

## Different Culture, Different School Culture

Teresa W. C. Ling, City Polytechnic of Hong Kong &  
Magdalena M.C. Mok, Macquarie University

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian  
Association for Research in Education, 22nd-25th November, 1993,  
Fremantle, Western Australia.

## Different Culture, Different School Culture

Teresa W. C. Ling, City Polytechnic of Hong Kong &  
Magdalena M.C. Mok, Macquarie University

This is a preliminary report on the first phase of an empirical study involving the socialisation of young migrants. The report is concerned with differences in school culture across two regions: Hong Kong and New South Wales. A survey research approach by means of questionnaires was used. Year 11 students from about 30 schools in each region were consulted on their views regarding the formal curriculum, the out-of-school curriculum, the teacher-student relationship, and the leadership of the principals. Hierarchical Linear Models (Multilevel models) were used to compare and contrast the culture of schools from the two regions.

## Different Culture, Different School Culture

Teresa WC Ling & Magdalena MC Mok

### Background

We are inevitably subjected to cultural influences at different levels -- family, school environment, social, national. Although human behaviours are outcomes of the complex interactions of

these cultural environments, this paper deals specifically with the combinations of the school and national environments. Such cross-cultural comparisons of the meanings of ways of life is especially tantalising for Australian schools because of multiculturalism in the Australian educational system. For example, in 1992, about 19% of all Government school students in New South Wales were of non-English speaking background. This involved more than 140,000 students coming from over 50 countries and more than 26 home languages (NSW Department of School Education, 1992). In the same year, Chinese is the most common language other than English spoken at home of all students of 8,921 (or 14.6%) of secondary students of non-English speaking background in New South Wales (NSW Department of School Education, 1992).

In terms of cultural differences, Hong Kong provides an excellent contrast for Australia. Various authors have commented on the differences in the value systems between Hong Kong students and their Western counterparts. Of notable importance to education was the observation by Yang (1981), and independently by Hsu (1981), that Chinese people tend to act in accordance with external expectations or social norms rather than with personal integrity. Because of the influence by the Confucian ideology, Hong Kong people placed great emphasis on academic achievement. Scholars were ranked top of the social hierarchy followed by farmers, workers, and merchants in traditional Chinese culture. Hofstede (1980) has also noted that the Chinese society was highly collective, and moderately high in power distance. These views were later supported by empirical data from various other authors (e.g. Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). In the Hong Kong school milieu, these findings mean that achievement can be viewed as contributing collectivistic rather than for personal interest, and teachers-student relationships tend to be hierarchical in nature: the power and authority of teachers tend to be accepted in schools without demand for justification.

The cultural contrasts between Hong Kong and the Western societies have serious implications for Australian schools: National statistics show that in 1992 Hong Kong had overtaken United Kingdom to become the largest source of immigrants to settle in Australia (Bureau of Immigration Research, 1992), with an increasing trend expected for subsequent years before 1997. The study to be reported here served to establish baseline data on the socialisation of Hong Kong young migrants to Australia. Specifically, this study sets out to compare and contrast the New South Wales and Hong Kong school cultures, with a goal to provide empirical based information for the school systems in both regions.

## Methods

A survey research approach was used for this study. Two self-administered questionnaires, one written in English, and the other its Chinese translation, were used. The sections of the questionnaire consisted of :

- (a) Six school culture scales: student-teacher relationships, students morale, attitudes toward the principal, attitudes toward the curriculum, qualities of the formal curriculum, and qualities of the out-of-school curriculum (Flynn, 1993);
- (b) Two expectation scales: expectation of a school regarding personal developments, expectation of a school regarding academic developments (Flynn, 1993);
- (c) A parental press for further education scale;
- (d) A scale on educational aspiration;
- (e) A section on background characteristics: gender, age, country of birth, migrant or non migrant, parental country of birth, language spoken at home, and
- (f) A section for other comments.

Each of these scales were in turn made up of a number of Likert items.

