

**The Experiences of Migrant Children  
in the Catholic Primary School  
in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s**

Submitted by

Christine Mary Creaser

BA Economics (Deakin), B.Theology (MCD),

Grad.Dip.Tourism, (Monash),

MA Australian Studies (Monash)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education and Arts

Australian Catholic University

Research Services

Locked Bag 4115

Fitzroy, Victoria, 3065

AUSTRALIA

Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

All research procedure reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics committees and organisations (where required).

Candidate's Signature ..... *E.M. Crease* .....

Date ..... *05/01/2015* .....

# Table of Contents

Figures .....	vii
Tables .....	viii
Abstract .....	x
Acknowledgements .....	xiv
Introduction to the Topic .....	xvii
Chapter One - Background and Context of the Study.....	1
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 History of Migration to Australia .....	2
1.3 Maltese Migration .....	8
1.3.1 Maltese migrants and Catholicism .....	15
1.3.2 Maltese migrants and education .....	19
1.3.3 Maltese migrants and literacy .....	24
1.3.4 Racial prejudice in Australia .....	27
1.3.5 The future for subsequent generations of Maltese migrants .....	30
1.3.6 Achievements of the Maltese migrants .....	31
1.3.7 How the Church managed the Maltese Catholics .....	32
1.3.8 Maltese parental expectations of their children .....	36
1.3.9 The Maltese contribution to Australian life .....	37
1.4 Polish Migration .....	37
1.4.1 The politics of Poland .....	37
1.4.2 Polish migration history .....	39
1.5 Conclusion .....	44
Chapter Two - Literature Review .....	45
2.1 Introduction .....	45
2.2 The Catholic Church in Rome and its Attitude to Migration .....	47
2.3 The Australian Catholic Church and Migration .....	49
2.4 The Development of Catholic Education in Australia .....	56

2.5	Problems within Schools .....	69
2.5.1	Overcrowding .....	69
2.5.2	Staffing .....	73
2.5.3	Authority within schools .....	77
2.5.4	Changed roles of the religious .....	80
2.5.5	Laification of the schools .....	83
2.6	Part II: The Experiences of the Migrant Child in the Catholic Primary School in the 1950s and 1960s. ....	89
2.6.1	The attitudes of Australians to the migrant .....	89
2.7	Australia's Experience of Migration and School Education.....	94
2.8	Research into Conditions of Children at School and their Academic Achievements.....	96
2.9	Research into Migrant Children in Schools .....	97
2.10	Comparisons of Various Ethnic Group Children at School and their Adjustment .....	98
2.11	The School Experiences of the Non-English Speaking Child in the Catholic Primary School in the 1950s and 1960s: General Migration Studies.....	110
2.12	The Multicultural Aspects of Children and Catholic Schooling: Migrant and School Studies .....	112
2.13	Migrant Children's Ethnic Backgrounds in Catholic School Learning Programmes: Studies of Australian Children Compared with Migrant Children .....	115
2.14	Conclusion .....	117
	Chapter Three - The Design of the Research .....	122
3.1	Introduction .....	122
3.2	The Choice of Qualitative Research .....	123
3.3	Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design.....	125
3.4	Ontology .....	126
3.5	Epistemology.....	128
3.6	Symbolic Interactionism .....	129
3.7	The Methodology of Grounded Theory.....	131
3.8	Constructivist Grounded Theory .....	132

3.9	Issues of ‘Sampling’ .....	135
3.10	The Method: Oral History Narratives Through in Depth Interviews. ....	138
3.10.1	Oral history narratives .....	138
3.10.2	How participants were recruited. ....	140
3.10.3	Analysing the data.....	145
3.11	Conclusion .....	151
Chapter Four - Perceptions and Testimonies of the Teaching Religious Sisters.....		152
4.1	Introduction .....	152
4.2	Training.....	155
4.3	Classroom Conditions.....	161
4.4	Equipment .....	169
4.5	Discipline .....	171
4.6	English Literacy .....	174
4.7	Perceptions of the Ethnic Groups.....	178
4.8	Conclusion .....	184
Chapter Five - Stories of the Maltese Participants.....		188
5.1	Maltese Migration History .....	188
5.2	Birthplaces of the Interviewees .....	190
5.3	Family Backgrounds.....	190
5.4	Beginning School .....	194
5.5	Schooling .....	198
5.5.1	Paying fees.....	198
5.6	School Experiences .....	200
5.6.1	Discrimination by teachers .....	200
5.6.2	Discrimination by other children .....	203
5.6.3	Overall experiences and preparation for later life.....	206
5.6.4	Attitudes of parents to education and their ambitions for their children.....	208
5.6.5	Learning English and the Australian way .....	219

5.6.6	Children’s assessment of their own abilities .....	221
5.6.7	Education levels of parents.....	225
5.6.8	Discipline.....	226
5.6.9	Prejudice.....	230
5.6.10	Self-imposed discrimination.....	234
5.6.11	Still in the Church .....	234
5.6.12	Conclusion.....	235
Chapter Six - Stories and Testimonies of the Polish Interviewees .....		240
6.1	Introduction.....	240
6.2	Polish Migration History .....	240
6.3	Birthplace of the Interviewees .....	243
6.4	Family Backgrounds.....	244
6.5	Beginning School.....	249
6.6	Paying Fees .....	256
6.7	Learning English and the Australian Way.....	257
6.8	School Experiences .....	261
6.9	Discrimination by Teachers .....	265
6.10	Overall Experiences and Preparation for Later Life.....	266
6.11	Children’s Assessment of their own Abilities.....	270
6.12	Education Levels of Parents.....	272
6.13	Discipline .....	275
6.14	Family Relationships .....	278
6.15	Prejudice .....	279
6.16	Self-imposed Discrimination .....	280
6.17	Other Problems Faced by Polish Migrant Children .....	280
6.18	Still in the Church.....	281
6.19	Conclusion .....	281
Chapter Seven - Differences in Experiences .....		284

