

1997

## The experience of being a migrant child : An early childhood perspective

Judith Candy  
*Edith Cowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons)



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Candy, J. (1997). *The experience of being a migrant child : An early childhood perspective*. Edith Cowan University. [https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons/699](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/699)

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.  
[https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons/699](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/699)

# Edith Cowan University

## Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A MIGRANT CHILD:  
AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PERSPECTIVE

By

Judith Candy, TeachCert *WAustKTC*.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Award of  
Bachelor of Education with Honours  
at the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University

February 1997

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT.

Most studies of migrant children have concentrated on English as a second language (E.S.L.), educational assessment and parental influences on learning. These studies have been mainly of older children and from the teacher's perspective. There has been little or no research into the child's own perceptions of the experience of being a migrant child, particularly from an early childhood perspective.

This study aimed to fill this void by investigating young children's migration to Australia. The information was gathered by means of discussions with migrant children and their teachers in Years 2 and 3 of two schools in the Perth metropolitan area. An investigation was made of the migration experience before, during, and after the journey; the differences between the children's backgrounds and cultures; and the teachers' perceptions of the children's adjustment to school in Australia.

It was found that while there were several common factors, children from both Humanitarian and Non-Humanitarian migrant categories, displayed many individual differences in background which could affect their development and wellbeing in Australia.

The Humanitarian migrant children's experiences of violence prior to migration contrasted with that of the Non-Humanitarian category migrant children. However, many in both groups had experiences of living in other countries; separation from their fathers; having to leave most of their possessions behind; and difficulties with peer group behaviour towards them on arrival in Australia.

The attitudes of the Humanitarian migrant children, who were happy to come here, also

contrasted with those of the Non-Humanitarian migrant children, many of whom were unhappy or apprehensive. Difficulties were due to loss of familiar people, places, and possessions; differences between education systems; and undesirable peer group behaviour displayed towards them.

This study also revealed contrasts between English speaking background (E.S.B.) and Non-English speaking background (N.E.S.B.) migrant children. The E.S.B. children, in spite of apparent similarity of language and culture, expressed more dissatisfaction with their migration experiences than the N.E.S.B. migrant children, and also reported difficulties with peers due to their being perceived as 'different'.

Discussions with teachers revealed very caring attitudes towards the children. However, most were unaware of many of the experiences and concerns of the migrant children in their classes, which could have a bearing on the children's development in school.

It is recommended that further research with larger samples of the various categories of migrant children investigate their backgrounds and experiences in the classroom and with peers, with a view to clarifying the picture.

Recommendations for teachers include talking to migrant children to discover their experiences and concerns; utilisation of children's prior learning of both education and culture in the classroom rather than the 'blank slate' approach; the provision of therapeutic activities for migrant children; and the promotion of tolerance and understanding between all children both in and out of school. This can best be achieved by the development of inclusive curriculae that value and utilise the individual experiences and cultures of migrant children in day to day classroom activities, as a foundation for education in Australian schools.

**I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief :**

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

**Signature :**

**Date :** 7. 2. 97.

## LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 1	Areas of Origin and Reasons for Migration of Migrant Children in the Sample	28
Table 2	Parental Occupations of Migrant Children in Sample	33



## LIST OF FIGURES

		Page
Figure 1	Influences of Migration and Individual Variables on the Migrant Child	16
Figure 2	Countries of Origin	26
Figure 3	Areas of Origin	27
Figure 4	Humanitarian Migrant Children Categories	30
Figure 5	Home Languages of Migrant Children	34
Figure 6	Religious Background of Migrant Children	35

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	i i
Declaration	iv
List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
 Chapter	
 1 INTRODUCTION	
1.0 Background	1
1.1 Significance	2
1.2 Research Problem	4
1.3 Research Questions	4
1.4 Definition of Terms	5
 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
2.0 Introduction	6
2.1 Europe	6
2.2 Canada	7
2.3 U.S.A.	7
2.4 Britain	8
2.5 Australia	8
2.6 Main Themes	10
2.7 Summary	11
 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	
3.0 Introduction	12
3.1 Psychosocial Development	12
3.2 Sociocultural Theory of Development	14
3.3 Influences of Migration and Individual Variables	15

## 4 METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

4.0 Design	18
4.1 Reliability/Validity	19
4.2 Subjects	19
4.3 Procedure	21
4.4 Data Collection	22
4.5 Data Analysis	23
4.6 Limitations of Study	23

## 5 RESULTS

5.0 Introduction	25
5.1 Profile of Children	25
5.1.1 Countries and Areas of Origin	26
5.1.2 Reasons for Migration	27
5.1.3 Humanitarian Entry Migrants	30
5.1.4 Non-Humanitarian Entry Migrants	31
5.1.5 Parental Occupations	33
5.1.6 Home Languages	34
5.1.7 Religious Background	35
5.1.8 Family Size	36
5.1.9 Length of Time in Australia	36
5.1.10 Summary	37
5.2 The Migration Experience	39
5.2.1 Prior to Migration	39
5.2.1.1 Introduction	39
5.2.1.2 Humanitarian Children	39
5.2.1.3 Non-Humanitarian Children	42
5.2.1.4 Family and Possessions	44
5.2.1.5 Parental Preparation and Attitudes	46
5.2.2 Journey to Australia	47
5.2.3 Post Migration Experiences	49
5.2.3.1 Arrival in Australia	49
5.2.3.2 Differences	50
5.2.3.3 Experiences in School	51
5.2.3.4 Peer Relationships	53
5.2.3.5 Concern about Peer Behaviour	55

5.3	Teachers' Perceptions	59
5.3.1	Introduction	59
5.3.2	Non-Humanitarian Migrant children	59
5.3.3	Humanitarian Migrant Children	60
5.4	Summary of Results	61
6	DISCUSSION	
6.0	Introduction	63
6.1	Migration Experiences	63
6.2	Teachers' Perceptions	74
6.3	Individual Differences	75
7	CONCLUSION	
7.0	Implications and Recommendations	77
7.1	Implications for Practice in Schools	79
7.2	Implications for Migration Practice	82
7.3	Future Research	84
	REFERENCES	88
	APPENDIX : Informed Consent Statement Forms	95

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background

Throughout the world there has been an increase in mobility between countries in recent years. Migrants, refugees, and families moving abroad for work or study, have all led to large numbers of foreign children entering the schools and pre-schools of host countries (Fritz, 1989). This factor, coupled with the decline of native-born children, especially in Europe, has led to problems within the society and education systems of the countries in which the newcomers take up residence (O.E.C.D., C.E.R.I., 1987).

In 1995 there were an estimated 20 million refugees in the world, and no signs of a decrease. Immigration is also increasing as people leave their countries of origin for various reasons, ranging from study and employment, desire for a better life and political uncertainty, to oppression, violence, war, or fear of personal safety (Burns & Goodnow, 1988; Victory, 1995). In Western Australia there has been a 'net gain' in the population of approximately 9,250 overseas migrants in the 12 month period to March 1995, 1,392 of whom were classified as Humanitarian migrants ( i.e. refugees, special assistance, and special humanitarian entrants) ( D.I.E.A., 1996 ).

Adjustment problems are most evident in those who have arrived recently, and in those whose cultural background is most dissimilar to that of the host country (O.E.C.D.1987). In Europe, attention is directed to the problems of 'Guest Workers' and their families. Accommodation of language and cultural identity is seen as important, as these groups

are expected to return to their countries of origin eventually.

Lack of literacy, educational underachievement and assessment in the second language, and parent education are also seen as significant problems ( Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988; Treppte, 1994 ).

Difficulties due to cultural conflict and changes in life style, altered family roles, different value systems and learning styles, result in anxiety and tensions, while loss of cultural heritage due to peer pressure can cause conflict between parents and children (Gougeon,1993 ; Wong, 1992; Thomas,1992 ).

Factors which help migrant children's wellbeing are the existence of ethnic communities in the host country and parents with 'ethnic resilience', which ensure secure ethnic and cultural identity and selfconcept (Beiser et al, 1995 ).

Emphasis on underachievement in minority children, as well as language differences and problems, have been the most researched areas, with little consideration of the psychological and social circumstances of the student ( Diaz et al 1986, cited in Garcia, 1993 ).

Educational research has mainly concentrated on investigating migrant children from the teacher's point of view ( assessment, underachievement, second language learning ) or the parent's point of view ( effects of parent's socio-economic status and education on the child's literacy, second language learning and school performance). Little research has investigated what migrant children think and feel about coming to a new country, particularly in the early childhood years. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions that young children have of their experiences of migration.

### 1.1 Significance.

The increasing numbers of migrant children, and the adjustment problems that they face in school and society in Australia, have been documented over the last decade

( Smolicz & Secombe, 1981; Kelly & Bennoun, 1984; Nguyen & Cahill, 1986; Krupinski & Burrows, 1986; Kahn & Fua, 1995).

Experiences of racism by intercountry adoptees is receiving attention in the 1990s ( Harper & Bonnano, 1993). The stresses that migration produces can affect the health, wellbeing and achievement of students, and this needs to be brought to the attention of those who will teach children from other countries and cultures ( Thomas, 1992 ; Beiser et al, 1995 ).

The changing nature of the society in which we live has a continuing effect on early childhood programming, which needs to reflect the increasing diversity of the population of which we are part ( Neugebauer, 1992 ). Teachers must be aware of the importance of helping children from different countries and cultural backgrounds to adjust and communicate in our schools and preschools ( Miller, 1992 ).

Most of the studies on the adjustment of migrant children in Australia have used samples of secondary and tertiary students. Only one study located ( Facer, 1985 ) investigated younger children and from the sociological and empirical perspective. Despite the multicultural emphasis given to early childhood education in the late 70s and early 80s, by authors such as Ebbeck & Dyer, (1978); Clarke, (1979); DeLacey, (1982); there has been little research investigation of young migrant children's adjustment to life in Australia. This is despite the fact that the increased mobility of populations between countries means that there is an increasing likelihood of some foreign born children being part of every early childhood teacher's class, with resulting differences and probable difficulties for teachers, parents and children.

In addition, most of the attention directed at migrant and minority group children has been from the teacher's perspective, with an emphasis on E.S.L., educational assessment,

and parental factors of socio-economic and educational background. There has been little consideration of the social and psychological circumstances of the child ( Diaz et al, 1986; cited in Garcia, 1993 ).

It is important to explore children's perceptions of migrating to a new country : what they think and how they feel ( Kelly & Cohn, 1988 ; Cullingford, 1992, 1994 ; Walsh, Tobin & Graue, 1993). Equipped with this information, teachers will be better able to understand and cater for unique differences between young migrant children and their experiences of migration to Australia.

## 1.2 Research Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the migration experiences of young children who have recently arrived in Australia, and their teachers' perceptions of their adjustment to Australian schools.

## 1.3 Research Questions.

This study aimed to investigate the following questions :

1. What are the experiences of young migrant children of migration to a new country as perceived by them?
2. What are their teachers' perceptions of how the migrant children have adjusted to school?

## Subsidiary Question.

What are the characteristics of these migrant children which may exert an influence on their adjustment?



#### 1.4 Definition of Terms.

**Migrant child :** A child born overseas and arrived in Australia in the last twelve months approximately.

**Early childhood :** Children between the ages of 0 and 8 years of age.

**N. E. S. B. :** Non- English speaking background

**E. S. B. :** English speaking background

**E. S. L. :** English as a Second Language.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.0 Introduction

The increasing numbers of foreign born children in education systems throughout the world and the diversity of these children's countries of origin have led to problems for children, teachers and schools ( Fritz, 1989; O.E.C.D., C.E.R.I., 1987 ). The majority of the research conducted on migrant children has been confined to older students with little focus on the experiences and adjustment of young migrant children to a new country. An examination of the literature emanating from Europe, Canada, the United States, Britain and Australia indicates world wide interest in the problems of migrants and minority groups, albeit with varying emphases in different countries.

#### 2.1 Europe

In Europe where the focus is on the problems of 'Guest Workers', the emphasis on second language learning in countries such as Scandinavia, Holland, France, and Germany, is seen as a short term response only, 'marginalising' those who are not integrated into the culture of the host country, and creating an underclass of those who are seen as inferior and lack equal opportunity (O.E.C.D., C.E.R.I., 1987) This is the position of the Finns and Samis in Sweden, whose children experience denigration, prejudice, feelings of shame of their origins, alienation, betrayal, and a desire to remove the accent that identifies them (Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988).

Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, (1988) maintain that a focus on the educational problems of minority students prevents the perspectives of the minorities themselves from being heard, resulting in loss of identity and selfdoubt.

Indeed cultural patterns affect children's behaviour, and may lead to ridicule of dress, physical appearance, and manners, in culturally different peers. This need to change to new ways of speaking and acting in a new country can result in stress. We need to know more to be able to understand the problems and stresses experienced by migrants, especially women and children ( U.N.E.S.C.O., 1982 ).

## 2.2 Canada.

Two Canadian studies document migrant high school student interviews and the effects of migration stress on the health, well being and achievement of students. Common to both are descriptions of trauma, separation from families and friends, feelings of alienation, depression, anger, and cultural conflict (Gougeon, 1993; Beisner, Dion, Gotowiec, Hyman, 1995).

## 2.3 United States.

In the United States researchers have focused on groups of immigrant children, including Vietnamese, Carribean, Central American, Hmong, and Asian, exploring adjustment and adaptation problems experienced by these groups . Echoed again are the feelings of pain, isolation, alienation, rejection and inferiority. Post- traumatic stress is also common and this can affect achievement by depressing mental processes (Yao,1985; Trueba, 1990; Nieto, 1992; Thomas, 1992 ). Neugebauer (1992 ) highlights problems of changes in society which in turn have effects on Early Childhood Education.

#### 2.4. Britain

Two British studies analyse the problems of Chinese and Japanese children in British schools, and document cultural conflict and difficulties with socialisation of these two groups of children (Wong, 1992; Mizuochi & Dolan, 1994). Parents strongly wish their children to maintain their cultural heritage and language, especially in the case of Japanese who worry that their children won't be able to re-enter the education system on return to Japan.

Conflict between the different types of education systems in the U.K. and Japan has also been seen as contributing to 'shyness' in primary school children, and language and learning problems in older school children (Wong, 1992; Mizuochi & Dolan, 1994).

A further emphasis in the British literature is on education for equality (Cole, 1989) and anti-racist education (Epstein, 1993; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992; Kelly & Cohn, 1988).

These studies highlight the feelings of children subjected to racial taunts and discrimination due to differences from the white middle class norm in school and society. Several studies of racism in primary schools (e.g. Troyna & Hatcher, 1992) and racial groups and behaviour in schools (e.g. Kelly & Cohn, 1988) are in response to the MacDonald Committee Inquiry into the killing in 1986 of an Asian boy by a white boy in a Manchester school, and emphasise the deleterious effects of name calling and the attitudes of children in response.

Kelly and Cohn (1988) stress, "how rarely pupils are asked about their experiences in school" and "hope to encourage researchers to listen and learn from pupils in all racial groups for they have a lot to tell us" (p.6).

#### 2.5 Australia

Australian literature echoes the findings of other countries in studies of immigrant groups including Vietnamese, Polish, Indo-Chinese, and South Sea Islanders, and the

adjustment problems of these children in school and society in Australia (Nguyen & Cahill, 1986; Kelly & Bennoun, 1984; Smolicz & Secombe, 1981; Kahn & Fua, 1995; Facer, 1985 ).

Intercountry adoption, and the children's experiences of racism ( Harper & Bonnano, 1993 ), and publications on the experiences in Australia of migrants, refugees and their children, highlight experiences of isolation due to language differences, problems of differing cultures and values, role reversal, and a pervading sense of loss (Brotherhood of St Lawrence, 1971; Cox et al, 1978; Burns & Goodnow 1988; Panich, 1988; Victory, 1995).

