

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

C R

Discussion Paper No. 14

Beyond good intentions:  
combating prejudice in schools.

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**FOREWORD**

It is the responsibility of the Human Rights Commission to promote the observance of the full range of human rights set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in the Declarations of the Rights of the Child, on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons and on the Rights of Disabled Persons.

Among the human rights articulated in these major international instruments is the right of children to education; in the case of children of racial, ethnic or other minority groups, this includes the right to be educated on terms of equality with others and with due respect for their own languages and cultures. Principle 7 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child states:

The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgement, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.

The rights of members of minority groups to have the integrity of their cultures respected is stated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27):

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

Discrimination which would have the effect of disadvantaging a person on the basis of racial or ethnic background is prohibited under S.9 of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cwlth):

It is unlawful for a person to do any act involving a distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of any human right or fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

Section 9 goes on to state that the rights and freedoms referred to here include those rights and freedoms set out in Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. That Article imposes on signatories an obligation 'to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law', in the enjoyment of rights which include 'the right to education and training'.

In February 1984 the Human Rights Commission made a decision to sponsor a number of separate but related studies on the existence of structural prejudice in schools against students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) and the implications of such prejudice for the human rights of students. Within this general framework individual studies would examine particular aspects of the school system and its operation, such as daily classroom practices, curriculum design and course options, and sporting and recreation activities.

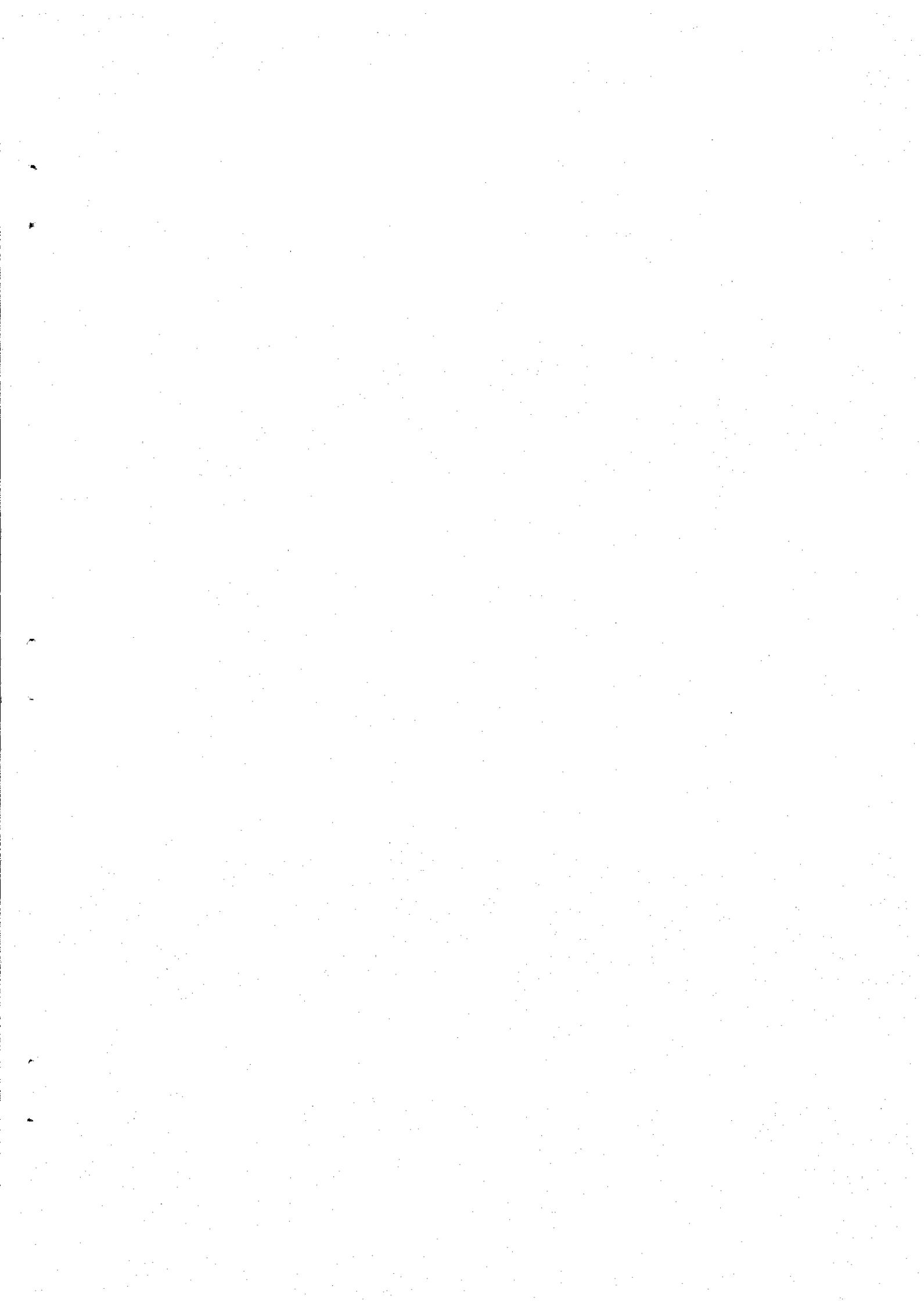
Beyond good intentions is the third report which results from that project. It describes in detail strategies for dealing with ethnic prejudice in the school system developed in one Victorian government school, with reference being made to another school for comparison. These strategies were formulated with the help of the Project Officer of the project, Combating Prejudice in Schools, a joint initiative of the Ecumenical

Migration Centre and the Richmond Community Education Centre which was established in response to a perceived increase in racism and discrimination in the school system and society.

The report recognises that prejudice in a school environment can be combated successfully only by action on the part of those directly concerned. It also shows how an outsider with professional experience of similar situations can nevertheless serve as a valuable resource by helping to identify issues, clarify the ways in which factors interact and compound each other, and formulate alternatives.

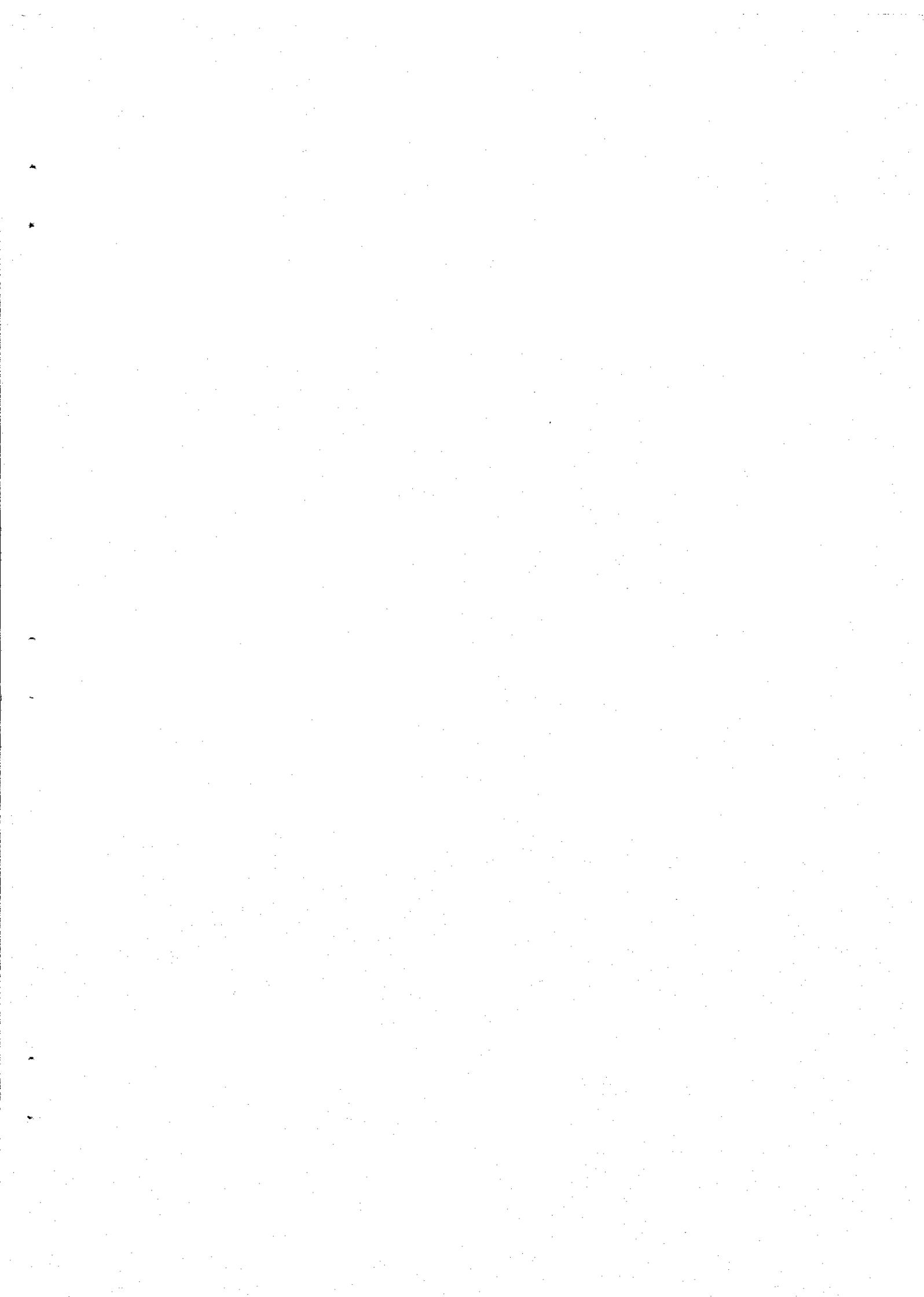
Above all, the report is informed with a sense of the complexity of prejudice as a social phenomenon. Each school, each community, has its own particular ethnic and socio-economic mix, its own history of ethnic interaction in education and the neighbourhood. Strategies for combating prejudice, accordingly, have to be just as particularised. They need to be formulated out of consideration of the circumstances at hand rather than based simply on general good will and intentions. However, this does not mean that the experience of one school in grappling with the problem of prejudice cannot provide value lessons for others, as the case study described in these pages shows.

The Commission wishes to thank for their involvement in this study the members of the organisations which support the project, Combating Prejudice in Schools: The Ecumenical Migration Centre, the Richmond Community Education Centre, the Victorian Ministerial Advisory Committee on Multicultural and Migrant Education, and Child Migrant Education Services. In particular, its gratitude must go to Kathy Skelton, the Project Officer for the study, who, with the assistance of Peter Nero and Mary Petsinis, carried out the field work and wrote the report.



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## 1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

### Introduction

The project, Combating Prejudice in Schools, is a joint initiative of the Ecumenical Migration Centre and the Richmond Community Education Centre. The project was set up in response to expressions of concern from a wide range of schools and teachers at what appeared to be an increase in overt racism among students and in the community - directed particularly towards newly arrived immigrants and leading, on occasions, to inter-group tension and violence.

Funds to cover the salary of a full-time project officer, travel, publishing and distribution expenses, and purchase of educational materials, were provided by the Victorian Ministerial Advisory Committee on Multicultural and Migrant Education. The Project Officer, a seconded teacher, was appointed at the beginning of 1984 and since funding for a second year was granted the work of the project continued until the end of 1985.

### Rationale

The project, Combating Prejudice in Schools, is not a research project in the normally accepted sense of the term. It does not aim, by using methods such as isolating variables or setting up control groups or administering 'pre' and 'post' attitude tests, to provide a definitive picture of the factors underlying racial and ethnic prejudice in Victorian secondary schools or a taxonomy of strategies for countering prejudice.

This is beyond the scope of a one person, short-term project and often information yielded by general research is considered by many schools to be of limited value. The complex and individual

natures of school communities make it very easy, and often quite reasonable, for schools to reject as the basis for action, findings which they see as too broad or deriving from too specific a context.

However, the project, Combating Prejudice in Schools, acknowledges the need for research which provides broadly applicable information, and at the same time takes the view that schools are more likely to change the practices and challenge the attitudes which discriminate against particular groups of students if they are able themselves to examine these areas within their own school community.

The fostering of self-examination as an ongoing practice in schools (including documentation both of everyday practice and 'critical incidents', and reflection upon these as a basis for change and development) is as essential to countering discrimination in schools as providing access to schools of relevant findings provided by more conventional research. In fact, the schools most likely to take account of the latter are those which are some way down the path to developing the former.

This, then, is the main direction or focus of the project - to work with schools or groups of teachers who have identified 'prejudice' (usually in the form of student attitudes) as an area of concern. The role of Project Officer is to assist them to document what happens in the school and classroom, to look beyond the surface manifestations of prejudice, to examine school practice (classroom and administrative) both for the underlying cultural assumptions and the contribution it makes to sustaining or furthering discrimination against particular groups of students, and for consideration of ways in which parents and students can be involved in the examination of these issues and the search for solutions.

None of this is easy. There is a long and difficult road between a school's willingness to do something consistent and constructive about student attitudes (the usual starting point

for most schools) and being able to acknowledge that teacher attitudes, teaching methods, school policy and organisation can all contribute to bolstering community prejudice and prove a source of discrimination for certain groups within the school.

However, because the project Combating Prejudice in Schools is of limited duration, yet hopes to be of use to schools and teachers other than those with which it is directly involved, it aims to produce some general materials - a broad bibliography on prejudice and racism, an annotated list of teaching resources and classroom materials, a booklet of strategies and guidelines for addressing the issue as a school community, and a booklet of teaching strategies and guidelines together with a collection of case studies based on the work of the schools involved in the project.

#### Background to the expression of interest to the Human Rights Commission

When the project was planned, with the support of the groups listed at the beginning of this report, it was felt that constructive use could be made of the funds offered by the Human Rights Commission for a number of reasons.