7.1	Introduction .....	284
7.2	Migration History .....	284
7.3	The Catholic Church's Response .....	285
7.4	Teaching Methods .....	286
7.5	Differing Maltese and Polish Experiences .....	287
7.6	Birthplace of the Interviewees .....	292
7.7	Schooling .....	293
7.7.1	Paying fees.....	293
7.7.2	Discipline.....	295
7.7.3	Learning English and the Australian way .....	297
7.8	School Experiences .....	301
7.8.1	Discrimination by teachers.....	301
7.8.2	Discrimination by other children .....	302
7.8.3	Overall experiences and preparation for later life.....	303
7.8.4	Attitudes of parents to education and their ambitions for their children.....	304
7.8.5	Satisfaction with their schooling? .....	306
7.9	On-going Involvement in the Church.....	307
	Chapter Eight - Discussion.....	309
	Chapter Nine - Conclusion .....	317
9.1	New Learning.....	317
9.2	Catholic Education in the 1950s and 1960s.....	321
9.3	Backgrounds of Maltese and Polish Children Arriving in Australia.....	322
9.4	Classroom Experiences of Newly Arrived Maltese and Polish Children.....	323
9.5	Nuns' Experiences of Teaching New Arrivals.....	324
9.6	Nuns' Teacher Training .....	325
9.7	Nuns' Views of How Teaching Approaches affected Polish and Maltese Children's Learning.....	325
	Appendix I - Legend Used to Identify Interviewees: .....	327
	Appendix II - Ethics Approval Letter .....	328

Appendix III - Letter Inviting Individuals to Participate .....	329
Appendix IV - Consent Form for Interviewees .....	332
Appendix V - Framework of Questions 1 .....	333
Appendix VI - Framework of Questions 2 .....	335
Bibliography .....	336

## Figures

---

<i>Figure 1.1</i>	<i>Analysis of intercensal increases of population: Victoria.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Figure 1.2</i>	<i>Catholics as a proportion of the total Australian population, 1881-2001.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Figure 1.3</i>	<i>Number of immigrants in thousands to Canada and Australia, 1959-1971.</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Figure 1.4</i>	<i>School retention rates - ethnic communities .....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Figure 2.1</i>	<i>Catholics registered in Victoria from 1871 to 2001 .....</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Figure 2.2</i>	<i>The different percentages of the Catholic population in Melbourne by their birthplace in 1981.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Figure 2.3</i>	<i>Roman Catholic adherents receiving instruction at different kinds of Australian schools, 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1933.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Figure 2.4</i>	<i>Comparison of Polish and Maltese children aged between 0 and 14, various census.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Figure 2.5</i>	<i>Enrolments in Catholic primary schools, Archdiocese of Melbourne, various years.....</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Figure 2.6</i>	<i>Percentage of Catholic children attending government schools.....</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Figure 2.7</i>	<i>Religious teachers as a percentage of total teaching staff at Catholic schools in Victoria. ....</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Figure 2.8</i>	<i>Classes in Catholic schools with numbers above 50. ....</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Figure 2.9</i>	<i>Religious teachers as a percentage of total teaching staff at Catholic schools in Victoria. ....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Figure 2.10</i>	<i>Numbers of religious and lay teachers in Catholic schools.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Figure 2.11</i>	<i>Ages of teaching religious .....</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Figure 2.12</i>	<i>Lay graduates from Catholic Teachers' Colleges .....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Figure 2.13</i>	<i>Retention rates of school children in Malta secondary schools, 1986-87 .</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Figure 5.1</i>	<i>Year of arrival in Australia (Maltese).....</i>	<i>189</i>
<i>Figure 5.2</i>	<i>Australian fertility rate over time .....</i>	<i>192</i>
<i>Figure 6.1</i>	<i>Year of arrival in Australia (Polish) .....</i>	<i>243</i>

## Tables

---

<i>Table 1.1</i>	<i>Analysis of Intercensal Increases of Population: Victoria (Exclusive of full-blooded Aboriginals) .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Table 1.2</i>	<i>Major Religious Affiliations: Census Years .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Table 1.3</i>	<i>Data on Migration from Malta to Three Major Destinations Showing Differences in Numbers .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Table 1.4</i>	<i>Malta-born Residents in Australia, by Year .....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Table 1.5</i>	<i>Percentage Age Distribution of Emigrants and of the Total Population of Malta .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Table 1.6</i>	<i>Marital and Sex Structure of Adult Emigrants and Total Adult Population (Adult = Over 15 Years of Age) .....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Table 1.7</i>	<i>Percent Distribution by Socio-Economic Grouping of Economically Active Emigrants* and of the Economically Active Total Population. ....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Table 1.8</i>	<i>Rate of Literacy/Illiteracy in the Maltese Population Above Five Years Old, Various Censuses, 1911-1931 .....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 1.9</i>	<i>Illiteracy in Malta by Age Group .....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Table 1.10</i>	<i>Religious Affiliations of Maltese Immigrants using 1986 Census (Percentages) .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Table 1.11</i>	<i>Polish Population Changes in Age and Sex Ratios between 1931 and 1946 .....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Table 2.1</i>	<i>Catholics in Victoria, 1871-2001 .....</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Table 2.2</i>	<i>Proportion of Overseas Born in the Total and the Catholic Population of Australia from Census 1947 to Census 1981 .....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Table 2.3</i>	<i>Percentage of Catholics by Birthplace, Living in Melbourne in 1981. ....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Table 2.4</i>	<i>Numbers of Polish and Maltese Immigrant Children Aged between 0 and 14 in Australia between Census Years 1933 and 1971 .....</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Table 2.5</i>	<i>Top Eight Occupations for Poles and Maltese .....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Table 2.6</i>	<i>School Age Children Migrating to Victoria between 1950 and 1960 .....</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Table 2.7</i>	<i>Number of Religious Engaged in Teaching in Catholic Schools .....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Table 2.8</i>	<i>Percentage of Lay Teachers Working in Catholic Schools .....</i>	<i>74</i>