Other important points documented in the literature include the need for more research on cultural adjustment in young children, to confirm or deny the findings that older children suffer more than younger children, as maintained by Fritz (1989 ) who cites Simon (1984); the value of case studies of young children which enable us to " view the world through their hearts and minds" ( Fine & Sandstrom, 1988 cited in Walsh, Tobin, Graue, 1993, p 470 ); and also "interpretive research (which) gives voice and visibility to those silenced and isolated" (Walsh, Tobin, Graue, 1993, p 473).

The importance of asking children their opinions is stressed by Cullingford (1992,1994) who states " children like to talk about what they think.....their own experiences are burning issues" (1992, p9 ); "children are susceptible to the mood and attitudes of society .....reflect society" (1992, p146 ). Children are good subjects for research for they rarely "invent" stories, contrary to some "suspicion about what they say" (1992, p10 ), and they "learn to interpret what they hear in their own way" (1992, p147 ).

LeCompte & Preissle (1993) advocate the use of qualitative research to " convey to teachers.....the diversity to be expected from children and classrooms..... and to enable them to respond more flexibly and appropriately to changes" (p31).

The importance of obtaining the perceptions of migrants is documented by authors such as Kelly & Bennoun (1984), Nguyen & Cahill (1986), Kelly & Cohn (1988), Nieto (1992) and Epstein (1993), who in their interviews with migrant children and older students, note that the participants were "happy to speak and tell the truth and often wanted to, but felt no one would understand" and "enjoyed it". Subjects stated that they felt like a "fish out of water"; "as if something was wrong with us"; "as if I were blind and deaf"; "as if everything we knew could not be used here" and also "Paki! - makes me want to run away". It is statements such as these that can give us valuable insights into the problems and feelings of the young migrant child in a new country.

## 2.6 Main Themes.

The main themes that emerge from the literature on migrant children are feelings of sadness and loss at leaving their country of origin, extended families, friends and familiar places and things; and the confusion, isolation, loss of cultural identity and shame at being different when they discover that all that they know is of no value since the new country does not recognise their cultural heritage. Also, they realise that to be accepted old ways must be shed and new ways learned. Children may feel humiliated and discouraged when their previously endorsed culturally appropriate behaviour is ridiculed due to different patterns of language, dress, habits, and food in the new country.

Parental desires to retain their cultural values, religion, language and heritage within the host country and to pass these on to their children, can help children cope with cultural stresses, if there is an existing same cultural community. However, many cultural groups do not have support, and children may suffer from cultural conflict, as they adapt to new cultural ways at school, and become caught between the two differing sets

of values. In addition, family roles may change as children have to interpret for parents, and this may undermine parental authority and cause role reversal. As a result, there may be feelings of powerlessness and resentment in the parents, as the children learn the language and culture of the host country faster than they do. Confusion and competition between the different values of parents and peers can have a lasting effect on the migrant child's self esteem, resulting in difficulties in both school and social achievement.

The process of migration can affect the development of the child, due to policies of selection and pre-migration experiences, characteristics of the migrant child and family, the reception by the host country and the stresses of the journey itself, necessitating understanding and sensitivity in those who work with migrant children in schools and the community ( Yao, 1985; Wong, 1992; Gougeon, 1993, Beiser et al, 1995 ).

## 2.7 Summary.

In summary, research has mainly concentrated on studying migrant children from the teacher's point of view (ie. assessment, underachievement, second language learning ) or the parent's point of view (ie. effects of parents' socio-economic status and education on the child's literacy, second language learning, and school performance). There has been little research investigation of what young migrant children think and feel about coming to a new country. Therefore the purpose of this study was to investigate the thoughts and feelings of young children in relation to their experiences of migration.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.0 Introduction

The framework that has been used in this research study is Symbolic Interactionism, or the construction of meaning through social interaction ( Le Compte & Preissle,1993 ). In this model it is maintained that individuals act on their perceptions of meanings interpreted during interactions in the social world ( Burns, 1994; Denzin,1989 ).

This approach is linked to the interpretive qualitative method advocated for research in Early Childhood Education, and which emphasises observation in naturalistic settings, understanding the perspectives of the participants, and the use of methods and questions which may emerge in the fieldwork ( Jacob, 1988; cited in Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993 ).

The value of this approach for teachers, is that it highlights the students' interpretations and perspectives, bringing greater understanding to those who work with children, especially in Early Childhood Education ( Lincoln, 1995; Walsh, Tobin, & Graue,1993 ).

#### 3.1 Psychosocial Development

Children's perceptions of themselves and the world around them have an important influence on their psycho-social and cognitive development. In his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson states that individuals are " shaped by the interaction of personal characteristics and social forces" ( Berger & Thompson,1996, p. 72 ), and



emphasises that "normal development must be understood in relation to each culture's unique life situation" ( Berk, 1994, p 15 ). In his fourth stage of development from 7 to 11 years of age, titled 'industry vs incompetence', in which children are concerned with learning skills which are important to their culture, it is stressed that negative experiences at home/school or with peers can result in feelings of 'incompetence and inferiority' (Santrock, 1993). Migrant children from different cultural backgrounds may find that the culturally appropriate skills learned in their previous homelands are not accepted in the new country, leading to feelings of inferiority.

Also according to Erikson's theory, a child of this age may be expected to have developed characteristics of 'trust', 'autonomy', and 'initiative' through the first three stages. However, some migrant children, due to their background experiences, may not have resolved these psycho-social 'crises' and may have developed the opposing traits of 'mistrust', 'shame/doubt', and 'guilt'.

Teachers need the knowledge and understanding to be able to help such migrant children to develop self confidence and competence, and to take a "special responsibility for the child's development of industry" ( Santrock, 1993, p45 ).

Primary school aged children's developing realisation of individual differences, self-criticism ( particularly of their intellectual abilities), and lowered self esteem, can result in 'learned helplessness', particularly in those children who lack experiences of success within the school and peer group. This is especially true in children from different cultural backgrounds whose prior learning may be inappropriate in the new country (Berger & Thompson, 1996).

An important factor in the development of feelings of competence for all children is peer acceptance, lack of which may have negative effects on children's self esteem,

school performance and family relationships. Cultural differences in migrant children mean that they may have to change their behaviour and appearance to gain this acceptance, causing conflict within the family due to differing cultural and ethical standards and parental attitudes and expectations of education ( Berger & Thompson, 1996; Jamrozik & Sweeney, 1996 ).

Parents can also be influential in establishing 'rewarding' peer relationships by arranging activities and contacts after school and socially, and by helping with 'advice and guidance' in interactions with peers. The migrant child's parents may be unwilling or unable to do so due to financial, cultural or language barriers, preventing the establishment of friendships which might otherwise flourish ( Berk,1994 ).

This importance of the peer group, in providing opportunities for interaction and acceptance, relating to others, learning rules of behaviour, problem solving skills, pro-social behaviour, and self understanding, cannot be underestimated especially for migrant children, who experience peer pressure in the playground to adopt new ways of dress, eating, and behaviour, in order to gain acceptance and avoid rejection by the group.

The friendship of at least one child is vital for the development of self confidence, which is necessary to enable participation within the group and alleviate feelings of loneliness, isolation, and inferiority ( Parker & Asher, 1993 cited in Berger & Thompson, 1996 ).

### 3.2 Sociocultural Theory of Development

In his sociocultural theory of development, Vygotsky stressed the importance of social interaction in children's learning of the behaviour and thinking of the culture in which they live, emphasising the support of adults and older peers in this 'culturally meaningful' learning, which may develop 'unique strengths' not found in other cultures ( Berk, 1994 ).

Vygotsky and Piaget both emphasised that children learn through active participation in, and interpretation of, the environment around them; social experiences; and individual differences. However, Vygotsky's emphasis on differing skills according to cultural experiences, is particularly relevant for the migrant child who may come from a completely different cultural background from the rest of the peer group and teachers in school. Recognition of these different culturally based skills and experiences is vital for the wellbeing of the migrant child, who will be especially in need of the supportive 'scaffolding' that understanding and empathetic teachers and peers can provide during the difficult early months after migration to a new country (Berk, 1994).

### 3.3 Influences of Migration and Individual Variables.

A significant amount of time is spent at school interacting with classroom teachers and peers. The treatment of the migrant child by teachers and peers can have a great influence on the development of feelings of either competence and adequacy or inferiority and self criticism. The success or otherwise of these interactions will be influenced by experiences both before, during and after migration, as these can affect the child's perceptions and valuation of the 'self' and the new country (Fig.1) (Beiser et al,1995).

**Figure 1.**

**Influences of Migration and Individual Variables on the Migrant child.(Beiser et al,1995)**

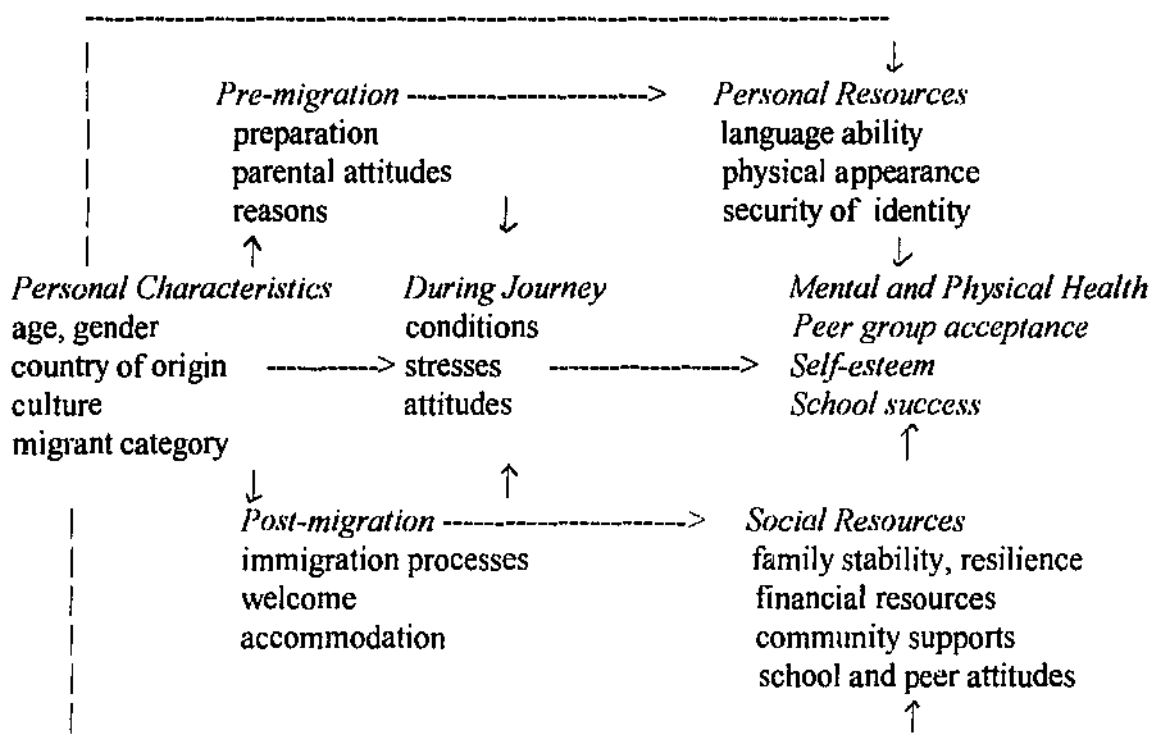


Figure 1 provides a model of the influences of the processes of migration and the characteristics of the child and family, on the development and wellbeing of the young migrant child ( Beiser et al, 1995 ).

For the migrant child, personal characteristics such as the individual factors of age, gender, and country of origin will have an effect on the culturally determined ways in which the child is handled. These factors, together with the family's status as immigrants or refugees, can be influential in determining the outcomes for the child in a new country, as immigrants choose to leave their country of origin, while refugees leave in fear of their lives in many cases, and have little chance of returning ( Beiser et al, 1995). The pre-migration experiences, such as reasons for departure due to escape from war or famine, reunion with extended family, or better opportunities are important. Advance

happy planning of departure or hurried escape in secrecy; selection and packing of belongings; parental attitudes; opportunity to say goodbye to friends; attitudes to the move, are all contributing factors to positive or negative perceptions about the experience.

The journey may be pleasurable, or a difficult experience fraught with illness due to a lack of, or unfamiliar food, and crowded, insanitary conditions; fear of the unknown; and anxiety for personal safety.

Post- migration experiences of procedures in the host country, such as immigration and customs processes in unfamiliar languages; whether the family is welcomed by relatives, friends, or sponsors; and the initial accommodation provided ( possibly in migrant, refugee or detention camps) can also have a profound effect on a young child ( Beiser et al, 1995).

Personal resources such as a secure sense of identity, physical appearance acceptable to the new culture, and an ability to learn languages are important, as are social resources such as family stability and ethnic 'resilience' and the support of an established ethnic community. Adequate financial resources to enable good living conditions, support services, and attitudes of school and peer groups are also vital influences on the young migrant child ( Beiser et al, 1995 ).

Each of these factors plays a role in the development of the health, wellbeing and self-esteem of children who migrate to a new country, and can affect the acceptance of the child by the peer group, determine the success or otherwise of the school process and the ultimate outcome ( Krupinski & Burrows, 1986; Beiser et al, 1995; Victory, 1995 ).

Therefore it is important to ascertain young migrant children's perceptions of their experiences and feelings prior to, during and after migration. It is these experiences that this study investigated, with a view to informing classroom teachers, Government officials and others, so that the young migrant child's needs may be catered for with understanding and sensitivity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

#### 4.0 Design

The approach used in undertaking this research was that of a descriptive investigation, in naturalistic settings, which is most suited to the topic of understanding young children and their behaviour, as well as the 'participant perspectives' which are the focus of this study ( Bogdan & Birklen, 1982; cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994 ; Burns,1994 ).

Strategies used in this research followed those recommended in Hatch (1990), and included taking adequate time to build trusting personal relationships with young children; using informal discussions in informal settings within the classroom; and asking questions with a basis in the subjects' own experiences.

The model for this study was that of an Interpretivist Paradigm, which is concerned with investigating and understanding the perspectives of the participants in naturalistic settings; with emphasis on the meanings to the individual; how they make sense of their lives; and listening to what they say (instead of just measuring as in quantitative research). "Interpretive inquiry compels researchers and the researched to see themselves in a new way, .....understand the meaning that people are constructing" (Walsh, Tobin & Graue, 1993, p. 465). An emergent approach was used in discussions of the children's experiences of migration to a new country. In addition, the subjects' teachers were interviewed to discover their perceptions of how the children had adjusted to school.

#### 4.1 Reliability / Validity

Questions of reliability and validity were addressed by the use of different sources of data such as discussions with children, teachers' interviews, and background document examination. A variety of methods (such as telling stories and drawing), was used with the children in small groups, before initiation of discussion about coming to live in another country.

The possible confounding influences of researcher status, social context, observer and setting effects were considered during the research process, and for these reasons, as well as to build up rapport with the participants, attendance at the schools for most of the research period, was considered vital to the research process (Walsh, Tobin & Graue, 1993; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

#### 4.2 Subjects

The sample for this research study consisted of 12 migrant children in Years 2 & 3 of two primary schools in the Perth metropolitan area. Two very different schools were involved: one a Government E.S.L school in a working class area, and the other a 'mainstream' independent school in a middle class area.

It was hoped in this way to obtain a reasonably balanced picture of the experiences and concerns of migrant children of both English and Non-English speaking backgrounds. However, this was not to be the case as the 'mainstream' school was found to have children of non-English speaking background as well as English speaking background attending, and all were included in the research sample. As a result, of the total of 12 children involved, migrant children of English speaking background were in the minority - (i.e. 25%).

