The school work of their children remained central to their daily routine.

On their part, children obliged their parents by working hard and achieving high grades. Inspiration to work hard came from children's internalisation of their parents' sacrifice, and realisation that with good grades they had a real possibility to achieve professional degrees which would stand them in good stead in Australia as well as back home in case they decided to return. While the parents wanted their children to be autonomous and independent at an early age they did not allow them to be socially independent while at school, the Gohs being an exception.

To a varying degree these families succeeded in creating the 'inner anxiety' or 'examination fever' in their children. Once the parents realised that their children were already putting in a one hundred per cent effort in their school work they stopped pressuring them further. For instance, the Cheongs were more worried about the eye sight of their daughter who had become 'addicted' to book reading. In Year 11 and 12 Hongzia had perpetual headaches because of loss of sleep. She came close to a nervous breakdown in an attempt to fulfil the dying wish of her father. Her major complaint was 'I cannot sleep. I have lost my appetite'. Chi Chen camouflaged his behaviours very well. At school he would give the impression that he was taking school work lightly but on a number of occasions his parents told me that studying up to 2 a.m. was not unusual for him.

Except for Lee Kok, all of the students had selected quantitative and science subjects in Year 11 and 12. In lower school they also studied Japanese. One parent gave the rationale for this approach: "Maths is the most important subject... It is important for them to learn Chinese otherwise they will lose contact with their culture. If they learn Japanese, Chinese and English and get a good degree they can find good jobs in any Asian country".

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# STUDENTS' SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

**Introduction**

The descriptive account of the subjects'family life given in Chapters Five and Six

conveys the message that home plays a key role in shaping the life chances of these high

school students. It is assumed that how the students adjust to high school is related both to

what happens to them out of school and inside the school. This chapter investigates how

the school experiences of students, teacher-student interactions and students' own

perceptions of schooling play an important role in their educational outcomes. To examine

how seriously these students take their school work, the dynamics of interaction between

students and teachers and among students in classrooms and in the school generally, are

described. The events are also portrayed from the viewpoints of students and teachers,

because what goes on inside the class is the result of teachers and students interacting with

each other in ways determined by their perceptions of the situation. As outlined in Chapter

Two, the interactionist perspective purports that the world "out there" is not fixed but

constructed by teachers and students using clues given to them by others and interpreted in

the light of their previous experience.

To conduct this research at Paramount Senior High, I concentrated mostly on

academic teaching. "Subjects on the periphery" (Hammersley, 1990) of the curriculum,

except for physical education, were observed much less. My decision to concentrate on the

academic subjects coincides with the "central value system" (Ball, 1981) of the academic orientation of Paramount Senior High. Although some information was collected from teachers and other school personnel, the bulk of my fieldwork experience was with students. Information about participating students was gathered on their classroom behaviour, work output in class and their lunch time activities. Eight students, I prefer to call them "the class of 1996" (followed from Year 9 to Year 12) was in my social studies classes for two years (Year 9 and 10). Clint, Chris, and Tein completed high school in 1995; Krista completed in 1997; Miran in 1998 and Pearl in 1999. These eight students were studied more intensively than other students from the same families were.

In the strict sense of the word at Paramount Senior High there were no 'sub-cultures' (as identified by Willis, 1977, Walker, 1988 and Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Multiple 'groupings' of students based on ethnicity, gender and common interests and ability were very common. I became aware of such groupings when I started to observe the behavioural pattern of these students. Most Chinese-Australian students tended to sit at recess and lunchtime in their own groups often divided on a gender basis. They tended to sit in the main quadrangle, foyers and in front of the library. At lunchtime Chinese-Australian students were over-represented in the library, computer rooms and science laboratory.

By contrast, Anglo-Australian students tended to be in mixed groups of boys and girls. Generally, they congregated in greater numbers near the canteen, school oval and in the secluded corners of the school. During recess and lunch time on most days for four years Glenn sat next to the canteen, an area rated by teachers on yard supervision as the most rowdy, noisy and littered. Chris socialised with his mates in an area that was labelled

as the "smokers' den". Clint was found mostly in the school oval practising basketball. Ben's favourite place was either the basketball court or the front lawn of the school, where he engaged in mock violence or arm wrestling with his mates. Krista, accompanied by her friends, flirted with boys in an isolated corner of the school. Rachel enjoyed conversations with her high achieving female friends, some of whom were Chinese-Australians. Lee Kok was a loner who spent most lunch times in the library, generally reading comic books.

At one stage, the deputy principal had rostered male teachers on yard supervision in areas where Clint, Chris, Ben, Glenn and Krista spent their recess and lunch time, as on two occasions two female teachers had complained that they had been sworn at, a female student had been spat at, some physically weak and Chinese-Australian students had been bullied, and some teachers had reported cases of smoking. On a number of occasions I found spots where students had urinated in doorways and left cigarette butts. On one occasion I found a match box containing a few dry leaves of marijuana.

## Anglo-Australian Students

Unlike the Chinese-Australians, Anglo-Australian students were much less homogeneous in their approach to school. In fact, each of them had a unique combination of characteristics which were not reducible to simple generalities. From the same family Rachel and Chris were at opposite ends of the continuum: the former being academically-oriented and the latter impatient to leave. In the Morrison family Clint and Glenn disliked school, hated their teachers and anything academic. However, all of them were very keen on sports, outdoor and leisure activities.

Students with difficulty in literacy and numeracy were labelled as 'students at risk'. Glenn started at Paramount Senior High as a focus student (low achieving student needing extra help) in English and remedial in maths. Based on his performance at primary school level, he was put in a low- achieving class[14] for three years. To the delight of his parents but to the agony of his teachers, Glenn managed to stay at school till the end of Year 12. He summed up his attitude towards school and teachers: "school sucks.... My teachers (maths and science) can drop dead.... The only subject I like is manual arts". Clint (Glenn's older brother) was an average student in Year 8. During his five years at Paramount he excelled in sports, enjoyed non-educational activities such as peer group leadership and helping people in the community through school-sponsored activities. In most subjects he achieved C and D grades, except for physical education where he got A grades. In Year 11 he started as a TEE student but changed to non-TEE subjects in Year 12.

Before I embarked on this study I taught Ben Morgan in Year 8 (1992). At that time he was a slightly above average student. Unlike Glenn, [who was in the same class] he was a polite, good-natured student who usually used to complete given tasks in class. Ben was performing at B level in academic subjects and A level in woodwork and physical education. In five years Ben turned out to be a super athlete and was included in the state baseball team. Although Ben wanted to emulate his successful brother who excelled academically as well as in sports, he was not so much committed to his studies. In Year 11

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[14] At Paramount before students enrol in Year 8 'low achievers' are screened on the basis of their primary school performance. They are taught in a class by less experienced teachers. Most of these students came from blue -collar families. Their teachers had low expectations of them, gave them little homework and rarely checked if it was given. Most of these students didn't take their homework seriously.

he surprised his parents as well as teachers when he decided to select all TEE subjects such as chemistry and higher maths. Mr Morgan was very satisfied with Ben's choice of subjects, but Mrs Morgan maintained that Ben was lazy, and did not have enough ability to handle harder subjects. She turned out to be right in this when Ben decided to switch over to what teachers called more "watered down" TEE and TAFE subjects in Year 12.

Krista Smith had completed Year 8 in a country school. In most subjects she had attained A grades. Change from a country school to a city school, domestic fights between her parents, and between Krista and her mother, meant Krista became increasingly peer group-oriented. The more Krista struggled to socialise with her friends the more frequently her mother grounded her. Krista rated her home life as boring and monotonous but enjoyed being at school. Although academically she was performing very well, she dropped out of school while she was in Year 11 and started to live independently. After a break from the school for a year, she re-enrolled at Paramount Senior High to pursue her studies with minor changes in study program. In 1997 Krista completed the TEE with an impressive score of 364/510.

Chris Marshall was hyperactive in primary school. At high school he performed at an average level in most subjects and above average in non-academic subjects. However, there was a dramatic change in his attitude to school work when he started in the upper school. In Year 12 he switched over to a mixture of TEE and non-TEE subjects. At this stage surfing and basketball became his passion in life. Since most of his mates had dropped out of school without completing Year 12, Chris lost interest in studies to the great disappointment of his parents and teachers. He failed to graduate.

By contrast, the parents considered Rachel Marshall a "perfect child" in the family and for her teachers she was a "pleasure to teach who put in 100% effort into her school work"; at the same time she had a very keen interest in netball. In most subjects she obtained A grades until she started facing problems in Year 11 where she could not handle the pressure of higher maths, physics and chemistry. Consequently, in Year 12 she decided to drop higher maths and physics. Her parents did not object. In fact, they were much relieved because now Rachel would not be under too much stress. Rachel's parents reasoned, "Why should she study higher maths and physics if she wants to be an interpreter of Japanese?"

At Paramount, the students included in this study rarely met each other. They did not belong to the same group. I never saw them together in any type of the activity. They had their own group, dens and interests. In the remainder of this chapter I will provide a thickly descriptive account of these students to demonstrate how the school policies, teachers' perceptions of students, and students' own perceptions of teachers and school affect their future life chances.

## Glenn Morrison

I came in contact with Glenn a year before I started this study. A senior teacher of social studies frequently complained about his disruptive behaviour in class. When Glenn became one of my case studies, I asked him if he liked his teachers and school. He made unspeakable racist comments about one of his teachers and alleged another was 'picking on me all the time'. The only teachers he had some kind words for were his physical education

and manual arts teachers. When Glenn was in Year 10 most of his classmates called him an 'idiot' and 'arse hole'. Most teachers labelled him a 'foul mouth'. Based on his performance at primary school he was considered a 'student at risk', and this label was legitimated at Paramount with an Inter D-score (IQ score) of $35^{15}$. For three years he was in low achieving classes and in the final two years studied non-TEE subjects.

At recess and lunchtime, Glenn sat near the canteen, the noisiest and most crowded place in the school. Accompanied by others Glenn could be heard and noticed by teachers on yard supervision. He would ridicule female teachers with derogatory and unsavoury comments, and bully younger students. Even when the rubbish bin was a few steps from where he sat, he would routinely throw the wrappers from potato chips anywhere other than in the bin. If a teacher on yard supervision asked him to pick up rubbish he would defiantly refuse saying, "why should I pick it up? I didn't drop it." This pattern of behaviour matched his behaviour in the classroom where I caught him a number of times, either leaving a squashed apple hidden on his chair or throwing a screwed paper on the seats of other students. One day on yard supervision, I noticed Glenn sitting on a bench in his favourite spot accompanied by his mates. For a few minutes I observed his behaviour from a distance. It involved passing unsavoury comments (e.g., you are flat) to girls, and intimidating physically weaker children. From a distance Glenn saw me and shouted,

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[15] IQ scores were based on students' performance in standardised tests prepared by the Australian Council of Educational Research. The school psychologist and post-compulsory Year Coordinator administered these tests. IQ scores were used as a measure of students' ability against which their performance was measured.

"Rambo when are you coming to my house mate?" It was then I approached him and we

had the following conversation:

> *Glenn: Did you get pissed at the weekend, Mr Malik? My Mum and Dad planned to go to the city. We had a piss party at my place. You should have joined us, [they all laugh and I am a bit embarrassed and feel insulted but I am used to Glenn's way of talking].*
> *R. M.: That would have been good but you did not invite me. Do you drink?*
> *Glenn: Piss off Mr Malik I do everything [loud laugh]*
> *R.M. : What do you mean by everything?*
> *Glenn: You know booze, grass and ummm. [He looks at some girls and gives a big laugh].*
> *Kane: [Glenn's mate] You should have seen him one night at my place. He drank five cans of beer and then spirit. He was kind of pissed off, cause he didn't know what he was doing. We were all pissed.... wasted man.*
> *Glenn: Mr Malik, have you seen blue movies? Come tonight we will show you [they all laugh and hover around me like bees].*
> *R. M.: Where do you get them from?*
> *Glenn: We have older friends who give them to us. And sometimes grass man. Have you got stoned and pissed Mr Malik? [laughter]. As other students begin to collect I leave the group. Glenn shouts: "See you Rambo. You are nice to talk to".*

Towards the end of the year when students unofficially come to know that their final

assessment has been taken, teachers invariably find it hard to keep students focused on the

task so in the last week give them fun exercises like word sleuth, group exercises and allow

them to watch videos. For four days of the last week of one academic year Glenn played

truant from school. When he turned up the last day he told me, "I went to watch cricket and

watch videos at home. Mum and Dad know there is no teaching during the last week of the

term." That day I found it very hard to keep him busy.

In Year 10 Glenn was in my social studies class. In this class there were 32 students

of mixed ability, ranging from outstanding performers like Hongzia and Victor to low

achievers like Ben and Glenn. Krista was also in the class and so were nine 'Asian'

students. My understanding was that I had a good rapport with students, however, the

Chinese-Australian students thought I was too lenient with Ben and Glenn. Normally I

allowed students to sit with friends. They were moved around only when they were asked

to do group discussion or when Ben and Glenn caused a disruption. Apart from the fact

Ben and Glenn did not like academic work there was little in common between the two of

them. In fact, Ben, a top athlete and popular, thought of Glenn as an 'idiot'who no one

liked to sit next to (except Kane and Alan who were also both disruptive and low

achievers). Glenn and his mates, consequently, always sat in a corner next to the back wall

just behind five 'Asian' girls who did not interact with them. Four Chinese-Australian boys

sat in the front row including Victor and friends who sat next to my desk. Here is a typical

account of the behaviour of five students in my class:

> *Today's lesson is on the climatic zones and vegetation of Australia. I have provided work sheets to all the students. For fifteen minutes I give instructions on how to draw climatic graphs and interpret the information. During instruction time everyone listens patiently except Glenn and his friends. Glenn interrupts twice by making a squeaky noise with his chair and hits Kane with a ruler. I warn him with a stern look, which he does not take seriously. After giving the instructions I ask the students to get on with the exercise. While they start doing the work I decide to play the role of an observer.*

> *11:20 - 11:35*
> *Teacher gives instructions. During this time Victor (sitting next to my desk, with two other Chinese-Australian students) listens with full attention. Ben (last seat in the middle row) yawns four times and continually whispers. Krista (middle of the second row) listens but talks frequently to her friend sitting next to her. Glenn (corner seat next to the back wall) has a ruler in his hand and whenever he notices that I'm not looking at him, he flicks the pieces of chewed rubber. I know what he is doing but do not interfere unless his disruptive behaviour prevents others from listening. On one occasion the piece of chewed rubber lands on the head of Hongzia (sitting in front of him with other high achieving Chinese girls). She turns around and gives him a dirty look. Glenn puts his head down to pretend that he did not do it. His friends smile. I shout at Glenn to cut it out. He says with a smile, "I am sorry." After five minutes he rocks on the chair which produces a squeaky sound. When I look at him he says, "I*

can't help it, I am not doing it on purpose." After three minutes he flicks the chewed rubber again. I approach him and confiscate it.

*11:35 - 11:40*
Students are asked to get on with the assigned activity. Victor and Hongzia get on with it straight away. Ben talks to his friends. I serve him a reminder. Krista gets on with the work but is interrupted by Ben who says something to Krista, which makes her laugh. Glenn gets up from his seat to borrow a coloured pencil from Krista. On the way he shakes the desk of one of the Chinese girls (who is working studiously). They give him a dirty look but Glenn's mates laugh (in appreciattion of his antics). I tell Glenn to get on with his work. "Sorry Mr Malik", he says.

*11:45 - 11:50*
Glenn puts his pencil in his mouth and starts looking at the ceiling. I ask him if he needs help. "No, I am okay", he says. He starts sharpening his pencil. As he gets up to use the rubbish bin, which is next to the door, he says something to Krista, which makes her laugh. On the way back he says something to her again. She responds by turning towards him and saying something, which I do not hear. Glenn has not started the work.

*11:50 - 11:55*
I get up from my desk to ensure that Glenn must start his work immediately. He makes a start. Victor and Hongzia are working with full concentration. Krista is working but at the same time every now and then writes notes on the cover page of her friend's file that is sitting next to her. They giggle. Ben has not made much progress but he is working.

*11:55 - 12:00*
I approach Glenn's seat to check his work. He says, "I am having a problem, I can't do it, Mr Malik." I explain the procedure to him. While I am explaining Ben is gossiping with the boys next to him. On being served a reminder he starts to work.

*12:00 - 12:05*
Glenn starts to work. I move to Ben's desk to check his work. I help him. He understands the exercise and continues.

*12:05 - 12:10*
I stand next to Glenn to put pressure on him to get on with his work. He stands up to borrow a ruler from Krista.

*12:10 - 12:15*
By now most students have finished the exercise. Ben, Glenn and his mates have made little progress.

*12:15 - 12:20*
*I ask the students to pack up and clean their desks before they leave the room. I tell*
*Ben and Glenn to complete the exercise at home. While Glenn leaves the room he*
*approaches Krista and looks at her seat. After the students have left the room I look*
*at Krista's chair. On the chair there was a graffiti of male organs. I wondered if this*
*was the source of laughter and Glenn's acts to push himself backward and forward*
*on his chair while looking at Krista.*

Five months later the work habits of these students remained unchanged. The above

observations were typical of Glenn's behaviour and quite often I found myself in a

dilemma. If I took a strong disciplinary stand with him I risked losing what small rapport I

had with him. If I allowed him to do what he wanted to do, his disruptive behaviour upset

the class. Being lenient with him also meant Chinese-Australian students thought I was not

strong enough to discipline him. Generally speaking, I avoided discussing his attitude

toward work and his behaviour in my class with his parents and, except for his physical

education and manual arts teachers, most other teachers rated him 'attention seeking,

disruptive and rude', and quite often teachers complained to his parents about him. Here is

what one senior science teacher told me:

*Glenn greets you but he is not sincere. He lies. Never does his homework. I don't*
*like him at all. He is an 'idiot', an 'arse hole'. With his long hair, braces on his*
*teeth, shabbily dressed and foul month who would like him? Do you? He will stuff*
*around all the time. He doesn't make an effort. I have asked the other teachers.*
*They all say the same thing about him. I gave him homework and he said he had*
*done it. When I checked it I found he hadn't done it. I detained him at lunchtime and*
*he said, "I will be late for physical recreation." "Whose problem is it? You said you*
*had done the work but you hadn't. So finish it at lunch time", I told him. "But I will*
*be late for physical recreation", he argued. "That is your problem", I told him*
*again. He gave me a dirty look and made a half-hearted attempt to work.*

Another teacher gave a similar account:

*The other day on the phone I told Glenn's mother her son was a shit. Of course, I did*
*not use the word shit. I said to her, "He is going to fail, because he doesn't try." His*

*mother said, "I think it is a personality clash, I think he tries as hard as he can." "But I have spoken to other teachers as well; they all say the same thing about him", the teacher said.*

The same teacher invited me to his class to see how Glenn behaved. I accepted the invitation and later recalled the following:

*Glenn's teacher is from the Middle East. Some students find his accent hard to follow. His approach is authoritarian and his favourite method of teaching is lecturing and doing exercises on the blackboard. He gives the job of picking up rubbish to disruptive students. In this class all students are low achievers. Lee Kok is the only Chinese-Australian student. Glenn is separated from the rest of the class. His seat is next to the door. The teacher checks homework. Half the students have not done it. Glenn is one of them and the teacher asks him, "Why didn't you do it?" Glenn responds with a dirty look. Raising his voice the teacher asks again, "Glenn why didn't you do your home work?" Glenn (getting ready for the showdown) says, "I am not the only one who didn't do it. Why do you pick on me?" He mumbles something, which makes some students laugh. "What did you say?" the teacher demands. "I said like everyone else I didn't do it." Then he adds something else which makes three more students laugh. The teacher asks Glenn to wait after the class is dismissed. Promptly Glenn says, "No I won't." The teacher ignores this and starts the lesson. As the teacher turns around Glenn shows the middle finger ("up yours") and mumbles the word 'prick'. The teacher solves two exercises on the board and asks students to copy. As the teacher is writing on the blackboard Glenn spits out a chewed paper which lands next to the teacher, who fails to notice it. The teacher distributes worksheets for students to work. Some of them start working; others have to be continually reminded to work. Glenn sits quietly doing nothing. He looks through the window. After a while he tries to talk to the student behind him. The teacher pounces on him and tells him to work by himself. Fifteen minutes before the end of the period another showdown takes place when the teacher asks Glenn to get on with doing the exercises. Rudely Glenn says, "I am thinking. What about the others? They are making a noise. Why do you pick on me?" Students keep the teacher busy. He is finding it difficult to control them. After a few minutes he comes to Glenn's desk and asks, "What is your problem? Why don't you work?" Glenn counter questions, "What is your problem?" The teacher shouts, "Pack your bag and get out of my class." As Glenn packs it up, he says, "Good, I want to go."*

At the end of the period the teacher told me, "I have tried everything with this 'shit' but he never works for me." The following day I decided to pay a visit to Glenn's house and Mrs Morrison told me:

*Some teachers don't like our sons. I know Glenn is not an angel but if teachers have patience he can work. Some teachers go berserk with him. We know Glenn can get under your skin but one of his teachers picks on him all the time. He isolates him from the rest. Glenn sits there and does nothing. We have requested the Head of Department to put Glenn in another class.*

During this home visit Glenn made some unspeakable racist comments about this teacher and said about another, "He can suck eggs. They pick on me all the time." In the second semester Glenn had a new teacher who found him "attention seeking, occasionally disruptive and one who likes the company of his mates." When asked how she felt about having him in her class next year she promptly replied, "No thank you. Six months are enough." A fourth teacher reckoned Glenn was lacking maturity in group situations, a disruptive influence in class, the class clown if left unchecked, and not a student I would like to have in my class." In fact, the only teachers who made somewhat favourable comments about Glenn were his physical education and photography teachers. The former found him keen on sports but not a good team member; someone who uses foul language while playing and does not always accept the verdict of the umpire."

A fifth teacher, noted for good discipline, who taught both Glenn and Clint commented: "They are slimy and ratbags... When you look at them they put on the innocent face but when your back is turned they crack their knuckles on the table and put up the middle finger sign". Remarkably, with minor variations, Clint's pattern of interaction with his teachers was very similar to that of Glenn's. One notable difference was that Clint's physical education teachers were very fond of him.

**Krista Smith**

Tall, slim and cheerful, Krista was very popular with her peer group, especially the

boys who thought of her as 'very sexy'. She had started at Paramount Senior High in Year

9 and in a short time had made good friends with a few girls; Kim (from South Korea) and

Paula (from Malaysia) were her two best friends and often the three of them went after

school hours to the nearby shopping centre. For two years (1993-94) Krista was in my

social studies class. In Year 9 she and her two friends sat together at the back in the middle

row. Quite often they brought teenage girls' magazines to read in class while pretending

they were doing their school work. Sometimes their giggles over the stories were

disruptive, but they always completed their work. Two female teachers at one point

approached me to find out if the three were disruptive in class, but by my assessment they

were not so much disruptive as 'playful'. Krista was an average high B grade student, Kim

was a low B level and Paula C level. I started observing Krista's behaviour more closely

after the end of 1993.

In Year 10 Krista was separated from Paula and Kim because they had selected

different electives[16]. She found a new friend, Vicki, to replace them. Coincidently, all of

Krista's friends had problems adjusting to their parents and there were frequent domestic

arguments in their homes. From informal conversation I gathered that they wanted more

freedom than their parents would allow. Indeed, it was this "desire for freedom" from

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[16] In Western Australian government schools students in their lower secondary classes (Year 8-10) must study science, maths, English and social studies—collectively known as "core subjects". Additionally, they are given the choice to select elective subjects suited to their interest.

parents, which united them and caused them to lend support to each other. At recess and lunchtime Krista enjoyed the company of Paula, Vicki, and Kim. These three socialised behind the school gym, a secluded corner of the school where groups of boys flirted with girls and impressed them by arm wrestling, horse-play and chasing each other rugby style. It was here they made their weekend and after-school plans. Teachers on yard supervision, half-jokingly called this area 'smoochers' den'. In fact, with a strife-torn home, and like-minded friends, Krista found recess and lunchtime the best time of the school day. 'Fun-loving' Krista, by her own admission, took her school work seriously, but her friends were equally important to her. In response to a statement, "I cannot wait for when school starts again" she said, "I miss the friends I haven't seen and get bored because I have nothing to do. I want to get back to school because of these reasons. At school I meet with my friends and have fun with them. I like some of my teachers and relate with them better than with my parents".

The typical comments of teachers on Krista's reports included: 'cheerful', 'intelligent', 'works well although a bit talkative and tends to waste time'... 'keen to do well, indulges in gossip but continues working'... 'completes homework but does not worry about a perfect score... works best by herself'.

