Parenting
in Australian families

A comparative study of Anglo, Torres Strait Islander, and Vietnamese communities

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Foreword

In recent years there has been a growing interest among researchers in parents' own ideas about the tasks of parenting, about how they are going about the business of rearing children, about the sources they draw upon for their understanding of the nature of childhood, and about the resources they are able to access to support them in their roles as parents.

This project was established by the late Dr Harry McGurk who had a special interest and expertise in parenting issues. Harry was Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies from 1994 to 1998. He considered that it was fundamental to a full understanding of the processes and outcomes of rearing children in contemporary society that the social context not be overlooked in the conceptualisation of parenting. Consideration, therefore, needed to be given to the ways in which individual parents go about the tasks of providing for, caring for, and interacting with their children, *and* to the economic, social and political conditions within which those tasks are framed in contemporary society.

Parenting-21 (the title refers to this Century) was a major cross-national research project under the Institute's Children and Parenting program. The Institute was as a member of an international collaboration known as the International Study of Parents, Children and Schools (ISPCS), involving researchers from Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United States. These research endeavours highlighted the significance of exploring parenting beliefs and practices in a variety of contexts, at a national and international level. It also underlined the importance of focusing on parents' understanding of parenting.

Violet Kolar, one of the authors of this publication, worked on the project from the outset, and took over the responsibility for it after Dr McGurk's death in April 1998. Her co-author, Grace Soriano, was the Research Officer for the Parenting-21 Extension Study which examined Torres Strait Islander parenting and in 1999 became part of the ISPCS group working on the Australian component of the study.

Their report is based on the perspective of parents themselves about how they approached the task of child rearing; how they perceived their competence as parents; the aspects of their family and community environments that helped them to achieve what they were trying to do for their children; and the supports, whether available to them or not, that would have facilitated their doing a better job.

Parenting in Australian families has a high level of policy relevance and will be a valuable resource for policy planners, service providers, researchers, and parents in general.

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About the authors

Violet Kolar has worked as a researcher at the Australian Institute of Family Studies for 12 years. Her formal qualifications include a Bachelor of Arts (major in Sociology) and a Masters Degree in Applied Social Research. Violet was involved with the Institute's Parenting-21 Study since its inception in 1995, with major responsibility for the management, conduct and administration of the project. From March 1998 to January 2000 Violet was the Acting Research Fellow on the project after the death of Dr Harry McGurk, the Institute's Director and the project's Principal Researcher. Violet was also responsible for managing the Institute's commitment and contribution to the international research collaboration. In this capacity she attended and presented papers at international conferences and project workshops in Canada, Italy, Switzerland and Spain. Violet has published widely in the Institute's research journal *Family Matters.*

Violet was the joint coordinator of the Institute's 1999/2000 seminar program. In mid-July 2000, she took up a new position with the Wallis Consulting Group.

Grace Soriano (BA GradDip (UP, Philippines), MSc (AIT, Thailand), GradDip SocWelfare (Monash)), is a Research Officer and Executive Assistant at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Her involvement in the Parenting-21 study began with the extension project involving parents from the Torres Strait Islands. From 1999, she became part of the international group working on the Australian component of the International Study of Parents, Children and Schools project and has attended and presented papers at the project workshop and meeting in Spain and China respectively.

Grace has also been involved with research on families in the Asia-Pacific region and had a major role in the preparation of three research reports on families in the Asia-Pacific region, two of which have been published by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) branch of the United Nations. Other publications include a chapter on the Filipino community in *Families and Cultural Diversity in Australia (1995)*, published by Allen and Unwin in conjunction with the Institute; co-author of chapters in *Australian Family Profiles: Social and Demographic Patterns (1997)*, published by the Institute; and co-author with Harry McGurk of 'Families and social development: the 21st century' in *Social Child (1998)*, published by Psychology Press, UK. She is currently working with the Research Operations Unit of the Institute.

Acknowledgements

1 Introduction

Parents play a prominent role in the development and socialisation of their children. It is a complex endeavour, but the majority of parents raise their children successfully to live productive and fulfilling lives (McGurk 1996a). This fact is often overlooked, and generally there is little recognition when parenting is done well (Leach 1994). The social expectations on parents to fulfil their responsibilities in an acceptable way are enormous; how women juggle family and work commitments is one example. When things go wrong it is easy to blame parents especially for problems such as child maltreatment, drug abuse, juvenile crime, youth homelessness and suicide (McGurk 1996a; Richardson 1993). However, it is often forgotten that parenting does not occur in a social vacuum; rather it is influenced by the wider social, economic and political context in a given period of time. Thus, it is not just the individual parent characteristics but a host of complex variables, including the characteristics of the child and contextual factors, such as access to support networks and the nature of the marital relationship, which interact to affect parenting practices and, subsequently, outcomes for children (Luster and Okagaki 1993). Indeed, social problems such as those noted above could affect families even when one or both parents are loving, nurturing and supportive.

Parenting is the central theme of this report, which is based on data collected as part of the Parenting-21 project, conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies from 1996 to 1998. Parenting-21 is the Australian component of the International Study of Parents, Children and Schools, which involves researchers from Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United States. Focusing only on data from the Parenting-21 project, the specific aims of this report are twofold: the first is to describe how Australian parents are raising their children, by focusing on parents' beliefs and child-rearing practices. The second is to explore the influence of cultural background on those beliefs and practices by comparing parents from various cultural groups. Limited resources made it necessary to restrict the number of cultural groups; thus, it was decided that the selected groups should broadly reflect Australia's European, Asian and Indigenous cultures. Three samples of parents, selected from Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander families, form the basis of Parenting-21.

The literature generally categorises the values of Anglo and Asian communities, in particular, as representing opposing ends of a spectrum. For example, Anglo culture is often categorised as espousing values of independence and assertiveness, while Asian cultural values are often defined in terms of dependence and conformity (Nguyen and Ho 1995; McDonald 1995). Little is understood about parenting in Indigenous cultures. In general, there is a public perception that there is great disparity between the parenting practices of different cultural groups.

Taking a primarily qualitative approach, this report on parenting presents findings around two key themes. The first focuses on parents, children and the wider societal context, exploring issues such as how society views parents, how parenting is learned, who is responsible for parenting, how parents judge themselves, and the influences of the wider social context, for example work and social support, on parenting. The second theme focuses on parenting practices such as teaching children values, particularly via

household chores, rules, and the involvement of children in decision-making; how parents approach discipline; and their long-term goals for their children.

The intention is to give an account of parental beliefs and behaviours in contemporary parenting practices in Australia, and how they are influenced by the wider social context. Parents' beliefs have important implications for parental behaviour. While not always directly reflected in behaviour, beliefs nevertheless provide an important indication of the way that parents intend to approach their child-rearing responsibilities. Parents exercise considerable control over the physical and social settings to which children have access. Thus, a child's developmental context is shaped directly by parents exercising certain choices and indirectly through the impact on parent behaviour of both general policies and specific family initiatives.

The policy interest in families generally, and in parents and parenting in particular, is reflected in the Federal Government's recent launch of the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*. One part of this strategy emphasises funding parent education programs as a means of supporting parenting. The Parenting-21 project was not designed to address specific policy issues. Nevertheless, the project provides a breadth of primary data on parenting generated from samples of parents from three culturally diverse communities, which may prove to be an important resource for policy planners, service providers and family practitioners. Specifically, it may be of interest in relation to the development of parent education programs.

Parenting-21 was designed as an exploratory study, using data from volunteer samples of parents. Thus, the samples are not representative and the findings cannot necessarily be generalised to the wider population. Similarly, although the comparative component enables comment about the similarities and differences between the parenting styles of the three samples, the project was not designed to be an empirical test of similarity and difference between cultural groups. Finally, it should be noted that the project focused on parents of young children and thus explored developmental outcomes for children only indirectly, through the perspective of parents. It was not the intention of the project to investigate the impact of different parenting styles on child development.

2 Parenting and the socio-cultural context

Parenting has always been about the socialisation, care and development of children as future adults. However, contemporary parents are faced with a complex and challenging set of responsibilities that are vastly different from those experienced by their own mothers and fathers. Parents, more accurately mothers, were once expected to care for the physical and moral welfare of children (Richardson 1993). Social expectations have expanded and contemporary parents are now also responsible for their children's intellectual, social and emotional wellbeing (Richardson 1993). Encompassing a multitude of approaches, influences, outcomes, and significant relationships, parenting is bound and defined by a particular social and cultural context. As Heath (1995:161) pointed out: 'Societies throughout the world charge parents with the primary protection, socialisation, and nurturance of the children they bear or adopt . . . Parents are assigned legal responsibility to raise their children to be productive, responsible adults in accordance with the expectations of each particular community'.

Ideas about parenting change quickly (Arendell 1997; Jamrozik and Sweeney 1996; Richardson 1993), with the social and cultural setting playing a major role in the type of parenting practices that are encouraged or constrained (Bowes and Hayes 1999; Harkness and Super 1995; Jamrozik and Sweeney 1996; McGurk 1996a). Thus, in order to understand parenting, not only is it important to consider characteristics of individual parents but it is also necessary to include the influence of the wider social and cultural context. This approach is based on the social ecology models advocated by Bronfenbrenner (1979), Garbarino (1995) and Harkness and Super (1996).

Ecological framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecology model offers a conceptualisation of child development as a 'social-psychological phenomenon' multiply determined by forces across four interactive levels, nested within each other. Bowes and Hayes (1999) presented a modification of this model (see Figure 1), in which the individual child is located within the microsystem (immediate family, school, peers, church and health services); the mesosystem (the interrelationships between settings in which the child is an active participant, for example the interaction between home and school); the exosystem (here the child is not directly involved but events occur that affect the child through influence on family members, for example the parent's place of work, the social networks of parents, and community influences); and the macrosystem (this relates to the broad societal and cultural context, which incorporates values and belief systems that influence the way that life is organised, passed on through social and government institutions) (Bowes and Hayes 1999; Bronfenbrenner 1979). As Bronfenbrenner stated: 'Public policy is a part of the macrosystem determining the specific properties of exo-, meso-, and microsystems that occur at the level of everyday life and steer the course of behaviour and development' (1979:9).

Bowes and Hayes (1999) added two additional components to Bronfenbrenner's model. The first acknowledges the choices made by individuals and the influences exerted through characteristics such as age, gender, health, and temperament. Thus, influence

flows in both directions: from individual to context, and from context to individual. The second addition is the chronosystem, which recognises the element of time, acknowledging change in individuals as well as contexts. As Bowes and Hayes explained: 'Developmental and historical change needs to be taken into account in any model of the interrelationships between people and their context' (1999:11). An example of the influence of development is the difference in method of discipline used with children in kindergarten compared with children in high school (Bowes and Hayes 1999). The influence of historical time is reflected in the changed attitudes regarding, for example, the immunisation of young children (Bowes and Hayes 1999).

With regard to parenting, the model emphasises the importance of the social environment, identified in numerous studies, as a fundamental influence on parents' beliefs and the way they approach their child-rearing responsibilities (Bowes, Chalmers and Flanagan 1997; Grusec, Hastings and Mammone 1994; Harkness and Super 1996; LeVine 1988; Luster and Okagaki 1993; Youniss 1994). In addition, the model incorporates the influence of the cultural beliefs about children and childhood which inform parents' approaches to their responsibilities; the historical and economic contexts within which parenting and child-rearing are framed; and the social and political attitudes and values that influence the status granted parents and their children in contemporary society (McGurk and Kolar 1997).

Figure 1 Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecology Model

Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press, Australia, from J. M. Bowes and A. Hayes (Eds), *Children, Families and Communties: Contexts and Consequences*, 1997, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.
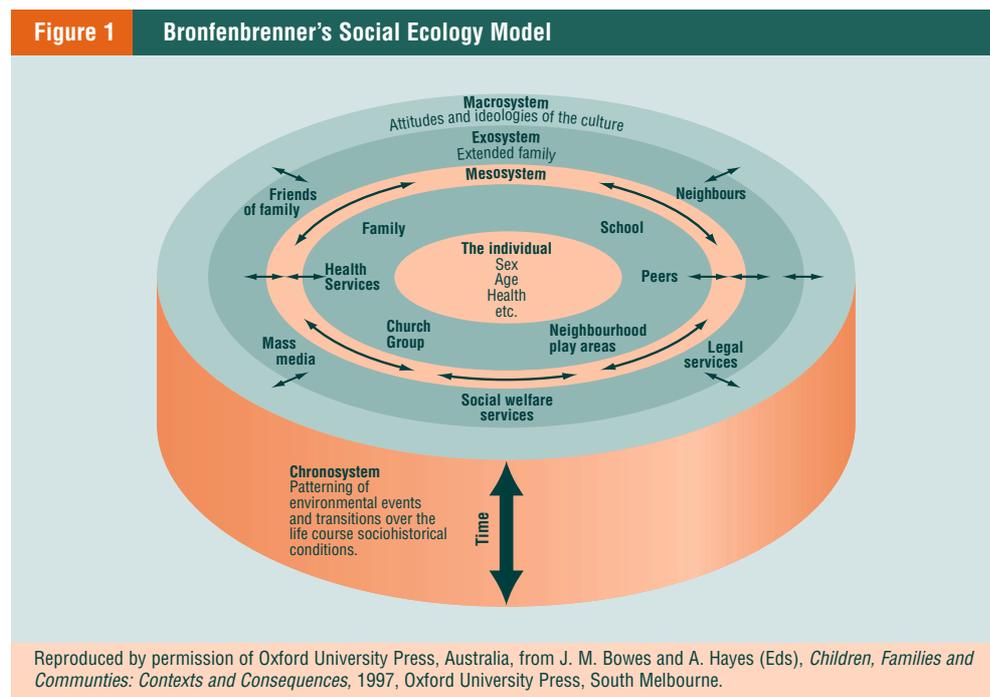
The underlying premise of the model is that parenting is not only about the personal capacity and character of each parent, but is affected by a multitude of influences that include parents' cultural context, their access to resources, and the characteristics of individual children. According to Jamrozik and Sweeney (1996), access to resources comes via a number of avenues including employment or investment; the informal network of extended family, relatives and the community; and formally via the state. Acknowledging the interrelationships between the various layers in a society, particularly between family and community, is widely regarded as central to fostering a sense of community and feelings of social connectedness (Bowes and Hayes 1999; Tomison and Wise 1999; Winter 2000a; Winter 2000b).

Indeed, the increasing concern about the perceived decline of community life and spirit has focused attention to the concept of 'social capital'. This term encapsulates the notion that 'social relations of mutual benefit [are] characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity' (Winter 2000a). For a sustainable community it is important to have social relationships that are high in 'social capital' (Winter 2000b). Communities that nurture 'social capital' through the provision of information, services and support are likely to enable parents to deal with child-rearing stress and difficulties in a positive and supportive environment (Tomison and Wise 1999).

Similarities and differences in parenting

According to LeVine's (1988) model of parental behaviour, there are three goals shared by all parents, irrespective of culture. The first relates to the health and survival of the child; the second is about teaching the child those skills that are necessary to survive economically; and the third is to encourage those attributes that are valued by a particular culture. However, more specific attitudes and behaviours adopted by parents are culturally influenced. LeVine noted that: 'Each culture, drawing on its own symbolic traditions, supplies models for parental behaviour that, when implemented under local conditions, become culture-specific styles of parental commitment' (1988:8). Each culture, therefore, acts as a frame of reference for the way that children are perceived, and for the development of parenting beliefs and practices (Sims and Omaji 1999; Okagaki and Divecha 1993).

While parenting is an activity that occurs worldwide, the cultural variable represents a fundamental component of analysis (Harkness and Super 1999). This is a particularly important point given that much research has been based on white middle-class families (Deater-Deckard, Bates, Dodge, and Pettit 1996). Beliefs and practices about parenting can be so embedded within a culture that they are regarded as a matter of common-sense; thus, what occurs in another culture may seem peculiar and can be regarded as a deficit (Arendell 1997; Bornstein, Hayes, Azuma, Galperin, Maital, Ogino, Painter, Pascual, Pecheux, Rahn, Toda, Venuti, Vyt and Wright 1998; Deater-Deckard et al. 1996; Harkness and Super 1995; McGurk and Kolar 1997). The issue of physical punishment is an example that illustrates the point.

Physical punishment is a sensitive and contentious issue in Western societies and is generally regarded as having negative outcomes for children (Balson 1994; Dreikurs with Soltz 1995; Cashmore and de Haas 1995; Saunders and Goddard 1999). However, it cannot be assumed that physical punishment will carry the same meaning among different ethnic and cultural groups (Deater-Deckard et al. 1996). The main focus of the study by Deater-Deckard and colleagues was the relationship between physical punishment and child outcomes rather than the use of physical punishment per se. In comparing European American and African American parents, they found that physical punishment was associated with negative child outcomes, only among European American children (Deater-Deckard et al. 1996).

The basis of cross-cultural research as applied to parenting is to examine the similarities and differences in child-rearing approaches and how they influence children's developmental outcomes (Harkness and Super 1996). Importantly, cross-cultural research acknowledges the diversity in family life and child-rearing from one country to another, but also within a culture, varying between groups as well as over time (McGurk 1996a; Smith 1995). Bornstein and colleagues (1998) noted, however, that ideas about parenting are becoming increasingly homogeneous given the exposure to education and mass media. In a review of cross-cultural studies, Heath (1995) noted more similarities than differences had been found in parental involvement and parental expectations of children but emphasised that more fine-grained research might reveal more differences.

In his review of parenting studies that incorporated a perspective on cultural context, Youniss (1994) reported that parents were sensitive to the culture around them and the type of child-rearing strategies they adopted. For example, he referred to a 1990 study that investigated a group of Croatian parents who had migrated to North America. The parents were from a rural Croatian area and had immigrated to an ethnic enclave in an isolated section of an urban area in New Jersey. The parents had retained their religious and ethnic traditions and spoke their own language. These parents also wanted their children to embrace the Croatian identity, including its language and customs. Yet, in contrast to parents who remained in Croatia who valued compliance in their children and punished disobedience, they preferred their children to be self-directed. Such values were embraced by the middle-class of the host American culture (Youniss 1994).

Generally, parents adopt practices that they believe will benefit their children in their future social adaptation, regardless of the extent to which parents themselves are assimilated to the host culture (Youniss 1994). Thus, parenting practices are not set in concrete; they change historically, they differ according to social class, and they are altered as migrants move from one culture to another; there is also diversity *within* social classes and cultural groups (Youniss 1994; Arendell 1997; Okagaki and Divecha 1993).