---

<i>Table 2.9</i>	<i>Australian Religious Personnel, 1901-1976.....</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>Table 2.10</i>	<i>Relative Representation of Lay Teachers in Schools in Melbourne Archdiocese .....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Table 2.11</i>	<i>Classes Sizes in Catholic schools .....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Table 2.12</i>	<i>Teachers in Catholic Parish Schools .....</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Table 2.13</i>	<i>Australian Attitudes to Migration (Percentages).....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Table 2.14</i>	<i>Percentage of Melbourne Respondents (1948 and 1964) Who Were Favourable to the Migration of Eight Selected Ethnic and National Groups.....</i>	<i>92</i>
<i>Table 3.1</i>	<i>Overview of the Research Design.....</i>	<i>125</i>
<i>Table 3.2</i>	<i>Inductive Logic of Research in a Qualitative Study.....</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>Table 3.3</i>	<i>Interview Schedule .....</i>	<i>145</i>
<i>Table 3.4</i>	<i>Example of Data Analysis of Collected Data.....</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>Table 5.1</i>	<i>Participants' Year of Arrival in Australia (Maltese).....</i>	<i>188</i>
<i>Table 5.2</i>	<i>Sponsorship for Migrants, Settling in Australia.....</i>	<i>189</i>
<i>Table 5.3</i>	<i>The Family Sizes of Those Maltese Who Were Interviewed For This Study</i>	<i>193</i>
<i>Table 5.4</i>	<i>Age on Arrival (Maltese).....</i>	<i>196</i>
<i>Table 5.5</i>	<i>Satisfied with the Educational Progress? .....</i>	<i>207</i>
<i>Table 5.6</i>	<i>Educational Aspirations of School Children in Australia in 1975 .....</i>	<i>209</i>
<i>Table 6.1</i>	<i>Year of Arrival in Australia (Polish).....</i>	<i>242</i>
<i>Table 6.2</i>	<i>Number of Children in the Polish Families.....</i>	<i>249</i>
<i>Table 6.3</i>	<i>Age on Arrival (Polish) .....</i>	<i>249</i>
<i>Table 6.4</i>	<i>Satisfied with the Educational Progress? .....</i>	<i>270</i>

## **Abstract**

---

Very little research has been undertaken into the Catholic primary school as it existed in Melbourne in the 1950s and 1960s. At this time, all over Australia, the infrastructure (which included school buildings) had been allowed to decline in order to allow everything to be directed towards the war effort. The situation that children all over Australia faced in their schools comprised outdated buildings and very little resources. There were insufficient teachers as fewer had been trained during the Second World War, and conditions were a long way from ideal. This was also the situation in government schools, but in Catholic schools it was much worse because there was no government funding to help to re-establish class rooms and provide needed resources.

The end of the War brought the soldiers back to Australia resulting in a marked rise in the birth rate, which in turn brought a large increase in the numbers of children needing to begin school from the 1950s onward. Add to this situation, the arrival, from the late 1940s of thousands of refugees and displaced persons from Europe, the large number of whom were non-English speaking. More than fifty per cent of these migrants professed an association with the Catholic Church and were thereby in need of a Catholic education for their children.

At the same time, the numbers of women entering the religious life was growing much more slowly than the numbers of children needing a Catholic education. The sum total of all these factors occurring simultaneously resulted in huge class sizes, insufficient quantities and quality of teaching resources, inadequate school buildings, either because of their age in inner city areas or because in new, outer suburban suburbs, there were no schools and such things as church halls or temporary buildings had to be used. Such was the need for teachers, that teacher training was often hastened so that classes would have a teacher. On top of all this, no

provision was made for the teaching of English to those children whose first language was not English. None of the teachers, either in Catholic schools or government schools, had any idea of how to go about this and all expected the children to pick it up as they went along. Teachers coped as best they could to manage the situations in which they found themselves.

This chaotic situation is what prompted the researcher to undertake a study to try to understand what the migrant children, in particular, experienced in order to gain an education.

From such an oral history project, it was hoped:

- to gain some understanding of the situation in the Catholic education system at the time of peak migration in the 1950s and 1960s together with the changes which occurred at this time, and;
- to try to understand the situation under which the teaching Religious were working;
- to try to understand the experiences of the migrant children who were undertaking their primary school education at that time.

Because there were so many migrant groups arriving in Australia at that time, the task of studying representative samples of all of them is far too large for a study of this kind, so a decision needed to be made as to which ethnic groups should be part of the project. The Italian was the largest group, but there has been a volume of study already undertaken about them. The next largest group was the Greek, but as they follow Orthodox beliefs, they were unlikely to be looking for a Catholic education for their children. The next two groups, both much smaller than the Greeks and the Italians, were about the same size. These were the Polish and the Maltese and it was decided that both groups could be studied and perhaps it could be determined not only what life had been like for them in a new country where the way of life was so different to what they had experienced in their home country and where they could not understand the language, but if they had experienced their transitions to Australia in the same way.

An oral history project was decided as being the best way to gather the information needed, allowing the interviewees to tell their stories without being confined to the boundaries of a questionnaire. This would allow interviewees to describe events and situations of which the researcher was not aware. Investigations were undertaken to determine what the backgrounds were to each ethnic group's lives in their respective countries of origin. What the situation was like in Australia at that time was also investigated.

The researcher needed to know in what physical conditions the immigrants lived when they first arrived and what the financial situation of the family as well as the number of children in the family and where the interviewee fitted in the family. The physical situation in which they were schooled was considered important and what they learned from their teachers. The researcher believed it was relevant to find out what conditions were like in the school from the teachers' point of view, to enable the broadest understanding of what the children experienced.

Finding migrants who had attended a Catholic primary school in the 1950s and 1960s was much more difficult than anticipated and eventually the snowball method of sampling was employed. In this approach, the interviewee who had responded to the initial requests for interviews which were made through ethnic organisations and clubs, and through the church newspapers, were asked to recommend others of their ethnic group to become interviewees. Social encounters sometimes resulted in more suitable references, thus more snowballing as more suggested interviewees were recruited.

The teaching sisters were found by sending letters to each of those orders who had been responsible for providing sisters to teach in Catholic schools, requesting interviewees willing to talk about their experiences. Several of the sisters from these orders agreed to be

interviewed. How they managed to cope under the very difficult situations in which they found themselves, adds to the picture.