Krista herself wrote about teachers and school as follows:

*Mrs X [a maths teacher] is probably my worst teacher... She has this really disgusting look, which she greets us with if we do anything she doesn't agree with. It sends shivers down my spine constantly!... We have to sit in set positions instead of with our friends, which is really annoying. She always makes us feel guilty, as if we are the worst class... She has a very tight hold on us.*

*My English teacher is slack and rarely punishes us. This is good in most students' eyes but you kind of lack some respect for him.... If you're not nice to him all the time he tends to give you a worser [worse] mark which must be my problem. He makes dumb jokes and comes across really weird to us sometimes. He is easy to push around. By that I mean that he always extends every due date for our assignments.*

*My science teacher Miss Y pushes so much work into one lesson that you don't get much time to try and define her character. She really lapses in discipline. You could really get away with murder in her class. She raises her voice about once a lesson to tell us off but we ignore her, and I guess she gives up and lets us continue doing whatever we are doing wrong. I have a lot of respect for her even though she got me into a lot of trouble. She collected a letter I was writing to a friend in her class and passed it on to the deputy principal who gave it to my parents, because it contained something I was planning to do which I shouldn't have. I really disliked her for that but I can't blame her, because she was put in that position and it was her duty in a way as an adult.*

*My social studies teacher [R.M.] is a good teacher and gives discipline out and always to the culprit. He is friendly and respects his students, which makes us respect him more. Lessons sometimes become boring because of having to write notes about things, but he saw how we felt. He knew what standard we were up to and tried to keep us above that. I think I really try in his class because the work challenges me to be able to get the grades I want.*

*I dislike my accounting teacher. She judged me by the people I sat with in class and treated me the same as them, which was very unfair. I worked hard in the class because I wanted to learn about the subject but she made it difficult for me. I got an 'A' for most of my work but she gave me a 'B'. I wasn't that disruptive in class because I knew the people I sat with. I wasn't that gooder friend with them. The pupils which never talked at all and sat with those kind of kids she gave them all 'A grades' when their work standards were 'Bs'. I guess they're the perfect students and regarded them highly because of that. (Unedited notes)*

In my class I found Krista passing notes to her friends mostly on Fridays and Mondays. These notes were always about boys and weekend activities. Sometimes when I took her file for checking her work I noticed comments about boys and love hearts written on the file cover. Sometimes she came late with an unironed school uniform and sat quietly by herself. However, the most typical thing about her behaviour was her tendency to talkativeness and writing comments on her file cover or her friend's file cover. One day the

following note, which slipped out of her file, and for which she gave me permission to use,

read as follows:

*Dear Vicki,*

*Hi, I'm in social studies right now. Mr Malik just busted Sarah and me. I agree with everything you said about Kelly, she deserves all the shit she gets. I don't think she knows about Tim and me yet, but when she does, I don't think she will be too happy. Is Naomi really pregnant? Oh my God, such shit hey! She fucked Adam Bevan after two days, fuckin hell. Now she's fucked Adam and Gavan. I wonder if David will talk to me today. I don't think he will because it really feels weird talking to him when I'm not going out with him. ... I'm gonna say I forgot my uniform because I can't be fucked, it is too hot. I'm going to the beach tomorrow with Kim and Michelle. For a change my bossy mother has agreed. She will get heart attack if she knows these guys as well will be there. You know my Mum is a real bitch. She grounds me for nothing. Are you still grounded? Are your parents still shity with you?*

*See ya, Luve Krista.*

Notes like this were frequently changed in class as it was confirmed from the other teachers who taught Krista.

## Ben Morgan

I taught Ben Morgan for three years. In 1992 he was in my Year 8 social studies class

but at that time I had not started this research project. In Year 8 Ben was a well-adjusted,

slightly above average, B grade student in social studies. In other subjects also he was

performing at B grade and in physical education an A grade. In 1994 I taught Ben social

studies, and geography in 1995. With blonde shoulder length hair, athletic physique, and

good demeanour, Ben was very popular with girls, although he told me that he was not

attached to any. He often came to school tired and with an unironed shirt and hair

uncombed. A colleague of mine who had studied with Ben's father and who taught Ben in

1996 commented: "Ben is an exact replica of his Dad."

During recess and lunchtime Ben and his mates [some of them studying TEE subjects and others studying non-TEE subjects] invariably sat on the front lawn, under the shade of a big tree in summer and enjoying the sunny weather in winter. The only time they were not there was when it rained. Sitting here they chatted about sports, read comics, arm wrestled and generally played around. Teachers on yard supervision never complained about their behaviour. In fact, if a teacher passed by they would say "hello". Quite often I chatted with them during recess and lunchtime. Most of them played sports with keen interest, Ben being the star athlete.

For Ben, playing sports was the 'real life', to borrow Walker's (1988) term. Except for the manual arts teacher and physical education teacher, Ben's teachers complained to varying degrees about Ben's resistance to class work. Ben wanted to be a football star like his older brother and do well at his studies. However, while he put in 100% effort into his sports, but when it came to studies he did the least possible. He knew that school work was important in order to graduate and to pursue the career path of radiographer or marine biologist, but he appeared to lack the will. His teachers and parents, particularly his mother, were concerned about this. His mother told me, "He likes to copy his older brother but he does not have the ability. He plays so much sports that he gets too tired to do any study." Extracts from my class observations given below sum up Ben's life at school:

> *I write notes on the black board. Ben and Glenn never complete them. I take the class to the library to look for the meanings of words. Ben generally copies from the work of others and keeps a book on surfing hidden underneath his file. In class I give the activities and Ben momentarily works. If I nag him he responds with a dirty look and passive resistance (October 1994).*

Excerpts from my field notes give some insight into Ben's performance and attitude towards school work.

> *After explaining for fifteen minutes I allow time for students to ask questions. During this time Ben is very restless and looks around for someone to instigate some disruption. Glenn obliges him a couple of times by shooting a piece of paper. During question time he does not ask any questions. I write a summary of the lesson on the blackboard. Most students start writing. Krista talks and writes. Glenn finds different ways to waste time and does not write. Ben pretends to write. I go to his seat and notice that Ben has not written anything. With raised voice I ask him to get on with his writing. He writes a few lines and stops again. In a firm and raised voice I tell him again to copy the summary from the black board. He mumbles a few inaudible words and gives me a hostile look (Wednesday, period one, 30 March, 1994).*

Again, towards the end of the year, I recorded Ben's behaviour in my class:

> *I start a new topic on inflation. I explain for about 20 minutes. During this time I serve a number of reminders to Ben, Glenn and his mates to pay attention. Ben is busy playing a game of "noughts and crosses". I stop him. Reluctantly, he stops. Whenever I stop looking at him he starts doing it again. I go to his seat and angrily try to snatch the paper from him to put it in the bin. He refuses to hand it over. I ask him to leave the room. He stares at me for a few seconds and then decides to leave the room. While I give instructions to the class a disturbing thought comes to my mind: "What else can I do to get Ben to the task? I have tried various ways but nothing seems to be working. His parents have asked me to let them know immediately if he does not work". The more I ask him to work the more resentful he gets. After giving the work to the class I talk to Ben outside the class.*
> *R.M What is your problem? Why don't you work?*
> *Ben I have no problem (he says disrespectfully)*
> *R.M (Raising his voice) Get on with your work then.*
> *Ben: (Staring in defiance) I will if you let me.*
> *I let him into the class. With passive resistance and testing my patience to the full he takes out his file and finds a biro while continuing to stare. I leave him alone to make up his mind and focus on the other students. Ben ends up not finishing his work. At the end of the period I detain him and ask him "Why don't you work?" With his head down he says, "I don't know". "Don't your parents check your work?", I ask him. "No", he said. I let him go. Earlier he had failed to hand in the major assignment.*

At this stage I decided to contact all of Ben's teachers and the Year 10 Coordinator to find out about his behaviour in other classes. His maths teacher [known to Ben's parents]

said, "He is very lazy. Does very little in class. Most of the time he gives me the impression as if he is ready to go to bed, or just got out of it". His science teacher was even more critical: "He is very thick and hard to motivate. Most of the time I leave him alone. If I force him to work he rebels." Glenn and Ben were at their best disrupting class when a female trainee teacher once took a group discussion exercise, which I was there to observe.

> *For about one third of the time the trainee battles to arrange students in groups and explain the procedure of the exercise. Ben bangs his desk against the wall to get the teacher's attention and to prompt reaction from a neighbouring class. In a loud voice Ben says, "Stop throwing rubber." In fact, it is Ben himself who has broken the rubber into pieces and thrown it at Glenn whenever the teacher turns her back. The teacher later checks Ben's work. His group has hardly made an effort. Within five minutes the teacher approaches Ben twice and threatens, "If you do not work I will separate you." A student from the group complains, "Miss X, separate Ben. He is not doing any work." After two minutes Ben throws the pieces of rubber again. When she comes to his group he pretends to cooperate. Three minutes later Ben takes his ruler and uses it to throw the broken pieces of rubber at Glenn which hit him on the face. Three students from Glenn's group laugh and one of them says loudly, "What a shot." Ben puts his head down and pretends nothing has happened. The teacher asks him to stand up. She finds six pieces of broken pieces of rubber on his chair. Ben is punished to pick up rubbish for fifteen minutes during recess time (7/10/1994).*

I gathered from one home visit that Ben's parents were furious about his behaviour and performance when a science and a maths teacher reported he was not doing the assigned work. They asked me to tell them all about his behaviour at school and assured me that they would take him to task. Mr Morgan gave me his work phone number and both parents wanted me to use my home visits as an opportunity to look at Ben's school progress. Ben felt threatened about this and felt that I was putting him on the spot. Whereas he once used to tell his parents how good a teacher I was, he now complained I was not explaining things properly. Yet later, under pressure from his father, he got B+ grade for a social studies assignment, I suddenly became a 'good' teacher again.

The following year, Ben was again in my class, this time for geography; he was (according to his parents) pleased to be there. Although in Year 11 he did not extend himself a great deal, he was more positive towards school work than the previous year when he could hardly settle on his seat and would need several reminders before he would do any work. However, Ben lacked the necessary commitment required for studying TEE subjects in Year 12, and failed to qualify for TAFE college, let alone enrol at university

**Chris and Rachel Marshall**

At high school Chris went through a number of phases. In 1993 he had long hair, but by 1994 he had shaven it off. He lost weight in 1993 and gained it in 1994. He started high school as an average student in academic subjects and above average in non-academic. Most of Chris's teachers were very fond of him. His lower school reports indicated that he could succeed in TEE subjects. Up until Year 10 he was doing well at school. But there was a dramatic change when he started Year 11. As the year progressed he started to lose interest in school work and became passionately interested in surfing and part-time work. In Year 11 he was studying TEE subjects but in Year 12 switched to a mixture of TEE and non-TEE subjects. Since most of Chris's mates had dropped out of school without completing Year 12, to the disappointment of his parents, he was contemplating doing the same.

I taught Chris for six months in 1993 when he was in my geography class. After observing his attitude toward geography for a considerable time I wrote in my logbook:

> *Chris sits at the front with female students. They like him, not that any of them is attached to him but "he is nice to talk to." He has so many stories to tell them. They*

*enjoy listening to him. Most of the time his interaction is with girls. I serve frequent reminders to Chris to stop chattering. He does not take an offence at reminders. Very often he brings a magazine on surfing and reads it in the class. If an exercise is given he rushes through it and finds time to read the magazine. Most days he asks my permission to go to the toilet and takes about fifteen minutes to return. I noticed his eyes are red sometimes. A number of times I have heard some students whispering to each other that "Chris is on dope". Frequently, students ask me 'why does Chris go to the toilet so often?' He rarely completes his homework. His geography file is very untidy. Although at Paramount all students are supposed to keep a homework diary, especially the upper school students, Chris does not keep one. When the class is given short tests he surprises me with high marks, although in the semester exam his score was fairly average.*

Chris's history teacher found him a below average student who constantly demanded attention and was slow to settle on his work. Most teachers used the terms like "cheerful", "gregarious" and "likeable" to define his personality. Chris's English teacher summed up his behaviour in class:

*Chris wastes time in class and doesn't work unless closely supervised. He worries about his grades but never takes me up on my efforts to check his essays or help him after school. Basically, he is a nice kid, not wilfully naughty and wouldn't upset me on purpose. He is honest about his difficulties and philosophical about the trouble he occasionally gets into at school.*

At recess time Chris always sat with four of his "good mates", none of whom was a TEE student. They sat at the far end on the boundary of Paramount Senior High and Southside primary school, a spot well covered by small bushy plants on three sides. At this spot they stood in a circle with an eye on the teacher on yard supervision. If the teacher approached them they dispersed. One day when I was on yard supervision I discovered Chris's group's 'smoking den.' At the end of recess when they had left the place, I inspected the spot and found two butts of cigarettes and three match sticks. As Chris's house was close to the school he, sometimes went there with his girl friend or his friends (in

the absence of his parents).  The following passage, which I recorded after a Year 12

geography field excursion, gives a good account of Chris's carefree life at school.

*Short haired, with black boots and loose check shirt Chris sits at the back seat of the bus.  One other teacher and I are in this bus.  Chris has ear phones listening to music from his pocket size Walkman.  All students are happy to get away from the school for the day.  They are allowed to not wear school uniform.  Sitting next to Chris are some of his close mates, some with long hair others with short hair.  Most of them are chewing gum.  Chris and the others sitting next to him  are reading surf and motor bike magazines.  Some of them erupt in a giggle when looking at the semi-nude pictures of girls in their magazines.  Even though their second semester exam is not far off, for the time being they are not  worried about it.  After sixty kilometres on their first stop at a country town, students are asked to collect data about the goods and services provided by the town.  They are given 40 minutes to complete the given exercises.  As soon as Chris and his mates get down off the bus they rush to the shop to buy potato chips, lollies, chewing gum and soft drinks.  While most students had written down their field observations, Chris and his mates had scribbled only a few of them.*

*Their next stop is a coastal town.  Students are dropped off the bus to make observations about the settlement pattern along the coast.  However, Chris and his mates have their own agenda.  They decide to break away from the rest of the students and keep on walking, unnoticed, for about half a kilometre away and enter a forbidden and dangerous area where some construction is taking place.  I shout and give signals but they pay no attention and keep walking.  The Head of the Department and myself are worried and in a panic to get them back.  All students and other people keep on looking at them helplessly.  After twenty minutes they return.  Seemingly angry, the Head of the Department asks them, "Who gave you the permission to go by yourselves?" Unrepentingly Chris says, "We thought we were free to wander around and choose a convenient spot to draw the sketch of the coast line and the development taking place there." "Show your sketch", I ask.  Two of them have drawn some rough sketches.  Chris has nothing on his file.  They are threatened with suspension from school.  They get in the bus with a grin on their faces as if they have accomplished a brave deed.  In the bus I stand with my back towards Chris and his group.  Chris boasts to the others, "It is a lovely surfing area mate. You should have come with us".*

*Three days later I asked one of the boys from the breakaway group why they decided to go of their own. After some hesitation he told me, "If you don't dob us I can tell you the truth.... Chris had some marijuana.  We had a quick bong.... Chris is a nice guy.  He is good company".*

In contrast, Chris's sister Rachel, was the "perfect child" in the family, a "pleasure to teach", who always took her school work seriously, and "put in 100% effort on her school work". While keenly interested in drama and netball, Rachel remained an "A grade " student throughout her school life. In Year 11 she selected what some teachers called the "elite subjects", like those studied by Hongzia and Chi Chen. In Year 12 she had dropped the higher maths and physics in favour of lower maths and a non-TEE subject. From primary school through high school all her teachers rated her a model student of "mature outlook". When asked to comment on a number of questions related to Rachel's behaviour and performance, her teachers showered praise on her. Below is a compilation of teachers' comments about Rachel:

> *She is an A grade student who is diligent and very keen to learn... She is good natured, intelligent and hard working... always completes homework and aims at a perfect score... well motivated and good at debating skills... She has outstanding work habits and gets on with the assigned task without any supervision. .. She does not ask many questions but when she asks they are very relevant and appropriate...If something is being demonstrated she listens attentively. If something is not clear to her she does not hesitate to ask questions... If I do not interfere she likes to sit next to high achieving female Aussie kids... She is a quiet and mature student with a high level of oral and written skills... She works very well in all types of situations... She is well organised, and takes pride in her work, does all that is required of her in class but does not isolate herself from her immediate peers. Her good nature and friendly personality, plus her keenness as a student, impress me.*

My own observation of Rachel's behaviour and performance in the year I taught her fell in line with the assessment of the other teachers. She got on well with Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian female high achievers. She socialised with and sat next to high-achieving Anglo-Australian girls at recess time. One of her best friends was the Dux of the Year. And more often than not she spent her lunchtime either in the computer room or library. After school hours she often stayed at school practising for drama or dancing.

In every respect Rachel was an academic conformist. Most of the time she typed her assignments on home computer and was always very keen to achieve high grades, but never panicked as much as Hongzia did. Teachers praised her for her very considerate attitude towards her peers. Had her parents applied half as much pressure as, say, Hongzia's parents did, she would almost certainly have easily qualified to enrol in any course at university.

## Chinese-Australian students

Chinese-Australian children at Paramount included in this study turned out to be the kind of students who were labelled by teachers as "they put their heads down and get on with their work". Although not all of them were academically bright, the majority of them were what Hargreaves (1967) called 'docile conformists' (see Chapter 3). Apart from their initial linguistic and racial problems all, with the exception of Lee Kok, had earned reputations as being academically-oriented. From the perspective of Glenn, Ben, Chris and Clint they were 'squares', 'nerds' and 'smacks'. Chi Chen and Hongzia were outstanding in most subjects; Tein and Lee were below average; the rest of them were fairly average. None of them participated in sports teams and none of them had been reported to the administration for misbehaviour, truancy or breaking school rules. Except for Chi Chen, who occasionally was seen in the school oval, these children were most visible at recess and lunchtime in the library, computer room or quadrangle, accompanied by their Chinese peers.

My observations revealed that proportionately more Chinese-Australian children used the library and more Anglo-Australians used school oval during lunchtime. Jestfully but

quite realistically one teacher-librarian commented: "The Asians come to get information

for their assignments and to borrow books. Australian kids come to read comic books or

books like 'Where did you come from?', 'How is a baby born?' or books on surfing." Most

of the Chinese-Australian children indicated that maths and science were their favourite

subjects, and that they were not keen on manual arts, home economics and physical

education.

Except for Chi Chen, the Chinese-Australian students hardly mixed socially with each

other, let alone with their Anglo-Australian peers. Generally speaking, the Chinese-

Australian children were guided by their parents into thinking that school was a place for

learning, that teachers were there to help them, and that their duty was to respect their

teachers. Victor, Pearl, Hongzia and Miran thus acted unquestioningly on the advice of

parents and teachers alike, and the latter spoke highly of most of them, even though they

interacted less frequently with them than they did with Anglo-Australian students. At

special school functions the Chinese students did not play leading roles but they did support

all school-initiated activities like free dress day, and the forty hour famine to collect

donations for charity. The general feeling among teachers was that Asian children were

model pupils, against which Australian children compared unfavourably. Only the physical

education teachers disagreed. A senior physical education teacher summed up: "Asian kids

obey the rules, participate in all activities but they are not in our team games. All our sports

stars are the Aussie kids."

In classrooms, unless teachers enforced a seating arrangement, Chinese-Australian

boys and girls mixed very little with Anglo-Australians. Whenever there was a single

Chinese-Australian pupil in class, he or she tended to sit alone or at the front of the class. Except for Hongzia and Chi Chen, during lesson time none asked questions but all of them listened attentively. They were never disruptive. This is not to say all Chinese-Australian students at Paramount Senior High were paragons of schoolroom morality, for outside my small sample there were a few non-conformists, some of whom caused teachers to get upset, if not outright angry. At one stage a teacher sent a Chinese-Australian student out of his class and scolded him, "You should be thankful to be here. You shut up and listen to what I tell you."

### Chi Chen and Tein Goh

Although most of Chi Chen's friends were Anglo-Australians, in upper school he shifted his attachment to a high-achieving female student of his own cultural background. Also, since he had selected the so-called high-calibre TEE subjects his low-achieving Anglo-Australian friends were no longer in his class. In Year 9 and 10 he invariably kept the company of low achieving "Aussie mates who were fun to be with", fooling around in the secluded area around the gym, which most teachers wanted to avoid during recess and lunch supervision. Here students would throw food scraps, gum nuts and water at each other. Some teachers found it puzzling to see Chi Chen in the company of scruffy-looking white Australian children in this area, and from this developed wrong notions about him. Thus a senior social studies teacher could not work out whether to award B or A grade to Chi Chen because he judged him by the company he kept. This teacher was puzzled when Chi Chen topped the class in every single test. Chi Chen's friends knew him better.

I taught Chi Chen in Year 9 for six months. He always sat at the back, accompanied by two Anglo-Australian students, one of them average in his studies and the other exceptionally able. There were five other Chinese-Australian boys and three girls in the class but Chi Chen rarely interacted with them. Other students in this class included Krista, Rachel, Victor, Hongzia, and Lee Kok. Chi Chen and his Anglo-Australian friend were easily the most able. If ever I asked a question, and Chi Chen and his friend could not answer it, no one could. Given a task in a class Chi Chen would get on to it and not stop until finished. I was most impressed with his analytical thinking and intelligent questions. In one assignment he got an A+ grade. This assignment was on an Asian country. Chi Chen selected China. Most of this assignment was to be completed in the library and at home. Chi Chen told me that at home his parents had a big collection of books on China, some of them in Chinese, which his parents read to him while completing the assignment. He read these books, borrowed books from the school and local libraries, and discussed the matter with his grandmother and parents. The typed assignment on computer was an extraordinary piece of work. He got the principal's award and the assignment was displayed in the library. I interviewed Chi Chen's parents about his brilliant work. His mother told me, "When Chi Chen settles on work he concentrates. He gets annoyed with himself if he cannot complete the work. He is methodical. He asks our opinion, consults different books and aims at doing a good work. Before he writes the final draft he writes rough copy two or three times".

Several times I caught Chi Chen looking over girlie magazines with friends[17].

However, he was always respectful, courteous and eager to learn. He was easily bored if he

thought that the lesson itself was boring, but showed a keen interest in problem-solving

exercises and class debates. He worked well in all situations but in spare time liked to

socialise with his mates who labelled him as 'naturally smart'. A year later I interviewed

Chi Chen's teachers. Their various comments were almost identical:

> *He is bright and capable.... Does waver up and down depending on his interest in the topic. Likes the company of low achievers and sometimes wastes time, needs reminders to complete his work. Talks and chatters mostly about basketball [maths teacher].*
> *His standard of work is extremely high, well above the year standard. He works without seeking attention. His presentation of work is excellent. He is self- motivated and achievement-oriented [science teacher].*
> *He works at A-level. He is inclined to be talkative but still works well. In class he asks questions which are very intelligent and analytical [Japanese teacher].*
> *He is an A-grade student who works well in all situations. Always aims at a perfect score. In class he sits next to the average ability Anglo-Saxon boys at the back. Perhaps so as not to be seen as too conformist. His performance in the class is outstanding [English teacher].*
> *He participates in all activities and enjoys sports [physical education teacher].*

Teachers of Year 11 and 12 had similar comments to make. Without exception they

maintained that he was one the top students who had a sharp mind and natural ability to

understand the lesson. In fact, his maths and physics teachers labelled him "a genius". But

whilst he had natural ability, I know from my home observations and interviews with his

parents that he also had an immense capacity for studying until the small hours of the night.

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[17] Two years later Chi Chen was in my tutor group. At this stage (in Year 12) he got attached to a Chinese-Australian girl. Quite often she sat on his knees in the class. He hugged her in presence of his teachers. His parents were quite supportive of his love for his girl friend.

## Tein[18]

In sharp contrast Chi Chen's sister Tein was an average ability student who was always too shy to ask questions. If there was a Chinese-Australian girl in her class, Tein would sit next to her, otherwise she preferred to sit by herself. Sitting by herself she would remain occupied with her work. Typical comments of teachers were:

> *Tein is a diligent, cooperative, respectful and quiet student. She works hard but finds it difficult to comprehend the basic concepts. In group situations she does not talk much. If she has a problem she hesitates to ask questions.*

Tein never mixed with Anglo-Australian girls. During lunch and recess time she always stayed with Chinese-Australian girls. But just as her brother had become an accomplished lion dancer, Tein too had become good at Chinese dancing and singing.