It was also intended to limit this study to children who had arrived within the last 12 months. However, several migrant children were found to have been here just over this period of time and therefore a decision was made to modify the definition of a migrant child for the purposes of this study, to one who had arrived within the last 12 months approximately.

Due to the difficulty of gaining access to migrant children in schools, as many schools already had researchers involved, or felt it would be too intrusive, the sample used in this study was quite small. Therefore richer multiple methods were used to counter the small non- random sample.

The sample of children comprised seven from the E.S.L. centre and five from the independent school. The children selected were those present at the time of data collection, whose parents had given permission, and who seemed happy to participate. The three classroom teachers of these children comprised the teacher sample for this study.

Attendance at both schools was weekly for a period of three school terms, and so the researcher was able to get to know the children well, to build up rapport, and to observe their behaviour and development of English language skills ( in the case of the N.E.S.B.children ). The N.E.S.B. children were in 'Phase 2' of their English language development and were making good progress in their understanding of English. Although their English oral skills were not as well developed as their English-speaking peers, the researcher experienced no difficulty in understanding what was being said in discussions, despite the frequent grammatical errors made by them.



#### 4.3 Procedure

In order for this research to present a realistic picture of what migrant children think and feel about their experiences, the researcher entered the schools as a volunteer well in advance of the data collection period, to build up rapport with both the children and teachers and to assist in the classroom. As previously stated, the researcher attended both schools once a week for the period of a school term to get to know the children and build up a warm personal relationship and trust. This attendance was then continued for two further terms and after data collection to enable verification with the participants.

The topic of migration was introduced as a result of an art experience in the normal course of the class programme where the children were asked to draw a picture of themselves arriving in Australia with their family. Discussion was then initiated with an emergent approach, whereby the children were encouraged to tell the 'story' of how they came to live in Australia and talk about their own concerns. These short informal discussions were conducted with the individual children in the naturalistic setting of the classroom, at a time convenient to the teachers and children and with the permission of the children and their parents.

All steps were taken during data collection to ensure that the experience was a positive and enjoyable one for the children, conducted in a responsible, flexible manner, and at all times responsive to each child's demeanour and body language. In fact the opportunity to interact on a one to one basis with an interested adult seemed to constitute a positive experience for all the children. After the interviews most children smiled and initiated conversation with the researcher, particularly previously 'shy' children, while others wanted to 'talk again' about themselves.

Teachers were interviewed in the classroom, or other place of their choice. Interviews were kept short and informal, during which initial questions were asked to establish the teachers' perceptions of the children's adjustment to school.

In these interviews an emergent approach was followed to allow participants to discuss freely their perceptions from their own perspective. While assisting the teachers in the classroom with general activities, the children were informally observed and their general interactions and demeanour with both peer group and class teacher noted. This enabled the researcher to become more familiar with each child before the individual discussions took place, and to assess whether each subject was likely to be happy to talk or become upset in any way, in which case no discussion would be initiated. In fact one child was extremely shy and so only a short time was spent on the initial discussion.

Some weeks later, after participation in two special outings and activities with the class, it was decided to talk again to this particular child. A noticeable difference was evident in the rapport with the subject, who spoke freely and in a relaxed manner during the discussion.

Documentation of place of birth, length of time in Australia and other relevant variables was obtained from school records to complete the 'picture' of each child.

#### **4. 4 Data Collection.**

Multiple methods of data collection were used in this study to overcome the limited access to migrant children in schools. These consisted of the following :

- A. Profiles of the sample established using background records to obtain demographic data..

- B. Discussion with children which obtained their perceptions of the migration experience. This was done in three time frames :-
- i. Pre-Migration Experiences.
  - ii. The Journey
  - iii. Post- Migration Experiences
- C. Interviews with teachers to provide data on the teachers' perceptions of the children's adaptation to school life.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis.

The profile of the sample as a whole is reported, using the demographic background data obtained from the children's records. These data are reported using descriptive statistics, that is by coding into common categories and reporting in tables giving frequencies and percentages supported by anecdotes.

The children's perceptions of their experiences of migration and concerns discovered during the discussions, are presented in descriptive form. These are supported by interviews with their teachers which present their perceptions on each child's adjustment to school, also in descriptive form.

#### 4.6 Limitations.

As the sample number is small, and drawn from two schools both of which are in the Perth metropolitan area, it may be the case that migrant children living in rural or isolated districts have additional experiences outside the scope of this study. All the children attending the E.S.L. centre are from non-English speaking backgrounds, while the migrant children from the independent school are mostly from English-speaking

backgrounds. Migrant children attending other schools and coming from different ethnic backgrounds, may have different experiences/perceptions from those uncovered in this study. However, discussion of the general trends and concerns obtained from these participants will enable a new dimension to be added to the research on migrant children in Australia

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESULTS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the investigation of English and Non-English speaking migrant children in Years 2 and 3 of primary school, and their perceptions of their experiences of migration. The data were collected by means of children's records; and freeflowing discussions with the children, during which the only interventions made by the researcher were to guide the discussion during pauses. Discussions were also conducted with the children's teachers to ascertain their perceptions of the children's adjustment to school.

The results are organised in three separate sections :-

1. Profiles of the sample from children's background records.
2. The Migration experience. This is presented as separate sub-sections:-
  - i. Prior to Migration.
  - ii. Journey to Australia.
  - iii. Post Migration Experiences.
3. Teachers' Perceptions.

Distinct differences were evident between Humanitarian category and Non-Humanitarian category migrant children and so these are reported separately.

#### 5.1 Profile of the Children

The sample from which data for this research were obtained, consisted of twelve 7 and 8

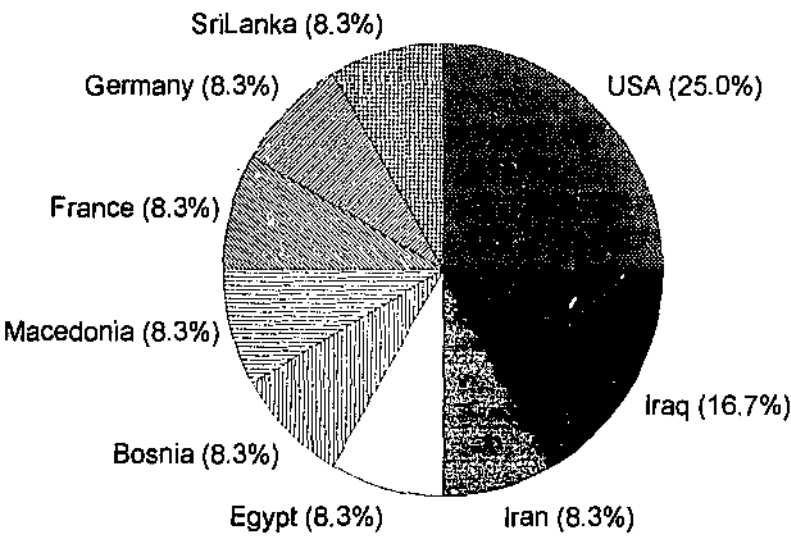
year old children in years 2 and 3 of primary school; five from a 'mainstream' Independent school and seven from a Government E.S.L. school. These children were those whose parents had given permission to participate in the research. Four parents did not give permission and so these children were not included .

5.1.1 Countries and Areas of Origin

The countries of origin, established in discussion with the children and verified from school records, were indicative of the wide range of source countries from which migrants to Australia are drawn ( Figure 2 ).

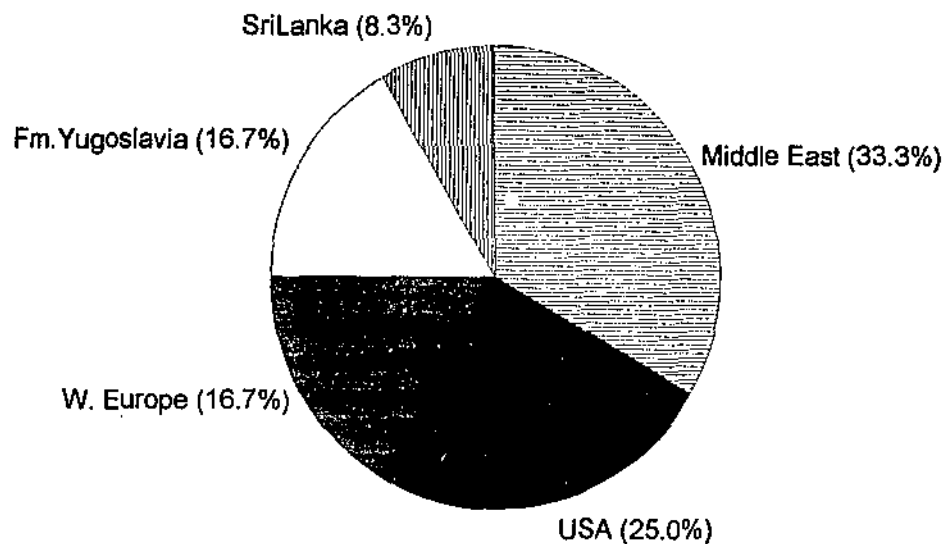
COUNTRIES AND AREAS OF ORIGIN OF MIGRANT CHILDREN IN SAMPLE

FIGURE 2                      COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



**FIGURE 3**

**AREAS OF ORIGIN**



It may be seen from Figure 3 that a breakdown of the countries of origin (Fig.2) into areas demonstrates that the largest group of 4 (33.3% of the total sample) came from the Middle East and the smallest of 1(8.3%) from Sri Lanka. This differs from the immigration statistics for W.A. which show that in 1994/95 the countries of origin of all migrants entering WA were the U.K, New Zealand, South Africa, Former Yugoslavia, and Myanmar, while total Australian figures for main source countries also included Vietnam and Hong Kong (D.I.E.A., 1996).

**5.1.2 Reasons for Migration.**

The reasons for migration (obtained from student records and discussion) are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 REASONS FOR MIGRATION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN  
IN THE SAMPLE

N = 12 children. ( Figures expressed in percentages)

Reasons for Migration

% of Total Sample

<u>Humanitarian</u>	<u>Father's Work</u>	<u>Family Migrant</u>	<u>Skill Indep.Migrant</u>	<u>Return Migrant</u>
41.7%	33.3%	8.3%	8.3%	8.3%

TABLE 1A REASONS FOR MIGRATION OF HUMANITARIAN MIGRANTS

N = 5 children

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Areas of Origin</u>	
	<u>Middle East</u>	<u>Frm Yugoslavia</u>
Refugee	2	1
Special Humanitarian	1	-
Special Assistance	1	-

TABLE 1B REASONS FOR MIGRATION OF NON-HUMANITARIAN MIGRANTS

N = 7 children

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Areas of Origin</u>			
	<u>U.S.A</u>	<u>Europe</u>	<u>SriLanka</u>	<u>Frm Yugoslavia</u>
Father's Work	3	1	-	-
Family Migration	-	1	-	-
Skill Indep.Migration	-	-	1	-
Return Migrant Family	-	-	-	1



It may be seen from Table 1 that the largest category of migrants represented in this sample were those who came to Australia under the Humanitarian Entry Programme (41.7%); followed by those who came because of the Father's work (33.3%) ; one Independent migrant family (8.3%); one family coming to live with a step-parent (8.3%); and one returning migrant family (8.3%).

This is consistent with Australia's Humanitarian Entry Programme which is subdivided into 3 groups defined as Refugees, Special Humanitarian, and Special Assistance categories (D.I.E.A.,1996; Victory, 1995).

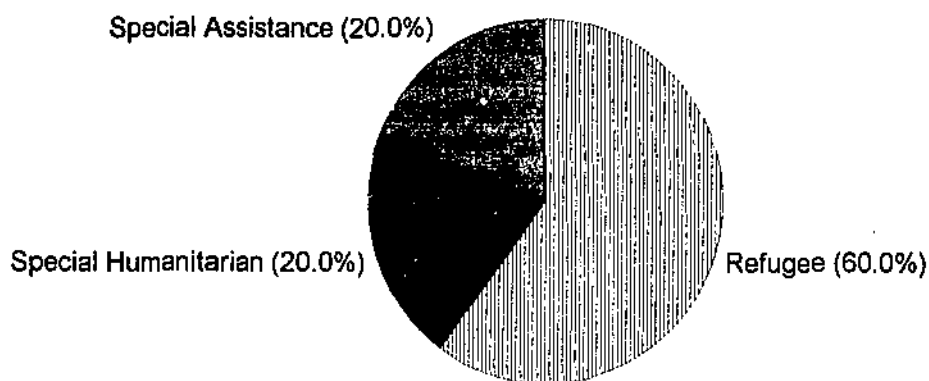
These three groups differ, for Refugees are those outside their country of residence or nationality who 'suffered or..... fear persecution' and whose travel expenses are paid by the government (D.I.E.A., 1996, p10).

Special Humanitarian entrants, are defined as having 'Experienced substantial discrimination.....gross violation of human rights' and due to 'links ' with Australia, resettlement here is deemed 'appropriate' ( D.I.E.A., 1996, p10).

The Special Assistance programme is available for those with 'close ties with Australia' and who are in situations of 'discrimination, displacement or hardship' ( Victory, 1995; D.I.E.A.,1996, p10).

The five children in this study who came under the Humanitarian Entry programme represent all three of these groups ; with 60% in the Refugee category; 20% in the Special Humanitarian and 20% in the Special Assistance groups respectively (Figure 4) and are discussed separately from the Non-Humanitarian category.

**FIGURE 4      HUMANITARIAN MIGRANT CHILDREN CATEGORIES**



#### **5.1.3 Humanitarian Entry Migrants.**

Areas of origin of the Humanitarian migrants in this sample were 40% of Refugees coming from the Middle East and 20% from the former Yugoslavia; with the Special Humanitarian and Special Assistance category children (40%), also from the Middle East (Table 1A). This is consistent with figures from the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (1996) which show that these two areas are major sources of Humanitarian migrants: with the Middle East contributing 32.5% of Refugees, 39% of Special Humanitarian and a smaller unspecified number of Special Assistance migrants in 1994/95. The former Yugoslavia contributed 31.2% of Special Humanitarian and 56.4% of Special Assistance entrants and a smaller unspecified number of Refugees in 1994/95. These two areas together with South- East Asia and the former U.S.S.R. make up the top source countries for Humanitarian migrants to Australia at present ( D.I.E.A., 1996, p13 ).

In W.A. in 1994/95 Humanitarian migrants made up 13.4% of the total migrant intake of which 39.3% were Refugees; 45% Special Assistance and 15.5% Special Humanitarian

entrants. Iraq contributes 30% of the Refugees, and the former Yugoslavia 54.2% of Special Humanitarian and 41.2% of Special Assistance migrants under the Humanitarian programme in W.A. ( D.I.E.A., 1996, p52).

These Humanitarian programmes are designed as a flexible response to the world wide problems of refugees and displaced persons. The priority areas in 1994/95 were the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia, and South East Asia (Victory, 1995). The sample for this study therefore reflects the former two priority areas ( i.e. Middle East and former Yugoslavia).

#### 5.1.4 Non-Humanitarian Migrants

The next category represented in this sample are those children who came because of their father's work, making up 33.3% of the total sample. Of those who came because of their father's work, 75% were from the U.S.A, two thirds of whom were sent by the father's company and one third of whom were academics. The remainder were also academics, but originating from Europe (Table 1B).

The immigration status of these subjects is unknown, but could well fall within the Temporary Resident category specified by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (1996) which 'meet specific objectives of benefit to Australia in.....skilled employment, sport, culture, international relations' (p22).

Of these temporary residents to Australia, executives make up 4.7%, visiting academics 3.6%, exchange 3.4%, specialists 11%, and the U.S.A. is the third largest source country behind U.K. and Japan ( D.I.E.A.,1996 ).

As detailed information was not available on this group of subjects, it is open to conjecture as to whether they fall within the Skill migration category or are temporary residents only.