Culture affects the social and employment opportunities available to parents, which serve to either encourage or hinder particular parenting behaviour; for example whether Western fathers are involved in the care of children (Harkness and Super 1995; Okagaki and Divecha 1993). Even though social expectations for fathers to be more involved in parenting have become stronger in Western culture, this has not been accompanied by actual increases in father involvement (Tomison 1998; Glezer 1991; Burdon 1994). Employment demands, especially increased hours at work, impact negatively on the role of both mothers and fathers, and the care of children (Arendell 1997; Bowes and Hayes 1999). In Australia, despite 'family-friendly' work initiatives, Probert argued that broader policy changes (market de-regulation and changes in the nature of work) are making it difficult for parents, especially mothers, to combine parenting and work (1999). As for fathers, Probert (1999:64) stated: 'Most striking of all, in fact, is the almost total absence of policy designed to help fathers balance work and family life, despite the evidence that they are finding this balance increasingly hard to achieve'.

Employment, together with social support and the marital relationship, comprise three important areas that can enhance or undermine parental competence and overall satisfaction (Arendell 1997; Cochran 1993; Okagaki and Divecha 1993). Support networks provide emotional and practical support and information, and represent a fundamental foundation for effective parenting. The marital relationship represents an important part of that emotional and practical support (Arendell 1997; Bowes and Hayes 1999; Cochran 1990, 1993; Gledhill 1996; Kolar and McGurk 1998; Tomison and Wise 1999).

Contemporary parenting

Parenting practices have been defined according to Baumrind's (1971) model of parenting styles. These have been identified as *authoritative,* where parent behaviour is loving and supportive, yet consistent and firm, and nurtures autonomy; *authoritarian,* where parents demand obedience from children and use punitive strategies when children do not comply; and *permissive,* where parents demand little of children and do not set boundaries (Baumrind 1971). Parenting behaviour influences developmental outcomes for children (Luster and Okagaki 1993; Arendell 1997). In Western societies, authoritative parenting is recognised as promoting positive developmental outcomes in children, such as social and intellectual competence, emotional security and independence (Arendell 1997; Baumrind 1971; Harvey 1998; Heath 1995; Smetana

1994). For example, in a review of cross-cultural research, Heath (1995) noted that those parents who had authoritative qualities, such as being supportive and using inductive methods (reasoning and explanation) in discipline, had children and adolescents who were socially competent.

As noted above, parenting beliefs and practices change over time, and contemporary parents are under enormous pressure regarding child-rearing responsibilities (Leach 1994; Richardson 1993). Social science research, mostly in the area of psychology, highlights the major influence of the parent role in regard to child development. Earlier generations of parents were primarily responsible for looking after the physical survival and development of their children (Richardson 1993). Nowadays, parents, especially mothers, are responsible for their children's social and intellectual competence, cognitive and moral development, and self-esteem (Richardson 1993). Richardson referred to this as the 'new job description of motherhood' which subsequently makes mothers increasingly the target for blame when things go wrong (1993:42).

Supporting this new job description is a burgeoning parenting information and advice business. Parents seeking advice or reassurance on how to raise their children can walk into any bookshop and be confronted by an extensive range of popular books on what to do and what not to do to ensure that children successfully grow to adulthood. Columns devoted to advice and tips on raising children are regular features in popular newspapers and magazines, and the same issues are addressed in the electronic media. All these present a rich resource of 'expert' advice and knowledge regarding child development and behaviour available to parents at relatively little cost. However, as Richardson (1993) pointed out, child care literature is diverse, regularly changing, and contradictory, which could lead to some parents feeling confused and uncertain about their own capacity to parent effectively.

Coontz (1992) argued that the considerable emphasis placed on the importance of parents to children's outcomes ignores the impact of the wider context. Parents are of course very important to their children's development and wellbeing but the experience of parenting is affected by the wider social, economic and political context. Resources are distributed unequally and parents need to have access to resources that will enhance their child-rearing responsibilities.

Coontz (1992:230) provided the following rationale for such resources: 'Just as most business ventures could never get off the ground were it not for public investment in the social overhead capital that subsidises their transportation and communication, parents need an infrastructure of education, health services, and social support networks to supplement the personal dedication and private resources they invest in child-rearing'.

Compared with the United States where families face limited support with services provided on a user-pays system, in Australia, support for families with young children is made widely available through universal services (Ochiltree 1999). These services were free (for example maternal and child health, child care services and preschools (kindergartens)) but in recent times have been subject to funding cuts, which have effectively restricted access and ultimately undermined parents' caring for children (Bowes and Hayes 1999; Ochiltree 1999; Brennan 1999; Leach 1994).

There has been growing recognition, however, that support for families is important. This was highlighted by the recent launch of the Federal Government's *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*. Significantly, the strategy strongly promotes supporting families through the funding of parent education programs. The popularity of such programs is linked to what McGurk (1996a:2) described as: 'Firmly held assumptions that the responsibility for child-rearing rests exclusively with parents. It is a short step

from such assumptions to the conclusion that social ills . . . are the outcomes, in the main, of inappropriate parenting. It follows, on this analysis, that if parents can be trained or educated to perform their child-rearing roles more effectively then many of these problems will be avoided'.

Perceptions of children and childhood

Parenting is a process that is intimately related to and affected by perceptions of children and childhood. As social constructs, childhood and parenting are subject to change from the influences of the wider social and cultural context. As Jamrozik and Sweeney (1996:13) noted: 'The changing images of childhood throughout history indicate that, at any given time, perceptions of childhood and corresponding attitudes toward children can be appropriately understood only in the context of the social structure and dominant interests of societies at that time.'

Table 1 provides a summary of the way children were perceived in different periods of time. The table illustrates the social foundations of childhood by showing the range of concepts of childhood as understood in various periods of history and how this was expressed formally, particularly in relation to the provision of children's services. As with parents, much of the impetus for the way children and childhood are perceived today has been heavily influenced by decades of social science research (Jamrozik and Sweeney 1996; Richardson 1993). One pervasive image of children in the West is as developing beings, good and innocent, with unlimited potential. Consequently, just as expectations have increased for parents, so have they also increased for children (Harvey 1998), who are expected to be 'faster, higher, smarter, younger' (*'Good Weekend', The Age Magazine*, 11 April 1998).

Table 1	Concepts of childhood		
Period of time	*Concept of children*	*Description*	*Application of concepts*
Up to and including the Middle Ages	Little adults	Same weaknesses and faults as adults	No longer applied.
17th Century (Calvinists)	Little demons	Potential for sin and corruption, need for discipline and guidance, potential to be good	Some child-welfare services.
18th Century (Romanticists)	Noble savages	Natural, free, need for development without restraint, child-centred environment, child is essentially good	Elements found in some pre-school centres which focus on self-directed play.
19th Century (Victorians)	Innocent beings	Time for fantasy and play, childhood as potential for happiness (and development), child innocent as well as good	Elements found in some child-centred environments and products (kindergartens, books with moral overtones, e.g. Fables).
20th Century (Child psychologists and educationalists)	Developing beings	Childhood experiences crucial to stability and maturity in later life, childhood important for itself, children good, innocent and have unlimited potential	Child-centred institutions such as kindergartens, pre-schools.

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Current Western perceptions also include negative images of children. For example, Christopher Green (1984), author of the popular parenting advice book *Toddler Taming,* described the young child as 'that negative, stubborn, self-centred terrorist toddler' (Green 1984:45). In a discussion paper addressing ways to overcome the structural barriers to child abuse and neglect, Tomison (1997) argued that in recent times, children have been negatively stereotyped in Western society. He described the way in which the two 10-year-old boys who were sentenced for the murder of 2-year-old James Bulger in the United Kingdom in 1993, were portrayed in the media as 'evil', 'monsters' and 'freaks' (Tomison 1997). He argued that, over time, the criticisms and negative descriptions of the two boys were subtly generalised such 'that the character of all children was impugned, challenging the concept of childhood innocence and the perception that children are "innately good"' (Tomison 1997:21).

The status of both parents and children is an important issue since it speaks to the extent that society is prepared to invest in future generations (Leach 1994). On the one hand, the role of parents is idealised, particularly the concept of motherhood (Richardson 1993; Bowes and Hayes 1999; Jamrozik and Sweeney 1996; Leach 1994), and children are recognised as a society's future. Yet on the other hand, caring for children is perceived as a low-status activity in society (Richardson 1993; McGurk 1996b). In the past, children were regarded as an economic asset because they could work. These days, even though children do bring benefits such as joy and love to their parents and the potential for future productivity, they are frequently presented as an economic liability in which they tend to be objectified, particularly in research such as that on the 'cost of children' (Jamrozik and Sweeney 1996; Quortrup 1997; Saunders and Goddard 1998). Quortrup comments that 'a balanced review of a family's use of resources would imply either sticking to an account of the whole family, or to account for both costs of children and costs of parents' (1997:99).

The view of children that is promoted via parenting literature and media, as well as via professional and informal networks, influences the image that parents hold about children. This in turn will affect the way that parents approach their child-rearing responsibilities (Backett 1982; Donovan 1987; Cashmore and de Haas 1995; Harkness and Super 1995, 1996; LeVine 1988; Okagaki and Divecha 1993; Youniss 1994). Disciplinary practices, particularly attitudes towards the use of physical punishment, also say a lot about the status and image of children in Western society (Balson 1994; Dreikurs with Soltz 1995; Saunders and Goddard 1998, 1999). Much of the parenting literature available to parents advocates an authoritative style of parenting (Harvey 1998) which incorporates the use of inductive methods such as explanation and reasoning (Papps, Walker, Trimboli and Trimboli 1995; Critchley, Sanson and Oberklaid 1998). However, there are parenting advice books that promote, for example, the use of rewards and punishments, which fall into the category of power-assertive disciplinary techniques (Papps et al. 1995; Critchley et al. 1998), and are punitive in nature. According to Balson (1994) and others (for example Dreikurs with Soltz 1995), rewards and punishments are part of an authoritarian style of parenting that does not sit easily in the context of a democratic social system.

Cross-cultural research in Australia

Cross-cultural research on parenting in Australia has been relatively limited and has tended to have a narrow focus. For example, Papps and colleagues (1995) explored the disciplinary practices that mothers from Anglo, Greek, Lebanese and Vietnamese communities used with their children. The researchers found that all groups most frequently used power-assertive methods (yelling, threatened use of force, and physical punishment); Vietnamese mothers used inductive methods (reasoning and explanation) more frequently than Anglo mothers (Papps et al. 1995).

Child-rearing values and practices were more broadly explored in a study undertaken in 1996 in Sydney, focusing on a sample of Japanese professional parents. The survey included issues such as children's desired character traits; discipline approach, importance of rules for children; parental responsibility; and aspirations parents had for their children (Andreoni and Fujimori 1998). The researchers found that: 'what is evolving is a particular form of Japanese multiculturalism: *washitedoozezu,* harmony without assimilation' (Andreoni and Fujimori 1998:69).

A recent pilot study investigated the process of adaptation in parenting practices among a group of recent migrant families from Africa (Sims and Omaji 1999). The researchers refer to the process of 'cultural mapping', which enables migrant parents to map their original frame of reference for parenting on to the frame of reference of the culture. Where child-rearing practices fall outside the boundaries of the mainstream culture, parents decide whether to keep, discard, or modify those practices. Indeed, practices that incorporate both the new and original strategies present an alternative to the process of assimilation, which has usually implied complete adoption of the practices of the mainstream culture and a rejection of those of the original culture (Sims and Omaji 1999).

For their sample of parents who had been in Australia for three years or less, Sims and Omaji (1999) found that the practices related to respect and punishment were particularly salient, with these parents perceiving dissonance between the values of their culture of origin and the host culture. In other words, teaching children respect was an important parental goal for this group of respondents, and they felt that Australian children lacked respect towards their parents and older people. For this group, physical punishment was an essential means of teaching children to conform, but they were aware that this conflicted with the Australian cultural view that physical punishment was inappropriate. This sample of parents resolved to maintain the parenting practices of their culture of origin (Sims and Omaji 1999).

Taking an international perspective, a study involving Australia and five other countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Sweden, and the United States) compared the involvement of children in household tasks (Bowes et al. 1997). Household work is an important means for passing cultural values on to children (Bowes et al. 1997; Goodnow 1996; Harkness and Super 1995). The study focused on the views of adolescents in relation to two forms of household tasks: self-care (making own bed, keeping bedroom tidy) and family-care (setting table for meals, helping with the dishes, washing the car). Their findings showed that Australian adolescents emphasised individual responsibility (self-reliance) more than responsibility to the family. In contrast, European adolescents emphasised responsibility to others. The researchers concluded that one way to encourage social responsibility in children might be to focus more on family-care tasks (Bowes et al. 1997).

According to Jamrozik and Sweeney: 'We have little research-generated knowledge of the ways and means families use to cope with daily tasks of child-care, economic management and personal relationships' (1996:60). They also saw a substantial gap between images of the ideal parent and parents' actual experiences (Jamrozik and Sweeney 1996). Parenting-21 seeks to contribute to the Australian literature on cross-cultural studies in parenting.

3 The Parenting-21 study

The overall aim of Parenting-21 was to provide a comprehensive picture of how 'ordinary parents in ordinary Australian families are going about the task of bringing up children who are going to live the major part of their lives in the 21st century' (McGurk and Kolar 1997). Parenting-21 was conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies between 1996 and 1998, and is the source of the data presented in this report. Specifically, the project involved studying the relationships between parental beliefs, ideas and understanding about the nature of children and childhood, and actual child-rearing practices. It focused upon the rearing of children from infancy to middle childhood. Informed by an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Garbarino 1995; Bowes and Hayes 1999), the project collected information on the values and beliefs parents held about parenting and child-rearing; the aspirations, hopes and misgivings parents had for their children; their sources of information about parenting and children; their sources of help, advice and support with parenting; and how all these influenced the way they reared their children.

Australia's cultural context

The project sought to explore parenting from the perspective of parents themselves. It was important that the project provide a picture of parenting that reflects the diversity of Australia's families. Post-war immigration has been the major source of cultural diversity in Australia, leaving an indelible imprint on all facets of Australia's social, cultural and economic life (Batrouney and Stone 1998; Harvey 1994). Since 1945, Australia has seen the arrival of some 5.5 million people from as many as 170 countries. From 1945 to 1995, close to half of the newly-arrived immigrants were from the United Kingdom and Ireland; by 1995–96 just over 11 per cent of new arrivals were from these countries. The dismantling of the 'White Australia' policy in 1973 saw an increase in the number of immigrants from other countries, particularly Asian. In 1995, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS Statsite), 77 per cent of the total population of Australia were born in Australia and 23 per cent were born overseas. Of those born overseas, 13 per cent were born in Asia and, of this group, 29 per cent were born in Vietnam.

The Indigenous population comprise 1.7 per cent of the total Australian population. Of the total Indigenous population, 2.1 per cent are Torres Strait Islanders (ABS Statsite). The Torres Strait Islands lie 150 kilometres north of Cape York, the most northerly point of the Australian mainland. There are some 100 islands, but a population of nearly 80,000 people inhabits only 17 islands. Over 2000 Torres Strait Islanders live on or adjacent to Thursday Island. There are 14 Islander communities on 13 outer islands and two Islander communities on the adjacent mainland. These communities have populations of between 100 and 600 people. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, one-half of the Torres Strait Islanders are aged 0-24 years (Hunter, Batrouney, McGurk, Buchanan, Gela and Soriano 1999).

Brief profile of three cultural communities

These three broad groups – Australian-born, Asian-born and Indigenous populations – represent important components of Australia's general population and highlight its

history of past and recent immigration. With over three-quarters of the total population born in Australia, the Anglo group represented the 'mainstream' culture and provided a base to compare parenting beliefs and practices with parents from Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Anglo

There is no accurate or literal basis to the term 'Anglo Australian' although it is indicative, in a cultural sense, of a cultural group that originated in the United Kingdom and Western and Northern Europe (German, Dutch and Scandinavian) (McDonald 1995). Intermarriages between these groups over a 200-year period have blurred the distinctions between them in terms of family values (McDonald 1995). However, there is 'no homogeneity of values in regard to aspects of family and family life in Australia, even among the numerically dominant "mainstream"' (Hartley 1995:16). Some of the significant recent changes in values include cohabiting before marriage and women's participation in the workforce (Hartley 1995). Nevertheless, the majority of people continue to marry. Women tend to return to work after having children, but on a part-time basis during the years before children start school. In this regard, the husband continues to be regarded as the principal income earner with the wife's income seen as supplementary (McDonald 1995). Household tasks and responsibility for child-rearing continue to be traditionally defined with women largely responsible for domestic chores and as primary carers to their children (Glezer 1991; McDonald 1995). Such traditional arrangements are less likely to prevail in households where couples are professionally employed, where the wife is employed full-time, where couples are cohabiting and where they have remarried (Glezer 1991; McDonald 1995).

In terms of raising children, as has been noted, the parenting literature tends to promote an authoritative (loving, supportive, consistent, firm) as opposed to an authoritarian (strict, power-based, and punitive) style of parenting (Harvey 1998). However, a particular aspect of parenting can appear to be authoritarian while the overall approach is authoritative. This can occur, for example, with approaches to discipline where parents may incorporate the use of power-assertive methods which are typically associated with an authoritarian style of parenting (Papps et al. 1995). Ultimately, a typical parental goal is to raise children who are sociable, happy and independent (Dreikurs with Soltz 1995; Grose 1999). In general, parents live relatively close to extended family, especially grandparents, who tend to provide practical support such as child care (McDonald 1995; Millward 1992; d'Abbs 1991).

Vietnamese

In Vietnam, the family is the main provider of financial, social, physical and emotional support for all family members (Vuong 1996). The elderly are revered for their wisdom, life experiences and for contributions to their families and the community (Nguyen and Ho 1995). Within the family, roles are clearly delineated according to gender, with males taking on the role of provider with authority to decide on all matters, while the role of females is that of caretakers (Vuong 1996). Parents' approach to child-rearing varies according to the age and gender of children. With young children, parents are relatively tolerant, believing that young children are not responsible for their actions (Nguyen and Ho 1995).

In 1995, there were 146,600 Vietnamese who were born overseas, comprising 3.5 per cent of all overseas-born in Australia. The Vietnamese community began to grow in Australia after the fall of the South Vietnamese government, at the end of the Vietnam War in April 1975. Up until 1991, almost 80 per cent of Vietnamese migrants had spent time in refugee camps in various Asian countries. It is only in recent years that Vietnamese migrants (comprising partners, dependent children, middle-aged or elderly parents and close relatives of the original group) have been admitted directly from Vietnam for permanent settlement in Australia, most notably under the Family Reunion Program.