Systematic examination of the effects of 'the school system' on particular groups of students was not a brief of the project, nor realistically within its scope. Yet the work of the Project Officer across a range of schools tentatively suggested that certain policies and practices within schools might discriminate against identifiable groups of students.

Secondly, it was obvious that within schools where some initial commitment had been made both to promoting positive interaction between students of different backgrounds and to addressing the issue of discrimination as more than just a question of individual and group attitudes, the greatest obstacle to working towards these ends was lack of time. The increasingly complex

and numerous daily, weekly and yearly demands of working in a school mean that teachers are either reluctant to take on any 'new issues' or make such exceedingly slow progress when they do tackle them that they often feel nothing is being achieved.

Hence, the funds made available through the Human Rights Commission project and the areas to be investigated were seen as providing both time and direction for a school to undertake some research of its own.

It was decided to offer the funds to a project school that had already taken some initiatives towards addressing the issue of prejudice and discrimination, and to offer, in the first instance, time release to a teacher within the school (rather than making an outside appointment).

There were two reasons for this course of action. Firstly, lack of intimate knowledge of the intricacies and idiosyncracies of a school community can often seriously hamper the efforts of even the most single-minded outsider. Secondly, and more importantly, research carried out in schools should be the basis for further action within those schools and this is much more likely to happen if the research is perceived as being part of a school initiative and not simply something undertaken for an 'outside' project.

A second school, sharing some of the characteristics of the project school, has been included in the study in order to provide a useful, if somewhat singular, point of comparison. Information from a range of other schools with which the Project Officer has regular contact will also be included, where relevant, to broaden the context in which the findings are considered.

Information from the second school was gathered by the Project Officer in interviews with students and staff and from appropriate school documents and records. The disadvantage (as indicated in a preceding paragraph) of the Project Officer not

being an 'insider' is off-set to a considerable degree by her long and intimate knowledge of the school over a period of eight years.

## 2. POTENTIAL DISCRIMINATION IN SCHOOLS - AN OVERVIEW

Schools, while having much in common, are quite individual places - the mix of staff, the mix of students, the contributing Community, curriculum traditions and school organisation combine to create an ethos which is never quite the same in any two schools.

At the same time, no matter how intense the debate on what their responsibilities or purposes should be, schools serve a broad function within society which gives all schools some common characteristics. To put it simply, it is a commonly perceived purpose of schools to prepare individuals for entry to well-paid and prestigious positions and so enable them to avoid the factory floor or unemployment register. It is often substantially in these terms that students ultimately measure the worth of their school experience. Few would regard their schooling as successful or positive if their post-school experience of work or training (or lack of it) is unsuccessful or negative.

The demands of the economy, the expectations of government, employers and academic institutions, the orientations of teachers, and the aspirations of parents and students, while not identical, work together to impose a certain uniformity on the way schools operate, even when they serve very different communities.

Often implicit in these expectations and impositions is the assumption that those students who, on leaving school, are assigned to the dole queue or factory floor, are there largely because of the school's neglect or failure. In some instances this is true - had school been a different place a particular student's post-schooling experience might also have been quite different.

However, it is equally true that the fierce competition for well-paid jobs, for access to the professions or for a job of any kind, is not the work of schools and is something which they are largely powerless to do anything about.

Therefore, in thinking about what effects schools might have on students of non-English speaking background (NESB), the influence of factors beyond the school's control, on the central purposes and outcomes of schooling as well as the specific policies and practices of individual schools, has to be kept in mind.

The ways in which schools might discriminate against non-English speaking background students are both explicit and implicit, inter-related, and influenced by a range of factors beyond simply the attitudes and pre-dispositions of teachers and key personnel in a particular school.

The presence of potential sources of discrimination outlined in the following paragraphs will vary from school to school. The extent to which they are influential will be conditioned and shaped by such factors as whether the school has a small or significant number of NESB students, whether the majority of these are newly arrived or from more established families, whether the school is private or part of the state system, whether the school is co-educational or single-sex, and whether the school serves a predominantly high, low or middle income earning clientele.

#### Assessment and grouping

The streaming of students on the basis of some ability measurement, competitive assessment and promotion practices, has the potential to discriminate against students whose English language skills are still developing.

The comments of Greek-Australian students in Sydney, interviewed by Eve Isaacs seven years after she had first spoken with them in their schools, reveal something of the discriminatory nature of streaming and the influence it can have on both the outcomes and experience of schooling:

For the first three years in high school I was in the lowest class. We students of Greek background were all put in for three years, and we started to complain in Form 1. We got nowhere, so at the end of Form 3 they put us up, but we were so far behind that we had to work hard to catch up. I left, because it was too hard and the school was rotten.

I didn't do well at school, and so I left school to go to work for a painter. I worked for \$3.00 a week, but he said I had too many brains and I should go back to school. When I came back they all remembered me from the dunces' class, and the teacher said that I had no right to be in his class. I saw that things hadn't changed much.

We had so many Greeks and other nationalities at school. They did not have enough teachers to cope with us. We had work to do, and most of the Greek girls have been stuck in the GA class and if it weren't for some of the staff we would have been left there. In the lessons the girls just talked.  
(Isaacs 1981)

Anglo-Australian students who are also judged 'failures' by the assessment and streaming practices of the school, particularly if the label 'problem' is somehow attached to them, are frequently the most vocally racist students and often those whom teachers feel powerless to challenge constructively.

It is not that streaming or competitive assessment creates prejudiced attitudes, but for some students these practices reinforce a sense of failure and hopelessness that they experience in their lives beyond the school and hostility towards their ethnically or racially different fellow students becomes an outlet for their frustration and disaffection.

A first draft of a paper to accompany an English 'combating racism' resources pack for teachers, refers to 'a small minority of lower-achieving, working-class boys, who display very high levels of racism at the outset and who are already quite alienated from the education system' and 'hard-core, NF type, working-class males (who) appear to be least positively influenced (by) an education system which they have usually not only rejected but actually rebelled against'. (Pattison 1984)

On the other hand, many students of non-English background (or their parents) have experienced schooling in which rigidly competitive assessment and promotion based on it are the unquestioned order of the day. This can mean at best bewilderment, at worst contempt, of schooling they may experience in Australia where such practices are absent.

#### Access to English

In defining access to and success in schooling, the paper, Curriculum planning and development in Victoria, issued by the Minister of Education, states that schools are required to 'design courses so that students may participate in each area of learning and are not prevented from continuing their learning as a result of school organisation, inappropriate subject choices or differences in performance in reading and writing English'. (emphasis added) (Education Department of Victoria 1984)

English is the language of public life - of schooling, the workplace, the influential media and many day-to-day transactions - and of a good deal of personal communication. Fluency in written and spoken English is no guarantee of obtaining the kind of work or post-school training aspired to, but it is certainly a pre-requisite if one is to be near the head of the queue when jobs and further education are handed out, and if one is to participate fully in community life and contribute to areas of decision-making in which one has a direct interest.

Schools can deny students of non-English speaking background access to adequate schooling in English in a number of ways. The most obvious is failure to provide sufficient and properly qualified teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) - a responsibility of education departments and government rather than individual schools.

Some preliminary research into ESL programs in Victorian schools and language centres, conducted in 1984 and reported on at the March meeting of the Victorian Association of Multicultural Education (VAME), suggests the following:

- on-going attrition of ESL programs
- an overwhelming concentration on 'first phase' learners
- gradual redeployment of ESL teachers to other areas
- large numbers of ESL teachers declared in excess
- ESL programs usually the last to be timetabled in schools and the first to be cut
- ESL programs often not an integral part of the school curriculum
- too often ESL departments consist of people with no classroom experience, people due to go on leave, etc.
- no visible career path for ESL teachers
- ESL departments too often used as a 'dumping ground' for all issues relating to migrant and refugee students e.g. arranging interpreters, welfare advice, etc.
- ESL confused with remediation in the minds of many people
- some schools refusing to accept recent arrivals.

(VAME 1984)

This indicates that even where staff are provided, the practices and decisions of schools can reduce their effectiveness and ultimately work against the interests of non-English speaking background students. ESL teachers can be absorbed into more general 'remedial' programs, can be used to cover staff shortages in other subject areas, and on leaving a particular school, are sometimes not replaced or are replaced by teachers from other subject areas. These decisions are made by single

individuals in the school administration, or a committee of key personnel, or in certain schools by the whole staff. Those involved in making such decisions would adamantly and sincerely deny that any form of overt discrimination was being practised. Yet the priorities reflected in such decisions and the assumptions and attitudes behind them are rarely probed or challenged.

### Classroom language and teaching

The teaching style, classroom techniques, and use of language by the classroom teacher can be influential factors in the satisfactory school experience of all students, regardless of cultural or language background. However, since English is the medium of instruction in almost every subject, the language style and usage of the classroom teacher can be a crucial factor in the learning and achievement of students whose first language is not English.

Again, the words of Greek-Australian students reveal something of just how crucial an issue language is in all subjects:

They mark us low. They give more marks to the Australians because, they say, 'You can't express yourselves...'

The teachers just wrote on the board every day of the year, saying, 'There are the answers and you learn them'. No explanation, no discussion.

From early stages the English teachers write, 'English expression faulty'. The teachers keep saying, 'It's hard to get good expression'.

My Science teacher is unable to help me develop the expression for an essay. I am unable to put my point across and when I ask the English teacher for assistance I get no answer. The teacher just goes over and over the facts and tells me to structure it differently and then put phrases and thoughts together.

(Isaacs 1981)

While these recollections might be somewhat distorted by the passing of time, and it is difficult to know whether the teachers were as uncaring as they sound, it is almost certainly true that the teachers' general exhortations that the students learn to express themselves, reflect a very real uncertainty as to how to foster this development themselves.

Language is central to all teaching yet little, if any, attention is paid to it in the training of Maths, Science, History, Geography and Art teachers, to name but a few. The relationships between language and learning, between language and the concepts of a particular subject area, and between the language tasks demanded of students and the purposes of the subject teacher are rarely an integral or central part of pre-service training courses.

Consequently, students are required to complete comprehension exercises, essays and reports which are often inappropriate for their stage of language development and not necessarily the best way of assessing or furthering their understanding of particular areas of content. It also means that oral instruction is often riddled with idiom, essential vocabulary is not given special emphasis and instructions (often embodying key concepts) are delivered in a variety of (and hence confusing) ways.

This is not to say that teachers emerge from their initial training ill-equipped, and remain that way. Many, especially those with some awareness that NESB students face particular difficulties in their schooling, seek the assistance of ESL teachers, participate in relevant in-service activities and generally attempt to modify or pay attention to their classroom language. However, many students have often passed through their hands by the time subject teachers reach this level of competence and confidence.

Teaching styles and classroom techniques are part of a much more complex and problematic area. There can often be a great deal of inconsistency and contradiction between students' perceptions

of what constitutes 'real work' or a 'good teacher' and the sorts of activities and teaching styles to which they positively respond. Furthermore, within the one school students are often exposed to a range of very different teaching styles - from the strict disciplinarian to the teacher who can create a working climate that is both interactive and purposeful, to the teacher who pays little real attention to what is happening in the classroom and is not particularly well prepared. Not all students will respond in the same way to the same teacher and teachers can, within a general teaching approach or mode, develop a somewhat different way of relating to particular students.

Whether non-English speaking background students are particularly disadvantaged by this complexity of teaching styles and working relationships is difficult to say. Certainly, the Greek-Australian parents and students interviewed by Eve Isaacs seemed critical of what they saw as the schools' lack of discipline, failure to adequately cater for their language needs and lack of personal interest and support. (Isaacs 1981) The first and last criticisms were also made by Adelaide and Sydney parents, largely of Anglo-Australian background, interviewed by Connell and his associates in the late 1970s. (Connell 1982)

The issue of discipline and its influence on teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships is a vexed one and deserving of more thorough investigation and discussion than can be given here. One question that can be raised, however, and one that will be touched on to some extent in the section which looks at schools in detail, is: if students' (and parents') perceptions of schooling are partly influenced by their notions of discipline and their expectations of schools in this regard, what conflict does this set up in the minds of students when schools appear not to meet these expectations? Does this affect students' motivation, sense of achievement and willingness to take the maximum amount of secondary schooling available to them? Is there more conflict, confusion, and hence disadvantage, for NESB students?

One further aspect of teaching practice which merits some attention and which has the potential to work directly and indirectly against the interests of NESB students, is the degree to which such practice is teacher-dominated. Small group work in which students collaborate in their learning is not a new phenomenon but is still an occasional, rather than normal, feature of classroom practice.

Structured, co-operative group work can benefit students of non-English speaking background by providing a situation in which they can practise and develop their use of English. It can also provide an alternative to planned and positive interaction between students of different backgrounds which characterises many classrooms and which can reinforce the prejudiced attitudes that students acquire outside the school.

We learn to co-operate with one another, not by hearing about co-operation, or by reading about co-operation, or even by discussing co-operation, but by living in a community in which co-operation is practised and rewarded. If the aim of multicultural education is to help children become responsible, productive people who can effectively participate with each other in joint enterprises, then teachers have an obligation to create a context for learning in which co-operative skills can be learnt and practised.  
(Davey 1983)

Yet, teaching/learning strategies, such as group work, which are not overtly instructional and teacher-dominated in style might be so alien to the schooling experience and expectations of certain groups of non-English speaking background students as to be unacceptable to them and negative in their effect.

As with assessment and promotion procedures, the answers are not clear cut, but undoubtedly there is a need for careful exploration and research of these issues, particularly at the local school level.

### The overt curriculum

While the kind of access to English available to NESB students, teaching styles and classroom practices, and school assessment and grouping procedures can directly shape the outcomes of schooling for such students, the content of the curriculum can have a less obvious, but nonetheless important, effect.