Of the remaining three Non-Humanitarian category children in the sample, one came to live with a step-parent under the Family migration programme which provides for sponsorship of spouses, fiances, dependent children and other relatives.

The second child and family came to Australia as Independent migrants under the Skill migration category which made up 39.7 % of the total migration programme to Australia in 1994/95 (D.I.E.A., 1996, p9).

The third child returned to Australia from the former Yugoslavia after spending more than 2 years living there.

In summary, the areas of origin of the children who comprised the sample for this study were the Middle East (33.3%), U.S.A. (25%), W.Europe (16.7%), former Yugoslavia (16.7%) and SriLanka (8.3%). The reasons for migration were predominantly humanitarian (41.7%) and father's work (33.3%). Finally, the predominance of the Middle East and the former Yugoslavia as source countries of Humanitarian migrants echoes the figures of the D.I.E.A.(1996) for W.A and Australia as a whole.

### 5.1.5 Parental Occupations

**TABLE 2 PARENTAL OCCUPATIONS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN IN SAMPLE**  
N = 12 children

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Father</u>	<u>Mother</u>
H.Duties		6
University Academics	3	
U.S. Companies	2	
Teachers	2	1
Artist		1
Civil Engineer	1	
Doctor		1
Fridge Service	1	
Mechanic	1	
Musician		1
Paymaster		1
Professional	1	
Sales Assistant	1	1

#### Humanitarian Migrant Parental Occupations

<u>Teacher</u>	<u>White Collar</u>	<u>Trades</u>	<u>Academic</u>	<u>Home.D</u>
3	2	1	1	3

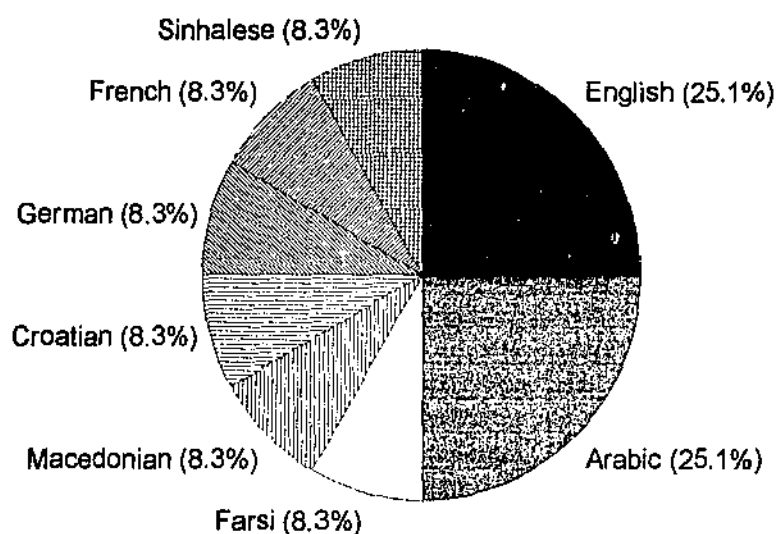
It may be seen from Table 2 that parental occupations of the sample are biased towards the professions, although 50% of the mothers' occupations are listed as home duties.

The parental occupations of the Humanitarian migrant sub-group are also biased towards the skilled migrant entry category ( Table 2).

This is consistent with the statistics for Western Australia which reveal that in 1994/95 30.5% of migrants entering were skilled , 8.6% semi-skilled and 3.7% unskilled, while 49.3% were not in the workforce before arrival, and most of these were women (63.1%) ( D.I.E.A.,1996 p54).

### 5.1.6 Home Languages

**FIGURE 5 HOME LANGUAGES OF MIGRANT CHILDREN**



An examination of Figure 5, which shows the range of home languages spoken by the migrant children in this sample, provides an interesting insight into the diversity of children entering our schools. Only 25% were from an English speaking background (E.S.B.) and languages other than English (L.O.T.E.) spoken by this group of children were :-

Arabic (25%); Farsi (8.3%); Sinhalese (8.3%); Croatian (8.3%); Macedonian (8.3%); French (8.3%); and German (8.3%).

It was expected that in the 'mainstream' school all the migrant children would be from an E.S.B. but this was not the case. Two children (40% of the sample from this school) were from a N.E.S.B. The predominance of N.E.S.B. in the total sample is a clear demonstration of the increasing diversity of migrant groups entering Australia and our schools.

D.I.E.A.(1996) figures on migration did not provide any statistics on languages spoken by migrants. Presumably an assumption is made that this can be inferred from data on countries of origin.

#### 5.1.7 Religious Background

**FIGURE 6      RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF MIGRANT CHILDREN**

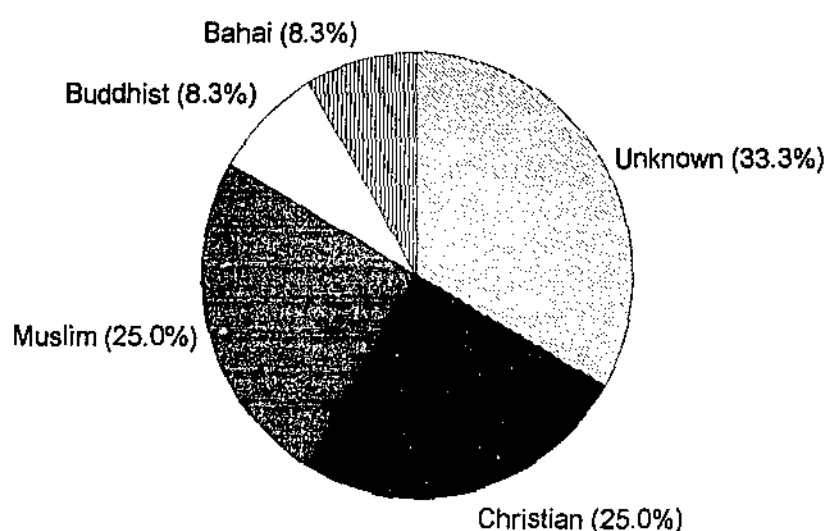


Figure 6 reveals the diversity of the religious background of the children in this sample. Religions listed were :- Muslim (25%); Christian ( 25%); Buddhist (8.3%); Bahai (8.3%); Unknown ( 33.3%).

These latter come from U.S.A. and Western Europe and are therefore assumed to be of Christian background: either Protestant or Roman Catholic. Within the denoted Christian category there was also diversity, with 33.3% Roman Catholic and 66.6% Eastern Orthodox .

#### 5.1.8 Family Size

Family size in this sample ranged from 1 to 5 children, with a mean of 2.83 which is consistent with the W.A. mean of 2.3 children per family. Humanitarian migrants had the higher average of 3.8 children per family, while Non- Humanitarian families had an average of 2.42 children each.

The largest families in the Humanitarian migrant group were from the Middle East with a minimum of 4 and maximum of 5 children, while the family from the former Yugoslavia had 2 children only.

The largest family in the Non- Humanitarian migrant group, was that of the return migrant child from a former Yugoslav state, which had 4 children . The remaining families in this migrant group all had 2 children, with the exception of one family from U.S.A. which had 3.

It was interesting to note that the largest families in each of these migrant groups were those whose fathers' occupations were listed as trades.

#### 5.1.9 Length of Time in Australia

The length of time in Australia varied from 3 to 15 months with a mean length of stay of 8.58 months. As previously discussed, the limit of the study to those children who had been here for a maximum of 12 months, was varied to facilitate the inclusion of several children who had been here a little longer than 12 months.



#### 5.1.10 Summary

In summary this sample of twelve migrant children from two different schools in the Perth metropolitan area, can be seen to consist of children from widely differing backgrounds.

The Humanitarian migrant children in this sample are predominantly from the Middle East, Arabic speaking, and Muslim in religious denomination. These children are all from families of four children and have parents who are teachers or academics. The two exceptions are one child also from the Middle East, but Farsi speaking and Bahai in religion; and one from the former Yugoslavia, who is Croatian speaking and Roman Catholic in religion. These two migrant children come from families of 5 and 2 children, and parental occupations are trades and white collar workers respectively.

The Non-Humanitarian migrant children in this sample are also predominantly non-English speaking, including three from different countries in Europe (one a former state of Yugoslavia), and one from Sri Lanka. Religious denominations include Orthodox Christian, Buddhist, and unknown (presumed Christian, either Protestant or Roman Catholic, as the children are from Western Europe)

The migrant categories of the families of these children range from Family migrants, Independent (skilled) migrants, return migrants, and one child who has come due to his father's work. It is not known in this case whether it is a temporary or permanent arrangement.

The parental occupations of these families are mainly in the professions, with one listed as trades. The family sizes range from one to four children, with two children being the most predominant number.

The English speaking migrant children in this sample are all from North America and migrated due to their father's work, as a company representative or an academic.

Religious denominations of this group are unknown, although it is assumed that most would be Christian. Family size is predominantly two children, although one family has three children.

Differences in countries of origin, reasons for migration, home languages, religious backgrounds, and parental occupations, as well as the fundamental difference of migrant category (Humanitarian or Non-Humanitarian) are evident in this sample.

The individual differences in migrant children in our classes and the part that these differences play in each individual child's experiences of migration, cannot be underestimated as important factors in determining the future wellbeing of these children in Australian schools. (Beiser et al, 1995)

## 5.2 THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE

### 5.2.1 Prior to Migration

#### 5.2.1.1 Introduction

The topic of migration was introduced after the children had drawn a picture of themselves arriving with their family in Australia. The children were invited to tell their stories of how they had come to live in Australia and free flowing discussion was encouraged. Questions were only asked by the researcher if the conversation lagged, and at all times the children were encouraged to express their concerns in a manner consistent with an emergent approach ( Jacob, 1988; cited in Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993).

The experiences of the children in this sample prior to migration differ greatly depending on the migrant category to which they belong. Therefore the sample has been sub-divided into Humanitarian and Non-Humanitarian categories to enable these initial differences to be presented separately.

#### 5.2.1.2 Humanitarian Migrant Children

Those children in the Humanitarian category of migrants have come here as a result of war, loss of their homes, fear for personal safety or persecution. 80% of the children in this category are from the Middle East and 20% from the former Yugoslavia.

Eighty per cent of the Humanitarian subjects had spent time in at least one other country since leaving their country of origin. Only one child from the area of the Gulf war, had come directly from where the family had been living to join other family members in Australia, under the Special Assistance category.

The experiences of the remaining four before departing for Australia, included 2 children living in a refugee camp; 1 living in Pakistan; and 1 in Croatia and Hungary. Separation from their fathers was experienced by 60% of the Humanitarian migrant children. In two cases (40%) the father left home and entered Australia first, and was subsequently joined by the family after many months.

### How the child came to live in Australia

When asked how they came to live in Australia, comments by the Humanitarian migrant children discussing 'their story' were illuminating. One child who had lived in Pakistan for a time commented, " We was all angry. All the people was black in Pakistan and all cows ! - it's yucky ! I like my country. There it gets wet and everything yucky !" This family came under the Special Humanitarian category and joined relatives in Australia. Another child from the Middle East stated - " We came from X..... in a helicopter. It was night in X.....

First I came in a car and now in a helicopter. I was scared in the helicopter, and then went in the plane."

Yet another child commented - " Dad gave my Mum money in X....., Mum gave to man and we come to Australia."

### Feelings

The children were asked how it felt to be told that they were leaving home to live in another country. Feelings expressed by these children at leaving for Australia were mostly happy (80 %), although they were sad to say goodbye to relatives left behind.

One child expressed it thus . "If I telephone to X ....., I cried. My Grandma and Grandfather I miss. I love her, I kiss her. I walk in the park, she give me \$10 . She likes me and I like her."

However it should be noted that all but one child who came from the former Yugoslavia have relatives here in Australia ( 80 %).

Although no questions were asked about circumstances leading to the child's departure, many Humanitarian migrant children spontaneously mentioned violence (80%). Such spontaneous comments were :

- \* "My sister was going to school. They did that to her eyes ( child punched the air) and then we went to Pakistan."
- \* "My Mum's grandfather has died, all my aunties died too in X....."
- \* "X..... planes shooting. In Australia not shooting. X..... fighting and Saddam shooting people, ( child demonstrates) other ones fighting, not Saddam."
- \* "People came my house and kicking my Dad, my sister was crying. "

One child spoke repeatedly and vehemently about 'Saddam', stating, " Saddam shooting people, other ones fighting, not Saddam." " X..... not good because Saddam take people and do that ( child demonstrates shooting and bombing ) and had no food. Potatoes thrown there like (on sand). Saddam he's eating, he's happy, he's not good, very naughty" "If you come to X....., Saddam he shoot you, all scared."

This same child talked about someone dying and being covered with sand, but unfortunately it was difficult to understand as the child's speech was rapid and disjointed.

- \* " One boy her kick and he smack him. I tell my Dad , grandfather, grandmother, Mum, my family. He said very naughty. He died, put sand to him."

These comments would all seem to be an indication of traumatic circumstances leading to migration in contrast to the experiences of the Non-Humanitarian category of migrant children.

Because of their experiences, Humanitarian migrants are more likely than others to have suffered violence and danger, both in their country of origin and in leaving it, which may result in damage to health and development or post-traumatic stress disorder (Huych & Fields, 1981; cited in Beiser et al, 1995).

Other factors which may also pose risks to health and wellbeing, include lack of financial support and poor living conditions, death of relatives or separation from either parent (Kuprinski, 1986; Trueba, 1990; Beiser et al, 1995). Most Humanitarian migrant children in this study have experienced at least one of these stresses before arrival in Australia, while some have experienced all of them.

#### 5.2.1.3 Non-Humanitarian Migrant Children

Of the seven Non-Humanitarian category of migrant children in the sample, 57% have come to Australia because of their father's work. Two fathers work for American companies and two fathers are university academics. The children of the former have had many experiences of travel and seemed to have moved about frequently. However, when asked how it felt to be leaving home, one child stated, "We didn't want to leave. Dad's work said if he wanted more money and not so much travelling we had to come." Another commented, "I wish Dad wouldn't work for the company in other countries" Comments such as these would seem to indicate that these children were not happy to leave their home countries.

### Experiences in other Countries

The children of the academics also discussed their experiences of living in another country. One child and family had spent considerable time living in New Zealand prior to coming to Australia, and discussed how they had driven round New Zealand, and how they hoped to do the same thing here. - " My mum wanted to see if we would like Perth. We drove round X..... and New Zealand - not in Australia, we're going to do that."

Another child spontaneously mentioned being at school before, in the country of origin and a second country. - " In X .... I went to an American school. In X..... I could not speak English. I felt sad in X..... , everyone said you were 'like a baby - couldn't speak English' ( child used a silly voice) I couldn't tell the teacher - couldn't understand."

Comment was also made that the father was living here already when this child arrived.

### Separation from Fathers

A total of three Non-Humanitarian migrant children experienced separation from their fathers (42.8%). One had parents who had divorced, the father had since died, and the family had come to Australia to live with a stepfather. This child stated, "I was frightened of (step) Dad at first! Not now!" in response to the question " How did you feel about leaving home?"

The other child who had experienced separation from the father was the returning migrant child, who had spent more than two years in one of the former Yugoslav states, living with family and relatives while the father remained here in Australia, apart from one brief visit when a grandparent died.

The remaining child in this category was from a professional family which visited Sydney for 10 days in 1994 and then returned home, prior to migrating as Skill Independent category migrants to Australia. The comment made was, "I came to Sydney before in '94 for one week, it not good. Here we've got the same people- friends".

Thus it may be seen from the foregoing report of discussions with the subjects that the two categories of migrant children experienced very different circumstances leading up to migration. In contrast to the happy feelings about leaving home experienced by Humanitarian migrant children, many of the the Non-Humanitarian children, did not appear to be happy to leave. Negative feelings about coming to live in Australia were expressed by 57% of these children, 28.5% of whom stated that they disliked moving from country to country due to their father's occupation.

