

# Cultural Practices and Learning:

Diversity, discipline and  
dispositions in schooling

Megan Watkins and Greg Noble



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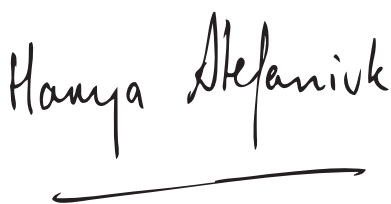
## Foreword

The *Cultural Practices and Learning* report offers an innovative and challenging contribution to debates around teaching and learning in a culturally diverse society. The study explores home and school practices of Year 3 students from three different cultural backgrounds in a number of NSW public schools in order to more fully understand students' embodied capacities for learning and how these may impact on their successful participation in schooling. It provides valuable insights into the causes of differential achievement rates of students from the three target groups.

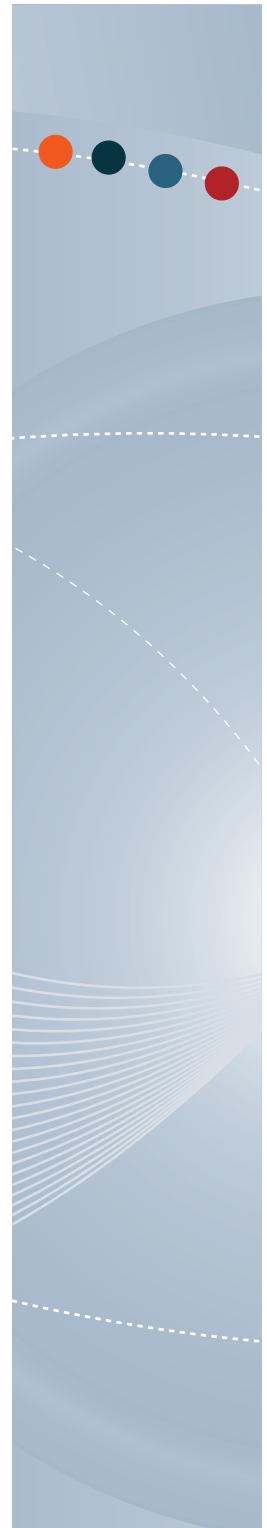
The study is particularly focussed on exploring these bodily capacities as *dispositions* that derive from habitual engagement in particular practices, both in the home and at school, and which build students' capacity for study and for learning.

This is critical information for teachers. The report offers a persuasive demonstration of the importance of a focus on classroom practice that supports the development of effective habits of learning, an area that is often misunderstood and, therefore, neglected. The report also provides crucial information for parents from all backgrounds about the kinds of home practices that support their children's learning at school.

This report is a significant resource for addressing issues of differential educational achievement rates for students, particularly those from language backgrounds other than English. It also offers insights into how we can develop greater congruence between home and school expectations. This is a ground-breaking study that challenges many of our settled assumptions about education and multiculturalism, and I commend the report to schools and their communities.



Hanya Stefaniuk  
Manager, Multicultural Programs,  
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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Background .....	1
From cultures to cultural practices: unpacking our terms .....	3
From psychological attributes to practised capacities .....	5
Embodiment, discipline and learning .....	6
Research questions and the structure of the report .....	8
<b>Chapter 1 – Research design</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 A question of method .....	9
1.2 The sample .....	9
1.3 Project methodology .....	12
<b>Chapter 2 – Surveying parents: some insights into educational capital</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Survey sample .....	18
2.2 Background of respondents .....	19
2.3 Academic engagement at home .....	22
2.4 Extracurricular activity .....	25
2.5 Parental engagement with school .....	29
2.6 Parents' views of child's academic achievement .....	30
Conclusion .....	31
<b>Chapter 3 – Disposed to learning</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1 Differently capacitated bodies .....	33
3.2 Capacities, dispositions, action and habitus .....	37
3.3 Aspirations and educational capital .....	40
3.4 Educational outcomes .....	45
3.5 Teachers' perceptions of ethnicity and dispositions to learning .....	46
3.6 From stereotypes to practices .....	52
<b>Chapter 4 – The relationship between dispositions to learning and home practices</b>	<b>53</b>
4.1 The importance of homework .....	53
4.2 Time, quantity and regularity of homework .....	54
4.3 After school routines .....	56
4.4 Location of homework .....	58
4.5 Supervision of, and parental involvement in, homework .....	63
4.6 Engagement in extracurricular activities .....	65
4.7 Reading, library attendance and other pastimes .....	69
Conclusion .....	70

<b>Chapter 5 – The relationship between dispositions to learning and school practices</b>	<b>73</b>
5.1 Perceptions of target students' responses to different pedagogic modes .....	73
5.2 Students' attitudes to different pedagogic modes .....	80
5.3 Whole school practices and dispositions to learning .....	82
5.4 Classroom practices and dispositions to learning .....	85
Summary of classroom practice and students' dispositions to learning ....	97
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>101</b>
A focus on practice .....	101
Surveying practice .....	103
Embodied capital .....	105
Practices within the home .....	107
Practices within the school .....	109
Modalities of discipline and the formation of a scholarly habitus .....	111
<b>Future directions</b>	<b>115</b>
Professional learning for in-service teachers .....	115
Pre-service teacher training .....	115
Parent and community engagement .....	116
Further research .....	116
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>117</b>
Appendix A – Survey .....	117
Appendix B – Principal Interview Schedule .....	120
Appendix C – Teacher (Mainstream and ESL) Interview Schedule .....	122
Appendix D – DET Personnel and CLOs Interview Schedule .....	124
Appendix E – Parent Interview Schedule .....	126
Appendix F – Student Interview Schedule .....	128
Appendix G – Guidelines for Observation Field Notes .....	130
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>137</b>



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Finally, we would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Australian Research Council, the NSW Department of Education and Training and the University of Western Sydney. The public funding of research is essential to the ongoing task of redressing educational inequalities and achieving educational excellence in schools. We feel this project has made some contribution towards developing a greater understanding of key issues in meeting these goals.

## Executive summary

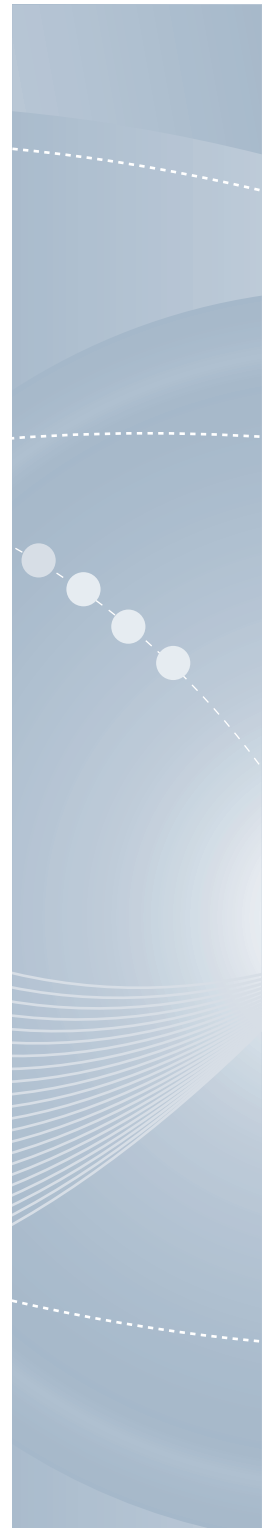
This study examines the links between ethnicity and what we have termed the *scholarly habitus*, the dispositions to learning which shape successful participation in schooling. It focuses on Year 3 students of Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo Australian backgrounds, and is based on a survey of Year 3 parents, classroom observations and interviews with students, parents and staff in a number of primary schools across Sydney. Against common assumptions about the 'natural' or cultural attributes of different ethnic groups, it explores how home and school practices produce the attributes of learners, how these attributes are embodied as dispositions towards learning, and how these practices are patterned in terms of ethnicity and socio-cultural background.

The context of this study is the social perception that certain groups of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds – especially students from 'Asian' backgrounds – have a predisposition towards educational achievement because of cultural values. This is often also cast in terms of these students having a 'learning style' which equips them well in developing the skills necessary for academic success. On the other hand, students from other backgrounds, such as Pasifika students, are perceived as culturally prone to educational underachievement.

While there is evidence for the patterning of educational outcomes in terms of ethnic background, it is not clear *how* these are related. This study therefore focuses on the *practices* in which students are engaged on an everyday basis, both inside and outside school, and which shape the capacities they acquire. A focus on practice avoids the stereotyping that often comes with discussions of ethnicity and education, and it also points to more effective ideas for intervention to overcome the unequal distribution of educational achievement.

These patterns are in evidence in the survey data, which demonstrates some broad but complex links between socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity and 'educational capital'; that is, the knowledges, skills and values which ground orientations to education. This survey gives some insights into the distribution of different practices – such as homework routines and extracurricular activities – amongst the three target groups. Chinese students, for example, were required to do more educational work outside the school than the Pasifika and Anglo students, but they also engaged in disciplined extracurricular activity which may have educational benefits.

The study explores the links between these practices and the *bodily* dimensions of learning. It suggests that, against the focus on the cognitive dimensions of learning, inadequate attention has been given to the ways educational attainment is founded on embodied capacities. It argues that there are forms of productive stillness and quiet, for example, which are crucial to sustained attention and application in intellectual endeavour. These capacities provide a state of composure, a readiness for engaged school work. The absence of these capacities, on the other hand, produces an unruliness which is counterproductive for intellectual labour. These differently capacitated bodies evince different *dispositions* to learning, with contrasting abilities for *self-discipline* to undertake







academic engagement. Chinese and high SES Anglo students were more likely to embody these skills than the Pasifika or low SES Anglo students. Many teachers interpreted these variations in terms of cultural stereotypes but were also wary of any simplistic judgements.

The study examined these patterns in terms of the practices undertaken at home and school. Home practices were particularly significant in considering the development of strong orientations to education. The Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo students had very different approaches to completing homework, for example. The Chinese students spent more time than Anglo and Pasifika students on their homework and completed more of it, and had a more routinised approach to this work, developing a discipline of independent study. Particularly important was the degree of parental supervision. The emphasis given to academic endeavour within the home was also evident in terms of the location and environment in which homework was undertaken: the majority of Chinese students completed their work at a desk in their bedroom or a study or another space set aside for this purpose, which was not the case with the Pasifika or Anglo students. This self-discipline was also fostered through a range of extracurricular pursuits and reading practices.

These home practices connected to school practices in ways that contributed to students' dispositions to learning. Whole school and classroom practices had observable effects on the formation of educational habits. Teachers felt that different groups responded to different teaching methods: the Chinese were seen to prefer greater teacher direction which many teachers, given the dominant ethos of student-centred learning, were uncomfortable with. There was less agreement in terms of the pedagogic modes seen to be suited to Pasifika students; indeed, there were often contradictory perceptions. Anglo students weren't seen to have a cohesive 'ethnicity' and thus were more likely to be conceived as individuals or in terms of social class. The students' comments revealed a lack of fit with teachers' perceptions: most students across the three groups preferred working in groups but felt they learnt best working either as a whole class or independently.

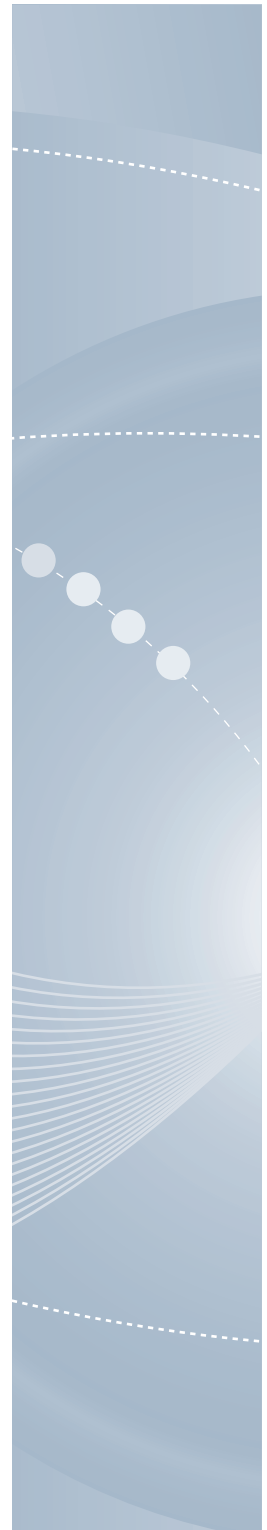
This data challenges our assumptions not only of ethnic difference, but also whether school practices promote the forms of self-discipline needed for sustained educational work. Across the schools, a range of practices fostering differing degrees of discipline were evident: a disabling discipline of control, an enabling discipline of control, a discipline of disengagement and a discipline of engagement. These different forms illustrate the ways in which school practices affect students' involvement in learning. The notion of discipline used here is not simply about classroom control, but points to the embodied skills which need to be habituated to achieve success. Where positive forms of discipline were employed by teachers, such as an enabling discipline of control and a discipline of engagement, active participation in learning followed. These forms of discipline proved enabling for all students, irrespective of the students' ethnicity.



However, they were particularly effective for those Chinese or high SES Anglo students who had already embodied a discipline to learn from routines within the home and so experienced a congruence between home and school.

In classrooms where negative forms of discipline were typical, such as a disabling discipline of control and a discipline of disengagement, students were less likely to be actively engaged in learning. Many, especially from Pasifika or low SES Anglo backgrounds, were left to rely on their existing habitus to provide any discipline to learn. In classrooms where a discipline of disengagement prevailed, there were too many distractions for those students who lacked the self-discipline to work independently or participate effectively and school reinforced the habits they possessed. In classrooms which featured a disabling discipline of control, students were rarely extended and so many, whatever their background, reproduced familiar patterns of behaviour without acquiring the competencies they needed.

The different patterns of achievement amongst students from Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo backgrounds are often perceived as 'natural' or deriving from an ethnic background, the result of a cultural pathology, but they should rather be attributed to the practices in which students engage both at home and school. Educational systems, therefore, need to address ways to support parents in fostering effective habits of learning, and to refocus on the school as a crucial site of intervention – not to erase the cultures from which families come, but to augment them with the capacities for effective educational and social participation.





# Introduction

This report considers the relations between ethnicity and the dispositions towards learning necessary for successful participation in the Australian education system. In contrast to common assumptions about the cultural attributes of some ethnic groups, it considers how home and school practices help produce the attributes of learners, how these attributes are embodied as dispositions towards learning – what we call the *scholarly habitus* – and how these are patterned in terms of ethnicity and broader socio-cultural background. The report is based on research in ten primary schools across a number of regions of the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) within the Sydney metropolitan area involving diverse linguistic and socioeconomic groups, but focuses on three specific groups: students of Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo Australian backgrounds (see glossary). The study argues that dispositions to learn need to be understood in terms of particular kinds of *practices*, rather than explained by ‘ethnicity’ per se. The home and school experiences of these students are therefore examined with the aim of enhancing our understanding of effective educational practices and contributing to the current NSW DET initiatives of Quality Teaching, the State Literacy and Numeracy Initiative and the NSW State Plan.

## Background

There is a common perception that some groups of students from specific cultural and linguistic backgrounds – what is conventionally referred to as ‘ethnicity’ (see glossary) – have a cultural predisposition towards achievement. Students from ‘Asian’ backgrounds, for example, are seen as having such a cultural advantage, while others, such as Pasifika students, are perceived as culturally prone to underachievement. There are assumptions about ‘Asian values’ of strong family and hard work (Robinson, 2000) and myths about how ‘Asian’ students have greater (natural) abilities in maths and the sciences which are recycled in the media (Duffy, 2001, p.28). These myths treat ethnicity as a fixed, even biological category, and see educational achievement as a result of the inherent qualities of particular groups of students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE).

The relationship between ethnicity and education, particularly in a culturally diverse society such as Australia, is a complex one that has not been fully explored, and research into the links between ethnicity and educational outcomes has been uneven (Kalantzis, Cope, Noble & Poynting, 1990). Claims have often been made about the educational disadvantage (de Lemos, 1975) or advantage (Birrell, 1987) of LBOTE students. An analysis of the data shows that there is no universal factor of ethnicity related to achievement – rather, there are substantial differences on the broader basis of socio-cultural background, demonstrating the complexity of the relationship between ethnicity, language, social class and gender, and between the first, second and third generations (Kalantzis & Cope, 1988; Khoo & Birrell, 2002).





Yet simplistic claims continue to be made about the educational consequences of ethnic background. Bullivant (1988) argues that 'ethnic drive' is the determining factor in the success of LBOTE groups, claiming that the personal motives for leaving one's homeland translated into specific aspirations and hence an educational advantage for young LBOTE people. This may be important in some cases, but it doesn't explain the poor outcomes for other groups, such as Pasifika students. In addition, the notion of discrete 'learning styles' has reinforced a common idea that there are culturally specific attributes that shape educational outcomes (Jensen, 1988; NSW Department of School Education, 1992). This literature often makes broad claims on the basis of assumptions about the neurological or cultural bases of these attributes that pathologise ethnicity: students of Arabic speaking background, for example, are labelled as 'kinaesthetic' learners, unable to engage with academic endeavours (Poynting & Noble, 1998).

Despite these qualifications, there does seem to be some patterning in the links between ethnicity and educational achievement, at least for some groups. Chinese students, for example, are more likely to complete Year 12, have a University degree and be in managerial or professional employment than most other groups (Jones, 2005). The educational (and occupational) success of Chinese migrants to Western nations is well documented, both here and overseas (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). In contrast, a large body of research, especially in New Zealand, also documents the poor educational outcomes of Pasifika students (Nash, 2000; Flockton & Crooks, 2001, 2003; Horsley & Walker, 2004). Often raised in debates about these outcomes is the part played by cultural factors.

As Sue & Okazaki (1990) demonstrate, the success of 'Asian' students has often been explained, inadequately, in terms of hereditary differences in intelligence, or in terms of cultural values. Similarly, Rosenthal and Feldman (1991) critique claims that a simple notion of cultural difference could be used to explain the contrasts in educational performance between Chinese and 'Western' students in Australia and the US, and that the importance of family environment was due to a complex combination of socio-cultural factors.

These links, therefore, need to be addressed, but in more complex ways than popular myths and learning styles research suggest. Wu and Singh (2004), for example, explore the phenomenon of 'wishing for dragon children' associated with Chinese parents. They argue that this desire for the educational success of their children derives not simply from Confucianism, as is often claimed, but relates to the historical role of the civil service and its educational system in dynastic China, and to the reinvention of this system under the Communist regime in the 1970s. Moreover, they suggest that the reproduction of this desire amongst the Chinese Australian diaspora reflects the dynamics of migration for white-collar workers who are unable to have their qualifications recognised, and so shift their energy to their children's educational success, fostering, for example, the growth of coaching colleges and the intensification of competition

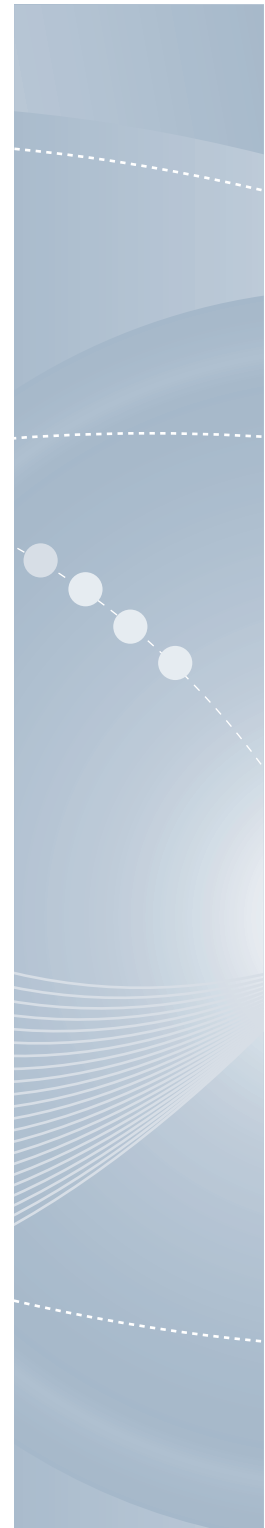
for selective high school places, among other things. Sue & Okazaki (1990) similarly argue that blocked mobility for Chinese migrants is crucial to the increasing value given to the educational success of their children.

The creation of family environments in which there were strong demands for educational achievement, values of effort, restraint and industry (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1991), then, is less to do with overarching, ethnically defined values than a complex of factors. Moreover, the factors have to connect with the institutional practices of the educational system. Campbell and Verna (2007) argue that the formation of 'academic home climates' was central to the success of gifted children, especially when they meshed with the academic climate found in the school. Recent research into the success of Chinese students in mathematics suggests that whatever success is achieved is due to a combination of good teaching, and motivation to achieve, parental help and extra study (Da-Cheng et al., 2006); a finding echoed in earlier work (McInerney & McInerney, 1994).

The lives of Pasifika groups in Australia, while also shaped by a complex process of migration and settlement, are a very different story, involving social and economic disadvantage, educational underachievement and criminality far removed from their homeland experiences (Francis, 1995; White et al., 1999; Dooley et al., 2000; Singh & Sinclair, 2001). Media coverage has been given to the increasing incidence of crime and the relationship between this and low levels of school retention (Hildebrand, 2003), and 'Asian' students are sometimes compared with Pasifika students in terms of educational success (AAP, 2002). Yet, as Coxon's (2007) account of education in Samoa demonstrates, educational structures and practices cannot be explained by some primordial and unified system of cultural values, but by complex and changing histories. In Samoa, a 'traditional' focus on the teacher as an authority who must be respected and not challenged, deriving from the hierarchical structure of village life, is being challenged by the recent shift to a child-centred focus and 'active' pedagogies brought in as part of a modernising process that itself relates to a history of colonisation, decolonisation and economic underdevelopment. Any claim that the 'cultural values' of migrants from places like Samoa entail communal values of cooperation and sharing needs to address more closely the specificity and contingency of educational and cultural practices.

### **From cultures to cultural practices: unpacking our terms**

Part of the problem in thinking through the links between cultural background and educational experience is the terminology used (see the glossary for a list of terms used in this study). 'Ethnicity', for example, is often assumed to be an unproblematic category based on clear boundaries around 'cultures' or 'races'. 'Ethnicity', however, is a sense of commonality based on several characteristics: language, physical similarities, national origin, customs, religion and so on. Ethnicity is, in fact, a social construction based on the perception of shared qualities, borne out of the interaction between self-identification and identification by others (Bottomley, 1979). It can sometimes be an absurd





construction. The idea of 'Asian', for example, is problematic because it includes a range of diverse national, regional and social groups and, in any case, means different things in different nations. Ethnicity is, moreover, linked to various socio-cultural factors such as family socialisation, socioeconomic status, gender, generational experiences of migration and language maintenance.

Because 'ethnicity' has come colloquially to refer to particular groups of migrants in Australia (but not English speaking background groups or Indigenous groups), and has developed negative connotations, it has become increasingly common to talk about 'cultures' instead. This doesn't solve the problem of terminology, however, because 'culture' refers to a whole array of processes: social class and gender are also 'cultural', for example. Moreover, once we turn it into a noun – a culture – we end up with the same problems of seeing culture as a *thing* not a multi-dimensional *process*. The point here is not to offer a better definition of these terms, but to recognise two things:

- the *complexity* at the heart of what we are talking about when we invoke notions of ethnicity or culture: people exist at the intersection of multiple social processes and to reduce them to a single, innate 'culture' loses this complexity;
- the forms of communal life we identify as 'cultures' are not pre-given categories but the result of particular kinds of *practices*, which relate to social relations and institutions and develop over time.

These points don't detract from the important ways people identify with a particular ethnic identity, but suggest that we need to shift our focus to the *practices* whereby it is produced rather than take it as a starting point of discussion (Brah, 1996; Nasir & Saxe, 2003).

A central aim of this study, therefore, is to explore the kinds of *practices* which aid participation in schooling, and then see these in terms of patterns of ethnicity. At the foreground of practice-based approaches to understanding social life has been the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and we will use several concepts that derive from his approach: educational capital, dispositions and habitus. Bourdieu talks about the role of schools in the reproduction of 'cultural capital' – the learned competence in the valued ways of doing things in a social context. Initially, Bourdieu sees this in terms of the reproduction of power, and argues that these forms of competence serve merely to 'consecrate' class-based knowledge (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). However, he later acknowledges that this competence is 'technical' (that is, it has a basis in performing certain tasks) as well as 'social' (that is, it distributes people into positions of power) (Bourdieu, 1996). Although Bourdieu himself talks about academic and intellectual capital, we will use the more general term 'educational capital' (Fay, 2001) to cover an array of competencies, skills and knowledges. These may range from an understanding of the schooling system (a significant form of knowledge for many from migrant or poor backgrounds) to more academic forms of knowledge –

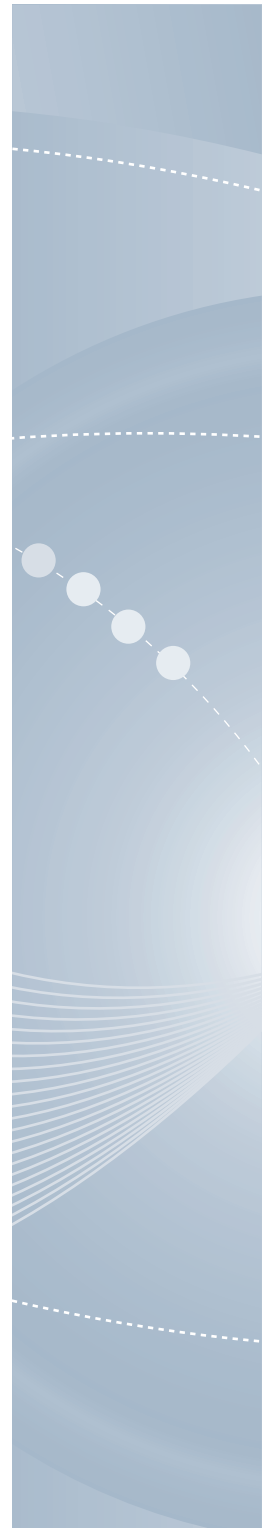
of language and society. Such competencies are distributed unevenly, according to class, ethnic background, gender, and so on, and they form the basis of particular *dispositions* towards learning.

### From psychological attributes to practised capacities


An increasing body of research is focusing attention on the ways that educational achievement is best understood not just by the acquisition of specific cognitive abilities and content knowledge, nor simply determined by larger social categories, such as class, gender and ethnicity, but involves an array of factors which produce in students certain kinds of attributes which predispose them towards learning in different ways. A recent Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2006) report on immigrant students, for example, argued that their engagement in school can be seen in terms of a disposition towards learning which entails questions of motivation and aspiration, self-efficacy, an ability to function in an institution, cooperating with others and a sense of 'belonging'. An Australian study identified dispositional forces and barriers to staying on at school, which similarly revolved around questions of interest, motivation, self-efficacy, attitudes to and a sense of belonging in school (Lamb et al., 2004). Research on motivational orientation within educational psychology provides further evidence for unpacking the attributes of successful learners which predispose them to scholarly work. It emphasises the centrality of intrinsic motivation, self-determination, experiences of competence, cognitive flexibility, achievement orientation, the capacity for self-regulation, diligence and focus, and the desire to learn for its own sake (see Boggiano & Pittman, 1992; McInerney & Van Etten, 2001), as well as more specific research on the 'disposition to critical thinking' (Urdu & Giancarlo, 2001, pp. 44-45).

While useful, much of this research is undeveloped both empirically and theoretically. Its focus tends to be macro, deriving broad generalisations from large surveys, and it mixes cognitive, physical, institutional and social dimensions, and moves too easily between the attributes of individuals and social groups, without adequately conceptualising the relations between them.

Such research often finds evidence of ethnic differences in such capacities: Ip et al. (2000), for example, found, that Chinese students showed a negative disposition towards critical thinking. Yet, because it is framed as psychological attributes, this literature seems to confirm assumptions that these attributes are rooted in deep-seated cultural pathologies. Tiwari et al. (2005) argued that the differences between Hong Kong Chinese and Australian students' critical thinking dispositions could be just as easily explained in terms of institutional, educational and professional factors as well as cultural background. We can infer from this that the literature is often conceptually narrow because it treats these as psychological or cognitive attributes, measured by attitudinal surveys and questionnaires. Little research grapples with such dispositions observed in context, which could help to show that these dispositions may be better conceived and understood as embodied attributes derived from socio-cultural practices.







Despite the emphasis on personal attributes in the research on motivational orientation, they actually translate into particular practices, capacities and values, often highlighted in the literature on motivating students: the ability to plan and monitor work, a strong sense of control and focus, a belief in the value of learning, authoritative but not authoritarian parental support, a stable and efficient work space and routines at home (Martin, 2003). Much of this comes back to the home environment in which a child studies, and not just the school experience itself; together they produce 'academic resilience' in the student, or the capacity to deal effectively with challenges (Martin, 2003, pp.10-11). Yet because this literature continues to treat these as *psychological* attributes, they don't capture the sense in which they exist as *embodied* attributes derived from socio-cultural practices. This report will use the work of Bourdieu to see how these ideas can be made concrete through an examination of the practices which produce the skills, knowledges and behaviours effective in schooling.

### Embodiment, discipline and learning

Rather than locate these dispositions in some innate qualities of the learner or their ethnic background, we want to see them as specific *capacities* and forms of *educational capital* that emerge from specific *practices*. Against the cognitive orientation in educational research, we want to suggest that educational participation depends on particular embodied skills which are evidence of a *disposition towards learning* that we call, drawing on the work of Bourdieu, the *scholarly habitus* (which in turn affects cognitive ability). This habitus entails the mastery of certain kinds of skills and knowledge, but as embodied capacities which predispose the learner to work in particular ways. By understanding this, we believe, we can better understand the relationships between ethnic background and educational experience.

“The habitus is ‘a system of dispositions to be and to do’ which doesn’t just embody our past but allows us to act in the future.”

— Bourdieu (2000, p.150)

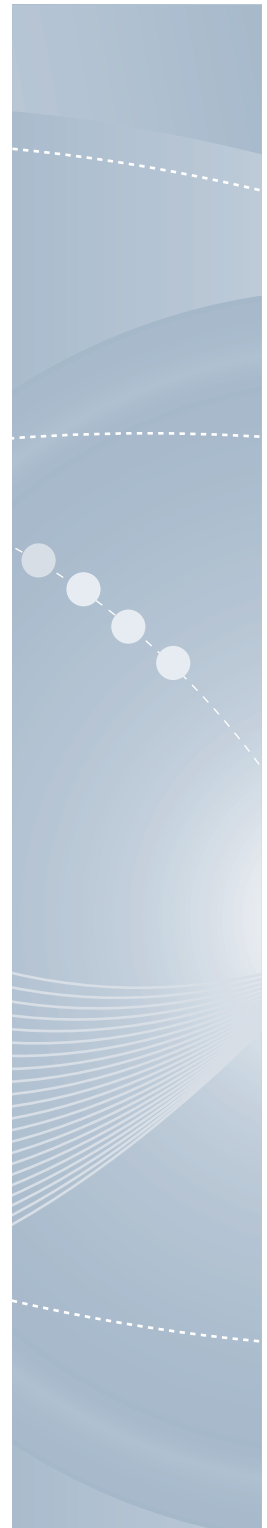
Importantly, because these competencies are embodied they feel natural, which explains why they are often overlooked in educational research. Central to our analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and educational experience is an understanding of the ways the skills, knowledges and behaviours important for educational participation are embodied in learners through particular *practices* which instil

in students certain *dispositions* towards learning – not just the ability to perform certain tasks but the desire to learn and the ability to manage one's learning. We address these questions not by pathologising ethnicity, but by exploring the ways educational capital is internalised by students in ways that dispose them towards, or away from, educational achievement. The project deploys the notion of a 'scholarly habitus' (Watkins, 2005a) to analyse the development of these dispositions through practices that underlie the capacity for educational success. Bourdieu uses the concept of 'habitus' to describe the embodied dispositions which make it possible for someone to function appropriately and largely unconsciously in a particular milieu: a system of durable thoughts and actions

(Bourdieu, 1990, p.53). The habitus is 'a system of dispositions to be and to do' which doesn't just embody our past but allows us to act in the future (Bourdieu, 2000, p.150). The habitus we acquire through family socialisation impacts upon a child's embodied preparedness for academic endeavour, because it entails capacities that are valued and productive in educational institutions: self-discipline, the ability to work intensively, self-confidence, independence, the inclination to contemplation and abstraction, valuing excellence, and so on (Bourdieu, 1996; 2000). Unfortunately, Bourdieu didn't ground this in ethnographic observation in classrooms. He was more interested in considering their role in the reproduction of class relations by legitimising the cultural capital of the middle class. It is important then to examine the kinds of embodied capacities that ground these dispositions towards learning.

The bodily basis to educational success, however, is largely ignored in educational research, whether this is the physical skills of writing, sitting still, focusing attention or self-discipline. Most discussions see educational achievement in cognitive terms, reflected in test results and other tasks. While educational theory has begun to address the corporeal nature of schooling, this has been largely framed in terms of social control with discipline understood as simply being repressive (O'Farrell et al., 2000), rather than as potentially enabling (Watkins, 2005a). Michel Foucault (1977), whose work has also influenced this study, acknowledges the productive capacity of discipline but focuses more on practices of domination and surveillance that produce 'docile' bodies than on 'useful' bodies that have capacities that enable them to work effectively in a given setting. Such disciplinary skills are partially taught in the early years of schooling, but are more likely to be assumed as the 'natural' propensities of the successful learner. The acquisition of these skills needs close examination particularly as they pertain to different ethnic groups and socio-cultural backgrounds. Research, for example, into parenting practices in various nations (Strom, 2001; Choo & Tan, 2001; Campbell & Verna, 2007) would suggest that ethnicity might impact on students' motivational orientation, but only through *specific* practices. These studies show that a relation between ethnicity and productive practices exists, but that any simple claim about 'Asian values', for example, is misplaced.

The concept of a scholarly habitus is useful then in exploring the links between home and school practices, embodied dispositions and sociocultural background because it allows us to address issues of self-regulation and the possession of educational capital without falling into simplistic arguments about 'ethnic drive'. It also allows us to shift the focus from test results to questions about the dispositions that shape performance and to capacities for self-direction that have implications for the educational opportunities of students. This report aims at fostering insights into the links between engagement and self-regulation (NSW DET Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003b, pp.16-18). In this regard the project relates to the DET's goal of achieving excellence in education and training outcomes for all students, and especially LBOTE students, in relation to the *intellectual quality* and *quality learning environment* of teaching (NSW DET 2003a; 2003b).





## Research questions and the structure of the report

To develop these issues, the study asked specific questions:

1. Is there evidence of different dispositions to learning amongst specific ethnic groups and are these critical to academic achievement?
2. How are these dispositions related to knowledge of the schooling system and home-based practices such as routines around homework, workspace, parental regulation, extracurricular activities, etc?
3. In what ways do these different practices relate to family experiences, socioeconomic status and gender as well as ethnicity?
4. Are particular practices utilised in the classroom that promote bodily dispositions conducive to academic endeavour?
5. How do teachers, parents and students consider that teaching practices contribute to different dispositions of learning?
6. How might knowledge of these practices inform understandings of the differential achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

To answer these questions, the report is organised as follows. Chapter 1 outlines the methodology used in the research – a mix of survey, interviews, observations and document analysis – and issues concerning the sample and the groups targeted in the research. It also outlines the approach of *cultural research* which is used in the study designed to challenge our pre-existing understandings of the educational process. Chapter 2 reports the findings from the first phase of the study: a survey of Year 3 parents in ten schools across Sydney. Using SPSS analysis it outlines the broad trends found in the survey. Chapter 3 draws together some of the material to demonstrate the existence of specific dispositions towards learning amongst the different groups. It uses the classroom observations and the interviews with students, parents and teachers to examine attitudes to schooling, aspirations, expectations and classroom behaviour, and their link to test results, to make some general claims about the evidence for specific dispositions amongst students and their relation to patterns of ethnicity. Chapter 4 explores these dispositions by relating them to home-based practices, including homework and extracurricular activities, as well as considering how work at home is valued, organised and conducted. Chapter 5 examines school practices and their contribution to the development of the scholarly habitus. It focuses on questions of pedagogy, using interviews with teachers and the observational data. The report concludes by drawing these issues together, reviewing points raised in each chapter and addressing the central problem of notions of ‘discipline’ and how we need to relate this to quality teaching goals around self-regulation. It also returns to the question of how we consider the popular stereotypes of learners from specific ethnic backgrounds.

# Chapter 1 – Research design

## 1.1 A question of method

*'Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a great thirst for new ideas, and that there's a great poverty of vision and of fresh ways of thinking about things at a grass roots level. For example, in local government, and other organizations concepts such as 'community', identity' and 'multiculturalism', or even 'access and equity' to name but a few, have become stale, stuck in closed circuits of meaning devoid of the capacity to inspire creative ways of dealing with issues at hand.'* len Ang (2005, p.482)

An aim of this research has been to take on the challenge posed by Ang to present 'fresh ways of thinking about things at a grassroots level' and to encourage innovative policy development in the field of multicultural education and education in general. In examining different cultural practices and the extent to which they may contribute to certain dispositions to learning, this project has had to rethink the very concepts Ang highlights – 'community', 'identity', 'multiculturalism', 'access and equity' – together with 'pedagogy' and 'discipline'. The impetus for doing this was not simply the theoretical framework informing the study; it also resulted from the methodology of cultural research that the study employed. Rather than only adopting the methods associated with traditional social science research, such as large scale surveys and structured interviews, which it was felt were unable to capture the aspects of the experience of the different groups we were investigating, the study instead sought to adopt a 'methodological pluralism' (Johnson, Chambers, Raghuram & Tincknell, 2004, p.26). This involved a range of techniques, both qualitative and quantitative, with the potential to shed light on what Gupta and Ferguson (1997, p.4) refer to as 'the culturally chaotic present'. This 'cultural chaos' is reflected in the diverse and fluid nature of the groups under investigation, each of which, while indicating a common ethnicity, varied internally in terms of their class, religion, education, previous experience and duration in Australia. Yet it is also characteristic of the various 'cultures of schooling' encountered within the study which differed not simply between schools but within them too.

The study, therefore, drew on data derived from several sources: a broad survey, in-depth interviews, observation and document analysis in a two-phase process which is outlined below. In a sense, a *triangulation* of data was sought, but not as it is understood within a more traditional research paradigm as a technique for obtaining a verifiable truth – a social fact. Rather, by employing multiple methods, in particular the interviews and classroom observations, a perspective on the richly textured nature of the participants' experience generated data which provides new understandings about the differential achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students with the NSW education system.

## 1.2 The sample

The project was undertaken in two phases drawing on a range of culturally and socioeconomically diverse populations within the Sydney metropolitan area. Phase 1 involved ten schools and Phase 2 six schools. The intention in Phase





2 of the project was to focus on three ethnic groups: students from Chinese, Pasifika (primarily Samoan and Tongan) and Anglo backgrounds. As outlined in the introduction the rationale for selecting these groups was the diversity of current perceptions of their academic achievement: Chinese students are seen as high achievers (60 Minutes, 1999, cited in Wu & Singh, 2004) while Pasifika background students are generally viewed as low achievers (Duffy, 2001; AAP, 2002; Hildebrand, 2003). Anglo students are generally not seen in ethnic terms, and so make a useful comparison for discussions. These groups are not, of course, simple categories, so the project also gave some attention to the socioeconomic status and gender of students in an attempt to more fully understand the complexity of cultural difference or 'cultural chaos' as mentioned above. Schools were selected according to the following categories:

**Group 1** – Two schools of high Chinese population

**Group 2** – Two schools of high Pasifika population

**Group 3** – Two schools with a reasonable representation of each of these two groups.

As the schools with high percentages of Chinese students tend to be of a higher SES than those with large populations of Pasifika students, the rationale behind selecting schools for inclusion in Group 3 was to minimise this imbalance. A number of Anglo students were selected from across the three groups of schools with the breakdown of Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo students provided in Table 1. A profile of each of the schools and the names and ethnicity of students involved in the study is also given below. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality pseudonyms have been used in all cases. Pseudonyms have also been used for teachers, parents and community representatives but these are not listed here. Where relevant throughout the report these participants' association with a particular school or student is indicated at that point.

**Table 1 – Overview of students involved in the study**

Ethnicity	Number per Ethnicity	Gender		SES*	
		Male	Female	H/M	L
Chinese	11	8	3	5	6
Pasifika	11	7	4	0	11
Anglo	13	8	5	5	8
Totals	35	23	12	10	25

\* This delineation as either high/middle (h/m) SES or low (l) SES is based on survey returns of parents' income and occupation and serves as only a general categorisation in terms of SES.