A study of Aboriginal history, relations with white society, and contemporary Aboriginal issues, the centrality of migration to Australia's development since the beginnings of white settlement; and social issues of contemporary Australia including sources of inequality, prejudice and discrimination as well as the reality of cultural diversity; and the use of literature and materials which reflect this diversity, might not determine the educational achievement of NESB students nor where they go on leaving school. However, the study of such issues and their permanent inclusion in mainstream curriculum content can develop understandings essential to informed participation in Australian society by all students, and influence the perceptions all students have of themselves and of each other. It can mean a reduction in the ethnocentrism of Anglo-Australian students, particularly those in predominantly Anglo-Australian schools, and the development of a more positive perception of the rights of all Australians. For non-English speaking background students it can mean a less marginalised view of the rights and contribution of their own community in Australia and, as a result, perhaps a more confident and positive approach to schooling.

It is important to remind ourselves, however, that the division between content and teaching methods is largely an artificial one - since they inextricably work together to develop understanding, challenge preconceptions and encourage questioning and enquiry; or work at odds to have the opposite effect.

Purging the text books of stereotypes, boosting the minority groups in the teaching materials and adjusting the curriculum to accommodate cultural diversity will have little impact on how children treat each other, if teachers make rules without explanation, if they command needlessly and assume their authority to be established by convention. (Davey 1983)

### Languages other than English

Large numbers of NESB students enter Australian schools with the potential to become competent users of their mother tongue in a way that is personally useful and satisfying, or to become fully functioning bilinguals to the extent that this can make a contribution both to their tertiary entrance and work prospects. That the Australian school system makes an uneven and inadequate contribution to fostering this potential (Human Right Commission, Annual report, 1981-82) seems beyond dispute, but is still, like many issues raised here, a complex and problematic area.

The provision of community language teaching within mainstream schooling is affected by many factors - the availability of teachers; the preparedness of governments and education departments to recruit and train teachers and to promote and encourage such programs; the degree to which more traditional school languages such as French and German are established within schools having significant numbers of NESB students (but not of French or German background); whether there is any tradition of language teaching (other than English) in a school; whether such languages are a compulsory or serious part of the mainstream curriculum or offered as part of an elective program; the status accorded such languages within the curriculum by the staff and student body generally; demographic shifts which might quickly make the teaching of particular languages not viable within a single school; and whether particular languages have accreditation towards a final year qualification.

Therefore, in examining the efforts of individual schools to maintain the mother tongues of some or all of their NESB students (and herein lies another problem) and to provide an opportunity for students to study these languages to an advanced level, one has to be aware of these complex and interacting factors which impinge upon the school's capacity to make this kind of provision.

At the same time, the ethnocentric and prejudiced perspective of some school staffs and administrations can be a very real stumbling block to developing such language programs, as shown by the following comments made in a staff discussion of a proposal to provide mother tongue tuition for Vietnamese children in a primary school:

There's not enough time to teach subjects in the curriculum now without introducing an unnecessary one.

In the schools we are here to teach the children to live in this country. Therefore we should teach them English!

Why should some children be given the opportunity to learn a second language?

Immigrants of the 40s and 50s have survived without this additional language teaching and have learnt English quicker because of it.<sup>1</sup>

#### Non-English speaking background staff

The insignificant numbers of women in positions of promotion within schools and within the Education Department have been well documented in Victoria. (Faneburst 1984)

This is of concern not only because of the lack of equality which this represents for women teachers but also because of the model it sets up for female students and the influence it might have on the existing and developing attitudes of male students.

Are teachers of non-English speaking background in a similar position? If so, what explanations can be offered and what effect does this have on students of all backgrounds?

In America and Britain there is pressure for affirmative action in the appointment and promotion of black teachers, and affirmative action is firmly established in the case of promotions. The main argument advanced in favour of such action has been and still is, the very unequal position of black teachers within schools and the education system, particularly in Britain. The potential impact on students is an acknowledged, though a secondary consideration:

Black teachers as a group are exploited and oppressed by the British education system with its hierarchical divisions of sex, class and most predominantly, race...As Black teachers we experience oppression through overt and covert racism which is used to manipulate situations to our disadvantage. Case histories show that Black teachers with greater experience and vastly superior qualifications are bypassed and overlooked when applying for promotion.

Children constantly see Black teachers in nondescript and subordinate roles, without any position of authority or status. Children are very sensitive to the attitudes of people and we discredit their ability to size up this 'superior' White situation.  
(A.L.T.A.R.F. 1984)

Does this have any relevance to the situation in Australia? If those in positions of power are male and white while those in lower status positions are female and/or black, then this is usually obvious and consequently impinges on the consciousness of students, teachers and parents even if little is done about it. If, on the other hand, ethnicity is not so obvious, what contribution is this making to the hidden curriculum in Australian schools? Are students in predominantly Anglo-Australian schools being taught by a predominantly Anglo-Australian staff, and does this lend support to the notion of the 'inferior' status of migrants? In schools with significant or predominant numbers of NESB students, is the same message being spelled out because of the absence of such teachers or because they are 'invisible'? When NESB teachers are present in a school can it be assumed that they are willing to use the language they have in common with parents and students, to share their experience as members of ethnic minorities with all students and teachers, and be willing

spokespeople for the needs and interests of NESB students when important decisions are being made? Do qualities in teachers shaped by class background, teaching style and gender, rather than by ethnic background, influence a student's perceptions of and attitudes towards teachers?

While it is important to examine the school hierarchy, the decision-making processes and the climate of the staffroom for their assimilationist pressures on NESB teachers, it is equally important not to impose identity on NESB teachers.

Barbara Chambers' warning about the dangers of ascribing cultural identity to children could apply, in some measure, to teachers:

...educators have to be particularly sensitive about 'publicly' ascribing cultural identity and even cautious about labelling the personal identity of the child in terms of their ethnic group. This eagerness to redress the former grievance of 'we' denying 'them' their ethnicity by 'we' insisting that 'they' are their ethnic identity could result in a crisis of personal identity...Both attempts are invidious because persons other than self are doing the defining.

(Chambers 1979)

### The school and parents

The move, of recent years, towards greater parent and community participation in school decision making reflects a growing realisation that the likelihood of worthwhile educational achievement is greatly enhanced when there is consensus among teachers, parents and students on the means and ends of education. Secondly, since these are often questions of value judgment and not always of professional competence, there is an acknowledgement that teachers should not be the sole arbiters of either the aims of schooling or how these are achieved.

For a long time, parent participation meant the participation of English speaking parents, regardless of the school's clientele. It is only now, after forty years of post-war immigration that significant numbers of schools have reached the stage where they

automatically have all important school notices translated, arrange interpreters for report nights and parent meetings, and arrange interpreters for individual parent interviews rather than use a senior student who speaks the same language. Schools, of course, have not been helped, and are still hampered by the inadequate provision of these services.

While schools are now beginning to involve parents in curriculum and policy decisions, it is true that for a long time what went under the name of 'parent involvement' did not involve this kind of decision-making.

In the early 1970s, an inner Melbourne school conducted a parent survey following some in-depth interviews of Greek parents by staff. The survey was completed by 122 families of Greek, Yugoslav, Italian, Turkish and Anglo- background and contained eighteen items related to curriculum and school organisation. After the survey was completed a staff meeting was held to discuss the results and the preliminary handout given to staff stated:

The results of the recent parent survey, even when all its imperfections are considered, seem to indicate that parents disagree with or are at least confused about certain of our educational aims and practices.<sup>2</sup>

The areas where the views of parents seemed at odds with those of the staff were: homework, the link between punishment and behaviour, assessment by marks rather than by written comment, the need for tests and examinations, movement of students around the classroom during lessons, students having a say in determining rules of behaviour, and the degree to which student interest should influence what they study. (Claydon 1974)

Subsequently, a Greek parents committee was established and the school continued conscientiously to cater for NESB parents through employment of appropriate ancillary staff, and regular use of translators and interpreters. However, there was no real

attempt to tackle the issues raised by the survey and to establish some discussion among parents themselves and ongoing dialogue with staff.

This was partly because this is no easy task but also because there was a tendency among some of the teachers to regard the parents as a force for conservatism and consequently a threat to some of the more progressive things the school was attempting. If parent-teacher discussions of what is happening or should be happening in a school are put into this 'win-lose' framework then the prospect for all those who are part of the school community of working towards common goals in ways that are understood is remote indeed. Where the school community is significantly NESB then any lack of dialogue and consensus is likely to disadvantage NESB students.

#### Teacher attitudes

Permeating all of the areas considered so far are the attitudes of teachers - in the classroom, the staff meeting, the school administration, the regional office, and the policy making sections of education departments. These will vary; from an awareness of prejudice and discrimination, to prejudice and ethnocentrism embedded (wittingly or unwittingly) in opinions and decisions, to open and undisguised prejudice and racism.

The latter is not always the most damaging in the long term, particularly if it is confined to individual, personal views. Views such as those of the practical class teacher who ordered a group of students of Polish, Rumanian and Vietnamese backgrounds to speak English as they completed their models, and not to 'use their wog language here', will certainly hurt students but might not be so damaging in the long term as a principal's decision to use an ESL teacher to cover a staff shortage in another subject area.

That is not to say that such remarks should go unchallenged. Teachers who hear of such incidents should take some kind of action, having as options: taking the matter up directly with the teacher concerned, working through a more immediate colleague or department head of the teacher concerned, or working through the school administration. Ideally, students need skills and processes for responding to these situations themselves and these are most likely to be developed where students have had some role in the formulation of school rules and codes of behaviour, where there is someone on the teaching staff to whom they can relate such incidents with confidence and where they are encouraged to discuss such occurrences and how they might respond. Furthermore, pre-service and in-service teacher training courses and activities should include strategies for assisting teachers to acknowledge and understand their own attitudes.

Feeling devalued and not fully accepted can make one's experience of school negative and affect one's capacity and motivation to learn. Students of non-English speaking background, particularly those more recently arrived, might find consistent exposure to such attitudes, when coupled with the pressures of schooling in a second language, a negative influence on their own expectations or even a determining factor in 'dropping-out' of school.

However, schools need to examine the less obvious decisions and practices in which prejudice and the potential for discrimination might be implicit. Likewise schools with small numbers of NESB students whose councils and curriculum committees do not consider they have a responsibility to address multicultural issues should consider what contribution they are making to the continued existence of prejudice and discrimination in our society.

In this section the potential of the school system to discriminate against NESB students has been outlined. Grouping and assessment procedures, the availability and quality of ESL

teaching, classroom language and teaching styles, the content of the overt curriculum, lack of opportunity to study one's mother tongue as part of the formal curriculum, the numbers and status of NESB staff in schools, the quality of interaction between parents and the school, and the attitudes of teachers and the way these are reflected in their treatment of students and policy decisions, all have the capacity to contribute to specific disadvantage for NESB students.

It seems appropriate also to point out here that while non-English speaking background students are the focus of this report, the use of this term is not meant to suggest that such students form a homogeneous group. Gender differences, class differences and differences in ethnicity can be crucial factors in the educational experience of non-English speaking background students. Unfortunately, these factors cannot be explored here.

The issues raised in this section are intended to provide a context in which to consider a more detailed examination of two specific school communities and also to reflect upon what is happening in one's own school.

Some of these issues will be addressed more directly than others in the findings emerging from the two schools in question - had different schools been involved, then the dominant issues or concerns might have been different. Secondly, the information has been gathered in slightly different ways (explained in the text) and this too might have shaped the findings to some extent.

It should be pointed out that the two schools were chosen because they had significant numbers of NESB students and the writer of this report had meaningful access to them. They were not selected because of some 'established reputation' for discriminatory practices.

### 3. THE SCHOOLS

Downtown High School is situated about five kilometres from central Melbourne. It has a student population of approximately 450 students and a staff of fifty-one, including a Vietnamese teacher aide, a Turkish teacher aide and an Italian speaking Community Liaison Officer.

Seventy-five per cent of the school's students have a first language other than English, the main ones being: Chinese and Vietnamese (36%), Turkish (11%), Italian (10%, though only one of these students was born in Italy), and Greek (8%). In all there are twenty-two languages spoken by the families represented at the school; and the school information booklet, updated and reprinted each year, is published in ten languages.

The school is situated very close to a Ministry of Housing estate, which is home to many of the school's families. This means that there is a high student turnover each year for the school and a considerable proportion of the school's families are receiving unemployment benefits or government pensions of different kinds.

The school is organised along traditional lines with classes at Years 7 to 12. The senior levels, particularly, have a curriculum which is oriented towards Maths, Science and Commerce subjects. This reflects student preference for subjects which seem less 'language-centred' than those in the general humanities area and also the importance attached to Maths/Science subjects, particularly by Indo-Chinese students.

Other features of the school worth mentioning are: an ESL department of six teachers (1984 figures), catering for students at all levels; an International Parents and Friends group which meets regularly and is co-ordinated by the Community Liaison Officer; participation in the local Translator/Interpreter Service, a co-operative venture set up by ten local schools and

funded by the Supplementary Grants program; and an involvement in music and musical productions which has had a high profile both locally and across the State and has done much to foster school morale and a more positive image of the school in the community.

In short, the Downtown High School community faces the same pressures and strains as many other inner-city schools in Sydney and Melbourne, yet is not without some advantageous characteristics, including a relatively small school population, a low staff turnover, a high level of staff participation in decision-making, a traditional yearly, residential school in-service and effective use of outside personnel and available funding.

Westside Technical School is an old school in a new building overlooking parkland about eight kilometres west of the city of Melbourne. About five years ago it made the transition from a single sex school (all boys) to a co-educational school, although female students still only number about 20% of the total student population.