Many of the children in both migrant categories had spent some time in another country before coming to Australia (66.6%); while 50% of children in this sample had also experienced separation from their father. Separation from, or death of a parent can affect the health and wellbeing of all children (Beiser et al, 1995). Children in both Humanitarian and Non- Humanitarian migrant categories may be at risk if this is a factor, as is the case with many children in this study.

#### 5.2.1.4 Family and Possessions

In response to the question, "Who did you say goodbye to?" all children described being sad when saying goodbye to their grandparents and leaving family members behind.

\* " I felt very sad. I love Grandma, the best Grandma in the world. I'd like to live with her, feel sad."



- \* "We went to see Grandma to say goodbye, I felt sad, really miss my family. We're going back for Xmas, taking extra time. We miss our family."
- \* "I said goodbye to Grandma and Grandpa, and my best friend. I felt sad"
- \* "I feel a bit sad, I don't want to come, there is better. My sister had a baby, I didn't want to come, it was fun there. I have so much friends there."

In reply to the question "What could you bring with you?" the Humanitarian migrant children told of bringing mainly clothes, a few toys and books. Only the Special Humanitarian migrant family brought furnishings to Australia, and these were carpets. The child commented - "we can just bring 20 kilos".

57% of the Non-Humanitarian migrant children stated that they had brought toys, clothes and furniture with them. The exceptions were the returning migrant family who had been living in an aunt's home in former Yugoslavia, the Independent migrant family, and one child who stated that their things were in storage.

One family had unsatisfactory experiences with 'house sitters'. In an angry voice, the child said, "The house sitter was careless. Her boyfriend smoked, and smoke was in the house and it stank. They used the master bedroom and they weren't supposed to. Mum got really mad. The dog jumped the back fence and got run over by a car, Mum told her it could get out. I got really mad. We specially liked that dog."

Many children spoke about giving away their possessions when asked what they could not bring. A third of the children in the sample gave away or sold their pet. A third also either gave things away to relatives or left them behind to be 'looked after'. A larger percentage (41.6%) of children expressed feelings of sadness at this, 80% of whom were Non-Humanitarian category migrants and only 10% of whom were Humanitarian, while 58.3% of the total said that they didn't mind.

The process of migration results in loss of "specific relationships or significant objects" (Furnham & Bochner, 1986, p163), such as family, friends and pets, as well as familiar surroundings, foods, climate, etc. To a young child this can be extremely stressful, whatever the reason for migration, and may cause reactions of grief and mourning as a result of this loss of important people and possessions (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

#### 5.2.1.5 Parental Preparation and Attitudes

Parental attitudes and preparation for leaving also play a part in contributing to the wellbeing of the migrant child. In this sample of children, when asked who told them they were leaving, 33.3 % stated that they were told by one or both of their parents; 16.6 % overheard the parents talking; and 8.3% were told by a friend of the parents.

Two Humanitarian migrant children did not say how they found out that they were leaving (16.6%), while a third stated, "We went to see somebody in a building, if they say 'yes' we come to Australia".

One Non-Humanitarian migrant child stated, "We didn't want to leave but we had to for Dad's work". Another child said, "Can't remember".

Just under half (42.8%) of the Non-Humanitarian children said that it was their mother's choice to come here (25% of the total).

In summary these figures reveal that the largest percentage of children in the sample (58.3%) were told by, or overheard one or both parents; 16.6% were told by a friend or official; and 25% did not say or had forgotten.

It is important for sensitivity to be shown in preparing children for the prospect of uprooting themselves and travelling to a new country, leaving behind everything that is familiar to them. Adequate preparation is needed and this can be facilitated by involving

children in the planning as early as possible, so that no sudden, unexpected decisions are made which may possibly be traumatic and detrimental to the wellbeing of the young child .

#### 5.2.2. Journey to Australia

The long flight to Australia can be stressful for young children even without the hazards that Humanitarian migrant children in particular have to endure before this leg of the journey begins.

Most of these children had experienced travelling from their own country to several others before the plane flight to Australia, and many in traumatic circumstances.

Responses to the question, "Did you come straight to Perth or go somewhere first?" included the following comments :-

- \* " I go in Z....., I very happy. Sad to leave Bosnia. People in Bosnia kicking." " We first stay in X..... and in X..... .. we go in Z....., and we(go) in aeroplane to B..... "
- \* " First I was in my country it was X....., and then it was Pakistan, and then went to Australia"
- \* " I go another country and another country, Y.....X..... I slept weeks in X..... and I come here."

#### Method of Travel

In answer to the question, "How did you get here?" all the migrant children, both Humanitarian and Non- Humanitarian, in this sample stated that they arrived in Australia by plane. For many the flight itself may be an unpleasant experience. Long hours sitting or trying to sleep in uncomfortable aircraft seating, unpalatable or unfamiliar food, sickness due to turbulence, unfamiliar routines, and differing time zones

as well as the inconvenience of cramped aircraft toilet facilities, can all contribute to stress in young children. When invited to tell the researcher about the trip, 41% of children expressed negative feelings.

- \* " On the plane my ears were hurting, I was scared. I was having no good feelings. It was yucky!"
- \* " I felt sick on the plane".
- \* " I was scared because it do that" (banked and turned ).
- \* " I not eat pig, yucky!"
- \* " Food not nice. I went to toilet with Mum, couldn't open the door. I was crying".

The food provided by the airlines was the subject of negative comments by 58.3% of children in the sample. These ranged from "not very nice", " not good, didn't eat it " through to "yucky!"

Positive aspects of plane travel mentioned by all children were the receiving of books, pencils, games, and toys, from the airline. One child had still kept the book of stickers which was proudly displayed. More than half (58.3%) of the children in this sample found the flight a good experience " When Xmas time came it was lovely, we came in the plane. We got lots of things."

Many airline companies make a concerted effort to care for children on a long journey, providing them with frequent cold drinks, toys and activities to occupy them. This is very important, particularly given the length of the journey to Australia, and the physical restrictions of crowded uncomfortable seating, as well as the lack of frequent stops and the opportunity to move around. Effort should also be made to serve food that children are able to eat, perhaps in small sealed containers, which may be kept for later if necessary (eg. jelly, biscuits, fruit, cheese, yoghurt), if the child is not hungry at meal times.

### 5.2.3 Post Migration Experiences

#### 5.2.3.1 Arrival in Australia

The children were asked if anyone met them and what they thought when they first arrived here. Relatives already here welcomed 41.6% of the migrant families on arrival in Australia and 80% of the Humanitarian migrant children were in this situation of being met and taken to stay in relative's homes.

- \* "My auntie and cousins met us. We went in their house, and sleep there lots of times."
- \* "Then I told my uncle "where's my cousins?". He said in X....., I said "ok." My uncle tricked me, my cousins were there. I told my uncle " you tricked me!"

A third of the children in the sample had no relatives to greet them but were met by friends or father's workmates.

- \* "Dad's friend from work met us , we went to a hotel and then leased a house."
- \* "When first we got here it was night. We stayed with friends."
- \* "Dad's friend met us, got a taxi, bus and then walked. He got that house for us"
- \* "Somebody met us, Dad phoned them to bring his car- he lived here" (Dad)

One Humanitarian migrant child from the former Yugoslavia came in a group with others from that area and was taken to accommodation provided which she described thus :-

" We go in Australia in the house. We have tv, chair, washing machine, toilet, table, beds, in Australia house. "

Some children had fathers who were already living here and so were able to go straight to their homes, while others discussed the father organising accommodation :-" Dad asked man for house and we went to house."

None of the children in this sample appear to have been in any type of camp in Australia. Indeed arrival in Australia seems to have been a satisfactory experience for most of the migrant children in this sample. Nevertheless, several children spontaneously commented that they could not speak English when they arrived.

\* " I couldn't understand the language, it was different. It's quite easy now but I could not understand at first."

\* " We came in the plane and no speak English."

\* " Nice in Australia. We go in X..... in the house. Lots of people....(live in flats.)

Woman with my language, 3 months, she goes with me in car, bigger car and she go with me to doctor and we finish 3 months with woman . She is in house in X..... We eat bread, salt, sandwiches, salad."

#### 5.2.3.2 Differences

Differences between countries were discussed at length by some of the children when asked what they thought now that they had been here a while.

\* " There, there are different trees, lots of pine trees. Cars drive on different side of the road in different countries. Here they call it 'the States' or 'USA'. There we call it America or US ."

\* " Different there, very hot. There wear yellow and red clothes, different colour. Sandwiches are different, not square , in X..... are round. Cars are different- white cars. Different animals, tigers sometimes go near my house."

\* " In Y..... there were many cities, lots of buildings, five kinds of trains, I went in only three of them, once in the fastest of all. There are different kinds of cars there."

Differences in living conditions between the child's country of origin and Australia were also a subject for discussion for many children, one in quite negative terms.

\* " In X..... we got our own house in Z....., my father was in the government, gave him a house and a car. The house is different .This house is very small, we got big house in X....."

\* "In Y..... we didn't have garden, in Y..... we didn't have bigger garden in Y....., not beautiful.( Draws house in Y.....) Not windows, it was yucky!"

\* " Now I think it is very silly and boring still- nothing to do. There there's hundreds, thousands and millions more stuff. "

Just under half (41.6 %) of children in the sample commented favourably on these differences of living conditions, 60% of whom were Humanitarian category migrants and 40% Non-Humanitarian category migrants. Of the children who made comments which were unfavourable, 33.3% were Humanitarian and 66.6% Non-Humanitarian migrants.

The largest percentage (66.6%) of the unfavourable comments related to the inferior standard of housing which was discussed by two children from each migrant category. Research has demonstrated that moving house can be very stressful ( Furnham & Bochner, 1986 ). It is potentially far more stressful for young children to not only change homes but also countries, and without adequate consultation and preparation.

#### 5.2.3.3 Experiences in School

When invited to talk about school in their country of origin, many of the children in the sample discussed their experiences in the schools that they had attended in other countries and compared them to Australian schools.

\* " Yes I went to school in X....., we didn't go on as much excursions and didn't watch movies, it was just really different. I think it's a little more fun here. One thing not as fun is P.E. It's really fun in X....., play games there. We don't do any games in P.E in Australia, they only do sports, not games."

\* "I went to school in X....., it was good. In X.....they were speaking French. Playgrounds are different, in our playground nothing, only swings that's all. Here children have long hair, in X..... no boys have long hair. Girls want to be nice here."

\* " I went to school , reading in X..... was very hard, lots of homework, I had to read with mum, dad and sister. I learn about animals and things, it was very hard. There are two writings, it's harder. Here not very hard. We were learning English, the beginning, - boy and girl, now here I didn't forget."

\* " I went to school in X....., not like this, I did not wear this. We wear shorts, it is too hot, we wear t-shirts. Nearby we got 2 temples and went with the school with friends."

Three quarters of the children made comments about Australian schools which were favourable (44.4% Humanitarian and 55.5% Non-Humanitarian category ), while 58.3% of children made comments which were unfavourable (28.5% Humanitarian and 71.4% Non-Humanitarian migrants). Some children compared positive and negative aspects of schools both here and abroad and so their comments were both favourable and unfavourable. Nevertheless, the children's spontaneous comments made during discussions indicated further adjustments to change that were required of them upon migrating to another country, whether from parental choice or necessity.



#### 5.2.3.4 Peer relationships

Peer relationships were also of concern and discussed by many children in the sample in response to the question, "Who are your friends at school?"

\* " You don't have any friends. It's good when you have friends, if I don't I just walk around a lot. Sometimes in X..... it's the same, just moving to different places. "

\* " In Y..... I went to an American school. In Y..... I could not speak English.

I felt sad in Y..... everyone said you were-" like a baby - couldn't speak English" (silly voice). When I could speak English I said " you're like a baby" (silly voice). I couldn't tell the teacher -couldn't understand. I told Mum , she told the teacher and it still continued."

\* " School here felt funny - things are not the same. I know most of what they do here. . I felt kind of funny. They tease me about my American accent and my last name. Children notice my accent a lot. "

Some evidence of 'scaffolding' was noted among the children in this sample.

\* " N... and A.... came when I came and could talk same (language). Good to talk, learn words. N..., L....., K....., A....., A....., M....., ( names of children) all tell words in playground, they say ..... you try!"

\* " Some children speak Arabic, teacher said write in Arabic. I got two schools , when I go home Dad teaches me and cousins Arabic."

Three quarters of the children in the sample made favourable comments about peer relationships (33.3% Humanitarian and 66.6% Non-Humanitarian category), while two thirds of the children made comments which were unfavourable (37.5% Humanitarian and 62.5% Non-Humanitarian category), and some children made both. This seemed to indicate that many of the children had friends, although there were some difficulties experienced within the peer group for the majority of children.

It may have been expected that English speaking background (E.S.B.) migrant children would have less difficulty with peer relationships, but this was not the case.

When the sample was divided into English speaking background (E.S.B.) and non-English speaking background (N.E.S.B.) groups, it was found that 66.6% of the E.S.B children and 77.7% of the N.E.S.B. children made favourable comments, while 100 % of the E.S.B. children and 55.5% of the N.E.S.B. children made unfavourable comments. This would seem to indicate that the E.S.B. children experienced more difficulties with peer relationships than the N.E.S.B. children in this sample.

All the children in this study stated that they had friends at school, although 33.3% of the N.E.S.B. migrant children mentioned friends left behind and spoke regretfully.

One third of N.E.S.B. children commented that they had been helped by other children who knew their language when they first arrived. In contrast, the N.E.S.B. migrant children attending the 'mainstream' school (22.2%) stated that they were ridiculed at first due to their lack of English. This could be attributed to the fact that in the E.S.L. school individual differences and lack of English were the 'norm'. Therefore, lack of peer group acceptance, was less likely to be based on language and cultural differences and lack of English in particular in the E.S.L. school, than in the 'mainstream' school.

The importance of 'scaffolding' of social, cultural, and emotional support provided by understanding and tolerant peers cannot be under estimated. Peers, especially if sharing the same first language as the newly arrived migrant child, can act as a 'bridge' between cultures, enabling the migrant child's participation in a new environment. This will also help to prevent feelings of loneliness, isolation, and inferiority, and will help to facilitate acceptance and participation in the peer group in a new country, which is a necessary factor in the development of confidence and self esteem (Santrock, 1993; Berk, 1994).

#### 5.2.3.5 Concern at Peer Behaviour

Many children expressed concern at the behaviour of others at school, when asked about their likes and dislikes at school. Specific instances of teasing and bullying were not confined to the N.E.S.B. migrant children in the sample, but were also reported by the E.S.B. migrant children.

\* " People kick me at school, dad very cross. I don't like one boy, do that (raised finger) or kiss. Say "Don't do that, I tell teacher." Boys kiss and hit me, I do that (punches air) I tell my Mum."

\* "I don't like if children kicking. Don't like people in my bus because they are kicking."

\* "I don't like to fight. Any one grumpy- not my friend. I tell to teachers - he was naughty."

\* "I don't like being teased, they say "You are a slob because you're from X....." and make fun of my last name."

In this sample 75% of the total number of migrant children discussed problems relating to specific behaviour of the peer group, while 25% of the total did not report problems, and these were all from a non-English speaking background.

Half (50.6%) of the problems concerned incidents of teasing, name calling, and physical aggression; while 16.6% mentioned rejection ( e.g. did not like it when no one played with them). One child stated " I told everyone I could kill people and fight them. I hate everything, I want to hurt people". Other behaviour of concern to children was kissing and 'rude' signs.

These findings are consistent with studies by Kelly and Cohn (1988), who investigated name calling and fighting among older students in British schools. It was found that these experiences were common, with two thirds of students in differing racial groups having been called names that made them 'angry or miserable'; almost 60% of students being involved in fights; while only one third had not experienced any problems.