## Phase 2 schools

Group 1 schools	
Chestervale Public School (PS)	Colinville PS
Chestervale PS is located in a middle SES suburb in Sydney's north-west with an overall population of 700 students. Chinese background students, from mainly Hong Kong, China and Malaysia, make up 74% of the student population. The school has an Anglo population of 12%. The remaining major ethnic groups are Indian and Korean.	Colinville PS also has a population of 700 students including Opportunity Classes in Years 5 and 6. It is located in an inner-western suburb of Sydney and, while there are a considerable number of students whose parents have professional and managerial employment backgrounds, there are also some from a lower SES. The school is 55% LBOTE with significant numbers from Chinese backgrounds.
<b>Students involved in the study:</b>	<b>Students involved in the study:</b>
<i>Chinese background</i> — Ben, Jenny, Walter and Norman	<i>Chinese background</i> — Alice, Gary, Yupeng and Seamus
<i>Anglo background</i> — Wallace, Eric and Ian	<i>Anglo background</i> — Flynn and Melissa

Group 2 schools	
Allerton PS	Aston PS
Allerton PS is a school of 400 students located in the south-western suburbs of Sydney in an area of considerable disadvantage. Most students' families live in public housing accommodation and the school receives Priority School Program (PSP) funding. Allerton PS is approximately 60% LBOTE with half of these students of Pasifika background, mainly Samoan. The student population is also 8% Aboriginal.	Aston PS, with a student population of 500, is located in the outer western suburbs of Sydney. Most families are of a low SES and the school receives PSP funding. The largest group within the LBOTE population is Pasifika, mainly Samoan, though there are also Cook Islander, Tongan and Maori students at the school. In addition to this 23% of the population is Aboriginal. Given the relatively transient nature of the Pasifika population in the area, there were considerable difficulties in recruiting Pasifika students for the study.
<b>Students involved in the study:</b>	<b>Students involved in the study:</b>
<i>Pasifika background</i> — Darren, Joe, Lottie and Tuilia	<i>Pasifika background</i> — Tim
<i>Anglo background</i> — Bryon and Tilly	<i>Anglo background</i> — Braydon, Leanne and Narelle

Group 3 schools	
Broughton Heights PS	Briar Plains PS
Broughton Heights is a very large school of over 1000 students. Located in the western suburbs of Sydney it draws on families from lower-middle and working-class backgrounds. There is a range of different ethnic groups represented at the school with students of Chinese background being approximately 50% and Pasifika students 9% (mainly Tongan and Samoan). Other backgrounds represented at the school include Lebanese, Iraqi, Afghani, Sudanese, Vietnamese and Korean.	Briar Plains PS is also located in the western suburbs of Sydney and draws on a similar population to Broughton Heights PS. Its student population is 550 with 98% being LBOTE. Of these 19% are of Pasifika background, 38% Arabic speaking and 6% Chinese. There are very few Anglo students at the school.
<b>Students involved in the study:</b>	<b>Students involved in the study:</b>
<i>Chinese background</i> — Sonya and Vincent	<i>Chinese background</i> — Robbie
<i>Pasifika background</i> — Sonny, Finau and Fred	<i>Pasifika background</i> — Emma, Lua and Toni
<i>Anglo background</i> — Joan and Callum	<i>Anglo background</i> — Jason





### 1.2.2 Why Year 3?

The rationale for a focus on Year 3 students lies in the significance of this year in the structure of the educational processes within the NSW system. Up until 2007 students completed their first NSW Basic Skills Test (BST) in Year 3 and this data is drawn upon in the study as a measure of each student's achievement and to provide additional background data on each school<sup>1</sup>. Also, in their following year, students may sit for tests for admission to selective classes for Years 5 and 6. Responses to questions related to these tests provide useful insights into students' current performance and their own and their parents' educational aspirations. Year 3 is also an important year as it represents the first year of primary school and students' transition into Stage 2 within the NSW system (Years 3 and 4). Finally, in terms of the notion of the development of a *scholarly habitus* which is a focus of the study, dispositions to learning are evident by this stage of a student's school life but they are not as engrained as is generally the case by the end of primary school, prior to their entry to high school (Watkins, 2003). Given these factors it was felt that Year 3 was an optimal time at which to investigate a child's dispositions to learning and the ways in which both home and school had contributed to their formation.

### 1.3 Project methodology

As indicated the project was undertaken in two phases:

#### Phase 1 – Survey

Following discussion with selected school staff and community liaison personnel, and information supplied through school newsletters, a survey was sent to all parents of Year 3 students in ten schools with questions concerning:

- demographic information: income, educational qualifications, cultural identity, place of birth, years in Australia
- knowledge of the NSW schooling system, participation in school activities, attitudes to school
- habits and practices in the home that are conducive to learning, such as, homework and extracurricular activities
- parents' aspirations for their children.

The purpose of the survey was to amass data on the range of different cultural groups represented in each school, to inform the design of the parent and student interview schedules and also to assist in identifying the schools and possible participants for the second phase of the project (see appendices). The survey, therefore, also included an expression of interest for parents and their Year 3 child to be involved in Phase 2. The number of parents willing to participate greatly exceeded the required sample. Despite some respondents not

<sup>1</sup> The BST was a NSW Government initiative designed to assess the English literacy and numeracy skills of students in Years 3 and 5 in government schools. It was available to Catholic Education Commission and Independent schools. In 2008, it was superseded by the National Assessment Program.



belonging to the groups targeted in the study, many were interviewed anyway and the data obtained informs a supplementary report entitled *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Parents' Perspectives on Schooling*.

The selection of schools chosen for inclusion in Phase 2 was based on the following factors:

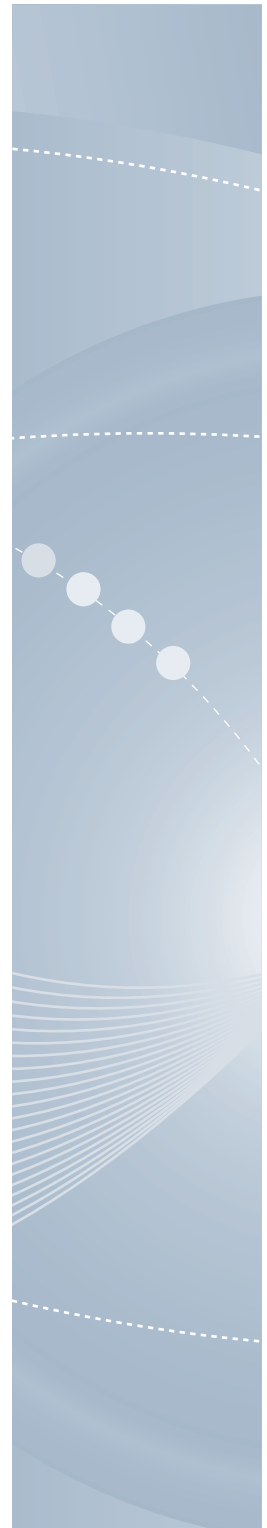
- overall return rate of surveys within the school
- return rate of target groups within the school
- interest demonstrated by school staff based on feedback during the initial information sessions.

Following the selection of Phase 2 schools, further information sessions were held for relevant staff by members of the research team to discuss different aspects of the second phase of the project, to appoint a school contact person and to ensure informed consent by those involved.

## **Phase 2 – Interviews, observation and document analysis**

### **Interviews**

Data was collected during Phase 2 using interviews, observation and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with parents, students, the Year 3 teachers of each student, school principals, deputies and a selection of English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or community language teachers, Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) or other community representatives. A complete breakdown of the interviewees is provided in Table 2.



**Table 2 – Breakdown of interviewees**

School	Students	Parents	Ethnic Background of Interviewees	Principals & Deputies	Year 3 Teachers	*Other
Group 1 Chestervale	7	7	4 Chinese 3 Anglo	1 Principal 1 Deputy	4	1
Group 1 Colinville	6	6	4 Chinese 2 Anglo	1 Principal 1 Deputy	3	2
Group 2 Allerton	6	6	4 Pasifika 2 Anglo	1 Principal 1 Deputy	2	2
Group 2 Aston	4	4	1 Pasifika 3 Anglo	1 Principal	2	0
Group 3 Broughton Heights	7	6	3 Pasifika 2 Chinese 2 Anglo	1 Principal 1 Deputy	4	1
Group 3 Briar Plains	5	5	3 Pasifika 1 Chinese 1 Anglo ‡	1 Principal 1 Deputy	1	3
<b>Sub Totals</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>

<b>Total per focus group – Students</b>	Chinese – 11; Pasifika – 11; Anglo – 13
<b>Total per focus group – Parents</b>	Chinese – 11; Pasifika – 10; Anglo – 13
<b>Overall Total of Interviewees</b>	<b>105</b>

\* 'Other' includes ESL and community language teachers, CLOs and other community representatives, and one DET Senior Officer with extensive experience within Pasifika communities.

‡ (there was only one Chinese and one Anglo student in Year 3)

Most interviews with parents and students were conducted during Term 2 of 2006. After obtaining informed consent in line with the UWS Ethics Committee's requirements and those of the DET, parent interviews were held at their child's school, at home or their workplace. Individual student interviews were conducted at each school with two researchers present.

Parent interviews ranged in time from 30-70 minutes and most student interviews were approximately 20 minutes in duration. The interviews with school staff and community representatives were conducted on school premises during Term 3 and early Term 4 following the period of classroom observation. The interview schedules for parents and students were based around similar questions presented in the survey with more specific treatment of habits and practices in the home, aspirations and the NSW DET BST and University of NSW (UNSW) competition test results with respondents' elaboration encouraged.

The questions for teachers centred on classroom practices and possible observed differences between groups of students, behaviour, self-regulation and engagement. The questions for the principals and deputies focused on issues related to school and community relations, parental involvement, school ethos, discipline and homework policies, and achievement levels of different groups of students (see appendices).

### **Classroom observation**

Overall, the aim of the observation sessions was to capture what was happening in each of the Year 3 classrooms in relation to:

1. the targeted students
2. other students from each of the target groups
3. the class overall and interaction between teacher and students.

The number of observation sessions per class ranged from two to four with most being conducted during Term 2, 2006. Each class was observed by two of three researchers on separate occasions to ensure a range of classroom experiences were recorded from the perspective of different members of the research team. Each, however, utilised the same guidelines for compiling field notes with the categories of analysis relating to pedagogic space, classroom regimen and curriculum implementation (see appendices).

### **Document analysis**

A range of documentary material was collected during school visits including:

- teachers' programs
- lesson stimulus materials
- additional curriculum material
- school newsletters
- schools' annual reports
- documents pertaining to parent information sessions
- professional development materials.

This material was used as additional data to inform the overall perspective of each school and the different groups represented in the study rather than as data requiring detailed analysis. Together with the above, the Basic Skills Test results for each school and those of each student participant were collected. Parents were notified of the collection of this data and could lodge an objection if they preferred their child's results not to be considered for analysis.

This wealth of data from various sources has assisted in the attainment of a 'thick description' of the experience of each of the target groups. The following chapters draw on different aspects of this data in an attempt to provide fresh and insightful perspectives on the relationships between ethnicity, educational experiences and outcomes.





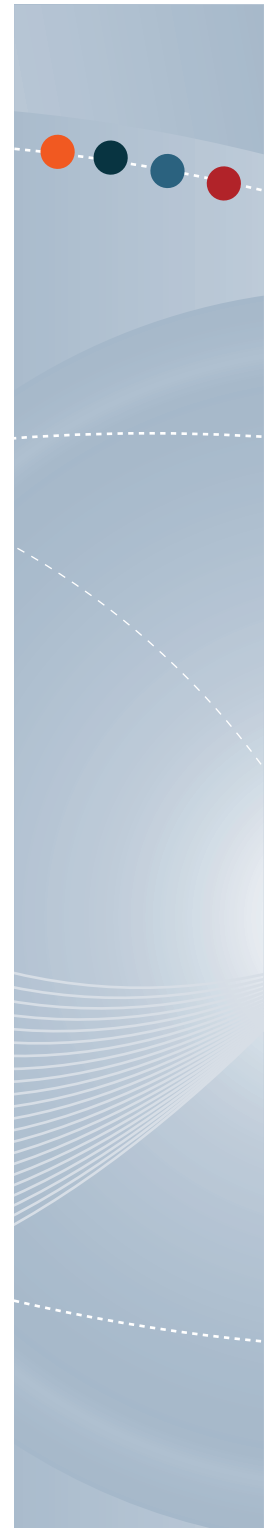
## Chapter 2 – Surveying parents: some insights into educational capital

This chapter presents data derived from the survey of parents of Year 3 students in ten schools across Sydney conducted as Phase 1 of the project. As the previous chapter outlined, the objective of the survey was to collect information on the different ethnic groups within each school that was relevant to the wider research questions as well as to inform Phase 2 of the research. Responses to the survey questions allowed us to develop some initial insights into the relationships between parents' ethnicity, their educational capital and home practices, students' experiences at school and their dispositions to learning addressed in detail later in the report.

Numerous studies have explored the role of educational capital in shaping students' outcomes (Fay, 2001; Reay, 2004). This educational capital is seen to be the various resources individuals accumulate – forms of knowledge, skills, values, qualifications and so on. For Bourdieu (1986), this educational capital, as part of the larger groups of resources he calls cultural capital, is largely structured by social class, but is reproduced first through family socialisation and then through the schooling system. Bourdieu suggests in many places that this fundamental relation between family, class and education is much more complicated than we normally imagine, but he rarely explores this in all its complexity (and in particular says little about ethnicity). While Bourdieu's conception of forms of capital is more productive than those sociologists of education who have perceived 'family background' as primarily a reflection of larger class structures which determine educational attainment (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), he has not written, as Reay (1998) argues, directly on home-school relationships.

Marjoribanks (1979; 2002) has also attempted to elaborate the multiple dimensions of these relationships. In particular, he examines the nexus between ethnicity and class through an unpacking of various dimensions of family background, structure, values and orientations to achievement, and how these relate to educational capital, school structures and student characteristics, recognising that each element mediates and moderates the effects of the others. In the educational and psychological literature there is a wealth of research into various aspects of the role of the family environment and 'effective parenting' – Campbell and Verna (2007) for example, draw together much of this research and formulate a notion of a positive 'academic home climate' which promotes curiosity and encourages the child to pursue their academic interests. This generates positive behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and values that lead to children having higher levels of achievement. This is especially true, they argue, when the academic home climate is in sync with the school's academic climate. Yet the level of theorisation which ties these insights together – as educational capital – is often missing.

Reay, for example, unpacks Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital in terms of schooling to list seven aspects of cultural capital relevant to primary schooling: material resources, educational qualifications, available time, information about the educational system, social confidence, educational knowledge and the ease with which parents approach teaching staff (Reay, 1998, pp.57-59). This





survey attempted to capture something of these aspects of educational capital: parents' backgrounds, engagement with school, values around learning at home, extracurricular activities and parents' perceptions of their child's educational achievement. The survey reveals some very broad patterns around the connections between socioeconomic background and educational orientation, and significant differences between the three groups under examination.

## 2.1 Survey sample

The Phase 1 survey was distributed to an initial group of ten schools with three schools from Group 1, three from Group 2 and four from Group 3. Four schools were included in Group 3 due to the difficulties involved in finding schools with a significant representation of both Chinese and Pasifika students. This additional school was surveyed to allow for greater choice in the selection process for Phase 2. In all, a total of 839 surveys were distributed in eight languages: Arabic, English, Korean, Mandarin, Samoan, Spanish, Tongan and Vietnamese. Many more languages were spoken across the ten schools but principals selected these as meeting the language needs of their school populations. Of the 839 survey forms distributed, 469 were returned, representing an overall return rate of 56%. The return rate varied across the schools surveyed, with the highest return rate at one school being 75% and the lowest 28%. Both of these schools were included in the next phase of the project as the return rate was one of many indicators which made the schools of value to the project. Differing return rates can be attributed to the commitment of the schools involved and the strategies used by the schools to assist in survey return, but the variation also indicated the level of parental access and engagement, and communication between schools and parents. Schools with high survey return rates were generally also schools which actively facilitated the research process and tended to be of a higher SES than those with a low return rate. These schools were also those with higher proportions of Chinese students.

Data from these surveys were entered and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (SPSS). The findings proved interesting in relation to the differences between ethnic groups but are not analysed here in terms of presenting any statistical variation given that there was no attempt to gain equivalent samples of each ethnic group. Instead, the focus is on identifying broad trends which are explored in more detail through the interview and observational data discussed in Chapters 3-5. It also provided a broad context for understanding each of the schools and groups. A total of 15 self-identified language groups responded to the survey, nominating 56 different countries of birth. For the purpose of this report, the results discussed below will refer only to those cultural backgrounds under investigation. The number of surveys returned from each of the ethnic groups targeted varied considerably: 154 were of Chinese background, 38 of Pasifika background and 119 of Anglo background. Based on the representation of these groups across the surveyed schools, this indicates a return rate from Chinese parents approximately double

that of Anglo and Pasifika parents<sup>2</sup>. This may suggest that amongst Chinese parents there is a greater interest in and knowledge of education, educational research and a familiarity with schooling, and an expectation of possible benefits for their children – evidence of educational capital.

This survey tried to document some key aspects of the forms of educational capital held by parents. Given the established links between social class and educational attainment, we provide some information related to socioeconomic background (income, occupation and qualifications), before we explore parents' participation in school, academic engagement at home, extracurricular activity and views of their child's academic achievements. These provide a broad context to later arguments about the different patterns of educational orientation amongst the three groups.

## 2.2 Background of respondents

### 2.2.1 Educational qualifications

Questions related to parents' own experiences and influencing factors helped to develop a profile of the respondents and establish a notion of cultural identity beyond simple ethnicity. One such issue was the respondents' own education which is significant not only in terms of each group's aspirations for their own children's education but what it suggests about the parent's educational capital and the process of educational reproduction. Many studies (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Sticht, 1988; Haveman & Wolfe, 1996; Anderson & Bruce, 2004) examine the correlations between parents' level of education and their children's educational achievement. In this study, a similar but broad correlation was evident. Chinese and Anglo parents had the highest level of education, with 74% of Chinese and 60% of Anglo respondents having completed post-secondary educational qualifications, compared to just 23% of those of Pasifika background. Anglo parents also had the highest proportion of higher degree qualifications, whereas none of the Pasifika respondents had tertiary qualifications. This suggests that our Chinese and Anglo samples tended to be better qualified than the respective ethnic categories nationally: in the 2001 census only 40% of those of Chinese ancestry and 36% of those of English speaking heritage had a post-school qualification, while our Pasifika sample was relatively comparable with the national figures, with 27% having a post-school qualification (ABS, 2007).

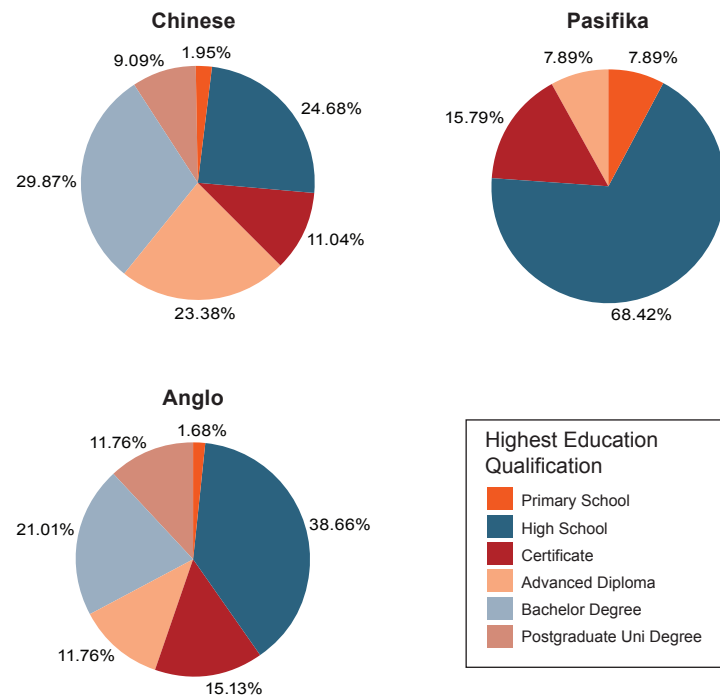
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<sup>2</sup> This estimation is based on the number of students within these language groups across the ten schools.





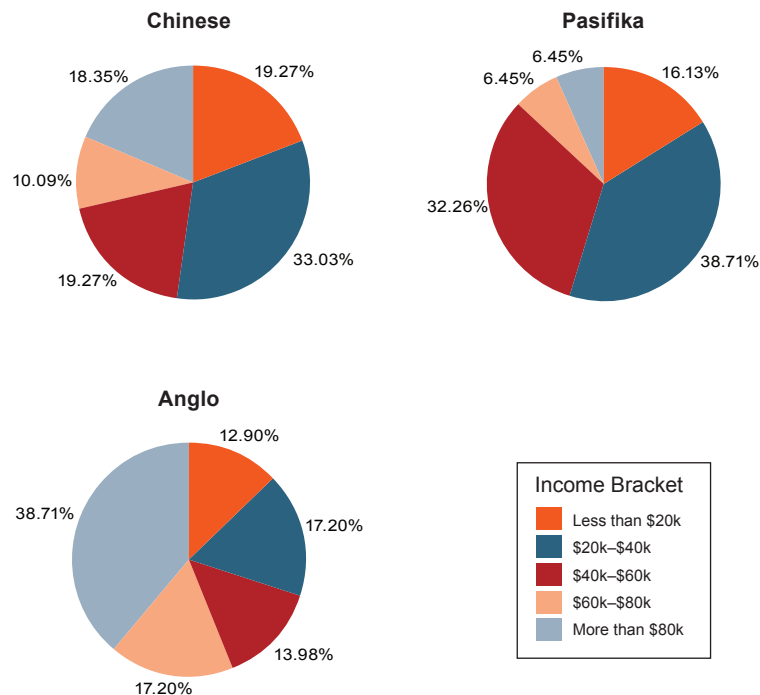
**Figure 1 – Education qualifications of target groups**



### 2.2.2 Income and occupation

As with the parents' educational qualifications, figures on income also revealed differences between the three groups. The survey revealed that Anglo respondents were the highest income earners, with 56% earning above \$60k, compared to just 13% of the Pasifika respondents. In comparison, 56% of Pasifika parents earned less than \$40k. The income bracket representation of Chinese respondents varied significantly, with the same percentage of Chinese parents earning less than \$20k as those earning above \$80k. While the Anglo sample in the project was, however, faring better than the national figures for this group (only 37% earn more than \$60k), the Chinese and Pasifika samples tended to be doing less well than their group nationally (ABS, 2007).

**Figure 2 – Income brackets of target groups**



A similar pattern can be seen in relation to occupations. Anglo parents were more likely to have a professional or managerial position (33%) than either Chinese parents (21%) or Pasifika parents (8%). Anglos were also less likely to be unemployed or work in manual labour (1%) compared to Chinese (12%) and Pasifika (21%). Again, this means our Anglo sample is somewhat better off than the nationwide group, although the comparisons for Chinese and Pasifika groups are more complex. Only 23% of Anglo adults are in professional or managerial positions nationally, and 5% in manual employment, while the unemployment rate is 4.6%. The corresponding figures for the Chinese are 24%, 4.7% and 5.6%, while for Pasifika adults they are 11%, 12% and 9%.

These distributions are largely reflections of the SES of the suburban locations of the schools. Income and occupation are often taken as the simplest measure of social class, and then correlated with educational outcomes (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), yet, as we have suggested, large analytical categories such as class (like ethnicity) are useful only up to a point. As they operate at a macro level, they provide little insight, for example, into how economically advantaged children actually acquire the competencies that are inequitably distributed. Many key approaches to social reproduction, such as those of Bourdieu and of Bowles and Gintis, are concerned with the ways schooling legitimises the cultural capital of the privileged, not how they acquire that capital. While the socioeconomic figures listed above may indicate something of the material resources and qualifications Reay includes in her breakdown of educational capital, they tell us less about



how these relate to educational orientations per se. A focus on practices and values can provide a more nuanced analysis yielding interesting insights about differential achievement rates. For this reason survey respondents were also asked to provide information about various activities within the home that could impact on their child's educational performance. As mentioned, the nature of the educational capital of parents and children will be developed in Chapters 3-5, but it is important here to report some general trends that set the context for these more detailed findings arising from the interviews and observations.

## 2.3 Academic engagement at home

The focus of this part of the survey was on trying to ascertain the ways habits and attitudes of students and parents outside the classroom impact on students' academic performance, and so address issues to do with aspirations, knowledge and orientations to learning established through home practices. As we have earlier indicated, existing research has suggested that achievement motivation, parental help, diligence, independent study and extended application (Da-Cheng et al., 2006; McInerney et al., 1998) are conducive to better educational outcomes. Such attributes and practices are crucial to the knowledges and skills that constitute educational capital through the fostering of a positive 'academic home climate' (Campbell & Verna, 2007). Survey responses reveal differences in the way target group students and parents foster educational capital in the home, around attitudes and practices of academic engagement which instil the valorisation of academic pursuits, addressed in the areas of homework practices, extracurricular tasks and reading.

### 2.3.1 Amount of homework

Debates about the usefulness of homework have been around for a long time. This section is not concerned with this, often narrowly framed debate, but with the practices and values adopted by parents of particular groups of students and the ways, as we will develop later in this report, they may relate to the formation of the scholarly habitus. As Xu and Corno (2003) note, the value of homework practices, and especially the role of parental assistance, may be less in terms of immediate educational outcomes than in the development of forms of self-regulation and in the creation of an environment conducive to study.

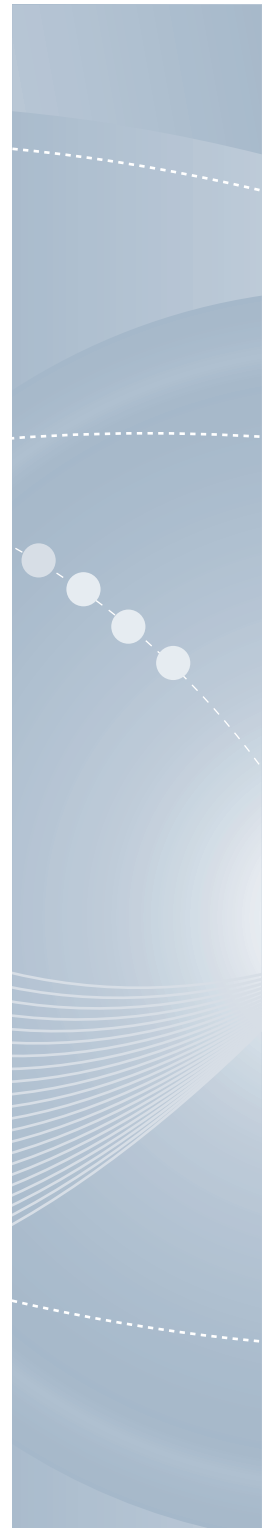
Of the Chinese respondents, 56% stated that their children spent more than one hour on homework each night, compared to 24% of Anglo respondents and 35% for Pasifika parents. The majority of Anglo and Pasifika respondents stated that their child spent 30 minutes on homework per night. The interviews showed that many Chinese students were also doing homework from coaching colleges which could contribute to the extra time spent on homework by this group. The point here is not simply that more homework produces better educational outcomes in and of itself, but that this extra homework demonstrates an extended application to study and the formation of a disciplined approach to academic engagement. In one significant discriminator, 57% of Chinese parents said their child enjoys homework, while only 26% of Anglo parents said they did.

The figure for the Pasifika parents – of 87% – wasn't reflected in the interviews, and suggests an example of a tendency amongst some Pasifika parents to say what they think the interviewers wished to hear. This links to Nash's point (2000, p.76) that there is a clear gap between the unrealistic aspirations of Pasifika parents and their child's scholastic achievement.

In relation to the supervision of their children's homework, 79% of Anglo, 66% of Chinese and 83% of Pasifika respondents claimed they "mostly" or "always" supervise their children's homework. These results tend to suggest an idealised representation of parental help which, again, isn't really borne out by the interview data, particularly in relation to the Pasifika parents. But it is important to record here that this is what the parents have *claimed*. Certainly research has suggested that effective parental help in homework is linked to educational attainment and orientation to schooling (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; 2005).

### 2.3.2 Homework location

Xu and Corno (1998) point to the importance of the creation of an appropriate environment for completing homework, and the role of parents in shaping this and helping their children manage it. The location of the space given over to homework is important because it indicates in the first instance the material resources given over to this activity and the kind of environment in which the children are expected to undertake this work. Of the Chinese respondents, 40% stated that their children do their homework either in their bedroom or in a study, compared to just 13% of Anglo and 25% of Pasifika respondents. Anglo students tended to favour the kitchen or dining room with 69% completing their homework in this area of the home. A similar result of 64% was recorded for Pasifika students. These figures might also suggest something of the different academic focus in the homes of respondents, in particular how Chinese students tend to complete their homework in a space where they may be more inclined to work quietly and independently, removed from areas within the home of greater noise and activity such as kitchens and dining rooms. These choices will be partly shaped by the family's socioeconomic status, of course, but they are not simply reducible to this. Interestingly, Pasifika children were far more likely to do their homework in front of the television, according to their parents (66%), compared to Chinese (42%) and Anglo (31%) students.



**Table 3 – Percentage of each target group completing homework in front of TV**

	Chinese	Pasifika	Anglo	Total
<b>always</b>	0.6%	7.9%	1.7%	1.9%
<b>mostly</b>	1.9%	5.3%	1.7%	2.3%
<b>sometimes</b>	39.6%	52.6%	27.7%	36.7%
<b>never</b>	57.8%	34.2%	68.9%	59.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

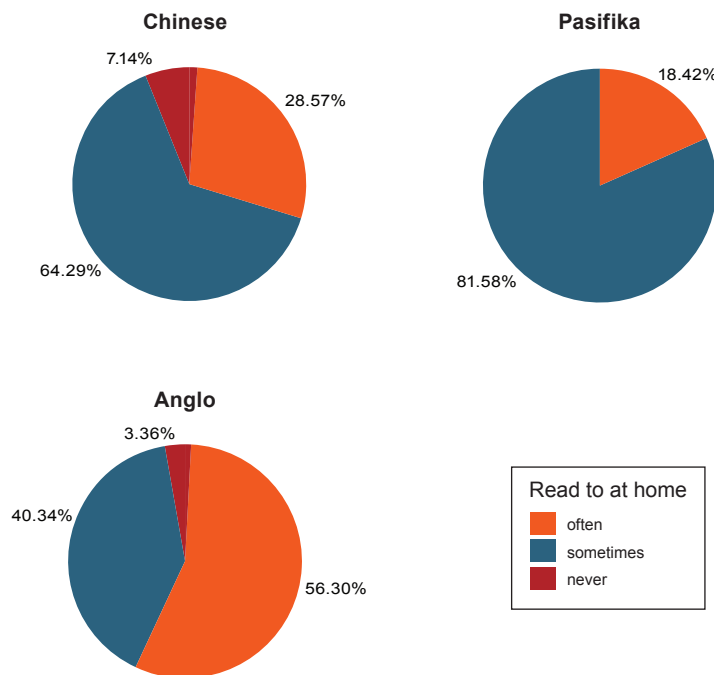
### 2.3.3 Extra homework tasks

Of the Chinese respondents, 95% stated that they give their children extra academic tasks above their normal homework, compared with 57% of Anglo parents. About 92% of Pasifika parents also said they set extra tasks, but this wasn't confirmed in the interview data. Perhaps even more telling was the figure of 21% of Chinese parents who always set extra tasks, compared to 13% for Pasifika parents and 7% of Anglos. Extra academic tasks in this case could be work set by coaching colleges or study guide books purchased from book stores as well as tasks devised by the parents themselves. The importance of this extra work lies not necessarily in its immediate educational benefit, but the extent to which this greater amount supplied by the Chinese parents indicates once again a greater focus on academic engagement within the home. Yet it also has implications for school-based homework, the amounts given and perceived appropriateness.

### 2.3.4 Reading

Of the Anglo respondents, 56% stated that they “often” read to their children at home, compared to just 18% of Pasifika and 29% of Chinese. These results could be due to both language and time constraints, as well as parental and students' own preferences for independent reading. Either way, much educational research demonstrates the importance of parent reading in children's early mastery of reading (Bus et al., 1995). As Lareau (1989) argues, many (especially middle-class) parents invest time and effort in trying to ensure their children gain an ‘advantage’ through fostering reading competence, and this is crucial to the reproduction of their cultural capital.

**Figure 3 – Target students read to at home**



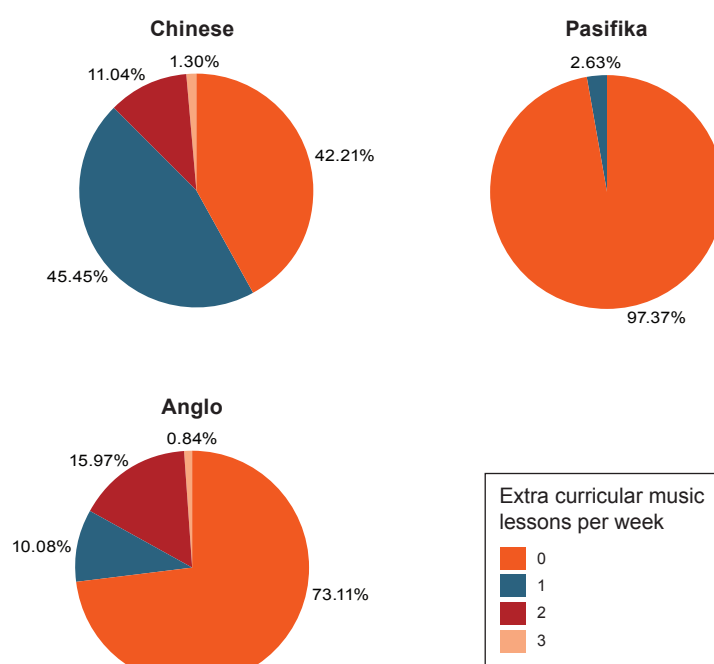
## 2.4 Extracurricular activity

The relationship between extracurricular activity and educational attainment is complex and largely under-researched. Some evidence exists which suggests that certain forms of participation in such activity may correlate with higher academic performance and aspirations (Holland & Andre, 1987). Questions regarding extracurricular activities were also included in the survey to establish the way time outside of school was spent and whether trends related to particular activities could be identified. The main activities which respondents nominated as the extracurricular pursuits of their children were music, sport and extra tuition, especially through coaching colleges.

### 2.4.1 Music

The results for extracurricular music were quite dramatic, with 58% of Chinese respondents stating that their child attended music lessons one or more days per week. This compared with 27% of Anglo respondents' children and just 3% of Pasifika respondents. Interview data revealed that many Pasifika children did attend music activities at settings such as church but these were not considered to be formal 'music lessons' by their parents responding to the survey. Of the Chinese respondents, 33% stated that their children practice more than 3 days a week. This reveals a significant level of applied discipline and concentration outside the classroom and on a regular basis. This investment of time and money may also be seen to reflect the importance that many Chinese respondents place on this particular activity, either in its own right or as an educationally useful activity. This is of particular interest given that the SES of Chinese respondents varied greatly, but the uptake of extracurricular music seemed to be relatively consistent across SES. The Chinese communities seemed to put a strong emphasis on the development of musicianship and its perceived link to academic ability and discipline.

**Figure 4 – Extracurricular music lessons per week**

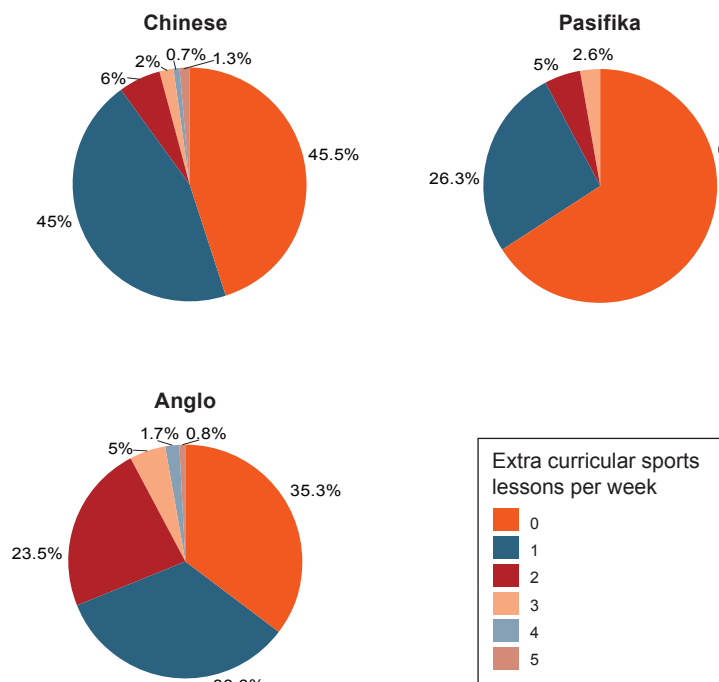




## 2.4.2 Sport

As with extracurricular activities generally, the relation between participation in sport and academic success is still ambiguous, although Fejgin (1994) claims a clear and positive correlation for some groups. Of the Anglo respondents, 65% stated that their child was involved in an extracurricular sporting activity one or more days a week, with 31% of these attending such activities more than twice a week. In comparison to this, 45% of Chinese children attended sport once a week and 7% more than twice per week. Only 34% of Pasifika students were involved in extracurricular sport: they may have been the most actively involved in sporting activities in the playground and at home, but this didn't seem to translate into involvement in organised sport.

**Figure 5 – Extracurricular sport lessons per week**

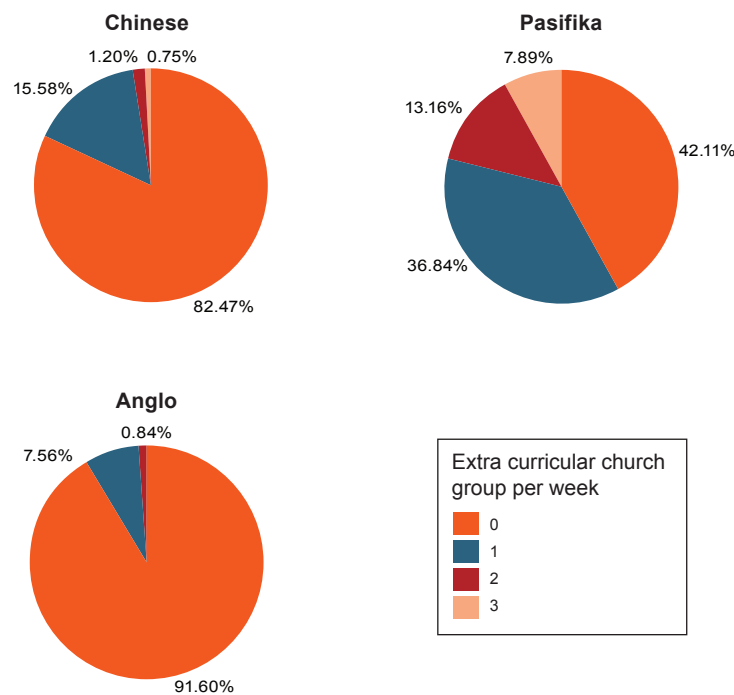


## 2.4.3 Church

Although Pasifika respondents were not as involved in other areas of extracurricular activities, a significant 48% attended church one or more days a week. This is compared to just 8% of Anglo respondents and 18% of Chinese. This shows that for Pasifika respondents, church and church-related activities occupied a significant proportion of available free time on weekends and during the week. While this attendance may be an important social activity, as well as a religious one, there did not appear to be a transference of skills learned from

church-based activities to the educational domain of school and so it didn't accrue the kinds of educational spin-offs that we might associate with other forms of extracurricular activity.

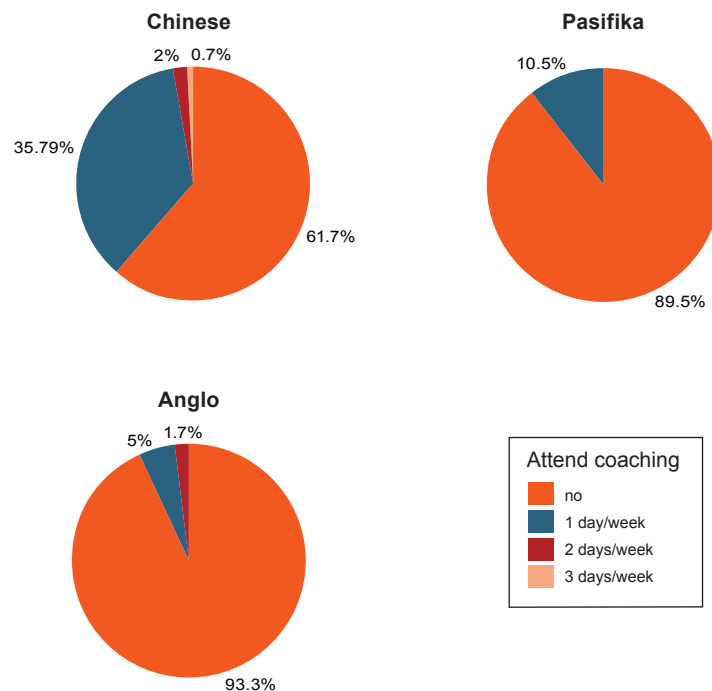
**Figure 6 – Extracurricular church-based activities**



#### 2.4.4 Extra tuition or coaching in Maths and English

Of the Chinese respondents, 39% said that their children attended extracurricular academic coaching one or more days a week, compared to just 7% of Anglo parents and 11% of Pasifika (although this latter figure might include attendance at school homework centres). As will be discussed later in Chapters 3 and 4, principals and teachers (particularly those from Group 1 schools), believed the number of Chinese students attending coaching to be significantly higher, but there were some issues around disclosure with some parents and children feeling uncomfortable acknowledging attendance given that there was criticism of such activities within schools. Such tuition might include attendance at a formal institution such as a coaching college, or it may be one-on-one help from someone at home.

**Figure 7 – Target students attending coaching classes**



## 2.5 Parental engagement with school

One issue that emerges in the literature on the reproduction of educational capital is the confidence with which parents approach and deal with the school (Reay, 1998) which is an especially significant issue for some groups of a language background other than English (Kalantzis et al., 1990, p.51). The survey investigated a series of questions related to parental involvement with the school. This was undertaken to establish the level of engagement and participation occurring between the school and the parents and to ascertain the degree of accessibility and lines of communication which existed.

One crucial point needs to be made here about length of residence in Australia for those of migrant backgrounds. Arriving from another country with a different language, a different educational system and different cultural values around education would significantly shape parents' engagement with school, especially if residence in Australia was relatively brief. We don't want to discount these factors, but it is important to point that, while a small number of parents of Chinese and Pasifika background had arrived within the previous three years, most had been here for some time. The average length of time in Australia for Chinese parents was 13.6 years, while for Pasifika parents it was 11 years, suggesting that most had been in the country long enough to become acquainted with the new system.