The composition and structure of Vietnamese families in Australia can be largely attributed to their unique migration experience. Unlike the traditional extended family in Vietnam, which tends to reside in one household, in Australia the extended family tends to stretch across a number of households, usually located in the same street or the same suburb. Thus, the common family structure in Australia does not include parents, children and grandparents living in one household. For grandparents, the experience of migration has not been easy. In general, they perceive that their status as revered family members has been compromised given that they tend to find themselves in the unexpected situation of being dependent on adult children in a foreign culture (Birrell 1993; Thomas and Balnaves 1993).

Economic necessity has seen an increase in the number of families where both parents work, which has challenged the traditional role of women in the family (Gold 1993). Nevertheless, the majority of married Vietnamese women continue to defer to their husbands in a number of family matters such as the discipline and education of children. The parent-child relationship can reflect the conflict between traditional parental values and those values acquired by children from their extra-familial socialising. The parent-child relationship can be further strained where parents lack English-language skills and knowledge of the new country (Nguyen and Ho 1996). A major motivating factor for parents is to ensure that their children receive a 'good' education. Parents strongly believe that education will secure for their children a successful career and bright future (Hartley and Mass 1987; Thai 2000).

Torres Strait Islander

Islander communities vary in the degree to which they have retained their cultural traditions or moved towards adopting Western values and practices. They continue to follow traditional and spiritual beliefs and practices but a majority of Islanders also follow one of various forms of Christianity, with the growth of fundamentalist churches being an important recent development. Values that hold the social fabric of Islander culture together include 'apassin' (having respect for and helping one another) and 'kozon' (sharing).

The clan system to which all families and individuals belong underlies the social fabric of Islander societies. Clan structures and kinship systems are extremely complex, informing relationships, obligations, social etiquette, and duties and privileges attached to the bonds of kinship. There are also duties and obligations attached to one's position in the social hierarchy, basically defined according to one's gender and age. Thus, male members are the head of their families and represent them in community meetings, while the eldest sibling in the family may have a status similar to parents, particularly when it comes to disciplining younger siblings. It is also the eldest sibling, usually the male, who represents the family on behalf of the father.

Among indigenous communities the kinship system, with the extended family at its core, ensures that the responsibility for parenting and child-rearing is shared among a host of 'significant others'. Parents have particular responsibility for providing children with a secure and nurturing environment. But, usually, responsibility for discipline, transmitting traditional values and skills and other cultural practices, is shared with a child's grandparents, aunts and uncles, from both sides of the family.

Method

The project employed a multiple-methods or triangulation approach (Denzin 1978; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander 1990) to select the three samples and collect the data. This approach allows flexibility but it also 'adds rigor, breadth, and

depth to any investigation' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:2). There are various forms of triangulation (Denzin 1978; Creswell 1997); this study employed both methodological and simultaneous triangulation. The former involved the use of multiple methods for selecting the samples of families and the use of a number of data collection instruments, described below. The latter involved the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Creswell 1997).

Sample selection

The method of recruiting respondents to the project was tailored for each sample and occurred over a three-year period.

Anglo

Families were defined as Anglo where the child and parents were Australian born, with grandparents born in either Australia or the United Kingdom. A total of 60 parents, with a child in one of five specific age groups (6 months, 18 months, 3 years, four-and-a-half years, seven to eight years), were interviewed in 1996. Three interviewers were employed to conduct interviews with the Anglo sample.

Recruitment for the Anglo sample began in February 1996 in the Melbourne metropolitan area, with a media release inviting parents of children aged between six months and eight-and-a-half years to register to take part in the project. The number of parents registering was boosted by the publicity resulting from a number of radio interviews and use of the snowball sampling technique. After this initial phase, parents were screened using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) to ascertain their eligibility for inclusion in the Anglo-Australian sample.

Vietnamese

Families were defined as Vietnamese where the child was born in Australia, with parents and grandparents born in Vietnam. This sample of parents also numbered 60 and had a child in one of the five age groups noted above; they were interviewed in 1997.

The recruiting of Vietnamese parents, who also resided in the Melbourne metropolitan area, was handled quite differently. A Vietnamese community worker with extensive experience working in the Vietnamese community and in interviewing was employed on the project. This person was solely responsible for publicising the project within the Vietnamese community, recruiting parents to the study, and conducting in-depth interviews.

Torres Strait Islander

In 1997, the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services of the Department of Health and Family Services awarded the Institute a contract to extend the scope of Parenting-21 to include families from the Torres Strait Islands. During the initial phase of the study, a Steering Committee was formed comprising four members from the Torres and Northern Peninsula Area Health Council. This Steering Committee was an invaluable source of local knowledge and Islander wisdom and assisted greatly in the identification of key informants who could act as contacts in the various communities and who would be able to identify and help recruit possible participants for the study. In order to introduce the study to the Torres Strait population various strategies were undertaken such as publishing in the print media (Torres News) a description of the project using the local-language and broadcasting through the local radio network (TSIMA).

The Anglo and Vietnamese components of Parenting-21 were essentially designed to explore parenting in an urban, industrialised setting. This contrasts dramatically with Islander life, which is non-urban and non-industrialised and has a social structure based on cooperation and reciprocity, and where parenting is a shared responsibility. Moreover, in Islander communities, information is exchanged through 'yarning' (sitting and talking). These considerations made it necessary to employ a less structured approach than that used with the two urban samples.

As a first step, a preliminary survey was conducted across a wide selection of islands in order to identify Islanders' parenting issues and concerns, to gather information about local circumstances and to identify the contacts within each community. Five islands were then selected as sites for fieldwork according to the following criteria:

- the diversity of communities in terms of cultures, histories, and stages of development;

- convenience factors such as distance, travel and accommodation costs; and

- acceptance by local communities and provision of support for fieldworkers.

Information provided by the Steering Committee and the results from the preliminary survey were used as a basis for recruiting participants. Two Project Officers, a male (Indigenous) and a female (Anglo long-time resident of the Islands), were recruited and focus groups were conducted from July to October 1998.

It was planned to hold family group discussions with a single extended family on each selected island. Focus group discussions would be held with the following groups: young parents (mothers and fathers who typically had a child in primary school); experienced parents (mothers and fathers who had at least one teenage child); and elders (typically grandparents). There would also be interviews with key informants such as teachers, nurses, health workers and social workers. The aim was to have at least six to eight people in each of the focus groups, giving a total of eighty-four participants.

Demographic profile

In the Anglo and Vietnamese groups, mothers were the main source of information (95 per cent and 83 per cent respectively). Most parents were married or cohabiting and had at least two children. The median ages for the Anglo sample was 34 years and for the Vietnamese sample 37 years. Seventy-eight per cent of Anglo parents had a tertiary qualification, and a high proportion was employed on a part-time basis. In contrast, 40 per cent of Vietnamese parents had a tertiary qualification, and most were not in paid work.

Several waves of Vietnamese immigration are reflected in the Parenting-21 sample; some parents had been in Australia between 17 and 19 years, while others were more recent arrivals with between three to eight years' residence.

With the Islander sample, non-attendance at focus groups in some cases resulted in data collection becoming opportunistic, with interviews and focus group discussions held as opportunities arose. The final number of respondents, including family group participants and key informants, totalled sixty-nine. The numbers of women and men were fairly evenly distributed with 29 mothers and 25 fathers. The median age for young mothers was 30 years, young fathers 28 years, experienced mothers 48 years, and experienced fathers 40 years. Only 38 parents mentioned their marital status; of this group, 45 per cent were married, close to 30 per cent were in a de facto relationship, with the remaining group single or widowed. The average number of children among all Islander respondents was three. Most respondents had not completed Year 12; those

who went on to do further studies had completed a TAFE course. Nearly all the mothers (n=25) and around two-thirds of the fathers (n=19) responded to the question on employment; most of the mothers (n=15) and almost all of the fathers (one was retired) were employed. Within the group of key informants, eight were women and seven were men; the average age among them was 42 years.

Research instruments

Anglo and Vietnamese parents provided information about their child-rearing practices by means of a series of self-completed questionnaires. They then took part in a semi-structured face-to-face interview in which child-rearing values and practices were explored in more detail.

For the Vietnamese sample, all research instruments were translated into Vietnamese. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese with parents' responses written in English by the Vietnamese interviewer. Interviews were not tape-recorded. Vietnamese parents chose not to fill in the self-complete questionnaires separately, but left them to be completed by the interviewer in the face-to-face interview. The explanation offered by the Vietnamese interviewer was that filling in research questionnaires is not something that the Vietnamese community is accustomed to. Thus, interviews with Vietnamese parents lasted, on average, 6 hours compared with an average of 2 hours with Anglo parents.

The approach with Torres Strait Islander families was less structured, with general themes from the interview schedule adapted for use with the focus groups. Three sets of questions were prepared for discussion with the families selected for interviews, the focus group, and the key informants. Given this less structured means of data collection, it was not possible to incorporate a number of the questions pursued with Anglo and Vietnamese parents. Nevertheless, for each group, questions focused on family composition and interaction, and the parenting role. The two Project Officers generally conducted most of the interviews working together. The interviews were recorded as written notes as well as taped; these were subsequently transcribed. Interviews varied in length, with some lasting up to three hours.

Analysis and interpretation

The aim of Parenting-21 was to explore parenting beliefs and practices based on a phenomenological perspective (Smith 1995; Denzin 1978; Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Phenomenology was developed as a methodology by Husserl (1889-1938), a German philosopher, to resolve a number of fundamental philosophical issues (de Laine 1997). Essentially, the method involved stripping away (or 'bracketing', a term used by Husserl) preconceptions in order to arrive at the experience itself, whatever that experience may be.

In essence, phenomenology is the study, in-depth, of the human experience, including subjective perceptions, thoughts and feelings. In this case, the focus was on the meaning and experience of parenting for parents. The use of qualitative rather than quantitative data throughout this report enables themes in parenting to be identified, and gives a sense of the everyday experiences of three samples of parents. Further, parents' quotes are used intact, as far as possible, to convey the meaning and the feelings underlying what parents had expressed. The only exception has been to include words, which appear in square brackets, in order to clarify certain references.

The demographic profile indicates differences *within* the samples. Intra-group differences were particularly notable in the Vietnamese sample, which encompassed

different waves of immigration. The experience of migration and the particular circumstances that underlie it affect the way that immigrant groups settle into their new environments (Menjivar 1997). Thus, Vietnamese families who arrived as refugees and have been in Australia for a number of years cannot be assumed to be similar to those who were non-refugees and arrived relatively recently. It was important, therefore, both to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the group and to give context to the responses. Accordingly, number of years in Australia is used as a principal identifier in all quotes included for Vietnamese parents.

Supplementary quantitative data are also presented, primarily for the purpose of summarising or clarifying issues.

Limitations of methodology

As described above, Parenting-21 employed multiple strategies in recruitment and data collection, raising issues of sample comparability. This prompts the question of whether differences (and for that matter, similarities) are real or a by-product of the adopted methodology. There is no simple answer to this. The essence of the project was exploratory, both in its focus and the methods employed. The findings provide a preliminary benchmark of a range of parenting beliefs and practices, which future research can further develop. Importantly, interpretation of the findings needs to be tempered by the limitations detailed below.

First, one of the problems associated with a phenomenological perspective, as with any other self-report method, is that of self-report biases. That is, it is possible that some participants in the Parenting-21 project may have under-reported what they perceived as less socially acceptable beliefs and practices. This may, for example, have arisen in relation to the use of physical punishment. However, there is no way to ascertain whether this was the case.

Second, the project relied on volunteers who were willing to express their views about parenting practices. Such views may well differ from those of parents who did not volunteer to participate. No doubt, there were parents who did not know about the study and so were not in a position to volunteer; and parents who were experiencing difficulties with family life in general or parenting in particular may have been unlikely to want to take part. Third, the sample of Anglo parents was skewed towards those well educated and financially secure, whereas the Vietnamese sample was more heterogeneous.

Fourth, it was generally mothers who took part in the research, a finding reflected in the wider parenting research literature. The role of fathers has largely been overlooked in research (Tomison 1998). This largely reflects the fact that mothers, in the main, continue to be responsible for the care and nurture of children (Glezer 1991).

Fifth, the translation of instruments for the Vietnamese sample means that it is not possible to ensure 'direct equivalence' (Andreoni and Fujimori 1998:71). That is, there may not be a shared meaning in the questions. For example, words such as *dependence, submissiveness, indulgent* or *permissive,* are valued in Vietnamese culture, yet in Western cultures, these very same words tend to be imbued with negative connotations (Nguyen and Ho 1995; Papps et al. 1995).

Finally, it has been noted by Hunter and colleagues that the structure of Islander focus groups (which included extended family and Islander elders) 'could lead to respondents being inhibited and deferential in the company of other family and community members' (1999:98). While it was not possible to obtain interviews from all likely informant groups and some interviews were completed as opportunities arose, a wide

spectrum of views about Islander parenting was nevertheless obtained from all fieldwork sites (Hunter et al. 1999).

Because of these limitations, the findings may not be representative of all parents with young children or of the three communities involved. They therefore, should not be generalised to the wider population of parents. Parenting-21 was designed to be an exploratory study; its strength lies in the depth rather than the breadth of data collected. Therefore, it is a useful resource for policy planners and practitioners, as well as for parents in general, who may wish to compare their own beliefs and practices with those of other parents. It can also be used to inform the development of future parenting research.

4 The wider social context

Important aspects of parenting revolve around parents themselves, their children and the influence of the wider social context. These aspects are discussed around issues specifically related to: the status of parents; how parenting was learned; who was responsible for parenting; how parents judged themselves; their perceptions of children; what elements enhanced and hindered parenting; their sources of support; and the special contribution of the extended family network.

What it means to be a parent

To assess their experiences of the role of parent, respondents were asked to describe: 'What does being a parent mean to you?'. Qualitative analysis of the interview data indicated that across all three samples, parents' responses could be broadly classified into one of three themes: the status of the role of parents in the wider society; the impact of parenting on personal growth; and the day-to-day responsibilities of taking care of children. The theme of long-term goals was also highlighted, and is explored later in this report. The comments indicated that, generally, there appeared to be a shared understanding among the three samples of what it meant to be a parent.

Status of the role of parents in society

Anglo and Vietnamese parents highlighted the importance of the social context for parenting, particularly in terms of the status accorded to the parent role. In the examples below, acknowledgment of the significant role of parents as nurturers of a new generation of adults, as well as a future generation of parents, was juxtaposed with feelings of ambivalence and anger, and perceptions that parents were not generally valued:

> 'Many times I feel angry and resentful about the fact that I'm nothing more than a parent and feeling, hearing myself say that and think – that is a terrible thing to say – because being a parent is crucial.' (Anglo parent)

> 'We play important role – to raise children, bring them up in a happy family. If they were spoiled then become bad element of the society – then it is parents' fault.' (Vietnamese parent, 11 years residence)

> 'It really concerns me at the moment because so many people are saying to me – when are you going back to work. That makes me really angry because I think parenting is a really undervalued occupation. It's about giving my children security and the best chance of absorbing the best values I can give them and possibly also helping them develop their gifts, helping them to be thinking, intelligent, responsible individuals.' (Anglo parent)

The status of parents was also an important theme for Islander parents, but there was no ambivalence expressed about their role and that of the wider community. This may well be a reflection of the fact that parenting is regarded as a communal responsibility in Torres Strait Islander communities. Parents are supported in their role and it is recognised that other family members have an important contribution to make in child-rearing. The

social hierarchy that underlies parenting in Islander communities is an example of cooperative and complementary roles undertaken by all family members. This contrasts starkly with the sentiments expressed by Anglo and Vietnamese parents and the social expectation that they were solely responsible for child-rearing. Indeed, Islander parents held the view that parenting in the 'South' was demanding and relatively unsupported. The following examples illustrate the above points:

> 'The main strength of an individual is based on the immediate family and the main strength of the immediate family is based on the extended family, and the main strength of the extended family is based on the tribe.' (Torres Strait Islander, key informant)

> 'Everyone is there for everybody, for each other.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

> '[Can get] help from auntie next door, couldn't ask next door there [down South].' (Torres Strait Islander, young father)

Impact of parenting on personal growth

The parent-child dyad is a two-way relationship. That is, just as parents affect the development of children so children themselves may affect the development of parents' ideas, expectations and behaviours (Okagaki and Divecha 1993; Schaffer 1996). This notion of parenting as a period of personal growth for parents was succinctly summarised by an Anglo parent in the following way:

> 'It's a learning experience and you just keep on. New things keep on coming up all the time and you've got to keep on changing, adapting, and as they get older you've also got to keep on adapting to different changes in their life as well.' (Anglo parent)

Among Vietnamese parents, the theme was alluded to in a general way; parents talked about aspects of the parent–child relationship using references such as 'mutual trust', 'having children also affects your life', and 'to have children is a marvellous thing, married and children is complete happiness'.

With Islander parents, the theme was implied in comments about changing lifestyles and shifting priorities associated with becoming a parent. Having children was said to 'open up a whole new world'. Parents also spoke of experiencing a range of emotions including pride, love, and happiness:

> 'Being a mum makes me happy . . . you know . . . I use to be like this – ahh, I don't want to have any children . . . but when I had her, it was different . . . it's totally different, a whole new world, you're responsible and you have to be responsible.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

Day-to-day parenting responsibilities

With Anglo and Vietnamese samples, one of the themes highlighted in the responses related to the day-to-day responsibilities involved in parenting. These included references to the basic tasks of daily child care; the joys and frustrations of parenting; and the delights of watching a child grow:

> 'I think being there for your children, looking after them, teaching them to smile and the importance of that, and just being happy in themselves, I think are the important things. So my role in being a parent is organising all of that and, you know, the other things of diet and sleeping properly and all that sort of stuff.' (Anglo parent)

‘Responsibility to bring up your children, feed them, discipline them, love them.’ (Vietnamese parent, 3 years residence)

Islander parents also referred to a range of parental responsibilities. These included the physical and emotional care of children when ‘sick or hurt, nurse them’; and ‘hold, hug and try to make them feel good’; ‘someone they can talk to’. Others spoke about the importance of ‘earning a living so can provide for family’, ‘feed the family’.

Learning about parenting

As Neven (1996:53) noted, ‘parents are not made at birth but become parents over time’. Despite the range and nature of the responsibilities involved, parenting is largely a process for which there is no formal training or educational qualification. Nevertheless, future parents may well have some general ideas about children and parenting, ideas that are moulded by multiple influences (Arendell 1997; Okagaki and Divecha 1993). Previous research indicates that, generally, parents’ ideas about children and their own parenting are influenced by their own family of origin; other informal sources (such as other relatives, friends, and neighbours); and formal sources (such as parenting books and professionals working with families) (Harkness, Super and Keefer 1992). While these three areas of influence are important to the development of parenting, family of origin represents a major source of influence.