The slightly higher incidence (8.4%) of children in this current study who reported problems of peer group behaviour may be attributable to their younger ages, ( 7 & 8 years of age compared with 10 years of age and over, in the studies by Kelly & Cohn, 1988) and/or the fact that these children had recently arrived in this country and therefore may be more vulnerable to this type of behaviour due to their differences in language and culture.

Again it may have been expected that E.S.B. migrant children would not have as many difficulties as N.E.S.B. migrant children, but this was not the case. All of the E.S.B. migrant children mentioned problems ranging from rejection, teasing and name calling, to fighting and aggression, and seemed either withdrawn, unhappy, or angry in their demeanour.

It is particularly relevant to note these difficulties experienced by the migrant children of English speaking background in this sample, as it would seem to indicate that cultural differences and difficulties are not only related to the more obvious differences such as language, racial group, and physical appearance, but are also evident in those who appear on the surface to be similar to the Australian born children in our schools.

No problems were reported by a third of the N.E.S.B children, although the rest of the N.E.S.B. children discussed experiences ranging from rejection, laughing, teasing or name calling due to lack of English (33.3%); to hitting, kicking, rude signs, kissing and fighting (33.3%), again echoing the findings of Kelly and Cohn (1988) that two thirds of children in schools report problems of peer group behaviour.

Of the 75% of children in this sample who discussed specific problems with peer behaviour, 77.7% were noted by the teachers to have been involved in incidents of

verbal or physical aggression with other children, while 22.2% were withdrawn in their relations with others.

The cultural differences in migrant children mean that they may experience peer pressure in the playground. In order to gain acceptance by the peer group and to avoid rejection ( so important to 7 and 8 year olds) these children are under considerable pressure by the group to adopt new ways of dress, eating, and behaviour (Berger & Thompson, 1996; Jamrozik & Sweeney, 1996). The data from the present study would tend to indicate that this was the case with the majority of the children in this sample.

Two thirds of the children in this study reported being subjected to taunts and ridicule due to differences from the norm. This finding is disturbing given that such behaviour of the peer group can cause feelings ranging from rejection, isolation, alienation, and inferiority to depression and anger, placing stress on the health, well being and achievement of students at school (Beiser et al, 1995)

Erikson states that individuals are " shaped by the interaction of personal characteristics and social forces" (Berger & Thompson, 1996, p. 72), and that negative experiences at home/school or with peers can result in feelings of 'incompetence and inferiority' (Santrock, 1993). The increased realisation of self-criticism and lowered self esteem, which occurs in children of this age, can result in 'learned helplessness' particularly in those children who lack experiences of success within the school and peer group. This is especially true in children from different cultural backgrounds whose behaviour and prior learning may be inappropriate in the new country (Berger & Thompson, 1996).

An important factor in the development of feelings of competence for all children is peer acceptance, lack of which can have negative effects on children's self esteem, school performance and family relationships. The friendship of at least one child is vital for the development of self confidence, which is necessary to facilitate participation within the group and alleviate feelings of loneliness, isolation, and inferiority especially in the migrant child (Parker & Asher, 1993 cited in Berger & Thompson, 1996).

For these reasons it is vital that teachers closely observe and conduct group discussions with immigrant children ( whether E.S.B. or N.E.S.B.) to ascertain their feelings and experiences and to take action to prevent the deleterious effects of loneliness, isolation, discrimination or rejection.

### 5.3 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

#### 5.3.1 Introduction

This section investigates the teachers' perceptions of how the migrant children in their classes have adjusted to school. Discussions were held with the Year 2 and 3 teachers of the children in the sample, during which questions were asked about each child's prior school attendance, participation in class activities, enjoyment of school and any concerns the teacher might have.

#### 5.3.2 Non-Humanitarian Migrant Children

As a result of these discussions it was established that 57% of the Non-Humanitarian migrant children were thought by the teachers to have settled in well to school in Australia, and to give no cause for concern. This was in contrast to the concerns spontaneously expressed by these children, all of whom complained about lack of friends in the peer group in a new country.

Half were concerned at lack of acceptance by the peer group (teasing and bullying), while the remaining half did not want to leave their country of origin. A quarter also expressed concern over leaving extended family members.

About two fifths (43%) of Non-Humanitarian migrant children were seen as being of some concern to the teachers, and these concerns were related to either developmental deficiencies, aggressive/dependant behaviour, or lack of English language skills. However, the children spontaneously expressed concerns ranging from not wanting to

migrate or children laughing at their lack of English to the extreme 'boring here', 'hate school', and 'want to hurt people', in one particular instance.

Thus there would seem to be a lack of congruence between teacher and child perceptions and concerns, particularly in relation to the E.S.B. children.

### 5.3.3 Humanitarian Migrant Children

During the discussion with the teachers of the Humanitarian migrant children it was established that 60% of the children had English language skills which were of concern, and 20% of this group had other problems as well. These related to the child being "difficult to teach" due to "lack of attention, disorganisation"; "unacceptable things said or done"; and inappropriate displays of affection, which may be culturally based.

The remaining 40% of the Humanitarian migrant group were seen to have some difficulties due to personality. They were either very shy and thus unable to ask for help, or arrogant, leading to difficulties making friends with the peer group.

The teachers' concerns related to the ability of the children to 'fit in' to the demands of the classroom and cope with the 'normal' expectations of school in a new country.

The concerns which emerged in discussions with the children included negative experiences (including violence) and being 'scared' in the case of every Humanitarian migrant category child. Differences between schools and languages were of concern to 80%, and differences in environment and lifestyle to 60% of the group.

The peer group, friends and relationships with other children were also of importance to Humanitarian migrant children, many of whom spontaneously commented that they did not like it at first when they did not have any friends and no one to play with.



Those children who were thought to have difficulties other than English language skills (60% of the group), discussed concerns which ranged from sadness at leaving ; missing grandparents; separation from their father; to violence or oppression in the country of origin. Of these children, 40% discussed at length negative experiences before migration and also expressed concerns about aggressive reactions of the peer group.

Therefore evidence was found among the migrant children in the sample, of children's concerns of which the teachers were unaware. This was evident even in the group for whom the teachers felt no concerns, and whom they thought had adjusted well to school in a new country.

The children for whom the teachers did express concerns, also discussed feelings of which the teachers were unaware, and which could have considerable bearing on the perceived problems of the migrant child, ( e.g. shyness, unable to seek help, inappropriate displays of affection) and any present or future difficulties the child may experience.

#### 5.4 Summary of Results

Discussions with young migrant children to obtain their perceptions of their experiences of migration, reveal considerable differences both pre-migration and post migration.

The sample may be divided into Humanitarian and Non-Humanitarian categories of migrant children, and also into English speaking background and non-English speaking background migrant groups. Differences and similarities between these groups of children noted have been in both pre-migration and post migration experiences.

Most obvious are the Humanitarian category migrant children who mentioned traumatic experiences involving oppression or violence before leaving their countries of origin, in contrast to the experiences of the Non-Humanitarian migrant children.

The Humanitarian migrant children's feelings of happiness at leaving, also contrast with feelings expressed by more than half the Non-Humanitarian migrant children, who did not want to leave home or did not like it in Australia.

Most children brought mainly clothes to Australia, for only one third of the children stated that they brought furniture, and these were all Non-Humanitarian category migrants. All children were sad to leave extended family members behind, although more than half were met by relatives living here already.

More than half the children in the sample either overheard or were told by their parents that they were leaving, while half had experienced separation from their father, and three quarters had lived in another country before coming to Australia.

Post migration experiences provided an interesting opportunity for comparison of favourable and unfavourable comments about differences in living conditions, experiences in school, peer group relations, and specific peer behaviour of concern to the children. In each instance the Non-Humanitarian migrant children made more unfavourable comments than the Humanitarian migrant children, while all the E.S.B. migrant children made unfavourable comments about peer relationships and had concerns about specific behaviour which included teasing, rejection, and fighting.

Investigation of teacher perceptions about migrant children in their classes, revealed that children had problems of which teachers were unaware, and this was evident both in the groups for whom the teachers held concerns and those that they did not. This finding has important implications for the teachers of young immigrant children, to ensure the best possible outcomes for these children and is discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION

#### 6.0 Introduction

In this chapter the results of this study are discussed both in relation to the research questions posed and the findings of previous work on the experience of migration (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kuprinski & Burrows, 1986; Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990; Beiser et al, 1995). Implications of this research with reference to classroom practice are also discussed with a view to increasing understanding and empathy for migrant children in Australian schools.

#### 6.1 The Migration Experience

It has been propounded in previous studies that the experience of migration is a stressful one for all ( Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kuprinski & Burrows, 1986; Beiser et al; 1995). This is especially true for young children who leave home, familiar surroundings and routines, extended family and friends, pets and possessions, to begin a new life in a different country.

Against this background, this study aimed to investigate the perceptions that young migrant children, from both Humanitarian and Non-Humanitarian migrant categories, have of their own migration experiences; reporting the individual differences in the backgrounds of the children in the sample as a whole; and obtaining their teachers' perceptions of how they have adjusted to school.

The first research question which was investigated in this study concerned the experiences of the young migrant child as perceived by themselves regarding migration to Western Australia.

Migration results in exposure to stresses before, during, and after the journey, and it is an experience which can have significant consequences on the health, development, and wellbeing of the young migrant child in Australian schools.

### Premigration Experiences

Premigration stresses can have a direct effect on a child's health and wellbeing ( Kuprinski, 1986; Beiser et al, 1995). Humanitarian and Non-Humanitarian migrant children are exposed to very different experiences prior to migration to Australia such as the living conditions, reasons for departure, preparation and packing, and attitudes of parents to leaving. These experiences can result in stresses which may affect the child's happiness and wellbeing in a new country.

Because of their experiences, Humanitarian migrants are more likely than others to have suffered violence, danger, or oppression, both in their country of origin and in leaving it, which may result in damage to health and development or even post-traumatic stress disorder (Huych & Fields, 1981; cited in Beiser et al, 1995).

Other factors which can also pose risks to health and wellbeing, include poor living conditions and lack of financial support, separation from either or both parents, and death of relatives ( Kuprinski & Burrows,1986; Trueba, 1990; Beiser et al , 1995).

It has been established that most of the Humanitarian migrant children in this study have experienced at least one of these stresses before arrival in Australia, while some have experienced all of them, confirming the position stated by Krupinski & Burrows, (1986); Victory, (1995); and Beiser et al, (1995).

A major difference between the two migrant categories of children in this sample is the evidence of trauma experienced by all the Humanitarian migrant children, most of whom mentioned violence, prior to migration to Australia. This was in contrast to the experiences of the Non-Humanitarian migrant children.

Most of the Humanitarian category migrant children (80%) had also left their country of origin (one by helicopter), and had lived in another country prior to migration, while half of these had been in a refugee camp.

Another interesting difference, possibly related to these experiences, is the Humanitarian migrant children's feelings of happiness at leaving, compared with the contrasting feelings expressed by more than half the Non-Humanitarian migrant children, who stated that they did not want to leave home or did not like it here in Australia. The feelings of the former may be due to the 'blessed' relief felt by those escaping conditions of war or oppression, in which they fear for their safety and survival (Furnham & Bochner 1986); in contrast to the sense of loss experienced by children who have had to leave conditions of relative comfort, security, and familiarity. In many cases these latter children may experience an actual decline in the standard of living to which they are accustomed, and certainly the lack of support from extended family members and friends, which can contribute to sadness and a feeling of loss in a young child (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

The actual process of migration results in loss of 'specific relationships or significant objects' (Furnham & Bochner, 1986, p163), such as family, friends and pets, as well as familiar surroundings, foods, climate, etc. To a young child this can be extremely stressful, whatever the reason for migration, and may cause reactions of grief and mourning as a result of this loss of important people and possessions (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

The feeling of sadness experienced by children at leaving Grandparents, extended family, and friends behind, was evident in all children in the sample, in both migrant categories. However over half came to relatives already living here (80% of the Humanitarian and 42% of Non-Humanitarian category migrants), which is likely to contribute favourably to adjustment in a new country (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

Two thirds of the children in the sample did not bring many possessions to Australia, and possessions brought were mainly clothes. Only one third of the children stated that they had brought furniture, and these were all Non-Humanitarian category migrants. Just over half of the children did not seem to mind this, but of the children who did mind, most (80%) were Non-Humanitarian migrants. Many of these children were in the situation of having to leave their familiar surroundings, comfortable homes, and most of their possessions behind to come to live in another country, a situation about which they were not happy.

Three quarters of the children in the sample had the experience of living in another country (80% of the Humanitarian and 71.4% of Non-Humanitarian children). Furnham & Bochner (1986) raise the question of whether the experience of being the child of a 'multiple sojourner or frequent tourist' has beneficial or negative consequences. Two of the Non-Humanitarian children in this study, specifically expressed negative feelings about their experiences of moving from country to country due to their father's occupation, which indicates that many children do not find the experience pleasurable at this age.

Another risk to the wellbeing of the migrant children in both Humanitarian and Non-Humanitarian categories may be the experience of death of, or separation from a parent, as is the case with half the children in this sample (60% of the Humanitarian and 40% of Non-Humanitarian migrant children) (Beiser et al, 1995).

One family separated from their father in the early '90s, when he had "walked to Australia" from the Middle East. During this period the family spent some time in a camp in another country, and did not arrive here until fairly recently, which was a considerable time after the father's arrival in Australia. These sorts of experiences are likely to have a lasting effect on all the members of the family, but especially on the development of young children who need the security and comfort of both parents whenever possible to ensure continuing health and happiness.

#### Experience of the Journey

All the children in this sample came to Australia by plane, and although the flight was long, it seemed to be a relatively satisfactory experience for most of them. Some made unfavourable comments about the food and toilets, but all the children were pleased with the 'presents' of books of stickers, games, etc. given to them by the airlines. These 'handouts' seem to be an important factor in ensuring that young children do find the experience of flying a positive one, inspite of the negatives of long hours of sitting still, unpalatable food, and even travel sickness in some cases.

#### Post migration experiences

Post migration experiences can also create stresses for young migrant children due to " exposure to unfamiliar cultural influences " (Furnham and Bochner, 1986, p245). Torbiorn (1982, p138) cited in Furnham and Bochner (1986, p227) states, " To a child the move abroad also often involves more than an overall adjustment to the host country culture as a whole; it may also mean frequent changes of school, friends and so on" .

### Arrival in a New Country

Experiences of arrival in a new country can have a profound effect on a young migrant child. Formalities of customs, immigration, and quarantine procedures are even more daunting if conducted in the environment of an unfamiliar culture or language, and can cause both parents and children confusion, anxiety and a feeling of being unwelcome in an alien land.

The importance of being met by family, friends or sponsors who provide initial accommodation when the migrant family first arrives cannot be underestimated.

The majority of children in this sample (90%) were in this favourable situation.

This early welcome and support of the family can influence the wellbeing of the migrant child in a new country (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Beiser et al, 1995).

Adequate supports can play an important part in facilitating the processes of cultural adjustment necessary when migrating to a new country. Factors such as family stability and 'ethnic resilience', financial resources adequate for good living conditions, community and government support services, the support of an existing ethnic community, as well as attitudes of the school and peer groups are vital influences which can affect young migrant children in Australia (Beiser et al, 1995).

Furnham and Bochner (1986) ask, "Do voluntary, prepared, well organised migrants adjust more happily or quickly than refugees who have suffered considerable hardship and difficulty while moving?" (p 227). In the light of this present investigation, it would seem that where young children are concerned, this is not the case, perhaps due to the sense of loss experienced by children who have had to leave conditions of relative comfort, security, and familiarity, and the support of extended family and friends, to come and live in a new country.