In 1984 there were approximately 700 students attending the school and of these 54% were of non-English speaking background (28% born in Australia and 26% born overseas). Twenty-six languages are spoken within the school community (1985 figures), the main ones being: Italian 8%, Croatian 6%, Macedonian 6% and Vietnamese 5%. The school has a Vietnamese teacher aide and, of the staff of seventy-six, 25% are of non-English speaking background, including Australians of Vietnamese, Turkish-Cypriot, Italian, Macedonian, Egyptian and Czech backgrounds.

The school building is of an innovative design, is well equipped and enables the school to offer opportunities in a diverse range of subject areas: media, commerce, home economics, computer education, art and design, textiles, music, trade, physical education, maths, the sciences, ESL and humanities.

The school is organised into three mini-schools, a change made to increase the contact between staff and students and to break down the impersonal nature of the school at a time when its student numbers were closer to 900. This organisational or structural change is literally cemented into the physical design of the new building. However, there are numbers of staff who have never accepted this break with traditional organisation and others who feel its drawbacks outweigh its advantages. This difference of opinion certainly could not be described as dividing staff but it is an issue which re-surfaces in different guises in many staff discussions and curriculum days.

The co-ordinators of the mini-school are elected by the staff within them in keeping with the fact that decision-making within the school has long been a fairly democratic process. Despite claims that the mini-schools reflect philosophical differences, there is little real difference between them. Students at Years 7 and 8 are offered a general education with some choice of subjects, a greater number of electives are available at Year 9 and considerable choice has to be exercised at Years 10 and 11. Study at Year 12 level has only been available for two years and consequently a wide range of subjects is still not available at this level.

Westside Technical School serves a similar clientele to Downtown High School though it has 20% fewer non-English speaking background students and fewer of those are newly arrived in Australia. Further, its student population comes from a wider geographical area and it does not draw a significant number of its students from a single residential area such as a Ministry of Housing estate.

During the past ten years the staff have been involved in three protracted industrial campaigns centring on issues of staffing and buildings. Parental support was sought and gained in each, and this has combined with the efforts of the well established ESL department (set up in the early 1970s) to foster practices

across the school which have encouraged NESB parent involvement. Further links between school and community have been developed by a long-standing and well-respected scheme in which local volunteers come in and read with students; and more recently, a school farm has been established on nearby vacant land. This employs two NESB farm workers and is used by students and their families living in the immediate vicinity.

What follows is largely a more detailed examination of Downtown High School and, in particular, the position of its non-English speaking background students - an examination carried out chiefly by individual teachers at the school.<sup>3</sup> The experience of Westside Technical School will also be included where relevant and in relation to the experience of Downtown High School rather than written about separately.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. SCHOOLS AND PREJUDICE - A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

The starting point for most schools in tackling prejudice and discrimination is student attitudes. This is not surprising. Overt expressions of prejudice among the student population can mean discipline problems for teachers, an unpleasant classroom or school yard atmosphere, an increased workload for pastoral teachers and welfare co-ordinators, concern for parents, misery for some individual students and, for some teachers, an inescapable feeling that they are failing to educate in the very real sense of the word.

In setting out to increase students' understanding, awareness and respect for the rights of others and to promote more positive interaction between students of different backgrounds, some schools learn a lot about themselves. While acknowledging that student attitudes have roots in factors beyond the control of the school, they discover that characteristics of school organisation and practice can reinforce these attitudes. Such things as lack of a clear policy which is contributed to by all in the school community, the omission of specific areas of content from the curriculum, particular teaching styles and classroom approaches, and assessment and promotion practices, can all contribute to the sort of atmosphere in which prejudice is sustained.

Concern about student attitudes and relations provided something of a starting point for Downtown High School. Towards the end of 1983 two incidents occurred in the school grounds which really heightened staff awareness of the need to address the issue of inter-group relations. A two-day residential in-service program was already planned for April 1984 to examine broad curriculum issues and teachers were asked to rank those areas which they felt merited discussion and action. The area of 'race relations', as it was then designated, received a high priority from all staff and was consequently granted a workshop

session by the in-service organisers. Among those who participated in this session were the Principal and the Deputy Principal, a number of ESL teachers, a maths teacher, a music teacher, the Turkish teacher aide, a Turkish parent and an outside consultant.

While the workshop discussions were in the main confined to trying to define the issues, and debating whether formulation of a school policy was the most appropriate way to begin, perhaps the most important decision this group made was to become a permanent committee which would meet regularly to pursue the ideas barely formulated at this in-service program.

Over the next three months this group met about once a month after school and held one evening meeting. It had the active support of the school administration - the Deputy Principal, particularly, took an active role in all curriculum discussions and was a member of this committee.

The first task the group set itself was to draw up a school policy aimed at setting down the school's position on overt racism and steps that would be taken to counter it. A staff workshop to develop awareness and to provide a wider teacher perspective for the proposed school policy was suggested. In order to plan for this, committee members and a small number of other interested teachers were released from classes for half a day; at this planning meeting, time was also given to discussing procedures at the administrative level for handling racism and appropriate long-term curriculum initiatives.

In all of this there were many protracted discussions, all of which were useful because they brought out the complexities in the area and sharpened the understanding of all involved. However, it meant that for most of Term II things seemed to move very slowly.

The Committee quickly realised that the question most frequently asked of any group working for change in a school - 'What have they done?' or 'What are they doing?' - would soon be directed at them, if the work of the committee could not proceed more speedily and with a more public profile. It was decided that the best way of achieving this would be to grant a teacher time release to co-ordinate the work of the group and liaise more effectively with staff.

When the Human Rights Commission (HRC) project was announced and funds were eventually made available, the Downtown High School Race Relations Committee discussed what tasks to set the teacher granted time release. It considered the question to be addressed was not simply, 'How can those areas nominated by the HRC project be most effectively investigated?' but rather 'How can this investigation take place through the normal curriculum development processes of the school?'

### Findings

The findings set out in the following pages are both qualitative and tentative. They are derived from the investigations of the teacher on time release and have been gathered through interviews with teachers and students, from documented meetings and recorded group discussions. Data gained in this way has been supplemented by some separate research undertaken by a member of the school's Human Rights Committee for a Bachelor of Education course. He investigated, through the use of two separate questionnaires, the school ESL program and the adjustment of twenty-four children of non-English speaking backgrounds to their first year of secondary schooling.

As indicated in the preceding paragraph, the name of the committee was changed from 'Race Relations' to 'Human Rights' not so much because of the source of funds or the nature of the project, as because the committee felt the former title gave precedence to and over-emphasised the notion of 'race' when what it wanted to stress was the worth and importance of each individual.

The decisions and activities undertaken by this committee, and facilitated by the teacher on time release, will be described and incorporated in appropriate parts of this section.

While obvious, it is worth stating none-the-less, that the points presented in the findings need to be more thoroughly and systematically investigated before they could be the basis for any generalised statements about prejudice and discrimination in schools.

### Access to English

The questionnaire completed by Year 7 Downtown High School students, and the interviews conducted with students at Years 8, 9 and 11 all reveal that lack of competence in English is a major concern for students of non-English speaking background. The former perceive it as a major factor in any difficulties they encounter in academic school work; the latter cite it as a source of mockery and abuse from other students:

According to the young children, the overall importance or value of school and school work is to learn the English language, since all other learning is dependent on it. ('General Studies is important subject. They help me speak English very well and understand all work well...This subject help me to learn more English'.) All children see the English language as the key to meaningful communication and academic success.

At the same time the difficulties such students experience with English are sometimes perceived by others as evidence of their efforts to gain favouritism or avoid punishment, as the following comments reveal:

They use their lack of the English language as a scapegoat or excuse when things go wrong for them. (Year 9 Anglo-Australian boys talking about Indo-Chinese students at Downtown High School.)

In ESL one half of them speak better English than me, but they're still put in ESL because they've got different looks.

There's different rules for them.

They pretend they can't speak Australian.  
(The above comments are part of a recorded discussion  
among Year 10 students at a Melbourne high school.)

These last comments suggest that language is not the only barrier between students fluent in English and those learning the language for the first time. The solution to this kind of resentment will not be simply a question of language. However, the importance of having sufficient numbers of qualified, competent ESL teachers who can provide intensive language teaching and general classroom support cannot be over-emphasised. A well-organised, established ESL program not only means that students can be placed in appropriate language groups, but also that they have a supportive group of teachers sensitive to their needs in a range of areas and a group of fellow students with whom they can quickly feel comfortable and readily identify.

In 1984 Downtown High School had eight fully qualified teachers working in the ESL faculty. They offered ESL classes parallel to English classes from Years 8 to 12. Because English is incorporated into a General Studies program at Year 7 a parallel ESL class in General Studies was provided. Parallel ESL classes in Australian Studies (Year 8), Geography (Years 8 and 9), History (Years 8 and 9) and Social Studies (Year 10) were also offered.

At Westside Technical School a similar system of parallel classes operates. ESL is offered at the same time as Humanities classes and, while parallel classes in other subjects are not provided, the five ESL staff offer support teaching within the subject classroom, particularly in Maths and Science, but also in other subjects containing significant numbers of ESL students.

While this method of organising ESL classes in both schools cannot be said to constitute 'withdrawal' in the traditionally accepted sense of this term (that is, students being taken out of a range of classes for English tuition) students are,

nevertheless, being separated from their peers on the basis of their level of English and indirectly, their ethnic background. The fact that groups of students, within a single form or class group, are consistently together for subjects like Maths and Science and consistently apart for English (or Humanities) must contribute to some sense of distance between them.

ESL teachers at Downtown High School acknowledge the disadvantages of this separation, suggesting that 'students would learn more English if they were mixed into mainstream classes; feelings of racial tension are created/exacerbated by the separation, and the skills of ESL teachers are being concentrated on too few students'. However, they consider that these disadvantages are outweighed by the supportive, confidence-building climate of the ESL class and the potential it offers for more explicit, appropriate language teaching techniques. Furthermore, they suggest, 'the students do not see themselves as being severed from a larger group. Students do not feel stigmatized or do not have stigma attached to them because they attend ESL classes'.

Two further observations on the role and status of ESL teaching within Downtown High School indicate ways in which this 'separation' operates at a structural level:

ESL seems to be seen by most staff members as a separate subject area; this perception encourages the situation where ESL teachers are responsible for all problems associated with the migrant child.

The dilemma that exists is that as the number of ESL teachers grows in a school, other staff members may relinquish any responsibility to develop courses catering to the specific language needs of migrant children.

Whether non-English speaking background students would be better served by an ESL program which operates within mainstream classes or by one which runs parallel to mainstream classes is difficult to say.

If the former helps to reduce the distance between students of different backgrounds, if it creates a more corporate sense of responsibility on the part of all staff for all students and if, more specifically, it leads to better classroom teaching through a greater awareness of language issues and the opportunity for teachers to work on these together, then little can be said against a 'mainstream' program.

However, to achieve this requires certain conditions and factors which exist in very few schools: sufficient numbers of ESL staff to work alongside subject teachers; willingness and capability of teachers to work together; creativity and flexibility in teaching approaches so that particular situations, such as the arrival of 'beginners', can be catered for; and recognition by the school administration and all staff that two teachers working with one class is not a luxury to be dispensed with in the event of staff absences or shortages. These conditions need to be virtually guaranteed for a 'mainstream' program, at least an extensive one, to be successful. Perhaps this is why so few schools have adopted this approach. Downtown High School and Westside Technical School, for example, have not.

What can be said about the ESL programs of both schools is that they are an integral part of the school curriculum and classes are not scheduled against subjects crucial for continuing education. Both schools are staffed with qualified and experienced ESL teachers and sufficient numbers of them to offer a worthwhile program that is not marginalised. However, according to the terms of the 'Agreement on Conditions and Staffing 1984' (an agreement reached between the Education Department and the teacher unions) both schools are entitled to more ESL staff on the basis on their non-English speaking background student numbers.

Insufficient numbers of ESL teachers (or classroom teachers with ESL training) inevitably, in schools like these, result in programs which concentrate almost solely on 'first phase'

learners (see page 10). At Downtown High School almost 70% of the students catered for in the ESL program have been in the country for six years or less. At Westside Technical School the percentage is even higher. The student born in Australia, or arriving here at an early age, whose mother tongue is not English, and who might therefore experience some difficulty in English expression, or require specific kinds of language assistance or tuition, is not reached by the ESL programs of either of these schools.

### Classroom language

An observation by an ESL teacher from Downtown High School that 'in the past there has been comparatively little evidence of teachers making a consistent effort to simplify their language where possible and otherwise take account of the 75% of the student population for whom English is not their first language', is supported by the responses of the twenty-four Year 7 students surveyed.

While these students had a generally positive view of their school work in terms of their own motivation, their enjoyment of it and their perception of its difficulty, any problems encountered were nearly always associated with language. Most subject areas were mentioned in this regard, but Science, in particular, was singled out: 'I don't like Science because I don't speak English'; 'Science, because there is lots of things I don't understand. And the words are too hard'; 'Science, because I can't write in English'.

The teacher carrying out this research concluded that '...the difficulty in Science is caused by two things: (i) the technical language and concepts used...where...often teachers may presuppose a vocabulary the child has in his/her own language; and (ii) the tasks given are usually in the nature of reading, comprehension and written assignments'.

A discussion with a group of Year 11 students of Vietnamese and Laotian background at Westside Technical School reveals similar attitudes to Science. When asked about 'difficult subjects', the students unanimously nominated Science, and 'English' as the reason for their difficulties. One student, elaborating, said, 'Lots of writing. Some days four or five pages from the blackboard. Some words hard to understand and some new words'. Of course, without actually being in the classroom it is difficult to know exactly how this written information was presented. Was it put on the blackboard after some kind of experiment or demonstration? Was it written up in stages as an experiment or demonstration proceeded? Was it read through and discussed, with questions asked to elicit students' understanding? Or was it the sole method of delivering information on a particular topic or issue, leaving students to grapple with the main understandings and concepts as best they could?