To explore family of origin and its possible influence in shaping parenting values and practices, Anglo and Vietnamese respondents were asked two questions regarding their child-rearing strategies: ‘What sorts of things would you do that are similar to your own mother and father?’ and ‘What sorts of things would you do that are different?’. The data provided for both qualitative and quantitative analysis not only enabling similarities and differences to be analysed, but also providing a summary rating for the family-of-origin model. The salience of family background was also illustrated in the Torres Strait Islander data despite the fact that Islander parents were not asked the above two specific questions.

Themes of similarity and difference

The legacy of childhood was revealed in the way parents spoke about their mothers and fathers, and their respective approaches to parenting. Several interrelated themes emerged as valued aspects of parenting, relevant to both Anglo and Vietnamese parents. These included: personal qualities (being respectful, tolerant, patient and committed, and possessing a sense of humour); being emotionally and physically nurturing (fostering self-esteem, stability, harmony and loving relationships); being able to communicate with children (talking and listening); being involved and available (spending time and playing with children, generally being interested and able to enjoy their company, and being physically present); and the use of an authoritative discipline approach (consistent approach, clear rules and boundaries, and democratic styles).

The examples below illustrate the salience of personal upbringing for Anglo and Vietnamese parents, and its influence on subsequent parenting behaviour:

‘Mum was very loving, and when I have difficulty with [my child] I think of my mother who was always calm in all those situations.’ (personal qualities – Anglo parent)

‘Dad was very creative in what he did. We learned a lot about equipment, building things etc. . . . we were involved in what he did. We try to involve our kids in projects, we work together.’ (involvement – Anglo parent)

> '[Like my mother] I take care of my children well, [like her I am a] kind, loving and caring mother.' (emotional/physical nurturing and personal qualities – Vietnamese parent, 6 years residence)

When talking about the aspects of their own parents' style they had changed or rejected, respondents referred to characteristics that were opposite to those traits they valued. Thus, for example, negative aspects of 'personal qualities' included references such as arrogance, being disrespectful, impatient or intolerant. As with the positive comments noted above, Anglo and Vietnamese respondents were also explicit regarding the aspects they rejected in their own mothers and fathers, and the way this affected how they raised their own children:

> 'I do a lot of things different in how I talk to my children, for example, my father, he would say – oh, you're hopeless, you're useless – whereas I would never ever say that to my children.' (parent/child communication, emotional nurturing – Anglo parent)

> 'My mother was mainly responsible for discipline and she often over-reacted, so I would be more cautious about going crook at the kids just because I feel uptight. Punishment shouldn't be so severe, just something to get your message across effectively.' (discipline – Anglo parent)

> 'My mother was too modest, she did not praise her children . . . I praise and encourage my children.' (emotional and physical nurturing – Vietnamese parent, 16 years residence)

> 'My father was extremely strict, he never play and smile with [his] children.' (discipline – Vietnamese parent, 19 years residence)

As noted, Torres Strait Islander parents were not asked specifically about the sorts of things they wanted to emulate or do differently from their own mothers and fathers. The data, nevertheless, suggested that the upbringing experienced by the parents had exerted a strong influence on how they raised their own children. This was particularly apparent when parents talked about their personal experiences of being disciplined and how they disciplined their own children (see section on discipline). A father's involvement and love was fondly remembered by one parent while another parent spoke about her mother in negative terms:

> 'My Dad, he was always with us, played sport with us, if Mum couldn't make it to our sports, he was always there or sometimes they'd be there together . . . he used to give us love, tender loving care.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

> 'I always talk to my children, like I had a lot of struggles in my life . . . like today I'm not a drunken mother . . . like my mother's a drunken mother, sometimes she beat me, hit me.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

As noted earlier, the nature of parenting is gendered with women primarily responsible for child care (Glezer 1991; McDonald 1995). Indeed, this was reflected in the data from Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander families and appears in the section below on 'Who is responsible for parenting and household tasks?'. Of interest, however, is that the data above show respondents were able to talk about learning parenting from both their mothers and their fathers.

Socio-cultural context

Richman and colleagues noted that 'however broadly the social context is defined, rarely are the influences of our own cultural beliefs and values on the parent–child relationship considered' (1988:65). As noted earlier, the beliefs and practices of a culture are so taken for granted that they come to be regarded as a matter of common-sense (Arendell 1997;

Bornstein et al. 1998; Super and Harkness 1999; McGurk and Kolar 1997). It was not surprising therefore that the socio-cultural context was a main theme that differentiated the Anglo parents from the Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents. For the dominant Anglo group 'culture' was invisible, while for the Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander groups it was a significant issue.

Vietnamese sample

Vietnamese families had to settle in a vastly different culture – socially, economically, and politically – to the one they had experienced when growing up. The change in socio-cultural context had implications for parenting practices. Respondents focused on the changed circumstances and the need to adapt parenting practices to reflect those in the new culture:

> 'In Asian culture, parents, especially fathers, rarely express their feelings toward their children. Parents don't usually pay much attention to children's emotional needs . . . My child does not have to suffer so much as we did. We grew up and came from a war-torn country. We came to Australia empty-handed to begin everything from zero, to learn a new language, new culture, and we went to school again to get our qualifications back.' (Vietnamese parent, 19 years residence)

> 'We are now in a different environment, different culture. Some of the old ways are no longer suitable . . . children need to be trained to look after themselves, to be independent.' (Vietnamese parent, 11 years residence)

> 'In Vietnam we were poorer and life was much harder so our parents were much stricter toward children. Here, life is much easier, I wouldn't treat my children that strict. I am much, much more easier on them, tolerant.' (Vietnamese parent, 11 years residence)

An ultimate goal for Vietnamese parents was for their children to be comfortably adapted to the mainstream socio-cultural context:

> 'I want my child to have higher education, to be more successful so she can mix into Australian society easily and be more confident.' (Vietnamese parent, 12 years residence)

> 'Now we live in a well developed rich country, I want my child to be like others – good career, comfortable life.' (Vietnamese parent, 4 years residence)

Torres Strait Islander sample

When Islander parents spoke about their parenting practices the data reflected the continuing centrality of culture in their lives; in the way they thought, acted and prioritised their values. However, the social context in which parenting took place was opening up to the influences from mainstream society. Thus Islander parents found themselves having to grapple with two conflicting demands: the need to preserve their culture; and the need to adapt to mainstream culture. For some parents the dilemma was difficult to resolve:

> 'I think we are confused because that position from, the change from us to our children, it is totally different from what we've experienced.' (Torres Strait Islander, key informant).

> 'I want my kids to grow up like me . . . life was better then. Today kids have too many things.' (Torres Strait Islander mother)

Some Islander parents expressed a willingness to be open to the influences of mainstream society, but not to the exclusion of Islander culture:

Acceptance of parenting in family-of-origin

The qualitative data from the two questions about family-of-origin was used to assign a summary rating to each respondent in the Anglo and Vietnamese samples. This summary rating was an attempt to represent graphically the influence of the family-of-origin in the development of parenting practices. It should be noted that respondents were not asked to rate themselves in this respect, rather this was a post-interview coding exercise. This summary rating is only indicative of the general level of acceptance or rejection of parenting in the family-of-origin.

The summary rating data in Table 2 indicate that parenting in the family-of-origin was valued and modelled, but there were also areas where parents had adopted different approaches (40 per cent Anglo; 68 per cent Vietnamese). The high proportion of Vietnamese parents who had changed their parenting approach even though they valued the family-of-origin model was influenced by the changed social and cultural context; this is discussed below.

In the main, the parenting practices experienced by respondents in the family-of-origin were not accepted unconditionally. Indeed, it was only a small group of parents (13 per

Table 2	Summary rating of acceptance of parenting in family-of-origin	
	Vietnamese	*Anglo*
Difficult to code	12	10
Generally reject, try to adopt a different way	5	7
Only a few specific aspects retained	2	3
Mixed, some retained but also quite different	3	27
Valued as model, but a few areas where try to be different	68	40
Conscious effort to recreate values/style of family of origin	10	13

Notes: Rating constructed by ISPCS research coordinators, Statistical analysis not appropriate given small cell numbers.
Source: Parenting-21, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2000.

cent Anglo; 10 per cent Vietnamese) who embraced and consciously tried to recreate the parenting practices adopted by their own mothers and fathers. These were parents who had enjoyed their childhood years and shared very close relationships with at least one of their own parents. An equally small group (7 per cent Anglo; 8 per cent Vietnamese) generally rejected the parenting practices they experienced in their family-of-origin and tended to approach child-rearing in very different ways. These Anglo parents described their childhood as a negative experience and had strained relationships with one or both parents. Among the Vietnamese parents in this category, relationships with their own mothers and fathers were not necessarily negative but the experience of growing up was less than positive.

Responsibility for parenting and household tasks

Despite the growing public expectation that fathers should generally be more involved in parenting, the data confirmed that the reality for parents, be they from an Anglo,

Vietnamese or Islander background, was that mothers were primarily responsible for looking after children. Although Islander culture epitomised the principle of shared parenting, data from the focus groups highlighted a social hierarchy that emphasised the role of mothers as central, but the role of fathers as dominant:

'Mother is the most important person in the household because she takes – well, how can I say this – the mother's job is 24 hours.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

'Mother do all the work but father is the boss.' (Torres Strait Islander, female elder)

Thus, in each sample, on a day-to-day level, the division of labour for child-rearing responsibilities and household tasks generally remained traditionally defined and gendered. In spite of this, mothers were reasonably satisfied with the help received from their partners in looking after children and with the time partners spent with their children.

Where mothers expressed ambivalence or dissatisfaction about their partner's role in child-rearing, it was the demands of work that circumscribed a father's availability and involvement; an aspect relevant for Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents. The impact on family life caused by a father's absence due to work commitments is illustrated in the following comment:

'He works 70 hours a week. He is good with the children when he sees them, I'd prefer he spend more time with them. I'm starting to see them as 'my children' and am now beginning to get annoyed with him if he disciplines or does something differently to the way I would.' (Anglo mother)

Despite work demands, fathers were acknowledged for their effort when they were available:

'When my husband is around he is fantastic, I couldn't ask for any more. But because . . . he doesn't get home till . . . say seven at night, I find it a long day.' (Anglo mother)

'He is a good husband and father but he is always busy with work. He works overtime quite often.' (Vietnamese mother, 17 years residence)

'He's just there to support the family and he look after the kids sometimes – if not very busy [with work], he takes over the kids.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

How parents judged themselves

An important component of parental beliefs is how parents perceive their ability to parent. This concept of self-efficacy as well as satisfaction in parenting can have implications for the quality of parent-child interactions (Bornstein et al. 1998; Grusec et al. 1994). How then did respondents judge their personal parenting strategy? In particular, what did they perceive to be their strengths and shortcomings in rearing their children?

With the Anglo and Vietnamese samples, these issues were explored by asking respondents two general questions: 'As a parent, what sorts of things do you do well?'; 'And what sorts of things are you not so good at?'. Although parents in the Torres Strait Islands were not asked these particular questions, the focus group data did reveal themes related to perceptions of self-efficacy.

Parenting strengths

Anglo, Vietnamese and Islander parents perceived their strengths as parents in terms of the way they emotionally and physically nurtured their children. For Islander parents, the data also highlighted the themes of children's displays of positive behaviour and children's future career achievements.

Ability to provide emotional and physical nurturing

The following examples illustrate the nature of the emotional and physical nurturing that parents provided for their children:

> 'I think I give them a lot of attention. I'm affectionate with them, play with them . . . the children are a big part of our life, they are not on the periphery. We try to respect what they want and they have a say.' (Anglo parent)

> 'I make sure children have a good-balance diet, good standard of health, create warm family environment, satisfy children's need within a limit, [and] available when children need me.' (Vietnamese parent, 19 years residence)

With Islander parents, a nurturing environment that provided love, comfort, affection and security was a significant theme of parenting. One key informant summed up the strength of Islander families as 'lovingness more than teaching'.

Children's displays of positive behaviour

Although not reflected in the Anglo and Vietnamese samples, data suggested that Torres Strait Islander parents also gauged their parenting strengths based on the positive behaviour of their children:

> '[By children] doing homework, being helpful, polite to everybody, obeying me, saying hello to people.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced father)

> '[By children] being good at home.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

For the 'experienced' mothers in the Torres Strait Islander focus groups, the perceived strength of their child-rearing strategies was reflected in the way their offspring were raising their own children:

> 'Well, now looking at my daughter growing up my grand-daughter by herself, without my help, well, she's doing better than me.'

Children's future career achievements

Though the subject was not raised by Anglo and Vietnamese parents, Torres Strait Islander parents talked about the strength of their child-rearing approach in relation to the potential future career achievements of their children. Islander parents referred to these achievements in a general way, for example: 'being someone, get a good job'; 'be really good at something, have a job'; and 'seeing my dreams come true, things I placed in his head'. There were specific references, too, like: 'fly a plane, be a doctor' and 'being a role model for other kids'.

Parenting shortcomings

For those aspects of parenting that respondents perceived as shortcomings, parents emphasised themes related to personal characteristics, discipline difficulties and parent-child communication problems. The overall emerging theme was that parenting is not easy and that parents can struggle to do their best.

Personal characteristics

Personal characteristics were highlighted by Anglo and Vietnamese parents, but not by Islander parents. The following examples illustrate the issues related to personal qualities:

> 'Sometimes I lose my patience when I feel stressed. I tend to yell to get them to do what I want them to do, usually when I'm pushed for time.' (Anglo parent)

> 'I need to be more patient with [my children].' (Vietnamese parent, 16 years residence)

Discipline difficulties

Discipline, which is explored in detail later in this report, emerged as a vexing issue for parents from all three samples:

> 'Probably discipline is sometimes a bit tricky 'cause you're sort of floundering a bit . . . It's an issue that I spend a fair amount of time thinking about – I don't think it comes easily – it's not a natural response, whereas most things you do are more natural.' (Anglo parent)

> 'Despite [the fact that] I am a very open-minded parent, I try to rear my children in a democratic way, yet sometimes I feel I am still rather dictatorial towards my children.' (Vietnamese parent, 15 years residence)

Torres Strait Islander parents reflected broadly on the issue of discipline in relation to the influence of mainstream society. This proved unsettling given the perception that traditional approaches were being undermined in mainstream society (see later section on discipline). In the words of one key informant:

> 'I think we are confused because that tradition from, the change from us to our children is totally different from what we've experienced.'

Parent-child communication problems

It was Vietnamese parents, rather than Anglo or Islander parents, who talked about perceived shortcomings in terms of communication problems experienced with their children. Importantly, it was the issue of being able to communicate on the basis of a shared language:

> 'My English is not good enough to communicate with my children and my children's Vietnamese is not good enough to communicate.' (15 years residence)

The following example emphasises the impact of communication difficulties on parenting:

> 'Due to different culture and environment [I have] difficulty to communicate with my children, I feel lost and don't know how to handle them.' (17 years residence)

Satisfaction with parenting approach

The question on satisfaction was designed to elicit from parents their perception of their overall approach to parenting. Anglo and Vietnamese parents were asked specifically how satisfied they were with their overall child-rearing approach. This was on a five-point scale ranging from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. In the Torres Strait, the notion of parenting satisfaction did not arise in focus group discussions.

As Table 3 illustrates, the majority of both Anglo (87 per cent) and Vietnamese (73 per cent) were at least 'satisfied' with their parenting approach. However, parents assessed

their parenting differently with regard to the two 'extreme' ends of the scale; that is, Anglo parents (27 per cent) were more likely than Vietnamese parents (8 per cent) to report they were 'very satisfied', while Vietnamese parents (27 per cent) were more likely than Anglo parents (13 per cent) to report 'mixed feelings'. No Anglo or Vietnamese parents reported that they were 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with their parenting approach. It is likely that parents who felt dissatisfied would choose not to volunteer for the study.

Table 3	Overall satisfaction with parenting approach		
		Vietnamese	*Anglo*
Very satisfied		8	27
Satisfied		65	60
Mixed feelings		27	13

Note: X^2 (2) = 8.55, *p* < .05
Source: Parenting-21, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2000.

Sources of satisfaction

What were the sources of satisfaction for parents with regard to child-rearing? Both Anglo and Vietnamese parents highlighted children's positive behaviour and development as sources of satisfaction with child-rearing:

> 'Well, I think they're all healthy and happy and they get along well with other children reasonably well and don't have any major problems so I think I'm doing a pretty good job.' (Anglo parent)

> 'My child grows up as a healthy, easy and lovely baby.' (Vietnamese parent, 4 years residence)

A second source of satisfaction related to personal parenting ability. The following examples illustrate the confidence underlying parents' perceptions of their child-rearing strategies:

> 'I feel we're pretty in tune with where we want to go with parenting.' (Anglo parent)

> 'We started off on the right basis because we made certain decisions early on and we have stuck by them. We are disciplined in our approach to parenting and we handle it well.' (Anglo parent)

The following examples show that for Vietnamese parents, in particular, personal parenting ability was enhanced by social support, and importantly, by adopting a child-rearing approach that reflected the values of the original and mainstream cultures:

> 'I draw my experience from my family and friends – combine the good of the East and West.' (13 years residence)

> 'Here in Australia, via work, I had the chance to attend various parenting training courses. As a result, I have a balanced, compromised way to raise my children, to enjoy the best of both worlds – that is, Asian and European cultures.' (19 years residence)

Interestingly, the general mood of the group of respondents who said they were 'satisfied' with their overall approach appeared circumspect. This was particularly so for Anglo parents. While they were happy with their approach, they nevertheless tended to express some reservations about their own ability:

> 'Well, I feel that they're fairly happy children so that makes me feel good, but I would probably like to . . . you know . . . Sometimes I feel guilty that I'm

just not giving enough, yeah, so that's why I wouldn't say "very satisfied" but "satisfied", yeah.' (Anglo parent)

'I think there's always room for improvement but I don't think I'm a bad parent . . . I try hard and I'm always thinking about it, I'm usually reading child development books or self-improvement books. My trouble was I didn't want to be the sort of mother my mother was . . . but I only know how to mother the way my mother did, so I suppose that's why I'm always into these books.' (Anglo parent)

Sources of mixed feelings

What were the sources of mixed feelings for parents with regard to child-rearing? For Anglo parents, 'mixed feelings' were related to misgivings about personal parenting ability, with parents generally perceiving themselves as lacking in parenting ability. The examples below illustrate, in one case, unreasonable expectation and, in the other, a general ambivalence:

'Because I don't think I could ever be confident enough to feel I have covered every area of parenting and every area of all their personalities you could know.' (Anglo parent)

'Because I think I'm not doing as good a job as I could but then other times I feel happy, so I suppose it's mixed feelings.' (Anglo parent)

Vietnamese parents also identified their parenting ability as the source of 'mixed feelings' as well as the quality of the relationship they shared with their children:

'Sometimes I really feel lost and don't know how to handle my children, especially the older two, they are disobedient and uncooperative. I have tried to be friendly and close to them but it doesn't seem to work. It is difficult to bring up children here in Western country.' (Vietnamese parent, 17 years residence)

'I don't seem to have a harmonious relationship with my children, especially my son.' (Vietnamese parent, 19 years residence)

Influence of the wider social context

As emphasised in the literature and in the analyses above, social context is widely acknowledged as a significant variable in the analysis of parenting beliefs and behaviours. In order to explore the influence of the social context on parenting in more depth, respondents were asked about factors that enhanced parenting as well as those that hindered it; their sources of support; and the particular role and influence of the extended family.