## Hongzia and Miran Kwang

Short, always in school uniform, well-groomed with dark silky shoulder-length hair Hongzia and Miran were those well-adjusted students who have been described in some studies as 'Model Asian students': a delight to teach, diligent and well-behaved. Typical comments of teachers in their reports were 'an outstanding performer', 'makes 100 per cent effort to achieve a perfect score', 'quiet and very competitive'. In turn, Hongzia and Miran had a very positive attitude about most of their teachers. Even though they experienced

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[18] As mentioned in Chapter Seven all of these students did not graduate at the same time. Some of them graduated before and some after what I have called 'the class of 1996'. Tein graduated before Chi Chen did. Therefore, I did not observe Tein, Clint, and Chris as closely as I did the others.

problems because of their Asian looks and lack of fluency in English, they enjoyed their

school experience. Hongzia talked about her experience:

> *There is more freedom here in Australia. For example, I attended a jewellery class. I was arguing with my teacher about a copper plate which I made in class. I was holding it tight, but he wanted to snatch it off me, because he said it would look better after firing. I reckoned the teacher was wrong, so I complained, complained and complained. In Hong Kong I wouldn't have argued with my teacher. I would do what he told me to do and I would support his idea even if I didn't agree. Teachers here allow you to speak and chat freely in class, but in Hong Kong we were not even allowed to whisper. Overall teachers in Australia are more kind to students, just totally the opposite of Hong Kong.*

Teachers described Hongzia as a 'typical Asian student who worked hard and cried

hell if she got low marks'. She always aimed to get a perfect score and had an eye on the

scores of those who she thought were her rivals. Before she enrolled at Paramount Senior

High School she had encountered a number of problems, socially and linguistically. At

Paramount she was put in English as a Second Language (ESL) class, but with hard work

by Year 10 she had managed to enter the normal stream. Her Inter-D Score or IQ was

slightly above average. Teachers rewarded Hongzia for her good behaviour, diligence and

perseverance. On her part, Hongzia had a warm attitude toward her teachers who had high

expectations of her. Whenever she got high marks students said that was expected of her,

but when she got low marks she could not hide her tears.

I taught Hongzia for six months in Year 9 and again in Year 10. She always sat at the

front, accompanied by other Chinese-Australian girls, but preferred to work by herself

because, as she said, "If I am working in a group, other group members slack off and leave

the work to me." Unlike the other Chinese-Australian students Hongzia always tended to

lead the group discussions, never hesitated to ask questions, and applied herself to all types

of learning situations. If a student disrupted the class Hongzia hated it. Whenever I gave homework she always completed it. Given the work in class, she would get on to it without further reminder. When she was in Year 10 she told me, "Everyone thinks I am a big mouth, so I decided to change my image. One day I turned quiet but found myself being left out and not getting involved in the group as usual. So I decided to change back."

By upper school Hongzia had become a fierce competitor. Even though in each subject she had been getting around 80% marks, with A-grades and 'outstanding' comments for her efforts, her desire for excellence was insatiable. Her teachers told me that she did not like any score less than 90%. She had become an autonomous and self-motivated student who could not relax until all her work was completed to her satisfaction. All her assignments were meticulously prepared and typed. When teachers returned the marked assignments or test papers Hongzia kept a close eye on her rivals' scores and aimed to stay at the top. She told me, "If I make a mistake I work harder to get it right... If I do not understand something in class I ask my teachers.... Some students still tease me about my accent but I don't care". She allowed me to look into her personal diary wherein she wrote:

*School assignment was due in today. Those guys were calling me "square" and "slitty" [because of her eyes] because my assignment has got most pages. I think I will get pretty good marks on that assignment. Probably an A (26/8/94).... I have got my assignment back and got 18/20, pretty good! I am satisfied (31/8/94). I had my maths test today (2/9/94). I should get over 90% marks.... I got 81%—top of the class. I didn't like it. Shiaw Lee got 68%. I liked that... sux. Shiaw turned around and said (to me), "So slow". I said, "How pathetic".(3/9/94).*
*In social studies I got 41/50 (82%). I wasn't satisfied but Chi Chen got 45/50, "square"!. My competition is with Chi Chen... It is exam time.... I am stressed out. If life doesn't get normal soon, I will end up in mental institution. But I can't relax so soon (9/9/94).*
*I am glad I understand algebra. I hope to do it next term.... I like trigonometry more, although I don't want to be an architect or engineer dealing with construction and building stuff. Science is another subject I like (14/9/94).*

*In health education assignment I got 19/20. My health education teacher taught us about having a good diet but at lunchtime I saw him walking down with two hamburgers, two packs of chips and two cans of coke! Yeah! Right! He told us that he is having a good healthy diet. Now, bull shit! No wonder he is fat (21/9/94).*

The following year Hongzia opted to study the most challenging TEE subjects. She had doubled her efforts and got into the company of a Chinese-Australian high-achieving boy who later became her boy friend. For two years her undivided attention was directed to her studies. 'There is no rest until I finish TEE', was her catch phrase. Her maths teacher put it this way:

*Hongzia is a perfectionist. She cannot accept anything less than hundred per cent. She has got to understand that seventy or seventy five per cent also is a good score. This end of term test she stuffed badly. She got fifty five per cent marks, which is a C grade. She was shattered. But, during the term she had worked hard and still ended up getting B grade. She is not naturally talented but she is one of those who work hard. I believe as the difficulty of the work increases Hongzia will experience problems in being anything less than top of the class... If things don't go her way then others have to put up with the 'shit'. I really wonder how many friends in school Hongzia would have. I suspect none (16 December 1995).*

But making friends was not Hongzia's concern at that stage. All she cared for was to achieve high marks, a goal to which she devoted all her energy. Her peers described her as one who 'panics and makes everyone nervous around her'. One day when I was on the yard supervision duty, when students were not allowed to stay inside the classrooms, I spotted two students hiding behind a desk. As I approached them, with a smile Hongzia said, "It is me Mr Malik." The following day she told me that she and her friend had borrowed exam papers from the library and were studying for the end of the year exam. She did not want to share the papers with anyone else. At this stage even though she had been suffering from constant headache and loss of appetite, she was achieving above 85 per cent marks in most subjects. She commented: "When I had overcome my weakness in English, my grades

started to go up. Now I can say that I am one of the top academic students. When I got better marks than them (Anglo-Australian students) instead of teasing me they started to feel jealous."

Miran displayed identical behaviour to Hongzia. Although academically not as strong as Hongzia, she was equally keen to achieve high grades, and had moved from an ESL class into the normal stream. In Year 10 Miran was in my social studies class, and unless I shifted her around for a group discussion she always sat in the front row accompanied by two other academically oriented Chinese-Australian girls. She rarely volunteered to answer a question. Placed in a group situation, Miran would take a secondary role in discussions unlike her sister, Hongzia. Miran's teachers admired her for her neat writing. Miran's English teacher equated her neat writing with typing.

In the company of her Chinese friends Miran occasionally read teenage girls' magazines and giggled loudly. Unlike Krista, such light readings did not interfere with her class work, which she always took seriously. I remember once she burst into tears when I told her that she might drop from level A to level B in social studies. She consequently produced two excellent assignments to retain her level A. Teachers of other subjects also told me that she was always concerned about her grades.

Typically, during class instruction time, Miran would listen attentively and would get on with her work immediately without any further reminder. None of her teachers ever complained about her homework. In upper school she had selected five top-notch TEE subjects and one non-TEE subject. For two years, in upper school, bespectacled Miran had committed herself to her studies in order to achieve her goal of becoming an optometrist. A

number of times she told me at lunchtime that she had no social life because "all I want is to get a good TEE score to study optometry at university". Her teachers' comments on her end-of-term report were almost identical to what they had written about Hongzia, with the one exception that she was hesitant to participate in class discussions. In 1998 she was well on target and was doing well in all subjects. She obtained a TEE score of 364/510, a creditable achievement to take her into her coveted career to study optometry at the University of Western Australia.

### Victor and Pearl Cheong

Victor and Pearl were shy, obedient, silent and business-like in their behaviour. In class, unlike Chi Chen and Hongzia, they would rarely ask a question, although they would listen with full attention when the teacher gave instructions. They would only ask a question when they thought it was absolutely necessary. To the letter, they acted in a pre-conditioned way and never challenged the authority of parents or teachers. At school, teachers considered Victor and Pearl, 'model students'. Victor's maths teacher summed up Victor's classroom behaviour in this way:

> *Victor is in my top class (accelerated group). He takes pride in his work and always aims to get high marks. You give him instructions and he gets on with his work straight away. Displays a genuine willingness to learn. Does not ask many questions as he is very intelligent and works most things out by himself. I praise him for his neatness and diligence. As the year has gone by, he has come out of his shell a bit and I now see he has a fine sense of humour.*

A year later Victor's English teacher gave a similar description:

> *Very keen to do well, attentive listener but rarely asks questions in class. I praise this delightful student who is friendly, very polite, organised, prepared and willing to*

*learn. His manners and level of maturity set a fine example for the others to follow. He has a wonderful effect on other students near him. Some slightly silly and immature behaviour from certain students diminished when Victor worked in the group.*

In Year 10, Victor got A grades in all academic subjects, as well as a B grade in sports and a C in manual arts. At lunch break he spent most of his time either in the library or in the computer room, whereas at recess time he and Pearl invariably socialised with their Chinese-Australian peers. I taught Pearl for one year when she was in Year 9. Slightly more assertive than Victor, Pearl rarely interacted with any students in class. Most of the time she sat by herself. Outside class she was always accompanied by Chinese-Australian girls.

In 1997 when Pearl was in Year 11 she started to wear spectacles and became almost a replica of Miran. She set her goal at a degree in commerce, or law and commerce. Although a voracious reader, Pearl now focused her spare time in studies rather than spend it reading general books. At school she spent most of her lunchtime either in the library or in the computer room. At home her parents no longer had to remind her about her school work because as a matter of routine this was the first thing she would do. Typical comments of teachers on her reports were positive: "a quiet and reliable student.... pleasure to teach.... deserves to be congratulated on her excellent exam results. ... makes hundred percent effort to achieve high grades".

### Lee Kok

Lee Kok could be best described as a loner. In class he would sit by himself, quite often daydreaming. I monitored Lee's behaviour in my class several times. The excerpt below sums up Lee's life at school, as I saw it:

*With distinctive Chinese features and a strong-build, Lee sits by himself. Sometime I get the impression he is daydreaming. Almost in a trance. At this stage I don't know anything about his psychological problems. Sometimes he does well, at other times he rushes through his work and gets poor marks. He never asks any questions. For group discussions he doesn't like being placed with Anglo-Australian children. He*

*feels more at home working with Chinese-Australian children but they too tend to avoid working with him. Left on his own he doesn't like to interact with anyone. Sometimes he starts drawing pictures of boxers and basketball heroes.*

A few months later Lee's behaviour in class remained unchanged and as described in the previous chapter, he became a victim of school bullying which further affected his self-esteem and academic performance.

I observed Lee in other teachers' classes and interviewed all of them and found accounts of Lee's behaviour and performance congruent with my own. At recess time he spent his time playing basketball, mostly on his own, and at lunchtime reading comic books in the library. Rarely was he seen in the company of another student. Graduating with non-TEE subjects Lee enrolled at a TAFE college to study horticulture.

## Summary

The descriptive account of the nature of pupils' interactions with their teachers and peers suggest that performance at school is considerably influenced by such interactions. The internal structures of Paramount and its operations influenced pupils of different ability and background differently. Broadly speaking, Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian students can be categorised in two groups: the former with positive orientations towards school and teachers, and the latter with negative orientations. However, there is considerable intra-group and intra-family variation in the attitude and interaction of students. Chi Chen, Victor, Pearl, Hongzia, Miran and Rachel (the only Anglo-Australian) displayed positive orientations. Clint, Glenn, Ben, and Chris displayed negative

orientations. Pupils like Tein, Lee Kok and Krista fell roughly in between these two categories.

Those with positive orientations, fell in the "definition of teachers' situation". Hargreaves (1967) labelled them 'academics' or 'conformists' or 'pupils with docility predispositions' (Ho, 1994). From the point of view of Anglo-Australian pupils they were—with the exception of Chi Chen—'squares', 'nerds', 'smacks' or 'geeks' who 'buried their heads in books' all the time. Those with negative orientations either resembled 'lads' (Willis, 1977), Hargrave's (1967) 'non-conformist delinquescents', or Walker's (1988)'Aussie male chauvinists' or Mac an Ghaill's (1994) 'macho lads' or who were keenly interested in sports. Pupils like Lee Kok and Tein Goh who were conformists in their own way, with average to below average in their studies, did not participate in school team sports. Krista was good at sports as well as in academic work, and Rachel too was above average in studies and a participant in school team sports.

In general, the conformists ingratiated themselves and identified with teachers to win their favour. They were more willing to work within the framework imposed by teachers, and while allegedly 'burying their heads in books all the time', they invariably took little notice of what their peers had to say about them. They tended to be compliant to school rules for instrumental reasons: school being a means to social mobility and success in exams a ladder to it. With their docile predispositions (mainly attributable to their home life) these academically-oriented students tended to get favourable attention from their teachers because they were distinctively competitive, hard working, enthusiastic and a pleasure to teach. By Year 11, they were 'warmed-up' (Woods, 1984), autonomous and

self-motivated and had opted to study the subjects deemed 'top-notch' or 'high-calibre' according to teachers' definitions. It was their conformity to the authority of teachers at school, that considerably contributed to their higher educational achievements. For example, in classes of physics, chemistry and higher maths, typically almost half the pupils were Chinese-Australians, in contrast to 95% of Anglo-Austalians studying non-TEE subjects. As a group, Chinese-Australians in this study were punctual, had a very low rate of absenteeism, were not reported for misbehaviour, were regular users of library, laboratories and computers, were not involved in serious anti-social behaviour like vandalism and took their school work seriously. They were also taught by more experienced teachers and were given challenging exercises and frequent tests.

On the other hand, non-conformist sports heroes in their adaptations to school ranged from the outright rebel like Glenn, the resister like Ben, the intransigent like Clint and the easy going like Chris and Krista. With their negative orientations toward school and teachers they tended to resist or reject the values of the school. Often during lesson time they would pass time by fantasising over the clever manoeuvres of their favourite sportsmen, or simply 'muck about' or 'have a laugh' with their mates. Mostly during lunch and recess time they spent their time at the school oval or the gym, playing sports. The non-conformists tended to disapprove teachers' definition of the situation and strongly disliked the academics. They were less willing to work within the guidelines suggested by their teachers and tended to stay at school in Year 11 and 12 only because "there are no bloody jobs". Resentment, bitterness and frustration felt by them was evident in their comments: 'School sux.... School does not respect me.... My maths teacher can suck eggs

and drop dead'....'I am treated unfairly'.... 'If I talk to me mates in class my teacher goes berserk'....

On their part, the teachers did not trust them. For instance, a senior science teacher would allow Glenn to observe rather than experiment in the science laboratory because, as he put it, "I don't trust that shit to handle the scientific apparatus as he has already broken some equipment".

In school, the academics and the sports heroes did not voluntarily mix with each other, Chi Chen being the only exception. Teachers had their stereotypical perceptions of each group of students: Chinese-Australian as academically-oriented, and Anglo-Australians as sports-oriented. Physical education teachers found it hard to motivate Chinese-Australian pupils to take sports seriously. None of them were in school sports teams, even though they enjoyed playing sports. On the other hand, teachers of the academic subjects found them 'very serious about their school work who do not cause any behavioural problems'. One thing the Anglo-Australian pupils hated most about the Chinese-Australians was that the latter spoke in their own language during recess and lunch time when they got together. Anglo-Australians dominated in sports, school council, peer group leadership roles, whereas Chinese-Australians tended to over-represent in academic matters. The former group tended to challenge the authority of teachers and maintained teachers were paid to help them. Chinese-Australians tended to be compliant and apparently more grateful to their teachers for helping them.

A significant effect of Chinese-Australian students converging to 'top-notch' subjects and Anglo-Australian students gravitating mostly to non-TEE subjects was that the former

got more experienced teachers and were put in classes which constituted self-motivated and university-bound students. Chinese-Australian students believed that non-TEE subjects were meant for the slow learners. By comparison, Glenn, Chris, Clint and Lee Kok and Ben were assigned to less experienced teachers who held lower expectations of them. Their peers were not interested in pursuing further studies.

These peculiarities of the Chinese-Australians and Anglo-Australians, which developed as a result of interactional processes at home and school, had far reaching consequences on the career paths of these pupils. Teachers tended to favour those pupils who conformed to their expectations and put down those who defied their authority. In the case of Glenn his parents could not motivate him to school work. At home he resented school work and helped with household chores. He defied his parents' instructions. In his mother's words, "He is aggressive and short-tempered" and she knows that "he gets under the skin of his teachers". At school he was put in remedial and focus classes for three years. In Year 11 and 12 he studied non-TEE subjects and ended up getting a job serving food at a fast food stall, exemplifying Willis's (1977) oft-quoted statement: "learning to labour". The case studies of Chris, Clint and Ben unfolded similar stories. Paramount Senior High did not seem to make much difference to motivate these students to take school work seriously.

Glenn, Chris and Clint were put in focus and remedial classes. The logic was that specialist teachers would address their weakness appropriately. However, in reality inexperienced and temporary teachers taught them. Other students in such classes were also not academically-oriented. Put in such classes they tended to select friends who were not

interested in pursuing tertiary studies, but they were very keen on sports and leisure activities. With their negative values they took "the values of academics and turned them upside down" (Hargreaves, 1967, p. 162), and formed "an example of negative polarity" (Cohen in Hargreaves, ibid). For them meeting their mates and playing sports was the "real life" in school. Consequently, for three years these students stayed in focus and remedial classes.

For the final two years of their high school they ended up studying non-TEE subjects, that they termed as "vegie subjects". By then, they were 'cooled out' (Woods, 1984) because their teachers had low expectations of them and they lacked self-motivation. Studying non-TEE subjects, they 'tended to percolate downwards in the processes of academic and behavioural differentiation (Ball, 1981). They had developed traits of behaviour, which were not helpful to them to excel academically. Sometimes Chris played truant; Ben and Glenn cut classes in maths and science; Ben had withdrawn psychologically, and Lee Kok daydreamt quite often. Thus, all of them committed themselves minimally to school work. Their estranged relationship with their teachers had strengthened their anti-school behaviour and low performance. In a way, they perceived their interactions with teachers as an 'us' and 'them' situation. Sitting next to the canteen (Glenn), in secluded corners of the school (Chris), and basketball court (Clint), they had adopted a 'typical gang behaviour' which was displayed in a deliberate assertion by littering the place and refusing to clean it.

At one stage, the deputy principal's remarks were directed at the likes of Glenn, Chris and Clint: "We have got a problem at the moment. Some of them are bullying the younger

kids and even female teachers. They use abusive language. There is litter everywhere. It is worrying.... We either ignore it but if we ask them to clean we feel threatened". Talking about Glenn, a male teacher on yard supervision saw him throwing rubbish. When he asked him to pick it up Glenn said, "You pick it up". "I came very close to clobbering him", the teacher said.

It appears that classification and evaluation of students is socially constructed in the daily interaction of children, their parents and teachers. I posit that advantage or disadvantage starts at home and is reinforced by school. On their part, students develop their attitude towards school and authority as a consequence of their interaction and interrelation with parents, teachers and peers. When Glenn, Chris and Clint started high school in Year 8 they were identified as students with problems in literacy and numeracy. Ben, Krista and Rachel were normal in every respect.

Eventually, not only did they become disillusioned and 'give up' but also learnt to blame the system for their failures. They learnt to 'resist' the authority of teachers and 'acted tough'. In unison, they claimed that teachers used heavy handed discipline and handed out degrading and sadistic punishments. About one of their teachers, who taught Glenn and Clint, they complained that he swore at them, but if they did, he punished them. They labelled him 'humourless, ill-tempered and gutless'. They also complained that some of their teachers had favourites. "If I talk, my maths teacher picks on me while the whole class is talking.... One day he started yelling at me and then I started yelling at him. Then he sent me to the time out room" [a room to isolate the misbehaving children], Glenn complained.

Ben, Glenn and Clint acted like 'ring leaders' and challenged teachers' authority. Quite often they tended to use vulgarities, foul speech, rough manners and deliberate disregard of the niceties in class. Swearing and yelling in class and smoking in school grounds were very typical of them. Teachers also had formed their opinions about them. "If there is a noise in the class, Ben and Glenn are at the centre of it. Kick Glenn out and there is peace in the classroom.... Separate Krista from the rest, she works well.... Clint leads the others astray".

By comparison, Tein, Hongzia, Victor, Miran and Lee Kok started high school education with a clear disadvantage in language. All of them were in English as Second Language classes. Ironically, ESL classes were meant to improve their fluency in English but they considered it a stigma to be in ESL classes. Their parents believed that if their children were in ESL classes they were not performing well[19]. By the end of Year 9 not only they had moved to the normal English classes but were performing as well as the average English speaking pupils were. The stereotypical attitude of teachers was that even though ESL pupils were weak in English, they were hardworking and followed class rules. ESL teachers were specialists and had higher expectations of their pupils. Teachers told their ESL pupils that they were smart and when they improved in English their grades would improve in other subjects as well. This was in sharp contrast to the teachers of

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[19] An ESL teacher told me that at a meeting with Chinese-Australian parents she had a difficult time to convince them that ESL was a facility for students from non-English speaking background to overcome the language problems. But the parents thought that once their children were registered in ESL classes they would not be allowed to transfer to the normal stream. As an insider I know that to a degree these parents were correct in their assessment. In order to show the numbers some Chinese-Australian children were coerced to enrol in ESL classes even though they did not have to be there. Mrs Goh, for example, argued against Tein to be enrolled in ESL class because "being Chinese does not mean she is not good at English."

remedial maths and focus English who were not the specialist teachers and did not have high expectations of their pupils. They led the pupils to believe that they were "no good".

The ethnographic account of the life of students given in this chapter has provided substantial evidence in support of teacher expectation effects otherwise known as self-fulfilling prophecy. There are striking differences in the ways Chinese and Anglos approach their school work. Teachers' comments on students' reports indicate that the former make higher evaluations and give greater pedagogic commitment to those students whose academic and social behaviour is closest to the classroom standards and rules set by them. Some of the most common behavioural signals teachers expect to see pupils give are quiet social interactions, ask questions, participate in class activities, be obedient, respect their authority, use standard English when speaking, accept personal responsibility for their actions, perform the given tasks and actively and harmoniously interact with others in classrooms. Chinese, more than Anglos, meet most of the above criteria. Consequently, their teachers interact with them in more positive ways. Behaviour of students at school indicates that certainly Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian children approach school differently and this difference in their approach makes a big difference in their performance. Chapter Eight examines the differences in their academic performance.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

# CROSS CULTURAL COMPARISONS

**Introduction**

In the preceding three chapters I focused on the home life and school adjustment and attitude of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian high school students. In this chapter I will compare their academic performance and educational and occupational aspirations. Also, I will discuss some key factors which explain the variations in academic performance of children from these families. Although I followed these students for three years I had full access to their academic and sports records from primary school to the end of high school. Information given in a number of tables is derived from students' reports and interviews with their parents and teachers. In most Western Australian schools students receive their progress reports four times a year in lower school and twice a year in upper school. For convenience, clarity and brevity I have taken the end of the year grades in lower school and half-yearly grades in upper school.

The data reported in Table 8-1 shows that in the final report of Year 7 Krista, Rachel and Chi Chen were rated outstanding students; Miran, Hongzia, Tein and Victor were average students in all subjects, except in English, and were enrolled in ESL classes. Clint, Chris, Ben, and Pearl were above average students. Glenn was below average in maths and English whereas Lee was an average student for whom bullying had dealt a heavy blow to his self-esteem. Table 8-1 also shows that, collectively, students from neither group differed markedly from each other on their Inter-D scores, a crude measure of their ability.

Rachel, Krista and Chi Chen had the highest Inter-D scores; Ben, Hongzia, Chris, Clint, Miran and Pearl were average and the rest were below average.

The most frequent words, which featured in teachers' comments about the behaviour and attitude of Chinese-Australian students, were 'quiet', 'diligent', 'obedient' and 'co-operative'. Except for the comments on Rachel's report, the words such as 'quiet' and 'diligent' were missing on Anglo-Australian students' reports.

**Table 8-1: Ability (Inter-D Score) and Performance in the Final Year of Primary School**

| Student | Final Year 7 Report | Inter-D Score (IQ Score) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Language % | Quantitative % |
| Chi Chen Goh | Outstanding | 85 | 95 |
| Tein Goh | Average | 35 | 40 |
| Pearl Cheong | Above Average | 80 | 70 |
| Victor Cheong | Average | 30 | 34 |
| Hongzia Kwang | Above Average | 70 | 70 |
| Miran Kwang | Above Average | 75 | 68 |
| Lee Kok | Below Average | 20 | 80 |
| Rachel Marshall | Outstanding | 100 | 95 |
| Chris Marshall | Above Average | 65 | 70 |
| Krista Smith | Outstanding | 80 | 85 |
| Ben Morgan | Above Average | 58 | 70 |
| Clint Morrison | Average | 50 | 55 |
| Glenn Morrison | Below Average | 35 | 20 |

In Year 8 Glenn was put in an English focus class and remedial maths because of his weakness in these subjects. Except for Chi Chen and Pearl, Chinese-Australians were put in ESL classes because of their weakness in English. Students in ESL classes were taught by specialist teachers to help them improve their proficiency in English.