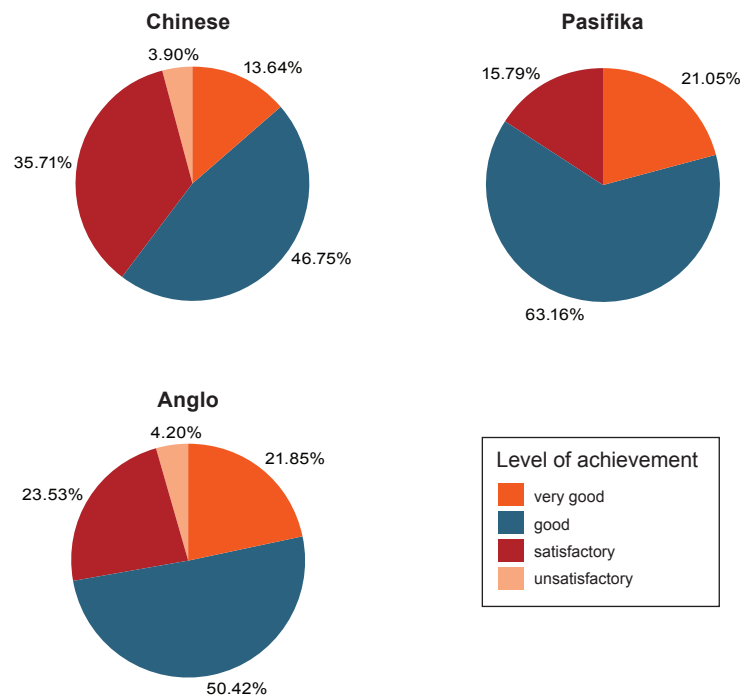


Of the Anglo respondents, 95% indicated they attended parent/teacher interviews at their child's school compared to 84% of Chinese and 79% of Pasifika. The numbers of parents attending parents and citizens meetings at the school were quite similar, with 20% of Anglo, 17% of Chinese and 21% of Pasifika parents indicating they attend such meetings. Of the Anglo parents, 71% attended information sessions at the school compared to 44% of Chinese, although evidence from the interviews later suggested that Chinese parents were more likely to attend school information sessions which were related to academic opportunities such as Opportunity Class testing and selective high schools.

## 2.6 Parents' views of child's academic achievement

Parents were also asked questions related to their child's level of achievement and their aspirations for their child, because the investments parents have in education will be reflected in different expectations. Most parents across the three groups were happy with the level of their child's academic achievement, but this varied slightly: 60% of Chinese respondents said that their child's achievement was good or very good, compared to 72% of Anglo parents, and 85% of Pasifika parents. This means that there was a significant tendency for Chinese parents to be less enthusiastic about their children's achievements: 36% were more likely to state that the level of achievement was only satisfactory compared to 24% of Anglo and 16% of Pasifika parents. This may suggest a higher level of expectation amongst Chinese parents for their children, or even a stronger perception that the school isn't quite doing enough to teach their children. This level of expectation emerges in other ways. Significantly, of those parents who responded that they would like their child to be tested for a local Opportunity Class (OC), 56% of Chinese respondents stated that they expected their children to be successful in the test, compared to just 22% of Anglo respondents. Interestingly, none of the Pasifika parents expected their children to be "unsuccessful" in the OC test, but most were either unsure or did not expect their child to be tested in the first place, which seemed to corroborate findings from the interviews.

**Figure 8 – Level of academic achievement**



## Conclusion

The survey is a fairly blunt instrument for interrogating complex social phenomena: it provides broad brushstrokes of educational experiences and processes. The findings of this survey do reveal some patterns linking ethnicity with home and school experiences; patterns which will help us make sense of later findings. Some of the data received, however, is limited because it tells us more about the parents' ideals rather than their practices, such as the amount of time spent on homework. Having made these qualifications, the survey results show broad tendencies which help to set the picture for comprehending the complex relations between home and school, ethnicity and education. These patterns go some way to differentiating the three target groups: tendencies which need to be addressed by examining the detailed interview and observational data. As Bourdieu (1996) argues, it is not enough to 'have' educational capital derived from one's social class; it is about strategic 'investments' which allow families to realise social 'profits' through that capital. But the kinds of educational capital we have begun to outline here are a far cry from the forms of cultural distinction (through training in drama, music and art, for example) that Bourdieu's model prioritises (Reay, 1998, p.51). These are forms of activity which enable educational attainment through the production of embodied capacities and dispositions to learning. The interview and observational data will help to draw out evidence of these different dispositions and lead to a better understanding of the relationship between home and school practices and differential achievement rates.



## Chapter 3 – Disposed to learning

Chapter 2 drew on the survey data to show that there were broad links between ethnicity and patterns of home and school practices which have some bearing on students' educational achievement. The aim of this chapter is to take this argument a step further by drawing on the interview and observational data to consider if students display different dispositions towards learning in the development of the scholarly habitus, a crucial claim if we are to comprehend the relationship between cultural background and educational performance. As we saw in the introduction, research is increasingly examining the ways in which educational achievement can be attributed to far more than cognitive ability; that it involves a range of other factors that produce certain capacities in students that predispose them to learning. Much of this research, however, tends to rely on viewing the attributes of successful learners in psychological terms. Rather than locate these dispositions in the innate qualities of the learner or their cultural background, we want to see them as specific *capacities* and forms of *educational capital* that emerge from specific practices. To do this we need to draw upon different types of research methodology and data, to think about bodies in specific classrooms.

This chapter, therefore, begins by considering vignettes from the classes we have observed during the research that exemplify different dispositions to learning in particular students. It doesn't attempt to explain these dispositions in terms of ethnicity, class, effective teaching or family socialisation; rather, it tries to develop an empirical and conceptual understanding of these attributes – and specifically forms of self-discipline – as embodied capacities that enable the formation of this habitus, prior to a more detailed examination of the home and school practices in Chapters 4 and 5. This chapter also addresses the educational capital of the students and their parents, before making concrete links between educational outcomes, cultural backgrounds and students' dispositions. It draws on different data from the research, including the student, parent and teacher interviews, to elaborate and explore these issues. Finally, the chapter turns to the ways teachers in particular understand the nature of these capacities, especially in regard to stereotypes of the abilities and behaviours of particular ethnic groups, and how these frame their understandings of teaching.

### 3.1 Differently capacitated bodies

A large body of academic research and government statistics demonstrate the significant variations in educational outcomes for students from different ethnic backgrounds (Partington & McCudden, 1992; Khoo & Birrell, 2002; Jones, 2005). As revealing as this literature is, it doesn't tell us much about the experience of students working in classrooms and how this relates to educational performance. We want to illustrate the forms of embodied capacities that underlay dispositions to learning by considering several students in our sample who exemplify the range of different dispositions we observed. We do this not because we start with a philosophy that 'all students are individuals' – indeed, our point is that these capacities are profoundly *social* phenomena – but because these capacities are lodged in individual bodies doing specific tasks, they are therefore best understood by examining particular students in particular situations. This







will help us understand how these capacities, dispositions and habitus are also distributed unevenly in terms of patterns of practices that mediate class and cultural background.

We can demonstrate these bodily capacities by contrasting students in different classrooms and schools. We will begin by considering Sonia and Sonny, students in different classes at Broughton Heights PS, which is a Group 3 school with significant representations of all three target groups and demonstrates well the variation within a school population as well as across these groups. One class is an enrichment class with many high achieving students; the other has many of the least able students<sup>3</sup>. Sonia is in the enrichment class, which is comprised mostly of students of Chinese background, with a smaller number from Vietnamese and Indian origin, and a few of Anglo background. There is one Arabic speaking student but significantly no Pasifika students. Sonny's class is more diverse, and has many Pasifika students, with small numbers of Chinese, Arabic speaking and Anglo students.

### 3.1.1 Sonia

Sonia is a girl of Chinese background, and her approach to work is typical of the enrichment class as a whole. On one day of observation, she and her class shuffled into their classroom and sat down at their desks with minimum fuss. Many of them, like Sonia, pulled out books and read them while waiting for the teacher to enter; if they talked, it was quietly. Whether they were seated on the floor or at their desks, they sat still: Sonia's posture, like that of most of the students, was upright, even when they were working. During the observation, Sonia was almost always work-focused, or always ready to move into work; she sat still and quietly, and got on with her work; even in moments of unstructured discussion she remained task-orientated. She seemed to have a substantial investment in her work and its conduct. Sonia, like most of the students in her class, had mastered the arts of stillness, self-control and quiet. As her teacher Heather said, she was 'very motivated', 'she is very quietly driven'.

This was seen in the way Sonia and the rest of her class undertook the Year group's maths assessment task on fractions. While other classes treated it as an everyday class lesson, in Sonia's class it was completed in test conditions. Although many might see this as an 'inauthentic' task, Sonia and her classmates responded enthusiastically. After the teacher explained the task and the 'test' conditions, she primed them by initiating a lively discussion of fractions; but when directed, Sonia and her classmates moved easily into 'test' mode. There was little movement or talk, unless it was a question of clarification to the teacher. Most finished and moved onto their maths workbooks. There was a lively discussion afterwards as the class went through the answers and the

<sup>3</sup> The enrichment class is a selective class run in Years 3-6 at the school. The students are selected both on the basis of academic achievement and on the basis of a writing task where they indicate why they would like to be part of the class. Membership of the class is reconsidered each year.

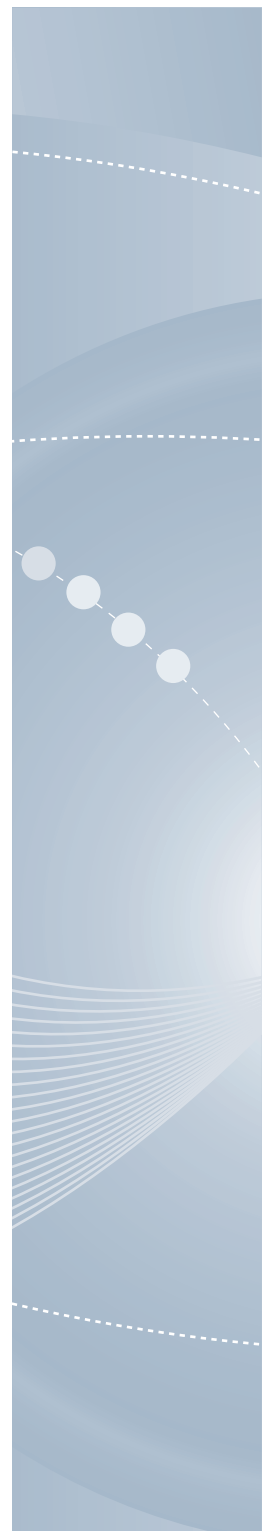
procedures for working out the answers. There was a clear sense of a strong investment in the process and the product: many showed annoyance when they got things wrong, and deep pleasure when they were right.

Sonia, like many in her classroom, demonstrated capacities for sustained attention, self-direction and a form of bodily control or self-discipline which underlies the other capacities. We would call this a state of composure, a readiness for work. The teacher didn't have to check inappropriate noise or movement often – the students had internalised these behaviours as capacities that directed their work. They even policed each other. There was occasional talk, but it was rarely loud. When required, this class was capable of sustained attention, concentration and application. This was *not*, however, a class where passivity was the rule – their stillness and quiet was appropriate for specific tasks. If the activity required it, they were more than capable of lively discussion; and some of the students didn't hesitate in challenging the teacher. Their capacity for prolonged attention and application helped produce their capacity for sustained discussion.

### 3.1.2 Sonny

Sonny's class, on the other hand, bustled in, taking a while to settle. Sonny, a Tongan boy, and many other students stood around chatting, playing, shoving each other until the teacher came in and ordered them to sit and be quiet. The noise from the students never abated, even as the teacher was giving instructions, and it frequently reached high levels. Sonny typified the constant movement in the room – he, like several students, frequently visited each other; one even rolled around on the floor. Sonny struggled to stay on-task for more than a couple of minutes and had little investment in his work. He generally didn't seem to care where he was at with the activity, and waited for the teacher to push him. Sonny was a large child – the teacher commented that his physical presence in the class was a constant problem and he often unintentionally bowled other students over. The teacher struggled to manage Sonny's body – he talked frequently and loudly, he constantly leant back on his chair despite being placed in a way that pinned him against a cupboard, and at a table with Chinese students who generally followed tasks, separated from the three or four unruly students.

This constant movement used up a lot of class time and signified a high degree of off-task activity. His teacher Betty said, although she thinks he 'has a lot of potential', 'he tends to get off-task really quickly. He is very easily distracted.' When Sonny's classmates were directed to sit at the front, several crouched, some sat away from the area, several stood. When they were at their desks, many slouched forward or leant back; many rocked back and forth. The frequent directions of the teacher to put 'feet on floor' and 'hands on heads', to call for quiet and attention had little effect, resulting in her constantly raising her voice, but to no effect. As a result, there was unproductive movement and noise, they were rarely still, posture was poor, and many students spent large amounts of the time not attending to work or the teacher. They were rarely ready for work





when the teacher called them to it; they saw a change in activity as a chance for distraction, movement, chatter. Despite all the talk in this classroom, these students, and especially Sonny, were less capable of engaging in sustained classroom discussion and, despite the greater emphasis on group organisation, they were less capable of working collectively.

The point of this comparison is not to make a simple contrast between one ethnic stereotype and another but to begin to think of attributes as embodied capacities which differentially dispose students to learning. The comparison of these students, and their classes, shows a very uneven distribution of particular capacities. Composure, or the readiness to work, is fostered by the capacities for stillness, quiet and self-restraint which also underlay the ability to give sustained attention to classroom events and to concentrate on tasks. Such capacities are always situated (Shilling, 2004), however, and we should be careful not to make a simple assumption that stillness, quiet and obedience are good, and their opposites bad. Apart from the fact that the enrichment class showed itself capable of noisy behaviour (as when they were completing a craft activity), the point is really about the appropriateness and productivity of these embodied competencies for particular tasks, and the ability to move between these capacities when necessary.

### 3.1.3 Eric

There is another kind of stillness that we found in a class in another school we observed. Eric attended Chestervale PS, which was favoured by parents of Chinese background. This class was by no means as unruly as Sonny's – classroom behaviour was generally well managed by the teacher and the students were fairly adept at following tasks. Eric, of Anglo background, seemed at first glance to be a well-behaved student who did his work. Watching him for several hours, however, it became obvious that for large chunks of the classroom time he did little, but was not recognised as such. He was often distracted, but not noisily, and he didn't disrupt other students. His distractions amounted to little more than staring at the contents of the shelf next to him and fidgeting. At one point Eric spent 45 minutes adding only marginally to his writing task – a comprehension task. This was also run in near-test-like conditions of quiet concentration, and, apart from the minor distractions, he seemed to be following the task. But close observation indicated that he completed only one or two questions in three quarters of an hour. The teacher strolled around checking students' work and giving advice or praise as needed – she managed the class quite well – but seemed not to notice when she checked Eric's work that he hadn't written much. Eric, who did have a history of occasional disruptive behaviour, was acquiring a different set of capacities – skills in getting out of work that are educationally unproductive. This is not what we have described as a state of composure. Eric's strategies mean he was able to 'float' through the class, but his failure to develop productive capacities was demonstrated in his poor reading and writing levels.

We return to this classroom in Chapter 5 focusing on other students, but this example highlights two important points for us. First, stillness and quiet in themselves aren't signs of educational 'productivity' – such capacities always have to be seen in context, related to specific tasks and aims. Second, we should be wary of looking to ethnicity as an explanation of the uneven distribution of capacities: Eric, as an Anglo student, isn't subject to the kind of cultural pathologies usually reserved for students of particular ethnic backgrounds.

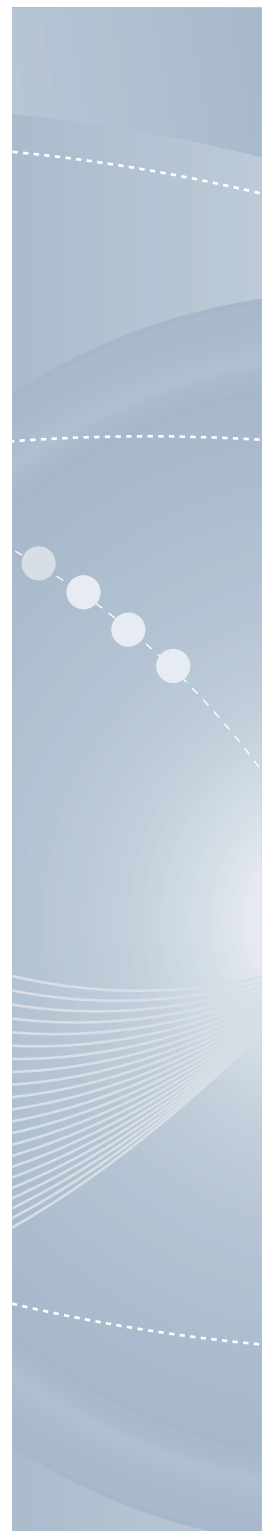
### 3.1.4 Kenny

The grounding of dispositions in bodily capacities can be illustrated by considering a student in a boys-only class at Aston PS, a composite 3/4 class with a large proportion of Pasifika (mostly Samoan) students. While Kenny, of Anglo background, was not one of our target students, he is mentioned here given the insights his example provides of a differently capacitated body. In a session on handwriting and creative writing, it was clear that Kenny had no idea about correct grip. He simply held his pencil with a clenched fist as if he had no familiarity with writing at all. He anguished over each letter and not surprisingly was the last to finish the work on the board. Though difficult, inefficient and uncomfortable, it was the style he had habituated and it seemed without active intervention there was little prospect of him changing. Like other boys in this classroom, his writing demonstrated poor letter formation and uneven directionality, and very limited (and incomplete) content. The writing that Kenny produced indicated that he had not achieved the transparency of writing technology because he had not acquired writing as an effective bodily capacity. Moreover, while Kenny was not a particularly unruly student, he exhibited little enthusiasm for work – it was more a series of mechanical tasks that he was required to do, under the gaze of the teacher. He complied, but he was not evidently self-motivated in his learning; his manner did not evince a disposition to learn.

## 3.2 Capacities, dispositions, action and habitus

The point of these vignettes is not to simply demonstrate different abilities, but to underline several claims. First we want to stress that what we see here are *embodied* capacities, not simply personality traits or psychological attributes deriving from a cultural pathology. Second, we want to stress the productivity of certain embodied competencies for particular tasks. Third, we want to suggest that these capacities produce a broader orientation to schoolwork that we are framing as a disposition to learn. Fourth, this disposition to learn and its attendant capacities constitute the scholarly habitus.

Teachers, we found, readily drew on a range of psychologically-derived categories to explain the differences in performance – they talked of 'drive' and a 'will to learn', for example – often linked to ethnic background. Yet they also often emphasised how these attributes are realised in particular, embodied characteristics – concentration and attention, distraction, fiddling, noise, etc





– which were shaped by practices both at home and school. We will return to this at the end of the chapter, but the point here is that in their discourse they recognised the need to move beyond psychological attributes to physical capacities and socio-cultural practices.

The significance of a shift away from psychological or cognitive attributes of learners towards embodied capacities demonstrated in practices is also an important methodological shift: away from quantitative (attitude surveys and questionnaires) to qualitative research methods (interview and observation). As we saw in Chapter 2, surveys and questionnaires can produce useful information about broad patterns, but the kinds of capacities we are talking about here are observable, not measurable. Unlike educational psychology, we don't propose to list a specific number of discrete items which can be quantified. Rather, we wish to explore analytically the nature of these capacities and their role in dispositions to learning. When we look at the attributes foregrounded in educational psychology – intrinsic motivation, self-determination, self-regulation, concentration, and so on – they only make sense when we recognise them as particular practices. Bourdieu's 'practice-based' theory is again helpful because it shifts the focus away from such abstracted attributes to embodied humans in specific settings. Because Bourdieu did not elaborate his insights into educational dispositions, it is important to locate them in relation to task-related bodily competencies.

First, writing, listening and talking in class are all forms of labour that require bodily control as well as forms of knowledge. Sonia, for example, evinced capacities of stillness, quiet, attention, self-direction and self-discipline which disposed her to *engaged* learning. As mentioned, we would call this a state of *composure*, a readiness for activity. When required, she was capable of sustained attention and application. This is not to be mistaken for docility – her stillness and quiet were productive for sustained academic engagement. In contrast, Sonny and many in his class were far from being composed; they did not have sustained capacities of stillness and quiet or, more fundamentally, the capacity for self-control in an educational environment. Sonny and many in his classroom manifested different types of bodily capacities which incline many of them, like Sonny, towards *disengagement*. Eric, as a different case yet again, displayed a degree of quiet and stillness that was unproductive, that didn't ready him for engaged activity.

“when your writing  
doesn't come easy it is  
going to take longer”

Second, this sense of bodily control also operates at basic levels of mastery as well as readiness for intellectual activity. Indeed, such low order capacities are necessary stepping stones for higher order ones. It is very difficult to develop literacy, for example, without also mastering the physical skills of writing. Such skills require a bodily stillness and a certain posture for perfecting the technical aspects of letter and word formation. Such mastery is needed for the use of the technology of writing to become 'transparent': that is, the student stops thinking about forming the letter

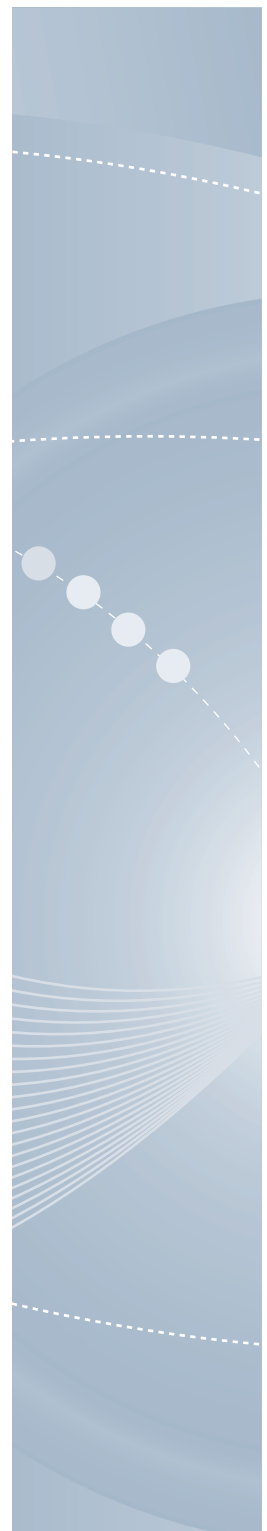
or word with the pen, and starts concentrating on the content of what they are writing. The physical nature of the labour of writing stops being a conscious task and becomes a largely unconscious capacity, which then lends itself to the development of capacities in composition, contemplation, analysis and abstraction. Neither Eric nor Kenny had developed that kind of mastery – of the pen or of their own bodies. Eric had ‘immature fine motor skills’, which affected his writing, according to his teacher, Deirdre. She pointed out that ‘when your writing doesn’t come easy it is going to take longer’, which means he ‘rarely completes things’.

These ‘technical’ dimensions often have consequences for student motivation. At the same school, Tenille described Ian – another Anglo boy with writing and behavioural issues, as

*‘distracted very, very easily: he just doesn’t have the will to really learn something new ... his attention span is so limited’.*

The technical problems of grip and posture mean that some students not only don’t master writing as a developed skill, but it also impacts on their acquisition of knowledge and cognitive skills because they never acquire a sense of efficacy, control over task and sense of belonging at school – many of the features identified as central to developing a disposition towards learning. The achievement of these capacities means not only that students internalise forms of action that allow educational work to proceed, but that they also find in it and its outcomes a certain kind of pleasure which forms the basis of their disposition towards this work. The pleasure Sonia and her classmates voice is not shared by Sonny or Kenny. In fact, one of Kenny’s classmates, Braydon, found the postural demands of sustained academic work a source of displeasure: he didn’t like school because ‘you have to sit up straight ... hurts my back’. The struggle that some students have in completing tasks demonstrates little joy in schoolwork. The composure we describe above captures the kind of readiness that links specific capacities with a disposition to learning, an ability to move into task-relevant activity quickly and which answers the requirement of sustained attention and concentration.

The third point that follows from this is that bodily capacities are thus a form of ‘physical capital’ specific to ‘situated action’; that is, they relate to a particular task and context where they have value and efficacy (Shilling, 2004). The competencies we’ve mentioned above need close, observational analysis because they are productive for larger educational skills: as we’ve seen in thinking about the writing skills of Kenny and Eric. Just as the sportsperson needs to pay attention to and work upon their technique by breaking it down into constituent components before reassembling it into fluid movement (Noble & Watkins, 2003), so too we need to break down educational ‘action’ into its







specific components, work upon them, before bringing them into a larger whole<sup>4</sup>. This also means, that educational practitioners need to consider the ‘technical’ dimension of capacities as well as their ‘social’ dimensions (the ways they reproduce social relations of power); the linking of basic literacy, bodily control and higher cognitive tasks that Sonia has mastered, and the others have not.

“**This self-discipline is not one ‘attribute’ among several, it is the condition of possibility for all academic practice.**”

The fourth point is to emphasise the forms of self-control that enable concerted action. Stillness and quiet exemplify a certain type of restraint in which physical and mental energy are focused upon a specific task, where control of motor functions is such that

fluid movement is possible, disruptions are backgrounded and elemental actions are automatised. This self-discipline is not one ‘attribute’ among several, it is the condition of possibility for all academic practice, similar to the qualities of restraint and industry Rosenthal and Feldman (1991) showed were associated with positive educational outcomes. Sonia and her classmates exhibit this control, allowing them to work independently and with self-direction. Sonny, Eric and Kenny, in different ways, needed an enormous amount of teacher intervention just to stay on-task.

The fifth point is that this approach allows us to shift away from seeing the habitus (and forms of capital) as a mere instrument of social reproduction, based on a principle of repetition and containment, to recognising it as a dynamic and generative system of dispositions which give us agency because they provide resources for engagement in our social worlds (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005). Stillness, quiet, self-control, sustained attention and concentration, and control of writing technology, all represent capacities which produce efficacy in relation to specific tasks in the classroom environment. The kinds of engagement Sonia’s class exhibited in their wide-ranging discussions reflect an intellectual agency that will prepare them for educational success.

### 3.3 Aspirations and educational capital

If these embodied capacities represent forms of ‘physical capital’ that enable, or disable, educational participation, particularly in relation to understanding ethnicity, they have to be placed alongside other forms of educational capital. As we’ve pointed out, Bourdieu uses his analysis of forms of capital to explore the reproduction of inequality in education as a process of legitimising the powerful, rather than the production of bodies with capacities. Several decades of educational research has, however, used Bourdieu to develop a more nuanced approach to understanding the relationships between family

<sup>4</sup> There are, of course, a range of capacities that are productive in other actions. The physicality demonstrated by Sonny, for example, might be useful on a football field, where stillness and quiet are less valuable. But our point here is that educational achievement fundamentally requires the dispositions of the scholarly habitus.



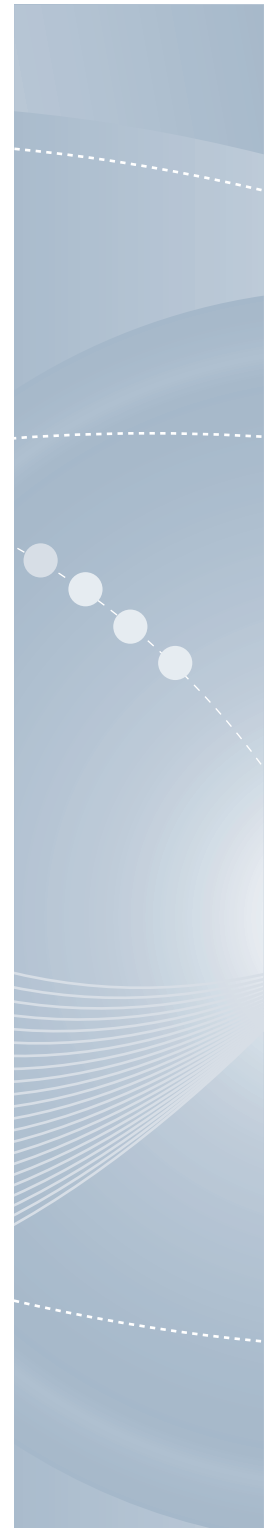
environments and children's school-related outcomes. Marjoribanks (2005), for example, develops a model that involves a more complex conceptualisation of 'family background' and the associations between various forms of cultural, social and economic capital, parents' aspirations, and cultural contexts, and specific aspects of family settings. Modood (2004) makes a similar argument in analysing the success of some students from ethnic minorities. He shows that class doesn't adequately explain the phenomenon, and speculates that we need to look at the link between parents' cultural and social capitals, aspirations and the processes whereby they pass these on to their children, a point returned to in the conclusion. Dandy and Nettelbeck (2002) have made the point in a comparison of Chinese, Vietnamese and Anglo students that the educational outcomes of Asian students can't be explained by group factors per se, but require consideration of the links between the extra time and effort spent studying by these students, parents' expectations and support, and how these relate to student motivations and aspirations: the whole 'socio-cultural package'. Aspirations are, of course, complex ensembles of hopes which can be related to education, occupation, values, etc. For those of migrant background, these aspirations are also tied up with the 'migration narrative' (Coates, 2006). Educational achievement and social mobility have been suggested to be key aspirations and strong motivators for first and second generation immigrants, yet have been relatively under-researched in Australia (McInerney et al., 1998; Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002). The point for this section is not so wide-ranging, but simply to sketch some aspects of 'educational capital' that correlate with the embodied capacities of individual students and their cultural backgrounds.

To make this link, we asked the students a range of questions designed to elicit a sense of their aspirations and expectations and to capture aspects of their educational capital in formation. We asked them about future occupations, knowledge of schooling, high schools, testing, and so on. In the first instance this involved asking them about what jobs they would like to have when they grew up.

**Table 4 – Future occupations**

	Professional	Manual/Service	Nothing
Chinese	9	0	2
Pasifika	2	6	3
Anglo	6	7	0

Chinese students overwhelmingly nominated occupations with tertiary qualifications, such as doctor, lawyer, teacher or vet. None identified a manual or service job. The Pasifika students, on the other hand, were much more likely to nominate manual or service occupations, including building, cleaning, sport or working in fast food outlets. Three of these students said they hadn't given it any thought at all, which in itself is an indicator of aspiration. The Anglo students were roughly divided between professional and manual/service jobs. Unsurprisingly, their choice corresponded strongly with whether they lived in a high or low SES area, while for the Chinese there was no such pattern,





much as Modood (2004) found. The occupational 'horizons' articulated here have significant consequences for educational aspirations in the form of future training. While some of the students who nominated professional occupations and had a sense of the higher education they would need to achieve it, one Anglo girl from a low SES background said she wanted to work in McDonald's simply because she liked the food.

While these trends tell us something about the broad orientations across ethnicity and socioeconomic variation, they only give us general insights into the nature of the dispositions towards learning, so it is useful to return to the students we have already discussed, as well as referring to some of the other students, Sonny wanted to play football, while Sonia aimed to be a teacher. Eric said he'd like to be a chef or a doctor, because they were 'fun', and had thought of a third one but couldn't remember it. Eric is interesting, then, in so far as there is something of a mismatch between his choice of doctor and his academic ability, as far as we can tell from Year 3 results. His rationale, and his vagueness about his preferences, might also indicate something about the educational capital he is forming. It is one thing to have 'aspirations', it is another to have the capacity to envision them realistically and to actualise them. As Lareau (1989) has argued, possession of cultural capital has to exist alongside the ability to activate and invest one's cultural resources, and to attain a 'social profit' from that investment.

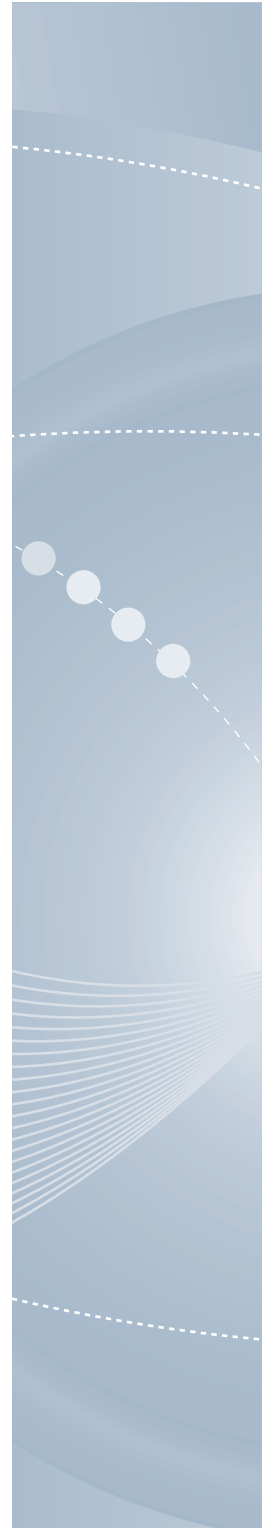
Such 'investments' entail questions of desire and pleasure in education. Eric said school was just 'okay' – the best part was sport. Braydon, from Aston PS, didn't like school – he found it 'boring'. The best part, he said, was that 'you can eat and have a rest'. Sonny liked school, but because 'I get to meet new friends'. Sonia also liked school primarily because she 'had friends to play with', but this belied her stronger educational orientation: she later talked about how English was her favourite subject and how much she liked reading. Her father Sam also mentioned the social side, but added that it was also because 'she performs well in the school'.

Choice of future high school also indicated something of their aspirations and knowledge of their options. Sonia unhesitatingly nominated one of the most successful selective schools in the state. She also indicated that she looked forward to going to university. In contrast, Braydon nominated the local high school, 'because all of my friends are going there', while Sonny talked instead of returning to Tonga to work. As he admitted, 'I don't know much high schools'. Eric could name two of the three local high schools, the nearest being the local government school, the other a prestigious private school, but he didn't mention the nearby, very successful, selective high school; yet he'd only thought about them in so far as they would entail walking home on his own. Only four students indicated a preference for attending a selective school – and all were Chinese. Two of these indicated it was because that's where the 'smart' or 'clever' kids go. Two Anglo students at Chestervale PS said they wouldn't go to the local selective school. Ian explained that: 'my mum and dad don't want me to go [there] because they don't do any sport, they only learn'. Wallace said he wouldn't go there either because 'they have too many Chinese people'.

These aspirations, of course, tell us a lot about the educational capital of these students' families. Most parents didn't wish to appear as though they are pushing their child, so often said they just wanted their child to be happy. Preferred options, however, emerged through discussion, and these tended to mirror the choices of the children. Flynn's mother, from an inner city high SES area, didn't 'really care what he does', but 'would like him to go to university because I would really like him to have that experience'; she thought he was 'capable' of it, but worried 'whether he will have the motivation to, in academic terms'. As well as wanting him to be happy, she wanted him to be successful, to have enough money and have meaningful relationships. The way she framed this, however, indicated certain types of values and knowledge which underlay a particular cultural capital. Joan's mother, also an Anglo but from a low SES area, similarly framed her response in terms of the child being happy, but added, 'she can be packing shelves in Woolworth's if she is happy ... life's too short to spend years being a doctor if that's not what you want to do'. This indicated a different horizon of possibilities and options. Joan's own preference was to work with children, but in daycare rather than a childcare organisation, and wasn't aware of the extra study needed to become a childcare worker. The Pasifika mother of Darren had as her priority that he get 'a good job', not 'a dirty job', like a factory worker'. Another Pasifika parent hoped that her daughter would get a job at Centrelink because she could use a computer.

Sonia's father Sam, a computing professional, is by no means an example of the 'force-feeding' philosophy seen to be typical of the Chinese education system (Ong, 2006) – he sent Sonia to coaching college but wasn't happy and refrained from directing her to high status occupations: 'I don't have any, you know, sort of targets for her. I always let her chose what she wants'. Yet he had high expectations. He said, 'I expect a bit more from school', if only in terms of the time spent working: 'kids could learn a bit more if they can stay in school for longer'. He thought the school was 'a bit weak' in maths, but said he wasn't focused on grades: 'achievement is good but ... you need to teach them how to understand'. Despite his English being somewhat stilted, Sam's vocabulary gave some indication of his own educational capital. He talked about issues around Sonia's 'pronunciation', the mixture of cultures being 'a reality' in his area, the 'social system', his 'investment' in her learning the piano, and how music helps 'brain activity' by practising the 'right brain'. Further, he felt that he could do as good a job as a coaching college.

In contrast, Braydon's father Dan displayed different levels of educational capital. Dan, who worked as a TAFE teacher, hoped that his son became 'something to do with electrical' or a computer technician. He'd like him to go to University but didn't think it was likely. His main goal was that 'the kids do better than what I did'. Dan seemed more concerned with issues of his son's wellbeing than pedagogical matters: how the staff dealt with Braydon's diabetes and experiences of bullying rather than educational outcomes. He thought 'stability' was the main role of a primary school, and he didn't believe in homework; indeed, he was happier for him to 'watch wrestling on Foxtel' or kick a football around. Braydon 'sometimes read', but his choices were Dr Seuss





or Rugby League Week. Dan's reflections on his own teaching also indicate his educational capital: he was more into 'practical' aspects of his trade than 'book work'.

It's difficult to say much about Sonny's family and their educational capital, apart from what Sonny himself said. An interview was scheduled with his father on three occasions, but each time he didn't appear and no reason was given nor the school contacted. This in itself may say something about the family's lack of connection to the educational system, corroborating the general picture we get from Sonny, especially with his comment that his parents hadn't talked about high school with him, preferring him to go to Tonga to work.

The educational capital of the family emerges in other ways, such as in knowledge of the schooling system, testing, and so on. Knowledge of various tests wasn't a big discriminator amongst the children in terms of ethnicity, but there were a few students who had a substantial understanding of them. Flynn, an Anglo student from Colinvale, said he liked doing tests because, 'I am very interested to find out the results if I got it all right'. His knowledge of the BST, the University of NSW tests and the Opportunity Class tests reflects an awareness of options fundamental to educational capital. There was a stronger pattern amongst the parents: Chinese and high SES Anglo parents were more likely to have knowledge about these issues than Pasifika and low SES Anglo parents. One of the Chinese parents at the high SES school spoke at length about the UNSW tests, the BST and the selection test for Opportunity Classes<sup>5</sup>. In contrast, the mother of Eric, the Anglo boy who seemed to be able to avoid doing much work in class, only seemed to know of such things because of what the school told her: 'I got a letter, otherwise I wouldn't have known about it.' She thought that while it would be interesting to see how he fared in the BST, and assumed he would do poorly in terms of the school's results, she didn't think they needed to have testing at primary school level. Another Chinese parent at Chestervale PS was also critical of the tests, but only because she felt they should have more but smaller tests. She saw this as a strong reason for sending her child to a coaching college. Similarly, while the Anglo mother of Tilly from Allerton PS didn't want her child to do the 'competitive' UNSW tests, she was happy with more testing along the lines of the BST: 'it is needed because that's where they find out if the children are learning'.

As with testing, the Chinese and high SES Anglo parents seemed to have knowledge of and interest in looking into the diversity of local high schools, selective high schools, specialist schools, and so on. Yet many parents had quite clear opinions about local schools and their reputations, even if they were resigned to having little choice about where they sent their child. Eric's mother, in contrast to her limited knowledge of testing, spoke with some deliberation

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<sup>5</sup> The UNSW tests are run by a testing centre at the University of NSW, and schools can choose to opt into these tests, for a fee. Opportunity Classes are specialist Years 5/6 classes that are located in specific schools and aim at catering for gifted and talented children, assessed by an optional exam in Year 4.

about where she would send him, and listed six different schools in the area. Significantly, several of the Pasifika parents at Allerton PS indicated they'd prefer not to send their child to the local high school because 'there are too many Islander boys there, big boys'.

But having knowledge about aspects of schooling wasn't enough. The familiarity with the institutions and cultures of schooling some parents exhibited was more likely to be translated into a greater preparedness to engage with the school. While almost all the parents we interviewed said they were comfortable approaching the school about matters that concerned them, there was a sense that Anglo parents from high SES backgrounds were most at ease, while some Chinese and Pasifika parents felt less confident about dealing with their school. The Chinese mother of Robbie explained that she didn't feel comfortable approaching the school, because 'I just don't want to complain against the teacher; the teacher will teach whatever he or she thinks is appropriate'. Lottie's Pasifika mother was disappointed to find out that her daughter's school didn't subscribe to the UNSW tests, but felt she couldn't approach the principal to lobby for their introduction. These incidents suggest that there is more likely to be a mismatch between parents' cultural capital and the school, based partly on knowledge of the schooling system, but also based on an ease in dealing with bureaucratic organisations employing professionals. They had, as Blackledge (2001) puts it, 'the wrong sort of capital': not just having poor language resources, but not knowing how to access the information they needed, not knowing how to communicate with teachers and not having the confidence to represent their child's needs or the ability to support their children's learning.

### 3.4 Educational outcomes

The dispositions towards learning in evidence here are often reflected in the educational outcomes of students. We drew on the BST results in these schools not as an absolute guide to students' abilities, but as an indicator of how, at this stage, orientations to education translate into very specific outcomes, especially in testing of literacy and numeracy. Of the students we interviewed, and for whom we have BST results, the results fairly clearly show better performance amongst Chinese background students, especially if we draw a line between the lower Bands 1-3 and Bands 4-5 (the highest):

**Table 5 – Target students' BST results by group**

	Literacy B1-3	Literacy B4-5	Numeracy B1-3	Numeracy B4-5
Chinese	1	5	1	5
Pasifika	9	1	9	1
Anglo	10	0	8	2

More broadly speaking, across the six schools we focused on, there were some obvious patterns in terms of educational outcomes. Of the Group 1 schools of high Chinese population which also tended to be of higher SES, one had





BST averages in Band 4 (literacy) and Band 5 (numeracy), while the other was similarly high. In these schools, students of a language background other than English (LBOTE) did slightly or significantly better than English speaking background (ESB) students. Of the Group 2 schools of high Pasifika population and generally lower SES, one averaged Band 2 (literacy) and Band 1 (numeracy) while the other averaged Band 2 in both literacy and numeracy. Of the Group 3 schools with a reasonable representation of Chinese and Pasifika groups, both averaged Band 3 in both literacy and numeracy. In one school, the LBOTE students achieved slightly better results than ESB students.

Again we can draw on specific students to illustrate these connections. In line with Sonia's stronger investment in education and the kinds of capacities she demonstrates in the classroom, she is not surprisingly a high achiever. In the BST for literacy, she was in Band 5 (the top band, representing the top 14% of students), well above her school's average in Band 3 (representing the middle 31%). She was also in Band 5 for numeracy, again above her school's average in Band 3. Further to this, Sonia received a high distinction in Science and a distinction in computing, in the UNSW tests.