Enhancing parenting

What were the things that enhanced the lives of parents with respect to child-rearing? Themes identified in the data related to external as well as internal factors. The former included the local community context, work and financial issues while the latter related to family factors such as the nature of marital relationships and the influence of children. Anglo and Vietnamese parents focused on a range of these themes while Torres Strait Islander parents emphasised the importance of the local community context, particularly infrastructure and the role of schools and the church. Support networks, principally spouse, extended family and friends, also emerged as an important theme for all three samples.

External factors enhancing parenting

The local context, its infrastructure as well as a sense of being part of the community were seen as enhancing parenting, expressed by one parent as:

> 'We live in an area where we're close to public transport and shops, it's great in terms of being a mother living here because you don't feel isolated.' (Anglo parent)

For both Anglo and Vietnamese parents child-rearing responsibilities were enhanced by the availability of flexible work arrangements, especially those related to hours of work; flexible hours enabled greater parenting involvement. Also important was the availability of work, which provided financial security as well as a balance to the pressures of child-rearing:

> 'My husband is a school teacher so he has all the school holidays at home with the children, so we all have a lot more time together.' (Anglo parent)

> 'Two-income family, it gives you a sense of security.' (Vietnamese parent, 13 years residence)

> 'Well, I've got some balance of work and child care in my life, I'd really hate to not work; even though it seems very difficult to work I wouldn't like not working.' (Anglo parent)

As noted above, the local community context emerged as a particularly important theme for Torres Strait Islander parents. The individual communities of the Torres Strait are small and this was perceived to foster neighbourliness and nurture community spirit. Its expression was most evident where families looked out for each other's children:

> 'You're not worried about your child like people are down south. I wouldn't be worried about my child she could be running about in the middle of the village but I know she's still safe. Even families that aren't really direct, like blood, related to me, they would look after her.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

> '[During school holidays] the whole community, we all go up to meet [the children] at the air-strip to show them they are important.' (Torres Strait Islander, key informant)

Schools on the Islands were also seen to be making an effort to encourage the participation of parents in school activities. A school on one particular island adapted its curriculum to make it directly relevant to the life of the students outside the classroom; a recognition that students have a unique culture yet at the same time are part of the wider Australian society. The church was seen to provide for the spiritual and moral growth of children (learning what is right from wrong, bible stories, prayers, Sunday school and church picnics).

Family factors enhancing parenting

The internal factors incorporated themes related more directly to the family context. As mentioned above, these included the quality of marital relationships and the influence of children.

Regarding marital relationships, most Anglo and Vietnamese parents reported their relationship with their partner as at least 'very close' (88 per cent Anglo; 82 per cent Vietnamese), and that generally, they were 'satisfied' with their relationship (91 per cent Anglo; 86 per cent Vietnamese). Four Anglo (7 per cent) and five Vietnamese (11 per cent) parents reported distant or variable relationships. These data indicate a biased

sample, with parents in troubled relationships being less likely to participate in the study than those in stable relationships.

Both Anglo and Vietnamese respondents highlighted the importance of the marital relationship in enhancing parenting:

> 'I know myself very well, and my husband. We have a very good foundation, a good relationship, so I think it's easier to have children when you've got that sort of strong background.' (Anglo parent)

> 'Resolve my marital conflict so that I can resettle my life, I can have time and peace of mind to do many things.' (Vietnamese parent, 19 years residence)

The particular characteristics of children also enhanced parenting, which was generally highlighted by Anglo and Vietnamese parents. In the main, parents focused on children's temperament and personality; the joy of watching them grow, develop and become more independent; and their love and affection:

> 'I've got two average happy children and I think that certainly makes it easier.' (Anglo parent)

> 'As they get bigger they are easier, able to do more things for themselves – makes a big difference.' (Anglo parent)

> 'Seeing your child develop and grow up into an active, healthy child.' (Vietnamese parent, 3 years residence)

> '[Having] good, sensible children makes life easier and more satisfying.' (Vietnamese parent, 14 years residence)

> 'I suppose it's the love and affection that you get back and the way the kids treat us.' (Anglo parent)

Hindering parenting

External elements represented the main hindrance to parenting, especially work-related factors, which were common to the three samples of parents. In contrast, the nature of parenting, the socio-cultural context, and the local community context were aspects that differentiated the samples, illustrating the different parenting priorities of the sampled Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander families. Support networks were again raised and will be discussed later.

Work-related factors

The following examples highlight the negative influence of two factors for both Anglo and Vietnamese parents; the difficulties associated with unemployment and financial problems, and work commitments affecting time spent with children:

> 'I cannot find job, financial constraint, it make life more difficult.' (Vietnamese parent, 15 years residence)

> 'Financially, we are not well-off and it makes [parenting] difficult. I am not working much and am not earning as I was, and when you have a child you want to give them everything and financial concern makes that hard.' (Anglo parent)

> 'It is harder financially because only my husband is working. We are low-income family [with] no savings.' (Vietnamese parent, 11 years residence)

> 'The most difficult thing of all is [partner's] work for me as a parent. It doesn't really matter so much to me as a person because I can amuse myself reasonably well, but in terms of me as the almost sole parent for a lot of the time, I find that really a constant stress.' (Anglo parent)

Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents talked about work commitments monopolising their time and energy, which then left little room for parenting responsibilities:

> 'Working makes [parenting] more difficult because it means that I'm not there [for children] all the time.' (Anglo parent)

> 'I work full-time, I can't have as much time as I want for my children, I always struggle between my duty as a parent and my career.' (Vietnamese parent, 15 years residence)

> 'Nowadays parents have to work, so there's little time to spend with their kids, probably only have the night to spend with kids and communicate and all that. For working parents it is very hard.' (Torres Strait Islander, key informant)

Nature of parenting (time)

The examples below also reflect the nature of the parenting role, such as the constant responsibility and demands of parenting that leave little time for oneself, as well as the pressure of demands and expectations. Anglo parents, in particular, spoke of these:

> 'The biggest thing is the responsibility, the continual parenting, it's 24 hours a day. The lack of time to myself, it's frustrating and I suppose it's more frustrating than I thought it would be.' (Anglo parent)

> 'Oh, probably coping with everything, working, doing things that I'm expected to do at [my child's] school . . . I often think that I should do more, and [at my other child's] playgroup. I'm on a lot of committees at school, so I'm sort of torn between a lot of things, trying to do a lot.' (Anglo parent)

Socio-cultural factors

One of the three Anglo fathers interviewed was employed as a shift-worker, which enabled him to be actively involved in parenting. He described his experience in the following way:

> 'It's difficult being a male looking after children . . . I find in the community that it's set up a lot more for women looking after children. People almost look at you and think – well, what are you doin' with them, where's your wife.' (Anglo parent)

Vietnamese parents had to deal with parenting issues in general and discipline in particular, in a bi-cultural context:

> 'We came from Vietnam to live in Australia (East – West). There are some cultural conflicts that create some confusion and difficulties in handling and rearing children.' (Vietnamese parent, 16 years residence)

> 'Discipline – how to raise the children in a democratic way but not to lose them, [not] to make them uncontrollable.' (Vietnamese parent, 18 years residence)

For Torres Strait Islander parents, bi-cultural issues also prevailed. With a lack of educational facilities, particularly at the secondary level, parents had little choice but to

send their children 'down south'. This caused problems for parents who missed their children and were not able to care for and discipline them. It was also problematic for children who had to deal with major and multiple transitions: from an island to a mainland culture; from childhood to adolescence; and from primary to secondary school:

'When kids go [down south for further education], they find that it's really hard and they pull out . . . they just walk the street and that's really, really poor eh, to see all those years wasted.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

'If kids go away they come back different, different teaching and discipline, it's not the parents' fault, they [kids] go to get an education – houseparents [at boarding schools] are not as tough, kids here [on the islands] follow their parents.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced father)

With regard to discipline, especially physical punishment, there was a perception that mainstream law had intruded and compromised parenting rights and generally contributed to children's lack of discipline:

'If you touch em [children], you definitely get into trouble, and I think the system when they actually put that into place, [they] never done their homework properly . . . so they actually just made the rule because of maybe some incident that had happened in mainstream Australia there and never . . . realise what would happen . . . never really understand how the changes would affect people from the Torres Strait, I suppose . . . because you got kids now that are actually running amok . . . the parenting rights, they have been taken away, you're not allowed to do this to your kid [physically punish].' (Torres Strait Islander, young father)

Local community context (infrastructure and resources)

Islander parents also emphasised the significance of the physical environment with regard to the responsibilities of child-rearing. There was a need for more recreational facilities and activities to keep children occupied after school, during weekends and during school holidays. Particular difficulties related to the absence of resources such as fresh food and basic amenities, including adequate water supply, suitable housing and electricity:

'When the barge comes in, and the kids they look forward to fresh fruit, bread and they love their fruit and they love their vegies. So we just don't get enough of that here. Not enough unless you're going to be first in first served sort of thing when the barge comes in, so that's difficult.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

'There's no water, that makes it really hard. Like if I want to wash kids, you know, my clothes, clothes and my kids, I can't do that because there's no water.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

'Some of the young families just live in a house, only just got a stove, there's no electricity connected to it. So you just depend on your next door neighbour and all that and, it doesn't give you that self-esteem or that confidence in yourself to call yourself a good parent.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

What was not lacking on the Islands, however, was access to modern technology. Watching television and videos was increasingly becoming a dominant form of recreation, not only for children but also for the whole family. This was regarded as responsible for the demise of activities that were seen as important to nurturing community spirit and a sense of belonging:

'Before when we finish tea we move from one house to another to have a yarn, now television, people stay home and watch TV.' (Torres Strait Islander parent)

'Parents want to go fishing and gardening, kids don't want to go but stay and watch TV.' (Torres Strait Islander, key informant)

Indeed, increasing exposure to violent television programs and videos was seen to negatively influence children's behaviour:

'Children are watching a lot of violent videos these days . . . and them fella go outside they tend to be playing with those sticks and pretend [it's a] gun or something, and all are more aggressive than before.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

Parental support networks

Access to informal and formal support has widely been recognised as fundamental to positive outcomes for both children and parents (for example Cochran 1990; Cochran 1993; Garbarino 1995; Gledhill 1996; Bowes and Hayes 1999). Social support, in fact, speaks to the strength of families and no longer implies a weakness (Gledhill 1996). The nature of support, in general, can be information-based (general or specific), emotional, or practical (Cochran 1993).

In general, the salience of support was identified as a key theme in the data focusing on factors that enhanced and inhibited satisfactory parenting. Data for Anglo and Vietnamese parents illustrated the importance of access to support, particularly that provided by family and friends. Generally, Anglo and Vietnamese parents faced difficulties when they could not access family support.

As mentioned earlier, in the Torres Strait Islands, support in parenting is part of the cultural tradition. Thus, difficulties associated with limited or no extended family support were not a feature of life for this sample of Islander parents. However, Islander parents highlighted difficulties related to some negative aspects of family members' behaviour such as drinking. There were also parents who expressed disapproval at what they regarded as interference on the part of grandparents, especially when it came to disciplining children; this is discussed in a later section on discipline.

Where parents turned for advice and support

The issue of parental support was explored more systematically by asking Anglo and Vietnamese respondents about where, over a 12-month period, they had turned for advice and support with their parenting, and the reasons underlying those choices (Kolar and McGurk 1998). Islander parents responded to a relatively general question on sources of support.

Anglo and Vietnamese parents turned to family (partner, own mother and father, sister and mother-in-law); other informal supports (friends and neighbours); and formal sources (the general and specialist medical profession, maternal and child health services, teachers, family services, books, magazines, television and newspapers). In general, Anglo and Vietnamese respondents relied on a combination of informal and formal sources of support. The use of multiple sources, especially combining informal and professional contacts, appeared to be the norm rather than the exception:

'[With range of support] all used for different reasons. Having support from [my husband] and my sister and parents and husband's parents is a part of

family life. Also neighbours offered support when I had a young baby, and with a nursing mothers group when I was expecting [my child], and I wanted to make sure I had enough support and information.' (Anglo parent)

'[Support is] available at home and in the community, they assist in different fields.' (Vietnamese parent, 17 years residence)

This pattern was also typical for Torres Strait Islander parents although the extended family represented the first port of call when parents had problems:

'[Seek support] among themselves, family first, brother and sister of the parents.' (Torres Strait Islander, key informant)

'If I got problems with my children or need any help I always rely on my sisters to help me.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

Despite the presence and availability of extended kin, Islander families were also aware of other more formal sources of support available to them. These included doctors, child welfare workers, social workers, teachers, priests, counsellors as well as community leaders. For example, as one parent commented:

'[I] talk to husband or his family or my family, or if it gets out of hand, to a social worker.' (Torres Strait Islander mother)

One feature that distinguished Torres Strait Islander parents from the other two groups was the reference made to religion. In the main, Anglo and Vietnamese parents described themselves as belonging to a religion. However, it was Islander parents who perceived religion as a source of mainly spiritual support. Islander families participated in religious activities together and the church was regarded as a vital source of spiritual support. Religion, to a large extent, influenced their way of thinking and parents turned to religion for spiritual enlightenment when they had problems with their children:

'People go to church to find strength . . . if they go to church, they'll support one another spiritually.' (Torres Strait Islander mother)

'I pray for patience and also if I have problems in life.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

'I pray, with my problem, I pray. The only thing is you need to have faith, you know, everything turns out the way you want it to.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

Informal support
Anglo parents turned to informal contacts for support because of: the easy availability of informal support; an underlying element of trust and respect; emotional attachment; mutual child-rearing values; experience with children; and a desire to replicate the child-rearing approach used by own parents.

'With [my own] mother, I want to use the techniques she used because they don't seem to have had a harmful effect. I trust her and she will be honest with me. [With] friends and neighbours, because they have more current experiences with children's socialising.' (Anglo parent)

For Vietnamese parents also, availability of informal support was an important factor:

'[They are] available and accessible, both sides of the family live in the same neighbourhood, traditionally, family takes care of its members.' (Vietnamese parent, 11 years residence)

Similar in part to the responses made by Anglo parents, Torres Strait Islander parents also commented on issues related to emotional attachment, trust and respect, as well as experience with children:

> 'I'd go to one of my cousins or my uncles that I've been close to.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

> 'I always talk to my older sisters and their husbands and find it out because I don't have experience.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents reported that informal contacts were important for the emotional and practical help they provided. The significance of emotional and practical support is illustrated in the comments made by an Anglo parent:

> 'Family members provided [practical] assistance of coming over and helping, or bringing food or doing the ironing . . . It really helps, especially when I was sick . . . that's when you just need someone to do it, or pick a child up from school. My girlfriends just give so much emotional support plus with the ideas, if I don't know what to, I'll just ring them, I mean, that's just been invaluable support on the practical level and emotional level, when you sort of wonder if you're doing the right thing.' (Anglo parent)

Formal support

Access to formal support was also important for parents, irrespective of background and the availability of informal networks. Generally, parents at some stage needed expert knowledge. Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents indicated that professionals were contacted for general information and specific advice as opposed to the emotional and practical support generally sought from informal networks.

For Vietnamese parents, in particular, the use of professional support represented an important link to the wider community and a means by which to learn about contemporary child-rearing practices. Even where Vietnamese parents had extended kin available, there was a perception that they were not necessarily an 'appropriate' frame of reference for contemporary child-rearing advice:

> 'Knowledge about child-rearing and parenting from family members may not be appropriate in the new country.' (Vietnamese parent, 16 years residence)

> 'We have access to media – traditional child-rearing may not be entirely relevant to bring up children [in Australia].' (Vietnamese parent, 18 years residence)

However, access to formal support could be marred with language difficulties presenting a substantial obstacle, particularly for those recently arrived:

> 'As a migrant without much English, life has been very difficult for me.' (Vietnamese parent, 6 years residence)

Whatever the circumstances of their arrival in Australia, some Vietnamese parents left their country of birth without extended family members. The following examples show that for these parents the absence of kin emphasised the need for professional support services:

> 'I don't have extended family available to help. I therefore turn to professionals and friends for help, especially emotional support.' (Vietnamese parent, 3 years residence)

> 'Like many of my friends [newly arrived in this country with no family support], we received help from Vietnamese community workers who are specialised with migrant resettlement, this includes family matters and child-rearing.' (Vietnamese parent, 4 years residence)

Apart from health-related matters, Torres Strait Islander parents attempted to deal with issues within the family before seeking professional support. Where parents did seek assistance beyond the family, community elders were approached before professionals:

> 'Sometimes come to me to sort out problems, mostly keep to [own] mother and father.' (Torres Strait Islander, community elder)

> 'Parents don't like to sit and talk unless know person well.' (Torres Strait Islander, key informant)

At times, the availability of extended family can, of course, prove to be a hindrance rather than a support. This proved to be the case in some instances so parents turned to professionals *instead* of their own extended kin, as illustrated in the following examples:

> 'My mother and sister are the emotionally closest women to me, but that wasn't much help, with books, there's no emotional ledger attached, you don't have to explain why you did or didn't follow advice.' (Anglo parent)

> 'Mum's there helping me out from the beginning. Sometimes her expectations and value judgements drive me berserk, but she has been valuable.' (Anglo parent)

The role of extended family

As illustrated above, extended family represented a significant source of support in the lives of parents, irrespective of cultural background. Adult-parent relationships were generally characterised as emotionally close, in both Anglo and Vietnamese families. That is, parents from both groups were, in the main, close to their mothers and to their fathers. Not only was emotional closeness a feature of these relationships but so too was physical closeness. Anglo parents reported having family members living within an hour's drive or closer. They tended to see family members on a weekly basis. Even though around half of the sample of Vietnamese parents had family members living overseas, those who had family in Australia had them living close by, and also visited them at least once a week. For Torres Strait Islander parents, data on the role of the extended family in relation to children is presented separately given that the extended family has explicit responsibilities with regard to child-rearing.