The point is that many subject teachers do not think about the appropriateness of the language tasks - either oral or written - which they demand of students. A group of Year 9 students from Westside Technical School (of Vietnamese, Polish, Yugoslav, Chilean and Lebanese backgrounds) said the most frequent kind of homework set in Science classes was the written 'assignment' which they frequently needed to undertake at school (where they could call on the assistance of ESL teachers, teacher aides or fellow students) because they were often confused by the wording of the assignment and were not sure what was required of them.

Inadequate awareness of language issues is not confined to Science teaching or Science teachers. However, there are a number of explanations as to why the students interviewed in both schools stressed their language difficulties in this subject in particular.

In the case of Downtown High School, the students expressed less frustration and dissatisfaction with other language-intensive subjects because, at the junior levels especially, these are

often taken by an ESL teacher and are taught from an ESL perspective. At Westside Technical School, aside from Humanities or ESL, Science is one of the few language-intensive subjects taken by all students at some time in their schooling. Like many technical schools this one offers a great range of practical subjects where language is not such a barrier to either enjoying or succeeding in the subject, and these subjects can constitute the major part of a student's timetable. This is not to say that the language of the Maths or Woodwork teacher is irrelevant - explanations, instructions, questions and written tasks are integral and crucial parts of all subjects. However, there is a degree to which the manipulation of symbols or materials can be observed and understood without fully understanding the accompanying English.

A preference for 'non-language' subjects was displayed by the Year 7 students of Downtown High School. The interviewing teacher commented: 'The preference for Mathematics by the young children can be explained in terms of the numeracy skills with minimal dependence on English language competence. A similar reason may explain the high preference for Art/Craft subjects where the emphasis is on manual and artistic skills and where verbal instructions are coupled, in most cases, with visual examples. There is a correlation between language and subject appreciation. There is increased satisfaction with a subject where the subject and skill to be learnt are primary concerns and not dominated by difficult language'.

In developing an approach to subject teaching which begins with an initial topic presentation not dependent on language and proceeds to build language development work on to this, Bill Cleland and Ruth Evans, two Melbourne teachers, argue that all students need to understand the way language is used and the style of language used within a subject; and that students for whom English presents no difficulty develop a deeper understanding of topics presented in this way. (Williams 1984)

The achievement of all students, regardless of language background, can be affected by the language of the classroom teacher and his/her awareness of language issues generally. However, students whose first language is not English and who experience difficulty in any aspect of the language, clearly stand to lose most in the classroom where language issues are not addressed or appreciated.

### Teaching styles and approaches

As indicated earlier (p. 11) this is quite a complex area and one about which it is difficult to be anything but speculative. To write about it separately from issues of 'classroom language' and 'teacher attitudes' is to suggest that the inextricable can be somehow extricated. Therefore the distinctions are made for purposes of clarity and to impose some order on the material.

While teachers often have little difficulty describing, in broad terms anyway, what might be termed their own teaching style or that of other teachers ('firm but progressive', 'strict disciplinarian', 'conservative authoritarian', 'slack radical') these are not immutable, fixed characteristics unchanging from class to class, drawing the same reactions from all students, and responding uniformly to these reactions.

We need to acknowledge that 'relations are constantly being negotiated in the flux of daily school life...Being an 'effective teacher' is not a settled trait of a person, like height or hair colour, but the consequence of a complex, multi-person practice. It depends on context...our evidence shows that the same person can be involved in significantly different practices with different people and groups. The same teacher can be liked and successful with some...and quite disliked by others'. (Connell 1982)

Just as the classroom styles of teachers can't be regarded as either uniform or constant, so too the responses of non-English speaking background students to such teaching styles or their

ways of interacting with such styles cannot be regarded as homogeneous. Differences in individual personality, family attitudes and expectations, past educational experience and cultural and class background are likely to be more influential factors in shaping the way students respond to particular teaching styles than the shared characteristic of having a first language other than English. However, this does not mean that exploring the responses of non-English speaking background students to their Australian teachers is not instructive or useful.

At Westside Technical School a Year 9 student of Vietnamese background articulated what seemed to be a generally shared view of one of the group's practical teachers.

The teacher no good. He short tempered. All the students feel the same about him...You can't make a good progress. Just 'you do this, you do that'. I'm not frightened of any teacher, Miss. Why should I be? But the way he talk, the way he treat you...you can't learn much about the subject.  
(Student of Vietnamese background, three years in Australia)

There appear to be two inter-related aspects to this student's reaction to this teacher. The first is to do with the teacher's personality or personal demeanour in the classroom, his 'short temper', which probably makes him fairly unapproachable in the eyes of most students. His second concern is the way he teaches - authoritarian, lacking explanation, providing few opportunities for students to learn through discovery.

Different students in both the Year 9 and Year 11 groups at Westside Technical School made particular reference to another practical class teacher. A second Vietnamese student in the Year 9 class said: 'When I came here I ask him how to do this. I scare. He doesn't explain...just do that. He don't show you'. Referring to the same teacher and explaining why he frequently misses school on a Friday a student of Vietnamese background in the Year 11 class, commenced: 'On Friday I

have...Very boring, you know. The teacher always yell, always get angry. The first time I say him, never friendly. When I touch something he yell. So I don't go'.

In the classes of both the teachers referred to there are almost certainly variations in the way students respond and in the way this affects what satisfaction and achievement they derive from the subjects in question. It is likely, however, that most students in these classes are not served by the tension which must be generated by the way these teachers appear to operate. Students of non-English speaking background, particularly those who are recently arrived in Australia, would have neither the opportunity nor the confidence to 'try out' their English in such classrooms, nor to acquire much language associated with the subject; and, in cases like that of the Year 11 student, would forgo the opportunity to acquire valuable skills and knowledge rather than tolerate a teacher who yells.

Students' expectations and perceptions of teaching derived from direct experience of another education system or from parental opinions must influence, to some degree, the way they respond to their teachers in a new system.

The students interviewed at Westside Technical School in both Years 9 and 11 found no difficulty in talking about school, as they remembered it, in their home countries. On matters of discipline, respect for the teacher and, in some instances, methods of teaching and learning, that past experience of students is the yardstick against which their new schooling doesn't seem to measure up. However, how this affects their achievement or sense of satisfaction in their Australian schooling is difficult to say. At times there seem to be some contradictions between what students appear to admire in their past schooling and how they respond in their new situation.

A Year 9 student of Polish background had this to say:

Here all the students don't care teacher. In Poland if you stay away they send to principal or kick you out of the school...If X (difficult student in the group) was in my country, they'd kick him out of the school. First time something happens they hit him...the class teacher...and after he muck around they send him principal, then they ask his parents to come and after that he must leave the school...In my country, after that, it's very hard to get back into the school...In Australia they should be able to hit the students because then you scare and then you study properly.

This student acknowledged, however, that he obeyed teachers not through fear but out of a desire to learn.

The students of Vietnamese background in the Year 11 class made the following contributions to the discussion of past schooling:

No swearing or yelling in front of the teacher...In Vietnam fifty or sixty in one class. You can hear a fly.

When you come into the class have to keep quiet, working, no talking. Everyday you have to come out to the teacher and the teacher give you a question and if you can't answer that he hit you...And when the student see the teacher he has to go like this (nods head).

While they all agreed that class sizes were too large in the schools they attended in Indo-China, they felt that Westside Technical School would be a better school if it were closer to the schools of their home countries in matters of discipline and respect for the teacher.

The Laotian student in the group, in describing the following memory of his past schooling, admitted it was something he hated, but when asked if he would like to learn in this way now, responded positively, claiming that it helped to develop a good memory:

After school he (the teacher) give you the words, lots of them, you have to remember by the head. You have to put the book down and say it. If you can't remember: 'Where you last night?'

All that can be said about the responses of these students is that their past schooling has largely shaped their notions of what sorts of places and people schools and teachers should be; and what sorts of things should go on in schools and classrooms. What impact these perceptions have on their experience of Australian schooling is difficult to say and will undoubtedly vary from student to student.

The sorts of dilemmas or uncertainties created for non-English speaking background students who have begun their education elsewhere are reflected in the story told by a Year 9 student of Vietnamese background at Westside Technical School. He is recounting the details of an altercation he had with a teacher whom he did not know well and his final comments seem particularly revealing:

He yell at me. He say, 'that piece of paper, pick it up'. I say, 'No, I didn't chuck it'...Then a teacher, a female, she came and picked it up...He say, 'You see me after, you give me trouble'. And I say, 'When I don't want to do something, you can't force me, not because you're a teacher'...'Yes I can. Yes I can'.

After he bring me to the Vice-Principal, he explain everything...I realised it's no good to argue with him...In my country I wouldn't argue with the teacher like this because they very good...I feel different about it, I respect them very much.

'Feeling different about it' is partly an inevitable outcome of adjusting to life in a new country, including a new school. Whether Australian schools can be accused of discrimination on this score is very much open to question. However, schools could greatly assist this process of adjustment by engaging parents (and students) in discussion of issues about which fundamental differences, deriving from different educational experiences, might exist - for example: discipline, homework, classroom teaching, assessment and promotion.

In the absence of such opportunity to understand and discuss a school's practices and the thinking behind them, students and parents of non-English speaking background are certainly disadvantaged, a disadvantage felt most keenly by those recently arrived in Australia but certainly not confined to them.

The Year 7 children interviewed at Downtown High School had a generally positive perception of and attitude towards their teachers, though a small number expressed hesitation or uncertainty about asking for the teacher's help in certain situations:

Yes, some teachers help me with work, the trouble is sometimes I hardly understand, I really want to ask the teacher but I scare they said you wasn't listen before, that why you don't know...Some teachers help me with my work, but others just say try until the period is over.

From the comments of students of both schools it is not possible to make any overall statements about the way teachers teach and the effect of this on students of non-English speaking background in either school, nor to make comparisons between the schools.

The students of Years 9 and 11 interviewed at Westside Technical School largely generated their own discussion with guiding questions from the interviewing teacher. Consequently, lengthy descriptions of the individual teachers and incidents emerge in their discussion but no overall picture of how they perceive the teachers in the school, other than a brief, initial response to the question: 'What do you think of the teachers at this school?' At both year levels the response was: 'Some good, some bad'.

The students at Downtown High School were younger and their comments were made as they completed that part of a questionnaire schedule relating to teachers. The items required a 'yes/no/sometimes' response. While information gained in this way made collation of responses possible and provided an overall picture of how this group of students felt about their teachers (very positive), less structured interviewing might have elicited a more complex set of responses.

This section, dealing with teaching styles and approaches, has had to be somewhat speculative and inconclusive. It is not possible to say that even a single school is characterised by a particular teaching style and that students of non-English speaking background respond in a singular way.

In fact, what students of all backgrounds are responding to within their schools are a range of teacher attitudes and practices which not only differ from each other but actually interfere with each other. For example, the teacher who plans small group discussion of a short story or film within her English class might find the students unable to work productively in this less teacher-centred atmosphere because they have just come from someone else's Geography class where they are not permitted to 'look sideways'.

While it is important to acknowledge that this kind of difference exists within schools and affects the way all students function and cope, whether students of particular backgrounds are disadvantaged because of it is much more open to question.

It would seem appropriate for a Year 9 student from Westside Technical School to have the last word here. He was talking about what made him respect a teacher:

...a good attitude, good teaching and they treat you well; they treat you equal with the other students...they're fair.  
(Vietnamese student)

The emphasis on fairness accords with Connell's findings in his interviews with secondary students, largely Anglo-Australians, in state and private schools. He found that the consistent thread running through all the interviews was student resentment of unfair treatment by teachers. He also found that the same students found it very difficult to identify or articulate just what it was that made for 'good teaching', though they had no trouble recognising it. (Connell 1982)

### Student attitudes and interaction

Interaction between students of the same ethnic background and of different backgrounds, and the attitudes they hold or display towards each other are usually not of the school's making. They are fostered in the family, in peer groups outside the school, in the wider community and in the media.

However, schools can contribute to the shaping of these attitudes, their reinforcement, and the quality and quantity of interaction between ethnically different students, in a variety of ways. Curriculum content which most often springs to mind when the influence of the school on student attitudes is under consideration, is not necessarily the most significant factor.

### Prejudiced attitudes and their expression

At Downtown High School a group discussion between Vietnamese, Timorese and Cambodian students (all male) at Years 8, 9 and 11 revealed concern that they were mocked or abused by non-Asian students for their imperfect English and physical appearance. The Year 9 students, expounding on the prejudice they felt, concentrated on teasing, name-calling, pushing and tripping while the Year 11 students referred to the expression of attitudes common in the wider community:

We don't like other students saying to us 'Go back to your country'...They think we take their jobs and they think we are taking over the country...I felt very angry towards Blainey when he said that 'we (Australia) should give the Asians one thousand dollars to go back to their country'.

At Westside Technical School a slight difference in perception or emphasis between the middle school and older students could also be detected. The former seemed more conscious of negative attitudes on the part of other students, as reflected in the comments of a Year 9 Vietnamese boy:

Sometimes they swear to us...If it's a girl, it's alright, if it's a boy I don't mind too much...if they touch you I don't want to fight, but they're too hateful...They think they're the best...I want to be friends with everyone.

These remarks suggest a student struggling to understand and cope with trying to protect his rights and dignity, yet avoiding retaliation as a way of handling the situation, and not able to escape culturally determined attitudes to women in his response to abuse or hostility from girls.