In the Year 8 reports for Glenn, Chris, Ben and Clint, teachers had commented on their lack of effort and occasional disruptive behaviour. In fact, Glenn had been suspended for a few days for swearing at a teacher; Clint had been reported for writing graffiti on the

desk, and Chris had been reprimanded for smoking. In sports, on the other hand, they had

impressed their teachers and they were included in a number of schools teams.


**Performance in Lower School**


By comparison, none of the Chinese-Australian students was reported for

misbehaviour. On the contrary, their teachers admired them for their compliance to the

school rules and for their diligence. An ESL teacher told me, "The most important aim of

the Chinese kids is to prove that they are as good as the Aussie kids in English. They want

to move to the normal English class." Apart from the compulsory participation they did not

show much interest in team sports. For their optional subjects they chose to study Japanese,

in sharp contrast to Anglo-Australians who opted to study manual arts, home economics

and physical recreation. Rachel was the only Anglo-Australian to study Japanese. In

general, the rate of absenteeism was low for all students. However, Glenn, Chris, Ben and

Clint were absent from school more frequently during winter than anyone else. If a

Chinese-Australian student was absent it generally happened on a class picnic day or on a

day of non-academic activities.

By Year 9 differences in academic performance of Chinese and Anglo-Australian

students had started to become more obvious. Lower school grades given in Table 8-2 and

Table 8-3 indicate that, in sharp contrast to Anglo-Australians, the Chinese-Australian

students kept on improving in all subjects. At the start of high school the most common

grade in most subjects for Chinese students was a B but by the end of Year 10 the majority

were getting A grades in most subjects. Even though they were not in any of the school

team games, in physical education they also attained B grades. With the exception of Chi

Chen and Pearl, all Chinese students were attending ESL classes in Year 8. By the end of

Year 9 all of them had been put in the normal stream for English. In Year 10 Chi Chen,

Miran, Hongzia and Pearl were all A grade students in English. Miran and Pearl selected

English literature as one of their upper school subjects and performed brilliantly.

**Table 8-2: Performance of Anglo-Australian Students Year 8-10**

| Student | Yr | English | Maths | Science | Social Studies | Physical Education | Manual Arts Japanese |
|---------|-----|---------|-------|---------|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Rachel | 8 | A | B | A | A | B/A | A |
| | 9 | A | B/A[20] | A | A | B | A |
| | 10 | A | B | A | A | B | A |
| Chris | 8 | C/B | C/B | C/B | B | A | A |
| | 9 | B/C | C | C | B/C | A/B | B |
| | 10 | C | C | C | B/C | A/B | B |
| Krista | 8 | A | A/B | B | B | A | A |
| | 9 | A | B | B/A | B/A | A | A |
| | 10 | A | B | B | A | A/B | A/B |
| Ben | 8 | C/B | C/B | B/C | B/C | A | A/B |
| | 9 | C | C | B/C | C | A | B |
| | 10 | C/B | C | C | C/B | A | B |
| Clint | 8 | B/C | C/B | C/B | B/C | A | B |
| | 9 | C/B | C | C | B/C | A | B |
| | 10 | C | C | C | C/B | A | B |
| Glenn | 8 | C | C | C | C | A/B | B |
| | 9 | C/B | C/B | C | C | B | C |
| | 10 | C/D | D/F | C/D | C | B | C |

[20] B/A means more B than A and C/B means more C than B in that year

**Table 8-3: Performance of Chinese-Australian Students Year 8-10**

| Student | Yr | English | Maths | Science | Social Studies | Physical Education | Manual Arts Japanese |
|---------|----|---------|-------|---------|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Chi | 8 | A/B | A | A | A | B | A |
| Chen | 9 | A | A | A | A | B/A | A |
| | 10 | A | A | A | A | B | A |
| Tein | 8 | C | C/B | C/B | C | C | C |
| | 9 | C | B | B/C | C/B | C | B |
| | 10 | C/B | B | B/C | B | C/B | B |
| Pearl | 8 | B | B | A | A | B | A |
| | 9 | B/A | A | A | A | B | A |
| | 10 | A | A | A | A | B | A |
| Victor | 8 | C | B | A/B | C | C | C/B |
| | 9 | C | A | A/B | B/A | C | C/B |
| | 10 | C/B | A | A | A | C/B | C/B |
| Hongzia | 8 | B/A | A | A | B | B | A |
| | 9 | B/A | A | A | B | B | A |
| | 10 | A | A | A | A | B | A |
| Miran | 8 | B | A | A | B | C/B | A |
| | 9 | B/A | A/B | A | A | C/B | A |
| | 10 | B/A | A | A | A | B | A/B |
| Lee | 8 | C | C | C | C | D | C |
| | 9 | C | C/D | C/B | C/D | D | C/B |
| | 10 | C | C/D | C | C/B | D | C |

By comparison, the academic performance of most Anglos had deteriorated, except in physical education. For example, Chris, Ben, Clint and Glenn were getting mostly B grades in Year 8 but in Year 10 their most common grade was C. Rachel and Krista performed very well in lower school, securing mostly A grades. All of them were doing very well in physical education. In fact, they had been included in various school sports teams. Clint and Ben too had been identified as talented athletes and been included in school teams to compete in basketball and baseball games at the state level.

The most common comments of teachers about the Chinese students were: "pleasure to teach", "makes hundred percent effort to obtain a perfect score". The teachers of Glenn, Chris, Ben and Clint said such things as: "has the ability but does not

**Table 8-4: Teachers' Impressions of Students from the Two Sub-Groups[21]**

| Student | TRUST-WORTHY | MOTIVATED | ASSERTIVE | OBEDIENT | RESPECTFUL | COMPETI-TIVE | CO-OPERATIVE | COURTEOUS | SUBMISSIVE | LAZY | DISRUPTIVE | PLEASURE TO TEACHER | HAPPY TO GET RID OF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Glenn | 5,5,4 | 5,5,4 | 3,5,4 | 4,3,2 | 2,3,2 | 5,5 | 4.5 | 3,4 | 3,5 | 4,3,1 | 3,1,1,1 | No | Yes |
| Ben | 4,3,4 | 3,4,5 | 3,2(1 PE) | 3,3,4 | 2,3,3 | 4,3 1(PE) | 3,3,2 | 2,3,2 | 3,3,2 | 3,4,5 | 3,2,3 | No | Yes/No |
| Krista | 2,3,3,3 | 3,2,3,3 | 3,3,2,3 | 2,3,3,3 | 1,2,2,2 | 3,3,3,3 | 2,3,3,2 | 3,2,2,2 | 3,3,3 | 4,3,3 | 5,4,4,3 | Yes | No |
| Rachel | 1,1 | 1,1 | 1,2 | 2,1,2 | 1,1 | 3,2,1 | 1,1,1 | 1,2,1 | 4,5 | 5,5,5 | 5,5,5 | Yes | No |
| Chris | 2,3 | 4,4 | 3,4 | 3,2 | 2,3 | 4,5 | 2,3 | 2,3 | 3,3 | 1,2 | 3,3 | No | Yes/No |
| Lee | 1,1 | 3,3 | 4,4 | 1,1,1 | 1,1,1 | 4,5 | 3,4,5 | 1,1,2 | 2,2 | 3,3 | 5,5 | Yes | No |
| Chi Chen | 1,1 | 1,1 | 2,3 | 1,1 | 1,1 | 1,2 | 1,1 | 1,1 | 2,3 | 2,3 | 5,5 | Yes | No |
| Victor | 1,1,1 | 1,1,1 | 1,2,1 | 2,1,1 | 2,1,2 | 2,1,1 | 2,1,2 | 5,4,4 | 5,5,5 | 5,5,5 | | Yes | No |
| Hongzia | 1,1,1 | 1,1,1 | 1,1,1 | 1,1,2 | 1,1,1 | 1,1,1 | 1,1,1 | 1,1,1 | 3,2,3 | 5,5,5 | 5,5,5 | Yes | No |
| Miran | 1,1 | 1,1 | 1,1,1 | 1,1,1 | 1,1 | 1,1 | 1,1 | 1,1 | 2,1 | 5,5 | 5,5 | Yes | No |

[21] On a scale of 1-5 one means most and five means least. For example two of Glenn's teachers who agreed to complete the questionnaire said Glenn was least trustworthy. Ben's physical education teachers rated him highly but the others said that he was disruptive and not a pleasure to teach.

The most common comments of teachers about the Chinese students were: "pleasure to teach", "makes hundred percent effort to obtain a perfect score". The teachers of Glenn, Chris, Ben and Clint said such things as: "has the ability but does not apply himself", "tends to waste time", "needs many reminders before he gets on with his work".

Table 8-4 gives a summary of teachers' impressions of the ten students whose teachers agreed to rank order them on thirteen behavioural characteristics. For each student five of his/her teachers were asked to comment. Teachers regarded Chinese students mostly as trustworthy, motivated, obedient, courteous, cooperative, and respectful. Interestingly enough, in academic pursuits teachers rated them highly competitive and assertive but submissive and un-competitive in sports. By comparison, Glenn's teachers rated him as lazy and disruptive. Ben's teachers rated him as very lazy in studies but very active, competitive and assertive on the sports field. Rachel was rated as favourably as the Chinese students but described as quite competitive and assertive in sports as well. Neutral comments about Krista were most common.

The single most important factor contributing to the improved performance of Chinese students was their predisposition towards school work and the time they spent on school related activities. Table 8-5 shows the number of hours per week these students spent on different activities. In general, Chinese students spent three to five times more hours on homework than their Anglo-Australian counterparts. For example, Lee and Glenn were both low achievers but the former spent five times more hours than Glenn on school work did, although academically he did not outperform him. Rachel, the top student in the Anglo-Australian group, spent half as much time on school work as Hongzia did.

An altogether different picture emerged when the two groups were compared on the time spent on organised sports. Miran and Hongzia reported that they did not spend any time on sports other than at school during physical education classes. Victor played golf and went swimming with his parents and his sister. Chi Chen had become keen on lion dancing and Tein was also enthusistic at Chinese dance.

**Table 8-5: Number of Hours Spent in Doing Various Activities Per Week 1995**

| | Homework | Part -Time Job | Tuition | Sports | TV/Stereo/ Computer | Socialising With Friends | Socialising With Parents | Household Chores |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chi Chen | 17 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 20 | 8 | 4 | - |
| Lee | 15 | - | 2 | 1.5 | 26 | - | 4.5 | 1.5 |
| Hong-zia | 24 | - | 2 | - | 18 | - | 6 | 2 |
| Miran | 22 | - | 1 | - | 29 | 4 | 7 | 4 |
| Victor | 23 | - | 2 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 6 | 2 |
| Pearl | 25 | - | 1 | 4 | 18 | - | 7 | 3 |
| Rachel | 12 | 10 | - | 6 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Chris | 8 | 15 | - | 9 | 15 | 24 | 2 | - |
| Ben | 11 | 14 | - | 15 | 15 | 10 | 6 | 4 |
| Glenn | 3 | 10 | - | 6 | 31 | 16 | 2 | 4 |
| Clint | 5 | 12 | - | 10 | 22 | 20 | 2 | 6 |

For Anglo-Australian students, on the other hand, playing sports after school hours was an integral part of their weekly routine. More importantly, their parents considered that it contributed to a healthy life-style. On average, Anglo-Australian students spent between six to fifteen hours a week on sport. Moreover, the after effects of daily organised sports, such as the resultant fatigue, discussion on sports and time spent watching sports on television also took place at the expense of doing work related to their school activities.

The data in Table 8-5, especially column 1, demonstrates the actual difference in the time spent by children in school-related and non-school activities. Among other things, it

shows that after school, Chinese-Australian children spent hardly any time socialising with friends. Parental involvement in their children's career paths became quite evident at the end of Year 10 when their children were making subject selections for the upper school study program. I noticed that Chinese parents attended the information night organised by the school about subject selection, and talked to their children about the value of more difficult subjects, and used their social network before they made decisions about their children. By comparison, Anglo-Australian parents tended to allow their children to select their own subjects after first listening to teachers.

Two other areas in which Chinese and Australians differed dramatically were working part-time and socialising with friends. By Year 10, all Anglo-Australians had been doing part-time work ranging from 10 to 15 hours per week, and were spending considerable amounts of time socialising with friends. For example, Chris spent so much of his spare time—about 24 hours per week—in the company of friends that, in his father's words, "he uses his home only to sleep in". Rachel at eight hours a week, spent the least amount of time with friends for an Anglo, but as much time as Chi Chen who was the most out-going in the Chinese group did. By contrast, socialising and part-time work were almost non-existent in the weekly routine of Chinese students. Except for Chi Chen and Tein who spent two to three hours a week working at their parents' news agency, none of the Chinese students worked part-time. Their parents held the view that at high school a child's main job was to study, and were extremely wary of peer groups. They did not want their children to be "influenced by street culture" or "the wrong crowd". Compared with the Anglos, Chinese students spent more time in the company of their parents.

A look at the time spent on watching television, playing computer games, and listening to stereos also revealed subtle differences. Rachel and Victor spent the least time on such activities. However, when these activities were investigated individually, it was found that Chinese students spent considerable time either typing school assignments on computer, or playing computer games with or without their parents. By contrast, Anglos, with the exception of Rachel, spent more time watching television and videos or listening to stereos and CDs with friends.

Put simply, the most common after-school hours activity of Chinese-Australian students was doing homework, whereas for Anglo-Australians it was sport, doing part-time work or socialising with friends. To further assist their children, by all Chinese parents had provided them with a home tutor by Year 10. None of the Anglo-Australian parents had done so. By the time upper school arrived, all seven Chinese-Australian students had moved out of ESL classes into normal English classes. Their improved reports in upper school support the argument that when spoken English language proficiency is not an issue, Asian students tend to obtain better results than local students (Bourne and Davenport, 1993; Burns, 1991).

### Performance in Upper School

By the middle of Year 10 teachers at Paramount counsel the students about their study programs for the final two years of high school. Essentially, this advice is given on the basis of students' performance in lower school. Thus the Chinese children in this study, except for Lee, had all stepped up their efforts to take up subjects, that could lead to

university courses. Rachel, Krista, Ben, and Chris were also keen to study at university, but only Krista and Rachel had made any effort to make their way into university courses. Except for Lee Kok, all the Chinese-Australian students had selected six TEE subjects (the maximum allowed). Chi Chen, Miran and Hongzia had selected the most challenging subjects, those which the teachers themselves called ' top-notch' or 'elite subjects'. In making educational decisions at crucial stages, such as selecting subjects for upper school (Years 11 and 12), all parents attended the information nights arranged by the school, but Chinese parents also used their social networks and consulted academic guides at school. For example, in Year 12 Miran and Pearl both dropped geometry and trigonometry in favour of applied maths in order to boost their TEE score. Table 8-6 shows that except for Lee, all Chinese-Australian students studied TEE subjects and registered an impressive performance.

Among the Anglo-Australian students, as shown in Table 8-7, only Rachel selected the so-called 'top-notch' subjects in Year 11, but by Year 12 she had dropped chemistry and calculus in favour of more watered down non-TEE subjects such as home economics and discrete maths. In Year 11 Chris, Clint and Ben had selected a mixture of TEE and non-TEE subjects. But in Year 12 Clint had dropped the TEE subjects in favour of all non-TEE subjects. In Year 12, Ben also dropped chemistry and higher maths. Krista, meanwhile, had selected one non-TEE and five TEE subjects.

In upper school in general and in Year 12 in particular, the polarisation of these students had crystallised: most Chinese gravitating towards studies, and most Anglos towards sports. In making key decisions the Chinese parents were much more supportive of

their children even though they were not conversant with the educational system in Australia. Invariably, they used their social networks to guide their children and made decisions for them, whereas Anglo parents mostly left it up to their children to select subjects that they were "capable of handling without much stress". Left up to them to decide, and influenced more by their peers than parents, Anglos had set their target either to study at TAFE college or to take full-time jobs after Year 12. Ben and Chris made half-hearted attempts to graduate with TEE subjects, but both of them failed to meet the minimum requirements for university entrance.

The influence of school policies became evident in upper school. In general, more experienced teachers tended to get the classes of students who selected more challenging TEE subjects, whereas new teachers with less teaching experience were assigned the classes of non-TEE subjects. Students who selected more challenging TEE subjects, as most Chinese students did, were more goal-oriented, self-motivated, and keen to learn. In classes with high achieving students they tended to reinforce the value of education as a vehicle to social mobility. Teachers who taught such classes also had high expectations of them. Teachers' efforts to draw the best out of such self-motivated students were further reinforced by the high expectations of their parents. Encouraged by their parents, Chinese children spent most of their spare time making notes from textbooks and extra resources provided by parents.

Year 11 proved to be crucial for students from both groups. The first semester examination of Year 11 gave a reasonably correct assessment of students' capability to handle the subjects, which they had selected with a view to pursue their future career paths.

Except for Chi Chen, all the Chinese experienced difficulties coping with upper school, so parents' ability to guide was crucial.

**Table 8-6: Academic Performance of Chinese-Australians in Upper School**

| Student | Yr | Subjects | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chi Chen | | Chemistry | Geometry | Calculus | Japanese | Physics | English |
| | 11 | 92 (A) | 90 (A) | 93 (A) | 87 (A) | 85 (A) | 76 (A) |
| | 12 | 91 (A) | 94 (A) | 91 (A) | 91 (A) | 88 (A) | 85 (A) |
| Hongzia | | Chemistry | Geometry | Calculus | Japanese | Physics | English |
| | 11 | 88 (A) | 78 (A) | 84 (A) | 88 (A) | 84 (A) | 77 (A) |
| | 12 | 84 (A) | 88 (A) | 74 (B) | 88 (A) | 78 (A) | 75 (A) |
| Victor | | Accounting | Geometry | Calculus | Economics | Computing | English |
| | 11 | 88 (A) | 67 (B) | 78 (A) | 71 (B) | 63 (B) | 58 (C) |
| | 12 | 85 (A) | 75 (B) | 84 (A) | 74 (A) | 48 (C) | 66 (B) |
| Miran | | Geometry | Economics | English Lit | Chemistry | Physics | Calculus |
| | 11 | 68 (B) | 76 (A) | 71 (B) | 74 (A) | 70 (B) | 72 (B) |
| | 12 | 73 (B) | 72 (A) | 75 (A) | 70 (B) | 77 (A) | 40 (D) |
| Tein | | English | Discrete Maths | Applicable Computing | Accounting | Economics | Geography |
| | 11 | 65 (B) | 61 (C) | 83 (A) | 59 (C) | 49 (C) | 51 (C) |
| | 12 | 60 (B) | 60 (C) | 78 (B) | 56 (C) | 48 (C) | 47 (C) |
| Pearl | | Chemistry | Economics | English Lit | Calculus | Political Science | Accounting |
| | 11 | 67 (B) | 61 (B) | 80 (A) | 51 (C) | 80 (A) | 75 (B) |
| | 12 | 53 (C) | 60 (B) | 80 (A) | 52 (C) | 78 (A) | 68 (C) |
| Lee | | Modelling Maths | Senior Eng | Senior Science | Work Studies | | |
| | 11 | C | C | C | D | | |
| | 12 | C | C | C | C | | |

Encouraged by their parents, Chinese children spent most of their spare time making notes from textbooks and extra resources provided by parents.

Year 11 proved to be crucial for students from both groups. The first semester examination of Year 11 gave a reasonably correct assessment of students' capability to handle the subjects, which they had selected with a view to pursue their future career paths. Except for Chi Chen, all the Chinese experienced difficulties coping with upper school, so parents' ability to guide was crucial.

**Table 8-7: Academic Performance of Anglo-Australians in Upper School**

| Student | Yr | Subjects | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rachel | | Economics | English Lit | Chemistry | Calculus | Drama | Japanese |
| | 11 | 78 (A) | 84 (A) | 72 (A) | 58 (C) | A | 86 (A) |
| | | | | Home Economics | Discrete Maths | | |
| | 12 | 70 (B) | 75 (B) | A | 86 (A) | A | 90 (A) |
| Ben | | Chemistry | Geography | Wood Work | Human Biology | Calculus | English |
| | 11 | 45 (D) | 53 (C) | B | 54 (C) | 35 (F) | 38 (F) |
| | | Physical Science | | | | Discreet Maths | |
| | 12 | 51 (C) | 48 (C) | B | 52 (C) | 71 (B) | 48 (D) |
| Krista | | English | History | Accounting | Health Studies | Physical Science | Calculus |
| | 11 | 76 (A) | 72 (A) | 85 (B) | A | 84 (A) | 74 (B) |
| | 12 | 70 (A) | 70 (A) | 70 (A) | 80 (B) | 78 (A) | 68 (B) |
| Glenn | | Wood Work | Maths in Practice | Metal Work | Photo | Senior Science | Senior English |
| | 11 | C | C | C | C | B | B |
| | 12 | D | D | C | B | B | C |
| Clint | | Geography | History | Human Biology | Wood Work | Photo | Physical Education |
| | 11 | 47 (C) | 45 (D) | 49 (C) | B | B | A |
| | | Senior Science | Metal Work | | | | |
| | 12 | 55 (C) | B | 50 (C) | B | B | A |
| Chris | | History | Geography | Human Biology | Physical Science | Metal Work | Home Economics |
| | 11 | 51 (C) | 49 (C) | 52 (C) | 54 (C) | B | B |
| | 12 | 40 (D) | 45 (C) | 46 (C) | 50 (C) | B | B |

Table 8-8 indicates the final scores and career aspirations of Anglo-Australian and Chinese-Australian children. With little difference in performance between them at the start of high school, we now see that they finished very differently indeed: most Chinese-Australians had enrolled in university, most Anglo-Australians either had enrolled at TAFE colleges or had taken part-time or full time jobs after Year 12. This pattern is remarkably similar to the overall differences in performance of Anglo-Australians and Chinese-Australians at Paramount Senior High School, as well as to findings in the U.K.

(Tomlinson, 1994; Gibson, 1994) and the USA (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992) as discussed earlier.

**Table 8-8: Academic Performance and Occupational Aspirations (1997)**

| Name | TEE/TAFE Score | Career Path/Aspirations |
|---|---|---|
| Chi Chen Goh | 450/510 | Science/Engineering (UWA) |
| Hongzia Kwang | 399/510 | Dentistry (UWA) |
| Victor Cheong | 367/510 | Commerce (Curtin) |
| Tein Goh | 335/510 | Business (Curtin) |
| Pearl Cheong | Yr. 12 | Commerce/Business |
| Miran Kwang | 354/510 | Optometry |
| Lee Kok | Completed Yr. 12 at TAFE | No further studies |
| Rachel Marshall | 403/510 | Japanese (Murdoch) |
| Krista Smith | 364/510 | Commerce (Curtin) |
| Clint Morrison | Completed TAFE course | No further studies |
| Chris Marshall | 164/510 (Failed TEE) | No further studies |
| Ben Morgan | 231/510 (Failed TEE) | No further studies |
| Glenn Morrison | Completed Yr.12 TAFE | No further studies |

**Table 8-9: Educational Aspirations of Paramount Senior High School Graduates**

| | Anglos | | Chinese | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1997 | 1998 | 1997 | 1998 |
| Number of students graduating with TAFE subjects | 103 | 101 | 6 | 14 |
| Number of students graduating with TEE subjects | 153 | 136 | 35 | 42 |
| Number of students graduating with a TEE score of over 70% | 32 | 24 | 15 | 25 |
| Number of students graduating with six 'elite' TEE subjects | 16 | 11 | 13 | 17 |

Source: Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1997 1998

**Table 8-10: Outstanding Academic Performance[22] at Paramount-1997**

| | Chinese-Australians | Anglo-Australians |
|---|---|---|
| General Exhibition | 2 | - |
| Certificates of Distinction | 9 | 2 |
| Certificates of Excellence | 10 | 10 |

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[22] Information given in Tables 8-9, 8-10, and 8-11 has got some margin of error because there were a few Chinese students with Anglo names. From these tables students with non-Chinese and non-Anglo names are excluded.