The data for Anglo and Vietnamese parents emphasised the positive role played by extended family in the lives of children. Even in cases where parents did not have good relations with their kin (these were rare), they nevertheless maintained that such relations were important for children. In general, contact with kin was important because it provided children with a sense of family history and identity; the opportunity to establish relationships that span a variety of ages; and in nurturing support networks for children.

Family history and identity

Extended family played an important role in terms of providing a connection to the past and a family identity, based on knowing where one comes from, and the passing on of values and customs:

'It is important that they realise that they are part of a wider group. From aunts and grandparents, great-grandparents, they learn about where they come from.' (Anglo parent)

'To know our origin, identity, to know our customs, values, to learn and maintain Vietnamese language.' (Vietnamese parent, 18 years residence)

Relationships across the generations

The extended family provided the opportunity to socialise and be involved in a variety of relationships; the relationship between grandparents and children was especially valued:

'She has a wonderful relationship with my own father and they get so much mutual enjoyment from each other, all the family members really. She loves all the caring, socially it's great for her and it's a good mixture of the generations so she engages with all age groups.' (Anglo parent)

'[Important] to foster a sense of extended family, to develop a loving and long-lasting relationship with his grandparents and uncles.' (Vietnamese parent, 6 years residence)

Nurturing support networks for children

The following examples illustrate the importance of extended family in nurturing a sense of belonging to a wider group and representing the foundations of strong support for children:

'He needs to feel loved and supported and feel part of a larger family that goes beyond these four walls.' (Anglo parent)

'[Important] that he grows up knowing the family [and] of the support that extended family can give, even though they're not around much he can still value them.' (Anglo parent)

'[Important] to provide kinship network, to provide support for children from early age. Sometimes children, they can't talk to their parents, they talk to their cousins because there are no generation gaps between them.' (Vietnamese parent, 19 years residence)

'[Important that] my children grow up in an extended family environment, to receive enough love and care, also to learn from [extended family].' (Vietnamese parent, 15 years residence)

As mentioned above, a proportion of Vietnamese families lived in Australia without their extended families. Distance can either strengthen or weaken kinship ties. The data showed that in some families parents thought it important to maintain family links precisely because kin lived overseas; while in others, maintaining family links was not important, for the same reason:

'[Important] to receive news from family in Vietnam and vice versa so you'll have peace of mind that they are alright. [Important for children] to know grandma and other relatives in Vietnam, to have links with them.' (Vietnamese parent, 5 years residence)

'[Not important] because my family live in Vietnam while my children were born in Australia, they hardly meet or know each other, the separation reduce the level of importance.' (Vietnamese parent, 13 years residence)

Torres Strait Islander sample

In the Torres Strait, since children are the responsibility of the entire family, the role of the extended family was of particular importance. Grandparents, aunts and uncles all played an active role in caring for children. They provided moral, emotional and financial support, and nurtured a powerful sense of belonging and a strong feeling that the family was 'there for you'.

Grandparents were regarded as the font of cultural knowledge. Accordingly, they had the responsibility for transmitting traditions and customs. This was usually done orally, telling stories and legends (Gelam stories), singing songs and taking children to places of historical significance. Grandparents were also expected to pass on knowledge on how to survive in the environment; for example, fishing, making and using spears, the best places to catch fish and crays, of the best places to dive, how to make mats, and how to garden. They also taught children about language and totems, about the family tree as well as land and sea markings so that families were aware of both their land and sea boundaries. As one parent said:

> 'My father show my boys – this is ours, this is our fish trap, this is our land, this is our boundary here' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother).

Aunts were responsible for initiating girls into adulthood while uncles took responsibility for their nephews. Aunts taught nieces skills such as cooking, sewing and gardening while uncles taught nephews skills such as fishing, and how to spear turtle or dugong. They contributed financially; for example, for a nephew's 21st birthday party. Uncles were also responsible for organising ceremonies such as a nephew's first shave (which occurs at around 16 years of age) and spearing a nephew's first turtle. As one parent remarked:

> 'With their uncle, they go out fishing and their uncle shows them a lot of things out on the reef, how to catch trout, what's the best way to put your hook in . . . and that.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

Both aunts and uncles played an important role as a child's confidante:

> 'With their aunties and their uncles, I think [children are] more open-minded . . . [more] open to speak to [aunties and uncles] about things than what they are with parents.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

> 'A child will always go to the aunt if she wants to know, say she wants to get married, she won't go tell her mother, she'll tell her auntie and aunties will do the talking [with parents].' (Torres Strait Islander, key informant)

The important role of aunts and uncles was emphasised in situations where a parent had died or a marriage had failed:

> 'Cause I'm a single parent, I feel it's important to have the family . . . a child has to grow up in a family atmosphere, they have to have a father figure. That I can't give my boys, they have to reflect on their uncles . . . they have to look at their uncles for that.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

Summary

In discussing parenting, respondents spoke about their status as parents and the way parents were regarded by the wider community. They highlighted the social nature of parenting and the influence and expectations of the wider social context. A certain ambivalence was apparent in parents' perceptions: on the one hand they recognised the significance of their role, but on the other, there were comments such as 'I'm just a

parent'. Indeed, it was explicitly noted that the parent role was generally 'undervalued' in the broader community. Both Anglo and Vietnamese parents highlighted such sentiments, and it was one of the main themes that differentiated them from the Torres Strait Islander parents. For Islander families, there was no ambivalence about the importance of parents and child-rearing.

A universal theme was that mothers were primarily responsible for child-rearing and household tasks. It was generally recognised by Anglo and Vietnamese mothers that the father's role in child-rearing was, to a large extent, limited by work commitments. In the Torres Strait, although the mother's role was regarded as paramount, parenting was part of a social hierarchy that involved the contributions of the wider family.

Personal upbringing was a primary source for learning about parenting, suggesting that parents were influenced by the style and approach used by their own mothers and fathers. Themes of parenting included: personal qualities, emotional and physical nurturing, parent-child communication, involvement and availability, and discipline. These themes applied to mothers as well as fathers and encompassed both positive and negative factors. That is, parents spoke about the things they admired and wanted to emulate, but there were also things they approached differently compared with their own mothers and fathers. While suggesting some inter-generational continuity in parenting, the data also highlighted change over time and illustrated the particular influence of the social context. This was especially relevant for Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents whose beliefs and practices were affected by the expectations and values of the wider social and cultural context.

Generally, Anglo and Vietnamese parents saw their strengths in relation to providing an emotionally and physically nurturing environment; the behaviour of their children was also an important factor. For Torres Strait Islander parents, the strength of their parenting was measured over the long term, largely gauged by the potential future career achievements of their children. With regard to shortcomings, Anglo and Vietnamese parents highlighted personal qualities such as being stressed and impatient. Vietnamese parents also reported experiencing communication problems with their children, mostly because of language differences. Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents all perceived discipline as a difficult issue. For Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents in particular, difficulties were based on how they perceived the broader social expectations regarding discipline. Despite these perceived shortcomings, parents were, in general, satisfied with their overall approach to parenting. Drawing mostly from the data from the Anglo and Vietnamese samples, it was apparent that satisfaction with parenting approach was related to the joy derived from children, and whether respondents perceived themselves as competent parents.

Parents also referred to the importance of the wider social context, specifically family and community, and its impact on parenting responsibilities. Marital relationships and the character and personality of children represented internal family themes that often constituted positive influences in the lives of parents. In terms of external community factors, parenting was enhanced by flexible and stable working arrangements while lack of work and associated financial hardships hindered parents in their child-rearing responsibilities. In terms of obstacles to parenting, there were some differences between the three samples. For Anglo parents, difficulties related to time issues specifically associated with the nature of parenting; Vietnamese parents had to deal with cultural issues, particularly in relation to discipline; and Torres Strait Islander parents had to deal with the physical environment where availability of resources was limited.

Although overall, families turned to both personal and professional sources of support, Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents turned primarily to family and

friends when they needed emotional support or practical assistance. Professional support was used, in the main, for general information or specific advice. Thus, these two forms of support served different purposes. For Vietnamese parents in particular, access to formal support constituted an important link to the wider community and an opportunity to learn about mainstream child-rearing approaches. With Islander parents, formal services were used when 'family-related' means were exhausted. Their use of formal services reflected what occurred in the family context; that is, parents preferred to talk to professional people with experience, which was defined by age and expertise.

It is generally accepted that the extended family plays a central role with indigenous and immigrant communities, whereas 'the great myth about Australian families is that the extended family does not exist' (McDonald 1995:44). Research has challenged this myth by presenting findings that have shown that the links between family members and the wider kin are strong and that they constitute a valuable network of support (d'Abbs 1991; Millward 1998, 1992). Indeed, the findings presented here clearly demonstrate that the extended family was very much a part of the lives of Anglo, Vietnamese and Islander parents and their children. Children's contact with kin was deemed particularly important because it provided a sense of family history and belonging. Such contact was also central to nurturing new relationships and supports for children. Indeed, another cultural similarity related to the special relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren. In other words, extended family was an integral part of the lives of these parents and their children. For the three samples of families, the overall picture was one of close ties and connected lives between parents, children and extended family.

These findings provide an important account of parenting given a climate of wide-sweeping economic change and a growing expectation for families in general to be relatively more self-reliant. They illustrate the significance to parents of changes in various settings, for example, work and availability of support. The ultimate goal of parenting is to promote the development and wellbeing of children, and in this parents are inextricably linked to the social context. Parents are directly involved in making choices about the physical and social contexts to which children have access. But wider contextual changes will either enhance or constrain those parental choices. The cultural component provides a context for understanding differences in parenting behaviour and provides a broader perspective for interpreting difficulties (LeVine 1988), all of which is important to informing policy development.

5 Parenting in practice

Three themes of parenting practices are explored in this section of the report, all of which have implications for children's overall behaviour and development, particularly with regard to teaching and imparting values. The first relates broadly to the values parents wanted their children to learn, and how these were imparted to children by their parents. The focus narrows with the second theme, which explores the role of household chores, rules and children's involvement in decision-making as specific means of teaching values. The third theme is on the way that discipline was approached as a corrective response to children whose behaviour was defined as 'inappropriate' by parents. Underlying parental practices were the long-term goals that parents aspired to for their children. These included general goals as well as parents' aspirations with regard to education, occupation and marriage.

Parental values desired for children

Parents from all three samples were asked a general question about the sort of values they wanted their children to learn. Their responses were categorised according to the following: historical aspects of culture; cultural and moral issues; the significance of the family; the importance of education; and religious values. Generally, there was similarity between the three samples of parents. Some areas of difference, however, were reflected in the themes of cultural history, education and religion.

Value of cultural history

The theme of culture reflected the differences between the samples. Anglo parents tended not to refer to culture, reinforcing the notion of the 'invisibility of culture' in the mainstream context. Vietnamese parents also did not allude to the theme of cultural history, perhaps because it was not seen as a contributor to the future happiness and success of their children. For Torres Strait Islander parents, however, cultural history represented a significant theme.

It was important for Islander parents that their children learned about the history of the Islands and its traditions so that they '[know] where they are from'. Through stories told by 'aka' (grandparents), children acquired knowledge of the laws and the boundaries of the land, and native title. Children also learned about traditional ceremonies such as first haircut and shaving parties; tombstone opening (marking the end of mourning); dancing; and catching a first turtle. It was also important to learn traditional living skills: such as ways to catch, clean, cook and preserve dugong and fish, knowing how to make spears, how to build island style houses, and 'wongai' (carving).

Torres Strait Islander parents realised that some of the traditional skills they taught their children were being superseded by the vast array of new skills needed in order to cope with a fast-changing modern environment. They believed, however, that by teaching children traditional skills while young, the children would 'at least have that in their heads, they'll know about it'. There was emphasis on the children achieving a balance between Torres Strait Islander and mainstream Australian cultures; in particular, learning

about everything that was 'good' in both cultures. Achieving a balance also meant fitting the modern lifestyle with the cultural life in the Islands (not the other way around).

Cultural and moral values

In terms of cultural and moral values, emphasis was placed on respect and honesty, caring for others, and sharing. In terms of respect, parents from all three samples identified a number of dimensions, including self-respect, respect for parents, extended family, and people in general. Islander parents also referred to respect for government and the law. In Islander culture, the practice of respect was regarded as the foundation that underlined a social order, one that was also explicitly defined by age and gender. The following comments illustrate these points:

'It all begins with respect – it is the seed, the starting point of everything.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced father)

'Respect . . . builds strong sense of respect and will maintain strong values for law and family.' (Torres Strait Islander, young father)

'I respect [my older sister] and call her sissie all the time.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

Anglo and Vietnamese parents highlighted the values of caring, sharing and kindness (with regard to family and others); for Islander parents, such values were referred to as 'apassin' (having respect for and helping one another) and 'kozon' (sharing):

'Caring, understanding of others, caring and sharing, compassionate and loving.' (Anglo parent)

'To love and care for everybody, animals, environment, be open-minded, have strong sense of family and social morals.' (Vietnamese parent, 15 years residence)

'Sharing turtle and dugong with rest of the family like *aka* and *athe* [grandparents], time *kozon* this way was passed down from many generations.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

However, in the Torres Strait, it was difficult to continue with this spirit of sharing because modern technology, particularly the introduction of refrigeration, enabled food to be frozen for later use:

'I remember from when, on father's side . . . if you want turtle . . . if you ask every house . . . every house got share. You won't find that [today]. People go out make turtle or dugong, they put in the fridge.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced father)

The value of family

In the previous section, the importance of the extended family was highlighted by all three samples of parents. In this section, the theme of family is again highlighted in relation to the values that parents wanted their children to learn:

'Honesty, fairness, love of family, friends and community.' (Anglo parent)

'[To] respect and love own parents and grandparents, [to be] polite and courteous, and have family spirit [based on mutual support and living in harmony with family members].' (Vietnamese parent, 11 years)

'I was brought up to respect my older brothers and sisters. If my eldest sister tell me to do something, I'll just do it but I think it's more got to do with the way you feel and love that you've got for them.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

Also important to Islander parents was teaching children about their family tree. Aside from giving a sense of history and connection to others, knowledge of the family tree also enabled easy identification of family land and sea boundaries and their ownership. The emphasis on children being aware of their family tree was especially relevant in the light of the prevalence of adoption within the communities and the fear among parents of children inter-marrying. Through the family tree, children also learned about the roles that aunts, uncles and grandparents played in their lives.

The importance of education

Passing on the value of education was an important priority identified by both Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents, but not by Anglo parents. This does not imply that this sample of mostly well-educated and professional Anglo parents did not care about their children's education. As the later section on parental long-term goals and aspirations illustrates, they clearly did care. However, for Anglo parents it was not an issue that arose spontaneously, in response to a general question on values, as it did for Vietnamese and Islander parents. Education appeared to be of particular importance for these two samples of parents because they saw it as a means for their children to secure a better future. Thus Vietnamese and Islander parents indicated a high regard for scholarship as a value to be encouraged in children:

'To love learning in order to do well at school.' (Vietnamese parent, 12 years residence)

'My husband did not have a good education when he was small and he wants them [children] to have that thing that he didn't have.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

Religious values

Anglo and Islander parents considered Christian religious values to be an important guide for children's moral development. Religious precepts tied in closely with the concept of 'respect' which these parents saw as encapsulated in religious teachings such as, for example, 'love thy neighbour as yourself'. Young Torres Strait Islander parents, in particular, emphasised teaching their children about Christianity.

Vietnamese parents did not refer to religious or spiritual beliefs explicitly; however, the nature of values is such that their possible influence may be articulated in indirect and subtle ways. For example, in a quote used to illustrate the importance of 'role modelling' in teaching children values (see next section), a Vietnamese parent mentioned taking the children to 'the temple'.

How parental values were taught

The use of proverbs or stories is one way to teach children about values; the daily routine practices of a household represent another (Grusec 1997). As a means of imparting values, story telling was indeed reflected in the data for all three samples of parents, as was the importance of role modelling. Household practices were not spontaneously identified by parents as a means by which to teach their children values. However, specific questions about household practices were asked, particularly with regard to the

importance of household chores, rules and children's involvement in decision-making; responses to these are presented in the next section.

Story telling

The following examples show the way story telling was used by Anglo and Vietnamese parents to teach their children:

'Through stories, sometimes we'll tell a fantasy story with a [particular] issue in it or just talking about an issue.' (Anglo parent)

'By telling Vietnamese and Chinese stories which have good models and moral sense.' (Vietnamese parent, 17 years residence)

For Islander parents, story telling was referred to as 'yarning' and was regarded as an informal way of 'shaping the mind' of children. Values were expressed indirectly through legends, stories and songs. Grandparents, in particular, played a vital role in passing on values from one generation to the next:

'When the children with their grandparents, especially at night, they sit down and they question them about a lot of things . . . the youngest ones will ask them, they'll say – papa, ama, will you tell us stories – and they'll tell them stories that was handed down from generations over generations of our culture . . . and they'll tell them everything . . . they'll sort of like yarn to them.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

Role modelling

Parents acknowledged that they were role models for their children, so the need to set a good example was very important:

'The most fundamental ways always are by example and by involvement. For example, I will be considerate and respectful of him and show him how I appreciate beauty around me. To take him to see exhibitions and point things out to him like certain pieces of music, and engage [child] in different ways.' (Anglo parent)

'Not only explain them but also practise them myself. When I go to temple I take my children with me. I try to do good things for her to follow.' (Vietnamese parent, 5 years residence)

'The time [child] spends with you, whether it's an hour or ten minutes, are the times he's learning – he's looking at how you react to things, how you do things, how you speak about things.' (Torres Strait Islander, young father)

Overall, parents were involved in value-transmission through talking to their children and providing the opportunity for a range of experiences beyond the household. These included social outings, visits to places of historical significance and sacred sites, sending children to particular kindergartens, and being involved with the church.

Household chores and rules

As mentioned above, the household practices explored with parents related to the importance of chores and rules. These usually related to practical family needs such as helping to set the table or helping to wash the dishes; they included also setting clear and consistent boundaries for children's behaviour. The practical benefits for a family can mean the smooth day-to-day running of a busy household. Such practices also have longer-term developmental outcomes; these include imparting values, such as

self-reliance, and individual as well as social responsibility (Bowes et al. 1997; Goodnow 1996; Schaffer 1996).

Anglo and Vietnamese parents were asked about the importance of household chores and rules as well as the perceived benefits of these activities. Torres Strait Islander parents were not specifically asked about these matters; although references did arise in a general context, these were in the main related to the issue of household chores.