A list of questions was drawn up to set the direction of the interviews not to be a rigid path to follow. From here interviewees were encouraged to talk about their personal experiences and what they felt about their primary school life. Each of the interviews was carefully dissected to find out what the common experiences were and what factors most impinged on the stories. Experiences to more than one interviewees were considered most important, and what the sisters talked about enhanced the whole picture.

From this research project, it was hoped that a better understanding of what the post-war child immigrants to Australia experienced as they settled, would be illustrated. Although many advances have been made in teaching migrant children and of the need to teach them English as a second language, rather than letting them learn from the other children, it is the more personal experiences of 'slings and arrows' that can be transferred to today's migrants, so that we can teach them with more understanding.

## Acknowledgements

---

This exercise has been a wonderful journey where I have met some wonderful people, a number of whom have become good friends. I have visited some great places in the course of my search for information and have learned much more than I ever anticipated, in the process.

The first people whom I must acknowledge and thank are my two supervisors, Associate Professor Kath Engebretson and Dr Michael Buchanan, both from the School of Religious Education in the Faculty of Education at the Australian Catholic University. I very much appreciate their varied skills and expertise which they have imparted to me to enable the completion of this treatise. I realise that supervising someone such as I, being so much older than either of them, could not have been easy and I thank them for their perseverance. Many thanks go to Dr Richard Rymerz with whom I began the voyage.

Father Terry Curtin found me a supervisor when I had given up hope. Without his help I wouldn't have started this project.

Dr Robert Dixon from the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference kindly provided documents indicating in which parishes in Melbourne Poles and Maltese were concentrated.

I am very grateful to Dr Rachel Naughton of the Catholic Historical Commission for her help in accessing documents in relation to the Catholic Education Office and the Catholic Migration Committee.

Much insight into the Maltese people and their reasons for and attitudes to migration, was learned from the late Bishop Joseph Grech (a migrant himself) in Australia, and Msgr Philip Calleja in Malta. Both gentlemen had worked with migrants for many years (the latter from

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

50 years working on the Emigrants' Commission in Malta) and were generous with their time and wisdom in understanding of migrants and migration issues

My children are the next people whose patience and persistence I must acknowledge. Angus, Liesl and Megan have provided me not only with bed and board when I have come to town, but also great encouragement to finish what I started, particularly when I have reached a low point in the journey. To Isobel, my cousin, who proof read for me and Julia, my friend, who undertook the formatting, - my grateful thanks.

To my study buddy, Denise Goodwin, who has fed me and provide me with a bed at times, who has encouraged and advised me from her own experience, I will always be very grateful. To her family who have endured me taking over part of their mother's time, - thank you very much.

My thanks also go to the Leviny family who also were very generous with their bed, board and encouragement.

Without the support of the friends in the HDR room, who knew exactly where I was at and what was needed, I might never have finished this research. To Lily-Claire, Annie, Peter, Gerry, Tom, Verana and Syehrial, I shall always be grateful.

To the most important of all, the people who allowed me to interview them, thank you. Without you there would have been no study.

To the library staff at both Catholic Theological College and Australian Catholic University, I am very much indebted. Thank you.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

I am also grateful to the people in Malta who gave me much assistance especially the staff at the University of Malta library who enabled me to understand how the education system worked in Malta. I am grateful to all of you.

# Introduction to the Topic

---

## Background to the topic of this thesis

### Documenting the stories

With the exception of the indigenous people, Australia is a nation of migrants. For the first 170 years of European settlement the migrants were largely from the British Isles, but this was to change radically after the Second World War. Today the diversity of races that comprises modern Australia would have been unimaginable in the first century of British settlement. This diversity carries within it millions of stories of displacement, journey, loss of familiar places and ways of life, and new beginnings often under strange new conditions. For the most part these stories are never told except within family and friendship groups. A particular strength of this thesis is that it tells hitherto untold stories of Maltese and Polish children who came into Australian Catholic schools in the 1950s and 60s. It also tells of the stories, perceptions and experiences of some of the teaching religious into whose under-resourced classrooms these children came. As such, the research reported in this thesis makes a unique contribution not only to the history of Australian migration, but also to the history of Catholic education in Australia. It gives voice to some of the personal and familial stories that underlie these histories.

Some sixty years ago the Anglo-centred way of life in Australia changed forever. The greatest changes happened in the 1950s and 1960s with the arrival of the economic migrants from southern Europe and people of other nations displaced by war. Having personally lived through these times, the complete redesign of cultural mores has always fascinated the researcher. We now drink more wine than beer, women are allowed to drink in hotel bars in

establishments which bear no resemblance to the tiled walls and sawdust strewn floors of yesteryear's 'pubs', food has gone from 'meat and three vegs' to a gourmet's paradise, we play soccer as well as rugby and Australian Rules, olive oil is no longer purchased in small bottles at the pharmacy, and we travel overseas so much more. This is almost completely due to the European migrants (the first of Australia's waves of migration) who left war-torn Europe after the Second World War to begin new lives in Australia.

These migrants used their backs and muscles to build great national infrastructures and to establish our manufacturing industries. They were and continue to be heavily involved in agricultural pursuits, including fruit orchards, in the wine industry, in construction and in many more areas. Frequently their professional and trade qualifications were not recognised in Australia and those who had acquired them often found themselves 'digging ditches' as their fellow migrants were. Many of these migrants have become very successful and their offspring are involved at every level of Australian government, the professions and business.

While the changes had a profound effect on the Anglo population of Australia, it must have had an even bigger effect on the migrants themselves, especially those who spoke no English and even more particularly on their children. Those children who went through the trauma of migration and attended primary school in the 1950s and 1960s are now getting older, with the most of them now aged between 50 and 70. The researcher believed it was important for future generations to understand what these migrants went through to become part of the fabric of Australia's multiculturalism.