**Table 8-11:** **Outstanding Performance in sports at Paramount 1995-1997**

| | 1995 | | 1996 | | 1997 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Chinese | Anglos | Chinese | Anglos | Chinese | Anglos |
| Athletics | 4 | 25 | 3 | 20 | 5 | 23 |
| Basketball | 0 | 15 | 0 | 14 | 1 | 13 |
| Netball | 1 | 11 | 2 | 10 | 0 | 12 |
| Hockey | 0 | 8 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 9 |

Table 8-9 shows that almost equal numbers of Anglo-Australian students at

Paramount enrolled in TAFE courses; as they did in university degree courses. On the other

hand, only a small fraction of Chinese-Australians enrolled in TAFE colleges, the majority

of them enrolled in university. Even more significantly, most Chinese-Australians

graduated in 'elite' TEE subjects with over 70% marks. By comparison, a smaller number

of Anglo-Australians scored over 70% marks and most of these in easier TEE subjects. Chi

Chen, Hongzia, Victor, Miran, and Pearl all graduated in 'elite' subjects, but only Rachel

and Krista did so, from the Anglo-Australian families.

I now turn to comparisons between the highest performers in sports and academic

subjects. The information given in Table 8-10 shows that Chinese-Australian students not

only studied TEE subjects but also strove for academic excellence. Considering that at

Paramount the number of Chinese-Australian students was about one-fourth of the total

number of students, Chinese-Australians out-performed their Anglo-Australian counterparts

and this trend remained the same for five years. This pattern was reversed when it came to

excellence in sports. In virtually all the major sports, as indicated in Table 8-11, Anglo-

Australians won all sports awards. Again, this excellence in sports generally is almost

identical to the interest and performance of Anglo-Australians included in this study.

The data given in the above tables reveals how the gap between Anglo-Australian and Chinese-Australian students' academic and sports performances kept on widening over time. In the remainder of this chapter I proffer some explanations for these differences particularly about the role of home and school, and students' own values and attitudes.

# The Chinese-Australian Model

**Cultural Values**

Adherents of the cultural thesis argue that in different cultures different values are emphasised because the social matrix in which they are embedded profoundly affects individuals. Some ethnic groups are able to achieve in spite of disadvantages and discrimination because their culture places a high premium on ambition, persistence, deferred gratification and social mobility (Ho, 1994). Chinese parents generally, like many other immigrants, have cultural respect for learning and value education as a means of self-advancement. In these families, the following characteristics were observed: a) demands and expectations on their children for achievement and upward mobility, b) induction of guilt about parental sacrifices (e.g., the Kwangs in particular), c) the need to fulfil obligations, d) respect for education, e) social comparison with other Chinese-Australian families in terms of academic success, and f) obedience to parents and teachers.

Given the emphasis on effort in the Confucian tradition, it is hardly surprising that Chinese-Australian children are expected to and do spend a great deal of time on activities related to education. With their beliefs embedded in Confucian culture, which traditionally values education and the virtues of hard work and effort, these families brought with them the cultural view that scholarship and effort are the routes to social mobility. Pinning almost a desperate faith in education Chinese parents, reinforced by their experiences in Australia, gave top priority to the education of their children.

In accordance with the filial piety children obey and conform to the rules made by parents, show reverence and respect towards them and are absolutely submissive. The case studies of Pearl, Victor, Miran and Hongzia bear testimony to support this claim. Chinese families held high expectations of their children and kept them goal-oriented. Having succeeded to convince their children that education is the key element for social mobility, these parents not only expected their children to perform well, but to study the subjects which would pave the way to professional vocational degrees. To achieve these goals the parents provided their children with a sense of mission, direction and challenge. For instance, towards the end of Year 10 when Chinese-Australian children were in the process of selecting their upper school subjects, their parents virtually selected the subjects for them. A year later when some of them found it hard to cope with the demand of the challenging subjects, their parents provided them with home tutors and extra help books.

With their Chinese cultural heritage (refer to Chapter Four), Chinese families tended to maintain "Chineseness" in their homes while pursuing Western education aggressively. In order to inculcate Chinese values, parents tended to take an authoritarian approach to child rearing. Chinese meals at home or at restaurants, Chinese music at home, and a distinctively Chinese social network all tended to confirm parents' desire to maintain Chineseness. And an emphasis on family unity, respect for elders and teachers, value of diligence and effort and personal discipline was also evident. Chinese-Australian parents' respect for scholarly attainment paralleled a high regard for effort, and the notion of performance was viewed as hinging on effort rather than ability. The cognitive socialisation of Chinese-Australian students followed a complex interpersonal process that transforms into an intrapersonal one (Cole et al., 1978; Pang, 1995). The need for approval

through doing well became internalised, though children were typically unaware of the process. For instance, by the time these children were in Year 11 they had become autonomous, and had accepted the responsibility of their own studies, and their parents had stopped pressing them to do their homework. Victor summed up the views of other parents: "When I was in Year 8 my Mum used to supervise my work all the time but now (Year 11) she knows that I don't need any reminder. Homework is my first priority". Hongzia's confession is worth repeating: "Before (in Years 8 and 9) we were not allowed to watch too much TV. They expected us to study all the time. Now (Year 11) they know we are studying hard, they allow us to watch more TV. Now I work so hard that Dad says 'don't give yourself too much pressure'. My doctor advises me to relax".

While the parents from these Chinese families were keen to improve their children's language skills, they were equally concerned about the danger of acculturation which followed from this. Mrs Cheong, Mrs Goh, and Mrs Kwang were worried that their daughters were "catching the bad habits of the Aussie kids" (by talking back and demanding outings with friends). To stop this "subtractive assimilation" (Gibson, 1995) they encouraged their daughters to attend Saturday Chinese language school, watch Chinese videos at home, participate in Chinese dance, Tai Kwan Do, and Tai Chi. Equally effective was the parents' strategy to socialise their children in their Chinese social networks made up of families similar to their own. This would quite often involve them eating out and picnicking together and at the same time allowed the children to mix and the adults to compare notes on school performance.

When I asked Chinese parents "What worries you most about your child?" their typical responses were: "bad habits rubbing off from the Aussie kids", "mixing with the wrong crowd", "challenging our authority", and "becoming lazy "and" demanding part-time work. As parents demanded obedience, emotional restraint, and formality in interpersonal authority, occasionally parent-child conflict flared, despite or because of the best efforts of parents to maintain traditional Chinese values. Such conflict was most evident when children from these families demanded to be allowed to go out with friends, to watch certain television programs, to talk at length to their friends on the phone, or to postpone their homework. In the case of Miran, there was conflict about speaking Chinese with her parents. And that brings me to another discovery.

**Parental goals**

Goal setting by parents has its origin in their traditional values for education, their colonial experiences, and their hardships as teenagers and their perceptions of opportunities in Australia. As teenagers they were supported in their education by parents who were self-employed in small businesses like street hawking or ownership of small grocery stores or coffee shops. They had witnessed the hardships of their parents as well as their financial sacrifices to educate them. They worked hard at school and settled in white-collar jobs, which enabled them to lead a more comfortable life than their parents did. These experiences became the motivational force for them to internalise the value of education [and to encourage] in their children [to take education seriously]. As these parents themselves reaped the rewards of higher education, so they perceived that their children too would benefit similarly by acquiring university degrees. Even though economically they

were well placed in their own countries, they perceived Australia as a land of opportunity, especially for their children. Three factors consequently motivated these families to emigrate to Australia: socio-political problems in their native countries, an appealingly easy-going life style in Australia, and better educational opportunities for their children. The parents' perception was that with Australian degrees their children could either acquire well paid jobs in their own countries or, alternatively, settle in professional occupations in Australia itself.

On arrival in Australia these people found that their upward social mobility was restricted owing to their limited knowledge of the English language and, according to two families, because of racism. Consequently, they encountered problems finding suitable jobs and ended up instead within the 'middle class migrant economy' (Light, 1972) or in self-employment. This means they tended to acquire lower status jobs than they had in their countries of origin and, accepted this in order to provide economic security for their families and—more importantly—educational resources for their children. The parents' drive for self-employment, however, was not necessarily due to the alleged discriminatory nature of the job market. Rather, self-employment provided an opportunity to give work experience to their children while allowing the parents to keep a watchful eye on them during after-school hours. Furthermore, experiences in low status jobs in Australia, plus the inspiration of successful Chinese-Australian professional families within the family social network, and their vision of available opportunities for children, motivated them to encourage their own children to put an inordinate number of hours doing school work and aiming to study for professional degrees.

One explanation for these families' enthusiasm [to direct their children to pursue] for professional degrees, can be attributed to the fact that since the late 1970s there has been accelerated industrial growth in Southeast Asia, and with it a demand for many technically trained professionals. However, with a limited number of universities and training institutions in these countries and, in some cases sociopolitical problems, also forced some people to emigrate to Australia. This would partly explain why Chinese-Australian parents so insist on Saturday Chinese school, studying Japanese as an optional subject, as well as directing their children to study maths, business and science oriented subjects which could lead to technical jobs. In short, with a university degree as the desired goal for their children, the parents in these families not only invested heavily on educational resources, but through their personal sacrifice of time and interest, they transmitted clear signals that to enjoy a "good life" later their children must work hard *now*.

### Commitment to education

As well as setting goals, Chinese-Australian parents in these families also provided emotional support, and *cultural* and *social capital* (Coleman, 1988). They brought with them the cultural view that scholarship and effort are the route to social mobility. And, although new to the country and not understanding the educational system well, they each showed one common value: namely, keeping their children committed to school work. The strategy they followed was to work hard in low paid jobs, show frugality, and invest heavily on education. Fully aware of their children's social and academic difficulties during the initial stages, they chose to suffer through sacrifice to help their children overcome language-related and social adjustment problems.

Chinese parents tended to believe that success in life has to do with the things studied at school. This belief is directly related to their children's improved grades as they progressed through high school. As Table 8-5 shows Anglo-Australian children spent far less time on school work during after-school hours, whereas for Chinese-Australians school work was an all consuming activity. This observation is in line with other cross-cultural studies (Garden, 1987; Stevenson, Lee and Stigler, 1986) which have established that the superior performance of Chinese and Japanese students, over Anglo-Americans, is due to the longer hours spent doing homework. The present study also shows that Chinese-Australians spent far more time on science and maths. Their commitment to studies was also reflected in the quality of work they did at home, the fact they all kept homework diaries and typed their assignments on computers, much to the appreciation of their teachers.

It was in order to provide those educational opportunities in the first place, that these parents decided to buy homes in the catchment area of Paramount Senior High. This itself is a strong indicator of their commitment to education, which is also reflected in their investment in time and educational resources and the provision of home tutors in glish, maths and science even when the likelihood of success was already high (e.g., Chi Chen, Hongzia, Pearl and Victor) or very low as in the case of Tein Goh or Lee Kok. The Kwangs were the most persuasive and even coercive in their demands for high grades. Mr Kwang's illness, the unemployment of both husband and wife (Mrs Kwang had resigned from her job in order to look after her ailing husband) and the subsequent financial hardship did not stop Hongzia and Miran from having a home tutor in maths. In due course, both girls improved in English and moved on from English as Second Language classes. The dying wish of Mr

Kwang to his older daughter was: "If something happens to me, don't give up your studies. We came to Australia for your sake. We would like you to be a doctor."

Similarly, Mrs Goh expressed high expectations for her daughter: "If you do not get 80 per cent marks I will nag you. I don't care how you feel." Victor and Pearl had remarkably set routines after school in order to complete their homework before being allowed to watch television or take part in any other recreational activities.

**Table 8-12:    Parental Expectations**

| Family | Expected Score(child 1) | Expected Score (Child 2) | Satisfied with (child 1) | Satisfied with (child 2) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chinese-Australian | | | | |
| Cheong | Victor  80 | Pearl  75 | 90 | 90 |
| Kok | Lee  55 | | 70 | |
| Kwang | Hongzia  100 | Miran  95 | 95 | 90 |
| Goh | Chi Chen  100 | Tein  60 | 70+ | 98 |
| Anglo-Australian | | | | |
| Marshall | Chris  50+ | Rachel  75+ | Any score | Any score |
| Morris | Clint  70 | Glenn  60 | Average score | Average score |
| Morgan | Ben  70 | | 80 | |
| Smith | Krista  70+ | | 80+ | |

The educational expectations and commitment of Chinese parents is reflected in Table 8-12. The parents were asked the question: if the class average is 70% what score do you expect your child to get and what score would you be satisfied with? The clear indication is that parental expectations were very high and that they were not satisfied with an average score. Moreover, such high expectations matched the cultural and social capital provided in these homes.

In most cases [when the students were making their selection of subjects for upper school] Chinese parents played a vital role; they virtually selected the subjects for their

children. In advising their children the parents were not driven as much by the interest of their children, as by their own desire to select career paths for them. On their part [Lee Kok was the only exception] these children obliged their parents by working hard and aiming at achieving high grades. Hongzia's commitment to studies was typical of the other Chinese-Australian children: "To get into medicine 80% marks and A grade is not enough. I want to keep my score above 90%. How can I slow down when I haven't done my TEE? I cannot sleep because I want to improve my score. I got 'A grades' in all subjects but my average was below 88%. Unless I get 88% aggregate I cannot get into medicine. My Dad always wanted me to do medicine." To achieve such targets these children had become noticeably self-disciplined and self-driven.

In these families the parents put their children to a set routine and insisted that they must finish homework before watching television. On Saturday all of them had to attend Chinese language classes. Near exam time all of them worked for long hours, some in the small hours of and some late at night. Near exam time they put extra time into their studies and the "exam fear" was so intense it took a toll on health. Hongzia suffered from perpetual headaches, loss of appetite and difficulty in sleeping. She, Miran and Tein also suffered from test anxiety and the pressure for high grades. Victor and Pearl were driven by their desire to please their parents with good grades. Interviews with teachers revealed that they were unaware of the depression and frustration of Hongzia and Lee Kok. About Pearl, Mr Cheong half-jokingly said, "If she had a choice between sleeping and reading she would choose reading." He and his wife were even compelled to cut down the time she spent on studies. Chi Chen stopped participating in the lion dance, and Victor stopped playing golf for three months before the TEE. In most cases this drive to excel was self and not parents

driven. The children had simply internalised their parents' expectations to give school work priority over all other activities. Consequently, they were the most regular borrowers of books from school and local libraries as indicated in Table 8-13.

**Table 8-13:    Use of books from the libraries**

| Student | School library | Local library |
|---------|----------------|---------------|
| Chi Chen | Borrowed regularly | Borrowed once or twice a week |
| Tein | Borrowed regularly | Borrowed once or twice a week |
| Victor | Borrowed regularly | Borrowed once or twice a week |
| Pearl | Borrowed regularly | Borrowed twice a week |
| Hongzia | Borrowed regularly | Borrowed once or twice a week |
| Miran | Borrowed regularly | Borrowed once or twice a week |
| Lee | Borrowed occasionally | Borrowed occasionally |
| Rachel | Borrowed regularly | Borrowed once a week |
| Chris | Borrowed occasionally | Borrowed rarely |
| Krista | Borrowed frequently | Borrowed occasionally |
| Ben | Borrowed infrequently | Borrowed occasionally |
| Clint | Borrowed infrequently | Borrowed sometimes |
| Glenn | Borrowed rarely | Borrowed rarely |

### Parental control

The most striking feature of these Chinese families was parental control over their children's after-school hour activities and the lack of it in Anglo-Australian families. This control by Chinese parents appeared to be similar to their own upbringing, which was characterised by filial piety and adherence to parental authority. By their own confession they themselves had been subject to strict control and physical and psychological sanctions when teenagers. As a result, they believed that "rearing without education is the fault of the father; teaching without strictness is the negligence of the teacher." In line with this Confucian ideal of filial piety Chinese-Australian children considered teachers as authority figures who were not to be questioned or challenged. Led by the belief that parents should

be firm with their children, these parents adopted strategies which appeared authoritarian but were certainly not accompanied by hostility and coercion. In fact, the emotional link between parents and their children was quite strong. Parents' control involved a great deal of active and positive support. There were two aspects to Chinese parents' authoritarian behaviour: first, their desire to counteract the influence of Australian children; and second, their desire to control the activities of their own children. In both respects they believed that they owed a responsibility to the child. They feared that if they allowed them to mix with Anglo-Australians or some "Asians who had become too much Australians" they might lose interest in studies. Thus there was a marked curtailment of children's spatial parameters outside the home and, even at home, children's activities were outlined with most of their time being spent doing what they (parents) considered purposeful. They also monitored routine learning activities, provided corrective feedback, and then imposed sanctions to reinforce their children's behaviour. On their part, the children responded in a positive manner trying to fulfil their parents' expectations by participating in achievement-related activities.

Of all the families, the after-school hours of the Cheong family were the most tightly controlled. Showing his disapproval of part-time work for students, Mr Cheong emphatically said, "At high school my children's main job is to concentrate on studies. Why should they go for a part-time job when my wife and I are both working? What are parents for? We can't understand how Australians can ask their children to leave home at the age of fifteen." Victor and Pearl told me that rules like doing homework from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., and not watching TV after 8 p.m., were a bit strict, and for this reason they had only partially accepted their parents' rationale. Enjoying a fair degree of autonomy, Mrs

Cheong, like her husband, was exacting and demanding. Victor followed his father's tradition by avoiding what his father called the "negative influences of the street kids". The Kwangs were equally strict with their daughters whom they coerced, and constantly lectured. Instead of allowing their children to spend time with their friends, the parents sacrificed their personal comfort and organised their homes around the activities of their children. They provided private tutors and invested heavily in educational resources, sometimes at the expense of considerable hardship, and even though they were not conversant with the educational system.

**Parental involvement**

Chinese parents were also closely involved in their children's recreational activities. At weekends and during holidays they spent a major portion of their time with their children, either watching Chinese movies, playing Chinese chequers or cards like the Kwangs; or getting involved in swimming, golf, and Kung-Fu, like the Cheongs; or in the lion dance and other Chinese dances, like the Gohs. And, Mrs Kok making herself available to the Christian Youth Group when Lee joined it.

Although there were differences in the ways parents in different families emphasised activities, it is the commonalities rather than differences which were most apparent. They motivated their children to take school work seriously and held high expectations of their children and remained practically and emotionally involved in their school activities.

In each family, children participated in facets of Chinese culture, such as the lion dance, Kung-Fu, Tai Chi and the organisation of cultural performances on occasions such

as Australia Day and Chinese New Year. To minimise the effect of subtractive assimilation but at the same time maximise support for the education of their children, parental involvement in school work activities was high. Significantly however, parents did not visit school other than on important occasions such as if their child was awarded a special honour for securing A grades in all subjects. The most important after-school hours activity of children was homework and notes revision, and when parents were unable to help (like the Kwangs and the Koks) they employed home tutors in maths, English and science. This they did, not because their children were necessarily weak (e.g., Tein and Lee) but, in most cases, in order to secure higher grades. Family visits were mainly confined to very carefully selected people of their social network, so that their children had the opportunity to interact with children of similar cultural background and educational aspirations.

My visits to the family, random or by appointment, between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., revealed these children's commitment to school work. In all four families straight after school, children went to their homes, some walking and others picked up by their parents. At home Mrs Cheong would sit next to her children reading novels or short stories while they completed their homework. Between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. twice a week a tutor would come to help Victor in English and maths. Twice a week Victor and Pearl would be taken to swimming lessons, on the way visiting the local library in case they needed books to complete an assignment. During the week, none of children were allowed to watch television after 8 p.m. and if they did not have much homework, they were encouraged to revise their notes and do extra work in maths. Predisposed to the values of school, the children from these families approached school work meticulously and, by their good

behaviour, impressed their teachers whose favourable responses only served to reinforce

parental high expectations.

**MACRO LEVEL**

**MICRO LEVEL**

**Native Country**

Confucian Values
Reasons to emigrate
Urban Living
Middle Class Values

Belief in
a) diligence
b) scholarship

**Home Environment**

- Provision of educational resources
- High Expectations
- Early goal setting
- Family-oriented life style
- Home tutor
- Control over after-school time
- Commitment to education

Presence of social capital

**Host Country**

Parental Experience
Choice of Residence
Choice of SchoolSocial
Network

**School Adjustment**

Minimum Participation in Sports
Docile Conformity
Teacher Expectations
Classroom Interactions

- Accommodation without acculturation
- Dual frame of reference
- Self-employment
- Social mobility via education

High Academic Performance
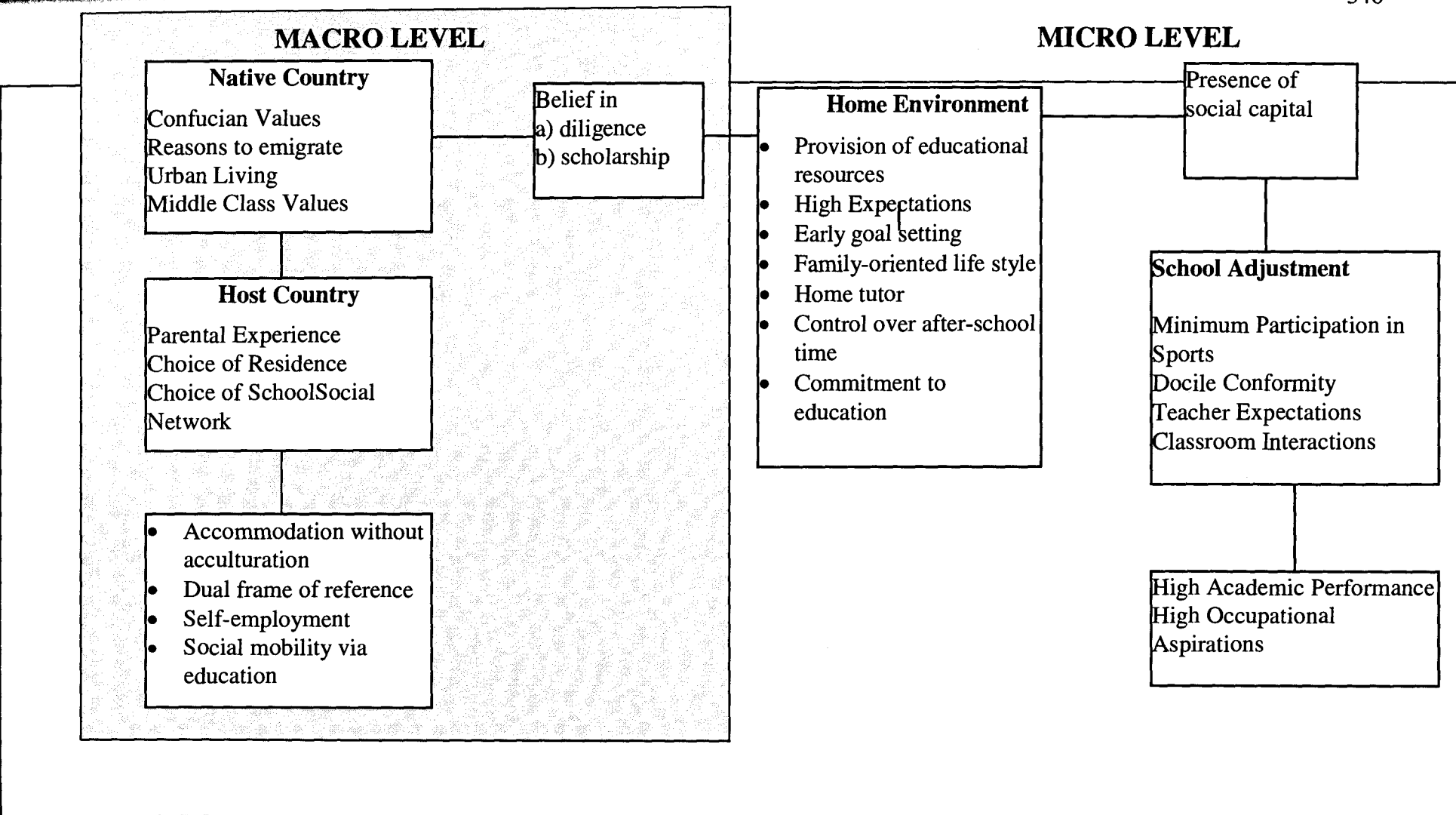High Occupational Aspirations

Figure 2:   CHINESE-AUSTRALIAN MODEL

Figure 2 brings together, as a model, many factors, previously discussed, which help to account for the academic success of the children in these four families.

# The Anglo-Australian Model

Unlike the Chinese-Australian families, the Anglo-Australian families in this study resided in Southside long before Paramount Senior High School became noted for its academic excellence. Some had chosen to live in Southside because, along with primary and secondary schools, it had all the necessary sports facilities. The Smith family had chosen to live there because relations were residing there. Some had seen the opportunity to extend their houses, if and when, other children came along.

### Interest in sports and leisure activities

As discussed in Chapter Five, excellence in sports is an important Australian value. During their teenage years, for example, the parents in these families had been very keen on sport. In fact, before marriage these parents met and started courting while playing sport and their interest in sports and leisure activities did not diminish as they grew older.