Importance of household chores and rules

As a strategy for raising children, how important were household chores and rules? Anglo and Vietnamese parents responded almost unanimously. A substantial majority of Anglo (95 per cent) and Vietnamese (97 per cent) parents reported that household chores were important; this applied equally to household rules (Anglo 97 per cent; Vietnamese 98 per cent). They not only helped parents but also provided learning experiences for children. In the Torres Strait Islands, children of preschool age were not expected to help with household chores or to be subject to family rules. Expectations changed, however, once children reached primary school. There were specific chores (cooking, cleaning, washing, looking after younger siblings) expected of eldest daughters and sons to ensure the smooth running of the household.

Qualitative analysis of the data indicated that household chores and household rules were regarded as specific means by which parents taught children about responsibility, co-existence and cooperation.

Responsibility

The following examples illustrate the importance of chores in teaching children responsibility, but in different ways for Anglo and Vietnamese parents. For an Anglo parent, responsibility was about being independent and self-reliant, while for a Vietnamese parent, responsibility was about focusing on the family:

> 'It teaches independence and the ability to run their own lives when they are adults, e.g. to cook and clean for themselves.' (Anglo parent)

> 'To teach the child to have responsibility. Every family member has a joint responsibility toward the family's welfare.' (Vietnamese parent, 7 years residence)

Household rules also taught children about responsibility. The general perception was that rules should be explained to children but that they should not be inflexible. Rules were more about setting guidelines and parameters rather than about strict control:

> 'Important to have rules, but rules can always be flexible. It's good to have basic guidelines so [children] know what is acceptable and expected. But there can always be exceptions.' (Anglo parent)

> 'To live within family circle [important to have] family rule, every member has their place, their role to play, freedom within limit.' (Vietnamese parent, 4 years residence)

Co-existence and cooperation

Further, household rules also taught children about coexistence and cooperation between family members, which was essential to ensure a peaceful household:

> 'I think it shows the child that a family is a unit and works together and that you do things for each other.' (Anglo parent)

'If we want to live harmoniously under one roof, it requires consideration. It helps children understand their limitation.' (Vietnamese parent, 6 years residence)

Discipline

Disciplinary practices are designed to 'inculcate within the child a set of moral standards and values that provide the basis for self controlled behaviour' (Brody and Shaffer 1982:32 quoted in Papps et al. 1995:51). Such practices involve teaching children what are appropriate behaviours as well as controlling child behaviour deemed inappropriate by adults (Papps et al. 1995). The focus here is specifically on controlling those aspects of child behaviour disapproved of by parents; the disciplinary strategies used by parents to respond to it; and, in particular, the use of physical punishment.

Anglo and Vietnamese parents were asked to describe their disciplinary style. The majority of Anglo (54 per cent) and Vietnamese (65 per cent) parents described themselves as 'firm but fair'; but they also reported that disciplining was a component of parenting they did not enjoy (Anglo 47 per cent; Vietnamese 45 per cent). The following examples illustrate how parents experienced discipline:

'I could be a bit better at discipline, there's lots of things I let [children] get away with which I shouldn't do. On the other hand, there's also a lot of things that I don't let them get away with and maybe I should . . . probably discipline's one thing I need to strengthen up on, I think.' (Anglo parent)

'Handling things when one of the children loses their temper with another or hurts, not to fly off the deep end is quite a challenge, [and] handling it when one of them gets angry with me and won't do what they're told.' (Anglo parent)

'I do my best to take care of them but they are very stubborn and it is very difficult to discipline them, control them. When they grow older it must be more difficult.' (Vietnamese parent, 7 years residence)

'If you are too strict with your child it is against the law, if you are too easy they don't listen.' (Vietnamese parent, 4 years residence)

'You can't straighten a bamboo when it is mature. In like manner you must straighten the child while small.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

Child behaviour

Cultural beliefs about children and childhood, particularly as they relate to 'misbehaviour', influence parents in their approaches to discipline. Anglo and Vietnamese parents were asked specific questions to explore their beliefs regarding why children did things adults disapproved of. From a list of seven possible explanations, Anglo parents emphasised that children's 'misbehaviour' was: a matter of natural curiosity (28 per cent); attention-seeking (22 per cent); and a means of testing limits (30 per cent).

Vietnamese parents also perceived some 'misbehaviour' to result from the natural curiosity of children (30 per cent). In contrast to the perceptions of the Anglo sample however, Vietnamese parents tended to regard misbehaviour as not deliberate but rather a way in which children learned (30 per cent). In addition, Vietnamese parents believed that sometimes other people influenced children to 'misbehave' (33 per cent). These views reflect the perceptions held by the wider Vietnamese community in that children

are regarded as not responsible for their actions (Nguyen and Ho, 1995). Islander parents held similar views; that is, young children (babies and toddlers) were perceived as incapable of understanding and were not, therefore, disciplined.

In terms of the 'misbehaviour' of children that parents were concerned with, it was apparent that for children aged under two, parents were focused on issues of child safety, given that this was an age where children explored their environments. Anglo parents highlighted these safety issues. With children aged three to four-and-a-half, the concerns of Anglo and Vietnamese parents broadened to include sibling arguments and rivalry; attention-seeking behaviour and tantrums; ignoring requests or instructions; and aggressive behaviour such as hitting, kicking or biting others. For the older group of children, those aged seven to eight, the issues related to arguments with parents, general defiance, and fighting with siblings. These issues were also of concern for Islander parents, although it was not possible to determine age categories of children.

Discipline approach adopted

How had parents dealt with their children's 'misbehaviour'? In general, discipline was implemented with children aged three years and older with an array of approaches, often in combination. Strategies included: talking/ reasoning/ explanation; ignoring (tantrums); yelling; and isolation (including 'time-out') or withdrawal of privileges. It was apparent that parents in all three samples used reason and explanation as a common disciplinary measure. While parents had indeed resorted to the use of physical punishment (discussed in detail in the next section), and this was reflected in the data for each of the three samples, physical punishment was not identified as forming part of the usual disciplinary approach adopted by Anglo and Vietnamese parents. They may, however, have been reluctant to talk about it. In contrast, Islander parents appeared to be relatively open about referring to physical punishment. Some parents combined the use of inductive and power-assertive methods, while others used a varied approach that was influenced by circumstances at the time.

Combining inductive and power assertive methods

Parents from all three samples drew on a combination of inductive and power-assertive methods. This involved talking/ reasoning/ explanation as a first approach, followed by isolation ('time-out') or yelling if a child's undesired behaviour persisted. This use of inductive reasoning combined with power assertion has been reported elsewhere (Critchley et al. 1998). A point to note is the escalation in the response used by parents if children's 'misbehaviour' continued; this is clearly illustrated in the following examples:

'I try and reason with her at first and then if that doesn't work I lose my temper and she knows I'm cross. If she fights then I bring in punishment, for example, she has to stay in the laundry.' (Anglo parent)

'Explain to her. If she does not listen threaten her.' (Vietnamese parent, 19 years residence)

'I tell them, if they don't do it they get flogged.' (Torres Strait Islander parent)

Using a varied approach

While not reflected in the responses of Vietnamese parents, some Anglo and Torres Strait Islander parents indicated that their approaches to discipline varied, according to a number of factors. These included the mood of the parent, the nature of rules or standards that had been broken, the severity of the transgression, and the age of the child:

'Depends on my mood.' (Anglo parent)

'It depends on the situation now, what they did for you to punish them, some you may look at light punishment. Some you may say - you won't get your meal tonight - or something like that and - go straight to bed, just have a shower and go straight to bed - or - no sweets for you - or something like that, I mean it depends on the situation.' (Torres Strait Islander, young father)

Physical punishment

Legally, the law allows parents to use 'reasonable' physical punishment with their children (Saunders and Goddard 1998; Cashmore and de Haas 1995). This lies at the basis of ongoing public debate with professionals continuing to lobby for legislation that prohibits the physical punishment of children (Saunders and Goddard 1999). In contrast, social attitudes have changed only marginally; while there may well be a stigma about hitting a child in public, there is a general reluctance to support the prohibition of physical punishment, since it is perceived to infringe on a parent's rights.

This was indeed highlighted by Anglo and Vietnamese parents when they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: 'A law to stop parents from smacking or hitting their children is a good idea'. Parents responded using a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

Table 4 shows that the majority of Anglo (60 per cent) and Vietnamese (68 per cent) parents either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the above statement. While more Anglo (18 per cent) than Vietnamese (5 per cent) parents were strongly opposed to the statement, this does not necessarily indicate real differences between the two samples (p > .05). It was a relatively small proportion of Anglo (22 per cent) and Vietnamese (22 per cent) parents who agreed with the statement.

Table 4	Agree with law to stop parents hitting				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Anglo	2	22	17	42	18
Vietnamese	2	20	10	63	5

Note: X^2 (4) = 8.29, p>.05
Source: Parenting-21, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2000.

In general, parents responded differently to the issue of physical punishment. Physical punishment was not a strategy preferred by Anglo parents. Their comments reflected guilt about using physical punishment, invariably using descriptions such as: 'it's ineffective'; 'inappropriate'; 'it's violence'; and 'it comes from anger, doesn't do any good'. One parent said: 'I hate myself for it'. Others talked about the impact on their children: '[child] becomes quite distressed', '[child] is frightened'; 'it hurts, it's pain, it's horrible'.

Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents expressed confusion regarding the implications of the use of physical punishment:

'We dare not apply physical punishment, we may get into trouble with government department.' (Vietnamese parent, 15 years residence)

'We didn't have laws and with my kids now there's laws, you know – you hit a child, you go to court.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

The exercise of strict discipline that included physical punishment was considered an important practice in child-rearing for Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents. Thus, these parents were perplexed that such behaviour be seen as anything other than the exercise of parental responsibility:

'We [physically] discipline our children. Means we love them, care for them. They are our children, we know where to stop, how to control our anger and not to become an abuser.' (Vietnamese parent, 19 years residence)

'It's the way of life we lead, [the way] we were brought up.' (Torres Strait Islander, elder female)

Torres Strait Islander parents expressed a firm belief that physical punishment was an effective way of managing 'misbehaviour' in children. There was a general perception that physical punishment, referred to as 'flogging', had a positive impact:

'Flogging was really hard then, but now to see what sort of person it made us into, well I can't complain.' (Torres Strait Islander, young father)

'Dad was very strict and we weren't allowed to go anywhere, if we would he'd come up and flog us and that's how we learned . . . we know that next time dad tell what not to do, we don't do it. We know what we get, so we learned the hard way.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

Some Islander parents held the view that physical punishment was the only effective way to discipline children:

'Kids know that they are not gonna get belting, only growling [yelling] . . . so they can keep doing it [misbehaving].' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

'If we want to go back to the way we were, we have to go back to the way we disciplined before – if nothing changes it will get worse and worse.' (Torres Strait Islander, young father)

The role of extended family in discipline – Torres Strait Islander sample

The role of the extended family in matters of discipline was not specifically asked of Anglo or Vietnamese parents, nor did it arise spontaneously during interview. In contrast, the involvement of kin in discipline matters did arise as a pertinent issue for Torres Strait Islander parents.

Apart from parents, aunts and uncles were also involved in the discipline of children. Indeed, aunts and uncles, depending on their age, were in a position to veto decisions made by parents regarding discipline. Where an aunt or uncle of the child was the elder sibling of the parent, parents would be reluctant to step in and contradict them or go against their wishes, because of respect for older family members:

'Uncle can override the rights of the father and mother, he is the one we really recognise, especially in teaching. He can say – I don't want this – father and mother can't talk, they respect uncle.' (Torres Strait Islander, young father)

'When my sister belt her son and she go overboard . . . I shout – that's enough – and I grabbed the boy away from her. I said – you have to respect me, I'm his auntie . . . right or wrong, I've intervened.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

Grandparents, on the other hand, rather than involved directly with discipline, nurtured special relationships with their grandchildren:

'Grandparents' door always open for grandchildren – no matter what problem they have with parents. Even if the children are at fault, the grandparents won't side with parents or reinforce their punishment. Their home is a safe haven, a safety net for kids with problems.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced father)

'Aunties and uncles they give a lot of love and care plus discipline, whereas grandparents, the way I see it, they only give love and care, not much discipline because they love [grandchildren] to death.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

As mentioned earlier, for some parents, grandparents represented a source of frustration because they were seen to interfere when parents attempted to discipline their children:

'You'll smack [children] but [grandparents] won't let you and they'll get aunties and uncles to spoil them with lollies. I don't want them to eat it . . . I don't want teeth get rotten.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

'[Grandparents] get really angry when we hit [the children], they spoil them rotten.' (Torres Strait Islander, young mother)

Parents' long-term goals and aspirations

The dawn of a new millennium evokes visions of widespread change. Parents' future aspirations for their children, who will be growing up in the 21st Century, can indicate 'whether the patterns and values of the present are likely to be replicated in the long term' (Andreoni and Fujimori 1998:76).

Parents' general long-term goals were raised in response to the question on 'what it means to be a parent'. The data are presented here because of their relevance to future outcomes for children. As a long-term goal, parenting was about raising well-balanced, responsible, happy, independent human beings. By all accounts, the role of parent and the task of parenting represented a significant and major undertaking. The following examples illustrate how attuned parents were to broader social expectations:

'It's the most important job you will ever do in your life. The social ramifications of parenting are so important because the responsibility is yours to bring happy, well-adjusted people into adulthood . . . The joy and despair are often seconds apart and always oscillating. We really take being a parent so seriously.' (Anglo parent)

'We have responsibilities towards our children – materially provide them with basic necessity such as food, clothing, shelter, entertain, and emotionally, provide them love, care, encouragement – raise them to become a good person.' (Vietnamese parent, 18 years residence)

Torres Strait Islander parents were also focused on ensuring a good future for their children. Essential to this was an education as well as an ability to speak English; this is discussed further below.

Parents in each of the three samples related their aspirations for their offspring specifically to their education, occupation and marriage.

Education

Anglo, Vietnamese and Islander parents expressed a firm desire to see their children complete tertiary education. The following examples illustrate that education was held in particularly high regard by Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents, who regarded it as the only way to secure a good future (via success in securing a 'good job'):

'I hope she can have better, higher education in order to have a stable job. That she doesn't have to work in factory – dirty, heavy job and poorly paid – like her father.' (Vietnamese parent, 5 years residence)

> 'We always advise [our children] you all must go to school and learn to get a good education, get a good job. No school, don't come in my house, that's my policy. I don't want my kids to leave school half-way like. I made that mistake.' (Torres Strait Islander, mother in family group)

Anglo and Islander parents expressed the view that a decision to pursue tertiary studies should ultimately be made by the child:

> 'My husband and I are both tertiary educated but I can't say that I want him to be tertiary educated if that's not what [child] wants.' (Anglo parent)

> 'As long as she is happy and proud of herself, that's all I want.' (Torres Strait Islander, young parent)

Closely linked to education goals was the desire by the Islander parents that their children should learn English. Indeed, learning the English language was regarded as a priority by parents, who perceived it as a vital factor for their children's future success:

> 'I'm hoping that their future will be bright and happy because their English is number one.' (Torres Strait Islander, experienced mother)

There was also, however, a desire for children to be proficient in the local language as well. As an Islander elder put it:

> 'It is only through their language that you can express yourself . . . it would be very hard to try to talk to [children] in English. I can explain all about it in English but there would be no weight, no feeling.' (Torres Strait Islander, community elder)

Learning English was not expressed by Vietnamese parents as an aspiration they held for their children. However, earlier data suggest that it was Vietnamese parents rather than their children who had difficulty with English.

Occupation

Anglo and Vietnamese parents were happy to leave the choice of occupation up to children, although parents hoped that their children would enter professional employment. In contrast, Islander parents had more concrete preferences about employment and made specific reference to their children becoming white-collar professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, health workers) or tradespeople (plumbers and carpenters). Whatever the position though, the consensus was that parents wanted their children to have jobs that were stable, financially secure, interesting and fulfilling.

Adopting a rather pessimistic forecast of the future, a couple of parents simply hoped that there would be jobs for their children. One parent found it difficult to contemplate the types of jobs that might be available in the future:

> 'It's hard to say. I imagine in the 20 years or so when he will be starting work, there will be that many different jobs that we don't even know about now. I hope he's doing something that he likes and that satisfies him.' (Anglo parent)

Marriage

Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents generally hoped to see their offspring eventually marry and have children. One parent offered the following reason for wanting her child to marry in the future:

> 'Because I am happily married I would hope that she could have that happiness too.' (Anglo parent)

Anglo parents also expressed the view that marriage was an aspect of life where the decision really was in the hands of the child. As one parent put it:

> 'I think that's gonna be very much up to him. If he wants to get married he can, if he doesn't, it wouldn't worry me.' (Anglo parent)

One issue distinguished the Vietnamese sample from the other two samples. Vietnamese parents were particularly focused on the theme that their children would have the 'freedom to choose their own partner'. The implication here was that 'mixed' marriages would be acceptable. This was the prevailing sentiment and was expressed by parents who had been in Australia for only four years as well as those who had been here for fifteen years or longer. The following example sums up the view of Vietnamese parents:

> 'Have partner of his own choice, no problem or prejudice against racial marriage, [we will] only provide him advice and guidance.' (Vietnamese parent, 18 years residence)

In a small number of cases, the contrary view was expressed. Both an Anglo as well as a Vietnamese parent expressed the desire that their children marry within their respective cultures:

> 'I prefer she married with our social culture – Anglo-Saxon.' (Anglo parent)

> 'A stable, happy marriage, if possible, to have a partner of the same culture – less difficulty, practical, easy to understand each other.' (Vietnamese parent, 19 years residence)

Some Anglo and Torres Strait Islander parents focused on the quality of their children's future relationships rather than the idea of marriage per se:

> '[I hope] he has a good healthy and sharing relationship – that would be lovely.' (Anglo parent)

> 'A loving husband that will take care of her and not treat her like she is nothing.' (Torres Strait Islander parent)

Summary

There were a number of similarities between the samples of Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents in regard to values, practices, and discipline. Parents wanted to teach their children about history, culture and moral issues, the value of family, the value of education, and religious morals. Parents taught their children those values via role modelling and story telling. The specific differences pertained to the importance of education and religious values. The former was salient for Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander families.

Household chores and rules were perceived as teaching children important practical skills to enable future independent living. They also represented means by which values were transmitted to children. These included: responsibility, towards oneself as well as one's family; and co-existence and cooperation.

Dealing with children's 'inappropriate' behaviour was commonly experienced as difficult, and not as an enjoyable aspect of parenting. In general, parents relied on reasoning and explanation as tools to influence children's behaviour, particularly when it involved teaching them why certain behaviour was inappropriate. These tools

comprise part of the 'inductive' method of discipline as opposed to power-assertive methods, which involve threats, yelling and physical punishment (Papps et al. 1995; Critchley et al. 1998). In fact, it was usual for parents to use a combined approach in discipline, relying on reasoning and explanation in the first instance and followed up if necessary, with using 'time out' or yelling. This highlights the escalation in parents' responses where children's 'misbehaviour' persists. For Torres Strait Islanders, the extended family had an explicit and important role to play in the discipline of children.