### **The selection of Maltese and Polish migrants for this study**

As the design of the research project was evolving, it very quickly became clear that to attempt to interview representative migrant children from the full range of ethnic groups who

had migrated to Australia and who attended a Catholic primary school in the 1950s and 1960s, made the project unmanageably large. The two biggest migrant groups were the Italians and the Greeks; however the Greeks were Orthodox, not Catholic, and a large amount of research has already been done on Italian migrants. It was thus decided to base the research on one of the smaller ethnic groups. The Maltese migrants were the third biggest ethnic group with the Polish migrants of a comparable size and it was ultimately decided to study these two groups. Both groups tended to have settled in the western suburb of Sunshine and the Maltese have tended to stay in the western suburbs region of Melbourne – most moving only one or two suburbs away from where they lived when they first arrived. To a degree, many of the Poles also stayed quite close to where they first settled, but a significant number of them had moved away from the western suburbs.

### **Research Aims and Research Questions**

The aims of this research were twofold. The first aim was to gather and analyse the oral narratives of Maltese and Polish adults who attended Catholic primary schools in Victoria in the 1950s and 60s. Answers were sought to three research questions: firstly,

RQ 1. What was Catholic education like during the period 1950-1970,

RQ 2. What were the educational and social backgrounds of the Maltese and Polish students when they arrived in Australia?

RQ 3. What were the classroom experiences of Maltese and Polish children as newly arrived students during the 1950-1970 period?

A secondary aim was to explore the classroom situation in Catholic schools of the 1950s and 1960s from the perspective of the nuns who were the educators in Catholic schools. Oral

narratives from a number of religious sisters who had taught these children, were gathered, in an attempt to find some understanding of the following questions:

RQ 4. What were the nuns' experience of teaching new arrivals, especially Polish and Maltese children during the 1950s and 1960s?

RQ 5. What teacher training had they received?

RQ 6. How did the nuns see their approach to teaching these Polish and Maltese children, had affected their learning?

Because World War II had created a backlog in education infrastructure, and because the number of children in Australia (the baby boomers) had increased hugely, (both factors which adversely affected the education conditions available at that time) it was considered important to determine whether these migrant children had indeed been more disadvantaged than Australian born children, and, of course, using the appropriate life narrative approach, simply to tell their stories.

To achieve the aim of the research, Maltese and Polish adults were interviewed about their experiences of education in the Catholic primary schools of Melbourne in the two decades following the Second World War. In addition, religious sisters, who had been teaching in schools where migrants were present in large numbers, were also interviewed.

### **Selecting the research method**

Two methods were considered to be appropriate in gaining the information needed to document the migrant children's experiences. One method was to ask the interviewees to fill in a questionnaire and the other was to conduct face to face interviews. The questionnaire method would have been a much quicker way of gathering the information, provided a

sufficiently large number of willing clients could be found to whom questionnaires could be sent. Experience shows that less than half of these would be returned, completed. Therefore to gather enough information using this method, questionnaires would need to be sent to a large number of potential respondents.

A second method was that of the face-to-face interview. This allows the interviewer to establish a relationship with the person being interviewed and to probe any interesting responses, something which cannot be done with a written questionnaire. Having established a rapport with the interviewer, the respondent can be encouraged to talk about more personal things because a relationship of trust has been developed. For this reason, the second method was chosen. Because the enlistment of interviewees was not likely to be easy, the personal approach enabled the interviewer to ensure that almost every contact would result in a positive exchange of information.

In order to get the best understanding of the childhood experiences of these children, it was decided to conduct one-on-one in-depth interviews, lasting approximately 45 minutes, which allowed the interviewer to probe some answers more fully and to assess body language as questions were being answered. With in-depth interviews as the method to be used for gathering information, a check list of potential topics was drawn up in order to make sure that those areas of their education which were of most interest to the researcher, were probed. This checklist was not a rigid list of questions but rather a guide to elicit a response from the person being interviewed, while at the same time, the person was allowed (and encouraged) to embellish the story with as many reminiscences as they wanted to share. Only in the event that the interviewee was straying too far from the subject being researched, would the interviewer intervene to bring the conversation back to something more relevant to the aims

of the research project. The details of the research design used in this study are provided at length in Chapter three.

### **Gathering the participants**

Finding where to reach potential interviewees, as expected, was not an easy exercise, so contemporary parish data provided by Dr Robert Dixon from the Australian Bureau of Census and Statistics, was examined to see where most Maltese and Polish migrants had settled when they arrived in Melbourne. Not surprisingly, they had settled where work was likely to be found and both groups had lived in the Sunshine area at that time. To this day, many of the former migrants had not moved very far away from the place they had first settled, the Maltese more stable than the Poles. During the 1950s and 1960s there were three parish schools in the Sunshine area and it was decided to approach the schools for access to their past pupils' contact information, particularly as one of these schools was celebrating a fiftieth anniversary of its founding. A comprehensive list of the ethnic associations connected with the two ethnic groups was accessible via the internet and an approach via mail to these associations was deemed an alternative way of inviting participants to join in the research. All of this information provides the content of the detailed account of the research design which is found in Chapter three of this thesis.

### **Structure of thesis and what can be expected in each chapter**

Following this brief introduction, the thesis comprises eight chapters. The first chapter sets the scene at the beginning of the post-World War II migration period in Australia. It describes the conditions prevailing in Australia at that time, such as the need for migrants in Australia and the attitudes Australians exhibited towards them. The wide spread belief that migrants needed to blend into the community (i.e. assimilate) as quickly as possible and the

total lack of understanding of the conditions under which most of the migrants had lived prior to their acceptance into Australia, was not considered to be important or even relevant. The Catholic Church at the time, like most Australian institutions, expected that the Catholics who were the most common religious group amongst the migrants would seamlessly fit into the community because, after all, wasn't the Church the same all over the world? Some sections of this chapter are devoted to the pre-migration situations of the Maltese and the Poles and what circumstances were existing at the time of their migration.

Chapter two discusses some of the research previously conducted by various government agencies and by academic researchers who have striven over the years to understand what obstacles and prejudices Australia's new population had encountered, and what could be done to make their experiences more pleasant and enable them to be happy, productive members of Australian society. While we cannot undo the mistakes that were made when the 1950s and 1960s migrants arrived in Australia, perhaps by paying attention to them, we could make the experiences of the subsequent waves of migrants a little more comfortable and less traumatic. It was also considered important that this area in Australia's ongoing history be recorded for future generations.