In contrast, Braydon and Eric (both Anglo) and Sonny (Pasifika) fared quite poorly in the BST, again reflecting the capacities shown in the classroom. Sonny, at the same school as Sonia, was in Band 2 for literacy and for numeracy (below his school's average in both areas). Braydon's results in the BST for literacy put him in Band 1 overall (the lowest band, representing the bottom 8% of students): he was in Band 1 for both language and reading, only achieving Band 2 (the next 19% of students) for writing. His school's average was consistently in Band 2. In the numeracy test, he was also in Band 1, and again below his school's average in Band 2. Eric's results were similar – he was in Band 2 for literacy (well below his school's average in Band 4), and in Band 3 for numeracy below the school average at the top of Band 5.

Focusing on a few of the students we began with – including a middle SES girl of Chinese background, one low SES boy of Pasifika background and another of Anglo background – is not designed to produce any generalisable findings about class or ethnicity, but to demonstrate the links we are making between the embodied capacities of these specific students, their dispositions towards learning, the educational capital held by their families, and their educational outcomes measured by the BST results. If we turn to the teacher and parent interviews we gain a slightly broader picture.

### 3.5 Teachers' perceptions of ethnicity and dispositions to learning

The findings so far indicate that there are patterns of behaviours and outcomes which suggest that the social perceptions of Chinese learners as educationally successful and Pasifika students as unsuccessful are well-founded. However, we want to steer clear of making universalising claims which lead to the entrenchment of 'cultural' explanations for this pattern. This is because, as we



will go on to explore, it is the practices which shape these dispositions, not the collective attribution of cultural proneness. But we also want to suggest that there is a distinction between tendencies which match cultural background, and pathological arguments that lump all members of an ethnic group together. Cultural stereotypes in terms of education have a basis in truth, but they are nevertheless myths. Well-intentioned attempts to be culturally sensitive – to value cultural differences and to teach appropriately in regard to them – can end up reproducing reductive cultural stereotypes. This seeming paradox emerges in interviews, especially in teachers' comments. In this section we want to document four things: teachers' perceptions of the patterned cultural differences in dispositions, the qualifications they make about this, the contradictory nature of some of the common beliefs about cultural background, and the ways these perceptions tip over into problematic stereotypes which shape teaching practices.

Generally, many teachers had a sense that there were differences in the abilities and demeanour of students from different backgrounds, and differences in the attitudes to education amongst their parents. Carly, from Broughton Heights PS, saw quite stark differences in relation to attitudes to education: 'I don't think Islanders value education as much ... I don't think Anglos do either and I think Chinese over-emphasise it'. Of particular significance for her was the fact that 'I don't think the Islanders understand the importance parents have in the attitudes in their children's schooling ... they just send the child to school and it will be fine'. The Pasifika students fall behind because of 'a complete lack of self-discipline'. Chinese students 'have more of a sense of discipline within themselves, the parents have more control over them ... a lot more control than Anglo parents'. In contrast, Pasifika kids lack 'boundaries'. She recognised this as a 'raw generalisation' but put it down to the fact that Pasifika parents 'have had no experience of schooling'. This pattern of comparisons was common across schools, as was the tendency to see each group in particular ways. It's important to recognise that ethnic categories were necessarily structured via relations of contrast. Betty also commented on the differences in capacities for self-organisation between Pasifika and Chinese students: in relation to one Pasifika boy, who 'just likes to be watching what everybody else is doing ... he needs to go and get a pencil and then he will set down and go "I need a ruler", you know. Whereas the Asian kids get in and they are very organised, they know where things are'.

The Chinese students were most frequently perceived in terms of simple cultural frameworks. Gavin, the principal at Colinvile PS, also talked about the Chinese students' ability to focus when they came into a classroom, and 'change their expectations upon themselves'. He also talked of their 'control over themselves'. He put their academic success down to 'expectations at home'. For Heather, the teacher of Sonia's enrichment class, Asian students generally tended to be more 'on-task, most of the time'. She recoiled from simple generalisations, but stated quite baldly that 'on the whole, the majority of Asian children are more amenable to discipline and direction'. She saw it as resulting from 'their home background and their culture ... very regimented and you have to do well at school'. They







could be like 'stunned mullets: it is very disturbing to begin with'. They eventually 'engage much more', 'more willing' to point out their mistakes. The link between classroom behaviours and broader cultural traits is often made. Jack, the principal at Heather's school, believed that,

*'the Chinese community are very successful in terms of their work ethic, in terms of providing opportunities for their children to immerse themselves in anything that is academic. However, I think the sad part about the Chinese community is that they have a programmed life without giving the children the opportunity of growing up as rational, happy, contributing human beings.'*

In contrast to most other teachers' comments, Cordelia talked about the *arrogance* of young Chinese boys and their lack of respect for women, and linked it to their lack of social experience because they are so work focused. Tom at the same school concurred to some degree, when he suggested that they aren't as disciplined as the girls, but believed that generally Asian students are more focused and show teachers 'more respect'. But the Chinese – both students and parents – were also seen by Catriona, at another school, to be very competitive.

In contrast, Pasifika students were seen to have 'a more laidback attitude to life', but this ill equips them for schooling. As Kate pointed out regarding the Pasifika students, 'things like homework, reading at home, parents' involvement in education, even the kinds of ambitions of the students to succeed academically' are just not 'as strong': 'that is just not really a priority for them'. As Heather claimed, Pasifika students 'are not interested at all, just can't be bothered'.

Larissa also saw the Samoan children as 'very placid and passive ... very easy to get back into line'. These are different types of behaviour – the 'passivity' of the Pasifikas, Carly admitted, arises from 'focusing on other things': the student she was discussing just 'doesn't want to get on with it'. This student seemed incapable of getting on with his work under his own steam: 'I literally have to sit next to him and then he will still focus on his rubber'. He was typical of a kind of student who, even with one-on-one support, 'they are not interested, they are simply not there'. Roze also saw the Samoans as exhibiting a 'kind of passivity that is like, "I am not really interested in anything"'. Yet Mireille talked about the 'stereotypical notion of the Pacific community being sort of more aggressive', a stereotype which is borne out 'to a degree'. Scott saw a distinction *within* the Samoan group, which is largely gendered: there are those who 'will be quiet, do their work ... whereas mainly the boys ... are just loud ... and they will do it in their own time'.

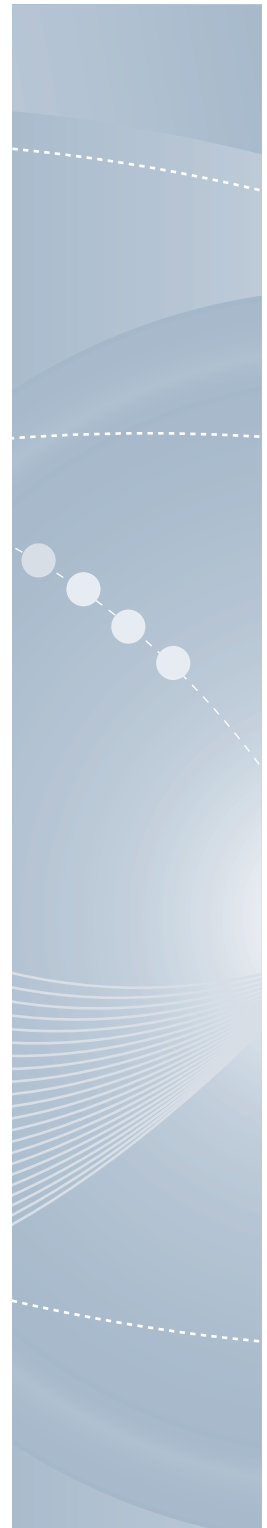
While the Anglo students were much less likely to be ethnically marked as a category, there were some cultural explanations still operating. The Anglo kids, Kate argued, 'are happy to just kind of enjoy whatever there is ... they are just ... coasting along, they are not really that concerned about the academics of life'. Tom pointed out that it was the Anglos who filled up the time-out room.

While some of these comments can be quite bald, the teachers often qualified their statements, recognising that the reality was more complicated. As Betty said, there are 'exceptions to every rule'. Nevertheless, these broad claims about ethnicity were maintained. Kate, for example, said she was hesitant to make any bald claims – 'I wouldn't say there is any significant cultural difference' – but proceeded to outline broad differences in the ways these groups dealt with problems: Pasifika kids 'don't know what to do', Chinese kids will sort it out 'as a big group' and 'the Caucasians will just cry'. It's not necessarily that these claims are invalid – indeed, they capture something of the uneven distribution of dispositions and the consequences for educational outcomes. One problem with such perceptions is firstly that they universalise, as we can infer from the caveats. Such qualification implies that the teachers often acknowledge that ethnically-based generalisations are problematic. Generalisations and averages always conceal the degree of variation in outcomes and abilities. As Anita commented, 'a few of the Islander boys are doing a lot better than the ones that don't have other backgrounds'. Sela claimed that, 'there is a problem generally, lumping Pacific kids together ... there are high achievers and there are low achievers, and there is in between'. A second problem is that these claims are also contradictory and mixed up. Carly talked about how some Asian students tend to be 'passive learners, they are not going to contribute'. Yet she bemoaned the fact that one of her Pasifika students 'tends to sit and want to do nothing'.

There is an interesting paradox in these teachers' comments: they see a patterning of behaviours which relates to ethnicity and disadvantage, but they are aware that it is not consistent, or involves a range of cultural processes not reducible to simple generalisations about cultural background, even though they use them. What comes through, however, is an acknowledgment of the links between embodied capacities, dispositions to learn and educational capital. Deirdre cited the example of one student with a Chinese father and an 'Aussie' mother whose problems were not explained by ethnicity but by specific home practices: 'we are talking about nearly the end of Year 3 and he still can't sit in a seat and his writing is all over the page'. She listed several problems, like poor diet, but concluded that the main issue was that 'there is no structure in his life. There is no routine, he goes to bed late, he is tired, never made to read'. Laura, from the same school, commented on their capacities as they develop at school – she had a keen eye for the bodily changes of learnt ability. She noted that as students are

*'engaged they are a lot stiller ... you can see when they've been told that they are good at something their posture changes ... standing up straight.'*

Jack had a more elaborated understanding of the embodied dimensions required for schooling, particularly for students from 'disadvantaged groups' but without being based on assumptions about cultural heritage: 'I put having a full belly when you come to school and feeling good about yourself as being prerequisites for learning'. They can't be 'focussed on the lesson, if they are focussed on ... some domestic things ... they are just not prepared for the day'. It was these kinds of experiences which lay the foundation for the behaviour problems,





especially aggression, amongst Pasifika and Anglo youth in his area. Like Betty, Jack identified particular kinds of social skills as central to making the successful 'transition' to school life – 'the skills to get along' or being 'persistent', which helps them become 'resilient': 'Those sorts of skills ... normally it starts at home, or it starts in the community'. For Jack, the issue was as much gender as culture and social disadvantage: '99.9% of the kids that come in because they've got a problem are boys. 99.9% are either Anglos, low socioeconomic, Arabic youth, or Islander students'. But, he added, 'Never see any Chinese'. Some of the difficult students are those that have particular experiences, such as being in a refugee camp 'where everything has to be fought for'.

These insights about the practices which produce these capacities are also seen in analysing the negative behaviours of students: Catriona complained that Lua, a Pasifika student from Briar Plains PS,

*'tends to sit and want to do nothing. He just spends all his time focusing on other things. Doesn't want to get on with it, and I think it is just a learned behaviour. He has been doing it for such a long time it is difficult for him to say, "oh, I think I should get on with my work". I don't know why or how it has developed and where exactly, but he seems to be the only one ... who after being explained something, I need to literally sit next to him and then he will still focus on his rubber, his pencil ... it is bizarre.'*

Despite the fact that she doesn't know where it comes from, her account suggests it is as much to do with learned behaviours at school as with home-based ones. Scott complains that the Pasifika kids, 'just don't have any persistence': 'it is a practised quality, you can't just say here is a lesson on persistence ... it is something that ... has to be practised and practised and practised'.

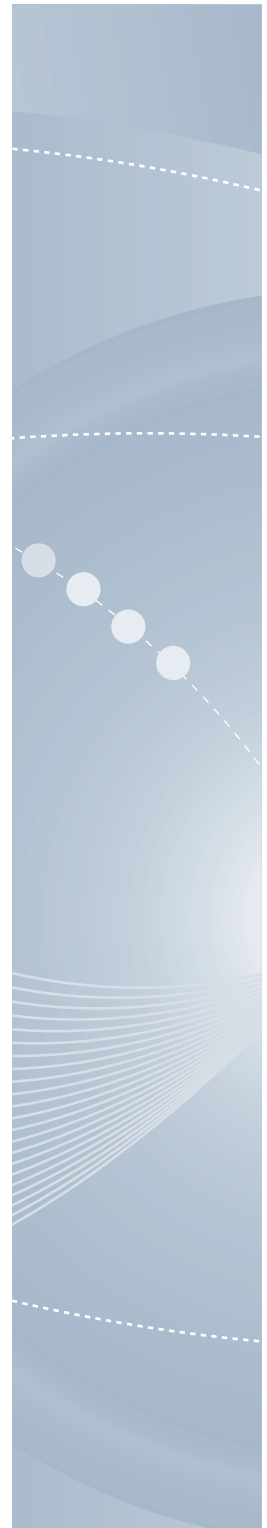
On the whole, most teachers talked about the various capacities they identified as primarily coming from the home, but often saw this in relation to a particular ethnic community. Most teachers argued, for example, that Asian parents are much more likely to have higher expectations for the children. Carly said that even if Chinese parents don't speak English, 'they expect their children to be proficient in it and excel in it, because ... if they do really well academically then they will have a better chance to get better jobs'. Islanders 'don't anticipate their kids to be lawyers and doctors. They are quite happy to be ... blue collar workers'. Some teachers talked of the problems of having to address sometimes unrealistic expectations of the Chinese parents. Marsha said that Chinese parents can be very ambitious' and 'very pushy': 'they want them to all grow up and be doctors and dentists ... that's their whole idea of getting them coached and into selective schools'. The Chinese students were often criticised as being over 'tutored' and to therefore lack understanding: Laura claimed that the Chinese students would get the answer right, but weren't interested in 'the process of getting there'. Pasifika parents, on the other hand, don't 'strive for excellence' but are 'happy' with their lot.

The issue here is not simply that these perceptions are problematic, but that they have implications for teaching practices and school organisation. Some teachers, for example, voiced assumptions about attributes they saw as culturally 'natural'. Sela commented in relation to Pasifika students: 'their strength that they bring with them to the classroom is *naturally* they can sing and dance'. Betty was of the view that with Pasifika students:

*'if you leave them to their own devices they will be off because they are not, by nature, they are not students. Some people are students and some people are not, and Islander kids tend not to be students. They are very relaxed in terms of things like their homework and their attitude towards school.'*

Across the interviews, many teachers made comments about the Chinese students being successful, but passive, that they learnt by rote and weren't taught to think, were too teacher-directed, and not communicative, were pushed, competitive, had poor social skills: 'a programmed life' that prevented them from being, 'happy, contributing human beings'. Penny, of Chinese background herself, said that the emphasis on education goes 'deep down to the root, to the Chinese culture ... right from 2000BC ... deep down from Confucius upward'. From here, it is a short step to forms of essentialising cultural pathology which effectively obscure our understandings of teaching and learning practices, not aid them. As Grimshaw (2007, p.308) has suggested, the construct of 'the Chinese learner' is shaped more by our cultural preconceptions than by what students 'actually do and say'; a construct which can only be challenged successfully by ethnographic observation. These myths are powerful, however, and shape our social perceptions of others.

Such essentialising, together with romantic assumptions about ideal learners, also has real consequences for teachers' practices, as we explore in more detail in Chapter 5. But it is useful to show how this illustrates some of the assumptions and consequences of cultural stereotypes in relation to students' dispositions. Tom, a teacher from Colville PS, recounts a story about the Chinese student Yupeng, who solved a Mensa problem given to him by a teacher in three and a half minutes, compared to the best girl in another class who took over an hour. Yupeng was also able to explain to Tom how he did it, in contrast to the lack of understanding of process Laura claimed. Tom then recounted a lesson where he got the students to work out a number pattern, which the class did quickly. He said that there was another way to work it out, but because it was lunch time they would come back to it later. Yupeng came in after lunch and he'd chosen to spend his lunch working on the problem: 'he said, "I went and sat down under a tree and looked at it and thought"'. But the punch line here is that Tom was anxious to ascertain that Yupeng had also played some handball: 'that's good, that's what I want to hear. So he didn't spend all lunch time trying to work it out'. For the teacher, the problem of Chinese overemphasis on work was at the cost of 'normal' childhood play, irrespective of the amazing feat Yupeng had accomplished, and the admirable application he'd shown in solving the problem.





### 3.6 From stereotypes to practices

We have seen in this chapter that when we look closely at specific students we can see strong links between particular embodied capacities, dispositions to learning and the family's educational capital. These capacities aren't the discrete and measurable attributes of psychological testing, but certain types of behaviours which are observable in classrooms. We have emphasised things like stillness and quiet for their importance in allowing for sustained attention and concentration, and have stressed the broader role of forms of bodily restraint, organisation and direction we call self-discipline.

Understanding these capacities is also important because it helps us unpack the cultural stereotypes around learning which frame our perceptions of particular groups. We have shown that while teachers are careful of over-generalisation, and often have clear insights into the complexities of the links between cultural background and educational experience, behaviour and performance, they still tend to perceive these links in fairly reductive ways. The teachers make broad and often contradictory generalisations on the basis of cultural pathology, but also frequently acknowledge their problematic nature. More importantly, there is also acknowledgment that, despite often resting on assumptions about the biological or cultural inevitability of these capacities, they are in fact reproduced through specific practices at home and school.

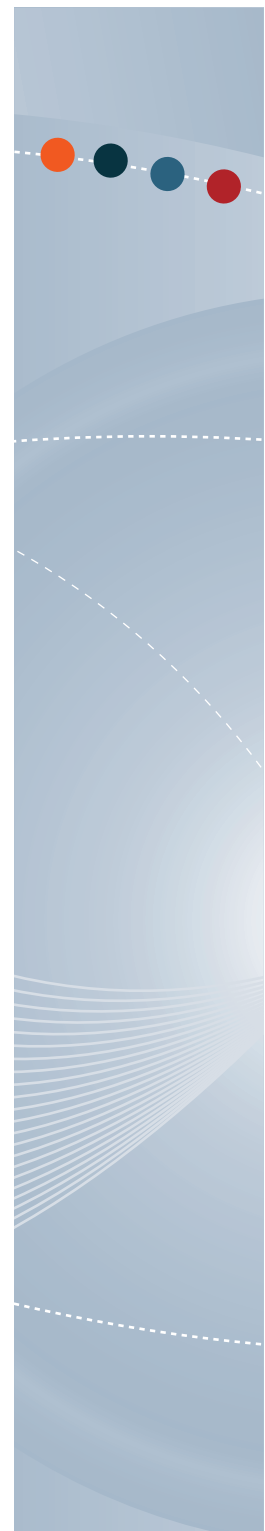
As we've suggested, even well-intentioned attempts to be culturally sensitive can end up reproducing constrictive stereotypes, and need to be problematised. There are two ways to challenge such cultural stereotypes: you can 'disprove' them by illustrating the counter example, or you can understand the grain of truth in the stereotype by understanding the ways they are produced. We need now, therefore, to turn to a consideration of the practices which produce students' capacities, both at home and school.

## Chapter 4 – The relationship between dispositions to learning and home practices

The focus in the previous chapter was on the extent to which students from the three groups targeted in the study possess different dispositions to learning. In this chapter emphasis is placed on practices within the home such as routines associated with homework, participation in extracurricular activities and parents' attitudes to their child's education as a way of examining how these dispositions may be produced. The practices that we engage in on a regular basis from our earliest years are formative in the development of dispositions or 'ways of being' which guide our everyday life. As indicated, the term *habitus* is used in this study to denote these dispositions, and *scholarly habitus*, those that are specifically related to engagement in academic endeavour. The aim of examining these practices is to identify any patterns that could shed light on the development, or not, of a scholarly habitus which is crucial to successful participation in schooling. Certain trends have already emerged from the survey data discussed in Chapter 2. Here, the comments of students, parents, teachers and community representatives are drawn upon to provide a more comprehensive account of academic engagement in the home and other *ways of being* within the domestic sphere that influence the performance at school of the students targeted in this study.

### 4.1 The importance of homework

Considerable emphasis was given to discussion of homework during Phase 2 of the project, focusing on participants' attitudes, when, where and how homework was completed and action taken by parents when it wasn't. There has been much public debate about homework in recent times regarding its usefulness, the amounts given and the degree to which it may restrict children's free time and unstructured play (ACSSO, 2007; Ferrari, 2007) especially in relation to the primary years. There seems some agreement, though by no means consensus, that it performs an important role in high school when students need to demonstrate independent learning skills (Cooper, 1989; North & Pillay, 2002). Little thought and attention, however, is given to the ways in which these skills are acquired. The discipline to learn and work independently on a task with little or no supervision is an ability acquired over time (Noble & Watkins, 2003). Students do not simply make a conscious decision on entering high school that they need to devote more time at home and school to academic pursuits. They need to have embodied the routines that enable them to do so, much in the same way as training for success occurs in other fields, such as music or sport ... through practice. In a sense, the primary years serve as a period of 'academic apprenticeship' not only in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy but in the often neglected bodily skills of application to work and independence in learning. Homework has an important role to play in relation to these and the differences that emerged between the Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo students in their approach to homework provide interesting insights into the differential dispositions discussed in Chapter 3.







## 4.2 Time, quantity and regularity of homework

### 4.2.1 Homework and Chinese students

Of the 35 children interviewed in the study, 11 were of Chinese background. The time these students said they devoted to homework each night ranged from 15 minutes to two hours, but further enquiry revealed much of this work was not actually school homework. Most students had homework distributed on a Monday and collected on a Friday and many generally completed their school homework the night it was given or devoted minimal time to its completion during the week, spending longer periods of time on extra work provided by their parents or the coaching colleges that many attended. Alice, for example, from Colinville PS explained that she finished her school homework in 30 minutes on Monday night and then did her 'other work' from coaching for an additional hour on Monday and throughout the remainder of the week, including Friday night and on weekends. She attended coaching college on a Saturday. Sonia, from Broughton Heights PS, spent an hour each night on homework but this was a combination of school work and work from books supplied by her parents. Sonia did not attend coaching classes. Only one of the 11 Chinese students, Norman, did not complete extra homework. Instead he spent approximately 15 minutes from Monday to Friday on homework supplied by his classroom teacher. Most of the Chinese parents felt Year 3 students should be spending at least an hour each night doing homework. Norman's mother, however, felt that less than 30 minutes was sufficient at this age.

Many of the teachers of students in the study reported it was common for parents of Chinese background to ask for extra homework for their children. As Tom, a teacher from Colinville PS, pointed out, 'If I had a dollar for every time I had an interview with a parent, a Chinese parent, that they don't seem to get enough homework, I would be able to retire now because they say it all the time'.

Similarly, Tenille from Chestervale PS explained, 'I am always getting asked from [Chinese parents]. I've had a few letters at the beginning with them asking for extra homework and I've had lots of the kids ask me'. Interestingly, many of the Chinese students interviewed felt that, not only did they not receive enough school homework but, it wasn't very difficult. Alice, for example, preferred her coaching homework 'because that's a bit harder'. Ben from Chestervale had a similar view,

*'I need to have homework that's a bit more challenging.'*

### 4.2.2 Homework and Pasifika students

The time devoted to homework by the 11 Pasifika students interviewed in the study ranged from one to 20 minutes, though many indicated they did not do homework each night. Six of these students attended homework centres one day a week at either their school or a local community centre but work there often involved extra tuition rather than completing school homework. In comparison to the Chinese students, those of Pasifika background spent far



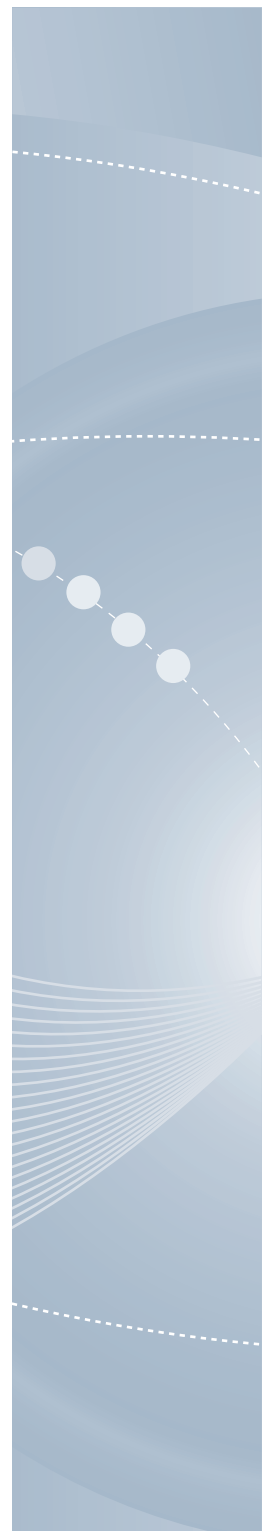
less time on homework during the week and on a less regular basis. They also tended to receive their homework on a Monday with some finishing it that night and then reading, but not much else, for the remainder of the week. Unlike the Chinese students, they did not complete coaching or parent provided work as additional homework. Many of the teachers of the Pasifika students indicated that completion of homework was a major problem. Kate from Broughton Heights simply said, 'Well, the Islander community don't do it ... school is for school and as soon as they walk out of that building, that's it'. Scott from Allerton PS commented, 'there are some here and there [who do it] but it's a bit erratic'. Despite these problems with its completion, seven of the 11 Pasifika students felt they should receive more homework, as did many of their parents, with a number commenting that they would expect their children to be doing somewhere between 30 and 60 minutes on the nights it was completed.

#### 4.2.3 Homework and Anglo students

The amount of time devoted to homework by the Anglo students ranged from ten to 30 minutes, though few students completed homework on a regular basis from Monday to Thursday. Generally it was undertaken two to three nights a week with sport or other extracurricular activities intervening. With others it was even less regular. Donna, Leanne's mother from Aston PS, pointed out, it was only 'every now and then' that her daughter did it. Most of the Anglo parents tended to think that a Year 3 child should be spending somewhere between ten and 30 minutes a night on homework, though two parents felt it wasn't necessary at this age at all. Instead they were of the view that it was something that could be left to high school.

#### 4.2.4 Summary

Clearly, there is a great difference in the amount of time each of these groups of students devoted to homework each week. Despite the variance in the SES of the Chinese students, and also their parents' form of employment and level of education, there seems to be some consistency in their approach to homework. Not only did the Chinese students spend more time completing some type of academic work at home, it was undertaken on a more regular basis than both the Pasifika and Anglo students. There seemed to be an understanding amongst many of the Chinese parents of the important role homework played, not simply in terms of reinforcing skills but in the need for practice and hence the formation of habits of learning. Mary, Vincent's mother from Broughton Heights, explained that 'if he got homework he can repeat something that they teach at school ... he will remember'. Sam, Sonia's father, had a similar view, 'First of all it gives them something to do, secondly it is not easy to remember by teaching once by the teacher, they need a bit of practice'. This focus on practice is not as evident in the comments of either the Pasifika or Anglo parents, at least not in relation to academic endeavour. The Pasifika parents, who were generally from a low socioeconomic background, seemed to see any school work as more the domain of school itself. As one of the Pasifika CLOs pointed out, '9 to 3 is the teachers. The teacher is the mother and the father, the teacher is the parent, everything





is the teacher. It's got nothing to do with parents'. Another Pasifika CLO added, '[Homework] is not a priority. It is important to do your homework but they won't follow through on it'. The Anglo parents from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds had varying views but there seemed little emphasis on the need to encourage habits of learning through a consistent approach to homework at this stage of schooling, particularly among those of low SES.

### 4.3 After school routines

#### 4.3.1 After school routines and Chinese students

On arriving home from school there did not appear to be any great distinction between the three groups of students in terms of when they settled down to work, if they did do homework. Most students had a break, which varied in length, before commencing work. A smaller number started their work immediately so they could 'get it over and done with'. Some trends in after school activity, however, were apparent. Many of the Chinese students had quite established homework routines. Debbie, whose daughter attended Colinvale PS, explained that when Alice came home from school,

*'She always takes one hour eating, relaxing and then she spend half an hour doing homework and then dinner time. After dinner she do one and a half hour reading, or the other work I give her and then she play 45 minutes piano and that's another day and then she do some reading in bed until sleep.'*

Vincent from Broughton Heights PS also had quite a structured homework and study routine which his mother, Mary, explained in some detail. He has

*'a break after school until a quarter past four, then he start his homework for one hour, sometimes 45 minutes until 5 or a quarter past and then he has a shower and dinner and then he start another time at 7.30 to 8 until he finish.'*

Of course not all of the Chinese students had such formal routines. Enid, Norman's mother from Chestervale PS, explained.

*'In these days he is getting on the routine himself because I just say you can finish to him first, then I will play ping pong or something else with you, because I just want him to get things done ... Yeah he will do it by himself.'*

Jenny, from the same school was engaged in a range of after school activities but her mother indicated that 'normally it will be after dinner that she will start her homework'. Despite this variation it was clear that all the Chinese students interviewed did have a routine: that is, a block of time was set aside for homework to be completed within the home, after school most days during the week.

### 4.3.2 After school routines and Pasifika students

Generally homework was undertaken on a more ad hoc basis by Pasifika students. As already mentioned some would complete work on a Monday but at no other time during the week. This was the case with Lottie from Allerton whose mother explained, 'Some time I ask her to leave some for another night, but when she came with the homework she did all that homework in one night'. Joe's mother remarked that homework was 'not every night, sometimes they lazy to do homework'. One of the Pasifika CLOs of Tongan background explained many parents had 'no understanding about routine and how important it is to read ... They don't set times to do their homework'. In relation to the students she visited at home she added, 'I could probably pick a handful that actually can do their homework by themselves without being prompted and they do it at a set time'. Clearly, many of the Pasifika students had a range of other tasks they had to perform at home after school. As many of their parents were shiftworkers, *housework* rather than *homework* was given priority. One of the school deputies explained,

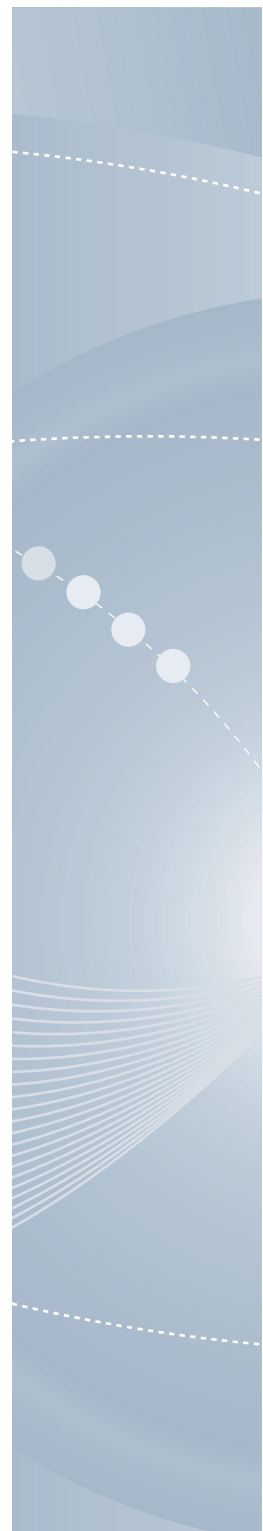
*'they are responsible for younger siblings, they are responsible for getting the vegetables and the tea done; they may be responsible for getting housework and jobs done because parents are working long hours.'*

The establishment in recent years of homework centres for Pasifika students, some of which were operating in the schools involved in this study, indicates there is already some recognition of the problems many Pasifika students face in completing homework. Some discussion of these initiatives is provided below in 4.4.4. Here the focus is simply identifying patterns of practice within the home and what this may suggest about particular dispositions towards learning.

### 4.3.3 After school routines and Anglo students

Anglo students, as a group, were different again in terms of homework routine. While, in comparison to the Pasifika students, there appeared to be far more students completing work at home, their approach to homework was less routinised than their peers of Chinese background. When Marcelle, whose daughter attended Colinville, was asked to describe Melissa's homework routine she declared, 'No, I can't because every day is different!'. Melissa completed homework Monday to Thursday but because of differing childcare arrangements it was undertaken in various locations at different times. Many of the Anglo students, particularly those of a higher SES, completed homework in after school care or other care arrangements. The establishment of a routine may also have been difficult given involvement in extracurricular activities. This was the case with Callum whose mother explained that, 'We have a busy schedule with soccer training at the moment so he tends to do a lot of his homework he will do on a Monday'.

While many of the Chinese students were also involved in other activities after school, time still seemed to be set aside for homework to be completed on a regular basis. A focus on regularity rather than simply 'getting it done' was





evident. Regularity established an overall positive attitude towards homework and seemed to assist in developing an understanding of its role in the development of self-discipline and the establishment of work habits. With other Anglo parents who tended to be of low SES, but not exclusively so, there was no real expectation that their children would complete homework each night. As Netta, whose daughter attended Allerton PS, pointed out, 'It is really hard because sometimes she gets it and doesn't let me know that she's got it, which is normal but I'll go through her bag ... and I'll say you've got homework here'. Netta tended to leave the responsibility to complete homework to her child, rather than establishing a regular time for homework to be completed.

#### 4.3.4 Summary

At one level these comments may appear as little more than random snapshots of different students' homework routines, but they can be generalised to reflect different tendencies within the three groups to the way homework is conducted and the emphasis given to academic engagement within the home. Dispositional tendencies are dependent on regularity of practice (Noble & Watkins, 2003). Some of the Chinese students appear to demonstrate a degree of self-regulation to undertake work and a commitment to independent work for sustained periods of time within the home environment. For some Chinese students there may be a perceived overemphasis on homework, particularly in the time devoted to extra work. This is an issue discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. What is of interest here is the apparent predilection for work that many of the Chinese students display which could relate to the focus given to these practices around work within the home. This is not simply a function of a particular attitude to work. For these students such a commitment to academic endeavour has become an engrained bodily practice, or what Mauss (1979) described as a 'technique of the body'; a habit of learning forged through iterative engagement in scholarly activity within the domestic sphere.

#### 4.4 Location of homework

The sites where students completed their homework were also investigated in the study. Location is significant in a number of ways. The different sites, both inside and outside the home, where this activity is undertaken suggest much about how homework is conceived and its perceived value in terms of the process of learning. In addition to this, the dynamics of place have a major impact on a child's habitus for learning; whether, for example, homework is undertaken in a solitary or communal setting, whether or not certain types of furniture are used that encourage particular postures of learning and whether or not a place evokes an ambience that is conducive to academic engagement.

##### 4.4.1 Location of homework and Chinese students

Of the 11 Chinese students, six completed their homework at a desk in their bedroom. This was not only the preferred site of their parents, most of these students liked working in their room because it was quiet. As Jenny commented,

'people won't annoy you'. Homework was considered a relatively solitary activity that required silence for concentration and application. Of the remaining five students, three completed their work in their lounge room, one at the kitchen table and another in a room that had been set up as a family study which this student shared with an older brother and his father. Interestingly, of the three students who completed their homework in the lounge room, two sat at desks which had been set up for this purpose. Both of these students were from low socioeconomic backgrounds and, while there were few items of furniture in the home; it was deemed important to complete homework at a desk and to mark out a place for study within the general living area of the home. The placement and use of a desk here is significant in that, unlike a table, which could have multiple uses, a desk generally has a specific function. It typically signifies a site of scholarly labour with work to be undertaken in an independent fashion.

#### 4.4.2 Location of homework and Pasifika students

Of the 11 Pasifika students interviewed, five also said that they completed their homework in their bedrooms. Where they differ from the Chinese students, however, is in how they used this space. Rather than sitting at a desk to

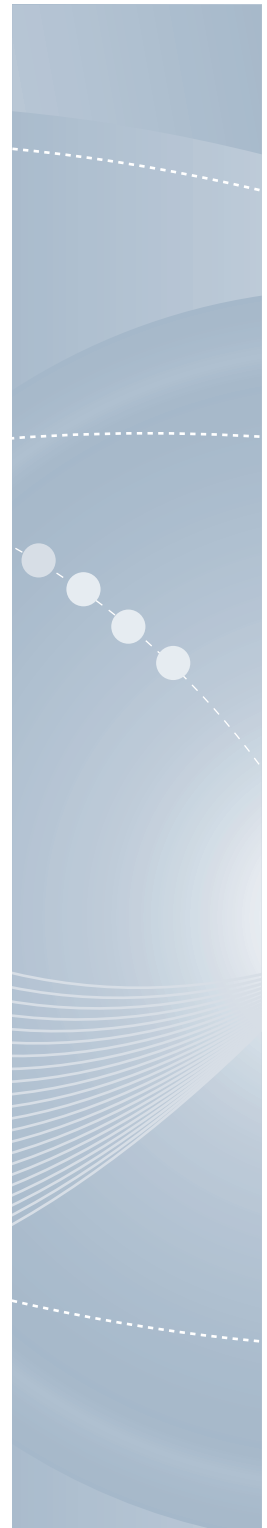
**“we acquire our habits from our habitat especially the norms and customs of our social habitat, our community.”**

— Garrison (2002, p.2)

complete their work, four of these students indicated that they sat on their beds which suggests a completely different posture and approach to work. Sitting on a bed to write is not a position that lends itself to sustained work. Either resting a book on one's lap or lying down to write is generally untenable for prolonged periods. This is not to suggest that learning does not

occur in such situations, it is more a matter of considering the contexts in which dispositions of learning are formed and congruence between the academic environments of home and school. Following the pragmatic tradition of John Dewey and William James, Garrison (2002, p.2) writes that we, 'acquire our habits from our habitat especially the norms and customs of our social habitat, our community'. There is a marked difference here between the Chinese and Pasifika students' utilisation of space. The habits each acquires from their respective social habitats are suggestive of a different scholarly habitus.

This is further evident in how the remaining Pasifika students used the space within the home to complete their homework. Of the other six students interviewed, three used the kitchen table, two worked in their lounge room and the last student wasn't really sure where he completed homework, which seems to suggest it was only ever done on an irregular basis, if at all. Five students, therefore, did use the general living area within the home for homework yet, in each case, they sat at a table with siblings and other family members. In contrast to the more solitary arrangement of the Chinese students, school work within the homes of the Pasifika students was generally a communal, indeed social, activity with older siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles and sometimes parents providing





assistance. For the Pasifika students, whose families tended to be much larger than those of the Chinese, completing homework in this way was more a matter of necessity. This contrast in the utilisation of space within the homes of these two groups of students, however, provides useful insights in terms of the formation of dispositions within the habitus.

#### 4.4.3 Homework and corporeal congruence

Individuals tend to acquire a degree of familiarity towards a space they inhabit on a regular basis. In a sense this marks the distinction between a notion of *space* and *place*. This familiarity, or what Seamon refers to as 'at homeness', is an embodied phenomenon that can be experienced in a range of settings: home, work, school and elsewhere. Individuals become comfortable within a particular milieu and the 'positive affective relationship' that develops encourages a certain naturalness about activities performed there (Seamon, 2002, p.425). Such is the case with the students described here. Many of the Chinese students seem to have acquired a naturalness about scholarly labour; sitting and working relatively independently on a task, as it is a practice performed regularly within the familiar environment of the home. In a sense, they have embodied the posture of a scholar which allows for a particular 'corporeal congruence' between home and school. The Pasifika students have experienced a very different sense of place and 'at homeness' in relation to academic endeavour which in some respects is quite dissimilar to school, particularly in the later years of primary and beyond. While in the early years of school, students tend to sit and very often work in groups, something familiar to many of the Pasifika students from their home experience, academic engagement, especially in terms of literate practice and mathematics, is essentially an individual activity and in exam situations, beginning with the external testing in Year 3, is exclusively so.

Highlighting the differences here in terms of space, place, corporeality and habitus is not about valorising a particular experience or denigrating another, it is about rethinking, or 'fleshing out' what is meant by home/school congruence and more appropriately preparing students for academic endeavour which involves much more than a cognitive and social preparedness for schooling. Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital in its application to education is generally understood as a bank of knowledge and linguistic resources that typically middle-class students possess and utilise to their advantage within the different contexts of schooling. Bourdieu (1986), however, also viewed cultural capital as an embodied phenomenon which is not simply comprised of knowledge and language, it pertains to a certain corporeality, or set of bodily skills, that is valued within a particular field. Here it is understood as a scholarly habitus or set of dispositions which is of value in terms of academic achievement.

#### 4.4.4 Homework centres for Pasifika students

While some of the Pasifika students did do school work at home, as indicated in 4.3.2, many attended homework centres at least once a week and it was only on these occasions that homework was completed. In these sites,



however, concentration was often given to extra tuition rather than work that the classroom teacher provided. In the course of the study three separate homework centres were visited, two located in project schools and the third at a high school nearby another project site that drew students from a number of local primary and secondary schools. A fourth centre that wasn't visited was located in a community centre near Allerton PS. Each of these centres operated at different times and was staffed by different personnel. Two of the centres ran for approximately two to three hours with one commencing at 6pm and the other 7pm. The third began almost immediately after school on a Wednesday for about one and a half hours with students given afternoon tea. Two were administered by Pasifika CLOs with one relying on volunteers from the Pasifika community and parents to assist students. The other was staffed by teachers and Pasifika university students who had volunteered their time. The third was staffed by volunteers from the Pasifika community and administered by the high school deputy.