In Western societies professionals generally accept that physical punishment has detrimental outcomes for children's development and wellbeing (Balson 1994; Cashmore and de Haas 1995; Donovan 1987; Dreikurs with Soltz 1995; Saunders and Goddard 1999). This was illustrated in the feelings of guilt expressed by Anglo parents who had physically punished their children. In contrast, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents who had used physical punishment expressed confusion. Regarded as an important disciplinary tool, and one not to be abused, there was a sense of disbelief among Vietnamese and Islander parents that the use of physical punishment should imply that they were mistreating their children. There was a sense that their role as parents had been undermined, and that this was further exacerbated by the stigma of being seen as guilty of child abuse as well as appearing to be unaware of alternative approaches.

Some Vietnamese and Islander parents expressed the view that without physical punishment, children would grow up 'spoilt' and 'out of control'. While these sentiments were not raised by Anglo parents, they are, nevertheless, similarly found in the wider mainstream community (Donovan 1987; Saunders and Goddard 1999). It may be that the phenomenological approach (relying on parents' own reports) and the impact of social desirability resulted in an under-reporting of the use of physical punishment. With respect to any formal response, the majority of Anglo and Vietnamese parents disagreed with implementing legal sanctions against physical punishment. This reflects a wider community ambivalence where there is a stigma to physically punishing children in public, but at the same, a reluctance to support a legal sanction that is seen to infringe on the so-called 'parent rights'. In the main, the findings indicated a difference in the way that the use of physical punishment was conceptualised by Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents.

In terms of long-term goals, parents were cognisant of the responsibility and expectation that their children grow up to be contributing and well-adjusted members of the wider community. In regard to parents' future aspirations for their children, education was an important consideration. The expectation and hope that children would complete their schooling and importantly, their tertiary education, was particularly strong among Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander families. For these parents, education was the means to secure a good job and future. For Torres Strait Islander parents, learning English was an important component of education. They also tended to be more specific about the jobs they hoped for their children while Anglo and Vietnamese parents were happy to leave the decision-making regarding occupation up to their children. Generally, parents' comments reflected a tone of optimism regarding the future, although there were a couple of instances where parents expressed concern about the prospect of future employment.

Regarding marriage, most parents expressed the hope that their children would eventually marry and have children. Anglo parents stated that such a decision would be totally up to their children. Vietnamese parents, in contrast, were particularly committed to the idea of marriage. For them, the salient issue regarding marriage was that their children would have the right to choose their own partner. In contrast, Torres

Strait Islander parents focused more on the quality of potential relationships rather than on marriage per se.

Exploring household practices is important because they provide an indication of the nature of parental beliefs. According to Goodnow (1996:317), household practices 'bring out ideas about the general goals of parenting or the general course of development' for children. They also 'provide the ways by which people first come to acquire a culture's concepts' (Goodnow 1996:316). Generally, setting household rules and chores for children was regarded as important by parents. Apart from the practical aspect, the allocation of chores was used by parents as a means by which they taught their children certain values.

The influence of culture is intimately related to parenting practices. Parents from all three samples were sensitive to cultural influences, which was effectively illustrated with the issue of discipline. Anglo parents were conscious of changed social attitudes regarding physical discipline. Vietnamese parents were faced with a changed social and cultural context but were adapting child-rearing practices to reflect mainstream values. Islander parents were faced with an imposed law but they too were adapting to some of the influences of mainstream culture.

6 Conclusion

According to Jamrozik and Sweeney, 'parenting is often portrayed as an ideal which does not correspond with the reality for many families, whether middle-class or working-class, particularly for the latter' (1996:42; Richardson 1993). The objective of Parenting-21 was to explore the reality of parenting experienced by contemporary Australian parents. This report represents a first step in probing and clarifying the similarities and differences in child-rearing between Australian parents of different cultural backgrounds. The Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander communities loosely reflected European, Asian and Indigenous cultures respectively. As a component of the wider mainstream Australian culture, the Anglo sample was used as a base from which to compare parenting in Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander families. However, it is important to emphasise that the three samples were composed of parents who volunteered to take part in the project. In addition, methods of data collection varied across samples. Thus, the results discussed in this report cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the wider population of parents, or to each of the respective communities. Acknowledging this caveat, the findings nevertheless provide various perspectives on contemporary Australian parenting as experienced by three cultural groups of parents. There are a number of important implications that flow from the findings. These encompass the need for cultural understanding; the need for a multi-layered approach to parenting difficulties; recognising that parenting education is not a panacea for all parenting problems; and the role of future research.

Contemporary Australian parenting

Overall, the three samples of parents had a strong commitment to their child-rearing responsibilities, expressing considerable clarity when talking about the short- and long-term future of their children. Their comments reiterated the complex nature of parenting: the joys and pressures experienced as well as the expectations, both personal and social. The findings, in general, indicated similarities across a number of areas of parenting, with differences confined to particular elements (refer to Appendix 1).

This seeming level of congruence between the attitudes and behaviours of the Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander families would suggest that perhaps there might be an 'Australian' style of parenting operating. However, to give any credence to such a proposition would require comparisons of the parenting practices between, for example, Vietnamese parents living in Australia and their counterparts living in Vietnam. Otherwise, there is no real way to tap into the issue of congruence and variability in parenting style. Indeed, the level of congruence among the Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander samples of parents is also indicative of the fact that parenting is a universal activity.

Need for cultural understanding

The findings clearly highlight the need for cultural understanding with the imperative that differences in child-rearing are not defined as deficit models of parenting (Deater-Deckard et al. 1996). Despite the changing nature of parenting, the pressures of social

expectations and the pace of modern life, the relatively privileged position of Anglo parents was evident. Anglo parents did not have to contend with language difficulties or attempt to balance conflicting cultural beliefs. Indeed, the influence of 'culture' was, in the main, taken for granted, regarded as natural. For Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents, however, the influence of the wider culture had strong implications for child-rearing strategies.

Vietnamese parents indicated that they were prepared to adapt aspects of their parenting practices in order to ensure a successful future for their children. In fact, there was a sense that a balance between the mainstream culture and their own culture would be ideal. There was clearly a sense of satisfaction with child-rearing among those parents who perceived that they had achieved this balance. For others, the parenting difficulties weighed heavily. Even though Torres Strait Islander parents were strongly committed to maintaining their traditional cultural identity, they, like their Vietnamese counterparts, wanted their children to succeed in mainstream Australian culture. In order to facilitate this, Islander parents also adopted a 'cultural mapping' approach, combining traditional and Western values. Islander parents were faced with the challenging task of passing on Island traditions (which were to a large extent orally transmitted) yet at the same time working to help their children acquire more 'modern' skills that they perceived to be important for their children's future success, especially related to employment.

Discipline – an example
The theme of discipline provides a particularly effective illustration of the need for cultural understanding and sensitivity. In general, in Western middle-class societies, physical punishment is perceived as a negative parenting practice with detrimental implications for the wellbeing and development of children. The main focus of research has been on parents' use of physical punishment with little investigation of the outcomes for children. In fact, a specific limitation of the Parenting-21 study is that there are no data on how physical punishment actually impacted on child development. The study by Deater-Deckard and colleagues (1996) previously described found no adverse outcomes from physical punishment for African American children. While this study also has limitations, its findings illustrate the importance of the cultural context and the need to question assumptions. The researchers argued that the conceptualisation of authoritarian parenting in general, and physical punishment in particular, cannot be generalised across ethnic and cultural groups. This is a salient point to note in relation to the findings from Parenting-21.

Generally, all three samples of parents expressed anxiety over discipline. In each group there were parents who had used physical punishment but the issues that arose were specific and varied among the three samples. Anglo parents were dealing with changed mainstream social attitudes that frown upon physically responding to children's misbehaviour, especially in public. Thus, Anglo parents expressed feelings of guilt when they talked about their use of physical punishment.

For Vietnamese parents, the issue of discipline generally, and physical punishment specifically, caused confusion and at times, fear. This sample of Vietnamese parents grew up in a culture that advocated strict discipline, including physical punishment (Vuong 1996). With the changed social and cultural context, Vietnamese parents found that the use of physical punishment was a contentious issue and was being argued against by professionals (Saunders and Goddard 1999, 1998). Some Vietnamese parents acknowledged the changed social and cultural context and the inappropriateness of a strict disciplinary approach; they felt comfortable about adapting their child-rearing practices to reflect those of the mainstream culture. Others were unsure as to how to

fulfil their parental responsibilities and were confused about the prospect of being perceived as child abusers if they used physical punishment.

Torres Strait Islander parents were raising children who were more exposed than they themselves had been to mainstream influences. For Islander parents, social changes in the wider mainstream context encroached on some firmly held cultural beliefs about children and child-rearing, including those related to the practice of physical punishment. While Islander parents specified various forms of discipline they used, there were some parents who believed that physical punishment was still the most effective means of managing children's 'misbehaviour'.

Need for a multi-layered approach

Responses to parenting difficulties need to be multi-layered. There is a need to recognise that parenting is situated within a broader social and cultural context and is subject to the influences of a multitude of complex variables. It follows therefore, that any attempt to support families and parenting must necessarily be multi-layered, incorporating both the social influences and the way individual parents fulfil their child-rearing responsibilities. Without an integrated approach, policies such as those aimed specifically at families can be undermined by the influence of broader societal changes (Probert 1999).

There is, of course, the issue of what constitutes 'family policy'. According to Brennan (1999:187), 'family policy' needs to be broadly interpreted: 'A vast range of policies – including those concerning employment, industrial relations, taxation, social security and immigration – can be considered as "family policies". Certainly, these are all areas that have a significant impact upon the resources, opportunities, constraints and choices available to family members'.

A multi-layered approach should also encompass an investment in services such as child care, education and community development (Bowes and Hayes 1999; Brennan 1999). The importance of community development is illustrated in moves to create social connectedness and support where they do not exist (Tomison and Wise 1999). Referred to as 'devised social networks', Vinson, Baldry and Hargreaves noted that these are programs 'which attempt to simulate some of the helpful child-rearing functions attributed to naturally occurring networks' (1996:540). In effect, they are a means to improve the social connectedness of program participants, and are deemed especially important in regard to the prevention of child maltreatment and the promotion of healthy communities (Tomison and Wise 1999).

The Parenting-21 findings clearly illustrated the importance of the broader issues. Employment flexibility made life easier for parents while its absence created difficulties. The availability of work and financial security were also identified by parents as important factors that can affect parenting. It is generally accepted that the availability of support is a crucial element of parenting (Bowes and Hayes 1999; Cochran 1990, 1993; Garbarino 1995; Tomison and Wise 1999). Indeed, the findings demonstrated a considerable degree of inter-dependence between families, as well as the extent to which they relied upon informal networks and professional support to carry out their child-rearing responsibilities.

In effect, it was Torres Strait Islander families who represented an example of communities which were relatively high in 'social capital' (Winter 2000b). This manifested itself at the neighbourhood and community level where there was a sense of security, friendliness and mutual trust, largely nurtured by a shared culture as well as the small geographic size of the communities. It is a culture bound by a strong sense of familial obligations and responsibilities and one where child-rearing is valued and recognised as a responsibility of not only parents, but also the whole community. The

social support for this sample of parents and children was strong and included extended family, neighbours and community elders; and there was a sense of concern and regard for other people's children. It is an aspect of Islander culture that should be further investigated in order to identify methods of strengthening families and communities in mainstream Australian culture.

Such strong social support and high 'social capital' could do little, however, to counter the impact of the physical environment, which created considerable difficulties for Islander parents. They faced an absence of various forms of infrastructure, such as the inadequate provision of water, food, housing and power, and educational facilities which meant that basic physical needs were not being adequately met. A shortage of healthy food meant that Islander parents were dependent upon the provision of food from the mainland; the absence of secondary schools meant sending kids away for further education. These factors negatively impacted on parents' ability to fulfil their parenting responsibilities and posed developmental risks for children.

Parenting education

The importance of parent education was noted by Coleman and Karraker, who stated that parent education programs designed, for example, to increase parents' efficacy beliefs can affect changes in those beliefs which 'has the potential to positively alter both subjective and behavioural responses to parenting' (2000:22).

In fact, the Federal Government's *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* places strong emphasis on supporting families through the funding of parent education programs. While parenting education should represent an integral component of a multi-layered approach, the above issues illustrate the inadequacy of relying on parenting education as a panacea to parenting problems. An extension of parenting education may have little impact in a context of funding cuts to universal services that include maternal and child health, child care and preschools (Ochiltree 1999). Parenting education cannot address some of the issues raised in Parenting-21, which highlighted parenting difficulties related to inflexible working conditions, unemployment, lack of support, and the absence of basic amenities.

Future research

Given the current policy focus on families, it is important to continue with Australian research into parenting and child development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecology model illustrates the impact of the macrosystem on various settings and everyday life. Therefore, it is not a simple matter of adopting policy, education programs, or research outcomes from overseas to Australia since they come from macrosystems that are different to Australia's (Ochiltree 1999). Australian research is necessary to help inform the development of Australian social policy.

A crucial area for further research is to explore how parenting styles affect the outcomes for children in different cultural groups. According to Harkness and Super: 'Demonstrating relationships between parents' cultural belief systems and child outcomes is a complex challenge, but one worth undertaking as the major variations in development are to be found at the level of cultural rather than individual differences' (1996:18). The theme of discipline, particularly the issue of physical punishment, represents one area of parenting where outcomes for children are a particularly important consideration.

An important role for research is to promote understanding of cultural similarities and differences in parenting practices since this has implications for developmental theory as well as practical implications, such as the development of parenting education. Such

research is also important given that it can challenge negative cultural stereotypes. LeVine noted that by learning about parenting beliefs and practices of other cultures 'we uncover universals and variables in the parental predicament and are able to place our current problems in a broader perspective' (1988:1). With cross-cultural studies it is important to also investigate intra-cultural differences, given the wide-ranging variations that may result from socioeconomic and other factors and that may affect the way that parents and children function and develop.

In conclusion, Parenting-21 provides a broad description of contemporary Australian parenting. The wealth of primary data collected from samples of parents from Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander communities incorporates an in-depth account of parenting beliefs and practices and the influence of wider contextual factors that serve to promote or hinder parenting. Since it represents the perspectives of Australian parents whose children will be growing up in the 21st century, the project is an important resource for policy planners, service providers, and parents. Especially with the recent launch of the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy,* the study of parents and their children remains an important area for continued research.

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Appendix 1

Summary of similarities and differences in themes of parenting between Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander parents

Themes of parenting	Anglo	Vietnamese	Torres Strait Islander
* What being a parent means to respondents:			
- Status of parent role	✓	✓	✓
- Parenting has an impact on personal growth	✓	✓	✓
- Daily parenting responsibilities	✓	✓	✓
* Learning about parenting – Family of origin as a source of influence in parenting approaches:			
- Parent's personal qualities	✓	✓	✗
- Emotional & physical nurturing	✓	✓	✓
- Parent/child communication	✓	✗	✓
- Parent involvement & availability	✓	✓	✓
- Discipline practices	✓	✓	✓
- Socio-cultural context	✗	✓	✓
* Main responsibility for parenting & household tasks belongs to:			
- Mother (parenting)	✓	✓	✓
- Mother (household tasks)	✓	✓	✓
* Respondents perceived their parenting STRENGTHS based on:			
- Ability to provide emotional & physical nurturing	✓	✓	✓
- Positive behaviour displayed by children	✗	✗	✓
- Child's future career achievement	✗	✗	✓
* Respondents talked about their parenting SHORTCOMINGS based on:			
- Personal characteristics	✓	✓	✗
- Discipline difficulties	✓	✓	✓
- Parent-child communication problems	✗	✓	✗
* Sources of SATISFACTION with parenting approach:			
- Children's positive behaviour & development	✓	✓	n.a
- Personal parenting ability	✓	✓	n.a
* Sources of MIXED FEELINGS with parenting approach:			
- Lack of parenting ability	✓	✓	n.a
- Difficult parent-child relationship	✗	✓	n.a
* Influence of wider social context – factors that ENHANCE parenting:			
- Local context (community factors)	✓	✗	✓
- Work flexibility	✓	✓	✗
- Work availability	✓	✓	✗
- Support networks	✓	✓	✓
- Financial security	✓	✓	✗
- Quality of marital relationship	✓	✓	✗
- Temperament & behaviour of children	✓	✓	✗

Themes of parenting	Anglo	Vietnamese	Torres Strait Islander
* Influence of wider social context – factors that HINDER parenting:			
- Lack of social support	✓	✓	✗
- Lack of work	✗	✓	✗
- Work hours	✓	✓	✓
- Financial hardship	✓	✓	✗
- Constant responsibility of parenting	✓	✗	✗
- Cultural expectations (community set up for mothering, not fathering)	✓	✗	✗
- Balancing two sets of cultural values	✗	✓	✓
- Local community context (infrastructure & resources)	✗	✗	✓
* Parental support networks incorporated:			
- Informal support	✓	✓	✓
- Formal support	✓	✓	✓
* Role of extended family important because:			
- Gives children a sense of family history & identity	✓	✓	✓
- Children can develop relationships with family members across various generations	✓	✓	✓
- It represents future support network for the child	✓	✓	✓
*Parental values desired for children related to:			
- Cultural history	✗	✗	✓
- Cultural & moral values	✓	✓	✓
- Family	✓	✓	✓
- Education	✗	✓	✓
- Religion	✓	✓	✓
* Parental values passed on to children through:			
- Story telling	✓	✓	✓
- Role modelling	✓	✓	✓
* Chores & rules important for children because it teaches:			
- Responsibility	✓	✓	✓
- Co-existence & cooperation	✓	✓	✓
* Parental approaches to discipline:			
- Involved using a combination of inductive & power assertive methods	✓	✓	✓
- Varied according to factors such as parent mood, and the type of child behaviour involved	✓	✗	✓
- Physical punishment arose as an issue	✓	✓	✓
* Parent goals & aspirations for their child:			
- To attain tertiary education	✓	✓	✓
- Choice of occupation up to child	✓	✓	✓
- Would like to see child in some type of professional occupation	✓	✓	✓
- Would like to see child eventually marry	✓	✓	✓
- Would like to see child in stable & loving relationship (does not have to be marriage)	✓	✗	✓
- Child will have 'freedom to choose own (marriage) partner'	✗	✓	✗

n.a – not available because not specifically asked and not indirectly raised
✓ - indicates theme was mentioned by parents
✗ - indicates theme was not mentioned by parents
Source: Parenting-21, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2000.