The methodology used in this study and the reasons it was chosen, are discussed, explained and justified in Chapter three. This chapter covers the way individuals, willing to submit themselves to be interviewed, were sourced. What was needed were individuals who had either been born in Europe to parents who subsequently migrated to Australia or who had been born in Australia to a couple, at least one of whom had been born in Europe, had survived the war and come to Australia as a migrant. They also needed to have attended a Catholic primary school between 1950 and 1970. Those born in Australia who had at least one parent born in Europe prior to the Second World War, were included. Requests were

also sent to a number of female religious orders who had been involved in teaching primary school children. The sisters who had experienced teaching migrant children in the time frame which had been determined, were asked to speak of their experiences. The questions asked of them covered similar areas of the Catholic primary school experience as were asked of the pupils at that time. These questions were chosen in order to discover the broadest range of factors affecting the migrant children's educational experiences.

Chapters four, five and six report the various stories the interviewees told. Chapter four tells the religious sisters' stories – their training, their living conditions, the conditions under which they taught. Also reported were their impressions of their pupils if they were offered. Chapter five describes the challenges and problems which those pupils of Maltese ethnicity underwent, in their efforts to 'fit in' to Australian society and yet still preserve their 'Malteseness'. The more articulate and arresting Maltese stories are related and sections quoted verbatim in this chapter. What the Polish children experienced at school is described in Chapter six, together with episodes from some of the more articulate and arresting stories. Care was taken to ensure the interviews for both Poles and Maltese were conducted, as far as possible, in the same way and asking very similar questions. At times these stories became very painful for those being interviewed and, although the stories needed to be told, it became very important not to distress the interviewees excessively.

Be they little or large, these episodes have affected how migrant children think of school, teachers, the Church and Australia as a whole. How little Anglo-Australians knew of life outside Australia is illustrated by the assumptions they made as to the best way to educate children from a culture alien to their own. What educators expected of the children can be compared with what the children and their families expected and the level of disappointment which existed when each fell short of the others' expectations.

Chapter seven brings the range of stories together, in all their variations - Poles and Maltese, boys and girls, those born after their parents had migrated and those born overseas, those who had been sponsored by friends or family and those who came knowing no one, those who finished their schooling and those who did not. This was done to discover whether there was such a thing as **the** migrant experience or whether different ethnicities experienced the migration process differently or whether each individual experienced the changes uniquely. The issues of how Australians could have improved the way they dealt with migrating groups of different ethnicities and perhaps what could be done to make the experience less traumatic in the future, are implied in this discussion. The final chapter that follows brings together the findings of the research, emphasises its significance, explains its limitations and delimitations and makes suggestions for further research.

# Chapter One - Background and Context of the Study

---

## 1.1 Introduction

In order to establish what prompted the Post-Second World War migration from Europe to Australia, it was imperative that the conditions which existed in both continents be described. The need to escape from the devastation brought about by the war was the driving force sending individuals far from their countries of origin where many were living in refugee camps or in badly damaged houses and cities. In Australia, there was a drive among the people to ‘populate or perish’, a popular catch cry. Infrastructure had been neglected in favour of the war effort and the labour force was not large enough to overcome this. Hence, Australia needed manual labour to address the issues involving large construction projects such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme. Thus, the Australian Government established a number of agreements with European governments to subsidise the transport costs for potential migrants from Europe to enable those who so desired, to migrate to Australia.

The conditions which existed in Australia at the time, including the attitudes of the government, the general population and the Catholic Church were all investigated, as were the expectations of the Australian people of the roles the migrants were to assume and the behaviour and attitudes they were to adopt. Also described were the conditions which existed in the countries of origin of the migrants and the attitudes of the population of these countries towards migration, as well as the situations from which these migrants came. Where the migrants settled on arrival in Australia and whether they had access to financial resources or a support network on arrival were considered very significant issues.

## **1.2 History of Migration to Australia**

Up until the Second World War, the Australian Government did not seek migrants who had a “high degree of industrial skill, but rather those who could settle in rural areas” (Borrie, 1949, p. 11). This was part of its plans for the fuller development of Australia’s land and primary products. In these times, Australia ‘rode on the sheep’s back’. At the same time, it was necessary to preserve the over-riding principle of migration policy - maintenance of the “White Australia Policy” (Borrie, 1949, p. 14). After 1945, migrants were required primarily for industrial, not agricultural purposes. At that time, the target intake number was increased to 70,000 with the object of maintaining that rate of increase until the population of Australia was at least doubled. Preference was to be given to those British or Europeans who could be “assimilated to the Australian economic and social patterns”. For British migrants this was believed to be achievable within six months, or a year at the outside” (Borrie, 1949, p. 86).

Until that time it had been assumed that British migrants did not required any conscious effort to assimilate them. However, in the late 1940s, as well as highly skilled persons Australia also needed building labourers, railway workers, and agricultural labourers. Conditions for such migrants could be very different and much more difficult than those they had experienced in their own countries. Arthur Caldwell, the Immigration Minister at the time, warned that Australians did not ‘warm’ to southern Europeans and that the assimilation of foreign migrants, with a foreign language and a foreign culture, could not be achieved unless both migrants and the community were prepared to work towards that end – the migrants by adapting themselves to their new social environment and the local community by giving sympathetic assistance. For this reason, those first to arrive in post-war Australia were blond haired, blue eyed Baltic migrants. The arrival of refugee migrants both before and immediately after the Second World War, led to complaints that “they have tended to live

apart and to retain their own institutions and customs” (Borrie, 1949, p.91). More serious allegations were made that:

*the refugees have been “cornering” the real estate market, and that they have been securing houses and jobs that should have gone to Australian ex-servicemen, and that they have been organising industry amongst themselves to compete with Australian industry. (Borrie, 1949, p. 91)*

Coombs (1944) pointed out that:

*it has been impossible to maintain, repair and replace to the full extent the capital equipment of the economy. Our houses, our buildings, our roads, our factories, our plant and equipment, our stocks have depreciated and been depleted, and there is an enormous pent-up demand to make good these deficiencies (p. 73).*

Because of the fact that housing for everybody was extremely limited, homes were not available for migrants with families (Borrie, 1949, p. 93) so migration policy tended to give priority to single males. Borrie went on to point out that this situation was not, in the long term, a desirable state of affairs in a country which was trying to increase its birth-rate. “From the long-term aspect it is desirable that an even balance of the sexes should be maintained” (p. 93). The likelihood of an ageing population was also potentially an undesirable outcome. Even without immigration, Borrie estimated that the numbers of those aged 65 and over would double by the end of the century. If the sexes were not balanced in the migrant numbers, not only would the crude birth-rate tend to fall, but “once those males

have passed their working years, they will tend to swell the ranks of the aged dependants” (Borrie, 1949, p. 93). They would have no family to help support them.