The same student, later in the discussion, referred to the attitudes of other non-English speaking background students in the school. This was a theme he returned to on two further occasions:

Some kids they come from Europe or the other countries when they was small. When they grow up they speak English. They say, 'I'm Aussie'. They get smart to you...Sometimes I can be friendly with them, but then they say to me 'get lost'.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to draw out the kinds of situations and contexts in which this sort of encounter occurred. Nevertheless, it is indicative of comments made by many teachers and students: that prejudice towards Indo-Chinese is not the monopoly of Anglo-Australians. Varying explanations of this are put forward within different school communities - the students referred to have taken on the attitudes of the local community, including their 'Anglo' peers; or the arrival of a new group provides them with the opportunity to proclaim 'I'm Aussie' and gain an acceptance or sense of belonging which has long been denied them; or the arrival of a new group, particularly in schools that have traditionally catered for 'new arrivals', means that some students see themselves as moving one step up in the 'pecking order' and the expression of prejudice and hostility towards the new group is one way of affirming this.

The Year 11 students at Westside Technical School said little about their fellow students other than 'some are friendly, some aren't'. Like their Downtown High School counterparts, they expressed a concern with community attitudes. When discussing the attitudes of non-Indo-Chinese people towards them, they moved quickly from the school to the community, and related incidents in which they had been abused and in which one of the students had been physically attacked.

Some Year 12 Anglo-Australian girls interviewed at Downtown High School observed that 'it seems to be worse in the community than at school'. They also felt that 'you become more tolerant and accepting as you get older. The more you get to know people, the friendlier things become'.

Whether this is really a reflection of greater tolerance and awareness or simply more restrained, less overtly prejudiced behaviour is open to question. Nevertheless, it might explain why problems of inter-ethnic hostility and prejudice seem of more concern, in the school context, at the junior and middle levels of the secondary school, than at the senior levels.

#### Student interaction

The Year 7 students at Downtown High School all stressed the importance of friendships contributing to a positive experience of school and indicated that their friendship groupings, not surprisingly, are mostly based on shared ethnicity ('...because I Vietnamese, in this school are many Vietnamese that I make friends easy'...'because they speak the same language...').

Recent research in England into the perceptions and attitudes of primary school children of different backgrounds confirms this pattern of 'ethnic preference'. Among a range of findings was 'little desire for intergroup friendship among the children in any of the...groups', though few of the children surveyed were recent arrivals in England and there was little overt hostility in the children's responses to survey tasks and questions.

(Davey 1983)

A Year 11 Vietnamese male student made the following comments in an individual interview at Downtown High School:

Perhaps I may have contact with one or two Australian boys and no more. None of the Australian girls will speak to me. I don't speak to them because it's my nature. I am fairly shy. Perhaps only a brief formal conversation. I have no contact with Turkish students because I don't know any. Nor do I know any Greek, Italian or other students. I would love to have some contact with these students.

These remarks reflect a concern that was voiced by all students interviewed at this school, with the exception of the Anglo-Australian boys in Year 9, that the school should provide more opportunities for positive interaction between students of different backgrounds.

The Anglo-Australian Year 9 boys, in contrast to the remarks above, claim 'the Viets won't join in with us...we let them join in our games but they don't seem to want to join in with us. They prefer to stick with their own countrymen'.

In both Downtown High School and Westside Technical School there are cross-cultural friendships and interactions between students of all backgrounds though whether these are more than transient or superficial, and whether they contribute to the formation of more positive attitudes is open to question. Certainly, the allocation of students to mini-schools (in the case of Westside Tech.), to year levels and to classes within these year levels means that in any one class there is rarely a concentration of any one ethnic group. (Though at Downtown High School where more than a third of the students are of Indo-Chinese background this is obviously less the case.) Over time and with continued contact the opportunities for students of different backgrounds to develop positive relationships certainly exist.

At Downtown High School students had the following explanations of this situation, ranging from the general to the personal:

Physical differences make things harder for Asians and because of this it may take longer for them to be accepted.

(Year 12, Anglo girl)

I would feel extremely shy about going to join in with another group. I don't know if they like me. I would be very reluctant to join them.  
(Year 11, Vietnamese male)

They don't like us speaking in our own language.

They think we take their jobs and they think we are taking over the country.

Australian students won't let you participate in games in the school ground.  
(Year 11, Indo-Chinese males)

It seems that being recently arrived in the community, and part of a group that is both visibly 'different' and numerically significant within the school community, contributes to the distance between the Indo-Chinese students and others in the school. Of course none of these factors would matter if community attitudes were different or if schools were better able, or more appropriate places, to counter community attitudes.

#### Prejudice and gender

Of the students interviewed at Downtown High the two groups of students one might expect to display prejudice in the context of local community attitudes are the two Anglo-Australian groups - the Year 12 girls and the Year 9 boys. Because the groups were relatively small, nothing could be concluded with any certainty as a result of comparing their comments, but the comparison is interesting, nevertheless.

The Year 9 boys, despite acknowledging their own prejudice and overt approval of schools teaching about different cultures - 'We should learn more about the Vietnamese and other cultures' - subscribe to most of the current community myths about newly-arrived immigrants, perceive their lack of contact with the Indo-Chinese students as being the fault of the latter, consider that those same students take advantage of their limited English to avoid accepting responsibility and receive preferential treatment from the teachers:

The Asians are trying to rule Australia. There are too many coming here. They are richer than us. They have got most of the jobs...There should be a limit to how many Asians the school can take.

The Year 12 girls, on the other hand, while not free of prejudice, display a far greater understanding of why negative feelings develop, of their own attitudes over a period of time, of the difficulties faced by non-English speaking background students, and they take a positive view of the multicultural nature of Australian society:

It's good that Australia is a multicultural society because we can learn from each other...It's good to have first hand experience with migrants. We feel privileged that we are able to have this contact with them.

When Asians first came to Downtown High we didn't like them. We felt threatened and insecure...Australians are the first to put migrants down because they feel threatened by them. We call them names for no reason.

Apart from the possibility that the girls are more sophisticated exponents of telling the teacher 'what she wants to hear', there are three possible explanations for the very obvious differences in opinion and attitude expressed in the two interviews. These explanations are age difference, difference in specific educational experience and gender difference.

Difference in age as reflected in the more sensitive and self-aware comments of the Year 12 girls must make some contribution to the differing perspectives of the two groups. Secondly, these girls had undertaken the Australian History Race Relations course, conducted by a teacher who gave his students a quite unequivocal understanding of what his viewpoint on racism was, yet gave students the opportunity to investigate the issues for themselves through such activities as surveys and interviews, along with more formal study.

It is not possible to say exactly what influence this experience has had on the attitudes of the girls interviewed, but it certainly should not be discounted.

Finally, what part might gender and related role conditioning play in explaining the difference in attitudes? Once again it is difficult to determine from these interviews. Certainly teachers can provide enough examples of the prejudiced attitudes of girls, yet there is some tentative evidence to suggest that girls might be less likely to be overtly prejudiced and possibly more amenable to curriculum efforts at attitude change. (Rodgers 1978; Verma & MacDonald 1971; Wiseman 1983; Maddock 1985; Davey 1983)

The research evidence on prejudice and gender is tentative because in each case the difference in attitudes between males and females was not statistically significant, but it was a tendency or trend definite enough for the researchers in question to feel it worth commenting on.

Research carried out in Chicago into the effects of a specially devised curriculum on the attitudes of school students in an area undergoing racial change, found that the strongest predictor of prejudiced and hostile attitudes among the adolescent students in the survey was being white and male. The implication for schools, drawn by the researchers, was the need for the development and exploration of new norms and peer group references for adolescent males. (Lessing & Clarke 1976)

#### Perception of ethnic background

The comments of students at both Westside Technical School and Downtown High School reveal a superficial awareness of students' backgrounds - other than their own and other than Anglo-Australian. The Year 9 Vietnamese student, critical of students of European background saying 'I'm Aussie' in order to distance themselves from him, has already been mentioned. In the same group when students were asked what were the backgrounds of the other students in the school, they responded in terms of countries, mentioning countries in Indo-China initially, then Yugoslavia and Greece. When pushed for more

they came up with Turkey, Italy and Argentina. Further questioning revealed that these are the backgrounds of students known to them in particular classes.

The student of Laotian background in Year 11 at Westside Technical School commented that the students in his Woodwork class were 'all right. Most of them come from the other countries - Italian, Greek'. When asked how he knew this, he explained that because he was very good at Woodwork the other students often asked him for help. Having made that approach, these students then felt able to ask about his background and he, in turn, made the same enquiry of them.

The comments of a range of students at Downtown High School indicate something of how 'ethnic background' is perceived by some students there - the complexities, superficialities and the kinds of attitudes that shape those perceptions or develop with them are very much in evidence:

The Viets won't join in with us - the Greeks, Italians and others are alright.  
(Anglo male, Year 9)

There are four main groups in the school - Vietnamese, Turkish, Chinese and Europeans/Australians...I see the Asians separated from the other groups...The most powerful group in the school seems to be the Turkish. They have the power in their numbers.  
(Vietnamese male, Year 11)

The Greeks and Italians are good, however some Turkish males can become quite aggressive and vulgar, particularly when they have the support of their peers.  
(Anglo females, Year 12)

One can only speculate about how these perceptions of other students' backgrounds have developed. Personal friendships and interaction, awareness of differences in physical appearance and language, recognition of 'different' names, observation of students' relationships with teachers or teacher aides of specific ethnic backgrounds, exchanges of personal information directly in class activities or indirectly through a form

teacher's efforts to ascertain language spoken at home, can all contribute to student awareness of the backgrounds of other students in the school.

This is not to say, however, that students have an accurate picture of the total school population, that they have anything other than superficial knowledge of the backgrounds of the students they can identify, nor does it guarantee positive attitudes.

The complexities of inter-group relations and perceptions are revealed in a recent Melbourne newspaper article on 'youth'. Making allowances for the hyperbole of journalism, there is still much in the article that is confirmed by the experience of teachers in schools with more established non-English speaking background students.<sup>5</sup>

The article refers to schools in both the eastern and outer western suburbs of Melbourne where a 'wogs-versus-Aussies' mentality has developed, linked to power groups within student populations, with Aussies or 'skips' not always having the upper hand. The students interviewed, of both English and non-English speaking backgrounds, acknowledge that the divisions had their origins in prejudice towards immigrants, but clearly are now complicated by issues of adolescent identity and youth culture.

As one student put it:

I think it's funny at our school because even though we've got the two groups, 'wogs' versus 'Aussies', I don't think anyone knows what group they're in. You have people of non-English speaking background on the Aussies side and Aussies in the so-called Wogs group.  
(Wilmoth 1985)

What these students have to say and the observations and perceptions of the students of both Downtown High and Westside Tech. indicate the very real need for schools to examine and understand what is happening in their own community. In devising ways of improving inter-group relations schools need to

be cognisant of the factors operating in their school community and not work on the assumption that prejudice is quite the same in all schools.

### Schools and student interaction

In numbers of schools students of non-English speaking background have been the victims of Anglo-Australian awkwardness with unfamiliar names. Indo-Chinese are simply the latest in a long line of students embarrassed by what was once of no concern to them. Some teachers, embarrassed at their failure to get their tongue around a name or to remember the correct word order or to accurately match a face to a name, sometimes avoid calling students anything at all.

Secondly, in many secondary schools there is little conscious attempt to make sure that all students know each other's names. Both these practices encourage the use of group labels instead of individual names and exacerbate the distance between different groups of students.

The following examples from a collection of 'common classroom occurrences' put together by teachers in an inner Melbourne high school illustrate the problems of group labelling and failure to accord students the dignity of their own names:

Students in 10F have been together as a group for all their core subjects for at least two terms (in many cases much longer).

Teacher: 'Brian, could you give this book to Phuong please?'

Student: 'Who? I can't tell the difference between them. They all look the same.'

In a Year 11 class which includes some Asian and some non-Asian students, the non-Asian girls persist in referring to the Asian girls as 'that one' or 'the one with the bow'. They have spent fifteen periods a week together for the whole term.<sup>6</sup>

It is to be hoped that the teachers who discussed these situations did not spend all their time talking about the attitude of the 'non-Asian' students but also considered ways in

which their approach to the class, the kinds of activities the students are generally engaged in, and factors beyond the classroom might be maintaining the distance between the students.

At Westside Technical School, ESL staff have provided teachers within mini-schools with information about the names and backgrounds of specific students and written information on general pronunciation guidelines.

The mini-school system (or any other form of organisation that offers a smaller alternative to the larger institution) has distinct advantages here in that it provides a forum for teachers to share concerns and responsibilities which run counter to departmental or faculty interests, and promotes a broader sense of responsibility for students of all backgrounds. In schools without this kind of organisation the very size of the institution, apart from anything else, makes it likely that a single department will be perceived to be, and hence become, the sole comforter and provider for students of non-English speaking background.

Teachers at Downtown High School, in a series of meetings aimed at devising strategies for promoting more positive interaction between students, suggested initial lessons devoted to the names of all students in the class. The activities included pronunciation; collecting games which involve students in remembering each other's names; displaying photographs in the classroom and staffroom with the names of students (and phonetic spelling); having students correct each other's work as a starting point for interaction and learning each other's names; the use of name tags by teachers and students in classes at the beginning of the year; and teachers always calling students by their names.

The teacher who surveyed the Year 7 students at Downtown High School concluded that:

Only a few children...mentioned the opportunities that the school provides for learning about other people and for social interaction with children of different ethnic backgrounds. The overall emphasis appears to be the learning of English, firstly as a means of coping with Australian culture and society and secondly as a means to achieving their vocational aspirations.

He found much the same general trend among a group of Year 10 students he interviewed - six students ranging in age from fifteen to seventeen and having as their first languages Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, Vietnamese and Arabic.