These centres seemed to operate with varying degrees of success. Each was well attended although staff indicated that, while there were regulars, the attendance of many students was somewhat erratic. So too, was the way work was conducted across the centres. At the high school homework centre students sat at individual desks and quiet was insisted upon. Generally talk only occurred when the volunteer tutors were providing assistance to students. At one point during the observation session a couple of students became unruly and they were ushered into another room where talk was allowed. At the other two centres located in primary schools, students sat in groups and there was a lot of chatter. In one centre in particular where students were not completing homework but were divided into year groups for extra maths and English tuition unrelated to their class work, they seemed to lack interest in work and paid little attention. Many were swinging back and forth on chairs, talking and joking with their friends. The volunteer tutors appeared unconcerned about the students' off-task behaviour. Overall attendance at this centre seemed more like a social event with there being little opportunity for tutors to work effectively with students, encourage them to complete homework and develop appropriate study skills. While it is important for students to enjoy the experience, this social aspect of the centres was commented upon by a number of teachers and CLOs. One of the principals who was supportive of the centre operating in her school, but fully aware of its limitations, remarked,

*'some of the Pacific community kids who go to homework club never hand anything in [but] they love it, they are having a lovely time... they almost get hurt that you ask them about it. They'll say "Oh, I was there" but they don't understand that they actually have to hand something in now.'*

The point of discussing the homework centres, however, is not to offer any detailed evaluation of their effectiveness. Despite various problems associated with the skill and expertise of staff, frequency of attendance, operating times, behaviour management and overall rationale, they do perform a valuable function in that many of the younger Pasifika students require an alternative







location to home to complete homework as many of their parents work long hours and are not available to supervise on a regular basis. Yet, while this role is important, homework centres, no matter how effective, are still sites quite separate from home. Habits of independent learning which may be encouraged in the classroom and elsewhere outside the home require reinforcement within the domestic sphere from a child's earliest years to attain the level of familiarity or 'at homeness' already discussed. Homework centres need to bridge the home/school divide, and schools, and the system in general, need to devise strategies to ensure dispositions of learning are engendered within a child's home environment.

Space and time set aside for school work within the home on a regular basis is of value not simply in terms of a reinforcement of skills – some homework may not even appear to fulfil this function especially in the early years – but more so in terms of encouraging the embodiment of a discipline to learn on which academic success depends. This is especially important in the case of many Pasifika students, given there seems a clear distinction between home and school. This division was remarked upon by one of the principals in the study in relation to students from the Pacific community of greatest representation in his school, 'Don't expect [those] kids to do homework because the need is at school, you do your work at school, you don't do your work at home'.

#### 4.4.5 Location of homework and Anglo students

The Anglo students were different once again in terms of where they completed their homework. Only three of the 13 did their homework in their bedroom at a desk and two of these three indicated that at times they would also work in the kitchen or loungeroom. Another student, Melissa, had a desk in her room but she didn't use it. She generally completed her homework in a range of different childcare sites, after school care, her grandparents' house, etc and so, as her mother explained, her desk had assumed another function:

*'She has a desk in her room, but she is very untidy and messy and she plays too much, so there is never room on the desk for homework. I bought her a lovely pink IKEA desk and it is full of dolls and perfume and that sort of stuff, and jewellery, beautiful things that all look a mess.'*

If Melissa was to complete homework at home her mother added, 'it is the dining room table, or I've got like a big flat, a big low coffee table in the lounge room. Yeah and on special occasions they are allowed to watch the TV and do their homework at the same time'.

Of the other nine Anglo students, six did their homework in the kitchen, one in the lounge room and two at after school care. On the rare occasion when these last two students did complete school work at home it was at a bench in the kitchen. The majority of these students were completing their homework in the general living area of the home. Academic endeavour, therefore, was not necessarily framed as a solitary or dedicated practice. As with many of the Pasifika students, it could be argued that the habits of learning these students

were acquiring within the home were reasonably congruent with the group-based learning environments of many primary classrooms. However, as has been mentioned, as students progress through school, academic work becomes a far more individual activity. On the whole, where and how students complete homework seems to receive little attention. Yet, given the differences that emerged here, these details could prove significant in terms of their impact on a child's habitus and general preparedness for the academic rigour required in the later years of school.

## 4.5 Supervision of, and parental involvement in, homework

### 4.5.1 Supervision of homework by Chinese parents

Both students and parents were asked questions about supervision of homework. Many parents indicated that they supervised their children's homework in some way. There were differences, however, among the three sample groups. Overall, the Chinese parents seemed to take a much stronger role in supervising homework. As one teacher explained, 'They know what their child has for homework' but more than that, as has already been discussed, many provided their children with additional homework which they also marked and discussed with their child. This was the case with Sonia and her parents with her father explaining that, we do have a bit of extra homework for her 'so with this kind of homework I just mark for her or ask her to mark by herself and then we check what mistakes she makes and if she can't understand we explain to her, especially the strategies for the maths'.

Another parent who felt her son, Gary, was a bit distracted when it came to doing homework pointed out that,


*'if we sit with him it is better, if no, he do some homework and play something. The hand, one hand must do another thing, toy or something so you must sit with him because he is still young.'*

To this parent, focused attention on homework was important and so supervision was not necessarily about assisting with the work itself – in fact there were a number of parents who had difficulty understanding the homework their child was given – it was more a matter of trying to instil a particular level of concentration, or the kind of 'productive stillness' referred to in Chapter 3. Completing homework for many of the Chinese parents, and academic engagement in general, was not simply about finishing the work, it was about acquiring a particular discipline in the process of doing so; an engaged body and mind.

### 4.5.2 Supervision of homework by Pasifika parents

There appeared to be far less parental supervision of the Pasifika students' homework. To a large extent this was related to a lack of understanding by many parents of the role of homework and the need in the primary years, and earlier, to engage in academic pursuits around literacy and numeracy within the home. As one of the Pasifika CLOs of Tongan background remarked,





*'a lot of parents really don't understand because their kids need a lot of education before they start school and because they believe that they don't need to provide any of that beforehand. Yeah, they are really missing out when they come here [to school].'*

For many Pasifika parents, however, it was more a matter of finding the time. As the same CLO pointed out,

*'a lot work double shifts, so the mother will be off at work during the day, the dad's just come home at six in the morning, so he is snoozing while the kids are babysat by the TV. So there's not really any interaction, so you know, it is difficult.'*

Balancing work and home was an issue for Silei, Fred's mother from Broughton Heights PS. There were periods she explained when Fred's older sister was not home and there was no supervision at all so he simply had to do his homework on his own: 'That's the only way to do it because my husband gets home after 6pm and I leave home when Fred gets home, so I try to do a bit of school work in the morning but he is so lazy in the morning when he gets up'. Problems with working shifts were also an issue for Ellie who felt very guilty about not giving her son Lua the support he desperately needed:

*'I know I should stay here when he do his homework helping him for reading, but you know, my family, working and I came home, I am tired you know, come home and he come ... I can't do this, I can't do this and this and this, so stress everything. So, sometimes when I finish talk to him and get angry I just sit down and think, you know, I feel cry, you know, because I feel guilty for what I do to him. He need my help but I am so tired.'*

There were Pasifika parents, of course, who did check their children's homework. Serena, a community representative from Allerton PS, explained, 'that is the time for us to sit down together and you know, they can do their homework, they will ask for help, when I do reading, reading newspapers or something, I will be there with them, that is our quality time with them'.

Serena, however, seemed more the exception than the rule. By and large, there was not a strong emphasis on supervision by Pasifika parents due mainly to the reasons discussed above.

#### 4.5.3 Supervision of homework by Anglo parents

Among the Anglo parents there was quite a deal of variation when it came to supervision of homework. Generally, however, there was less supervision within low SES households. Braydon's Dad from Aston PS, for example, said that he checked his son's homework at times but generally felt there was no real need for homework especially in the primary years. Donna, whose daughter Leanne attended the same school, had little to do with her homework. As Leanne said,

'she doesn't like homework'. Donna confirmed this by saying, 'I'm sick of helping because I can't understand half the stuff that they're doing'. Byron's mother at Allerton PS also had trouble helping. She commented that,

*'it is hard to sit down one on one with the kids, you know while they are doing it, but Yeah if he is stuck and asks, he will ask me or his Dad and one of us will help him and if I can't do it and his Dad can't, we say just you see the teacher.'*

Some parents of higher SES, whose children attended after school care, also rarely supervised their child's homework as it was generally done at school. This bothered one parent, Harry, whose two children went to Chestervale PS,

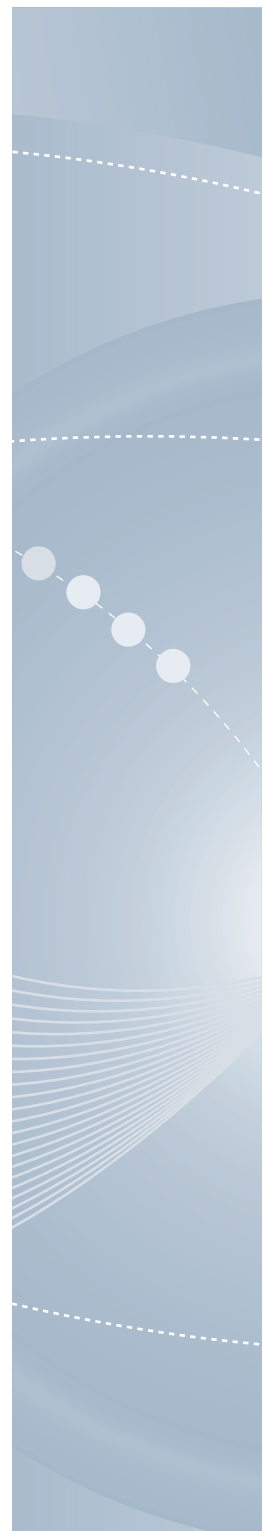
*'I've noticed they've been doing it at after school care and I'm not sure what's going on there. I think that they are doing it as a combined effort with a whole group of children because you can, you know, you can see that they are getting the same things wrong all the time ... and I wonder if they are being led and not really doing their homework, they are just sitting there copying.'*

#### 4.5.4 Homework and policy considerations

This comment raises a number of issues, not simply about appropriate supervision but the nature and function of homework itself. Despite the NSW DET considering it 'a valuable part of schooling' and the policy making reference to how homework 'establishes habits of study, concentration and self-discipline' (NSW DET, 2008), which are of key concern to this study, as responsibility is left to schools and communities to devise their own policies, approaches vary considerably. While some flexibility in policy is necessary, there seems little understanding within some communities, and also among teachers, of how effective habits of learning are forged in the early years and the important role homework can play in relation to this. Self-discipline and effective study habits, however, do not simply result from the completion of homework. As is evident from the various accounts provided, it has much to do with *how*, *when* and *where* it is completed and the emphasis it is given in the home. Due to its importance and the problems some communities face in instituting effective study routines within the home environment, in particular within the low SES Anglo and Pasifika households investigated in this study, consideration needs to be given to system-wide leadership with regard to this issue to more effectively address how homework is approached and an acknowledgment of its contribution in the formation of this notion of a scholarly habitus on which academic success depends.

#### 4.6 Engagement in extracurricular activities

Not only were there considerable differences between the extracurricular activities in which each of the three sample groups engaged, there were also differences, primarily along gender lines, within certain groups. This was most marked between the Pasifika girls and boys and is discussed below.





#### 4.6.1 Engagement in extracurricular activities by Chinese students

Of the three groups, the Chinese students were the most active in terms of the number and variety of activities they engaged in outside school. As was evident in the survey data, Chinese students were more likely to play musical instruments than either the Pasifika or Anglo students. Of the 11 Chinese students interviewed, six received piano tuition outside school and half of these also learnt one or two other instruments: Alice also played clarinet, Ben the violin and Yupeng the violin and recorder. Another three learnt an instrument as members of their school band. Only one of the Chinese students did not learn a musical instrument. In discussions with parents and Chinese community members, it was interesting the number who made links between playing piano and improved academic performance, particularly in terms of making reference to aspects of 'brain theory' that drew on notions of left brain/right brain interaction. Sam, the father of Sonia who in Year 3 was about to undertake her Grade 5 piano exam, explained that,

*'I think basically music does help academic performance. It improves, you know, the sort of brain activity sort of thing because with piano you use two hands, with left-handed at least you practise right brain. So I think it is helpful at least in the future.'*

The rationale for learning piano, therefore, was not simply related to its aesthetic appeal. For many Chinese parents, there was a perceived connection with academic achievement. Yet students were not only engaged in activities that their parents felt would assist them academically, there was a strong view that children simply needed to be doing something, that it was good to be busy and, despite differences in family income that could limit involvement in more costly pursuits, most of these students were very busy. Together with learning a musical instrument, there were those who attended drawing, dancing and Chinese language classes, and, despite the view of many teachers that few were involved in extracurricular sporting activities, a range of sports: cricket, swimming, tennis, soccer, T-ball, karate and AFL were all mentioned. Life for many of these students seemed highly regulated with parents appearing to specifically cultivate particular dispositions in their children. Vincent's mother, Mary, from Broughton Heights was quite upfront about this explaining that,

*'when they are young we have to control them like a tree, a small tree. When they are bigger and grow up like a tree they understand what is right, what is wrong, what they can do, what they can't do.'*

Mary, therefore, saw her son's early years as a formative period to focus on acquiring skills and values that would assist him and influence his behaviour in later years. In addition to their involvement in the range of activities discussed above, six of the Chinese students also attended academic coaching classes which were generally held for three hours on a Saturday morning. Apart from one of the Pasifika students, who had only just commenced coaching, none of the other students in the two sample groups attended this form of extra tuition. More discussion of coaching is provided in Chapter 5. Reference is made here

to these children's attendance to not only provide more detail about the range of activities which they engaged in outside school but to further demonstrate the generally busy and highly structured nature of their everyday lives that seemed a contributing factor in the degree of self-discipline many of these children appeared to possess.

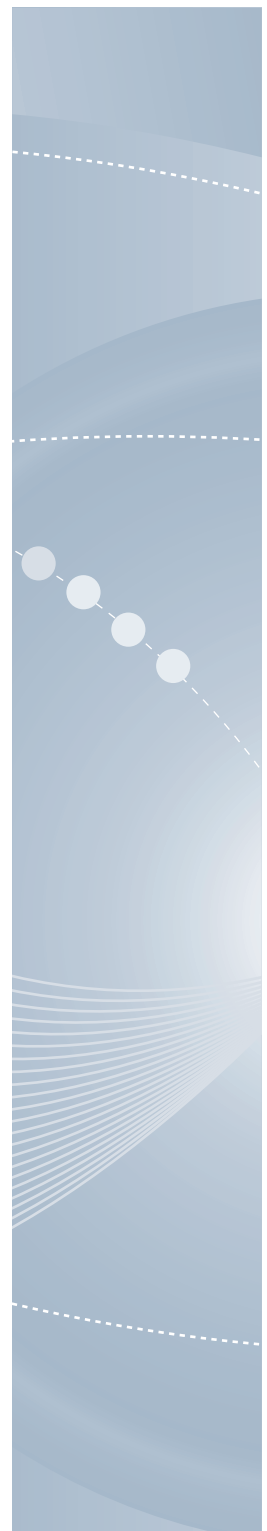
#### 4.6.2 Engagement in extracurricular activities by Pasifika students

There is a sharp contrast here with the Pasifika students who had far less involvement in extracurricular activities. While most of the students showed a keen interest in sport, there were only four boys and none of the girls who participated in sports outside school, and in each case this was either rugby union or league. In discussing the Pasifika students' extracurricular pursuits, one of the CLOs remarked, 'a lot play rugby. Sports, anything to do with sport but they don't do anything else'. A similar view was expressed by a Pasifika CLO in another school, 'Some kids they go and play sport, some kids they go and do dancing and some kids don't bother, they just don't do anything'. The girls that were interviewed seemed to have less involvement in extracurricular sport than the boys. This was remarked upon by a number of teachers and CLOs. One, in discussing a particular family explained,

*'with Finau's family, for example, without fail on a Tuesday and Thursday, they will take the whole family rugby training, won't miss any training at all because they love to go training, whereas I don't think they take Gillian, (who is a great sprinter) or any of the other girls to any extracurricular activities.'*

Three of the girls interviewed did indicate that they attended community dancing classes connected with their local church but it seemed many of the girls spent much of their free time after school and on the weekend simply at home, visiting family, or, as Lottie explained, 'hanging out with my cousins, seeing a movie or at the shops'.

A large part of many of the Pasifika students' and their parents' lives, however, revolved around the church and church-related activities such as singing groups and various youth programs. Despite the churches of different Christian denominations having a strong role in the Pasifika communities, there appeared to be some criticism by certain interviewees of the emphasis many families placed on the church. One Pasifika community representative felt that 'they monopolise the time and resources in the community because everything revolves around the church'. Another respondent was critical of the impact church-related activities had on children's education, 'our priorities are just wrong. It is important to do your homework but [many parents] won't follow through on it because we are to go to church'. Yet another community representative explained that, 'family, church and community are of central importance' but felt 'that this may not transfer to education as strongly as we would like'. Overall, apart from church, the singing and dancing classes they offered and, to some extent, sport, the Pasifika students seemed to spend little time involved in extracurricular pastimes. For some families the cost of







these activities may have proved prohibitive but priority appeared to be given to family, community and church. The individual interests of the Pasifika students, therefore, were quite narrow in comparison to their peers of Chinese background.

#### 4.6.3 Extracurricular activities and dispositions to learning

In exploring cultural practices and the formation of dispositions of learning this differential involvement in extracurricular activities is significant. For most of the Chinese students there seems to be an expectation that their time would be organised, that they would be *doing* something, *learning* something. The extracurricular activities in which they were involved were not simply for fun. In learning a musical instrument, a language and to some extent a sport, students were acquiring additional skills with a particular discipline required to master these, a discipline that seemed transferable to academic engagement. With some of the Pasifika students, particularly the boys who were involved in rugby outside school, they too required a discipline to attend training and heighten their skill level. This discipline, however, seemed focused on sport; a similar level of discipline was rarely given to academic pursuits. This may relate to the nature of the activity itself with the sport these students played being group or team-based as opposed to being individual like many of the activities in which the Chinese students were engaged. Also, the physicality involved in playing a sport is quite different to that in playing a musical instrument, learning a language or how to paint with the last three possessing a bodily composure and discipline generally consistent with scholarly engagement.

Further, the number and regularity of extracurricular activities in which the Chinese students were involved far outweighed those of the Pasifika students. To the former there simply seemed a stronger emphasis on applying oneself to mastering a skill and being involved in some activity, a dispositional tendency with possible implications for engagement in learning generally. It is not so much that the Pasifika students seem to have a lot more free time than the Chinese students, it is more the case of what is **not** being addressed in terms of this differential experience and whether there are skills that could be acquired that would have transferability to the academic realm.

#### 4.6.4 Engagement in extracurricular activities by Anglo students

The Anglo students' pattern of involvement in extracurricular activities was different yet again. Overall, these students played more sport outside school than the Chinese or Pasifika students with ten of the 13 students indicating they did so. For six of these students – four boys and two girls – this involved some form of football with soccer being the most popular. Two students also attended gymnastics and tennis and another two swimming in summer with one of these students attending Tae Kwon Do as well. Attendance at extracurricular sport was generally seasonal with only one student indicating involvement in both summer and winter sport, although more may have done so. Two of the students played an instrument as part of their school band, the trumpet and clarinet with only one learning an instrument, the viola, outside school. There were three students, two



of whom were from a low socioeconomic background, who were not involved in any organised extracurricular activity. The Anglo students, therefore, seemed to have some regular involvement in extracurricular activities, particularly sport at certain times during the year but, as with the Pasifika students, their overall commitment seemed far less than the Chinese students.

#### 4.7 Reading, library attendance and other pastimes

The focus in this section is on reading and attendance at local libraries but students were also asked questions about what they liked to do in their spare time. Across the three target groups there appeared to be a high level of computer game use, such as Playstation and X-box games, although there were some differences in terms of gender and SES background. By and large, with the exception of some of the low SES Chinese and Pasifika boys, it was mainly the boys who played these games. Only one girl of Pasifika background indicated she liked computer games but these were educational PC games rather than the fantasy battle and car racing Playstation or X-box variety that the boys favoured. The remaining Pasifika girls referred to attending church, visiting family and shopping as regular pastimes. The boys also mentioned going to church, visiting or playing games with family members such as football and card games. In addition to computer games, the Chinese boys referred to playing soccer, watching TV and riding their bikes as regular pastimes. The Anglo boys engaged in similar activities. The girls of Chinese background referred to reading, ice-skating, swimming and playing badminton, while the Anglo girls mentioned netball, watching TV, skipping games and playing with their pets. These responses don't reveal much variation in pastimes between these two groups. The most significant difference seemed to be with the Pasifika students as such a large number of both the boys and girls referred to involvement in family and church activities compared to none of the Chinese or Anglo students doing so. Clearly, as other data also indicated, church and family were of key significance to Pasifika students.

Students and parents were also asked a number of questions about reading: whether parents read to their child, what books children read at home and how often they seemed to read. Many parents whose children were having difficulty with reading felt they should read more regularly with their children but the parents of children who were now independent readers felt no real requirement to do so. Jessie, Flynn's mother from Colinville PS, for example, said, 'He likes to read, so the reading part is never an issue'. Some interesting insights were gained from responses to these questions such as how the Chinese and high SES Anglo students were more likely to refer to reading chapter books by this stage of schooling and named specific authors such as J.K. Rowling, Lemony Snickett and Emily Rhodda. The low SES Anglo and Pasifika boys referred to reading Dr Seuss, comics, sport and factual books. A number of the Pasifika students referred to the bible and bible stories as regular reading material at home.

Perhaps the most revealing data in terms of reading practice, however, related to visiting libraries. Students were asked if they ever visited or borrowed from their





local library. Of the 11 Chinese students, eight indicated they did so on a regular basis, one student every Sunday. All of these students were able to name the library they visited and borrowing appeared a regular practice. There were far fewer of the Pasifika (two) and Anglo students (three) who visited local libraries. This difference in attendance rates suggests the Chinese families were placing a stronger emphasis on books and engagement in literate practice as a leisure activity as well as a scholarly one. They seemed to view regular borrowing from local libraries as significant in terms of improving their children's reading and perhaps cultivating an interest in books.

## Conclusion

This examination of a range of practices within the home that may impact upon academic performance has revealed a number of key differences between the three ethnic groups investigated in the study. Overall, the Chinese students tend to spend far more time completing homework during the week than either the Pasifika or Anglo students that were interviewed. Much of this work, however, is not supplied by their classroom teachers but is instead additional work provided by either their parents or the coaching colleges that many attended. Differences in approaches to homework were far more pronounced than simply the amount completed each week, as there were also differences in routine, location and supervision. These factors could have a marked impact on a child's habitus for learning. Many of the Chinese students, who in Chapter 3 tended to exhibit a far greater degree of self-discipline and application in relation to school work than their Pasifika or Anglo peers, were engaged in certain practices within the home which could promote such dispositions. Many of these students didn't simply do more homework; it was undertaken on a more regular basis with space allocated within the home for this specific purpose, even within the homes of those of low SES. The Chinese parents also seemed to be far more actively involved in monitoring their child's homework. For some parents this meant actual assistance with aspects of the work itself, for others it was simply sitting and ensuring their child stayed on-task. Whatever the case, homework was given priority and so a discipline to perform academically was embedded within their domestic routine. It was simply a way of being that these students had embodied which was not confined to academic pursuits. A discipline to learn and apply oneself was also evident in the number and variety of extracurricular activities in which these students engaged. There seemed a real imperative to be involved, to be busy, to be doing something.

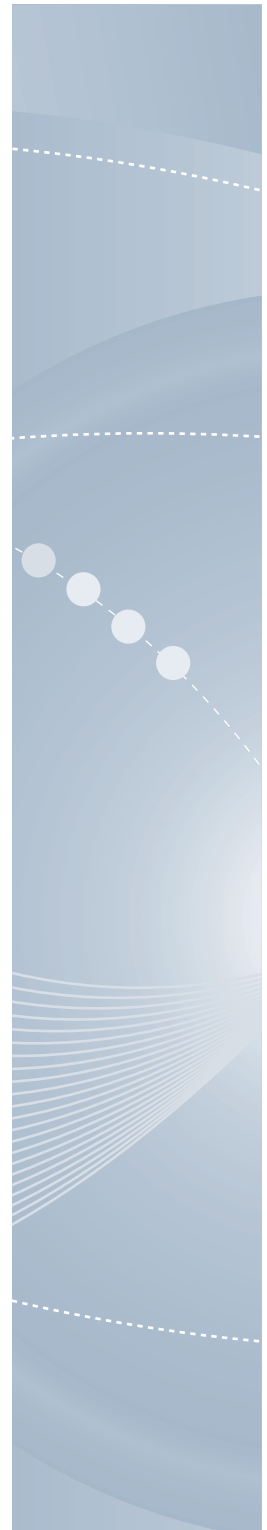
In numerous studies of the Chinese learner (Watkins, Regmi & Astilla, 1991; Salili, 1996; Wing On, 1996) this drive to perform is understood in psychological terms as if a particular cultural psychology produces a specific set of practices. It is the contention here that the reverse is more the case, that it is the practices themselves that produce the psychology with an individual's habitus mediating the process. Bourdieu (1999, p.78) refers to the habitus as 'history turned into nature' and pinpoints a kind of 'genesis amnesia' that obscures the processual aspect of its formation, that is the ways in which the habitus is formed over time. Many of the Chinese students appear to have a scholarly habitus given the

particular practices in which they have been involved from their earliest years. This point is of crucial importance in understanding the differential achievement rates of students from different ethnic backgrounds as the emphasis in terms of intervention can shift from a focus on ethnicity per se to cultural practices, and so, not who or what a student *is* but what they *do*. This distinction is also significant in that, while there was some degree of uniformity in terms of the practices in which the Chinese students engaged – as with both the Pasifika and Anglo students – they were not a homogenous group. There were differences given their individual life experiences and factors such as class and gender. A focus on culture as product rather than process masks this diversity. It is not only inadequate in terms of meeting individual needs; it quite inappropriately pigeonholes students assuming that a common ethnic identity signifies homogeneity such as approaches that attest to ethnic groups possessing specific learning styles (Jensen, 1988). Patterns of practice were evident but there was also a degree of variation within each of the groups targeted.

In comparison to many of the Chinese students, those of Pasifika background tended to not only do far less homework, they were also less likely to do it at home. A striking feature of the practices within many of the Pasifika households was the clear distinction between home and school. Parents tended to view school, and so school work, as the responsibility of the teachers, a point remarked upon by a number of respondents. The emphasis given to academic pursuits within the homes of Chinese students, as in establishing homework routines, providing specific space for academic endeavour and encouraging reading, was not apparent in Pasifika households given the comments of students and their parents. If Pasifika students completed school work at home it was rarely undertaken within a space specifically set aside for this purpose, that is, it was either completed within the general living area of the home in a communal fashion working with siblings or other family members or in a relaxed fashion on a student's bed. As mentioned earlier, this is not to denigrate this approach to learning merely to highlight the differences and the ways in which these specific practices may impact on a child's overall disposition towards academic engagement.

Finally, the Anglo students were perhaps less cohesive as a group. While overall they appeared to do less homework than their Chinese counterparts, though more than the Pasifika students, the emphasis placed on completing homework, parental supervision and engagement in extracurricular activities tended to vary in terms of socioeconomic background. The Anglo students of low SES tended to do less homework and had less involvement in activities than those of high SES.

Across the three target groups, while variation was evident, general patterns of practice emerged which suggest there are differential approaches to not only academic pursuits within the home of each group but to a range of other activities that can affect a child's habitus. In the next chapter this notion of habitus and its impact on learning is given further consideration; this time with a focus on practices in each student's school and classroom, highlighting the ways in which differing pedagogic approaches may affect a child's existing habitus and whether or not they promote the discipline to learn within a classroom setting.





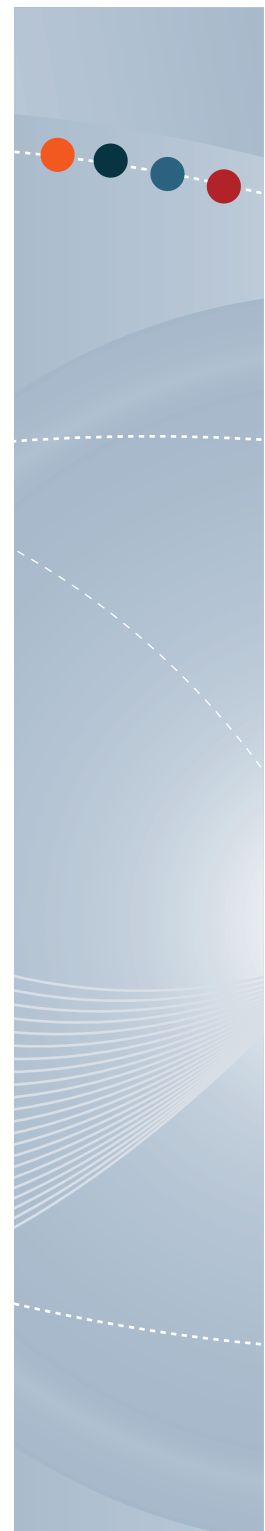
## Chapter 5 – The relationship between dispositions to learning and school practices

In addition to the home, practices within the school are formative in the development of dispositions within the habitus. Home and school are the two key spheres of influence in a child's life. They not only affect cognitive development but also the production of embodied habits of learning that can promote academic engagement. The focus in this chapter shifts to the school and the ways in which individual school cultures and classroom practices may engender forms of embodiment that contribute to different dispositions to learning. This is undertaken through an examination of the classroom experiences of a selection of students from across the six schools involved in the study; including an analysis of the organisation and regimen of their classrooms and the techniques their teachers employ in implementing the curriculum. Prior to doing this, however, we will consider if teachers felt there were approaches to learning more suited to students of specific ethnic backgrounds and if the students themselves had a preference for any particular pedagogic mode, such as independent learning, group work or whole class instruction. This is especially relevant given the prevalence of notions of learning styles within educational policy and practice and the common perception that these styles are culturally specific.

### 5.1 Perceptions of target students' responses to different pedagogic modes

The teachers of each of the students from across the six schools, their principals, ESL teachers, CLOs and community members were all asked if they felt students from the three groups targeted in the study responded better to particular teaching styles. While some felt there were no observable differences, such as Melinda who commented that, 'it doesn't matter where they come from they are all taught the same' and Ray who felt that 'kids are kids and they will all benefit from the same thing', overwhelmingly, interviewees were of the view that students from particular backgrounds responded better to certain approaches. This was most marked in discussion of the Chinese and Pasifika students. Interviewees gave less emphasis to how students of Anglo background responded.

Comments in relation to the Chinese students were primarily obtained from staff in Groups 1 and 3 schools where there were higher concentrations of Chinese students. By and large most felt that those of Chinese background favoured either a more teacher-directed style or working independently. Keith, for example, remarked that 'our Chinese kids respond to you know, teacher at the front'. Jack was of a similar view: 'The Chinese community [within the school] most certainly responds to the actual directed notion of teaching'. Laura agreed, 'the Asian children by and large like to be told what to do. They don't want to be given the free rein'. Generally, however, this perceived preference for teacher-directedness was viewed in a negative light with Betty pointing out that, 'I definitely think Asian children respond better to teacher-directed learning but I don't think that they are really taught to think' and Kate, who commented that 'it doesn't really teach the kids to learn for themselves'.





Many teachers tended to distance themselves from more didactic methodologies. Teacher directedness was characterised as an approach that simply involved issuing instructions and handing out stencils. The more positive features of teacher direction, such as scaffolding students' learning and guiding class discussion did not figure in the way they understood the term 'teacher direction'. It was a pedagogy interviewees believed many Chinese students may have preferred but it was not in their best interests to use. In a sense it was not deemed 'appropriate pedagogy', a view Doherty and Singh (2005) found evident among tertiary educators of Chinese students who utilised techniques to increase the level of oral participation in their classes in line with what they felt typified more effective 'Western' conceptions of education that emphasised student-directed learning.

### 5.1.1 Perceptions of Chinese students, pedagogies and the coaching phenomenon

Many of the teachers interviewed in this study associated teacher-directed learning with the coaching that a large proportion of the Chinese students attended outside school. The pedagogy used in these institutions was viewed as rigid and formulaic, successful in teaching 'test-wiseness' but limited in its ability to extend students and promote higher order thinking. As Jack explained, 'It doesn't teach them the 'whys' or 'hows'; it teaches them this is the process, black and white, no thinking, no problem solving, no creativity'. The knowledge students acquired through this process was seen as perfunctory rather than indicative of academic excellence. This perspective underlies Deirdre's remark that, 'a bright student is more a natural student and a lot of the Chinese students are tutored so sometimes you might perceive them as being bright but to me they are not'.

Such a comment raises interesting questions about the nature of knowledge and the role of the teacher in a student's acquisition of skills. Deirdre seems to conceive of learning as a 'natural' process. No account is made of the practice and training required in the acquisition of particular skills, the need to automate certain forms of understanding which then enable higher order thinking. Overall, teachers tended to place little value on coaching and were concerned about the number of hours many students spent attending these classes. Betty felt that 'when they grow up they are going to regret the fact that they didn't have a childhood'. This was a view shared by Heather, 'These children don't have much of a childhood because they just work all the time'. There were teachers, however, who had a less negative view of coaching. Carly commented that,

*'people say "Oh, all these Asian kids are tutored". I mean if they are only going one or two hours a week, I don't see the problem. People are quite happy to have their kids watch 20 hours of TV a week, yet these students are seen as criminal for going to tutoring two hours a week but 20 hours of TV is acceptable.'*



Coaching was also seen to interfere with school work in a number of ways. There were a couple of teachers who felt students gave preference to their coaching homework over that provided by the school, yet completion of homework by Chinese students never seemed much of an issue. As indicated in Chapter 4, many students – and not only those of Chinese background – actually felt they did not receive enough homework from school and that it was not particularly challenging. In a sense, coaching and work supplied by parents filled this gap. There was also a view that many of the Chinese students who attended coaching were completing class work far too rapidly and developing an understanding of concepts well in advance of when they were introduced at school. Betty commented on one student who had asked for additional work: ‘She had done half of it in the textbook. I told her to stop otherwise she was not going to have anything to do in class time if she kept going’. Deirdre had similar experiences with her students:

*‘I’ve got kids that have done like a whole page in five minutes so it creates problems for us as well. I mean it is great that they are being tutored and it is great that they are up to Year 8 level, but really!’*

The completion of work beyond stage-determined outcomes seemed a common occurrence in Maths. It was not only the level at which students were working that teachers remarked upon but the way in which many of the Chinese students approached their work. While classroom teachers favoured a pedagogically appropriate move from the concrete grasp of a mathematical concept prior to introducing its abstract formulation, many of the Chinese students had moved beyond this. In a number of classes, they displayed frustration at having to work through the more simplistic treatment of a concept such as the manipulation of blocks or counters to assist an understanding of different numerical functions. As Tenille remarked in relation to a lesson using blocks to gauge area,

*‘I mean the Chinese kids love it but they didn’t want to build them to find the answer because they could just look at it and do it and do it the quickest. I think it is because of tutoring and because they wouldn’t really get hands-on things at tutoring.’*

Despite this, many teachers persisted in using more concrete techniques as they felt students did not really understand ‘how’ to arrive at the correct answer or at least they could not explain the process involved.

Indeed, coaching colleges and the more teacher-directed techniques they employed (and teachers felt Chinese students preferred) were viewed as discouraging oral participation and promoting a ‘passive’ approach to learning. As Keith pointed out in describing the Chinese students at his school, ‘our kids are quite passive and just want to interact quietly’. This is a view Carly shared, ‘I think the Asian kids are taught to be passive’. Passivity is one of a number of characteristics that Grimshaw (2007) explains is commonly felt to define the ‘Chinese learner’ along with a relative lack of learner autonomy, lack of critical thinking and reticence in class. As Grimshaw argues, the Chinese learner is typically represented as ‘a reduced Other’, supposedly lacking skills







of critical engagement, co-operative learning and contributing to discussion; abilities associated with the Western progressivist tradition of education. Yet there are contradictions with both this reductionist conception of the Chinese student and teacher-directed learning which Grimshaw, and others such as Biggs (1996), acknowledge. Despite the perception of Chinese students as passive learners they are also seen as self-disciplined and effective workers. As Heather remarked, 'I can admire the work ethic that they show and I think that's

“I can admire the work ethic that they show and I think that's really important.”

really important'. Similarly, while often derided as a pedagogy, teacher-directed learning can produce outstanding results, particularly it seems with Chinese students (Biggs, 1996). This suggests the antipathy towards so-called passivity in learning and instructional pedagogies may be somewhat misguided.

Within current paradigms of learning 'passivity' and 'activity' are simply dichotomised. A passive learner is seen as one who is quiet, sits still and is seemingly not engaged whereas the active learner who engages in discussion with other students and perhaps moves around the classroom to access resource material is displaying involvement in the learning process. Clearly, either both or neither could be on task. Activity through talk is no guarantee a student is actively engaged (evident in the discussion of Sonny in Chapter 3), nor does sitting still and being quiet signal lack of engagement (evident in the discussion of Sonya in Chapter 3). A notion of 'situated action' is necessary here as much depends on the nature and stage of a lesson as to which is more appropriate. Yet it seems 'passivity' is more often than not problematised. As mentioned, this view seems to stem from the progressivist tradition still framing Western pedagogy (Watkins, 2005b). The 'passivity' many Chinese students are said to display may actually constitute active engagement in another form, namely quiet attention and concentration. Li (2004) explains there are different kinds of silence and rather than viewing speech and silence as opposites it is better to see them as forming a continuum, an important point in terms of understanding different stages of the learning process.

Li is also of the view that criticism of Chinese students' tendency to be quiet reflects a lack of cross-cultural understanding in that well-meaning teachers who encourage talk are not recognising what different kinds of silence actually denote. Such as comment, however, seems to simply essentialise the quiet many Chinese students display. While teachers in this study did overwhelmingly comment upon Chinese students as being quiet and often reluctant to engage in class discussion, the observational data discussed below also provided considerable evidence to the contrary. Chinese students, as with those of Pasifika and Anglo backgrounds do not constitute a homogenous group. While certain dispositions to learning were evident, these should not be considered in isolation but as a product of not only the home practices discussed in Chapter 4 but the particular strategies utilised in classrooms that may or may not promote required forms of behaviour. The point here is not so much whether Chinese students are passive – some are and some aren't – it is more about identifying

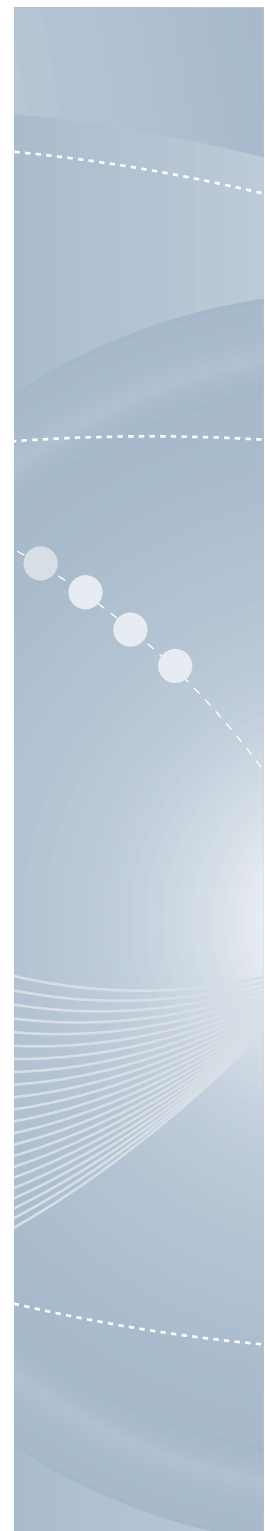
the practices that tend to promote academic engagement. Working quietly – often configured as passivity – is an approach to scholarly labour encouraged in the homes of many Chinese students and also the coaching colleges many attend and this seems to foster a discipline to learn. The importance of quiet and developing all students' capacity to concentrate may need to be given further consideration within contemporary Australian classrooms. As Pamela, a teacher from Allerton PS, pointed out in responding to a question about the capacities required for learning; 'I think you learn lots of things by being in your own silent space'.

Silence for its own sake, however, is of little importance. Students may need quiet and time to concentrate but they also need the requisite discipline and level of skill and understanding to apply themselves within that silent space. To Heather, who taught Sonya's enrichment class comprised primarily of Chinese students, this is partly explained in the following way: 'Some of the Chinese students excel because they are pushed and because they do all this tutoring, whereas it is felt that there are some children who are bright but because they are not directed like the Chinese children have been directed, it is not showing up as obviously'.

In one sense Heather's comment is a criticism of the teacher-directed learning many of the Chinese students receive in coaching classes but at the same time it suggests the importance of aspects of such an approach in promoting academic engagement; the discipline to engage in scholarly pursuits. While to many of the teachers that were interviewed the style of teacher-directedness employed in coaching colleges was problematic – focusing narrowly on practice and repetition – through engaging in such practices many Chinese students were quickly automating certain skills and, at the same time, a level of self-direction that assisted them in other areas of their school work. As Pamela explained,

*'for most people if you want to learn something you have to be shown it, you have to have it demonstrated to you, you have to have the opportunity to practice it by yourself, particularly for academic things. You don't practice it while you are having conversations with somebody else. If you are required to write or to think you are just thinking ... as you know it's an internalised thing.'*

A focus on practice or developing habits of learning in the early years receives scant attention in current curriculum documents or within teacher education (Watkins, 2005b). It is interesting to note that John Dewey (1930, p.105), philosopher and early advocate of progressivist education, was of the view that, 'in learning habits, it is possible to learn the habits of learning'. Teacher-directed pedagogies, however, while they appear effective in promoting these skills could also target others such as critical thinking and effective oral communication which likewise need to be scaffolded appropriately and practised regularly. Examples of this are evident in some of the vignettes of classroom practice





discussed in 5.4; Tom in particular effectively promoted these skills in his class which was comprised of a relatively high number of students from Chinese backgrounds.