The data consisted of 2,615 Year-11 students from thirty schools in the four metropolitan regions of Sydney, and 1011 Form 6 (equivalent to Year-11 in the New South Wales school system) students from Hong Kong. The schools were sampled by stratified sampling method in each region. Students and their parents in the cooperating schools were approached for consent. They were guaranteed confidentiality, freedom of participation, freedom of refusal to answer any question or part of the questions, and freedom to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Data were collected between 21 July and 30 September 1993.

Hierarchical linear models (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; also known as multilevel models, Goldstein, 1987) were employed in the analysis, acknowledging the cluster nature of the data within each region. Firstly bivariate confirmatory factor analyses were performed to construct the scales. This was performed using the BIRAM package (McDonald, in preparation). This step established the conceptual facets of school culture that had validity in both regions. Secondly, multilevel descriptive statistics were given for the scales using ML3 (Rasbash, Prosser, & Goldstein, 1990). The third step of the analysis involved fitting hierarchical structural models (Goldstein & McDonald, 1988; McDonald & Goldstein, 1989) to the data. In this third step of the analysis, the variance of the scales were decomposed into a within- and a between-school components, and the structural relations between the variables were tested. The proportion of

total variance explained by school were also estimated.

## Results

It must be stressed from the outset that the results reported here are only preliminary. This research is still ongoing. Because of the different semester timetable in the Northern Hemisphere, data collection have just finished at the time of writing. A full report of the findings will be available in the format of a journal paper later.

Results of initial analyses indicated that

1. There were significant differences between the Australian and Hong Kong school cultures. The differences in general favoured the Australian schools;
2. Hong Kong students were more homogenous than Australians in their views regarding school life;
3. Students from both regions were under great pressure from their parents regarding school work, but Australians were under more pressure than the Hong Kong students;
4. Australian students placed stronger importance to schools in carrying out the roles of either personal or academic development for their students than their Hong Kong counterparts;
5. Migrants from Hong Kong were more positive in their views about schools, had higher aspirations for higher education, and were under more parental pressure than the local Hong Kong students. The longer these migrants had been in Australia, the more positive their views tend to be.

## Discussions

It must be stressed that this is only a preliminary analysis. Results from this initial analysis showed that students from the two regions had different expectations and satisfaction of their schools. As expected of adolescents, their peers remains the most important source of emotional support. This was especially true for Hong Kong students. Such findings concurred with the findings of Wheeler, Reis, and Bond (1989) that family and friends were the major in-groups of Hong Kong people.

## References

- Bryk, A.S. & Raudenbush, S.W. (1992). Hierarchical Linear Models. Sage Publications.

Flynn, M. (1993). *The Culture of Catholic Schools*. N.S.W : St Paul Publications.

Goldstein, H. & McDonald, R.P. (1988). A general model for the analysis of multilevel data. *Psychometrika*, 53, 455-467.

Hofstede, C. (1980): *Culture's consequences: international differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Hsu, F.L.K. (1981). *American and Chinese: Passage to differences* (3rd ed.). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

McDonald, R.P. (in preparation). User Manuals for the BIRAM package.

McDonald, R.P. & Goldstein, H. (1989). Balanced versus unbalanced designs for linear structural relations in two-level data. *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology*, 42, 215-232.

NSW Department of School Education (1992). Mid-Year Census -1992, Management Information Services Directorate.

Rasbash, J., Prosser, R., & Goldstein, H. (1990). *User's Guide for the ML3 Software for Three-level Analysis*. Institute of Education, University of London.

Schwartz, S.H. & Bilsky, W. (1990). Toward a theory of the universal content and structure of values: extensions and cross-cultural replications. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 878-891.

Wheeler, L, Reis, H, & Bond, M.H. (1989). Collectivism-Individualism in everyday social life: the Middle Kingdom and the Melting Pot. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 79-86.

Different Culture, Different School Culture, Ling & Mok,