On the other hand, other students interviewed, whose comments have already been referred to on a range of issues, clearly saw the school as having a greater role to play in promoting more positive interaction:

We should learn more about the Vietnamese and other cultures.

(Anglo male, Year 9)

Teachers should encourage more activities so that Asian and non-Asian students can mix together...We want to have contact with Australian and other European students.

(Vietnamese male, Year 11)

In the playground I play basketball when and where I want. I don't play football so I wouldn't join in with the other students who do...I do not have very much contact with the Australian students. There are only formal conversations in class and discussing work in class...I would like to see teachers try and prevent isolation of groups and encourage more integration.

(Vietnamese male, Year 11)

So clearly there is some sort of mandate from students to staff for the school to do more about interaction between students, though it's not possible to say how widespread this is or what sort of priority it would be accorded by different students.

In the same series of meetings or workshops referred to above teachers from Downtown High School suggested a range of approaches for fostering more positive interaction between students.

Strategies were suggested in three broad areas - classroom strategies, whole school strategies and community strategies.

Along with ideas for encouraging the learning and use of students' names, the first category included ways of developing self-esteem in all students, how teachers can be more positive role models, handling racist comments in class, establishing rules for class behaviour, and setting goals with and for students - strategies not dependent on subject matter and relevant to all teachers.

Whole school and community strategies related more directly to the human rights policy and included suggestions for responding to student violence and racist literature and more effective use of school assemblies, the school's ethnic aides, the student bulletin and ways of involving parents.

Downtown High School runs a very successful program of year level camps. They are well supported by staff and students and carefully planned from both an educational and social interaction perspective. Films, videos and simulation games are selected for their relevance to issues in the school community and as a stimulus for student discussion and exchange of views.

The following comment from a group interview with Year 11 Indo-Chinese students is particularly revealing:

Even though some non-Asian students were fairly friendly at the camp, when they returned to school they reverted...to their natural anti-social anti-Asian feelings.

This comment is not so much a reflection on the atmosphere at Downtown High but on the school system generally and on the quite different power relationships and constraints that operate within a school and away from it.

On most school camps there is a sense of collaboration and corporate responsibility among teachers which, despite staff co-operation in planning courses and materials, is never quite

replicated in relation to classroom teaching. The community of the camp is much smaller, it is a short-term venture and the participants are there by choice. The students usually have some responsibility in the daily running of the camp; and experiences, such as eating meals together, playing a game of chess, not part of normal school routine, are shared by staff and students alike. While the authority of the teacher remains, issues of 'control' as they operate in the classroom do not.

While Downtown High School is less authoritarian, less hierarchical and less impersonal than many other schools, there is a degree to which it can't avoid some compulsion and coercion of its students. Collective behaviour on the part of students, including prejudice towards a particular group, is often partly a reaction to the impositions of the school. The absence of the camp environment characteristics from the school environment doesn't create 'anti-social, anti-Asian feeling', it just seems to make its expression more likely.

Finally, interaction in the classroom needs to be considered. While it has already been suggested that individual teaching styles are difficult to categorise meaningfully and they are conditioned by a range of factors, it is still possible to talk about 'elements of common practice' in the way teachers teach. For example, the degree of teacher-centredness in their teaching and the extent to which individual activity (as opposed to co-operative activity) is required of students, can usually be identified in most teachers' classrooms over time.

Hours of observation and interviewing would have been required to explore this area in either Downtown High School or Westside Technical School. However, discussions with a range of teachers across a range of schools along with personal experience and observation suggest that most classroom teaching is still teacher-dominated and most student activity still has an individual focus.<sup>7</sup>

The relevance of this to the level and quality of interaction between students of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds is that opportunities for interaction provided outside the classroom will have marginalised impact if the 'message' from classroom activities is a highly individual, competitive one.

Secondly, content and materials designed to develop students' understanding of diversity and the rights of others will make little impact if students work passively with the materials and not co-operatively with their fellow students.

In too many classrooms, too much discussion goes through the teacher and too little between the students themselves; too much research is carried out by individual students for purposes of individual assessment and not enough collaborative, structured group tasks are incorporated in students' work; too much classroom interaction is incidental and not enough is planned for.

The work of educational researchers, particularly in the United States, suggests that co-operative learning has the potential both to improve achievement levels and to reduce inter-ethnic prejudice. However, the same researchers in no way underestimate the need for co-operative skills to be taught. These are sophisticated skills, often not well developed in adults, and students can't simply be put in groups and expected to co-operate. On the other hand, if co-operative group work were to become the norm in classrooms rather than the exception, the majority of students might emerge from schools with skills and attitudes which now seem randomly distributed and acquired. (Sharan 1980; Johnson 1982)

### Curriculum content

Separate consideration of the content of the curriculum is not to suggest that it can really be considered apart from the way it is taught or from other practices and attitudes within the school which might impinge upon it. However, because the

content of the curriculum and the materials in which that content is conveyed are so often singled out as the sole means by which central understandings will be developed in students or current misunderstandings challenged, it merits some separate examination.

The kind of curriculum content which might reduce ethnocentricism, and increase students' understanding of our society's diversity and the rights of all within it, has been briefly alluded to already. (See p. 13)

The Human Rights Committee at Downtown High School has worked through the school's curriculum committee and individual faculties in an attempt to develop recognition of rights and respect for diversity and to challenge prejudice within existing programs and courses. Working through existing courses, they argue, greatly increases the likelihood that such perspectives will become a permanent part of the curriculum, and not dependent on the enthusiasms and interests of individual teachers.

Their main initiatives in 1985 have been at Year 8 and Year 10 levels. At Year 8 level there has been an Australian Studies course for some years, integrating History, Geography and Social Studies. The multicultural nature of Australian society and the importance of migration in Australia's development has always been part of this course, but it has now been given a stronger 'community' focus. That is, while issues of diversity and migration are still examined in the broader Australian context, they are now explored closer to home - in the local community.

The experiences and interests of groups in the local community, represented in the school and classroom, are studied in more detail. Excursions, guest speakers from the local community, and local investigations and surveys are incorporated into the course in the hope that students' knowledge and awareness of their immediate environment will broaden beyond that shaped by family and peer group.

Developing and implementing the course has not been without its difficulties, including the need for teachers involved in the program to meet and plan as the course evolves. Student responses have not always been positive, not so much to the notion of 'community studies' but to particular parts of the course. In one class, for example, two students objected to learning about days of significance for the local Indo-Chinese community. The teacher was met with the familiar chorus, 'We don't want to do this. Why do we have to do this?', in an unmistakably hostile tone. However the same students responded much less negatively to a visiting speaker from the local Vietnamese community.

This illustrated two elements of experience familiar to many teachers. In introducing what might be termed 'multicultural content' into their courses, they sometimes encounter prejudiced or negative attitudes in students, which means a negative response to the course content or outright rejection of it. Secondly, giving material a personal dimension by using a guest speaker, or an appropriate film, or creating an atmosphere in which students can share their own experience while not guaranteeing a change of attitude, will often generate a more receptive climate in which to discuss the issues.

Students taking Australian History at Year 12 complete the Race Relations option (and in 1984 this involved them in a survey of racism in the local community and correspondence with Geoffrey Blainey); Year 10 Social Studies teachers planned a study of 'prejudice and discrimination' to be tried in a small way in 1985 and developed more fully the following year; and the Year 11 core (pastoral) program has a strong community service emphasis which has involved some students in 'placements' or activities associated with local community groups and parents.

A cross-age tutoring program has been developed with Years 8 and 10 students. It is conducted during the Year 10 core (pastoral) session and students at this year level are matched with ethnically different students in Year 8. They work with the

younger students on a regular basis, assisting them in the subject that is timetabled at that time. The Year 10 students are required to keep a journal of the experience, and to date the response has been very positive at both year levels.

Westside Technical School has also made efforts in the area of multicultural education and, in particular, developing students' understanding of social structures and issues, but the interests of individual teachers seem to play a much larger part in determining curriculum than is the case at Downtown High School.

Curriculum content in the Humanities area tends to be determined by Humanities teachers within each mini-school, rather than within the Humanities department across each mini-school. This is not to suggest that students are being taught esoteric content determined by the idiosyncratic priorities of individual teachers. Neither does it mean that there is no collaboration among teachers in developing courses and producing materials. However, it seems to me that there are no formally agreed upon areas of content which all students will have been exposed to by the time they complete their five or six years post-primary schooling.

For example, in 1984 large numbers of classes at the school, ranging from Year 8 to Year 11, saw a play about the experiences of migrants and the prejudices they face. Teachers made this play a starting point for exploring these issues more formally in class and some went on to do this quite extensively. The play was brought into the school partly because it was available, but also because teachers were concerned about prejudice in the community, particularly in view of the highly public 'immigration debate'. While this demonstrates both staff awareness and capacity to act in a concerted way, it comes with no guarantees that the issues explored through a play and follow-up activities in 1984 have a permanent place in the school curriculum.

This state of affairs is partly the outcome of school-based curriculum development, a movement particularly strong in Victorian technical schools and responsible for the production of some truly innovative and successfully implemented teacher-developed courses and materials. However, the understandable move away from prescriptive syllabi, imposed from the centre and not meeting the requirements of particular school communities, has meant in some cases too strong a move towards a curriculum determined by individual teachers and unsupported by underlying guidelines on what is considered 'worthwhile and important' knowledge.

Curriculum is not just courses planned and produced. It is also what goes on in classrooms and this often can't be pre-determined by detailed preparation of materials and activities. Obviously when events 'happen' which alter the course of a lesson teachers need ways of responding effectively in the immediate context and in the future. The capacity to respond effectively will be assisted not by the search for more 'perfect' materials, but by discussion of and reflection upon what actually happens in the classroom.

Racist remarks in the classroom arise sometimes in the context of the subject content but frequently not. They sometimes come as a challenge to the personal authority of the teacher (particularly if his/her views or values are known) as a diversion from the main focus of the lesson, as an acting out of inter-group rivalry which might have its basis in something other than racial or ethnic difference, or as an attempt to confuse an issue and avoid punishment. (A teacher in a high school in Melbourne's western suburbs gives an example of the last in writing about an incident which took place in her Year 9 Geography class: 'Sorry I'm late, Miss, I couldn't get past the 'chongers' near B block. They breed like rabbits, ya know'. A detailed description of this incident was used to stimulate the teacher discussion described below.)

Obviously, remarks like these reflect, to some degree, the attitudes of students who express them, but how deeply entrenched they are and the motives for their overt expression are much more open to question, and teachers need to be sensitive to this in deciding how to respond.

A transcript of a Downtown High School staff discussion group suggests that one group of teachers has this sensitivity and is aware of the complexity of the issues. However, two passages in the transcript merit some comment because they reveal why teachers in many schools fail to tackle racist remarks or tackle them halfheartedly.

The degree of classroom control that a teacher exercises (not necessarily the degree to which he/she has an authoritarian teaching style) is the yardstick by which most teachers measure themselves and their peers. Fear that they will lose control, if only for a single lesson, is often the reason teachers avoid challenging the views of their students or do so in a way that fits in with their pattern of control:

It's not right to confront the issue right there and then with one student while the rest of the class riots. It's just not feasible. You just make sure the student is seated and later confronted with the comments he or she made.

Secondly, as the following exchange reveals, even teachers who have a commitment to challenging the views of their students, feel a point is reached where they don't have the guidance or interpersonal skills to make any further impression:

A: What if a student says 'they take all our jobs' and then you produce counter figures to discredit their mythical statements and tell them that they've been misinformed, and then they produce another reason why they dislike Asians - things that they've heard and that they've built up and it's an overall view - it ends up that all the ideas which they give they believe on the outside, but inside there is a barrier against them. I believe this is the case with a lot of them.

- B: Won't they shift ground and give you as many reasons as they can?
- A: Basically, if you can get through as many of their explanations as possible you will eventually hit rock bottom and they will say that they 'just don't like them'. What would you do then?
- B: I think you would have to start talking about emotional and psychological issues. You have to start using reflective counselling. If you can get to that point then you have gone a long way.
- A: I agree with that. But if you do get to that point, we as teachers don't have the guidance skills.

There are two points which can be made about this discussion. Firstly, although the teachers might appear to have reached something of a 'dead-end' in acknowledging that they don't have the guidance skills for dealing effectively with these kinds of exchanges with their students, they have in fact reached a starting point for acquiring such skills - not by undertaking some specialist course, necessarily, but by using appropriate school personnel and support teaching services or by using the ideas and experience of a teacher like 'B' who appears to have more confidence in this area.

The second point is that both teachers' perceptions of class control and reaching the point where more sophisticated psychological techniques are needed reflect the more intrinsic ways in which schools are totally inappropriate institutions for countering community prejudice. The authority/power relation inherent in teacher-student interactions is just the beginning of what makes it difficult.

The following experience illustrates this point. A teacher in a northern suburban high school sought consultancy help because of what she described as the 'strident racism' of some of the students in her class. It had become something of a discipline problem, apart from anything else.

She was teaching a half-year elective on 'Migration to Australia' to a composite group of students from Years 8 and 9. Because the students had chosen the subject, she did not expect to encounter the problems that she did. What she didn't count on was:

- . An elective class is not necessarily a cohesive group of students, well known to each other. This means that often some students will indulge in attention-seeking behaviour and comments searching for peer recognition and support.
- . The same lack of familiarity amongst students will lead others to suppress more positive comments because they lack the confidence to express them in front of students they don't know well.
- . While the teacher regularly taught some of the students in the group, others were not known to her at all. Among these were some who might have felt compelled to challenge her authority and did so through the expression of racist remarks.
- . It was clear that some students regarded the elective as a 'soft option' and resented the teacher's efforts to treat the elective as a serious area of study. Some of the persistent and overt racism might have been triggered by this resentment.