In 1950, 1951 and 1952, the Federal Government held conventions (whose greatest achievement was arguably the establishment of the Good Neighbour movement) to enlist co-operation to ensure “the success of Australia’s post-war immigration programme, with particular emphasis on assimilation” (Holt, Borrie, Criag, Karmel, & Stevens, 1953, p. 183). (Price, 1963, p. 207) famously defined ‘assimilation’ in its early stages, as a process which:

*involved the speedy learning of English, the rapid adoption of Australian economic and living standards, and a steadfast refusal to form any kind of ethnic group or association, and that in its later stages it involved intermarriage with British Australian stock and the disappearance of Southern Europeans as separate ethnic groups and families.*

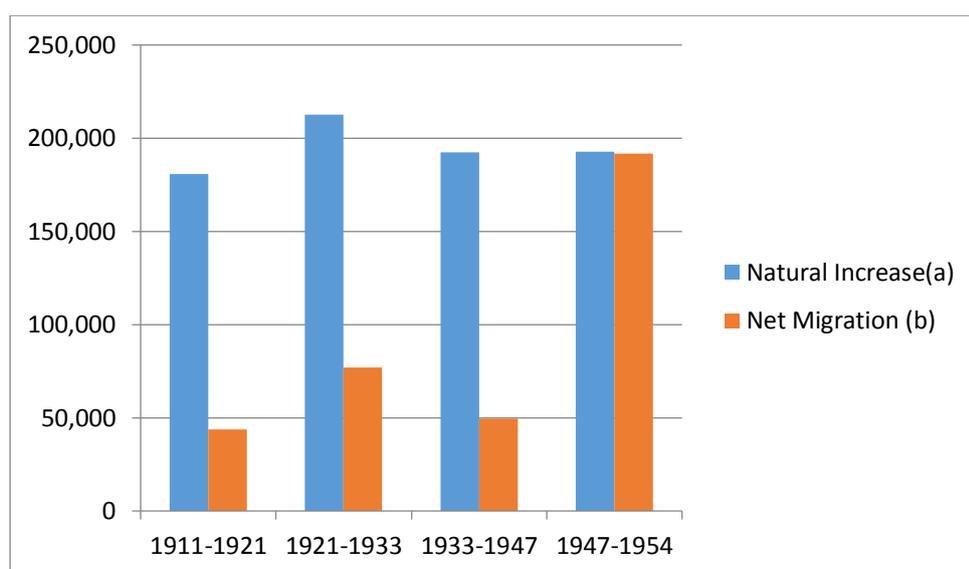
To facilitate assimilation, migrant children needed to be educated in mainstream Australia which would accelerate the process (Borrie, 1949, p. 90). Needless to say the attitudes exhibited little understanding of migrants or the issues which made their lives viable. However, the migrants continued to arrive.

By 1970, the Henderson Report into Poverty (1970) challenged the popularly held perception that migrant children were highly motivated achievers with above average performance and successful adaptation – an image which distorted the reality of the situation in schools particularly in the 1960s. A large segment of these children came from the families of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, with low education, who settled in inner city areas in what were seen to be ghettos.

The intercensal years 1947-54, showed a marked increase in migrant populations over the periods since 1911. As can be seen in Table 1.1, in the years between 1947 and 1954, migrant increase was almost as great as the natural increase, a state not seen since before 1911. As well as this, the proportion of Catholics in these arrivals was much higher than the proportion of Catholics in the overall Australian population immediately prior to the Second World War (1939-45).

Table 1.1  
*Analysis of Intercensal Increases of Population: Victoria (Exclusive of Full-blooded  
 Aboriginals)*

Census	Recorded Intercensal Increase		
	Natural Increase(a)	Net Migration (b)	Total
1911-1921	180,632	43,759	224,290
1921-1933	212,549	76,926	289,359
1933-1947	192,260	49,574	241,834
1947-1954	192,741	191,846	384,587



*Figure 1.1. Analysis of intercensal increases of population: Victoria.*

As shown in Table 1.1, the Catholic religion increased to the extent that it had the largest number of adherents of any religious group in Australia from its pre-war position of being second to the Anglican Church in Australia.

Table 1.2  
*Major Religious Affiliations: Census Years*

Census Year	Anglican	Catholic	Other Christian	Total Christian	Non-Christian	No Religion	Not Stated	Other (a)	Total
	Percent								'000
1911	38.4	22.4	35.1	95.9	0.8	0.4	(b)2.7	0.2	4,455.0
1921	43.7	21.7	31.6	96.9	0.7	0.5	(b)1.7	0.2	5,435.7
1933	38.7	19.6	28.1	86.4	0.4	0.2	12.8	0.1	6,629.8
1947	39.0	20.9	28.1	88.0	0.5	0.3	10.9	0.2	7,579.4
1954	37.9	22.9	28.5	89.4	0.6	0.3	9.5	0.2	8,986.5
1961	34.9	24.9	28.4	88.3	0.7	0.4	10.5	0.2	10,508.2
1966	33.5	26.2	28.5	88.2	0.7	0.8	10.0	0.3	11,599.5
1971	31.0	27.0	28.2	86.2	0.8	6.7	6.1	0.2	12,755.6
1976	27.7	25.7	25.2	78.6	1.0	8.3	11.8	0.4	13,548.4
1981	26.1	26.0	24.3	76.4	1.4	10.8	10.9	0.5	14,576.3
1986	23.9	26.0	23.0	73.0	2.0	12.7	11.9	0.4	15,602.2

Thus, the Catholic Church was growing in both numbers and proportion in Australia. This increase came at the time of a rapid rise in the national birth rate as soldiers came back from the war causing the phenomenon of the ‘baby boomers’ – a huge increase in the number of children particularly in the under-five age group.