### 5.1.2 Perceptions of pedagogies and Pasifika students

Unlike with the Chinese students there was far less agreement among teachers about the pedagogic modes Pasifika students may have preferred and which resulted in better learning outcomes. There were some who suggested group work, such as Jack, who commented that,

*'they respond better to more of a laid back approach with choices but no direction. They don't respond to structures. They respond better to feeling good about themselves and having a teacher that will relate to them as individuals.'*

Similarly, Sypalo, a Pasifika CLO of Tongan background, remarked, 'I think our kids are working better when they are in groups ... there is more activity than working in a whole group sort of thing or one on one'. In suggesting a preference for group work some interviewees were drawing on material that is currently circulating within NSW schools based on research throughout the Pacific that claims, 'Pacific people are tactile and communal by nature and students actively engage in lessons that are rich in activity and involve group work' (Delmas, 2003, p.12).

This document, however, is quite contradictory as, in addition to making claims about group work being a preferred pedagogic mode of Pacific people, it also adds that 'Homeland school experiences may have been predominantly teacher-centred with little hands-on or group learning' (Delmas, 2003, p.12). Teacher-directed learning, however, receives little further discussion as it seems to work against the progressivist line taken within the document which meshes with the simplistic connection made between village communal life and a predisposition for group-based learning. What is most problematic, however, is the essentialist conception of ethnicity that frames this document and any literature detailing so-called culturally specific learning styles. Pasifika students are a diverse group. They may have arrived in Australia from a range of very different Pacific nations and with very different family and educational backgrounds. Also, as Scott explained in discussing the Samoan students at his school, 'Some of them, their parents are Samoan but they were born here and brought up here, but they obviously still identify as Samoan but which category do you put them in?'.

Culture is a relatively fluid category. There may be some uniformity in terms of certain customs, language and so forth which is identifiable as a form of 'cultural coherence' but as Modood outlines this does not mean 'people of certain family, ethnic or geographical origins are always to be defined by their origins and indeed are supposed to be behaviourally determined by them' (Modood, 2007, p.89). Sela, another Pasifika community representative of Tongan background, pointed out,

*'I hear we have a specific learning style and that is the premise that a lot of teachers will work on. Because of the culture we come from they think that there is - that we have a different learning style like the sing and the dance - and the teacher uses that.'*

She felt, however, that a focus on this approach in teaching was inequitable, 'a bit like tunnel vision'. Rather than referring to learning styles or even the teaching methodologies Pasifika students may have preferred, other teachers emphasised what they felt many Pasifika students who were experiencing difficulties with their learning *needed* and this was guidance and structure. In terms of the Pasifika students she was working with who had quite poor English language skills, Carly felt the idea of giving them freedom to choose what they wanted to learn was simply 'kooky land'. While she used a range of strategies in her classroom she found that with group work many Pasifika students 'were not very communicative and happy to let other children in the group do the work for them'. If children lack the necessary skills, opting out is clearly a much easier and perhaps understandable course to take. Because of this, Carly preferred using pair work as she felt there was a much stronger imperative to communicate in the process of completing a task with only two students in a group. Betty also felt Pasifika students benefited from a more structured working environment because 'some of them really need that to be able to get through the school day'. Taranga, a teacher of Samoan background agreed, 'they need structure and they need routine, that's what they need'. Jack, however, was of the view that Pasifika students 'won't respond to guidance or structure because there is a discipline required to move through that and many of them don't have that self-discipline'.

Lack of self-discipline was a common charge levelled against Pasifika students, yet to Jack it was not acquired from engaging in more structured approaches to learning but was rather a requirement for working in this way. Such a comment seems to contrast considerably with the connections many teachers made between the highly regulated lives of many Chinese students and the discipline they displayed towards learning. Clearly, as evident in the previous chapter, the practices many of the Chinese students engaged in at home and outside school, routines associated with homework and the training involved with numerous extracurricular activities, instilled a discipline that had a marked impact on their performance at school. Most of the Pasifika students, however, lived very different lives outside school. The practices in which they engaged were less likely to engender the type of discipline required for academic endeavour.

### 5.1.3 Perceptions of pedagogies and Anglo students

Teachers were less likely to remark upon the teaching style which proved most successful with students of Anglo background. Being culturally dominant, teachers seemed to view them as constituting a relatively 'neutral' group. Cultural difference was less marked and so a perceived cultural cohesiveness was also less evident. As such, teachers were more likely to see Anglo students as 'individuals' rather than essentialising their ethnic identity which was a common, but sometimes unavoidable tendency, in relation to the Pasifika and





Chinese students, a point returned to in the Report's conclusion. If reference was made to Anglo students it was generally that they performed much better at group work and this was taken as an indication that they preferred this pedagogic mode. As Tenille from Chestervale PS explained, 'I think the Anglo kids really enjoy the hands-on in group work'. Larissa, from Allerton PS felt her less able Anglo students 'still need that concrete work' which was conducted in groups. Overall, however, no one approach to teaching was perceived as more successful with Anglo students.

## 5.2 Students' attitudes to different pedagogic modes

When students were asked if they preferred to work as a whole class, in groups or on their own 17 of the 35 indicated a preference for group work. Of the 17, eight students were of Chinese background, six of Anglo background and only three were of Pasifika background. In some ways these results contrast markedly with teachers' perceptions of the preferred teaching styles of each group. While teachers suggested that Chinese students responded better to teacher-directed learning and seemed to prefer it, many students actually indicated a preference for group work with friendship and sociality being the main reasons for this choice. Alice, for example, explained, 'I have fun in a group because I can chat with my friends'. This was a view echoed by Gary, 'I like a group of friends because we get to talk together a little bit'. Yupeng had a similar opinion, 'I love groups because there are friends and I would always go in a group with my friends'. Norman, in this group of Chinese students, preferred group work 'because if I don't know something then they will help me'. Sonya also indicated a preference for group work for this reason.

The responses of the Pasifika students were not so much at variance with what teachers had indicated, as there was no clear pedagogic mode that they considered the most successful or which students preferred. Rather, the contrast lies with the learning styles literature discussed in 5.1.2 that indicated Pasifika students are 'naturally' predisposed to work in groups. Only three of the 11 Pasifika students interviewed nominated group work as a preferred teaching style. In two cases this was because other students in a group could help them with their work and with the third student it was because they could assist other group members. Of the 13 Anglo students six indicated they preferred group work and the reasons they gave for this varied. As with many of the Chinese students they liked working in this way because groups allowed them to work and talk with their friends. Some, such as Callum, preferred this mode as it was easier to get help. For Tilly it wasn't just help it was 'because then you can copy off people'.

Of the remaining 18 students who did not nominate group work, there were nine who preferred whole class instruction and seven who favoured working independently. Two students were unsure. Of the nine who opted for whole class instruction there were three students from each of the target groups. Joan, for example, of Anglo background, said she preferred this mode because 'you get the information better'. She didn't like group work because 'some people might

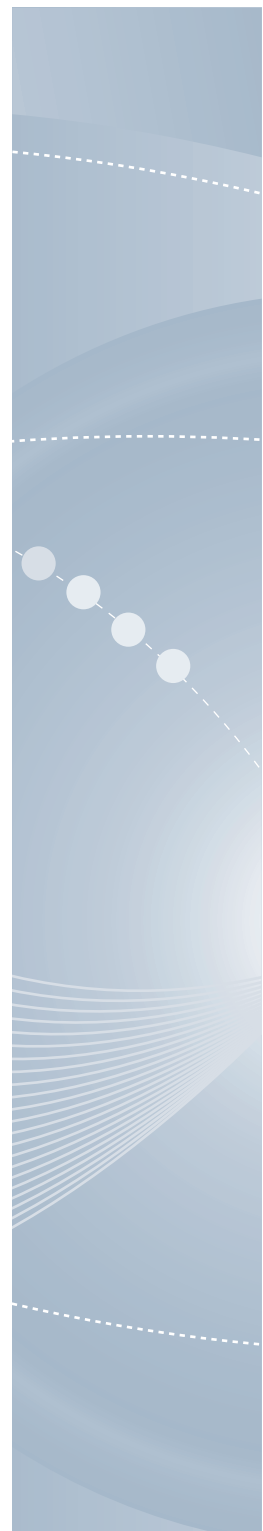
not know the information and then you have to help too much'. Of those students who preferred independent study, there were four Pasifika students, two Anglo students and one Chinese student. Darren of Pasifika background liked working independently in class 'because it is like quiet and I can concentrate on my work'. Sonny, another Pasifika student said he liked working 'on my own because [otherwise] everybody bothers me when I work'. Flynn, a student of Anglo background, preferred working on his own rather than in groups because 'I want to make my own decisions. When I am working in a group all the other people in my group make other decisions'.

While these responses provide some insight into students' learning within a classroom context, what proved more interesting was their responses to a question about how they felt they learnt best. Only two students who had nominated whole class instruction or working independently for the previous question changed their response. Both of these students had nominated whole class instruction as their preferred teaching style but felt that they learned better when working independently. One of these students was of Anglo background and the other, Lottie, was a Pasifika student who said, 'Well, it is just that I like to think to myself!'. Of the 17 students who had opted for group work, only one, Ben, a Chinese student, had indicated this was the way he felt he learnt best. He explained that, 'If you do it by yourself you just get bored and when you get bored you lose more concentration'. Interestingly, working with others was the way Ben felt he kept on-task. For the remaining 16 students who had indicated a preference for group work, this was not the case. While group work allowed them to talk to their friends and receive help, they felt they learnt much better either working independently or with the whole class. Alice of Chinese background, thought she learnt better, 'when we sit on the floor and listen to the teacher'. Vincent, also of Chinese background, liked whole class instruction because 'It's faster and we don't waste time'.

The shift from favouring group work to learning better by working independently was most marked among the Chinese students. They clearly enjoyed the sociality of group work but, with the exception of Ben, felt it hindered their ability to concentrate. When they had to complete a task it seems it was best done independently. Thea remarked upon this with her class that was comprised of predominantly Chinese students:

*'The classroom is buzzing and there is talk and there is you know all these things going on and then all of a sudden you hand them the sheet, they go to their seats and there is dead quiet. I could leave them with three sheets of work and they would plough through them and there wouldn't be a sound and they would keep going. It is almost like you switch on a button. They regard that as real work ... So they have this concept of what work is.'*

These students did participate in class and group discussion but when they were required to complete a task individually they had sufficient self-discipline to switch modes easily, self-regulating their behaviour to match the required approach to learning.







The Pasifika students as a group were also more likely to indicate that they learnt best by working independently. There appeared few accounts from teachers, however, that mentioned this ability. This may suggest that while many of these students may have felt they worked much better this way they actually had difficulty doing so. As with many of the lower SES Anglo students, they lacked the requisite discipline which so many of the Chinese students had embodied as a function of the patterns of practices which they had engaged in outside school. This was not necessarily coaching, as not all the Chinese students attended these classes, but most were completing additional homework or had routines that involved regular practice.

It seems from students' comments that there was too much emphasis placed on group work in some classes. While it may be a useful pedagogic mode for encouraging discussion and co-operation, it seems there was not sufficient time devoted to either effective whole-class instruction or the quiet, time and space for students to work independently. The latter does not simply involve leaving students on their own but, as would appear necessary for many Pasifika students, scaffolding the required independent learning skills to enable them to do so.

### 5.3 Whole school practices and dispositions to learning

While the above comments by students shed some light on their learning experiences it is analysis of actual classroom practice that perhaps provides the greater insight. Prior to doing this it is important to first examine the wider school context and give some attention to the overall culture that governs a school as this also impacts upon students' habitus for learning.

Spaces always exude a certain ambience and schools are no different. As institutional settings they will often actively cultivate a particular ethos by promoting certain practices such as those related to organisation, discipline, academic programs, extracurricular activities, uniform and the school environment. Of course other factors also impact upon each of these, namely a school's geographical location, architectural layout and the socio-cultural make-up of its student population. It is not the intent here to profile each school but rather to highlight one aspect of school culture that provides some insight into student conduct and academic engagement, each of which is central to the formation of a scholarly habitus. As examples of the collective make-up of a school, assemblies prove especially useful in this regard. They will differ in terms of when and where they are held and their overall purpose and content. The focus here is on two quite different assemblies their content, organisation, expectations of students' conduct and how the combination of these produced a particular ambience indicative of each school's culture.

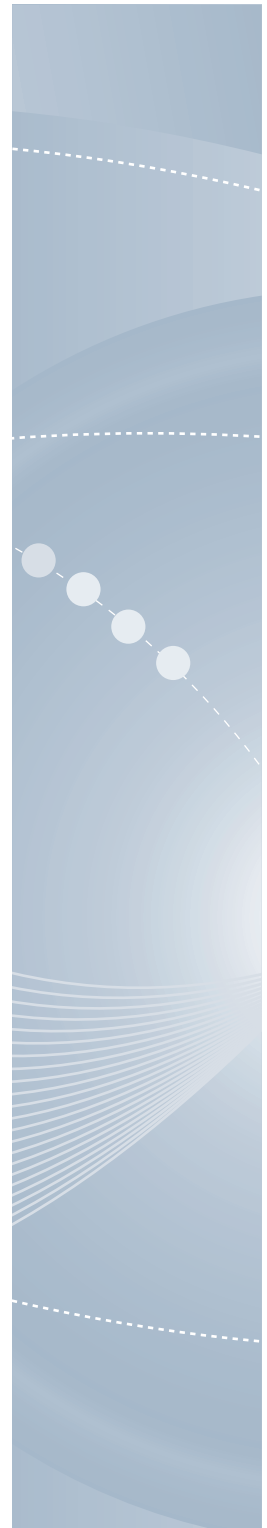
The first assembly was quite a formal affair conducted on a Friday morning at Colinville PS immediately after roll call. This was a regular weekly assembly for Years 3 to 6 students and this particular day was very cold and wet. Despite this, students followed an orderly routine of forwarding into the school hall



accompanied by their class teacher. Each class sat on the wooden floor in their predetermined position waiting for the assembly to commence. Although there was little noise and restlessness one executive staff member indicated quiet was required by clapping his hands a number of times. Following this, there was absolute quiet and he introduced the Year 5 class that was to host the assembly. A class representative opened proceedings with a Welcome to Country and then introduced the school principal for his address. He made reference to a series of school achievements including a performance at the Opera House the previous night. This was followed by a series of class awards for effort and academic achievement and then four or five high quality presentations by the host class on group assignments they had recently completed including a powerpoint presentation projected on a large screen involving music and animation. The staff member overseeing the assembly also made mention of students who had been collecting money for charity, and ribbons were distributed by House captains to students who had excelled in sport. All these students lined up and were greeted with applause from the audience. There were a number of other announcements and the assembly finally concluded with a performance by the choir, the school singing the national anthem and an award for the class of the week.

In all, approximately 450 students managed to sit quietly and listen to proceedings for a period of one and a quarter hours. Generally these assemblies were a little shorter but there had been a lot to discuss. During this time, with students seated on the wooden floor cross-legged, there had been very little noise or restlessness. There had been no need after the initial call for quiet to regain students' attention and correct behaviour. There simply seemed an expectation that students would behave and they did. Students appeared to have embodied the necessary discipline to control their bodies and conduct themselves appropriately with staff standing or sitting on chairs throughout the hall to ensure this order was maintained. Their presence, however, did not suggest an overt surveillance; there seemed a collective expectation of order and this appeared all that was required to sustain the appropriate conduct. Of interest here is not just the organisation and student behaviour but the assembly's overall purpose. There was definitely a focus here on achievement but at various levels; school, class and individual and in a range of fields; academic, sport, performing arts and extracurricular activities. It wasn't simply a matter of singling out individual students' achievement but of creating a sense of inclusion and whole school involvement that translated into what appeared to be a genuine interest in proceedings with the mass of students sharing this sense of success. The assembly was suggestive of a vibrant and dynamic school culture that seemed to engender a discipline of engagement among students, regulating their behaviour and overall performance at school.

This was in stark contrast to the second assembly held at Aston PS which was a regular daily event occurring immediately after the morning bell and prior to students forwarding to class. Given the regularity of the assembly one would assume set routines about conduct and organisation were in place. To some extent this was the case. Students stood in class groups in the main quadrangle,





some accompanied by teachers. There were also many parents and younger siblings milling around. An executive staff member was holding a portable loud speaker on a raised platform calling for quiet. This, however, was never achieved. Throughout the ten minute assembly there was constant noise and chatter. Despite the teacher in charge and others issuing numerous reprimands that resulted in moments of reduced noise the chatter and restless behaviour soon returned and the staff member in charge simply continued addressing the assembly relaying notices and calling for others to do so. Messages included reminders about school events, calls for involvement in particular activities and a notice drawing students' attention to the daily detention list that would be distributed via the school intercom system later in the morning. Following this, students forwarded to class in a rowdy fashion never really checking their behaviour despite the presence of their teachers, other staff and also many parents. This was the way students started their school day assuming a form of comportment that exhibited an indifference or at least a lack of the control required for meaningful engagement in learning. Students here seemed to have embodied a discipline of disengagement. There appeared to be no real expectation of quiet and orderly conduct and so none was given. This assembly of course had a very different function to that described at Colinville PS. It was about communicating information but its success in doing so, given the inattention of the students, is debatable. Aston PS may also have held assemblies where the focus was recognition of achievement but, as a similar approach to the daily assembly was evident each time it was observed, it seems conduct on more formal occasions may not have been much different.

Assemblies at Aston PS seemed to evoke a general culture of indifference to the extent that even reminders about detention had little effect. The disciplinary apparatus at the school simply reinforced the culture of disengagement and attempts at control were generally ineffectual. One new staff member referred to the school as having a culture that was 'punitive' and that some staff felt that 'if we are not punitive then we are not doing our job'. This approach was amplified by the daily intercom announcements of recess and lunchtime detentions that listed approximately 10-15 students attending each. Another new member of staff commented that, 'I think the teachers' point of view is it is good because it is sort of shaming them but I think maybe from the kids' point of view it is a prestige thing'. These techniques were therefore proving counterproductive, encouraging a habitus of resistance rather than engagement in learning. It must be stressed that the need for change was becoming more and more evident to staff at this school and effective measures have since been introduced. The school's involvement in this research, given the difficulties they were having, is to be commended and attests to a real desire for change. The reason for comparing these two schools, however, is not to simply characterise one as successful and the other as experiencing problems but rather to demonstrate how different cultures of schooling have different disciplinary effects that impact on students' bodies and minds and ultimately their performance at school.

Although outlined in Chapter 1, there has been no discussion up to this point of the sociocultural background of each of these school's student populations. Colinville PS has a large proportion of Chinese students many, but by no means all, are from middle-class backgrounds as were a considerable number of other students at the school. Aston PS was located in a low SES area with a large number of students from Pasifika backgrounds. Experiences of school for these two groups of students were therefore quite different impacting markedly on their habitus for learning. While external factors such as class and the practices students engage in at home affect their performance at school, contributing to this difference in school culture, it is possible for schools themselves, through the programs they implement and the structures they put in place, to not only promote a positive ethos but to improve student outcomes. It is not the function of this report to investigate such measures, rather, the focus here is to gain a better understanding of the factors contributing to the differential achievement rates of the groups of students targeted in this study that move beyond the current tendency to pathologise differences in ethnicity. Schools, in a sense, can act as agents of change and augment the capacities students acquire within the home. Without the appropriate intervention, however, schools only serve to reproduce a child's existing habitus which may not be conducive to academic endeavour. School level initiatives are important in this regard but it is the practices in which students engage on a day-to-day basis in classrooms that have the greatest impact and it is these that are examined in the next section.

## 5.4 Classroom practices and dispositions to learning

Thirty five students in 18 classrooms across six schools were observed during the course of this study. The focus here is on six of these classrooms as these best exemplify the range of practice that was evident. Through a series of vignettes, an analysis of each is provided that highlights the different forms of embodiment that seemed to ensue from the strategies teachers utilised from across the six schools. Of interest here is not only how teachers implemented the curriculum but how they organised their classroom and the regimen they created. Each of these has a powerful influence on a child's habitus for learning, engendering dispositions that promote different levels and forms of engagement. However, as with the comparison of school assemblies, the following is not intended as an evaluative exercise but as a way of examining the various factors that may contribute to the formation of the different dispositions to learning among students of Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo backgrounds. Also, it is important to note, that techniques observed during individual lessons may not be indicative of a teacher's overall practice. They do, however, provide the means by which practice can be analysed providing qualitative insights into the complexities of different classroom environments.

### 5.4.1 Ben, Walter and Eric's class – 3A

3A was a class of 29 students of which 70% were from a LBOTE background. Twenty five of the students were from either Chinese or Korean background, three were of Indian background and there was one Anglo student. Three





students in this class were involved in the study: Ben and Walter of Chinese background and Eric who was the sole Anglo student in the class. Eric, whose disposition to learning was discussed in Chapter 3, and Ben were from a relatively high socioeconomic background whereas Walter's family was far less affluent. 3A was observed on four occasions by two different researchers. The following account draws on segments from three of these lessons.

Deirdre, 3A's teacher, always ensured students lined up quickly prior to entering the classroom. She allowed six students at a time to do so to minimise fuss and disruption. On entering the class students stood behind their desks which were arranged in a horseshoe shape. After the morning greetings students then sat down and Deirdre began to call the roll. Students all sat up quietly. This process was followed by a brief discussion of the previous night's homework and then the class was divided into two uneven groups. There was a small group of six students that included Eric and Walter who moved from their desks and sat on the floor to play a spelling game. The remaining students in the larger group, including Ben, were working from textbooks completing a series of spelling and vocabulary exercises. Deirdre had not provided any explanation in relation to these exercises, students seemed to know what to do and simply opened their books and began working. Every so often there was a quiet murmur between a couple of these students or they would glance down at the students playing the game on the floor but generally this larger group was silent and very much engrossed in their work. The only real noise came from the group of students playing the spelling game on the floor, turning cards over in a 'concentration style' game to make words. Walter, Eric and the other four students were clearly having fun, as was Deirdre, but after 15 minutes she drew their attention to a series of spelling tasks she had written on the board for them to complete at their desks with the other students.

On making the move from the floor, however, both Walter and Eric appeared to be very distracted. They had difficulty settling down and lacked the drive and focus that Ben displayed who had been completing the textbook exercises and continued to do so with the same degree of concentration for a period of 40 minutes. Eric instead spent a considerable amount of time fidgeting and playing with equipment on his desk engaging in very little work. Walter simply appeared to be daydreaming. In another lesson over a period of 45 minutes he was observed exhibiting similar behaviour quietly evading work – in fact not writing anything – despite Deirdre who seemed a very attentive teacher circulating around the room to check students' progress and offer advice. Deirdre had explained that both Walter and Eric had problems with their work but this was compounded by their difficulty concentrating. They may have enjoyed the activity they had played on the floor but it seemed to have an unsettling effect as they were then unable to assume the appropriate composure for engaging in literate practice; a composure that would have directed their attention to the task at hand. This is not to say that they were not quiet, they were, but unproductively so. Their composure did not constitute a readiness to work, rather, it was indicative of an inability to do so. While the larger group of students had appeared to make a relatively seamless transition from the orderly nature

of the beginning of the lesson to commencing their work, the activity in which the smaller group had engaged involved a form of comportment and communal engagement quite different to what was then required at their desks. For some students already predisposed to scholarly endeavour such a move may not have presented a problem. For Eric and Walter, however, the staging of these activities had an unsettling effect and, without the appropriate scaffolding to focus their attention, were simply reliant on an existing habitus which was not inclined towards sustained concentration. They simply wasted much of the remainder of the lesson failing to complete their work; something Deirdre explained was a common occurrence with both of these students, but especially Eric.

Overall, the lesson seemed a process of reinforcing the dispositions students already possessed. The regime of silence and control that pervaded the classroom, especially when the smaller group had returned to their desks, was not really used in any productive way. It may have allowed for the larger group of students, who were predominantly Chinese, to concentrate on completing their textbook exercises, which seemed to replicate the kind of work offered in coaching colleges, but it afforded little opportunity for discussion and the development of the capacities of oral participation and critical thought around language that many of these students were said to lack. This is not to say that the students were not encouraged to engage in discussion on other occasions, an account of one such instance follows, but the ease at which the students completed work in their textbooks, and were able to do so over such a long period of time, suggests this was a regular practice and one that could have been varied to foster skills they may have lacked or at least those that required further development.

In another lesson in the afternoon on the following day there was more of an emphasis on discussion. Students were initially at their desks completing work-related activities on measuring mass from the day before. Deirdre was attending to other work and writing instructions on the board. After 15 minutes of quiet in which Walter and Eric were once again very distracted and Ben focused on completing his work, Deirdre placed students in groups to discuss their findings prior to a report back to the whole class by each group leader. During this five minutes of discussion there seemed little mention of each person's results, it was more a general chatter with some students, who hadn't finished, continuing to complete their written work. Deirdre then provided a quick reminder of what each group leader was required to say and one at a time called them to the front to summarise their group's results. This proved very difficult for most students who needed constant prompting from Deirdre to complete their group report. Dissatisfied with their responses, after ten minutes Deirdre gave her own summary and then distributed some sheets with related exercises for the class to complete. Students returned to their desks and for the next 15 minutes the familiar quiet returned as they settled down to what seemed a regular pattern of initial teacher input and then completing sheets or textbook exercises. Class discussion and more protracted and detailed teacher explanation seemed to be limited within this classroom. While periods of independent study are an essential component of effective classroom practice they need to be preceded







by the appropriate scaffolding of the tasks students are to complete for this time to be used constructively (Hammond, 2001). Otherwise, they are simply completing exercises that could just as easily be undertaken as homework, especially by the students in this classroom such as Ben who found this work relatively routine. Together with this, students like Walter and Eric need such periods of independent work to be supported by activities that enhanced their capacity for bodily control and mindful concentration. Without this, the kind of discipline of quiet and control experienced in this classroom simply had a disabling effect confirming their lack of academic engagement.

#### 5.4.2 Yupeng's class – 3B

In 3B, at Colville PS, a different regimen governed the pedagogic space. Of a class of 32 students, eight were of Chinese background; the remaining students were a diverse mix of Anglo, Indian and a couple from different Northern European backgrounds plus one Pasifika student. While many students at the school were of a relatively high SES, there were those, such as Yupeng, who were not. His family had arrived from China only two years earlier and at that time he had limited command of English. His oral language skills, however, had improved dramatically since that time as had his written English. Considerable emphasis was placed on his school work at home and Yupeng tended to be quiet and focused in the classroom to the extent that Tom, his teacher, said he 'lacked personality'. Yupeng seemed the type of student who, given the classroom regimen described in the previous example would be considered a 'passive learner'. In Tom's class, however, there was a much stronger emphasis on structured class discussion and teacher explanation to accompany periods of independent work and, within this environment, Yupeng seemed to thrive. He remained quiet and focused when required but also actively engaged in class discussion. This was the case during the four observation lessons, two of which are described here. These two lessons formed part of a unit of work related to the novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* that 3B was reading. Following a theme around sweets and cake – the link with the text – the first of these two lessons involved the class making patty cakes and the second using this concrete activity to write a procedural text.

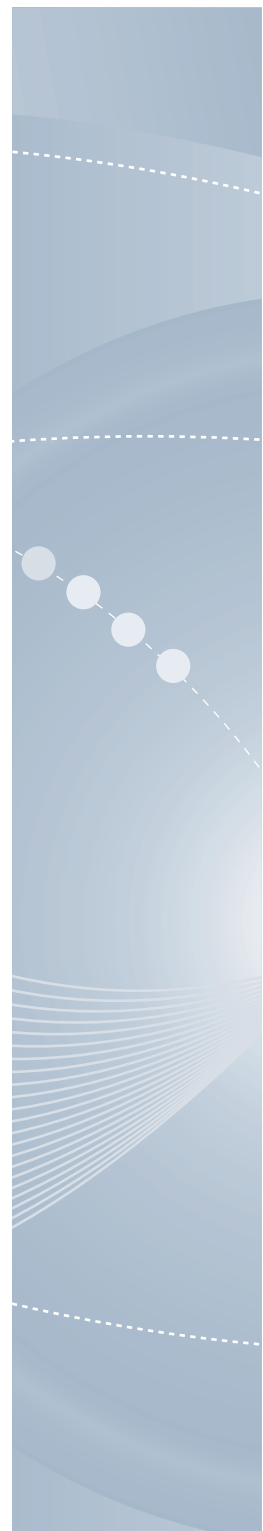
In the first lesson conducted after lunch students forwarded in and sat at their desks. Tom's room was an unusual L shape. Desks were arranged in rows facing a board in the horizontal section of the L. Floor space with another board and a number of computers and resources were located in the vertical section of the L. Tom had written the instructions for what to do on the board and asked for a volunteer to read them aloud to the class. Yupeng's hand immediately shot up and he proceeded to read from the board. Following this, students forwarded out of class once again to wash their hands and on their return group leaders were appointed. Each was assigned a separate area in which to make the cakes where all the necessary ingredients had been laid out in advance. In Yupeng's group each student had a turn of stirring and then placing the cake mixture in patty tins, with group members negotiating the process. During this time Tom and Jay, the ESL teacher working with the class, checked students' progress

and, despite the potential chaos of 32 children completing such an activity in a confined space, they seemed quite orderly with one student from each group taking trays down to the staffroom oven where Tom was loading them to be cooked and the remaining students cleared up.

After 45 minutes on this activity, Jay called students to attention on the floor and explained how they were to write a procedure on this activity the next day. She discussed the process highlighting the differences in tense between a procedure and a recount and also questioned students about the structure and grammar of instructional texts. This session was conducted as a guided class discussion with students seated on the floor. Yupeng, as before, was actively engaged, volunteering answers to most questions and Jay carefully scaffolding the text they would write by drawing on the activity the group had just completed. After 20 minutes of outlining the procedure, students were then instructed to forward to their desks and to read the set text or other material in the time remaining prior to the bell. Although there was a bit of noise it was interesting how students were checking their peers' behaviour, some 'shooshing' to stop any chatter so they could have quiet to read. Just prior to the bell Jay clapped to gain the attention of the class then students packed up and left for the day.

This lesson was continued in the mid-morning session of the next day. Students had spent part of the morning icing and decorating their cakes. Jay, who was once again seated on the chair, started to count and students quickly forwarded to the floor. Tom was at the back of the class and was team-teaching with Jay during the lesson. She proceeded to write a scaffold of the text on the board: ingredients and method, and three columns headed 'nouns', 'verbs' and 'prepositions'. With reference to the previous day's discussion Jay, with assistance from Tom, questioned students about these aspects of the text recapping on key points. Yupeng, sitting close to the front, was again actively involved in answering questions on prepositions, verbs and the differences between procedures and recounts. On completing the scaffold, which included writing the first two steps for the procedure as a class on the board, Jay asked students to return to their desks to use this to write their own procedure. As the board was difficult to see from his seat, Yupeng got a book, went to the board and quickly copied down the outline. Four other students followed Yupeng's example and they also returned to their desks to write. The class was given 30 minutes to construct their text. Yupeng and his classmates worked in a quiet attentive manner with most completing a draft prior to forwarding out to lunch, each taking one of the finished iced patty cakes that had been placed on a tray on their way.

The lesson here with 3B contrasts considerably with that experienced by 3A students. A discipline of engagement seemed to pervade this room. Students were gaining a more sophisticated understanding of text and grammar through the careful scaffolding by the teacher. Both Jay and Tom used students' responses to questions to do this. Being teacher-directed, students were effectively engaged in the process and the concrete and highly motivating cooking activity that preceded this heightened their understanding and







willingness to be involved. This was a concrete activity that was appropriately pitched, eliciting a sophisticated treatment of language unlike some of the concrete activities around maths that, to many of the Chinese students, in particular, seemed regressive. The approach used in this lesson was particularly effective for Yupeng who, though clearly studious and work focused, needed support to engage in discussion. While questioning and discussion occurred in 3A with Ben, Eric and Walter, it was not sustained in the lessons observed and discussion was left to students themselves. As such, it lacked direction and soon petered out. Students need support for effective oral participation, particularly given many have LBOTE backgrounds or are ESL learners. But also, the whole class nature of the activity in Tom and Jay's class created a sense of corporate involvement that had considerable effect. There was still an appropriate level of control within the class but of a type that encouraged rather than stifled discussion. Discipline within schools is not simply about classroom management, it needs to be conceived as a force that can be harnessed to instil self-discipline within students and promote capacities upon which learning is contingent. Without this enabling dimension discipline may simply reinforce existing dispositions which may be problematic, as was the case with Walter and Eric. With Yupeng, however, the opposite was evident. The discipline generated by the techniques utilised within his class not only promoted much needed skills of oral participation but provided the time, quiet and space to work independently and practise his written language skills.

#### 5.4.3 Braydon and Tim's class – 3C

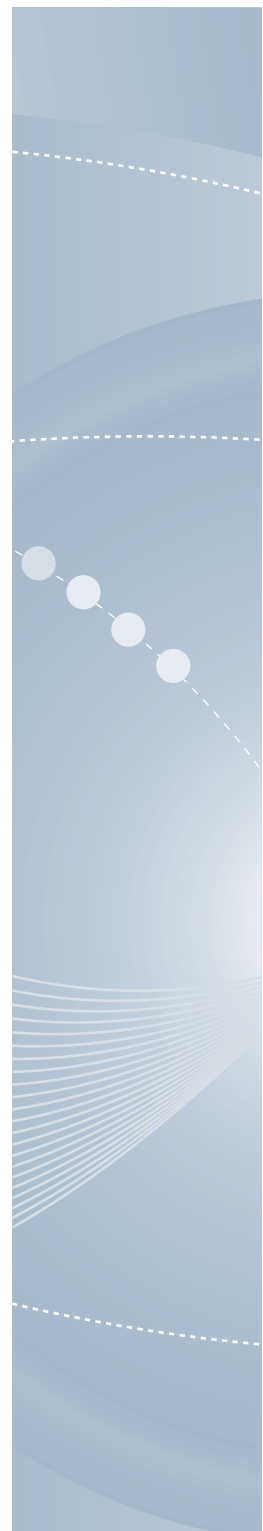
Braydon and Tim were in a boys-only 3/4 composite class comprised of mainly Anglo students with some also of Pasifika and Aboriginal backgrounds. Braydon, who was referred to earlier in the report, is of Anglo background, while Tim is of Pasifika/Maori background. The gender split with a parallel class was undertaken in an attempt to minimise behaviour problems and lift student performance. The following account draws on one of three lessons that was observed which was devoted to handwriting and then a creative writing exercise.

The classroom was quite large with two columns of three rows of desks directed towards a whiteboard at the front. Behind these desks at the back of the room was another whiteboard with space in front for floor activities. Braydon was seated at a desk at the back, while Tim was on the other side of the room at a front desk. While class monitors handed out handwriting books, Anita, their teacher, used an overhead projector, to display the day's date and a short saying for students to copy into their books. This exercise simply involved printing, there was no cursive script. Anita also pointed out that when they had finished they could continue practising single letters in the next page of their handwriting booklet. There was no demonstration or discussion of posture, grip and the particular directionality of the letters to be written. There was very little engagement with the class at all, simply an instruction to write and be quiet. The boys opened their books and started work. While the noise level in the class did rise at regular intervals, after reprimands from Anita the boys quietened down and overall they were well-behaved. Sitting quite close to Braydon, the

researcher was interested to see how long it took him to settle down to work. He fiddled with his pencil case, sorting through pens and pencils. When he did commence writing the researcher noticed he was left-handed. As he was sitting at the last desk on the right-hand side of a row of desks, this made writing difficult. So as not to impinge upon his neighbour, Braydon shifted his book to the right-hand edge of his desk with his elbow directed towards the front of the room. Seated in such a way, writing was an uncomfortable process and Braydon seemed to procrastinate over completing his work. Tim, on the other side of the room, also displayed posture that was inappropriate for writing. He was hunched right over with his face close to the page. This also was not corrected but Tim at least seemed far more engaged than Braydon, completing his handwriting exercises in the time provided. The writing of the class overall varied considerably. Some boys had quite a good hand but more often than not their writing was overly large with poorly formed letters. A number of the students had no idea about correct directionality in forming letters – which not only proves a problem when they start to use cursive script and affect ease of writing, it inhibits students' ability to focus on content. As already discussed in Chapter 3, writing technology needs to become transparent.

Anita progressed around the room on two occasions during the 50 minutes that were devoted to the lesson – the rest of the time she was at her desk or talking to a classroom assistant who had entered the room after the lesson had begun and sat at the back of the room most of the time providing little assistance. It seemed the intention was to maintain quiet and order among students and simply let the boys get on with their work. Yet, without direction and intervention to correct problems, they were not only habituating poor technique but, in the case of Braydon and others, a capacity for work avoidance reminiscent of that observed in 3A with Walter and Eric. There were students such as BJ of Pasifika background, who finished early but with little self-direction was unable to use his time productively. He went over to a book and magazine rack to read but soon lost interest and began doodling on a piece of paper back at his desk. Being quiet and seemingly occupied his lack of engagement went unnoticed. While a discipline of control appeared to govern this pedagogic space it proved disabling as it seemed to either foster disinterest or else mask the problems some were experiencing with handwriting.

Similar problems emerged with the next activity in this morning session. After monitors had collected the handwriting books, Anita had students at the back tables move to the floorspace and then the boys at the front joined them. They sat in rows sitting up straight to impress Anita who was seated on a chair in front of them. She read the boys a short poem called Smiley, asked the meaning of a word and then distributed a sheet to students to draw a picture of the character described in the poem and to write a diary entry about him with the best picture being awarded ten raffle tickets. There was no further discussion about the poem, what students could draw or more importantly how to write a diary entry based on the poem which was an unusual choice of genre given its descriptive rather than episodic nature. Many students were clearly unsure about what to do but returned to their desks to commence work. Braydon once





again procrastinated, playing with his pens and talking to the assistant. When he finally commenced working it was to draw the picture that appeared to bear very little relevance to the poem. During this time Anita progressed around the room but there was little guidance given. When she spoke it was mainly to praise what she referred to as imaginative or beautiful work. There was a continual hum in the room that would rise in volume at intervals but this was always kept in check. Like Braydon, Tim was focusing on his illustration before writing. After 25 minutes when Anita indicated time was almost up and students would have a minute or so to check their work, it was only at this point that Braydon scribbled the following down on his sheet: *Smlly hed never steepes has femlly was get of him thay wer net out o him*. Tim was less hurried but all he had written was the following caption for his picture: *If I was this person I wold fel unlovd*.

Students were then asked to return to the floor where a number were selected to show their illustrations and read out their work, one of whom was Braydon. While a couple of students had written up to a paragraph, none produced a diary entry. They were all mainly descriptions of the character. Some had difficulty reading their work as did Braydon who stumbled with his three poorly spelt and constructed sentences. Despite this, Anita responded with 'Good one – what a great picture'.

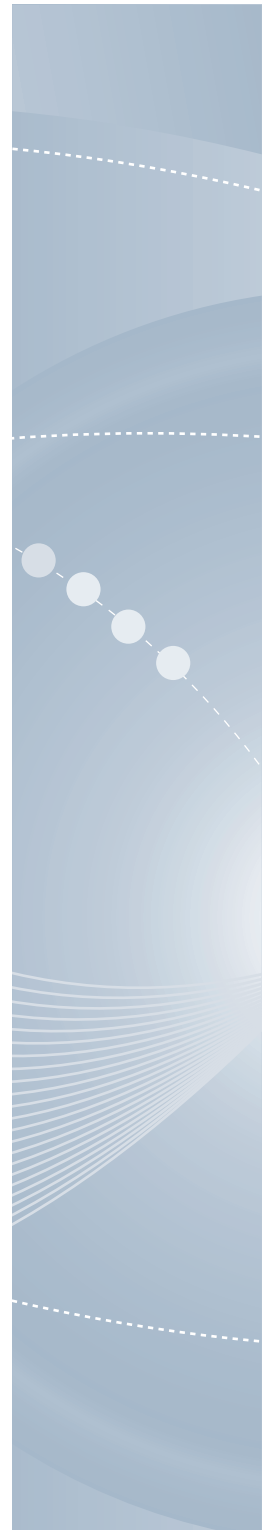
As explained in discussion of previous examples, the function of these vignettes is not so much to evaluate classroom practice but to consider their ramifications. The schools in the study with low SES Anglo students and those of Pasifika backgrounds tended to perform below average on statewide literacy and numeracy tests. Braydon's and Tim's BST results typify this. Practices in the home, rather than just the macro-concepts of class and ethnicity, provide some explanation for this as they contribute to a form of embodiment unsuited to schooling and academic endeavour, in effect impeding cognitive development. Practices within the classroom, however, can prove equally inhibitory. Tim, and especially Braydon, had not only failed to acquire capacities of effective literate practice within this classroom, poor habits through inaction had also been confirmed which would be difficult to reverse. Together with this, Braydon's procrastination over work was indicative of a lack of interest which had become habituated and so it would be difficult for him to apply himself to improve these poor skills.

#### 5.4.4 Lottie and Darren's class – 3D

In Lottie and Darren's 3/4 composite class with a similar demographic to 3C, a different set of classroom practices were evident. Both Lottie and Darren were of Pasifika background and, as with their school's student population in general, were of a low SES. 3D were observed on four occasions by two researchers and the following is an account of one of these lessons in which Scott, the teacher, conducted a maths activity on graphs. This lesson was held during the mid-morning session. There were 28 students in the class and while similar to 3C in many ways there was a higher number of LBOTE students, some of whom were first phase ESL. The students sat in groups of four at seven sets of desks with

all seats having a clear view of the board. The maths activity was preceded by a regular spelling mastery test and students were all sitting quietly and upright waiting to begin. Scott read out 25 words, included each in a sentence and then repeated the word. He moved around the room as he was doing this to ensure students were not copying. When the test was finished, students exchanged sheets with their neighbour to be marked. Scott chose students to spell each word before they were then handed back to him at the front to check and record marks at a later time. This was followed by a short dictation in a textbook with Lottie, Darren and the rest of the class listening intently. On completing this, Scott provided immediate feedback choosing students to spell each content word. The class then proceeded to complete some related exercises in the book with Scott moving around to each student to check both this and the dictation. There was a bit of chatter but generally students were on-task. Darren finished quickly and sat up quietly with his arms folded on the desk. Shortly after this, Scott asked students to pass their books to the front.