During their annual leave at Christmas these parents invariably took their children to coastal resorts to enjoy fishing and water sports. Other family activities also revolved around sports and recreation. In their backyard the Smiths had a swimming pool, table tennis and a dartboard, and a gamesroom with a billiard table and a bar. The Marshalls had a swimming pool, piano, ping pong, caravan and dartboard. The Morgans had a basketball

practice ring and dartboard. The Morrisons owned a basketball practice ring, dartboard, billiard table and a caravan. All of them had excellent barbecue facilities as well. By comparison, the Chinese-Australian families had fewer indoor sports facilities. In response to a question "How do you spend your weekends?" the Anglo-Australian parents boastfully said "playing or watching sports and catching up with friends." Male parents, in particular, were keen to watch Aussie Rules football and basketball.

Mr Morgan had been helping the local teams in baseball and Aussie Rules football as an umpire. The parents' interest in sports and leisure activities was germane to their children's interest in similar activities. Children from these families participated in organised sports and spent several hours a week training and playing sports.

The most common ground of interaction between Anglo-Australian parents and their children was this interest in sports and leisure activities. Ben, for example, was being comprehensively trained to compete in Aussie Rules football. Physically strong, he wanted to both identify himself with his older brother and father who put pressure on him to become a "footy star", and to please his parents who perpetually wanted him to win. The parents of Clint, Ben and Glenn regularly gave up their time to watch their children play sport. They followed their children's matches, yelled support from the sidelines, and were very keen to see them excel in games. Most days of the week between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. these children were either doing part-time paid work or playing sports. In this respect they were very different from their Chinese peers.

Clint was a basketball scholarship student and represented his school in interstate basketball competitions. Ben and Clint spent a lot of time training and playing games. Ben

was accepted by the Australian Institute of Sports to play baseball. Rachel, Krista, Glenn and Chris represented the school in various sports activities. Overall, this consuming interest in and achievement at sports seems to have been fairly typical of most Anglo-Australian students at Paramount Senior High. However, this is only my impression. Table 8-11 shows that practically all the sports awards at Paramount were won by Anglo-Australians who dominated all sports teams. Ben, Clint and Chris were also recipients of sports awards.

**Peer group orientation**

Unlike Chinese Australian children, Anglo-Australian children spent most of their time, especially weekends, in the company of their friends. These families held the view that children should be socialised into economic independence, assertiveness and the ability to make their own decisions at an early stage. Thus the parents encouraged their children to look for part-time work, help in household chores more often, and to freely socialise with their peers. This approach to child rearing had its roots in parents' own experience of part-time work when they were studying in lower high school, of saving money to buy second hand cars, and going out with friends of the opposite sex. Partly due to their own socialisation and partly because of their desire to have "free time for themselves" they wanted their children to be independent at an early age. These parents were of the firm belief that children learn a lot of things from their peer group and that responsibility comes to them if they are exposed to the workforce from an early age. In sharp contrast to Chinese-Australian children, who rarely met their friends after school, children from the

Anglo-Australian families spent most of their time socialising with friends, doing part-time work and playing organised sports.

While Chris enjoyed the freedom to socialise with his friends and his parents did not know anything about his weekend activities, Rachel (his younger sister) did a part time job-baby sitting on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. On Saturday evening her parents dropped her at a friend's place to watch a video while they went for dinner in the city. Children from the other families also routinely socialised with friends. In school, they socialised with their peers, and in case of Chris and Clint, often cut classes and went surfing. Parents found it hard to control them. At home, Chris, Glenn and Clint spent most of their time sleeping, watching videos or television. Parents had very little control over these activities.

Following months of home observation, the pattern, which emerged in these families, was this:

> *There is hardly any indication of order and routine in the living patterns of Chris, Glenn, Clint and Ben. Except for Ben, they leave and return home at will. Ben spends an enormous amount of time training for baseball and Aussie Rules football. When at home they function almost totally independent of their parents, in that parental guidance and supervision are minimal. Parents cannot dictate their terms to their children. In the company of their friends and parents, they spend time on leisure and sports related activities. Time and space orientations are largely determined by them rather than by their parents. Parental expectations about school work are loose and inconsistent. There are no firm guidelines to motivate them toward school work. Rachel, the ideal child in the Marshall family, developed an academic orientation and cheerful disposition, which is admired by teachers and parents. Krista demands freedom to have fun with her friends but her authoritarian mother does not allow her and this results in frequent arguments. All of them spend most of their spare time socialising with their friends, doing part time work or playing organised sports.*

Except for Rachel, these children demanded more freedom to spend time with their friends, playing sports and enjoying leisure activities. Most of the time the parents were unable to control the behaviour of their children. Behind the backs of their parents, they were able to do the things which parents would not approve of. And when their parents did come to know of such activities tensions built up and bitter arguments erupted.

### Lack of commitment to education

In these families parents were keen to see their children do well at school and complete TEE or TAFE courses, and provided plenty of educational resources (refer to Table 8-14), but the parents were not as committed to the idea of sending them to university as Chinese parents were. Except for Rachel, who was very committed to school work, other children took their school work quite casually. All of them, Rachel included, had dropped their grades as they progressed through the school to Year 12. The parents' own experiences of schooling were not very successful. Mr and Mrs Morgan and Mr Smith got their tertiary education as part time students whereas other parents had dropped out of school after Year 10. Thus the commitment of parents to education was not as intense as that of the Chinese-Australian parents. Parents like the Morrisons were keen to see their children to go to university but were not sure how to encourage them.

**Table 8-14:    Family Cultural Capital**

| Student | Home Tutor | Computers | TV | Atlas | Dictionary | News Paper | Books |
|---------|-----------|-----------|-----|-------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| Gohs | Yes | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Yes | 200 |
| Cheongs | Yes | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Yes | 70 |
| Koks | Yes | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Yes | 80 |
| Kwangs | Yes | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | Yes | 60 |
| Marshalls | No | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | Yes | 75 |
| Morgans | No | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Yes | 220 |
| Morris | No | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | Yes | 55 |
| Smiths | No | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Yes | 190 |

These parents had provided quality educational material at home but were not successful in nurturing good study habits and motivating their children to use these resources. Occasional parental outbursts of frustration simply further alienated their children from academic work. Whenever Mr Morgan used coercive techniques to get Ben to do his homework, Ben closed his door and pretended to study; his parents would later find him half-asleep in his bed with his book lying on his chest. Mrs Morgan explained:

> *If his door is half closed it means he is studying. If the door is fully closed he is asleep. Ben is very lazy. He does not apply himself. Books do not interest him much. There are so many books at home and the local library is around the corner but he rarely borrows books.*

Grinding her teeth in anger, Mrs Marshall said about Chris:

> *Books put him to sleep. Surf magazines and girls keep him awake. Most of his time goes in eating, sleeping and listening to music. What upsets us most is that he does not take interest in his work. He is lazy and disorganised.*

Even though the Marshalls, Morrisons and Morgans had high expectations of their children they were unable to create in them an intrinsic interest in school work. The sporadic, piecemeal and inconsistent familial efforts merely contributed to their children's lack-lustre academic success. The most common statement of Anglo-Australian parents

was "if X (child) is happy with the choice of subjects, we have no objection." Ben's was a typical case. In 1995 when Ben enrolled in Year 11 he selected six TEE subjects, including higher maths and chemistry. These subjects demanded a lot of homework but Ben's commitment to homework was not as much as it was to sports. Consequently, at the end of Year 11 Ben dropped higher maths and chemistry and instead chose easier TEE/TAFE subjects.

Other children followed Ben's example. Instead of providing extra help, like a private tutor, parents advised their children to drop difficult subjects and take a combination of TEE and TAFE subjects. The catch phrase in these families was "You choose what interests you most." When Clint did not do well in Year 11 and decided to study TAFE subjects, his father welcomed the decision saying, "This is the way to go. You don't have to kill yourself. You study what you enjoy." The jestful comment of Clint was typical of children from the other families, "it is against my religion to do school work on Friday night".

When Krista dropped out of school in Year 11 Mr Smith said, "I won't be disappointed if Krista decides not to study at university." Even the high achiever Rachel was advised by her parents to drop higher maths and chemistry in Year 12 and select easier subjects and a non-TEE subject, instead.

Chris failed TEE and dropped out at his second attempt to pass TEE. His parents were not disappointed with his performance. The Morrisons were happy that Clint had completed Year 12 with TAFE subjects. If their younger son Glenn could do the same (which he did in 1996) they would be very satisfied. The Morgans would have been quite

satisfied if Ben had studied TAFE subjects. In sum, Anglo-Australian parents had low expectations of their children but were deeply involved in their sporting activities. Consequently, their children excelled in sports but academically under performed. A high level of sports orientation and low commitment to school work were the outstanding features of these Anglo-Australian children.
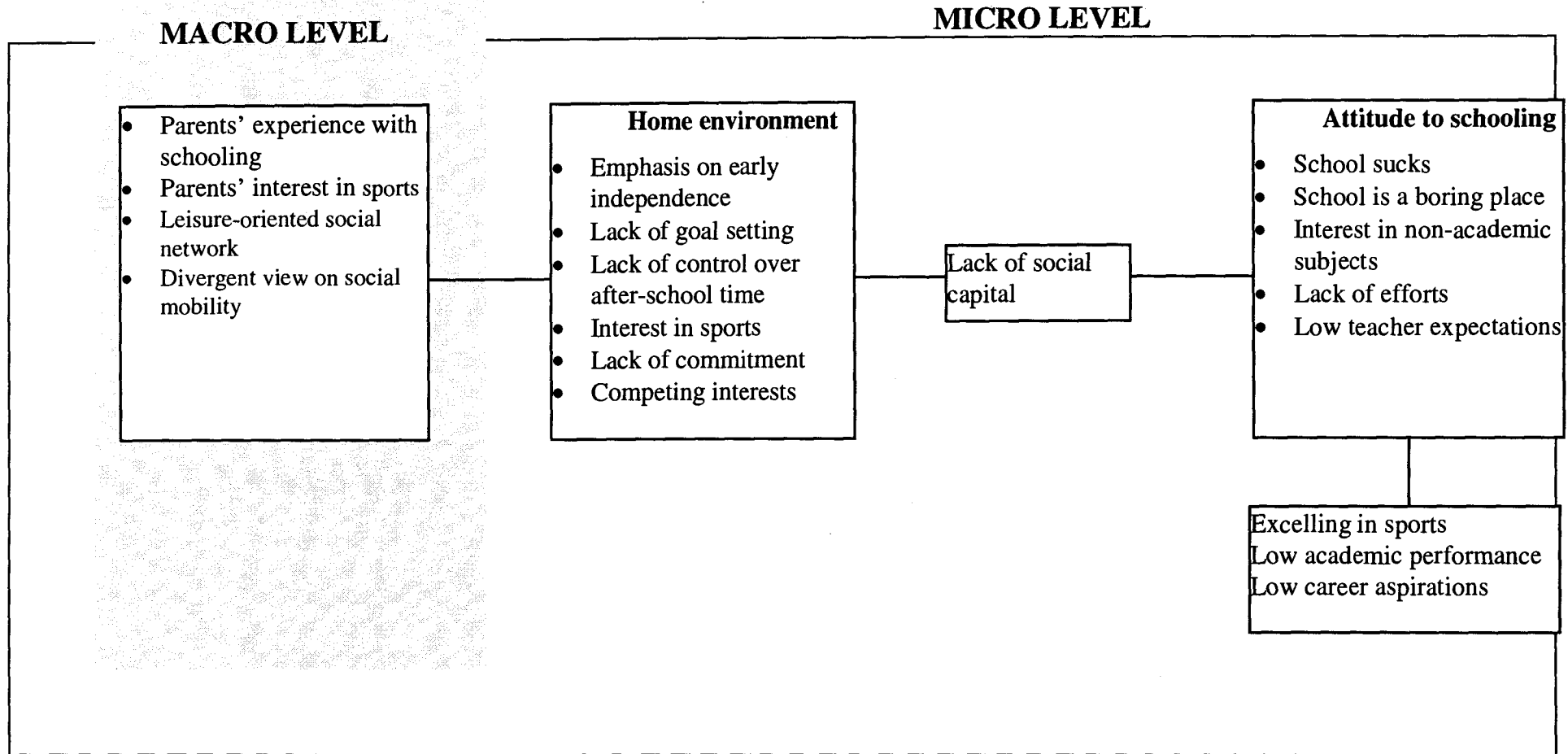
**Figure 3: ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN MODEL**

# Discussion

To understand the academic enhancing strategies adopted by parents it is important first to know the reasons for schooling strategies because people are profoundly affected by the social matrix in which they are embedded. What these case studies have revealed is that there is a significant variation in the home learning environments of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families. One crucial factor, which accounts for the variation in knowledge transmission in these homes, is the parents' own psychological-emotional state and coping abilities. Moreover, the parents' own life experiences have had a profound influence on their current psychological-emotional state. The models depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3 capture the factors which have a strong bearing on the educational and occupational aspirations of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian students.

With not a great deal of difference in ability, compared to Anglo-Australians, Chinese-Australians as a group started high school with a clear disadvantage of language and confronted social adjustment problems. By Year 10 not only had Chinese-Australian students enrolled in mainstream English classes but had selected challenging TEE subjects for upper school, a clear indication of their intention to pursue tertiary studies. All of them had improved in maths, Chi Chen and Hongzia being the top achievers. By comparison, Glenn, and Chris remained in remedial maths and focus English classes from Year 8 to Year 10; Ben and Clint did not register any improvement in English; and Krista and Rachel performed soundly in English but went down in maths. Physical education was the only subject in which Anglo-Australians regularly out-performed Chinese-Australian students.

Another noticeable difference was that while most Anglo-Australians studied subjects such as manual arts, woodwork and metalwork in lower school most Chinese-Australians studied Japanese.

Differences in both choice of subjects and performance became more pronounced in upper school. With the exception of Lee Kok, Chinese-Australian students selected TEE subjects, whereas only Krista and Rachel among the Anglo-Australians studied TEE subjects. The other Anglo-Australian students either decided to study TAFE subjects or the easier TEE subjects. Rachel, Krista and Ben could not cope with the demand of 'challenging' subjects and therefore in Year 12 decided to drop some of these with the full encouragement of their parents. When Chinese-Australians faced such problems their parents provided them with a home tutor and additional books.

Behind the impressive academic performance of Chinese-Australians and the comparatively lack-lustre performance of Anglo-Australians lay parents' own experiences with schooling and the importance they attached to education. Thus in the Chinese cases emigration and choosing to live in Southside in the catchment area of Paramount Senior High School itself tended to reflect parental values, expectations, and strict social control over their children's after-school activities. The values, attitudes, education, and economic status of Chinese parents prior to emigration, plus their experiences and perceptions of the opportunities in the host country, also appeared to be critical factors in their commitment to the education of their children. Encouraged by their parents, these children spent most of their spare time with workbooks created to review and supplement their regular textbooks.

The fact their parents were strategic in motivating them also caused the children to respond favourably to expectations. Acting to overcome their children's initial problems, help adjust socially, and become motivated, these parents guided and encouraged their children to develop good academic habits. The children in turn recognised that schooling was the primary avenue to social mobility (higher paying and physically less strenuous jobs for their children). The data given in a number of tables suggests that, with the exception of Lee Kok, the Chinese-Australian children at Paramount High steadily improved their grades. By comparison no significant improvement was observed in the performance of the Anglo-Australian students.

The question which remains, perhaps, is what led the Chinese-Australians to believe in education as *the* key factor in social mobility? The models depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3 capture the factors that seem to have a strong bearing on the educational occupational aspirations of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian students. Cultural explanations propose that achievement is a result of Chinese cultural values that extol the virtues of education, and maximise skills in gaining education.

In all eight families children were provided quality educational resources (Table 8-14), but how these resources were used was a different matter altogether. For example, Chinese-Australian students used home computers mostly to type their assignments and play computer games whereas Anglo-Australians used them almost exclusively just to play games. Furthermore, Chinese parents deliberately sought different ways to ensure their children used these resources constructively; whereas, Anglo-Australian parents left it up to

their children themselves. Consequently, left on their own, Chris, Glenn, Ben and Clint did not use the resources to their maximum advantage.

To sum up, this study indicates that in their drive for academic excellence Chinese-Australian parents pushed their children far beyond their limits; made their homes suitable for the studies of their children; and ensured continuity between home and school. This excessive pressure took its toll on the health of the children such as the mental illness of Lee and the occasional bouts of depression of Hongzia Kwang. However, on the positive side, Chinese-Australian parents succeeded in converting otherwise average children into high achievers [mainly because of the amount of time their children spent on school work, and the social capital their parents provided them]. At school, children from these four Chinese-Australian fitted the stereotype models of their teachers who consequently interacted with them in a positive way. Near exams, Chinese-Australian children studied for long hours at night and at weekends in a way no Anglo-Australian child did, except for the case of Rachel Marshall. While the Morrisons and Morgans had produced fine athletes in Clint and Ben, the general lack of Anglo-Australian parental involvement and encouragement in academic activities, together with parental life style, appeared to account for their children's lower academic performances. Since with modest education or by pursuing part-time tertiary studies Anglo-Australian parents had achieved 'a good life style' they apparently saw no reason why their children could not do the same. Thus they did not discourage their teenagers from developing side interests and an independent approach to life. Chinese-Australian parents on the other hand, appeared to guide their children 'by holding the hand' (Stigler and Stevenson, 1990), an approach which appears to have its origin partly in parents' cultural values, and partly in their own and their children's

experiences of Australian society. In a word, this study suggests that parents from the two groups of families took different approaches to the career paths of their children.

Considering all available evidence I am inclined to say that *there is no single explanation to account for the impressive performance of Chinese-Australian children.* But certainly something associated with being Chinese has a positive impact on school performance independent of the family process variables.

# CHAPTER NINE

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this final chapter, first of all I will sum up the main findings of this thesis and address some educational issues arising from them which in recent years have been the subject of heated debates. Pivotal to this thesis was the key question: Do Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian children perform differently? If so, what is the role of home and school? To address this issue I focused on what goes on in these homes and how children are affected by the values learnt at home, which in turn, influence their interactions at school and by extension, their academic performance. After observing the children from eight families in their homes and school, for four years, I am now able to say that the differences are significant: a claim, which is consistent with a number of the studies, discussed earlier. We can summarise the most important findings as follows.

## The Chinese-Australian Approach to Education

### Confucian Ethic

These case studies have revealed that there is a significant variation in the home learning environment of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families. Crucial to the differences in knowledge transmission in these homes is the parents' own psychological-emotional state, coping ability and life experiences.

The dominant explanation for the success of Chinese-Australian children is the crucial thesis which implies that successful minorities place a high premium on ambition, persistence and deferred gratification, and exhibit a strong desire for intergenerational social mobility (Glazer, 1975: Rose, 1959). Adherents of the cultural thesis argue that in different cultures different values are emphasised. Some scholars (Ogbu, 1987; Gibson, 1988) attribute academic performance to culture at a collective level. They have argued that to account for the variability in school success of minority children, it is necessary to incorporate the perceptions and understanding that the minorities have of their social realities and of their schooling. In his social action theory, Weber argued that meanings and motives direct human action, and therefore action can only be understood by appreciating the "world view", the image or picture of the world held by members of a society. From their worldview individuals derive meanings, purposes and motives which direct their actions. Weber[23] argued that in certain places and times, religious meanings and purposes can direct action in a wide range of contexts. The Confucian ethic which promotes hard work, rationality, future time orientation, family cohesion, patience, and thrift, is associated

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[23] In his classic work The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1904-5) Weber argued that Protestantism was a significant cause in the choice of occupations such as business leaders, owners of capital, high grade skill labour and technically and commercially trained personnel. He argued that the spirit of capitalism aims to instil an attitude, which seeks profit rationally and systematically and preaches an avoidance of life's pleasures. Calvinism, a version of Protestantism, entailed the idea of predestination; people are predestined to be either among the saved or among the damned. The idea of predestination left people uncertain about whether they were among the saved ones. To reduce this uncertainty people were urged to work hard, because if they were diligent, they would uncover the signs of salvation, which were to be found in economic success. The Calvinist was urged to engage in intense worldly activity and to become a "man of vocation".

Weber argued that religion had an influence on economic behaviour. He related the rise of capitalism with Protestantism. Thus if the ethics or ideology advocated by a particular religion can be shown to influence economic behaviour, it can also influence social behaviour in other areas.

with educational success in Confucian heritage cultures of the East, as the Protestant ethic is related to the development of Western capitalist countries.

In a plural society like Australia, people of both the dominant group and the ethnic/racial minorities tend to have their own respective understandings of how their society or particular domain or institution works, and their respective understandings of their places in that working order. In the domain of schooling, the cultural model of each group exists to provide group members with the framework for interpreting educational events, situations and experiences, and to guide behaviour in the schooling context and process. The cultural model of the immigrants enters into their schooling by influencing their educational attitudes and strategies. The nature of the contents of their cultural model leads the immigrants to adopt pragmatic or instrumental attitudes and strategies that are conducive to school success.

Led by the belief that "practice makes a person perfect" students like Victor, Miran, Hongzia, Pearl and Chi Chen were preoccupied with examinations and syllabus-bound in their approach to study. This belief in effort rather than ability may be rooted in a classical education which required memorising thousands of characters. Hence the Confucian belief is that diligence is the key to successful academic performance. Chinese-Australian parents thus gave moral support to their children by saying the things like "no pain no gain", "hard work is the key to success", "the sea of learning knows no bounds; only through diligence may its shore be reached". Mrs Cheong sat five days a week with her children after 4 p.m. to ensure they completed their homework. On their part, their children obliged their parents by working hard to get good grades. Miran's approach to her studies was representative of

the others: "So far I have got three A grades and one B which I am pretty pleased about. But I just keep asking myself 'why can't I get four A grades?' *This is what I am very very mad about.* I tell my parents I will do better next semester".

Victor captured a child's view of parents: "When I was in Year 8 my Mum used to supervise my work all the time, but now (Year 11) she knows that I don't need any reminder. Homework is my first priority." Hongzia's confession is also worth repeating: "Before (in Year 8 and 9) we weren't allowed to watch too much TV. They expected us to study all the time. Now (Year 11) they know we are studying hard, so they allow us to watch more TV. Now I work so hard that Dad says 'Don't give yourself to too much pressure'. My doctor advises me to relax".

Let me quote a few anecdotes. A Chinese student from Malaysia whose parents sent him to a private fee-paying school in Perth was the recipient of the prestigious Beazley Award for his top ranking [506/510 marks] in 1996 TEE results. He attributed his success to hard work and family support:

> *I owe my success to my family.... Even though my parents are thousands of kilometres away their support helped me through the TEE period.... Secret of my success is consistency of effort.... I studied every night throughout the year. My parents wanted me to be a doctor, so I chose to study medicine at the University of Western Australia* (The West Australian, 8 January, 1997, p.3).

By comparison an Anglo-Australian student with second ranking (504/510) attributed her success to luck and talent.

> *Luck as well as talent played a big part in my success.... Luck is not going to get you through on its own, but it will make a difference.... One of the most important reasons I did so well was because I chose subjects that interested me (ibid).*

She chose to study law and commerce at the University of Western Australia.

Similar cultural differences were also obvious when the top seventeen students were asked by a news reporter to comment on the secret of their success in the 1999 TEE results.

*Do all your homework and listen in class—Chinese-Australian student. You have to be committed to the work you do at school, but you have to keep your friends and have a social life—Anglo-Australian student. (The West Australian, January 5, 2000, p.6).*

In a recent article which featured in *The West Australian* (18 February, 1998) Professor Stevenson, a prominent American psychologist who has made a significant contribution in understanding the causes of differences in academic performance of Asians and Americans, noted that Asian parents and their children believe that they have to work hard to do well while Westerners think they need a good teacher. In response to a question "What is the most important thing you can do to improve your academic achievement?" Western children and their parents rated the quality of teaching as the most important factor. East Asians, however, thought that all students, whatever their innate ability, could improve by studying hard. Another difference Stevenson noted was the inexplicably high level of satisfaction of Westerners with their children's education. This robbed the American parents and children of the motivation to do better. My study lends strong support to the claims made by Professor Stevenson. As discussed earlier, Chinese-Australian parents were not satisfied with a score of less than 90%, whereas Anglo-Australians were satisfied with an average to above score of 60% to 70%.

## Discrimination and experiences

From their perceptions of opportunities and experiences in Australia, and with a social milieux that put a high premium on education, Chinese-Australian parents were driven by *utilitarian pragmatism* (Ho, 1994) and they considered scholastic success as a passport to high status. Desperate faith in schooling and an intense desire to excel in studies came from their fear of economic competition, racial discrimination (real or perceived) and their perceptions of the fairness and meritocratic educational system of Australia[24]. Chinese-Australian parents continually reminded their children by saying, "We came to Australia to provide you with a good education". One factor, which appeared to be at work, was that since they left their countries because of insecurity and in the host country a sense of being marginalised, they saw schooling of their children a vital avenue for social mobility. *This pragmatic trust in education, I submit, had its origin in the Confucian ethic and in discrimination in the job market in Australia.* Information on the history of Chinese-Australian families prior to emigration to Australia, Confucian culture, circumstances and reasons that prompted their emigration, the opportunity structure and social stratification system in Australia as well as their experiences with racism in Australia, all worked together to motivate them to high school achievement.