Furnham and Bochner (1986, p227) citing Torbiorn (1982, p138) also maintain, " children are more likely to be dependent than their parents on purely local conditions which will affect their chances of making friends and will probably decide which school they will attend. In some of their contacts with local culture ..... will probably feel under considerable pressure to conform to its attitudes and norms".

### School Experiences

Self esteem, which is a vital component in feelings of adequacy and wellbeing , may be low in migrant children due to differing emphases in educational experiences between the country of origin and Australia, and cultural differences between school and home ( Mizuochi & Dolan, 1994).

The lack of acceptance in the new country, of these previously accepted culturally appropriate skills, can give rise to feelings of what Erikson calls 'incompetence and inferiority' (Santrock,1993), which can cause stress in the young migrant child.

More than half the children in this sample (58%) made unfavourable remarks about their experiences in Australian schools, showing that lack of tolerance of these differences was of concern to many.

Problems can result when administrators, teachers and peers are from the majority culture and migrant children are from different cultural backgrounds and/or minority groups. These differences are not necessarily the most obvious ones of language or racial characteristics. Children who speak the same language as the majority, and whose racial characteristics such as appearance are similar, may also suffer due to lack of appreciation of differences in culture and education between their country of origin and Australia. Evidence of this problem was found in the English speaking background migrant children in this sample.

### Peer Group Relationships

Peer group relationships also play an important part in developing and enhancing wellbeing in young children. The cultural differences of migrant children can make it harder to gain acceptance due to different norms of social interaction from culture to culture and the lack of mutual "implicit understanding of the bases on which interaction takes place" (Furnham and Bochner, 1986, p217). This can result in misinterpretation and frustration leading to hostility and aggression towards the culturally different child.

The importance of a "culture friend ..... unofficial tutor in cultural ways" (Furnham and Bochner, 1986, p250) to provide the 'scaffolding' of social, cultural and emotional support in a new environment, needs to be recognised in promoting health and wellbeing in the young migrant child in an Australian school .

The difficulties of learning how to deal with social situations in an unfamiliar culture, due to lack of common experiences and understandings should not be underestimated for both the English and Non-English speaking migrant child.

Lack of English language skills also plays an important part in difficulties for non - English speaking background migrant children. Studies have indicated that the most difficult social situations are making friends of one's own age in the majority culture, dealing with persons who are angry or aggressive, and initiating contacts and beginning friendships. Other social situations that pose difficulties are understanding jokes or sarcasm and continuing conversations.

The process of social interaction is a "mutually organised skilled performance..... a source of misunderstanding and friction" for those from another cultural background who lack the skills and experiences required for successful "interpersonal communication " (Furnham and Bochner, 1986, p216-7).

An unexpected feature of the results of this study are the concerns of the three English speaking migrant children in the sample. One could reasonably have expected little cultural difference and few difficulties in the children whose first language was the same as that of the host country. However this was not the case. The children expressed feelings of lack of acceptance and difficulties in social interactions which were based on cultural differences such as accents, names and expressions, and colloquialisms. An explanation could be that these three children were in a 'mainstream' school and were a 'minority' group within the school in which the majority of children were born in Australia. Their differences of accents, colloquialisms, possessions and even clothes, would mark them as 'outsiders', making acceptance by the peer group more difficult at this age. One English speaking child remarked,

"I felt kind of funny. They tease me about my American accent and my last name.

Children notice my accent a lot. I can't say 'Texas' properly. I call them 'markers'. I don't like being teased. They say "You are a slob because you're from X....."and make fun of my last name."

The demeanour of the English speaking background migrant children seemed to demonstrate more unhappiness than that of the non-English speaking background migrant children, and this was freely expressed in the discussions.

In contrast, seven of the N. E.S.B. children were in an E.S.L. class where only the teacher spoke English and difference was the 'norm'. Although a number of children were Arabic speaking, there were also at least six other first languages represented. Most of the sample children in this class did not seem to express the same lack of acceptance and social difficulties as the E.S.B. migrant children. Factors which could contribute include the lack of sufficient English language skills among the N.E.S.B. migrant children to enable expression of their feelings and concerns as fluently as the E.S.B. migrant children; or a desire to give the most 'acceptable' answer to the researcher.

If this were the case however, the children's body language would be likely to be revealing, and on no occasion was it felt that either of these factors could be considered in this sample.

The conclusion could be drawn that within this group, differences of language, race, and culture were the 'norm' and none of these children were 'outsiders' in the group. As a result they were less subject to rejection and peer pressure to conform to a 'different' majority, as was the case with the E.S.B. migrant children in this sample.

### Specific Peer Behaviour

Three quarters of the total number of migrant children in this sample mentioned problems relating to specific behaviour of the peer group. All those who did not report problems were from a non- English speaking background.

Half of the children had experienced problems which involved incidents of teasing, name calling, and physical aggression; one sixth experienced rejection, while one child stated that he wanted to 'hurt' people.

Again it may have been expected that E.S.B. migrant children would not have as many difficulties as N.E.S.B. migrant children, but this was not the case. All the E.S.B. migrant children mentioned specific problems which ranged from rejection, teasing and name calling, to fighting or aggression, and showed signs of being either withdrawn, unhappy, or angry in their manner of speaking.

One third of the N.E.S.B children in the sample reported no problems, while one third of the remaining N.E.S.B. children reported experiences which varied from rejection, laughing, teasing or name calling due to lack of English, and the remaining one third reported behaviour which included hitting, kicking, rude signs, kissing and fighting.

It is particularly interesting to note the specific problems reported by the migrant children of English speaking background in this sample, as it would again seem to indicate that difficulties are not only related to the more obvious differences such as language, racial group, and physical appearance, but are also evident in those who are similar in appearance to the Australian born children in our classes. These migrant children are also being subjected to undesirable behaviour such as teasing, bullying, and rejection by the peer group in Australian schools. This behaviour of the peer group can cause feelings which range from rejection, isolation, alienation, and inferiority to depression and anger, placing stress on the health, well being and achievement of students at school (Beiser et al, 1995).

The cultural differences in migrant children may lead to peer pressure in the playground to adopt new ways of dress and behaviour to gain acceptance and avoid rejection by the group (Berger & Thompson, 1996; Jamrozik & Sweeney, 1996).

As a result, migrant children can be subjected to taunts, ridicule of dress, physical appearance, manners, and discrimination due to differences from the 'norm' of the majority culture in school ( U.N.E.S.C.O., 1982; Kelly & Cohn, 1988; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992; Epstein, 1993 ).

These factors which are featured in the literature, are echoed in this study of both E.S.B. and N.E.S.B. migrant children.

These negative experiences with the peer group and in school may add to the migrant child's feelings of being 'different' and in some way inferior, resulting in low self esteem and 'learned helplessness' due to a lack of acceptance of their cultural and social behaviour in the new country (Berger & Thompson, 1996).

## 6.2 Teachers' Perceptions

The perceptions of the teachers regarding the adjustment of the migrant children in their classes were, as might be expected, mostly related to the academic progress achieved and desired in the classroom. Concerns related mostly to English language skills in the N.E.S.B. migrant children, and in a small number of the total sample (both E.S.B. and N.E.S.B. children), to either motor skills, behaviour, or personality problems. No concerns were felt for most of the Non-Humanitarian category migrant children in the sample (70%).

Teacher concerns contrasted with the concerns reported by the children which involved lack of friends and acceptance in the peer group, teasing, bullying and fighting; not wanting to leave their home; and sadness about leaving family and friends behind; in the Non-Humanitarian category children. The Humanitarian category children discussed concerns of violence and being 'scared'; school and language differences; peer relationships and difficulties such as hitting and kicking which they had experienced.

It was apparent that for the most part teachers were unaware of the concerns of these children, and were concentrating their attention on improving the standard of skills taught in the classroom.

This poses the question, 'If migrant children are not able to have their concerns and anxieties addressed, how can they achieve the happiness and wellbeing necessary for satisfactory physical, mental, and emotional development, and therefore educational achievement in Australian schools?'

Teachers need to be made aware of concerns other than academic progress, and of the individual factors affecting migrant children's development in a new country.

### 6.3 Individual Differences

The final and subsidiary question in this study investigated the individual migrant children's different backgrounds and characteristics in the sample as a whole, to see if any of these could have a bearing on their adjustment to school.

This sample consisted of children from widely differing backgrounds, countries of origin, home languages, religious backgrounds, parental occupations, and reasons for migration. As well, there was the fundamental difference of migrant category, whether Humanitarian or Non-Humanitarian.

The Humanitarian migrant children in this sample came from the Middle East and the former Yugoslavia, while the Non-Humanitarian migrant children came from North America, Western Europe and the Indian Ocean regions.

Eight different languages were spoken by the children in this sample, the largest number being English and Arabic speaking groups.

Religious backgrounds ranged from Christian ( Roman Catholic to Eastern Orthodox ); Muslim; Buddhist; and Bahai.

Occupations of parents were skilled including professionals such as company representatives, engineers, teachers, and doctor; to trades and white collar workers. Half of the mothers did not work outside the home.

Individual reasons for migration included the largest group who came as Humanitarian migrants; fathers' work; family, independent, and return migrants. The latter four groups belonged to the Non-Humanitarian category of migrants.

These individual differences in the migrant children in this sample give some indication of the diverse backgrounds of the migrant children in our classes. The part that these differences play in each individual child's experiences of migration cannot be underestimated, and are important to be borne in mind as factors which can be influential in determining the future wellbeing of these children in Australian schools (Beiser et al, 1995).



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.0 Implications and Recommendations

This study presents a picture of the variety of individual differences and experiences that migrant children may possess by the time they are participants in Australian classrooms. To expect these children to be the same as their Australian born classmates is both naive and unrealistic. The experience of migration, as well as cultural differences due to the child's prior life in another country, means that these children may not 'fit in' easily and will need understanding, help, and time to learn the different cultural and educational ways in a new country.

Too often a 'Tabula Rasa' approach in education has been adopted, with an almost complete denial of any prior learning, either educational or cultural, before arrival in Australia. It is as if either no previous life existed before arrival in this country, or what did exist is valueless and irrelevant in this country: a situation which can be extremely hurtful to migrant children.

Teachers need to be aware of the background and past experiences of migrant children in their classes to help them adapt and gain acceptance in school and society. Allowing these children to use the prior knowledge gained in their previous country helps to build bridges between the different ways of life, and enables the child to feel that they are accepted and valued in a new country. To facilitate this learning 'culture friends' are vital to help guide and explain the new 'ways' in Australia (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

This study has demonstrated clearly that migrant children come to this country for a wide variety of reasons, and while some may be happy to come here, others may be unwilling or apprehensive. It was found that many have to leave home, family, friends and most of their possessions behind, resulting in feelings of sadness and loss (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Standards of living may be lower, and they may be subjected to taunts and discrimination due to cultural and racial differences, as is the situation for many children in this study (Kelly & Cohn, 1988; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988).

Several children in this study mentioned that they would return home when the situation improved in their country, and some may be here on a temporary basis only. Conflict and difficulties between the differing cultures of school and home can occur, as minority group parents wish to retain their language and cultural heritage. As a result migrant children have to cope with being torn between two different 'worlds' in order to meet the expectations of both home and school (Wong, 1992; Mizuochi & Dolan, 1994). All this can occur at a time of increased vulnerability at an age when young primary school children are striving to gain acceptance and participate in the peer group at school (Santrock, 1993; Berger & Thompson, 1996).

This study has revealed that not only N.E.S.B. migrant children suffer these problems in our schools, but E.S.B. migrant children who may seem on the surface to be very similar to the Australian born children in our classes may suffer also. These children may also experience sadness and loss at leaving their familiar environment; lack of acceptance by the peer group due to cultural differences such as accents; and educational and cultural differences which render their prior knowledge inappropriate or unacceptable, resulting in the risk of low self esteem and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.

Another issue revealed in this study is the discrepancy between the concerns of the teachers and the migrant children in their classes, in spite of the fact that all the teachers involved were extremely caring and concerned for the children's welfare.

The current preoccupation in schools and educational bodies with 'accountability' and 'outcome statements' may mean that pressure on teachers limits the time and attention that they are able to devote to the welfare of their students. If so, this may be especially disadvantageous to migrant children, who have particular psychological needs which must be addressed to ensure health, wellbeing and educational progress in a new country.

### 7.1 Implications for Practice in Schools

Several important implications result from the findings of this study.

1. Teachers need to be aware of the wide range of differences that migrant children in Australian schools possess. These include cultural and educational differences, and also the different experiences of migration which may affect the migrant child's ability to 'settle in' and cope with school in a new country. The differences apply to both N.E.S.B. and E.S.B. migrant children, and teachers need to realise that all migrant children, irrespective of what language they speak, are different from Australian born children even though some may appear similar in many ways. The experiences of living in another country and migration, are fundamental differences which must be borne in mind at all times.

2. Teachers need to use and build on the prior learning and experiences that all migrant children have when commencing school in Australia.

" Curriculum needs not only to address the real experience that children bring with them to the classroom, it needs to offer them the conceptual tools to interpret it" ( Troyna & Hatcher, 1992, p 203 ).

For example, when focusing on a topic such as 'homes' or 'native animals', it is inappropriate to just focus on Australian animals or Australian style houses, when many of the children may have had very different experiences in their country of origin. They may have lived in large apartment buildings, imposing mansions, jungle huts or even refugee camps. Therefore the teacher needs to use the individual experiences of migrant children to help them feel accepted, and make learning experiences in school relevant to real life. By so doing, the teacher is also broadening the horizons of the other children in the class, whose experiences may be different, thereby laying the foundations of tolerance and appreciation of other people and their cultures, which is important in the modern world.

"Children like to talk about what they think.....their own experiences are burning issues" (Cullingford, 1992, p9 ); "children are susceptible to the mood and attitudes of society .....reflect society" (Cullingford, 1992, p146 ).

3. Teachers must not be afraid to discuss and to listen to what young children have to say about their experiences, and differences in cultures and education systems. This will not 'upset' children, but can be therapeutic in helping them to come to terms with life in a new country.

" If we deny grief, we deny the importance of the meaning each of us has struggled to make of life.....the significance of our personal experience" ( Bowlby,1960; cited in Furnham & Bochner,1986, p.164).

Indeed, the most important concerns that children have in school in a new country, and which may affect their behaviour, may be those of which the teacher is unaware. Troyna & Hatcher, (1992) maintain, " There is a danger that teachers may selectively filter out what is of concern to children" (p 202).

Teachers may use social relationships and interactions " directly and indirectly to help children develop understanding of issues central to their lives" ( Troyna & Hatcher, 1992, p 202 ). For example, group discussions may be held whereby the children talk about what makes them happy or what makes them sad. When a child reports that he dislikes it when other boys "kiss or hit me", the teacher can use this as a problem solving and conflict resolution exercise, thus building and developing tolerance and socialisation, as well as language skills in the classroom.

4. Teachers also need to help migrant children deal with their feelings in a socially acceptable way. To facilitate the identification of emotions, their causes, and the legitimate expression of feelings in an acceptable manner 'emotion- focussed coping skills' should be developed (Butterworth& Fulmer, 1990). This can be achieved by means of a variety of activities including art, in which children are encouraged to express on paper the feelings which they may not be able to put into words. The different emotions can be used as a basis for the construction of collage, masks, hats, and mobiles. Drama activities, role play, and puppets are also valuable in helping children act out their fears and other emotions. Written expression in both the migrant child's own language and English, may be developed through creative writing topics, scenarios, and sentence completion based on children's feelings and emotions; while picture talks on this topic may also be used to develop appreciation of the point of view of others.

Finally the value of movement to appropriate music should not be overlooked in helping children to express their feelings, particularly with migrant children whose English language skills are limited ( Butterworth & Fulmer, 1990).