These activities proved a suitable segue into the maths activity that followed. Students were asked to move to the floorspace at the front and Scott commenced a class discussion about graphs, referring initially to their previous day's work on the topic. He questioned students about the purpose of graphs and what was required in constructing their own, demonstrating what to do on the board. He went on to discuss different types of data that could be graphed based on students' interests. Students were quite engaged in the discussion and volunteered possible topics such as students' favourite pets, foods, colours. Darren was close to the front, sitting cross-legged and listening intently. Lottie, behaving in a similar fashion, was sitting nearby. Students were then asked to vote on a topic to research and most selected favourite pets. Categories were selected, for example, cats, dogs and rabbits, six in all and students indicated their preference by a show of hands. Scott felt more data was required and so a group of six students were sent next door to record the preferences of another Year 3 class. Meanwhile, the remaining students returned to their desks and wrote the heading Scott had on the board at the top of the next page in their maths book. After two or three minutes, when the students returned with the data from the other class, Scott added to the board, tallying amounts and asking students to construct the axes in their books as he had previously demonstrated, though not at this stage using the data. Scott moved around the room checking students' work. Most seemed very engaged though there was a small amount of chatter. When this task was complete, Scott demonstrated how to record data on the graph, modelling the results for two categories and then having students complete the remainder, colouring each column they drew differently. This process was then replicated with another topic – favourite foods – with students then asked comparative questions about the two graphs. Lottie had been working quietly on her own and offered responses to these. Darren, who tended to have a bit of a chat during this time, still completed his work and also showed an eagerness to respond to questions.





Not only was there a far greater degree of teacher direction and explanation in the class compared with 3C, there was also more student involvement. Scott seemed to keep students' behaviour in check through an appropriate staging of activities and maintaining a strong presence in the room. He also moved among students monitoring their progress during independent work and encouraging involvement during periods of whole class instruction. These techniques seemed to promote a discipline of engagement. Students were keen to be involved and in doing so in such a focused and directed way acquired important skills and understanding. The interest generated by the techniques Scott employed was crucial here. As Tomkins (1962, p.33) explains, interest has a 'psychological function as an aid to sustained effort'. In effect, interest and ability operate in tandem. It is the accumulation of interest that supplies the necessary effort to acquire ability. Interest and its accumulation, however, are not simply psychological; they have a bodily dimension as in the capacities acquired through effort. They constitute the dispositions to learning that are the focus of this study and, rather than being culturally specific, are formed through the repeated engagement in practices that foster such dispositional tendencies.

#### 5.4.5 Finau's class – 3E

The 28 students in Finau's class were from a range of backgrounds: Pasifika, Chinese, Anglo, Vietnamese, Lebanese and Iraqi with the first two being the largest groups. Most of these students, including Finau, were of a low SES and many were experiencing problems with both their oral and written English skills. Finau, a Pasifika student, was near the bottom in reading and maths and struggled with his school-work. His class was observed on four occasions by two researchers and this account is based on one of these. In this session students forwarded into class after a short orderly morning assembly in the main quadrangle. Kate, Finau's teacher, had organised the desks in the classroom into four groups, two with boys and two with girls. Finau sat at the back at a desk with his Pasifika mates, Fred and Eli, and a couple of Chinese and Arabic speaking boys. The orderliness of the assembly dissipated very quickly on students entering the room. There was quite a bit of noise as students chattered, swung back and forth on their chairs and played with equipment on their desks, including soft toys and drink bottles that seemed to take pride of place. Over this clatter and talk Kate said 'Good Morning' but without gaining a suitable response she started to count to attract students' attention. Although this managed to quieten the class, silence was not maintained and there seemed a constant hum in the classroom that was at times checked by Kate with either more counting, reprimands or techniques such as hands-on-heads or fingers-on-lips. Amid this noise, Finau also swung on his chair and fiddled with his pencils and a plastic sleeve. Unable to achieve quiet, Kate simply started the lesson which involved a discussion of the week's spelling words, a different list for set groups in the class followed by students copying their words into workbooks. Although students had no more than ten words to write, this activity took 30 minutes. Students worked at various rates. Some finished early and settled down to read or complete other work but many were slow to start, Finau, Fred and Eli especially so. Instead, they were enjoying kicking each other under the table and attempting to disrupt other



students in their group with various levels of success. Fred and Eli eventually commenced writing but Finau hadn't even put pen to paper when one of the other students at his table – a Chinese boy – had already finished and started reading.

During this time Kate moved around the room checking other students' work or having students come to her desk at the other side of the room directly opposite to where Finau was sitting. She did not seem aware of the different levels of application within the class. When Finau finally did get down to work and finish he then left the class to put something in his bag and when he returned he roamed around the room at one point playing with a toy clock on a cupboard at the back. Finally, he was asked to sit down as the class moved onto one of two other tasks in this two-hour morning session: a language and poetry exercise and a comprehension exercise, both including a short period of discussion in which students showed limited interest. Finau and Eli demonstrated great difficulty with the writing and Kate completed the language and poetry activity with them out the front and had them copy out what they had undertaken together. This, however, also proved difficult for the boys. They were frequently distracted by others at their group of desks and had difficulty concentrating, though by this stage the task they were required to complete lacked any intellectual rigour, it was simply copying – busy work. This was very much the type of work the class as a whole undertook, what seemed like a series of unrelated tasks without sustained treatment of a topic and the appropriate scaffolding.

As a result a kind of discipline of disengagement governed this pedagogic space which was not simply a function of the curriculum implementation; it was also generated by the regimen of restlessness that pervaded the room. While Walter, Eric and Braydon from some of the other classrooms that were observed, also displayed disengaged behaviour it seemed a function of a different type of disciplinarity, namely a discipline of control that proved disabling for these students. Quiet was enforced but indifference continued as students appeared to have little interest to propel them. With Finau the situation was quite different. The class evoked a discipline that was itself disengaging as for most students it did not even allow the possibility for concentration through an enforced quiet and control. Some students with an existing habitus inclined towards academic endeavour may have been able to apply themselves to their work, and indeed this seemed to be the case. For many, such as Finau, the techniques employed in this classroom failed to equip them with the discipline to learn and, left to rely on their existing habitus, they simply floundered and instead appeared to be cultivating a disposition of indifference towards scholarly pursuits.

#### 5.4.6 Vincent's class – 3F

Vincent, a student of Chinese background, was in a 3/4 composite class. As he had arrived late in the year he was placed in the only class with a vacancy. His teacher, Carly, referred to it as 'the strangest class I've ever had'. Composite classes are generally comprised of a number of independent workers given the







teacher is required to direct their attention to different groups at different times of the day, yet Carly's class had very few really able children. As it was 90% LBOTE, mainly Arabic speaking, Chinese and Pasifika students, there were a number who required ESL support including two Afghani refugees and two African refugees. There were also two integration deaf children and two IM or students with a mild intellectual disability. They were a handful to say the least and Carly was very strict in relation to discipline. This lesson, which was one of three observation sessions, occurred halfway through the middle session of the day when students tend to get a bit restless. The Year 4 students were sitting at their desks in a group arrangement, quiet and focused. Carly was sitting on the floor with the Year 3 students discussing a comprehension exercise they were about to complete. Questions were written on a board close by and Carly was discussing each with the students and possible answers. She insisted that students replied with full sentences and demonstrated how to do this using part of the question. Sitting in a circle on the floor students seemed excited and engaged in the lesson but Carly insisted they sit correctly and didn't call out, though she did encourage quite a bit of orderly discussion. When she felt satisfied that they understood what was required, the students moved to their desks to complete the activity. With the exception of one of the IM children, who was distracted but not disturbing others, students settled down quickly to work. Activities seemed fast-paced. After ten minutes of sustained work students returned to the floor to discuss their work with Carly who then collected books to be marked.

This activity was followed by a Maths lesson. Using plastic blocks Carly engaged the class in a concrete activity about fractions. She put four blocks in a group on the floor and then divided this in two asking students for a number sentence to explain what she had done. After one of the class responded with  $\frac{1}{2}$  of 4 = 2, she then had the class repeat this in unison. Carly then followed this with a number of similar examples where she had individual students, including Vincent, manipulate the blocks to produce different fractions and then suggest an appropriate number sentence. Carly then moved to an abstract treatment of the same process using textbook examples with numerical notation. She discussed a number of these and then had those children who felt confident return to complete a set of equations. The remainder stayed with Carly on the floor and she gave these students some further explanation about the transition from the concrete to abstract formulation. Vincent was one of those who moved to his desk. He quickly completed his work, had Carly check each answer and then moved to one of the two computers in the room to complete extension maths work. Some other children who finished their work went on to read books just prior to lunch.

While there were various sites of learning most children appeared engaged in their particular activities. The capacities these students demonstrated, such as an application to work, seemed to have a direct relationship to the pedagogy that Carly employed. No doubt, as a function of practices within the home, Vincent clearly possessed a habitus that inclined him to academic endeavour, yet this may not have been the case with other students such as the Pasifika

children and the Afghanis and Africans, the latter with disrupted schooling. It appears that over a period of time in Carly's class these students had embodied the skills required for independent work. While the disciplinary force generated by Carly's pedagogy tended towards control, it also had an enabling effect, unlike that found in Eric, Walter and Braydon's classrooms. This was not a class where constant docility was the rule – the kind of class as an 'efficient machine' Foucault describes in which a 'morality of obedience' based on a prescriptive discipline of absolute silence and a Pavlovian process of 'signalisation' and response (Foucault, 1977, pp.164-7). Their stillness and quiet was by-and-large productive. This class was capable of sustained concentration and application and, if needed, discussion. Carly balanced control with engagement through her discussion and scaffolding of her students' learning, and, in the process, encouraged capacities of a scholarly nature.

### Summary of classroom practice and students' dispositions to learning

While 70 observation sessions were conducted in 18 classrooms, these six broadly represent the practices exhibited overall. They provide considerable insight into the pedagogy currently practised within NSW schools at a Year 3 level showing differences in organisation, classroom management and curriculum implementation, all of which have a marked impact on students' dispositions for learning no matter what their cultural background. While positive trends emerged from this qualitative enquiry there appeared to be a worrying move away from the craft of teaching which affected students in those classrooms where either a disabling discipline of control or one of disengagement were evident. The former was characterised by a pedagogy of minimal teacher input, ineffectual supervision and yet maximum quiet and control. Such an approach appeared to do little more than replicate each student's existing habitus for learning which in the case of students like Ben, of Chinese background, was not necessarily a problem, yet it provided only limited opportunities for engagement in class discussion and critical thought. For other students from across the three groups targeted in the study, without a disposition for academic endeavour, pedagogies framed by such a disciplinarity were generally disabling as their lack of engagement was never satisfactorily addressed, impacting on their overall skill development and acquisition of knowledge. A similar effect was apparent in classrooms where a discipline of disengagement appeared the norm. Although, without adequate quiet and control, such classrooms were perhaps even more problematic as even those students with a greater degree of self-discipline could be easily distracted, affecting concentration and the quality of their work.

On a more positive note there were classrooms in which practices prevailed that augmented students' existing capabilities. In each of these there was not only a strong teacher presence but active student participation effectively scaffolded through teacher direction. These classrooms, however, were characterised by different forms of discipline; either a discipline of control that proved enabling or a discipline of engagement. The former was evident in Vincent's classroom





and, while not apparent in his case, most students in his class lacked the necessary self-discipline to apply themselves to their work for sustained periods. Techniques employed by their teacher, which tended towards a discipline of control, appeared effective, however, in promoting students' engagement in learning. Routines had been established to regulate student behaviour such as limited, or no, talk during periods of independent work and strict rules regarding movement and use of equipment. This was matched by a highly scaffolded approach to curriculum delivery resulting in effective student participation. Vincent appeared to excel in this class due to a high degree of congruence between these disciplinary practices and those within this home. For other students without this advantage the routines they met in the classroom were clearly encouraging a greater engagement in learning but persistent intervention of this type would be necessary for this to be sustained and for these students to acquire a disposition more inclined towards scholarly pursuits.

In Yupeng, Lottie and Darren's classrooms the level of control may not have been so intense yet there were measures in place to effectively regulate student behaviour to promote engagement in learning. These took the form of a highly scaffolded approach to curriculum delivery, considerable teacher explanation and close monitoring of student progress during lessons. The latter was more apparent in Lottie and Darren's classroom as students were experiencing not only greater difficulties with their learning but lacked the same degree of self-discipline that Yupeng and most of his classmates displayed. As such, checks for on-task behaviour were more regularly required. These two classrooms, however, exhibited a discipline of engagement and while students in 3B appeared more disposed to academic endeavour, this approach also produced pleasing outcomes for 3D.

Despite the diversity present in the sample such as differences in ethnicity, socioeconomic background and gender, it seemed there were certain classroom practices that proved effective for all students in terms of encouraging engagement in learning and promoting a disposition to do so. These practices typically included: effective scaffolding of curriculum, both in terms of content and the language students required in processing it, detailed teacher explanation and active student participation. Together with this, it appeared students required both quiet and time for independent application of knowledge and skills, yet with the appropriate support and supervision of teachers if required. In classrooms where these practices were evident students seemed to thrive no matter what their ethnic background. This is not to say that ethnicity and cultural identity are of little importance in terms of schooling, rather it is important to bear Holliday's comment in mind that:

*'If we think of a people's behaviour as defined and constrained by the culture in which they live, agency is transferred away from the individual to the culture itself.'* Holliday, (2005, p.18)

The students involved in this study, namely those of Pasifika, Chinese and Anglo backgrounds all have the potential to succeed academically, yet it is the practices in which they engage at home and school which will either assist or impede this process. Schools, therefore, have a huge responsibility to ensure classroom practices effectively meet students' needs and appropriately augment the capacities embodied within the home.





# Conclusion

## A focus on practice

This study has sought to examine the links between ethnicity and what we have termed the *scholarly habitus*, dispositions of learning essential for successful participation in schooling, particularly in regards to students of Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo backgrounds. While to some extent the results of the study seem to reinforce the stereotypical representations of Chinese and Pasifika students discussed in the introduction – the results of those of Anglo background being far more variable – these were seen to be not so much an automatic consequence of ethnicity, nor its interface with class or gender, but a function of the practices in which students engaged on an everyday basis both inside and outside school. These practices are of course patterned by ethnicity, class and gender and, so too, a range of other factors, but by using practice as the starting point the study was able to more effectively investigate the basis of these stereotypes and to understand the ways in which certain educational capacities are acquired.

A focus on practice is also of benefit in that ethnicity itself is such a complex category. It is not singular or fixed nor does it have any biological basis. Rather, it is a process of collective negotiation. While this study was not investigating students' ethnic identity as such, it became clear that being 'Chinese', 'Pasifika' or 'Anglo' may be experienced very differently by individual students. Those who consider themselves of Chinese background may have arrived in Australia from China, Taiwan, Singapore, Fiji, Malaysia or even the UK or USA. They may be Australian-born or their families may have lived in Australia for generations. Such variation was evident in the study. The term 'Pasifika' has even less explanatory use, given it is simply a term of convenience used to refer to students from a wide range of Pacific nations with very different languages, traditions and histories. The label 'Anglo' poses other problems. In a way it operates as an ethnically-neutral term with teachers generally individualising students of Anglo background or choosing to privilege categories such as class or gender over any notion of 'Anglo' ethnicity in explaining academic performance. To complicate matters even further, students may have parents from quite different ethnic backgrounds. In fact, one of the Pasifika students in the study from Fiji had a grandparent of Chinese background.

Given this complexity one could ask why use the terms 'Chinese', 'Pasifika' or 'Anglo' in the first place or indeed conduct a study examining the relationship between ethnicity and academic performance. In terms of both social perceptions and forms of self-identification, these terms are meaningful for people and therefore useful analytically. We might add that because ethnicity is a socially and historically constructed category, not despite this, it is a useful tool for exploring the social patterns of commonality and difference in practices and outcomes. The fact that ethnicity is complex should not inhibit the use of this term; it just means we shouldn't think of it as static or indeed as a label that exclusively defines a student's cultural identity or performance at school. Educational achievement *is* patterned in terms of ethnicity, but the problem







is that we are not sure of the ways in which this occurs and research has not always taken account of the complexity of the process, as is evident in the simplistic notions of ethnicity that underpin learning styles research.

Generally, problems not only arise from essentialising ethnicity – whereby it is viewed as the definitive aspect of identity – but also the tendency to reify it. Analytically, the reification of ethnicity – conceiving it as a thing – makes no sense, as it fails to capture the processual nature of an individual's ethnic identity. Baumann (1997, p.211) discusses this in terms of Whitehead's 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness', whereby the fluidity and sometimes contradictory nature of both ethnicity and the broader category of culture are ignored. Such a view applied within education tends to result in misguided and ineffective intervention in addressing the poor educational outcomes of some ethnic groups or the lack of certain skill development in others, as it does not account for the complex array of factors that affect a student's performance at school.

A focus on practice, rather than ethnicity exclusively, means emphasis can be placed on the capacities required for effective academic performance, how these are acquired and why they are unevenly distributed. Agency then shifts from ethnicity and cultural background to the students themselves and the home and school practices that constitute them. This shift in focus does not reduce achievement to a product of individual performance, downplaying the impact of socio-cultural processes and focusing on individual psychology; rather it allows for a more nuanced analysis of students' cultural background. In such a way culture is not simply perceived as ethnicity, or as a more sophisticated construct combined with gender and class but, as Wickner (1997, p.40) explains, 'as a set of dispositions acquired by individuals in the process of living'. Educational achievement, therefore, can be understood as not only a product of these macro-cultural processes but, also, of what students do in the course of their everyday lives. Success then is dependent on the acquisition of certain dispositions of learning which, it is viewed here, collectively constitute a *scholarly habitus*.

An analysis of practice, however, requires a particular methodology, one that not only allows for the identification of broad trends but is also sensitive to the intricate patterning of students' experience. For this reason, as detailed in Chapter 1, a kind of 'methodological pluralism' was employed that involved a survey of parents of Year 3 children, detailed interviews with students and their parents from each of the target groups, teachers, principals and community representatives and also classroom observation. In addition to this, a detailed literature review of the following topics was undertaken: notions of culture and ethnicity, the relationship between ethnicity and achievement, the relationship between achievement and motivation, notions of educational capital and habitus, the corporeality of learning and factors affecting the achievement rates of Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo students. Finally a range of documentary material collected during school visits was also examined to enhance our understanding of the culture of each school and the individual experience of the students involved in the study. This wealth of data was analysed in some detail using the computer software packages SPSS for the survey material and

“Culture is a set of dispositions required by individuals in the process of living.”

— Wickner (1997, p.40)

NVivo to examine themes that emerged from the interviews. Rather than a broad thematic analysis of the observational data, which it was felt would not adequately capture the detailed dynamics of the classroom interaction, researchers' field notes were analysed in full and patterns of practice relating to the

organization of the pedagogic space, classroom regimen and curriculum implementation together with the classroom behaviour of target students, those belonging to each target group and the class as a whole, were considered. The results of the analysis of each data set then framed the different chapters within the report some dealing exclusively with one set of data, others a combination.

### Surveying practice

In drawing on the survey data, Chapter 2 provided some interesting demographic detail on the Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo families from the initial group of ten schools. Together with this, preliminary insights into the different homework routines and extracurricular activities of the Year 3 students from each of these target groups were provided. As already discussed, however, a survey is only a blunt instrument for gaining an understanding of parents' engagement in schooling and the aspirations they hold for their children's education. In terms of the educational qualifications of parents there was a stark contrast between the three groups. There was a far greater number of Anglo and Chinese parents with post-secondary qualifications compared with those of Pasifika background. Also, none of the Pasifika parents had a higher degree unlike the Anglo and Chinese parents who were both represented within this category, though the former were seen to have the higher proportion. These results are significant in terms of numerous studies that document the similarity between parents' own educational attainment and that of their children's (Sticht, 1988; Haveman & Wolfe, 1996; Anderson & Bruce, 2004). The strong correlation these studies reveal is generally attributed to the educational capital that parents possess, namely the skills and knowledge of value within education and also how their own experience and performance at school impact upon expectations they may hold for their children.

The survey also revealed major differences between the income levels of each of the target groups. In determining the sample in the original research design a considerable difference between the SES of the Chinese and Pasifika respondents was anticipated given the differences in migration paths and relative affluence of their countries of origin. Schools with higher concentrations of Chinese students tended to be high SES whereas those with Pasifika students were of low SES. For this reason the three different groups of schools were included in the study: those with high percentages of Chinese students, those with high percentages of Pasifika students and those with some representation of both. Anglo students of both high and low SES were represented in the three groups of schools. Despite variation in class background across the three target groups, as indicated by income level and educational qualifications,





overall, respondents of Anglo background tended to be of a higher SES than the other two groups. In comparison there were more Pasifika parents in the lowest income bracket, whereas there was equal representation of Chinese respondents in both the highest and lowest income brackets.

To some extent the differences the survey reveals are useful given this strong correlation that numerous studies indicate exists between parental income, educational qualifications and their children's educational attainment (Mortimore, 1997; Thrupp, 1998; Lareau, 1989, Teese, 2007). It may explain the poor academic performance of many Pasifika children in that a high proportion within NSW are of a very low SES and so educational attainment is not so much directly related to ethnicity but the ways in which it intersects with other factors, primarily class. This explanation, however, proves less convincing in relation to the Chinese students. SES may have some impact on the academic performance of Chinese students but overall it seems variable. While there were exceptions, Chinese students from both high and low SES backgrounds seemed to perform exceptionally well at school with a higher percentage on average gaining university entrance than those of Anglo background (Schneider & Lee, 1990; Wallace, 2008).

Similar results are evident in the USA (Abboub & Kim, 2005; Don, Don & Nishida, 1995) and the UK (Modood, 2004). Modood (2004, p.89), for example, writing on the performance of ethnic minorities students in the UK, found that more than twice the proportion of 18-24 year old Chinese, Other Asian, Indian and African students enter university than do whites. Also, while he found that it was generally true that a higher proportion of these minority groups had a middle-class profile, this was not invariable. There was something else going on, something that researchers seemed to have missed. From Modood's perspective it was because they had not asked the appropriate questions (Modood, 2004, p.101). Research does show that class is the major determinant of educational success (Mortimore, 1997) but while such umbrella terms are helpful to an extent, they don't reveal much about individual student performance nor do they provide effective means for intervention in improving student outcomes. Focus in the past has been on righting the imbalance that class creates. There was, and perhaps still is, a view that inequalities resulting from differences in parents' income and educational qualifications can be erased with a more equitable distribution of resources — This is one of the major objectives of the former Disadvantaged Schools Program. While resource equity is of considerable importance, it is not enough to achieve equity in terms of educational outcomes. It isn't only macro-factors such as class that should receive analytic attention but also the micro-practices in which different groups of students engage to determine the degree to which these might impact upon performance and so explain differential achievement, as is the case here between Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo students. To Modood (2004, p.101) such a focus on practice is 'an extremely fruitful line of enquiry' and one which, until now with this study, has remained unexplored. It is to these concerns that the survey next turned, questioning respondents, among other things, about their children's homework routines and extracurricular activities.

Data here was quite telling, revealing major differences between the three groups. Responses from parents indicated that Chinese students not only spent more time completing homework during the week than their Anglo and Pasifika peers but they were more likely to complete it in their bedroom or a study, working independently but generally supervised by parents. In contrast, Anglo and Pasifika students tended to complete homework in the kitchen or lounge room, very different settings that may have an affect on their approach to learning and their ability to engage in independent work at other times. In addition to these differences, the Chinese students were given far more additional work by their parents to supplement their school homework and, across the three groups, were also involved far more in extracurricular activities, especially learning a musical instrument. The survey data seemed to establish that Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo students were engaged in quite different practices outside school which may impact upon their learning. Survey data, however, can only reveal so much. The study, therefore, sought to investigate these differences in far more detail through interviews about students' home and school practices and also through classroom observation to see if differences in practice may foster different dispositions to learning and so provide some explanation for their differential achievement rates. Firstly, however, we wanted to investigate if the three groups of students did display any differences in their dispositions towards learning and also what perceptions teachers held in relation to this.

### Embodied capital

These areas of concern were the focus of Chapter 3 which, in drawing on the observational data, provided accounts of students with quite differently capacitated bodies. Some students displayed a readiness to work. They were quiet and still, sat upright and listened attentively, prepared to engage in classroom activities. If this involved working independently they settled quickly showing concentration and a sustained application to work. They also seemed to have embodied a particular posture for literate practice. They had assumed a naturalness about their grip of the pen, ease with writing and a certain orientation that Munns (2007) refers to as 'in-task' as opposed to just 'on-task' behaviour. They were engaged in learning but this seemed predicated on their bodily capacity to do so, a discipline to learn that governed their approach to scholarly endeavour. The form of composure and focused attention they displayed to independent work did not seem to inhibit these children from also actively participating in class discussion and group activities. The skills of sustained application they possessed were transferable; they were simply applied differently to another context of learning.

Importantly, these observable skills were of a bodily nature. While they clearly aided cognition they were not cognitively derived nor were they a function of psychological predisposition. They seemed more a matter of embodied habits of learning that had become almost second nature; acquired tendencies formed through repeated performance. They can be termed *second nature* in that they seem 'natural' but are really 'cultural', a product of everyday practice which





are often mistaken as naturally occurring or, in seemingly being characteristic behaviour of particular ethnic groups, a function of cultural pathology. The cultural theorist Brian Massumi (2002, p.11) explains,

*'The problem has been that the concern for 'naturalisation' was one-sided, only attending to half of becoming. Of tremendous help in looking at both sides is the concept of 'habit'. Habit is an acquired automatic self-regulation. It resides in the flesh. Some say in matter. As acquired, it can be said to be 'cultural'. As automatic and material, it can pass for 'natural'.'*

While we sat in classrooms and observed students displaying these capacities that had to them become second nature, there were others where this was not the case. Rather than a discipline to learn, there were many who exhibited little bodily control and lacked any real engagement in learning. They were restless and fidgeted; played with equipment on their desks, rocked back and forth on their chairs and chatted unproductively to other students. They had great difficulty applying themselves to their work and displayed an awkwardness towards literate practice often evident in their slumped posture and the poor pen grip they assumed when writing. These students had habituated a kind of disengagement that did not dispose them to scholarly activity. Without the appropriate degree of self regulation their bodies, and so too their minds, were not focused on learning. They had simply not acquired the necessary embodied capital for successful participation in schooling.

Still other students exhibited quite different forms of embodiment. There were those who were quiet during independent work but not productively so. They had instead developed capacities for task avoidance remaining quiet to avoid detection by teachers but lacking the discipline to apply themselves in a sustained way to their work. While their bodies were not necessarily still, they were not disruptive. They had assumed a kind of 'confined disengagement' that was similarly disabling. Generally these students also had some difficulty with writing, not only in terms of style and content but the mechanical process of forming letters which was impacting upon their progress overall. Quiet, then, as with talk, can be both productive and unproductive. As was explained in Chapter 3, in an examination of these dispositions, forms of embodiment only operate as *physical* or *embodied capital* in contexts where they are functional and productive. In terms of a notion of capital, action, therefore, needs to be conceived as situated (Shilling, 2004). While certain skills are transferable, this is not always the case and so students must acquire the appropriate capacities for the range of learning contexts in which they engage at both home and school.

While there were students from across the three target groups who had embodied these different dispositions towards learning, there was a strong tendency for those of Chinese background to display the capacities which seemed to dispose them far more towards scholarly engagement. Sonia, discussed in Chapter 3, seemed to typify this. There appeared to be far more Anglo and especially Pasifika students in the classrooms we observed whose behaviour marked them as disengaged, either through being restless as with



Sonny or unproductively quiet and lacking application, as with Eric. This disparity in physical capital seemed to align with the different aspirations the parents and students from across the three groups held. The Chinese parents who were interviewed seemed to have much higher aspirations for their children, especially in relation to the prospect of them attending a selective high school or with their future careers. Their children were also far more likely to nominate a professional occupation rather than a manual or service job than were the Anglo or Pasifika students. While differences in SES seemed to impact on the choices of the Anglo and Pasifika students this did not appear to be the case with those of Chinese background. With these students there seemed a keen desire to achieve no matter what their SES. This desire had assumed a material form as bodily capacity, not simply resulting from will, as in a notion of ethnic drive, but a training of the body to perform; the desire to achieve fuelling, and being fuelled by, their resultant capacitation.


This patterning of different aspirations and dispositions to learning across the three target groups was interpreted in various ways by the teachers involved in the study. While there seemed general agreement that these differences existed, some teachers were reluctant to link them to any notion of cultural proneness. Instead they qualified their acknowledgement of disparity in achievement between the three groups by referring to students who proved exceptions to the rule, as indeed there were. They seemed keen to avoid reinforcing the stereotypes of the Chinese and Pasifika learner. However, while these teachers did not deny this patterning of performance, they did not seem able to offer any suitable explanation for its occurrence without appearing to confirm the stereotypes. Some teachers did make reference to the work ethic of many Chinese students and problems with Pasifika students completing homework and applying themselves in class but, by and large, students' ethnicity seemed to cloud any direct relationship that was drawn between practice and performance. Rather than achievement being viewed as an outcome of practices, to some teachers it was simply an attribute of culture which the learning styles literature, with which many were familiar, simply confirmed. From a pedagogic perspective essentialising ethnicity in this way is problematic as it limits the possibilities to effect change and so modify practice and improve learning outcomes.

## Practices within the home

Chapter 4, therefore, sought to investigate the practices that the students engaged in at home in far more depth. The survey had indicated that there were differences between the homework routines and extracurricular activities of the three groups but interviews with the students themselves, their parents, teachers and community representatives provided far more detail of the ways in which these practices may be formative in the development of the different dispositions to learning described in Chapter 3. As the survey revealed, the Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo students had very different approaches to completing homework. While the interview data confirmed that the Chinese students were spending far more time on their homework and completing more of it, the more routinised nature of what they did is also significant. While many of the Anglo and Pasifika







**“Through regular completion of homework many of the Chinese students were developing a discipline towards independent study; a second nature ingrained through practice.”**

students only completed homework on a Monday night or on an irregular basis during the week, the Chinese students were more likely to complete homework every night – with the exception of Friday night – and often on the weekends. While some teachers were critical of what they saw as an overemphasis on homework by many Chinese parents,

and in some cases such criticisms need to be addressed, this regularity is important in relation to the formation of habits. Through regular completion of homework many of the Chinese students were developing a discipline towards independent study; a second nature ingrained through practice. In effect they were receiving a kind of academic apprenticeship, a training of the body for scholarly endeavour, with their parents seemingly realising the importance of this in the early years.

Unlike the survey, the interviews were also able to shed more light on parental supervision of homework and detail about where homework was undertaken. In comparison to the Pasifika and Anglo students, those of Chinese background seemed to be more actively supervised by their parents ensuring homework was completed, providing assistance and checking when it was finished. Factors relating to low SES seemed to have a significant impact on parental supervision of homework in Anglo and Pasifika households. Many Pasifika parents who were shiftworkers found it difficult to find the time whereas often the low SES Anglo parents simply attached little value to homework and so were reluctant to supervise their children's work. Both Anglo and Pasifika students also seemed more likely to complete homework outside the home in after school care or homework centres. While these facilities can prove valuable in providing space and time for students to complete homework, they are still sites outside the home and so, unless time is also made available within the home; academic engagement is perceived as an activity quite separate to students' home experience. Many Chinese students did attend coaching colleges and there were those who also went to after school care. The emphasis given to academic endeavour within the domestic sphere was also evident in the way in which the majority of Chinese students completed their work sitting at a desk either in their bedroom or a study or other space set aside for this purpose with the home. This did not appear to be the case with either the Pasifika or Anglo students who, if completing school work at home, were far less likely to do so in a space specifically designed for this purpose.

Yet it was not only practices around homework that seemed to instil a particular self-control and discipline within many of the Chinese students. A high proportion of all the students in the study were engaged in a range of extracurricular pursuits but, overall, Chinese students seemed to be doing far more, and also they were participating in a far greater variety of activities. Significantly, while SES seemed to play a role here in terms of limiting the activities some Anglo and Pasifika students attended, it did not appear to have much of an

impact on the Chinese students. There seemed to be a view, which some of the Chinese parents foregrounded in interviews, that it was important for their children to be occupied, to apply themselves to learning some new skill. The relationship between this form of application and academic endeavour is difficult to determine. There are studies that indicate links between sporting prowess (Sibley & Etnier, 2003; Taras, 2005) or learning a musical instrument (Costa-Giomi, 2004; Schellenberg, 2004) and academic achievement. This is not the focus here. Our concern is not so much about establishing any correlation between these skills but identifying patterns of practice and what this may suggest about students' levels of application and how their bodies are disciplined in different ways. In comparison to the Chinese, many of the Pasifika students, especially the girls, engaged in very few extracurricular pursuits. While many did attend church-related dancing and singing activities that had a strong social focus, there did not seem the same imperative to learn a skill and for their time to be occupied with more structured activities outside school as was the case with many of the Chinese students.

Reading practices within the home and also the library attendance of students from each of the target groups was also quite different. Chinese and high SES Anglo students tended to read far more chapter books and more so in their own time than Pasifika and low SES Anglo students. Overall, however, Chinese students more regularly visited and borrowed from local libraries than did the other students involved in the study. Reading and engagement with books appeared to be highly prized, yet the value attached to these pursuits was not something ephemeral, simply a love of books or reading. Rather, value here assumed a materiality inscribed in students' bodies as habits formed through iterative performance in these activities. And so, within their homes, as a result of the practices in which they engaged, the three target groups of students were acquiring different dispositions towards learning, a habitus that was either inclined or disinclined towards scholarly endeavour. As Bourdieu (1999, p.87) points out 'the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specifically pedagogic message)'. While Bourdieu does consider schooling important, as he acknowledges it has the potential to transform the habitus, there is a tendency in his work to give emphasis to its reproductive tendencies. There seems little room for the enabling potential of pedagogy, the ways in which what happens in classrooms can make a difference.

## Practices within the school

This was the focus of Chapter 5, examining school practices and the ways in which they may contribute to students' dispositions to learning. It sought to examine if, on the one hand, they simply reinforce a student's existing habitus or, on the other, prove transformative, encouraging new and productive habits of learning. Habits of course are not formed overnight. Chapter 5 was not about documenting the formation of habits but considering whole school and classroom practices and observable effects in relations to these. Prior to doing this, however, time was spent examining teachers' perceptions of whether or not





they felt students from each of the three groups responded better to particular pedagogic modes and what the students themselves may have preferred. As with data discussed in Chapter 3 concerning teachers' perspectives on the relationship between ethnicity and dispositions of learning, there were teachers who felt there were no real differences between the ways Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo students responded to different teaching methodologies. Generally, however, the majority of teachers did note some differences between Chinese and Pasifika students. They felt those of Chinese background were far more suited to teacher-directed learning and that this was an approach to which they responded well. Yet these more didactic methodologies were often criticised by teachers who not only found them limiting and reductionist, but saw them as failing to encourage skill development in oral participation and collaborative engagement which they felt many Chinese students required. Despite these criticisms of teacher-directed learning, which were often levelled against the coaching colleges that many Chinese students attended, there was an acknowledgement that the degree of support and direction they provided yielded impressive results and many Chinese students seemed to excel in being taught this way.

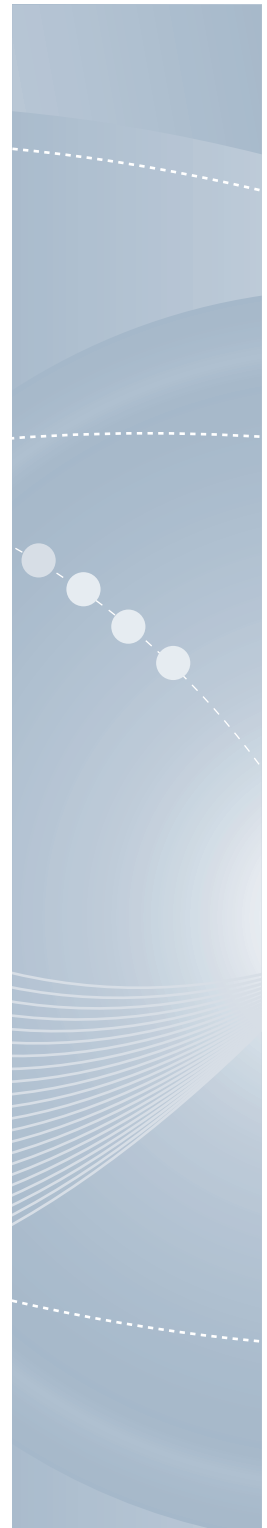
There was less agreement in terms of the pedagogic modes perceived to be best suited to teaching Pasifika students. Some teachers felt they would benefit from the structure of teacher-directed techniques and others who felt they lacked the self-discipline for this approach, as if it was a necessary prerequisite for, rather than a product of, being taught in this way. Many of these teachers were of the view that group-based and more student-directed learning would, therefore, prove more beneficial and it appeared some engagement with learning styles literature concerning Pasifika students had clearly influenced their perspective on this matter. With competing discourses around explicit and systematic teaching and student-directed learning, many teachers seemed to have difficulty articulating their views on pedagogy in broad terms and how students' ethnicity was or was not a factor in relation to their own pedagogic practice. In discussing if there was a pedagogy best suited to students of Anglo background, however, notions of ethnicity did not figure in teachers' responses. Anglo students were instead conceived more as individuals, or factors such as class, gender and family background were highlighted in considering the teaching practices that best suited their learning needs. This contrast in teachers' perspectives on the pedagogy to which they felt the three groups in the study best responded indicates ethnicity is all too often treated as a kind of macro-category of difference obscuring a more nuanced understanding of the needs of students from different ethnic backgrounds. This does not mean that ethnic difference should not be considered, for identification of students' ethnic backgrounds can be useful in monitoring performance and effectively targeting system funding. Rather, ethnicity as a category and the ways in which it impacts on learning needs to be rethought. Ethnicity should be conceived as a heterogeneous concept and also as only one of a number of factors that influence students' performance at school.

Students' comments on pedagogy seemed to contrast considerably with those of their teachers. There was not really any great difference in opinion between the three groups of students in terms of the pedagogic modes they preferred. Almost half of the students indicated a preference for group work and, interestingly, almost half of these were Chinese. Rather than the teacher-directed techniques their teachers suggested they preferred, Chinese students instead opted for group work because they could talk to and receive help from their friends working this way. The group least likely to choose group work was the Pasifika students. It seemed, despite the view of much learning styles research that this was their preferred method of learning; the majority of the small sample of Pasifika students in this study seemed to prefer working independently.

The question that yielded the more interesting responses from students and was more closely aligned with the question teachers were asked, concerned the type of teaching they felt helped them to learn best. Overwhelmingly, students across the three groups opted for either working as a whole class or independently. Despite the emphasis placed on group work within contemporary pedagogic practice, it seems the diverse mix of students within this study had problems with its effectiveness as a pedagogic mode. Many clearly liked its sociality but felt it was not suitable for some types of learning. Students' comments, therefore, did not suggest that certain pedagogic modes were more suited to students from particular ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic difference was not a discriminator as far as responses to this question was concerned. Rather, the students focused on whether pedagogic approaches were more appropriate for what they were doing. Group work was fine if they didn't have to concentrate, but for tasks such as writing they felt they needed to work independently or receive teacher instruction. While a large proportion of students clearly felt they learnt best when working on their own, observational data from classrooms indicated that a number had difficulty doing so, particularly many low SES Anglo students and those of Pasifika backgrounds. Problems seemed to arise from a lack of self-discipline and so the students had difficulty in applying themselves when working independently for any sustained period of time.

### **Modalities of discipline and the formation of a scholarly habitus**

In the final section of Chapter 5 the focus turned to examining whether or not practices within schools and classrooms actually promoted self-discipline, disposing students towards learning and heightening their ability to concentrate or whether they were left to rely on the physical capital they had embodied within the home, which, as Chapter 4 indicated, had been acquired to varying degrees by the different groups of students in the study. Across the six schools where both whole school activities and classroom interaction were observed, a range of practices engendering differing degrees or modalities of discipline were evident.





These modalities of discipline appeared to function in four distinct ways:

- a disabling discipline of control
- an enabling discipline of control
- a discipline of disengagement
- a discipline of engagement.

The comparative account of school assemblies and also the six vignettes of classroom practice included in Chapter 5, provided examples of these different disciplinary forms demonstrating the ways in which school structures and pedagogic practices affect students' engagement in learning and overall performance at school. As directed, the notion of discipline used here does not simply pertain to control, operating as a negative force inhibiting learning – though a disabling discipline of control was apparent in the pedagogy some

teachers employed and also framed some whole school practices. Discipline, here, has a broader meaning. Borrowed from the work of Foucault, it also refers to the knowledge and skills which need to be mastered in order to achieve success in particular fields (Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000, p.x). This view of discipline links with early meanings of the word recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary

**“A disciplined body is the prerequisite of an efficient gesture.”**  
— Foucault (1997, p.152)

(1989, p.735), where the verb 'to discipline' means to instruct, educate and train. As has been discussed, this discipline takes a material form, whereby students' bodies are capacitated through the discipline they embody. In light of this, Foucault was of the view that, 'a disciplined body is the prerequisite of an efficient gesture' (1977, p.152). This discipline, therefore, predisposes students towards particular types of endeavour; a discipline that takes the form of dispositions as in, what this study refers to as, a scholarly habitus. Differing degrees of discipline resulting from the repeated performance of certain practices is what distinguishes the three groups of students in this study. Although there was some variation, there was also considerable similarity within the groups – in particular the Chinese and Pasifika students – in terms of the practices in which they engaged outside school.

The disciplinary regimes operating within schools also impacted upon their bodies. For all students where positive forms of discipline were generated, such as an enabling discipline of control and a discipline of engagement, there appeared active participation in learning and sustained application to work. These forms of discipline generated by teachers' pedagogies proved enabling for all students in the classrooms where they were evident, no matter what the students' ethnicity. For many of the Chinese students, however, this was particularly the case. They had already embodied a discipline to learn from routines established within the home and so the relative congruence between home and school supported their learning and overall academic performance.

It was similarly effective for the Pasifika and Anglo students, though without the same habits of learning as those of their Chinese peers, they may not have been achieving at the same level.