In the situation just outlined factors relating to school organisation, relations between students and between teacher and students, together with the attitudes students bring from outside the school, combine to produce a classroom experience which runs counter to the teacher's aims in offering the elective in the first place.

Lawrence Stenhouse, a British educator who devoted much of his thought and work to curriculum development and race relations, sums up this complex situation:

In education we are dealing with situations which contain many variables, and over a wide range of subjects it holds true that the curriculum is not the most important variable to be taken into account in attempting to understand the results of curriculum development. Failure to recognise this is the greatest weakness in curriculum research.  
(Stenhouse 1975)

It would be remiss to conclude this section on the overt curriculum without some reference to community language teaching.

Neither Westside Technical School nor Downtown High School offers language teaching in the main languages of the school community, other than English.

In the past Downtown High School has taught traditional languages such as French and in recent years has tried to establish Turkish at junior levels in order to sustain a program begun in a major feeder primary school. To date these efforts have foundered largely through failure to find a suitably qualified teacher and to obtain funds for establishing the program.

Westside Technical School has, during the past three years, offered 'community languages' in a very minor way. Macedonian, Croatian and Turkish were all offered as part of an elective program alongside Sport, Radio, Media, Cookery and so on. Macedonian and Croatian were taught by teachers from outside the school, while Turkish was offered by a teacher of that background at the school. Turkish had the best survival rate because of the teacher's established relationship with the small group of students in his class. The other languages are no longer offered, partly because the teachers are no longer available, but also because they were never really considered as anything more than a year-to-year proposition.

The experience of Westside Technical School illustrates the problems inherent in introducing community languages into a school that has no previous tradition of language teaching other

than English - offering such languages within a general elective program thereby guaranteeing their ephemeral status, and tying the existence of such programs to both the interest and incidental availability of staff.

While it might be true that both schools have been somewhat tokenistic in their efforts in this area, it is equally true that the difficulties experienced in establishing and maintaining such programs will have to be addressed and solved beyond individual schools.

### The school community

Efforts taken at the school level to combat prejudice and discrimination will ultimately be both short-lived and uninfluential in the absence of a policy designed to underpin, affirm and reinforce such efforts. (Stenhouse 1983)

The Downtown High School staff acknowledged early in its attention to prejudice in the school community that a policy was needed to guide the practice and thinking of staff and students, one contributed to by teachers, students and parents alike.

The policy shaped by the school Human Rights Committee, and developed by teachers, students and parents covers such areas as graffiti, published material and language, and includes guidelines for staff and administration. Recommendations on curriculum and student interaction and staff-student relations have been written into the appropriate sections of the school handbook.

These issues were discussed by the school Student Representative Council and at specially convened meetings of parents. Six different language groups participated in one parent discussion evening - Turkish, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish and English. Each non-English speaking group had the services of an interpreter and all groups a teacher from the school to answer questions. The parents had, in fact, been

brought together to make a contribution to the school's discipline policy, so their opinions were sought on five fairly straightforward questions relating to the school's approach to racism and directly relevant to the policy being formulated.

There was a remarkable degree of similarity between the recommendations of parents of all backgrounds. There was agreement that racial abuse needed to be punished, but there was a clear mandate for a conciliatory or counselling approach rather than one that was strictly punitive.

All groups agreed that parents had a role to play in developing tolerance in their children, but only the Indo-Chinese parents acknowledged taking this course of action in the home.

All parents agreed that the curriculum had a part to play in fostering tolerance and respect and suggestions in this area ranged from values or moral education, to a study of migration, to teaching about equality.

The supportive nature of these comments may simply reflect the views of parents sufficiently interested to participate in an evening discussion. Also, views expressed within the school environment tend to be what is 'expected'. So the task now facing the school is how to obtain a more comprehensive and representative parent viewpoint and how to keep the issues before the school's parents.

Two ways in which the school continues its efforts in this area are through parent involvement in curriculum discussions (the Year 8 Community Studies program was discussed by a large group of parents of different backgrounds who indicated the areas they thought should be included in the course and possible ways in which they could be actively involved); and by effectively using local newspapers to report on the school's activities and initiatives. Over a period of time, photos and stories in the local press (of Vietnamese parents participating in a discussion evening, for example) help to promote the normality of the diversity which characterises the school and community.

The human rights policy has been endorsed by the school council and written into the school handbook, but it is acknowledged by the school's Human Rights Committee that it will need to be revised in the light of new understandings and that it will need to be reaffirmed again and again by all sections of the school community. This does not mean an annual reading of the document to a school assembly, staff meeting or parents' meeting, but continuing to emphasise the principles which underlie the policy in the curriculum, in staff development, in teacher-parent interactions and in all areas of student life.

The principles underlying the school policy, briefly, are these: recognition of the diversity which characterises the local community and acknowledgement of its positive value; the promotion of positive relations between all members of the school and community; specifically, the promotion of positive interaction between students of all backgrounds; protection of the rights, and self-image, of all students in the school; and acknowledgement that all staff must assume some responsibility for the attainment of these principles.

There has been no attempt to assess the attitudes of teachers in any qualitative or quantitative way at Downtown High School. Rather, beginning with the assumption that there will be all shades of opinion and attitude represented on the staff and that there is likely to be more goodwill than indifference, staff workshops have been held in which teachers have examined issues, devised strategies and indirectly explored their own attitudes.

This has been done through discussion of a series of vignettes or case studies in which events taken from school and community experience (though not necessarily all drawn from the Downtown High community) are written up in a detailed way, requiring teachers to think about the issues involved in each situation, to indicate how they would respond, given a particular role in the event described, and to examine the thinking underlying such responses.

The sorts of situations covered in these vignettes are racist remarks in a social situation away from the school, circulation of racist literature in the staffroom and classroom, a prejudiced outburst from a student in a non-Humanities class, a disciplinary issue for the school administration, and a senior student's essay which contains unmistakably racist viewpoints.

Discussions like these are valuable in that the issues are presented in some concrete, recognisable context and teachers are not asked to consider prejudice and discrimination in the abstract. However, they are only a starting point, designed to raise awareness and encourage confidence and commitment in teachers to go on addressing these issues.

In the area of prejudice and discrimination, particularly, schools need to move away from the 'expert and the kit' mentality - that is, the notion that some outside 'expert' can give them the 'right answer' or that a kit or collection of materials can provide the same thing.

Downtown High School has acknowledged the need to find its own solutions and ways of proceeding, while not eschewing outside expertise or the experience of other schools and teachers. In their own words, 'A multiplicity of approaches is required because prejudice is such a widespread and ingrained problem...There is a need to "saturate" the school, to think big, start small and draw together developing strands of action'.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

The broad survey research on the effects of the school system on non-English speaking background students reveals a fairly complex picture. There is evidence that students from certain non-English speaking backgrounds are staying longer at school than their English speaking background counterparts.

(Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs 1983)

There is also some evidence that 'second generation' students of particular non-English speaking backgrounds are not disadvantaged in comparison with their English speaking background peers in their access to tertiary education. (Monash University, Higher Education Research Unit, Melbourne 1986)

On the other hand, other groups of non-English speaking background students are over-represented among the unemployed upon leaving school (Young, Petty and Faulkner 1980) and in their rate of participation in secondary education. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1981)

The experience of the two schools reported on here, together with the kind of evidence alluded to above, indicate the further kinds of information that schools still need, to respond fully to the needs of their student populations and to minimise the perpetuation of disadvantage.

If certain groups of students are staying on longer at school, if only some of these are going on to tertiary education, if others can't find work on leaving school or abandon secondary schooling significantly earlier than most, what accounts for these differences and what can schools do about them?

Is length of time in Australia the crucial factor accounting for differences in the educational experience of different groups of non-English background youth? Or, for example, are language factors, assumptions about schooling, different learning styles, gender, previous schooling, parental expectations, family values and class background also significant?

More importantly, which combinations of these factors might account consistently for unequal educational outcomes for different groups of students? And, further, how do schools interact with and respond to these combinations of factors to ensure different educational outcomes for different groups of students?

Schools need findings from broad research which tackle some of these questions. They need them to provide a framework to inform their thinking about their own student populations. School-based information is needed too - on subject provision, choice and allocation, post-school destinations of students, parental knowledge and expectations of the school, and teachers' expectations of students and knowledge of the school community. Such school-based information needs to be collected in conjunction with information that gives a more personal dimension to the issues.

There is a need for research like that of Connell and his associates, which sets out 'to get close to the situations people found themselves in, to talk to them at length about their experiences...to learn what actually happened, and what they actually did, in their working lives and in relation to schooling'. (Connell 1982) The kinds of questions raised by the students at Downtown High School and Westside Technical School need to be explored more fully, with other students and with parents and teachers.

What can be said about the experience of the non-English speaking background students interviewed at both these schools, and to some extent those not interviewed, is that numbers of institutional factors appear to reinforce disadvantage stemming from their newly-arrived status.

In both schools the provision of ESL staff is inadequate and restricts both the number of non-English speaking background students who can be consistently reached by qualified ESL staff and the options for organising classes.

This shortcoming is a systemic one and reflects the way in which ESL teaching has been marginalised and begrudgingly provided ever since the program began in the early seventies. As late as 1980, the Victorian Education Department switched from the procedure of allocating a specified number of ESL teachers to individual secondary schools, to making such teachers part of each school's 'special needs' component - with the result that library, remedial, welfare and ESL were all competing to avoid a reduction in their numbers.

At the same time, decisions taken at the school level can also have some impact. At Westside Technical School, for example, an ESL teacher who departed at the end of 1983 was replaced by a Welfare Teacher (a decision taken by the school principal) despite the school's close proximity to a migrant hostel and a projected increase in the number of 'recent arrivals' coming into the school.

The lack of knowledge of language issues by subject teachers is largely an outcome of inadequate teacher training and has the potential to disadvantage all students. In the case of the non-English speaking background students interviewed, they perceive it as a particular difficulty in Science (one of the status subjects in terms of the subjects and courses it can lead to) and there is some suggestion that their subject choices are influenced by their perception of likely language difficulties.

In translating the rhetoric of multicultural education into practice, it is far more relevant to issues of access and equity for subject teachers in areas like Maths, Science and Metalwork to develop their language teaching skills than to spend time on the Greekness of Pythagoras or the Italian-ness of Galileo or the design and making of kebab skewers.

Students' responses to the personalities and teaching styles of different teachers and the perceptions they have of what constitutes good teaching and a good school open up a complex area. In response to teaching styles and practices, there is

not a simple dichotomy between English speaking background students and non-English speaking background students. However, for the latter, particularly those who have experienced another schooling system or who share their parents' educational values, the demands of adjusting to a new school system and to divergent teaching styles within this, might negatively affect their level of achievement.

Acknowledgement and exploration by teachers of the different learning styles which might be operating in their classes and the way in which widely divergent teaching practices within a single school might influence how students learn, need to be much more a part of staff development programs.

In line with this, there is also a strong argument, particularly in the case of non-English speaking background parents, of making the practices and philosophy of the school much more accessible to parents and in a way which makes it possible for them to respond and make their expectations known.

Much more could be done in schools to develop students' co-operative skills and to promote positive interaction between them. Teaching and organisational methods which embody co-operation and negotiation should be carefully and persistently developed. This does not have to happen at the expense of rigorous and serious learning.

Teachers need a collective approach to tackling racism, and students, parents and appropriate community personnel should be involved in developing this approach. It will need to be written into a school policy which is regularly reaffirmed and developed.

Short-term strategies for responding to racist incidents and attitudes can be developed in the school context with consultancy support, but the values and conceptual understandings given permanent and consistent attention in the

school curriculum and reflected in teacher-student relations and ultimately in the ethos and climate of the school, will be more influential in the long term.

NOTES2. POTENTIAL DISCRIMINATION IN SCHOOLS - AN OVERVIEW

1. Transcript of a primary school staff discussion supplied to author.
2. From papers in the possession of the author who was involved, as a teacher, in the drawing up and conducting of the survey and subsequent discussion.

3. THE SCHOOLS

3. Student information was gathered at Downtown High School in two ways.
  - (a) The teacher on time release interviewed students at Years 8, 9, 11 and 12. The students were all males with the exception of two Year 12 girls. The backgrounds of the students interviewed were Anglo-Saxon/Celtic, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Timorese. Some sessions were conducted in the form of question and answer interviews with one or two students; others were in the form of group discussion with between four and six students participating. About thirty students were interviewed in this way.
  - (b) Twenty-four children in Year 7 were surveyed by another teacher at the school as part of a task undertaken in his B.Ed. course. He used a simple, but extensive questionnaire. The children included in the survey ranged in age from 12 to 15 years; there were ten girls and fourteen boys; all children were born overseas, and the languages spoken at home were Vietnamese, Turkish, Cambodian and Cantonese. Their attendance at Australian schools ranged from four years to less than a year.This teacher also interviewed some of the school's ESL staff. Direct quotations from his final report are included in the text.

4. Two groups of students of non-English speaking background were interviewed at Westside Technical School. They were all males, had been in Australia less than four years and were students at Years 9 and 11. Their backgrounds were Vietnamese, Laotian, Polish, Lebanese, Chilean and Yugoslav. Twenty-four students in all were interviewed in group discussions over a number of sessions; more than half of the students were Vietnamese. The interviewing was conducted by the author.

#### 4. SCHOOLS AND PREJUDICE - A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

5. Confirmed by teachers in schools with 'more established' non-English speaking background populations, involved in the Combating Prejudice in Schools project.
6. Drawn up by staff at an inner-Melbourne school, from their own teaching experience for a staff in-service.
7. These observations and information have been collected during the course of the Combating Prejudice in Schools project, in teacher workshops and working with individual schools and teachers.
8. The words of a teacher from Downtown High School addressing a Combating Prejudice workshop in Melbourne April 1985.

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