It implies then that Chinese-Australian parents do not regard low socioeconomic status as an insurmountable barrier to educational achievement. The Kwang family

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[24] Even though some sociologists (e.g., Bowles and Gintis, 1976) question the meritocratic nature of the Western education system, Chinese-Australian parents believe in this aspect of the Australian education, especially when they compare it with the system of education in their native countries.

personifies Chinese veneration of education as a ladder to social mobility. This tradition of achieving upward mobility through education is rooted in the availability of an imperial ladder of social ascendancy in China: achieving upward mobility through education, more precisely, success in imperial examinations. Thus regarding education as a means to an end has long been identified as one of the features of Chinese education. Caplan, Coy and Whitmore (1992) arrived at similar conclusion in their study of Asian-Americans, claiming these students with disadvantaged backgrounds such as refugee students with limited English proficiency and low SES frequently contradict expectations and have high academic achievement in school. As there are not many options in a new country they see schooling as the main avenue for social mobility. This almost desperate faith in schooling was undoubtedly reinforced by the traditional veneration accorded to education in Asian societies

One important fact of this study is that Chinese-Australian families represent those immigrants who came to Australia after the 1970s as skilled and professional people. As selective migrants, with middle class values and belief in a Confucian heritage work ethic and a primary goal of their children's future, they were already predisposed to the values of education and were rightly placed to exploit the educational and occupational opportunities in Australia. They had a great dislike of blue-collar jobs. Their general belief was that in order to protect their children from racial prejudice, lower levels of the workforce, higher education was the best insurance. The Koks and the Kwangs could not get higher education in their original countries even though they had the desire to do so because of the financial constraints. These Chinese-Australian parents held the view that education is the third eye and that hardship breeds success. That is, a person can only become successful when he has

known hardship. These parents and their children perceived formal education as an investment in the future. A popular Chinese saying appears to be practised in these families: 'If you plan for a year, plant rice; if you plan for 10 years plant trees; if you plan for 100 years, educate your children'.

The Chinese-Australian parents in this study emigrated to Australia as professionals (e.g., Cheongs and Gohs), business migrants (e.g., Kwangs) or para professionals (e.g., Koks). Perceiving that the socio-political problems in their native countries not providing the same chances and opportunities as the Australian education system, they saw education as the road to to social mobility.

**Migrant drive**

Smolicz and Wiseman (1971, p. 8) refer to the concept of "migrant drive", a type of social mobility orientation in newly arrived families without property and influence in the host country, who have a great desire to make good through their children's excellence in academic and professional pursuits. According to Chun (1995, p. 99) "migrant drive"[25] might be attributed to their perception of some sort of a "thin grey line of subtle discrimination", which then strengthened their resolve and intense commitment to achieve status by investing in the education of their children. Mt interviews with parents and their children lend support to Ogbu's (1987) claim that voluntary migrant families such as East

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[25] The phenomenon of migrant drive is by no means universal and it does not explain why some ethnic groups (e.g., Maltese, Turks, and Latin Americans in Australia) do not appear to display the same drive. In their studies in the United States of America Stevenson and Stigler (1991) argued that migrant drive might be partly due to ethnocultural characteristics.

Asians, invest heavily in the educational shopping of their children as a mechanism to overcome discrimination. Gibson (1987, p. 273) noted, "Parents of immigrant children are more willing to work hard at low paying jobs and to endure prejudice because, from their perspective, there will be a return from their investment in their children's education."

Central to the Chinese-Australian families' migrant drive in this study are their cultural values, experience and perceptions of opportunities in the host society. They attach importance to education for self-improvement, family honour as well as a pathway to social mobility. Values such as impulse control (e.g., not questioning parents' authority), deferment of short term gratification (e.g., not doing part-time work, or intimate friends of the opposite sex), effort (e.g., we are new to the country we must work hard to establish ourselves) and scholastic achievement (e.g., with Australian education you can get good job), all these can be attributed to Chinese cultural values as much as to parental perceptions of opportunities for their children in Australia. Chinese-Australians placed secondary importance on their own interests and encouraged their children to work hard at school to get good grades in order to facilitate their entry into tertiary institutions and pursue professional degrees. In order to achieve their goals these families adopted a type of behaviour which Gibson (1988) called "acculturation without assimilation" and Ogbu (1987) the "alternation model". According to this model, immigrants, while retaining their cultural values, strive to play the classroom game by the rules and try to overcome all kinds of difficulties in school because they believe so strongly that there will be a pay off later. It is, perhaps, this unshakeable belief in education, which explains parents' strong involvement with their children, and their protection strategies from peer group influence. Another factor leading to migrant drive in these families was that Chinese-Australian

parents had a personal desire to pursue higher education, but they were denied the opportunity because of financial constraints. They did not want their children to suffer in the same way.

Although Chinese parents exhibited 'migrant drive', they all tended to be strategic in planning the education of their children. From an early age they each held high expectations and set goals for their children, and adopted a personal life style in keeping with these educational goals. They sacrificed their personal comforts and short term gratification in pursuit of the educational goals of their children. Initially, they socialised their children to believe that their main task at school was to take their studies seriously so that they could enjoy a better life later. Chinese-Australian parents considered school as a place only for academic attainment, and consequently set narrow goals focused only on academic subjects. For them performance was a function of effort. Tomlinson made similar observation in her study of migrant children in the United Kingdom: "Ethnic parents have made it clear that they are primarily interested in the educational attainment of their children" (1991, p. 130).

With the full encouragement of their parents, the Chinese-Australians tended to adopt what Biggs (1994) calls the "achieving approach", a strategy to achieve high grades by working hard, being efficient and being cue conscious. They did extra readings in local libraries or at home after school hours, tended to be punctual and did whatever was required to obtain the highest possible grades. Rachel Marshall and later on Krista Smith [after she had started to live independently] were the only Anglo-Australian students who adopted the achieving approach. In general, more Chinese-Australian children tended to show

willingness to persist in the face of boredom; had a high degree of metacognition or awareness of their own cognitive processes, and were predisposed to do the things required of them by teachers. Thus they fitted readily into the regimen of the classroom.

While Chinese-Australian parents were keen to improve their children's language skills they were equally concerned about the danger of acculturation. In fact, Mrs Cheong, Mrs Goh and Mrs Kwang (in the case of Miran) were worried that their daughters were catching the "bad habits of Australian kids" such as talking back and asking to go out with friends. Signs of culture conflict were visible in these families as their children became more acculturated to the norms and customs of Australia. Younger siblings from these families (Miran Kwang, Pearl Cheong, Chi Chen Goh) tended to stop speaking in their native language and abandoned their traditions. To stop this from happening, these parents encouraged them (in most cases with a great deal of success) to attend Saturday Chinese language school, participate in Chinese dancing, the lion dance, Tae Kwan Do, Tai Chi and to watch Chinese videos. Equally effective was their strategy of identifying and interacting socially with a carefully selected social network.

Although Eastern values and Western science has long been a slogan in the Confucian heritage cultures, and many scholars believe that it is possible to modernise without being Westernised, it is difficult to disregard Western influence in these societies. As Lee Kuan Yew (ex-prime minister of Singapore) reminded youngsters' "Because of traditional Asian values Singapore has grown into a successful socially cohesive society, but if Western values are adopted, cohesion will be threatened and the country will go down hill" (cited by Choose, 1985, p.10 in W. O .Lee, 1991). In Singapore the concept is to have the best of

both worlds—Western technology and Asian culture, perhaps an untenable goal. Chinese-Australian families in this study were keen to retain Chinese values but at the same time wanted their children to get the best possible education. In the short term they are succeeding in getting both, but there is plenty of evidence of culture-conflict.

**Social capital and psychological costs**

Coleman's (1988) idea of social capital (see Chapter Three) provides a powerful heuristic framework to understand family environments. Coleman argued that socioeconomic status is effective in cognitive socialisation only if the parents use their economic and human capital to the advantage of their children. Chinese-Australian parents were willing to forego luxuries and undergo extreme economic and social sacrifices for the sake of their children's education. The Kwang family in this study is a typical case where the parents provided cultural and social capital in spite of considerable financial hardship. Fully aware of the language-related problems of their children, the parents conversed at home in English, and encouraged their children to read English language newspapers, and watch television. They even hired private tutors in English, maths and science, not because their children were weak in these subjects but so they could have advantage over the others. In fact, in all four families there were additional books in maths and science that the parents had brought from their native countries to help their children, and in the Cheong and the Kwang family, I found some books written in Chinese used by the parents to help their children. Coleman (1990) made similar observations of Chinese parents.

Strong evidence emerged to suggest that there was more intergenerational communication or "care" that Chinese-Australian parents provided for their children. Mr Cheong summed up the views of other Chinese-Australian families when he asserted: "Chinese parents not only care for their children but live for them." Chinese-Australian families were centrally involved with their children's activities. In general, they established an emotional bond with their children. By keeping weekend activities as family oriented, the relationship between parents, children and community organisation was conducive to cognitive socialisation. With less abundant economic and human capital, they were able to use social capital effectively and efficiently to have positive effects on their children's school outcomes. When not at work, Chinese-Australian mothers spent more time with their children than did the Anglo-Australian mothers. "When this social capital is coupled with parental beliefs about effort and expectations for high performance that are continuous with the home country, the conditions for good educational performance are maximised. A core value is manifest in a different way under different societal conditions" (Takanishi, 1994, p. 360). Chinese-Australian families perceive more jobs opportunities for their children and therefore create a climate supportive to learning. Indeed, arguably, such high expectations also constitute components of social capital.

Furthermore, the Chinese-Australian families were able to mobilise support and resources through their networks. In fact, with the help of their social network and by giving moral and emotional support for their daughters, the Kwangs negated the effect of their low socioeconomic status. In each family I asked the children to think of ten families the parents normally paid visits to and the types of the things they did in each other's company. I found that Chinese-Australian families had selected their friends strategically

with common interests, and with children of the same age as their own who were keen to pursue their studies beyond high school. Communication between the parents and children and the amount of time they spent together in school related activities such as helping with homework, listening to their problems, applauding their successes and comforting their failures, emphasising self-control and teaching basic values, Chinese-Australian parents were able to stimulate cognitive development of their children.

Even though Chinese-Australian parents were not particularly conversant with the educational system and did not pay regular visits to Paramount Senior High School, their family-centred life style greatly influenced their children's school related activities. Mr Yu Chi Kwang's advice echoed in the other three Chinese families: "Don't take any notice of the other Australian kids. Once you improve your English, your grades in other subjects will improve and then they won't tease you because of your accent." By showing firmness and involvement with their children, these parents consistently stressed norms and behaviours highly valued by teachers.

A big difference between Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families is that the former had the ability and capacity to convert human and financial capital into social capital. The lack of human and/or financial capital did not hamper the academic achievement of Hongzia and Miran, and the possession of such capital did not automatically convert Ben into a high achieving student. The Morrison family was unable to provide as much social capital as the Kwangs did. The closeness of the Chinese-Australian families and clearly delineated lines of parental authority within them, enhance the parents' ability to control their children's use of time. Moreover, in none of the

Chinese-Australian families did the children resist this, rather they conscientiously fulfilled their parents' expectations.

One particularly striking finding of this study is that while the Chinese-Australian parents played a significant influence and placed considerable pressure on their children to achieve academically, this was not without adverse consequences. Indeed, their excessive pressure took a psychological toll on most of the children. For Lee Kok it was beyond his reasonable limits. In pursuit of high academic credentials are these parents doing incalculable psychological damage to their offspring? Is the pursuit of academic excellence at the expense of other activities detrimental to the long-term interests of these children and society at large? Let me quote a few anecdotes to elucidate the neurotic and pathological traumas some Chinese children suffer because of parental demand to perform. In 1996 a studious Chinese girl in my class was struggling to get an A grade, the goal her parents had set for her. Following an assignment when she got 70% marks she started to cry uncontrollably, and the same day after getting 65% marks in maths, collapsed in front of the library. The school psychologist and the principal contacted her parents. The father of this girl, highly educated with heavy accented English, could not get a suitable job which he claimed was because of his Chinese background. He was invited to school and was advised that he had to accept the fact that his daughter was doing her best, and he should stop applying excessive pressure on her. Instead of appreciating the advice, a week later he enrolled his daughter in a different school. Other Chinese girls who knew the family circumstances of this girl, told me that she was always scared of her father if she got less than an A grade.

Another case: For four years a high achieving Chinese student was in my tutor group. This was the period when I was actively involved in observing the school experiences of students for the purpose of this study. This boy got an A grade in each subject. In Year 12 he was the dux and completed the TEE with an impressive score of 478/510. He enrolled to do medicine. However, for teachers and students he was a topic of frequent discussion. Teachers would say, "Has he learnt anything at all besides putting his head in books?" He would move in a robotic way, with no one to talk to. Anglo-Australian students labelled him "square", "bookworm" and "mental". "He might turn out a genius doctor but didn't learn many social skills", commented a senior teacher.

Lee Kok's mother confided in me that Lee's psychological problems were compounded by the stern attitude of her husband. Hongzia had a perpetual headache, suffered from loss of sleep and lost appetite to the point that her family doctor served a strong reminder to her parents that she must ease up. Pearl developed eyesight problems due to excessive reading. Tein turned silent when her mother served the ultimatum that she must get 80% marks or else. Instances like these were numerous.

So, are such Chinese migrant families doing the right thing for their children? On the one hand they emigrated to Australia to give a new lease of life to their children, but at the same time they are suspicious of the values of Australian society.

And, what happens to children like Lee, Tein and Pearl who prove unsuccessful academically, and do not measure up to their parents' high expectation. Furthermore, are they disadvantaged by developing the social skills that the Anglo-Australian children possibly do through doing part time work, socialising with their friends, and playing

organised sports? Such children, I suggest, are doubly disadvantaged, sandwiched as they are between unrealistic parental academic expectations, and the schools' inability to develop in them social skills and at the same time mitigate racial prejudice.

## The Anglo-Australian Approach to Education

The Anglo-Australian parents here grew up in that era of Australian history when most teenagers finished school in Year 10 and went on to find jobs. From "floor to management" was the general path to social mobility. These parents grew up with the attitude that higher education was not a prerequisite to enjoy the good life. The concept of the good life for them was encapsulated in their interest in sports and leisure activities, satisfying short-term gratification and a stress free life. Parents like the Morgans and Mr Smith managed to pursue part time tertiary studies, but their lifestyle wasn't qualitatively very different from that of the Marshalls and the Morrisons who did not pursue tertiary studies. Anglo-Australian families did not have a history of taking education seriously (e.g., the Morrisons and the Marshalls). They achieved material comforts independent of higher education, and believed that a good life is a stress free life and sports and leisure activities are very important components to enjoy good life. They also believed that the Asians are changing their values and life style in Australia. Anglo-Australians had a much broader view of school: a place to learn new skills and acquire knowledge, a place to for vocational training, a place to excel in competitive sports, and a place to socialise with friends. Their sports and leisure activities-oriented life style partly explains why they don't encourage their children to undertake full time tertiary studies. A considerable portion of

their after-school and weekend time is spent in sports and part-time work. Both activities are physically tiring and compete with their study time. Consequently, they spend minimal time on school work.

The Anglo-Australian parents in this study realise that education is important but they do not change their life style, and so fail to provide the necessary social capital for their children. Parents' emphasis on their children's early social and economic independence, and their sports and leisure-oriented life style encourages their children to be peer group oriented. Children from such families therefore get the message that higher education is not crucial to their lives. For example, the efforts of Ben, Chris, Glenn, and Clint waned when their individual performance fell short of their expectations. They were unwilling to expend the extra effort needed for success, and even though at the start of high school three of them (Chris, Clint and Ben) were originally above average students.

There was a striking discontinuity between home and school of Anglo-Australian students. Socialised one way out of school, they were not predisposed to school tasks which they perceived to be pointless and boring.

It would be argued that Anglo-Australian parents in this study are failing in their responsibilities to their children in the academic arena, but quite supportive of their children's interest in sports activities. Even high status families like the Morgans and the Smiths were unable to provide the social and cultural capital needed for Ben's and Krista's education. Krista suffered from domestic fights between parents and such a strained relationship was dysfunctional for her studies. Ben's parents let him follow his own interest in activities like doing part-time work and playing organised sports. For one reason

or the other, Anglo-Australian families were unable to provide adequate social capital for cognitive stimulation. Social networking common in Chinese-Australian families was almost absent among Anglo-Australians. Whenever they met, the main purpose was to enjoy watching sports on television or going to the "bush" for a holiday. They did not pursue higher education by choice. With low education these families had managed to get jobs easily and access to middle class material possessions, while retaining their sports and leisure activity life style. With high parental involvement in such activities, their children tended to pursue a similar life style.

Anglo-Australian parents encouraged their children to enjoy the attractions of the teenage period, such as playing sports and having a friend of the opposite sex. With low parental expectations, their children tended to follow career paths which were in demand in the Australian context and which did not require a high level of study commitment. The attitude of Glenn, Ben, Chris and Clint towards school work kept on deteriorating as they moved through the higher grades. It appears that *education does not play as central a role in the Anglo-Australian conception as it does for Chinese-Australian parents. It is this belief, I submit, which explains why Anglo-Australian parents are satisfied with the mediocre performance of their children.*

### Resistance to School work

In Chapter Four I discussed reproduction theory and teenagers' resistance to school work. Reproduction theory obliterates the person who is actually the main constructor of the home/school relationship. It treats students as the bearer of cultural capital, abilities,

knowledge and attitudes, and depicts cultural forms and practices as largely the reflection of structural forces conceptualised at the school level, and does not examine the school processes that produce inequalities (MacLaren, 1989, p. 191). The phenomenological view of school is that individuals are responsible for constructing their own realities. The interactions among children, parents and teachers are constantly being negotiated and restructured (Connell et al., 1982, p.188). Therefore, the power of a society's dominant group to control the life chances of children from minority groups is not absolute. Individuals accept or reject, for their own reason, what schools have to offer or even what they may try to enforce (Walker, 1988, p. 4).

Resistance is a relation to school that is generated on a wide scale by the interaction of the authority structure of the school with class, gender and ethnicity. In some circumstances resistance becomes students' main relation to the school as the school becomes a focus of struggle with authority and parents. In this study, to a certain extent, I have tried to understand schooling from the perspective of pupils. School resistance by Chris, Glenn and Clint lends support to the assertion that it is a class struggle (Willis, 1977, Walker, 1988). Resistance as an assertion was common among these boys. Swearing, smoking, yelling at teachers, wagging school was common among them. Rebellious behaviour such as cutting classes (e.g., Chris), physical aggressiveness (e.g., Glenn and Clint) and vandalism (e.g., Glenn) were the common acts of resistance. Routinely, Ben, Glenn and Clint created resistance in class (see Chapter Seven). Alienation from learning, a rejection of curriculum, misbehaviour in class, and criticism of knowledge and values transmitted by the school were common behaviour features of Glenn, Clint, Chris and Ben.

Their misbehaviour stemmed from their diverging views of schooling, lack of interest in school work, and their interest in the sports and leisure-oriented lifestyle of their parents.

Whenever there was a special dress day they came to school in worn out jeans, high boots and check shirts.  In the company of their friends they conversed with each other in a language, that was punctuated with slang, and swear words and special jargon, which I found hard to follow.  Their lack of interest in school work conflicted with the demand for work by teachers, which widened the gap between the two.  For Chris, Clint and Glenn (coming from lower class families) the gap was two-fold: the gap between the school's emphasis on academic knowledge and their own adolescent culture, and that between working class norms and values and the dominant values of middle class society.  However, the same logic does not explain why Ben (from a middle class family) resisted the school authorities and Rachel (from a lower class one) conformed to school rules in the same way as Chinese-Australians did.

With the exception of Krista and Rachel, the Anglo-Australian children tended to disobey school rules and developed negative attitudes towards school and teachers.  Tagged with negative labels, they sought out the company of their sport and leisure activity peers who acted as multipliers to encourage them to break school rules, disrupt lessons, give cheek to teachers, play truant and fail to hand over homework.  With their anti-social behaviour Glenn, Clint, Chris and Ben were rejected by their normal peers, which had a negative impact on their adjustment, academic success and self-esteem.  They changed their hairstyle quite frequently.  Chris embodied the image of a "surfie" and cut classes, Glenn, Ben and Clint withdrew psychologically.  Weight of evidence suggests that the root cause

of their lack of interest in studies was their home life, peer group orientation and interest in non-educational activities and sports. School and teachers were unable to motivate them.

In my class Ben and Glenn acted as "ring leaders". Coming from a middle class family Ben's resistance appeared as taking on working class styles. *The case studies of Chris, Ben, Clint and Glenn (physical education teachers called them "sports heroes") indicate that there is a strong linear relationship between negative attitudes to school and teachers, positive peer group orientation and poor academic performance.* The salience of this relationship is also alluded to by Coleman (1961) and Vuchichini (1992). In his classic study *The Adolescent Society,* Coleman argued that there exists a strong student peer culture which is separate from, and often at variance with, the values and goals of adult society. Willis (1977) also described how the counter-culture of adolescents mediated between the structure of the society and their status attainments as adults. He described the culture of "lads" as one of resistance to school and how their disruptive behaviour in classroom ended up precluding them from school success and, by extension, from skilled employment. Sports heroes of this study were conscious that this was happening and indeed seemed to want it that way. Like Willis's lads, sports romanticised the culture of the sports heroes. Sports heroes labelled the academics as "squares" who would not know "how to kick a footy".

The lack-lustre performance in studies and strong orientation in sports of the Anglo-Australians may be attributed to parenting style, lack of social capital and parents' own interest in sports and leisure activities. While Confucian values were evident in the Chinese-Australian families, the Protestant work ethic was missing in the Anglo-Australian

ones, and such values had permeated to their daily routine family interactions. Anglo-Australian parents were satisfied with average academic performance but demanded excellence in sports. The amount of time Anglo-Australian students spent on socialising with their friends, doing part time work and playing sports competed with the time spent on studies. With low expectations in studies, a negative or indifferent attitude toward school, Anglo-Australian students made little effort and challenged the authority of their teachers who demanded compliance. Consequently, the gap between their performance and ability steadily widened. "I don't care.... School sucks.... My teachers can suck eggs", were statements frequently expressed. In short, *parents failed their children, and by not trying hard these students disadvantaged themselves.*

Considering the academic performance of Rachel and Krista, which matched that of most Chinese-Australian children, this study suggests that the processes that lead to good educational performance may be shared across cultures. As Rosenthal and Feldman (1991) noted, the factors that differentiate cultural groups do not account for individual differences within a cultural group. Factors related to individual differences in educational outcomes are not always those that result from cultural differences. This study supports the assertion of Schneider and Lee (1990) that the variation in academic performance is the result of the relationship between sociocultural factors and interpersonal interactions. Although all parents wanted their children to perform well, the *Chinese-Australian families in the study were more successful in translating general yearning into a workable set of life goals and strategies for reaching them.* Those children who were academically oriented described their home and school life as pleasant. They conformed to their parents' instructions at home and to their teachers' at school. They had positive orientations towards school, were

thankful to their teachers for helping them, and teachers had positive things to say about them.

## Major Insights

From these few families and one school it is hard to generalise about wider communities, but certainly these case studies have provided vital clues to understanding some of the issues regarding the influence of home and school on their academic performance. Some of the major insights emerging from this study are therefore summed up in the remaining pages.

1. Children from the two groups of families mirror the models of their parents. Chinese-Australians perceive social mobility mainly through education, whereas Anglo-Australians consider education as important but also believe that excellence in sports is equally important to the good life. Chinese-Australian families' orientation toward social status is embedded in their historical experiences in their native countries, and in their experience and perception of opportunities in Australia. The Anglo-Australian families are well established. They enjoy a good life style regardless of their level of education. Their orientation toward life is that higher income is not necessarily related to more education. Satisfied with the welfare system in Australia, the relatively easier availability of jobs, and excellent facilities and opportunities for enjoying sports and outdoor life, these Anglo-Australians do not attach the exclusive importance to education that Chinese-Australian families do. The Chinese-Australian families come from a culture and social setting which attaches importance to education. They perceive Australia as a country of opportunities and

on arrival realised that there were few job openings for their children without educational qualifictions. Moreover, these Chinese-Australian families had already experienced a middle class life prior to emigration. *Given this diverging orientation to life, we can say that Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian families exhibit different belief systems in that their folk theory to social mobility is related to their historical experiences, and socialisation practices are influenced by their own experiences with the dominant society and schooling.*

2. Pre-disposed to the value of education, The Chinese-Australian parents remain involved in the school-related activities of their children, and provide social capital for cognitive stimulation. They set educational goals for their children at an early age and organise their own life style to suit the needs of their children. Although the parents rarely visit their children's school, they ensure that the single most important activity of their children after school hours is to complete their homework. Another important feature of their parental involvement is that in the early years they focus on emotional support but as their children grow older trust them to obey. Children, for their part, start internalising their parents' sacrifice for them and get the message that education is vital for their survival. They become autonomous and parents no longer push them too hard.