Bibliotherapy, or the therapeutic use of books, is a valuable resource for migrant children and others who require help with problems and conflicts. Teachers may use suitable stories to facilitate children experiencing situations, feelings and solutions in a safe and

accepting environment. Current problems may be discussed, and compared, and constructive solutions sought which respect others' points of view ( Jalongo,1983 ).

5. The discussion of children's rights as agreed in the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', should also be a basis for activities and discussion in the classroom . These human rights are important for all children to understand and respect, but are of special relevance to young migrant children who need to have their differences valued and respected by other children, both in the classroom and outside in the playground. Recognition of one's own nationality and other rights can play a vital part in fostering feelings of self esteem, empathy, and wellbeing, which are so necessary in the developing child ( Vygotsy, 1930-1935/1978, cited in Berk, 1994; Butterworth & Fulmer, 1990; Erikson, 1950, cited in Santrock, 1993 ).

## 7.2 Implications for Migration Practice

### Pre-Migration

A large percentage of children in this sample ( 41.6% ) expressed regret at having to give pets or possessions away to relatives or friends. It is important that continuing contact is maintained where possible to prevent the overwhelming feelings of grief which can occur due to the loss of 'significant objects' ( Furnham & Bochner, 1986, p163).

These familiar and much loved items such the child's bed, pictures, books, and toys help to provide security in a young child's life and the child may feel a great sense of loss at leaving them behind.

Only one third of the children in this study were told by their parents that they were leaving. It is important to prepare children with sensitivity for what may constitute a

great upheaval in their lives. Studies have investigated the relationship between stressful 'life-events', such as a change in residence, and physical and psychological wellbeing in both adults and children ( Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974, cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986 ; Jalongo, 1985 ; Brown, 1974; Paykel, 1978, cited in Kuprinski & Burrows, 1986 ; Smardo, 1981 ). It has been postulated that the experience of migration involves many 'negative life events', such as change in living conditions, residence, schools, recreation and social activities, family get-togethers, and eating habits, which may cause stress and result in threats to the health and wellbeing of migrants ( Furnham & Bochner, 1986, p178-179 ; Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990). How much more stressful is it likely to be for a young child to experience leaving country, culture, home, friends and possessions, particularly when the decision is made by others, often without any reference or consultation with the child ?

The importance of maintaining contacts and communication with family members and friends cannot be underestimated, as is the need to inquire about the welfare of pets or other important 'objects'. Children should also be permitted to bring some belongings with them to act as 'security blankets' during the transitional period while they are becoming familiar with new surroundings. It is hoped in this way to minimise the feelings of loss and grief that young children feel when leaving behind all that is familiar to come to a new country.

### Journey to Australia

The journey to Australia can be very stressful for young children. Therefore, both parents and airlines need to demonstrate sensitivity and awareness of children's needs regarding toilet requirements, food, rest and occupation. Difficulties can result from the different physical requirements of children, in respect of sleeping, lack of appetite, fear of toilets,

and the inability to sit still. Although many airlines provide satisfactory occupation for children, the meal situation is often too inflexible to accommodate young children's needs. Parents can help by bringing a supply of acceptable snacks such as biscuits, cheese and fruit to supplement airline food when necessary. Where possible, parents should also bring culturally appropriate 'surprise' items such as pocket sized games, books of puzzles, and 'magic' slates, which may be produced when needed to provide extra occupation and novelty.

### Arrival in a New Country

The arrival in Australia can be made easier if migrants are met by family or friends who speak the same language, are of the same cultural group, and can provide or arrange initial accommodation. These contacts play a vital role in the transition to Australia by acting as 'culture friends' who can interpret, explain, and support the newcomers while they are settling in and getting established, thereby facilitating cultural adjustment in a new country .

### 7.3 Future Research

This study has investigated the immigration experiences of 12 migrant children in the early primary school years with some interesting results. Differences were revealed between the different categories and groups of migrant children which were not predicted.

1. Future research needs to investigate the different experiences and needs of various categories of migrant children coming to live in Australia.

In this study reported here, differing attitudes to leaving home were revealed in the Humanitarian and Non-Humanitarian category migrant children. The former were



happier to leave their countries of origin, and minded less about leaving extended family and possessions behind, than the Non-Humanitarian migrant children. This was assumed to be due to the traumatic conditions that these children had all experienced in their home countries, whereas many Non-Humanitarian migrant children were unhappy to leave their homes and possessions behind.

More favourable comments on the differences between Australia and their home countries were also made by the Humanitarian migrant children, in contrast to the Non-Humanitarian migrant children, which was possibly a reflection of the unhappiness felt by the latter at leaving home.

Comments on school made by the Humanitarian group of children revealed again that more were favourable than unfavourable, and this was the reverse of the Non-Humanitarian group. However in the case of peer relationships, more unfavourable than favourable responses were received from the Humanitarian migrant children, which would clearly indicate that they have more difficulties with peer group relationships, possibly due to lack of appropriate social and English language skills.

Non-Humanitarian migrant children, on the other hand, seemed less happy with school, mainly due to differences in education systems, but were able to relate better to their peers as demonstrated by their more favourable comments.

Nevertheless undesirable peer group behaviour such as rejection, taunting, and physical aggression, was reported by children from both groups in this sample. However, several N.E.S.B. migrant children were taunted about their lack of English skills, while E.S.B. migrant children were called names and teased about their accents, colloquialisms, and other superficial differences.

Thus Humanitarian and Non-Humanitarian category migrant children, and also E.S.B. and N.E.S.B. migrant groups, would seem to have differing attitudes and problems

in school which require investigation, as these may affect their development and wellbeing.

Research investigation into the experiences and needs of specific categories of young migrant children would facilitate the planning of programmes to develop their strengths and meet their needs, preferably through the utilisation of the children's experiences of culture and education in their previous countries.

2. The situation of the E.S.B. migrant children in our schools is an area of investigation which warrants particular attention. The experiences of these migrant children, who have been ignored in the past, include cultural and educational differences which may cause problems at school in Australia, and result in low self esteem. Investigation of these differences and the way that these children learn to cope, may help to identify areas of difficulty. It will also enable the planning of programmes to cater for the specific needs of these children, thus ensuring their wellbeing and educational progress in Australian schools.

3. There is also an urgent need for more research in general on young migrant children and their adjustment to life in Australia. Furnham and Bochner (1986) have asked whether those migrants who are 'voluntary, prepared, and well organised, adjust more happily than those who have suffered much hardship while moving?' This study seemed to indicate that this was not the case. However further research is needed with a large randomised sample to give a clearer picture of the situation, and to facilitate generalisability of the findings.

4. Investigation of peer group behaviour and attitudes towards both E.S.B. and N.E.S.B. migrant children in Australian schools would be valuable, particularly in the

current climate of criticism of immigration by politicians and others, and the current debate concerning the existence of racism in Australia.

Research of this nature would facilitate greater understanding of the situation faced by migrant children in Australia, and enable the planning of inclusive curriculae and education for equality, to help develop tolerance and understanding towards migrant and minority group children in Australian schools.

It is within our schools that unique opportunities exist to prevent the development of racism and discrimination. By utilising the valuable resources of cultural and linguistic diversity of migrant children in Australian schools, attitudes of appreciation and tolerance can be fostered, which will enable future generations in our increasingly diverse society to deal with complex world issues with sensitivity and compassion.

"Interactions in school provide opportunities to collaborate across cultural and linguistic boundaries in the generation, interpretation, and application of knowledge.....(to produce) individuals who have developed respect for both their own cultural identities and for the identities of others; who are capable of collaborating with others in the democratic pursuit of social justice; and who see themselves as members of a global community with shared economic, scientific and environmental interests" (Cummins, 1991, cited in Nieto, 1992).

## REFERENCES

Beiser, M., Dion, R., Gotowiec, A., Hyman, I., & Nhi, V. (1995). Immigrant and refugee children in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 40 (2), 67- 72 .

Berger, K.S, & Thompson, R.A. (1996). *The developing person through childhood*. New York : Worth.

Berk, L.E. (1994). *Child development* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *Ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brotherhood of St. Lawrence. (1971). *Two worlds : School and the migrant family*. Melbourne: Ramsay, Ware & Stockland.

Burns, A. & Goodnow, J. (1985 ). *Children and families in Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Burns, R.B. (1994 ). *Introduction to research methods in education* (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Butterworth, D. & Fulmer, A. (1990, 1993). *Conflict, control, power: A curriculum to teach conflict resolution to children aged 0 - 10 years*. Perth: Child and Family Consultants.

Clarke, P. (1979). Migrant children in preschool. In P. Langford & P. Sebastian (Eds.), *Early childhood education and care in Australia* ( pp. 227-232 ). Kew, Victoria : Australian International Press.

Cole, M. (Ed.) (1989). *Education for equality : Some guidelines for good practice*. London & New York: Routledge.

Cox, D., Chiu, E., Dileo, P., Mackenzie, A., & Taylor, J. (Eds.) (1978). *An uneasy transition: Migrant children in Australia*. 9th International Congress of the International Association of Child Psychiatry and Allied Professions. Melbourne: 1978.

Cullingford, C. (1992). *Children and society: Children's attitudes to politics and power*. London: Cassell.

Cullingford, C. (1994). Attitudes of children to their environment. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 24 (1), 7- 19.

DeLacey, P. (1982). Social realism in multicultural education for young children. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 7, 20-24.

Denzin, N.K. (1989). *Interpretative interactionism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. (1996). *Population flows : Immigration aspects*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Ebbeck, M. & Dyer, M. (1978). The early childhood teacher working with children living in two cultures. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 3, 8-12.

Eckermann, A.K. (1994). *One classroom, many cultures. Teaching strategies for culturally different children*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Epstein, D. (1993). *Changing classroom cultures: Anti-racism politics and schools*. London: Trentham Books.

Facer, E.J. (1985). *Immigrant education. Social adaptation of immigrant children: Indochinese in Australian primary schools*. Unpublished masters theses. University of Wollongong, N.S.W. Australia.

Fine, G.A. & Sandstrom, K.L. (1988). *Knowing children : Participant observation with minors*. ( Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods, Vol.15). Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.

Fritz, J. (1989) Intercultural communication skills among young children. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 14 (3), 29-34.

Furnham, A. & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture shock : Psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments*. London: Methuen & Co.

Garcia, E.E. (1993). The education of linguistically and culturally diverse children. In B. Spodek, (Ed.), *Handbook of research on the education of young children* ( pp. 372-384). New York: Macmillan .

Gougeon, T.D. (1993). Urban schools and immigrant families: Teacher perspectives. *The Urban Review*, 25 (4), 251-287.

Harper, J. & Bonnanno, H.(1993). Racial awareness and attitudes in intercountry adoption. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 18 (3), 28-34.

Hatch, J.A. (1990). Young children as informants in classroom studies. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 5, 251-263.

Jalongo, M.R. (1983). Using crisis-orientated books with young children. *Young Children*, 38 (5), 29-36.

Jalongo, M.R. (1985). When young children move. *Young Children*, 40 (6), 51-57.

Jamrozik, A. & Sweeney, T. (1996). *Children and society: The family, the state and social parenthood*. Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia.

Krupinski, J. & Burrows, G. (Eds.) (1986). *The price of freedom: Young Vietnamese refugees in Australia*. Sydney: Pergamon Press.

LeCompte, M.D., & Goetz, J.P. (1982). Problems of reliability and validity in ethnographic research. *Review of Educational Research*, 52 (1), 31-60

LeCompte, M.D. & Preissle, J. (with Tesch, R.) (1993 ). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2nd ed.). San Diego: Academic Press.

Lincoln, Y.S. (1995). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1 (3), 275 - 289.

Maykut, R., & Morehouse, P. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research*. London: Falmer Press.

Miller, K. (1992). Guidelines for helping non-English speaking children adjust and communicate. In B. Neugebauer, (Ed.), *Alike and different: Exploring our humanity with young children*. (pp 50- 53). Washington D.C: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Mizuochi, I. & Dolan, T. (1994). The problems facing Japanese children at school in England. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 24 (1), 123-133 .

Neugebauer, B. (Ed.) (1992). *Alike and different: Exploring our humanity with young children*. Washington D.C: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Nguyen, X .T. & Cahill, D. (Eds.) (1986). *Understanding Vietnamese refugees in Australia*. Melbourne: Philip Institute of Technology.

Nieto, S.(1992). *Affirming diversity: The socio-political context of multi-cultural education*. New York: Longman .

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation. (1987 ). *Immigrants children at school*. Paris: O.E.C.D.

Panich, C. (1988). *Sanctuary: Remembering postwar immigration*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Santrock, J.W (1993). *Children* (3rd ed.). Dubuque: Brown & Benchmark.



Skutnabb-Kangas, T., & Cummins, J. (1988) (Eds.). *Minority education : From shame to struggle*. Philadelphia: Clevedon.

Smolicz, J.J. & Secombe, M.J. (1981). *The Australian school through children's eyes*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Smardo, F.A. (1981). Geographic mobility: How do we help children cope? *Childhood Education*, 58 (1), 37 - 45.

State Board of Education, Victoria. (1990). *Social justice in schools: Some recent findings*. Research in Victorian Education. Melbourne: Author.

Sturman, A (1985). *Immigrant Australians and education : A review of research* (Australian Education Review. No. 22) Hawthorn, Victoria: The Australian Council for Educational Research.

Trueba, H.T., Jacobs, L., & Kirton, E. (1990). *Cultural conflict and adaption : The case of the Hmong children in American society*. New York: Falmer Press.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (1982). *Living in two cultures: The socio-cultural situation of migrant workers and their families*. Paris: Unesco Press & Gower .

Victory, M. (1995). *Crossing borders : The refugee experience in Australia*. Victoria: Cardigan Street .

Walsh, D.J., Tobin, J.J., & Graue, M.E. (1993). The interpretive voice: Qualitative research in early childhood education. In B. Spodek, (Ed.), *Handbook of research on the education of young children* (pp. 464 - 476). New York: Macmillan.

Wolcott, H.F. (1990). *Writing up qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Wong, L.Y. (1992). *The education of Chinese children in Britain : A comparative study with U.S.A.* Philadelphia: Clevedon.

Yao, E.L. (1985). Adjustment needs of Asian immigrant children. *Elementary School Guidance and Counselling*, 19 (3), 222-227.

## APPENDIX

### INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FORMS



**EDITH COWAN  
UNIVERSITY**

PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
CHURCHLANDS CAMPUS

Pearson Street, Churchlands  
Western Australia 6018  
Telephone (09) 273 8333  
Facsimile (09) 387 7095

**THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A MIGRANT CHILD:  
AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PERSPECTIVE.      SEPTEMBER 1996.**

**Consent Form**

**I .....**  
**have been informed about all aspects of the above research project and any**  
**questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.**

**I hereby agree to let my child.....**  
**participate in the study of the Experience of being a Migrant Child: An Early**  
**Childhood Perspective.    I understand that all information given will be treated in**  
**the strictest confidence, that anonymity will be maintained and that my child and I**  
**are free to withdraw from this study at any time. I agree that the research data**  
**gathered for this study may be published provided my child is not identifiable.**

**Signature of Parent .....**      **Date.....**

**Signature of Researcher.....**      **Date.....**



**EDITH COWAN  
UNIVERSITY**

PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
CHURCHLANDS CAMPUS

Pearson Street, Churchlands  
Western Australia 6018  
Telephone (09) 273 8333  
Facsimile (09) 387 7095

**THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A MIGRANT CHILD:  
AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PERSPECTIVE.                      SEPTEMBER 1996**

**Consent Form**

**I .....**

**have been informed about all aspects of the above research project and any  
questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.**

**I hereby agree to participate in the study of the Experience of being a Migrant  
Child: An Early Childhood Perspective. I understand that all information given  
will be treated in the strictest confidence, that anonymity will be maintained and  
that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. I agree that the research  
data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.**

**Signature of Informant ..... Date.....**

**Signature of Researcher..... Date.....**