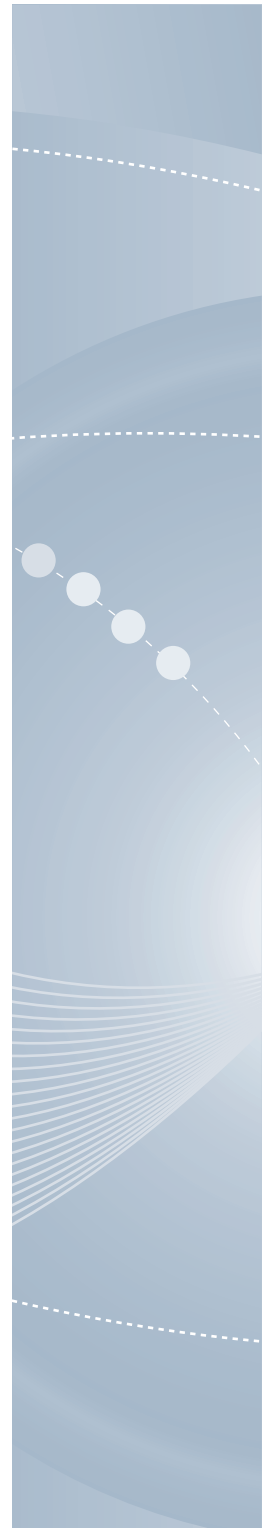
In classrooms where negative forms of discipline were the norm, such as a disabling discipline of control and a discipline of disengagement, students were less likely to be actively engaged in learning. Many, especially those from Pasifika or low SES Anglo backgrounds, were left to rely on their existing *habitus* to provide any motor or discipline to learn. In classrooms where a discipline of disengagement prevailed this was especially the case. There were far too many distractions for those students who lacked the self-discipline to work independently or participate effectively and school seemed to simply reinforce the poor habits they already possessed. In classrooms characterised by a disabling discipline of control, a different dynamic was evident, yet with similar effect. Some students completed work, others did not. The key issue was they were rarely extended and so many students, whatever their background, simply reproduced what were familiar patterns of behaviour without acquiring the competencies they really needed.

The differential achievement rates of students from Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo backgrounds is therefore not a function of cultural pathology but rather can be attributed to the different practices in which they engage both inside and outside school and the ways these then dispose them towards learning. To Parekh (2000, p.17), culture 'is not a passive inheritance but an active process of creating meaning'. It is dependent on what individuals do. Many students of Chinese background perform well at school because of the habits of learning they have acquired within the home that predispose them towards learning at school, habits that many Pasifika and Anglo parents rely on schools to encourage in their children but which do so with varying degrees of success. Habit and the bodily dimensions of learning are generally given little emphasis within contemporary pedagogy (Watkins, 2005b). Skills of self-discipline and sustained application to work are not only generally configured as natural abilities but of little relevance in the early years of school. The fact that they too are learned and their importance to successful participation at school are similarly overlooked. While it is important for parents to encourage effective habits of learning within the home, as did many of the Chinese and other parents in this study, this is not enough. Schools and systems do not only need to rethink their support of parents around

“[culture] is not a passive inheritance but an active process of creating meaning.”

— Parekh (2000, p.17)

these bodily aspects of children's learning but to focus on the school itself as an important site of intervention in this regard. There needs to be a greater awareness of the enabling potential of discipline and for schools to promote practices that allow students to develop capacities of a *scholarly habitus* on which, it appears, successful performance at school depends.







## Future directions

The findings of this study suggest three main areas for attention in order to enhance the ability of current educational programs in NSW public schools to redress the differential achievement rates of students, especially, but not exclusively, those of language backgrounds other than English: in-service teacher professional learning, pre-service teacher training and the relations and communications between home and school. The study points towards the need in each of these areas to focus on the formation of effective habits of learning in primary school-aged students and the importance of both home and school practices in fostering these habits. It also underlines the need for a better understanding of issues of cultural diversity to address the notion of inclusivity proposed in the Quality Teaching Framework for NSW public schools. In addition, the report points to the need for further research in relation to these and other key areas.

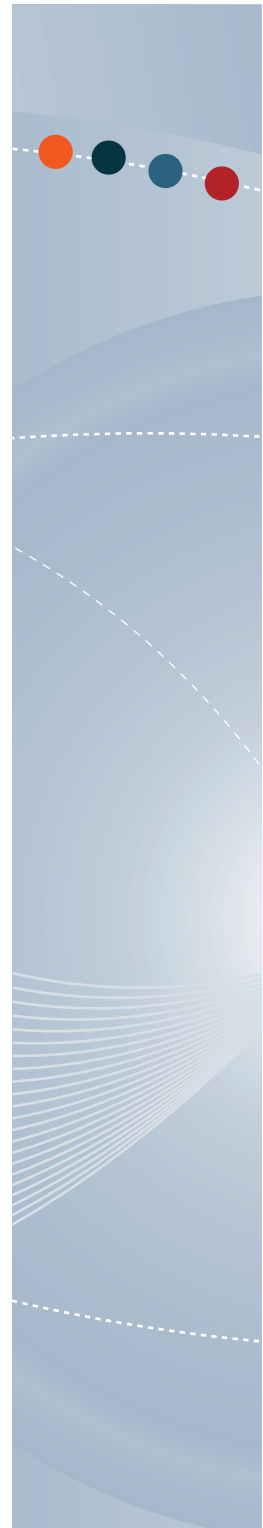
### 1. Professional learning for in-service teachers

The study revealed that participating teachers held a range of ideas about students' cultural backgrounds and learning processes, some of which were insightful, while others were contradictory or limited and based on stereotypes. The classroom observations and teacher interviews indicated classroom practices that supported the development of students' dispositions for successful participation in schooling with varying degrees of success, yet teachers did not always address the bodily dimensions of these dispositions. Moreover, they often saw these capacities in cultural terms, rather than as the outcome of home and school practices.

These findings, therefore, suggest the need for the development of professional learning materials that provide practising teachers with opportunities to enhance their understandings of cultural diversity and different cultural and home practices, the complexities of meeting the educational needs of diverse communities and the implications for teaching and learning. Such materials would be informed by the findings of this report, particularly those concerning the enabling potential of discipline, and home and school practices that develop the capacities of a scholarly habitus. This professional development would be enhanced by the conduct of a number of action inquiry projects designed to explore and extend teachers' understandings of cultural diversity, multicultural education and approaches to pedagogy. This process would aim to move beyond notions of cultural inclusion as simply cultural sensitivity towards a critical engagement with issues of how best to equip students with the capacities to participate effectively in culturally complex societies. This professional development should target teachers, school executive including principals and other education professionals.

### 2. Pre-service teacher training

These professional learning materials, designed to provide practising teachers with opportunities to enhance their understandings of cultural diversity and the importance of home and school practices, could also be developed for use in pre-service teacher training. It is therefore suggested that an investigation be





conducted of ways to promote training programs which provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to:

- develop understandings of cultural diversity and the needs of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds
- examine the impact of students' home practices on learning, and the relationship between home practices and teaching practices
- explore the implications of the development of bodily dispositions to learning for teaching and learning within schools.

### 3. Parent and community engagement

An examination of parents' attitudes towards their children's education and the importance of particular practices outside the classroom revealed a number of differences between the three target groups. Many home practices, including homework routines and extracurricular activities, aligned with the degree of development of dispositions towards scholarly endeavour and academic achievement, and therefore demand further attention in understanding the formation of effective habits amongst students.

These findings suggest that the development and delivery of parent and community information packages and workshops, involving Community Liaison Officers and other relevant professionals, which explicitly unpack the concept of the scholarly habitus and explore the implications of home practices for successful participation in schooling, would assist in building the capacity of parents from all backgrounds to support their children's learning. In addition, parents and communities would be supported in accepting responsibility for developing understandings of the cultures of schooling in NSW and working with schools to develop congruence between parental and school expectations.

### 4. Further research

Finally, the study suggests a number of areas for further research. These include:

- the degree to which the research findings can be generalised across all cultural and socioeconomic groups
- the ways conceptualisations of ethnicity, culture, multiculturalism and diversity shape schooling in a culturally diverse community and the delivery of specific programs under the label of 'multicultural education'
- the particular home practices that are significant in developing a scholarly habitus
- the particular school practices that are significant in developing a scholarly habitus
- the implications of the impact of these practices on successful participation in schooling for teaching and learning
- the importance of establishing and extending links between schools, parents and communities in the development of students' bodily dispositions towards scholarly endeavour, and the role of schools and Community Liaison Officers in fostering these links.

## Appendices

### Appendix A – Survey

Please complete the following survey by either ticking a box or writing a short answer response where indicated. This information will be used to assist in improving teaching and learning practices.

1. What is your gender? Please tick                      Male ☐    Female ☐
2. What language do you mostly speak at home? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you speak a language other than English at home?    Yes ☐    No ☐
4. What language is it? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How would you describe your cultural identify eg, Afghani, Anglo/Celtic, Australian, Chinese, Japanese, Lebanese, Samoan, Tongan?  
You may write more than one category. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. In what country were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
7. If you were not born in Australian, how long have you lived here? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How long has your Year 3 child attended school in Australia? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Is your Year 3 child male or female?                      Male ☐    Female ☐
10. What is your current occupation, eg, teacher, home duties, factory worker, unemployed? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What is your highest educational qualification, eg, primary school, high school, TAFE certificate, undergraduate university degree, postgraduate university degree, other? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What is your annual income? (optional question)  
Less than \$20, 000                      ☐  
Between \$20, 000 and \$40,000                      ☐  
Between \$40,000 and \$60, 000                      ☐  
Between \$60, 000 and \$80, 000                      ☐  
More than \$80, 000                      ☐
13. How many years has your Year 3 child attended this school?  
1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐



14. Approximately how long does your child spend doing homework each week day?  
0 mins ☐ 15 mins ☐ 30 mins ☐ 60 mins ☐ More than 60 mins ☐
15. Do you supervise your child's homework?  
always ☐ mostly ☐ sometimes ☐ never ☐
16. Do you check completed homework tasks?  
always ☐ mostly ☐ sometimes ☐ never ☐
17. Do you ever set your child extra homework tasks?  
always ☐ mostly ☐ sometimes ☐ never ☐
18. Do you think your Year 3 child enjoys homework? Yes ☐ No ☐
19. Does your Year 3 child attend a coaching college? Yes ☐ No ☐  
If yes, how often?  
1 day a week ☐ 2 days a week ☐ 3 days a week ☐ more often ☐
20. Where does your Year 3 child generally complete their homework eg  
bedroom, kitchen, lounge room? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
21. Does your Year 3 child complete work while watching TV?  
always ☐ mostly ☐ sometimes ☐ never ☐
22. Does your Year 3 child have an established homework routine?  
Yes ☐ No ☐
23. What extracurricular activities does your Year 3 child attend AND how often?  
Eg: Music lessons ☐  
Sports Training ☐  
Church Group ☐  
Singing lessons ☐  
Dance group ☐  
Other – please specify \_\_\_\_\_
24. Do these activities require extra practice or training at home?  
Yes ☐ No ☐  
If yes, how often? \_\_\_\_\_
25. Do you read with your Year 3 child at home? Yes ☐ No ☐  
If yes, how often during the week ? \_\_\_\_\_

26. Do you attend any of the following school meetings?

P and C	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
School Council	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Parent Information Sessions	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Parent/Teacher Interviews	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Community Meetings	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Fundraising Meetings	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

27. Do you want your Year 3 child to complete the exam in Year 4 for entrance to the local Opportunity Class?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

28. If 'yes', do you expect them to be successful?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

29. How would you describe your Year 3 child's level of academic achievement?

very good ☐ good ☐ satisfactory ☐ unsatisfactory ☐

30. Are you satisfied with the level of discipline at your Year 3 child's school?

Yes ☐ No ☐

### Expression of Interest

Would you be prepared to discuss these issues in more detail? It would involve a 45 minute interview with you and a 20 minute interview with your child at a time convenient to you. All information discussed in these interviews is confidential.

Yes ☐ No ☐

(If 'yes' please supply name and contact number)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate if an interpreter is required.

Yes ☐ No ☐ Language required \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your assistance in completing the survey.

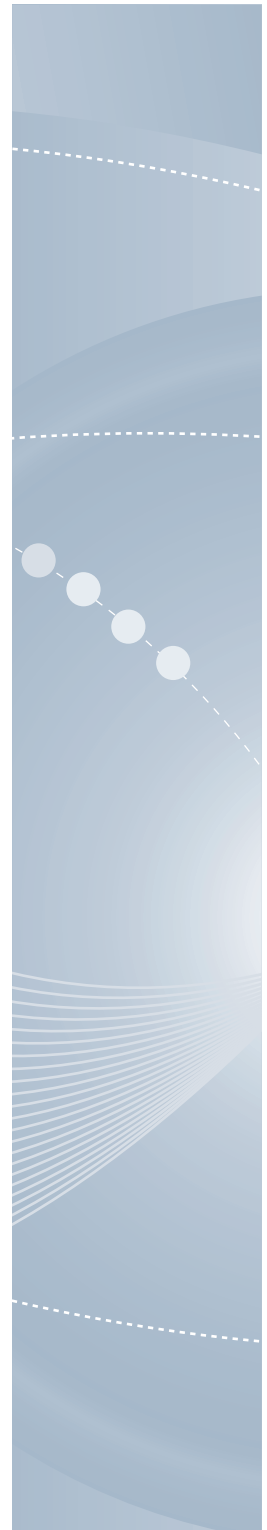




## Appendix B – Principal Interview Schedule

1. How long have you been principal at this school?
2. Have you been principal in others schools with high percentages of LBOTE students?
3. What is the total school population and what are the major cultural/linguistic backgrounds of students at this school?
4. What is the socioeconomic background of most of the students at the school?
5. How would you describe the overall ethos/culture of the school?
6. Are there noticeable differences in the academic achievement of students from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. If yes, what are they? Why do you think this is the case?
7. Are there noticeable differences in the behaviour of students from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. If yes, please describe them? Why do you think this is?
8. Are these differences ever addressed in staff meetings and/or professional development meetings?
9. What programs exist in the school to cater for these differences?
10. Do you think there are noticeable differences in the extracurricular activities of students from the different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. If yes, what are they? Why do you think this is the case?
11. Are there many students at the school who attend coaching in particular subjects outside school? If yes, are they of particular cultural/linguistic backgrounds? Why do you think this is the case?
12. Is there a difference in terms of parental involvement in the school by the different cultural/linguistic groups represented at the school eg attendance at P and C meetings, reading groups, fundraising, canteen, etc?
13. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different expectations of the school? If yes, what are they?
14. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different expectations of their children? If yes, what are they? Why do you think this is the case?
15. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different perspectives on homework? If yes, what are they?
16. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different perspectives on discipline? If yes, what are they?
17. Do many students in Year 3 sit for the UNSW competition tests and/or tests for Opportunity Classes in Year 4? Is there a greater representation of students from particular cultural/linguistic backgrounds who sit for these exams?  
If yes, why do you think this is the case?
18. What methods of communication are used to inform and contact parents at the school?

19. Is there a CLO or other community liaison representative at the school? How would you describe their role?
20. Would you describe your school as successful. Why/why not? What are the main issues currently confronting the school?
21. What would you consider to be the average age and experience of staff at the school?
22. What would you say was the overall educational philosophy governing the school?
23. Do you think there is a stronger emphasis on whole class instruction or group-based learning at the school or is it variable?
24. Do you think children from particular cultural/linguistic backgrounds respond better to particular styles of teaching. If yes, in what way?
25. As a group would you position your staff as more traditional or progressivist in teaching orientation?
26. What are your priorities for the professional development of staff this year?



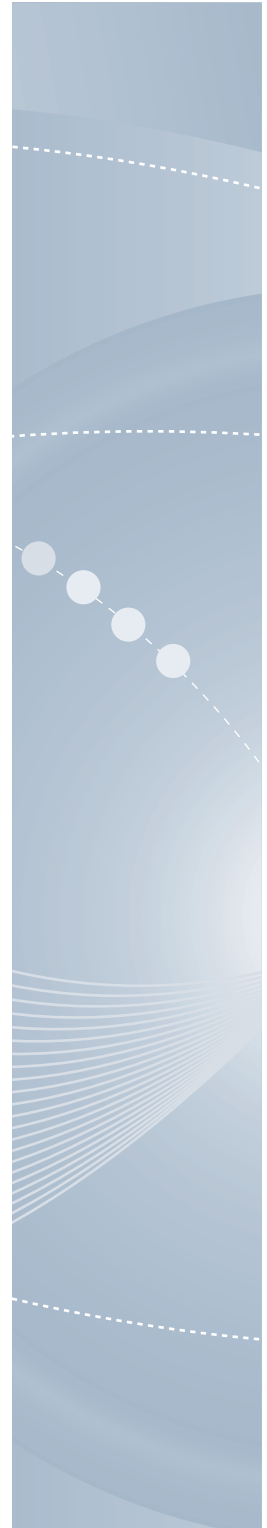


## Appendix C – Teacher (Mainstream and ESL) Interview Schedule

(Questions 12, 23 and 26 adjusted for TESOL contexts)

1. When did you complete your teacher training?
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. In how many schools have you taught?
4. What grades have you taught?
5. Where did you gain your pre-service training?
6. Was there any focus in your training on different styles or philosophies of teaching and learning?
7. Did your teacher training have a focus on TESOL or Multicultural Education?
8. How many students are in your class? What percentage are LBOTE students, Aboriginal? What ethnic groups/languages are represented in your class?
9. What is the ability range in your class? Are classes streamed or mixed ability?
10. Are there noticeable differences in the academic achievement of students in your class that are from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. If yes, what are they? Why do you think this is the case?
11. Are there noticeable differences in the behaviour of students in your class that are from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. If yes, what are they? Why do you think this is the case?
12. Do you make use of any particular programs to address these differences?
13. Are there noticeable differences in the extra curricula activities of students from the different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. If yes, what are they? Why do you think this is the case?
14. Are there many students at the school who attend coaching in particular subjects outside school? If yes, are they of a particular cultural/linguistic background? Why do you think this is the case?
15. Do you see any difference in the involvement of parents from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds in their children's education. If yes, why do you think this is the case?
16. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different expectations of their children? If yes, what are they?
17. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different perspectives on homework? If yes, what are they?
18. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different perspectives on discipline? If yes, what are they?
19. How would you describe the friendship groups of students in your class. Do students mix freely with students from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds?

20. How would you describe your approach to teaching? Would you say there was any particular educational philosophy that guides your teaching practice?
21. What do you consider to be the key ingredients for effective teaching?
22. Using the poles of traditionalist and progressivist, where would you locate your teaching practice?
23. What do you consider to be a teacher's role in the classroom?
24. What's your perspective on the way children learn?
25. How important is your role in your students' acquisition of knowledge and skills?
26. Do you tend to use more whole class instruction or group based learning in your class? At what times do you use these different pedagogic modes?
27. Do you think children from particular cultural/linguistic backgrounds respond better to particular styles of teaching? If yes, in what way?
28. Is homework given? How often and how much?
29. How do you organise the desks and seating in your room?
30. To what extent do you allow students to talk while they're working?
31. Overall, how important do you feel classroom management and control is in effective learning? What techniques do you use?
32. What would you give priority to in terms of your professional development needs?

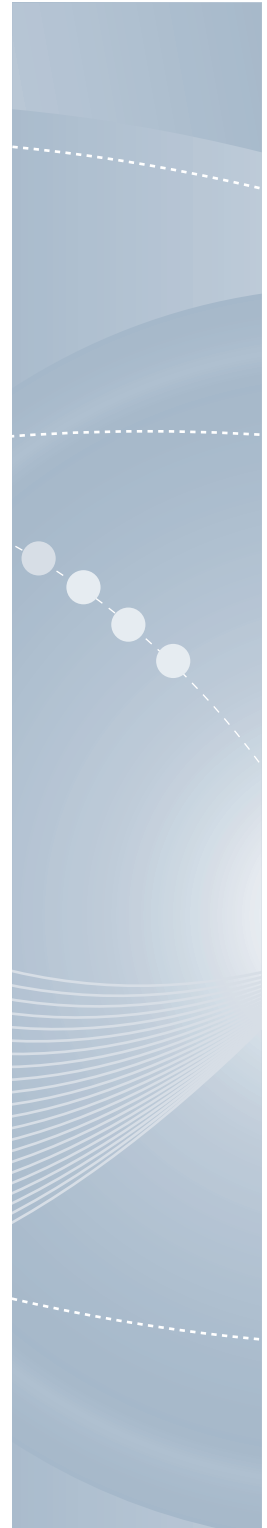




## Appendix D – DET Personnel and CLOs Interview Schedule

1. What's your current position?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. How did you acquire this position?
4. Could you give me a brief account of your own background eg how long you have lived in Australia, your own educational background, experience with relevant community, etc?
5. CLO – what training if any is required to be a CLO?
6. What's the duration of your present position?
7. CLO – What do you think are school and teachers' perspective on the role of a CLO?
8. CLO – How closely do you work with different staff members?
9. CLO – What do you think is their attitude towards you?
10. What do you see as your role?
11. Are there noticeable differences in the academic achievement of students from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. If yes, what are they? Why do you think this is the case?
12. Are there noticeable differences in the behaviour of students from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. If yes, please describe them? Why do you think this is?
13. Do you think there are noticeable differences in the extracurricular activities of students from the different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. If yes, what are they? Why do you think this is the case?
14. Is there a difference in terms of parental involvement in the school by the different cultural/linguistic groups represented at the school eg attendance at P and C meetings, reading groups, fundraising, canteen, etc?
15. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different expectations of the school? If yes, what are they?
16. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different expectations of their children? If yes, what are they? Why do you think this is the case?
17. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different perspectives on homework? If yes, what are they?
18. Do you think parents of different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different perspectives on discipline? If yes, what are they?
19. Do you think children from particular cultural/linguistic backgrounds respond better to particular styles of teaching. If yes, in what way? (Refer to document)
20. Are there different concerns for different groups of PI students eg Samoan, Tongan, etc?
21. What are relations like between these different groups?

22. Do you think the DET does enough for PI students? Should more be done to acquaint parents with the NSW Educational system?
23. Do you think there are any particular cultural barriers to learning eg girls staying home to look after kids, attitudes to homework etc?
24. How important is the role of the church in these communities?
25. Is knowledge of English an issue with PI students?
26. What do you see as the key issues relating to PI students?
27. How do you think these issues/concerns can be addressed?
28. Is it reasonable to expect parents to make considerable changes if they want their children to perform well in the NSW education system?







## Appendix E – Parent Interview Schedule

### Introduction and procedure, relate to survey

1. Does your child like school?
2. Does your child do well at school? Which subjects are they best at?
3. Is your child's experience at school what you expected it to be? Explain.
4. What aspects of your child's education are you happy with? Please specify.
5. What aspects of your child's education are you not happy with? Please specify.
6. What do you think is the main role of a primary school? Why?
7. What do you think are the most important values that a school should be teaching? Why?

### In the survey we asked about homework and want to follow up with some further questions.

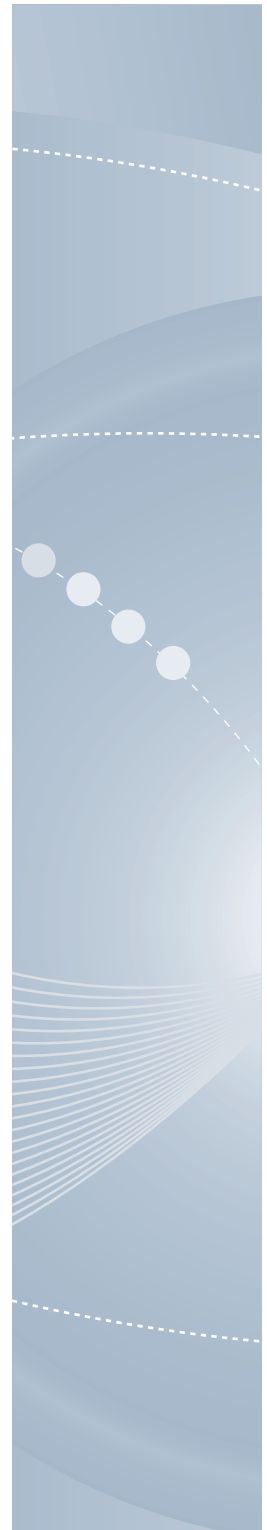
8. Do you think homework is important? Explain.
9. Do you supervise your child's homework? If yes, what do you do? If no, why not?
10. Does your child do homework every night? If not, how often?
11. How long do you think a Year 3 student should spend on homework each night?
12. Could you describe your child's homework routine, ie when and where they do it, etc.
13. In the survey you indicated that your child does/does not attend coaching. What's your view about coaching? Why do you feel your child does/does not need it?
14. Do you know about the different tests that school students can do in Years 3-6? [eg Basic Skills, opportunity class, University of NSW tests, etc]
15. How do you feel about testing in primary schools?
16. You indicated in the survey that you (do/don't) want your child to sit the opportunity class test. Why/not?
17. Have you thought about the high school they might attend?

### In the survey we asked about the activities your child was involved in outside school and wanted to ask you further questions about this.

18. Do you think extracurricular activities are an important part of your child's education? If yes, in what way? If no, why not? [prompt: do they help or get in the way of school work?]
19. Are you happy with the level of discipline at your child's class? Please explain.
20. Do you like the style of teaching used in your child's school? Why?

21. Overall, do you think a particular style of teaching is used at your child's school? How would you describe it? Eg is there more whole class teaching, group work or independent learning?
22. Do you think people from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds have different attitudes to education? If yes, what are they? [prompt them about their own community]
23. Do you think people from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds learn differently? If yes, how would you describe these different styles? [prompt about their own community]
24. Do you feel comfortable approaching the school and your child's teacher to discuss his/her schoolwork or any concerns you may have? Why/not?
25. Do you attend P and C or any other school meetings? If no, is there a particular reason why? If yes, why?
26. Do you think your child's school does enough to assist parents who have a language background other than English?
27. How important to you is your child keeping strong ties to people of your cultural background? Why/not?
28. What do you want your child to do when they grow up? Why?

Any questions you'd like to ask us?





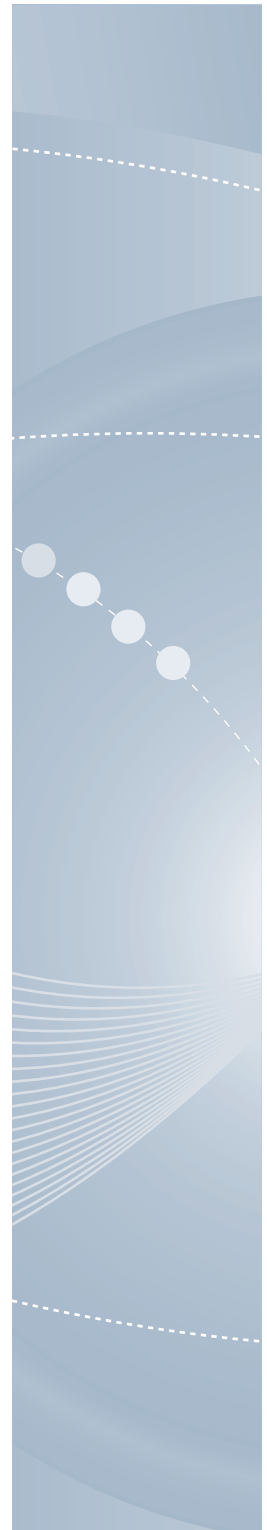
## Appendix F – Student Interview Schedule

(Directions for Interviewer)

Firstly, explain how we will be asking questions about school and things students do at home. Explain that the answers to these questions are private and that we don't tell anyone their name. Point out that because we have so many interviews to remember we record them so we can write the information down and refer to it later. Also add that if they want to stop at any time in the interview they just need to let us know. Finally say that there is no right or wrong answer to most of these questions; it's just their opinion that we're interested in.

1. What is your name?
2. What language do you mainly speak at home?
3. Do you like school? Why, why not?
4. What's the best part of being at school? Why?
5. Who are your best friends at school? Do they have a Samoan, Chinese, Australian background? Where are they or their family from?
6. How do you like working in class – on your own, in groups or as a whole class?
7. Why do you like working this way best?
8. How do you think you learn best – working on your own, in groups or as a whole class?/ Do you remember more when you work on your own, in groups or as a whole class?
9. Does your teacher mainly teach the class as a whole group, have students work on their own or in small groups? Why do you think he/she mainly teaches this way?
10. Do you like homework? Why, why not?
11. Do you do homework every night? If not, how often? Could you explain to us what you do?
12. Where do you do your homework? Is this a good place to do it? Why, why not?
13. Does anyone help you do your homework? If 'yes' who is it and does this help? If no, do you think you'd do better if someone in the family helped you?
14. Do you think you get enough homework? Why do you think this?
15. What's your favourite subject? Why?
16. What kinds of things do you do outside school, eg sport, music, etc?
17. How much time do you spend doing these things?
18. Do you have coaching for your school subjects outside school? What subjects do you have coaching in? How often?
19. Why do you do coaching?
20. Do you like doing tests? Why, why not?
21. Do you know what the Basic Skills Test is? If 'yes', how do you think you'll go in it?

22. Do you talk while you're working? Why, why not? Does your teacher mind you talking while you are working?
23. Do you sit in a particular place in the classroom eg next to your friends, etc? Describe hoe the tables are organised.
24. Do you think your teacher is strict? Why, why not?
25. What are some of your favourite things to do outside school on weekends?
26. Do you like reading? What things do you like to read at home?
27. Do you ever visit a library outside school? Which one/s do you visit?
28. Have you thought about which high school you'd like to go to?
29. What do you want to do when you grow up? Why?
30. What do your parents want you to do when you grow up?





## Appendix G – Guidelines for Observation Field Notes

Overall the aim is to ‘capture’ what is happening in the classroom in relation to:

1. the focus students
2. other students from the particular focus groups
3. the class overall and interaction between teacher and students.

Always begin by recording the date, day of the week, school, teacher’s name and names of focus students.

Notes are to relate to the following broad categories:

1. Organisation of the pedagogic space:
  - classroom design
  - ambience
  - use of space

Draw a sketch map of each classroom noting seating arrangements, placement of teacher’s desk, displays, book cases, clock, location of focus students. Note if certain cultural groups tend to group together. Consider the use of the space by teacher and students eg when and where activities take place – floor, desk – this may vary throughout the session, where are students’ attention and gaze drawn ie the front of the room and the teacher or to each other.

How would you describe the ambience, eg, restless, orderly, homely, etc and why? Does this seem to impact on the students?

2. Classroom regimen:
  - noise level
  - movement
  - seating arrangements
  - posture
  - teacher presence

There are obvious links here with the previous category in terms of use of space but place more emphasis here on the points listed above ie movement, behaviour especially of focus students. Describe the process of forwarding into class and getting ready to commence the lesson. Also consider if students are talking while they work. What are other students doing? Do they ask questions? What’s their posture like? Do they sit up straight? Are they easily distracted? How would you describe their level of concentration? How does the teacher use the space? How would you describe his/her presence in the room? Do they put on a performance? How do they use their voice? Are they animated? Do they insist on quiet when they are talking to the class? Do they circulate? Do they spend most time at the front?

3. Curriculum implementation:
- pedagogic mode
  - lesson content
  - lesson duration

Record the start and finish of each activity – there may be one activity in the session or several. If rotational group work how often do they rotate? Describe what is happening. What KLA/s are being taught? How does the teacher introduce the lesson? Are links made with previous work or the students' own experience? Describe the Q and A and discussion. What kind of pedagogic mode/s is/are used eg teacher instruction, group work, independent work? If group work how big are the groups? How would you describe the teacher's delivery? Does the teacher provide much explanation? When does this occur? Is there a final summation? How intellectually rigorous is content? How does the teacher use praise/criticism? What kind of classroom management techniques do they use?

Of particular importance:

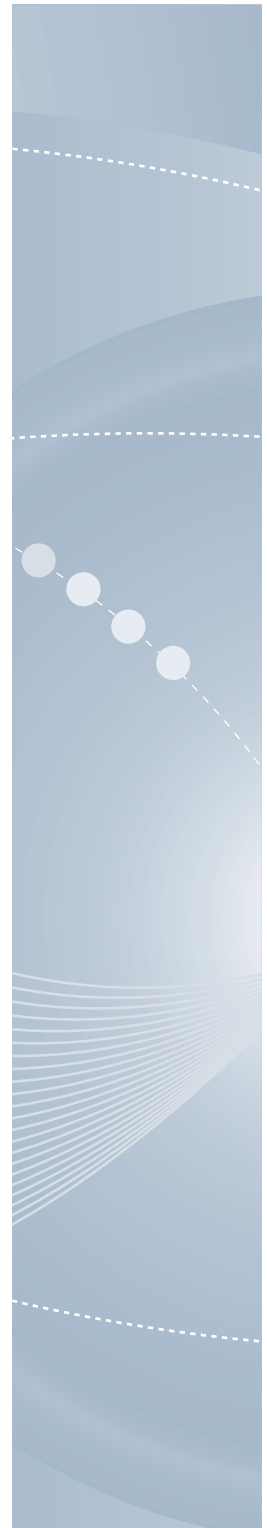
How do the focus students behave/work in the class?

How quickly do they settle?

Do they engage in class discussion, etc?

Collect any relevant handouts – label with date, school and name of teacher and note resources used. Record relevant information teacher writes on board.

Following each day of observation by the two observers there needs to be immediate discussion of what has been recorded, comparison of notes, identification of trends and notes are to be typed up within a week.







## Glossary

### Anglo

Anglo is a term of identification that groups together long-time Australians of English speaking backgrounds. We have used it to categorise one of the three target groups examined within the report because some parents chose this term as their label of ethnic identification and it has some currency in everyday discourse. Despite its vernacular origins, it is preferable to the common but problematic use of 'Australian' or 'English'.

### Asian

Asia is the land mass that stretches from Turkey to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Indian Ocean to the Arctic Ocean. Given this, it is primarily a cultural idea rather than a coherent entity, and it derives from the geo-political order arising from European colonisation. Despite this, 'Asian', is often used as though it has a coherence (either ethnic or racial), particularly within western nations like Australia.

### Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is a French social theorist who devised a complex theory of practice framed by the concepts of capital, field and habitus.

### CALD

CALD, standing for culturally and linguistically diverse, is often used adjectivally (as in CALD background) in place of other phrases that are seen to be problematic in some way: non-English speaking, migrant, ethnic, and so on.

### Chinese

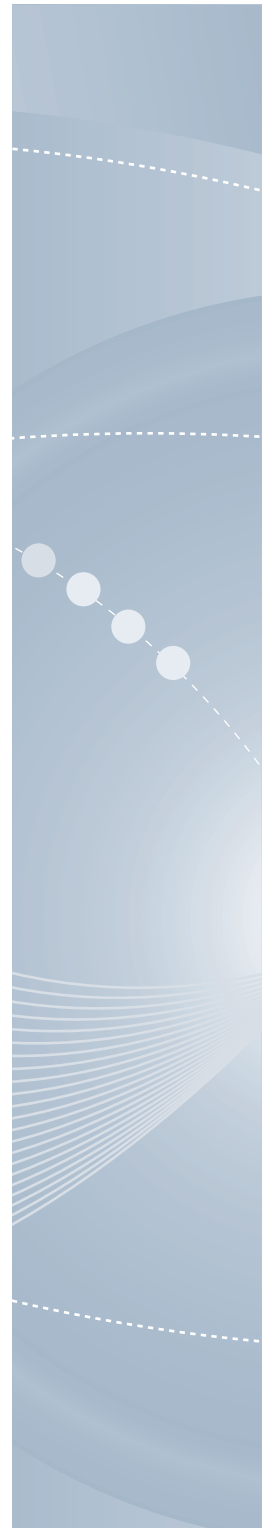
Chinese is a term used within the report to refer to one of the three target groups in the CPLP study. Those students referred to as Chinese, or of Chinese background, were identified as such by their parents who chose this term as their own label of ethnic identification. We have often dropped the word background for ease of expression.

### CLO

A Community Liaison Officer is an officer employed by the NSW DET to enhance links between schools, parents and community members from CALD backgrounds.

### Culture

Culture refers to the ways humans make sense of their existence and their actions. These tend to be organised into systems of meaning. In common use people often turn it into a noun – a culture – where we end up with the problem of seeing culture as a fixed *thing*, not a multi-dimensional *process*. We need to recognise, however, that culture is complex, dynamic and entails practices of meaning-making. Many things are therefore cultural, not just what we otherwise call ethnicity. Culture also operates at different levels of social organisation (western culture, Lebanese culture, urban v rural culture, subcultures, and so on).





### **Discipline**

Discipline, in the sense used in this report, is drawn from the work of the French theorist Michel Foucault. It refers not to the coercion one person might use against another, but to the power generated by both animate and inanimate bodies that individuals embody and which then affects how they act. Discipline is formative in the production of dispositions within the habitus with the potential to either subject or empower.

### **Disposition**

Disposition is used in this report to refer to an embodied inclination to behave in a certain way, eg, a disposition for stillness, quiet, concentration, etc.

### **Educational capital**

Educational capital is a specific form of what Bourdieu calls cultural capital. He uses cultural capital to describe the way our cultural knowledges circulate in a system of exchange like money capital, and are used to gain status in groups where they are valued. Knowledge of the 'great works' of art and literature is valuable cultural capital amongst middle-class people, a taste which gets validated by schooling. Educational capital more specifically refers to the forms of knowledge that are specifically useful within the education environment, including not just academic knowledge, but skills and competencies (like literacy), knowledge of the educational system, qualifications, and so on.

### **Embodiment**

Embodiment is the process whereby social traits and capacities, including discipline, are inscribed within bodies.

### **ESB**

English speaking background

### **ESL**

English as a second language

### **Essentialism**

Essentialism is a term to describe the ways people often view an entity (like an ethnic group, or a gender, etc) as being defined by a small set of necessary traits. It tends to be totalising and reductive (ie reducing everyone in that category to those traits) and produces stereotypes of people. Essentialism also often assumes that those traits are biological or innate. In contrast, a social constructionist perspective would see these traits as changeable over time and context, varying dramatically from individual to individual, and from situation to situation.

## **Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is a socially constructed category based on the perception of shared qualities and on practices of group-bonding. This is in contrast to the common assumption that ethnicity is an unproblematic category based on clear and timeless boundaries around 'cultures' or 'races'. Ethnicity, however, is a sense of commonality based on several characteristics – language, physical similarities, national origin, customs, religion and so on – borne of the interaction between self-identification and identification by others. It can sometimes be an absurd construction, because in the context of migration people often turn categories of national citizenship into categories of ethnicity. The idea of a 'Chinese' ethnicity, for example, is problematic because it includes a range of diverse social groups, languages, classes, faiths and regional backgrounds that originally derive from a particular nation-state. Ethnicity is, moreover, linked to various socio-cultural factors such as family socialisation, socioeconomic status, gender, generational experiences of migration and language maintenance. Because of the derogatory use of the term 'ethnic' in Australia, many people prefer to refer to cultural and/or linguistic background, but these are no less problematic.

## **Foucault**

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) is a French theorist whose work centres on the relationship between power, knowledge and discourse.

## **Habitus**

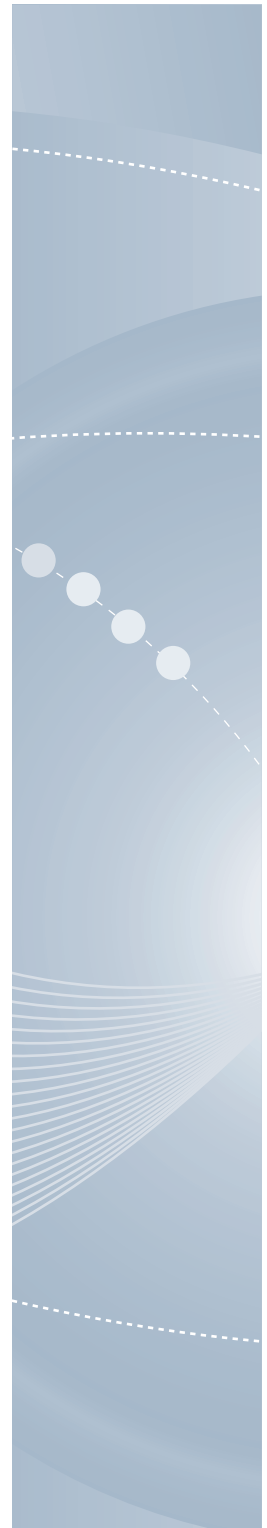
Habitus is a term with a long philosophical tradition, originating in the work of Aristotle. Within contemporary thought it is generally associated with the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who viewed the habitus as a set of embodied dispositions produced by an individual's everyday engagement in the world, ie, the various social fields of experience that then in turn unconsciously guide his or her practice.

## **Learning styles**

Learning styles refers to the variations in ways people engage in the learning process – these styles are sometimes characterised in terms of differences between visual, aural and physical emphasis, or in terms of propensities for abstract versus concrete thought, preference for maths versus language, and so on. While these variations do exist, the problem with some learning styles is that they tend to make these categories rigid, as though there are types of people who fit these categories. This is seen in the tendency to view these differences in terms of gender or ethnicity – often this is done as a well-meaning attempt to cater to differences, but ends up producing constrictive stereotypes.

## **LBOTE**

Language background other than English is used in this report and replaces the older term NESB (Non-English speaking background).



**Pasifika**

Pasifika is a term used within the report to refer collectively to students whose parents identified as Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islander, Maori, Fijian or Tokelauan.

**Pathologise**

This is linked to the reductive and totalising nature of essentialism, because it means that we tend to see some ethnicities as being biologically or psychologically prone to certain practices or beliefs – as innate properties of groups of people: for example, seeing people from the Middle East as being prone to violence, or Chinese as inscrutable, and so on. Social traits are turned into cultural pathologies.

**Scholarly habitus**

Scholarly habitus is a term drawn from the work of Bourdieu and used within this report to refer to the embodied dispositions that engender scholarly behaviour, eg, sustained concentration and quiet, engagement in academic endeavour.

**SES**

Socioeconomic status

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