One ritualistic educational behaviour in existence in these families involves homework assignments. Homework is perceived as a normal activity that is expected to be accomplished. Educational rituals performed in these homes included study activities as well as educational talks which parents considered "mandatory". Regular conversations between parents and their children about the role of education in life served to increase

children's level of awareness of their goals as well as the wisdom of their parents. These parents served as "supportive agents" of the school in their children's formal education. By actively participating in supervision, monitoring and overseeing their children Chinese-Australian parents were more successful than Anglos in producing academically-oriented children. On their part Chinese-Australian children invested their time in school-related tasks.

The time spent by Anglo-Australian parents in school related activities with their children started to decline when their children enrolled in high school, although their involvement in sports and leisure activities remained high throughout high school. Because leisure and sports activities involve other people, mostly of the same age groups, peer groups start to play an important role in children's daily routines. Added to this, Anglo-Australian parents believe that children should be socialised to be independent, socially and economically, at an early age. Thus by the end of Year 10 all the Anglo-Australian children had friends of the opposite sex, part-time work, and were involved in organised sports after school hours.

Such different interests of Anglo-Australian and Chinese-Australian parents help to explain the amount of time the former spend in non-educational activities, and the latter in educational activities out of school: cognitive socialisation in Chinese homes and socialisation in sports in Anglo-Australian homes. These diverging interests have some hidden effects as well. For Chinese-Australian children, spending time on homework is a continuation of what they do in school with parents playing the role of teachers. And given that *their superior academic performance is not because of their innate intelligence but due*

*to the inordinate amount of time they spend in doing homework, a similar logic applies to*
*the superior performance of Anglo-Australians in sports.* By sheer hard work and
internalising the values and sacrifices of their parents, Chinese-Australian students tended
to perform better than their ability would suggest, albeit at the cost of psychological strain.
On the other hand, the lack-lustre academic performance and high achievement in sports of
Anglo-Australians may be attributed to parenting style, different social capital and parents'
own interest in sports and leisure activities.

3. Bourdieu's claim that failure or success at school is attributed to the degree to
which the "culture" of home and school match, finds more support in Chinese-Australian
families than it does in the Anglo-Australian ones. Anglo-Australian families lacked
cultural and social capital which Chinese-Australian families were able to provide, in spite
of their lower socioeconomic status measured by parents' occupation. Children are strongly
affected by the human capital (e.g., education of their parents) but human capital may be
irrelevant to outcomes for children if parents do not play a directive part in their children's
education. In the case of the Chinese-Australian families, human capital is complemented
by social capital for cognitive stimulation and, in the case of the Anglo-Australians,
emphasis is placed on psychomotor skills and sports. Families like the Kwangs, for
example, with low human capital were able to provide more social capital than, say, the
Smith family, which had higher human and financial capital. Likewise, the high parental
status in Ben and Krista's case did not motivate them to be high achievers, though Rachel
Marshall from a lower status family performed well while her brother (Chris) failed to do
so. Ben, from a middle class family, was a low achiever and his older brother (not included
in this study) was a high achiever, which demonstrates that siblings can internalise the

proximal environment quite differently. On the other hand, most Chinese-Australians, regardless of their socioeconomic status performed well.

Family life styles are a critical source of children's cultural formation, which in turn provides valuable educational resources to foster the motivation to learn. *The fact that Chinese-Australian families are more successful in providing this social capital has got to do with their culture, their orientation to the value of education, and their experiences and perceptions of opportunities in Australia.*

This study shows that Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Coleman's concept of social capital (discussed earlier), can throw more light on our understanding of academic variations of children coming from different sociocultural backgrounds. Hess and Holloway (1984, p. 212) noted three features of the social world in which the child lives: the degree of consistency among socialising agents about the goals of education; the degree to which goals of education are taken seriously; and the ability of the socialising agents to counter knowledge, values and goals that come from competing sources such as TV and peers. On all these accounts Chinese-Australian parents were more successful than Anglo-Australian parents were. An increasing number of social scientists tend to believe that regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status of the family, the nature and intensity of relationship between parents and children—especially the time, attention, and effort spent by parents in stimulating the cognitive development of children—play an important role. Already interest in this direction is gathering pace. For instance, after two decades of research on the influence of home environment, Marjoribanks and Mboya (1997) and Marjoribanks (1998), found that social capital and cultural capital passed on by parents to

their children, are better predictors of academic performance than global variables like socioeconomic status and ethnicity. This strong relationship between social and cultural capital and cognitive development puts the theory of social reproduction on soft sand.

Although my study endorses Coleman's concept of social capital, it also highlights the fact that social capital in an individual home or community affects each individual differently. Rachel and Chris are from the same home and so are Chi Chen and Tein. Yet the academic profile of each differs markedly. On the whole the Chinese-Australian parents were more successful in providing social capitals than the Anglos were.

4. The school system tends to favour Chinese-Australian children because with their positive attitude toward schooling they impress their teachers who, in turn, interact with them in a positive manner. Teachers like these children because of their commitment to school work, low rate of absenteeism, conformity to classroom rules, and thus the teachers have positive things to say about them. Benefiting also from supportive homes these children are doubly advantaged.

Some studies have indicated that the success of Asians in Western countries is a false image, that they have become victims of inattention or even exclusion. As Kitano (1973, p.6) noted: the widespread belief that Asian-Americans have somehow overcome prejudice and discrimination, has meant they are a low priority group when it comes to receiving attention and aid. For example, in admissions to institutions to higher education and in financial aid, American-Asians are regarded as 'whites'. In his study of ethnic children Bullivant (1987) found very little evidence of teachers' prejudice against Asian students. In fact, teachers considered students of Asian origin to be exemplary, quiet, diligent and highly

motivated and valued their presence in class. After an extensive review of Australian research Sturman (1985, p. 83) concluded: "In summary, with respect to the educational experiences of immigrant Australians there is no indication that immigrant groups are disadvantaged in Australian society." Burke and Davis (1986) found that a greater proportion of non-Anglo-Australians was enrolling in tertiary institutions compared to Anglo-Australians. Williams (1986), Mistillis (1986), Birrel and Seitz (1986) and Mok and Parr (1995) also support this general picture. Any disadvantage, which they may have through lack of experience with Australian schools therefore, appears to be more than compensated for by the class factor (because the majority of them holds middle class values) as well as their culture, which puts a high premium on education (Dobson, Birrell and Rapson, 1996, p. 51). *The findings of this thesis robustly support this general trend and argue that academic variations are attributed to the differences in cultural attitudes to education.* The reason why education is salient to success in life for Chinese-Australians is because they perceive that they do not have much scope for social mobility in jobs, that require less education.

Consequently, it is probable that significant numbers of Anglo-Australians are at risk of a becoming a new category, namely, the self-deprived, in the sense of individuals inhibiting their own life possibilities and career scenarios. The self-deprivation syndrome (Bullivant, 1987) is partly due to students' own attitudes towards education and their disinclination to work hard to achieve their goals. In essence, they are influenced by a shirk-work ethic. The syndrome also appears to be due to the lack of parental encouragement and drive which, in contrast, is so apparent among parents from Chinese-Australian backgrounds. A number of British migrant settlers and Anglo-Australian parents

and students, particularly those from lower socioeconomic status, choose to shift the blame for their own inadequacies to those from Asian backgrounds.

The behavioural patterns of Chris, Glenn, Ben and Clint fitted in the delinquescents (Hargreaves, 1967) and represented "Aussie masculinity" (Walker, 1988) - those who stand up for themselves and their mates against the authority of teachers. Physical education teachers called them "sports heroes"; vocational subject teachers labelled them "good students"; but other teachers at different times called them "shits", and "dead heads" and said it was "difficult to get them on task." In upper school, other than Rachel and Krista, Anglo-Australians selected non-TEE subjects which they called "vegie subjects". Their general target was to study at a TAFE college or look for a job after Year 12. Ben selected TEE subjects, but did not have sufficient commitment to be successful. All of them committed themselves minimally to school requirements. They had negative orientations towards school and teachers.

5. The parents of the high achievers (Rachel Marshall from the Anglo-Australian group included), not only expected more and communicated this to their children, but also taught them the behaviour needed to fulfil their expectations. Those who failed to pursue tertiary studies (Lee Kok from the Chinese-Australian group included) not only lacked the skills to play the role of student to succeed, but were less likely to try to do the things that would lead to success.

Those children who were academically oriented conformed to their parents' instructions at home and to their teachers' at school and were thankful to their teachers for helping them. Their teachers had positive things to say about them. The weight of

evidence suggests that although school is an active and influential producer of educational outcomes, children's home experiences play a vital role. Optimal learning takes place when there is a continuity between teaching practices at home and school. *The superior academic performance of academically-oriented students, Chinese-Australians in particular, has to do with the way in which the home life and daily cultural practices concerning education are valued and maintained in these families.*

This study endorses the claim that through a range of powerful mechanisms such as streaming and creaming and hidden curricula, schools are active and influential in the educational outcomes of students. For example, students like Glenn, Chris, and Clint were sports oriented and such orientation took place outside of school. In school they were enrolled in focus, remedial and low achieving classes, and when they were in Year 11 and Year 12, studying non-TEE subjects, they were not compelled to study for the exams. Once the fear of exams was removed, they then found more time to fool around and tended to become increasingly exposed to their own subculture. Furthermore, the teachers who taught them were the least experienced. Their teachers' expectations of them were low and their parents did not expect them to study hard. Such low expectations influenced the nature of interactions between these students and their teachers. Frequent clashes by Ben, Glenn, and Clint with their teachers lend ample support to this argument. With low academic orientation and high interest in sports and leisure activities, they tended to seek the company of low achieving peers and challenged the authority of their teachers.

In general, the interest in school work of most Chinese-Australian and lack of it in most Anglo-Australian children developed outside of the school and inside the school

reinforced this interest. Reaching a similar conclusion, Connell et al. (1982, p. 188) argued that what children actually bring to school is their relation to their parents' educational experiences and strategies which may involve rejection, ambivalence, and misunderstanding as much as endorsement or duplication. Chinese-Australian come to the school with the values that everyone, no matter how humble their origins, had an equal chance to succeed.

Consistent with the overall pattern of performance at Paramount Senior High School and broader national and overseas studies, the Chinese-Australian students out-performed their Anglo-Australian counterparts, as was evidenced in the fact most of them enrolled at university, while most Anglo-Australians enrolled at TAFE college or took full time blue-collar jobs. Such differences took place in spite of the handicap of English language and social adjustment they initially faced.

The findings of this study also suggest that socioeconomic status of the family does not explain why some students from low status families, (e.g. Rachel Marshall) performed better than those from high status ones (e.g. Ben Morgan). More intriguingly, SES does not explain why Rachel succeeded and her brother Chris failed the TEE. Influence of SES was even much less noticeable in the case of Chinese-Australian families. From a low income family, Hongzia and Miran were as high achievers as Chi Chen from a high-income family. A similar conclusion was reached by Connell et al. (1982) who questioned the popular belief that working class ways of life led to a lower value being placed on education. The Morrisons and Marshalls valued education highly in spite of their bad experiences with

schooling. Furthermore, Chinese families had high regard for education even though economically they were not better off than (say) the Morrison family.

Anglo-Australian girls performed better than boys in the same group of the families but gender did, not seem to make much difference in Chinese-Australian families. Thus *convergence of evidence from this study indicates that family status is a poor indicator of academic performance, and surprisingly gender emerges as an important variable: girls performed academically better than boys*[26]. In this small group, at least, *Chinese-Australian parents were more successful in providing social capital for cognitive stimulation than were Anglo-Australian parents. This suggests that ethnicity is a potent factor in academic performance at high school level.*

Some early studies (Coleman et al., 1966, Stodolsky and Lesser, 1967) claimed that while both social class and ethnicity affect the level of intellectual performance, it is ethnicity that fosters the development of unique ability patterns, with children from higher social classes simply reflecting the same ability pattern of higher levels of performance than their lower socioeconomic ethnic peers. In studies undertaken in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, Marjoribanks reached similar conclusions. Such conclusions, however, are not definitive, firstly because the concept of socioeconomic status has been challenged (Coleman, 1988, 1990), and secondly, because the composition of immigrant groups in the Western countries has changed. The majority of recent migrants in Australia, especially

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[26] For five years I collected the data regarding the academic and sports excellence at Paramount High. Invariably, Chinese-Australian got more certificates of academic excellence and Anglo-Australians got almost exclusively all sports awards. Girls from both groups got more academic awards than boys.

those from Southeast Asia, are now skilled and professional people who value greatly education and scholarship.

Children from both groups of families mirror the models of their parents: Chinese-Australians perceive social mobility as occurring through education, whereas Anglo-Australians consider excellence in sports as a path to social mobility. *This study has highlighted the cultural divide between the two groups. An appreciation of these contrasts can perhaps help us learn from both.*

## What can be learnt from each other's values?

The pursut of careers such as medicine, engineering and accounting by Chinese-Australian children is attributed to a number of factors. First, such careers have universal applicability. Second, as immigrants they perceive that racial discrimination is more problematic at a lower level of the work force than at a professional level. Third, scholarship and high credentials are valued in Confucian cultures. Fourth, the choice of quantitative, technical subjects is strongly influenced by the under development of their linguistic skills which discourages them from entering fields which require a high level of fluency. Professional careers with low verbal interaction suit such migrants.

The Chinese-Australian parents in this study were so effective that in most cases they were able to convert average achieving children into high achieving ones. In some cases they pushed their children far beyond their limits, and placed them under stress, and denied them other non-educational opportunities. Hongzia, for example, came very close to a

nervous breakdown, and even though she performed brilliantly and went on to enrol in dentistry, she had a sense of shame because she could not fulfil the wish of her dying father who wanted her to be a doctor. In fact, her feeling of shame was the greater because she was aware of the financial hardship and sacrifice her parents had made. The depression that engulfed Lee Kok could be attributed as much to his authoritarian father's demand to achieve as to bullying at school.

Despite the academic rewards that these Chinese-Australian parents ensured their offspring, it could be argued on the basis of my evidence that they might ensure more well developed children if they let their children think for themselves more, and then let them explore the other opportunities that Australia offers to new settlers. Suzuki (1977) has argued that too many Asian students are being educated and socialised to be robots, for work in lower white-collar positions, and are not being educated for decision-making and administrative positions. Moreover, considering the enormous time Pearl and Victor spent doing homework after school, their TEE performance was no better than that of Krista who eventually liberated herself from her authoritarian mother. It is therefore prudent to ask whether quantity automatically translates into quality. In short, my evidence indicates that *given more freedom Chinese-Australian students would like to have more fun, and might benefit from doing so, while Anglo-Australian students, given more encouragement by parents might narrow the gap to reach their full potential in academic studies.*

The life style of these Anglo-Australian parents seems to have a great deal to do with the lack-lustre performance of their children. These parents believe in the virtues of part time work and early social independence. Mrs Morrison's advice to her fifteen-year-old

son, Glenn, captures the psyche of other Anglo-Australian parents: "If you don't try now [to find a part time job] you won't get one later." This stands in sharp contrast to Mr Cheong's alarmed question: "How can the Australians ask their fifteen year olds to look for part time jobs? What are parents for?"

The Anglo-Australian families observed in this study overall adopted a more diversified approach to schooling than did Chinese-Australians. Rachel and Krista were successful because they achieved high credentials, developed social skills and an independent outlook. Ben and Clint excelled at sports but in the long-term face the likelihood of poor employment opportunities, while Glenn and Chris run the risk of ending up like Willis' (1977) "lads", in the worst paid and most insecure jobs of all. On the basis of this evidence I therefore *submit it is the families, not Paramount High, which inculcated such strong attachments to sport, and in the process failed their children academically.* Krista had an unstable home and parents who were too preoccupied with their own difficulties to take an interest in her education. Glenn and Clint provide examples in support of Bowles and Gintis's "correspondence theory" (see Chapter Three). In sum, a *lack of social and cultural capital at home, plus an orientation towards peer group activities and parental leisure values developed in the 1950s and 1960s when education was not considered essential to the Australian "good life" helped to perpetuate hostile attitudes to school and study.*

The sociopolitical landscape of Australia has changed. Australia today is a multicultural society with a large intake of selective immigrants from non-traditional sources, technologies that have drastically reduced the availability of low-skilled, well-paid

jobs, and a pace of life in the competitive workforce that has challenged the easy-going life style which Australians have generally enjoyed. The need for higher education and a multi-skilled work force is on the increase.

A large proportion of skilled and professional jobs are now being taken by new immigrants, albeit many of whom cannot get jobs commensurate with their overseas professional qualifications and experience. The children of such immigrants often have the strong support of parents to pursue education to the highest possible level, and to achieve this receive the necessary social capital from their parents. Chinese-Australians, as selective immigrants with a history of valuing education and limited job opportunities in their native countries, are just such people. Thus while parents put a high premium on the education of children, the latter internalise it.

By sheer hard work, it seems, the Chinese-Australians tended to perform better than their ability predicted. The 'migrant drive' generated by a combination of factors apparently counteracted migrant disadvantage. *The values learnt at home counteracted the initial linguistic and sociopolitical disadvantages of parents.*

If in the long run these Chinese-Australians were academically advantaged and Anglo-Australians disadvantaged by family values, what are the possible implications for schools such as Paramount Senior High? Can schools fix the ills of the society? Are schools really failing in their responsibility to help children like Ben, Clint, Glenn and Chris? Such questions are important but go beyond the scope of this study. Suffice to say that in one sense Paramount is disadvantaging low achieving students by bundling them into low achieving classes and assuming all of them have similar problems, and the

attitudes and behaviour of teachers which follow from this are certainly not helpful. Even so, teachers cannot function in isolation, and until such time as the parents of low achieving students become involved in their children's program, which itself means in-putting social and cultural capital, it is hard to see how progress can be made.

Of course not all the Chinese-Australians in this study, and at Paramount High more generally, were academically successful. The future for low achievers like Lee Kok, and to a lesser extent Tein, is more problematic because they lack social and cultural skills and do not fit well into the overall school social structure and—by extension—into the workforce. These children were not given sufficient opportunities by their parents to develop social skills, and are at risk of remaining social outcasts in mainstream Australian society. In this respect, and in respect of the psychological stress experienced by the successful students, this study endorses Wong's (1995, p.226) observation that Asians show considerable intellectual aptitude, especially in the technical fields, but are socially inept and do not fit very well into the overall school social structure or general environment. If Chinese-Australian families come to Australia for a better life for their children, they might therefore be usefully encouraged to exploit the other sociocultural opportunities that Australia offers, just as Anglo-Australian parents might be encouraged to take more personal responsibility for the formal education of their children. In conclusion, if *educators can include the strengths of Chinese-Australians and Anglo-Australians in the future formulation of educational policies they may discover a recipe to convert a Lucky Country into a Clever Country.* After all, the essence of multiculturalism lies in the enrichment of all through blending the values of different cultural groups.

# Future Direction

Given the current trends, the problem of Asians immigrating to non-Asian nations is bound to increase. Furthermore, the majority of these families—if the present trend is anything to go by—are likely to be either business migrants or skilled or professional people, who have chosen Australia as a safe and prosperous haven for the future of their children. The high achievement of Chinese students is a case of minority status and high educational attainment. The reasons for this anomaly have been highlighted in this chapter. Ideally, the Chinese-Australian parents in my study  parents want their children to pursue technical-professional education and to aspire to professional jobs. Evidence from students' reports, teachers' comments about students, students' classroom behaviour supported by my observation at home and school, shows that the Chinese-Australians and Anglo-Australians have different conceptions of schooling.

Recently, rules of entry into the faculty of medicine at the University of Western Australia have changed. In addition to a good TEE score, students aspiring to study medicine must now do well in an interview. The rationale for this change is to ensure that students have well developed communicative, interactive and creative skills; the very skill most Chinese children do not have. As the parent of one Chinese child in this study confided in me, "This is another way of stopping Chinese students from being over-represented in medicine." On a more positive note, however, students with multi-skills

from diverse cultural backgrounds will continue to be encouraged to pursue prestigious courses at university.

I posit that if Anglo-Australian parents keep on dwelling in the era of the 1950s and 1960s and do not change their laidback attitude about education, their children could eventually be under-privileged in their own country - a fear which has been expressed in a number of studies (Birrel and Seitz, 1986; Bullivant, 1987; and Mok and Paar, 1995). There is a fear in some sections of the Australian community (see a principal's remark in Chapter Four) that groups of older European stock are in danger of being supplanted in positions of influence by the sons and daughters of Asians, especially Chinese immigrants. Yet no matter how misplaced or exaggerated is this fear, nor how confined it may be to particular sections of society, this study, though not claiming to generalise beyond the eight families studied, adds weight to the suspicion that in some respects Chinese-Australians *are* more determined and pressured academically than their Anglo-Australian counterparts, and herein lie lessons for us all. The achievement differentials between Anglo-Australian and Chinese-Australian students are likely to fuel continuing debates. The differences in school adaptation patterns and academic performance of Chinese-Australian and Anglo-Australian students highlighted in this study have implications for educational policy makers.

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# APPENDICES

# Paramount Senior High School



BASKETBALL COURTS

TENNIS COURTS

BIKE PARK

T9  T  T
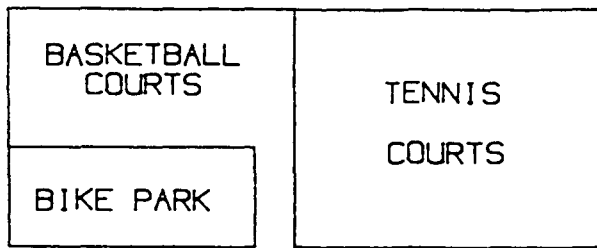
CAR PARK

TOILETS SHOWN

CAR PARK

T  T

T

T

B

C

D

T  T

T

T

CANTEEN

MAIN QUADRANGLE

STUDENT SERVICES

E

T.

GYMNASIUM

RESOURCE CENTRE

PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

ADMINISTRATION

STAFF ROOM

F

SCHOOL NURSE

ADMINISTRATION

T2  T1

T1A
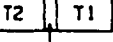
CAR PARK

BUS BAY

# TIME SPENT ON HOME INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS.

| Year | | Chinese-Australian Families | | | | Anglo-Australian Families | | | | |
|------|--------|-------|-----|-------|-----|----------|--------|----------|-------|-------|
| | | Kwang | Goh | Cheong | Kok | Marshall | Morgan | Morrison | Smith | Total |
| 1993 | Visits | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 33 |
| | Hours | 15 | 8 | 11 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 74 |
| 1994 | Visits | 14 | 13 | 15 | 12 | 12 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 100 |
| | Hours | 35 | 27 | 31 | 36 | 27 | 22 | 25 | 30 | 233 |
| 1995 | Visits | 12 | 10 | 11 | 13 | 11 | 12 | 10 | 8 | 87 |
| | Hours | 30 | 30 | 25 | 27 | 24 | 20 | 22 | 24 | 202 |
| 1996 | Visits | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 23 |
| | Hours | 5 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 47 |

253 visit.
556 hrs.

# HOMEWORK DIARY

## SCHOOL WORK

| | English | Social Studies | Science | Maths | Any Other | Studying for test | Household chores | Visit to the library | Reading for leisure | Chatting with family members | Chatting with parents | Socialising with friends | Playing computer games | Watching T.V. | Listening to Stereo | Part-time job | Playing Sport | No homework but doing Maths | No homework but doing Science | Being tuitioned a subject |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7.00 – 8.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3.15 – 3.45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3.45 – 4.15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4.15 – 4.45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4.45 – 5.15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5.15 – 5.45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5.45 – 6.15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.15 – 6.45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.45 – 7.15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7.15 – 7.45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7.45 – 8.15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8.15 – 8.45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8.45 – 9.15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9.15 – 9.45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9.45 - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Today's homework:
Easy                 Hard               Interesting              Boring

What you would do instead _____

If you do not have resources to complete homework, what do you do?

_____

Today my parents criticised me for _____

Today my parents praised me for _____

Before you go to bed write a paragraph to tell which member of the family spent time with you and what you did together.