However, while “post-Second World War immigration had increased elements of ethnicity and made the Australian Catholic Church one of the most ethnically diverse Churches in Australia, the legacy of Irish influences and Irish-born still persisted, especially at clerical levels” (Paganoni, 2003, p. 239). Paganoni suggested that because of the Australian Catholic

Church's long history of 'self-containment and insulation', it could not positively respond to the changes and challenges facing it in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, it experienced a pronounced decline in allegiance and was unable to devise a new sense of social mission (Paganoni, 2003, p. 240). He quoted Smolicz (1987) as claiming that many Catholics found that they had more in common culturally with English speaking non-Catholics than they did with non-English speaking Catholics from Europe. Already weakened by the political schism of the 1950s and 1960s, the Church was no longer able to maintain its position as a social force and political presence (Paganoni, 2003, p. 240). Its influence had declined to the point where any intervention was seen to be 'untoward and improper' and its opinion increasingly irrelevant (O'Farrell, 1985, p. 443 cited in Paganoni, 2003, p. 240). This situation was exacerbated by the almost complete absence of media reporting except in a negative, ultra-conservative light. Paganoni (2003) reported that there had been a drastic fall in Church attendances and interpreted this as an indication that the decline in Catholic participation in Church activities was much greater than that which had occurred in other churches (Paganoni, 2003, p. 242). Dixon (2012) supplied evidence to refute this claim. He agreed that, since the end of the Second World War, there has been a substantial decline in the numbers of Australians affiliated with a Christian denomination but his research indicates that between 1947 and 2006, the proportion of Anglicans in the general population declined from 39.0% to 18.7%, a decline also experienced by the category entitled 'Other Christians', but this decline started before the 1960s. The decline in the latter group, however, is not experienced uniformly across the various churches included in this category. (For example, Baptist and Pentecostal Churches have gained an increased affiliation over this period of time). The Catholic numbers have remained comparatively strong, although there is evidence to suggest that some people have ceased to identify as Catholics. However, Dixon's research does seem to confirm Paganoni's claim that Catholic participation rates are very low and,

believably could be lower than in the other churches. Quoting the 2006 National Count of Attendance, Dixon points out that “the total average weekend Mass attendance was . . . only 13.8% of the 2006 Census Catholic population, and not all of those attended every week” (Dixon & Powell, 2012, p. 301). A steady decline in attendance since the 1960s had seen weekly attendance fall from 55% in 1962 to 15.3% in 2001 to 13.8% in 2006 (Dixon & Powell, 2012, p. 301). In fact, “Mass attenders were older, better educated, and more likely to be female and born overseas than the Catholic population as a whole” (Dixon & Powell, 2012, p. 301). According to Dixon, “the decline might have been even greater had it not been for the strong representation of Catholics from non-English speaking countries (Dixon & Powell, 2012, p. 301).

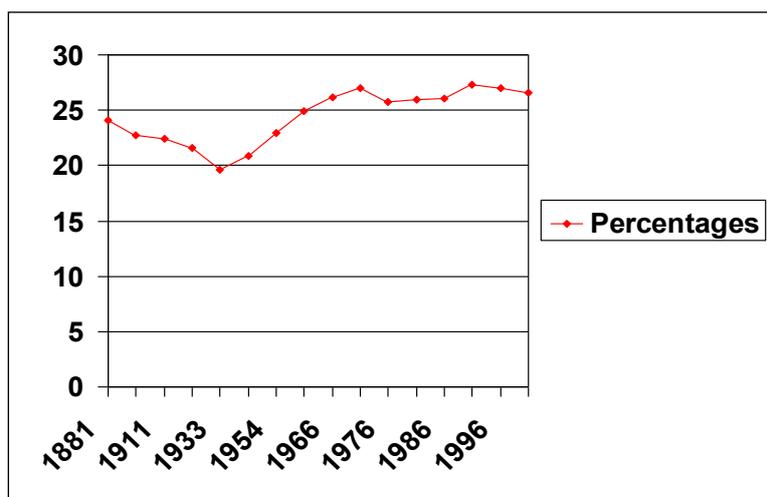


Figure 1.2. Catholics as a proportion of the total Australian population, 1881-2001.

### 1.3 Maltese Migration

As Jones (1973) has pointed out, “emigration is a well-established response in Malta to a severe pressure of population on resources” (p. 101). This led to a situation where Malta had “the highest emigration rate in Europe since the Second World War” (p. 101). Between the

1948 and 1967 Maltese censuses, there was a huge net migration from Malta of some 90,000 persons, amounting to 30 per cent of the 1948 population.

Table 1.3  
*Data on Migration from Malta to Three Major Destinations Showing Differences in Numbers<sup>1</sup>*

Destination	Period	Recorded emigrants at source*	Recorded returning to country*	emigrants to adopted	Recorded immigrants at destination*
Australia	July 1960 – June 1970	28,635	3,278		26,323
Canada	1960 – 1970 Inclusive	6,896	535		6,402
United Kingdom	1963-1970 inclusive	8,282	949		8,110

\* excluding students, diplomats, merchant seamen, visitors and their families

As Jones also pointed out:-

*Despite the distance deterrent, Australia has been the leading [migration] destination; this is because of its climatic affinities with Malta, its sustained economic expansion and, partly as a function of that, the wide range of nomination and sponsorship permitted under its immigration regulations (Jones, 1973, p. 105).*

---

<sup>1</sup> Sources: Annual Reports of Department of Labour and Emigration (Valetta); Australian Immigration, consolidated statistics; data provided by the Canadian Government, Department of manpower and Immigration; Commonwealth Immigration Acts, 1962., 1968; Statistics (annual) in Jones, Modern Migration from Malta, (1973), (p. 104)

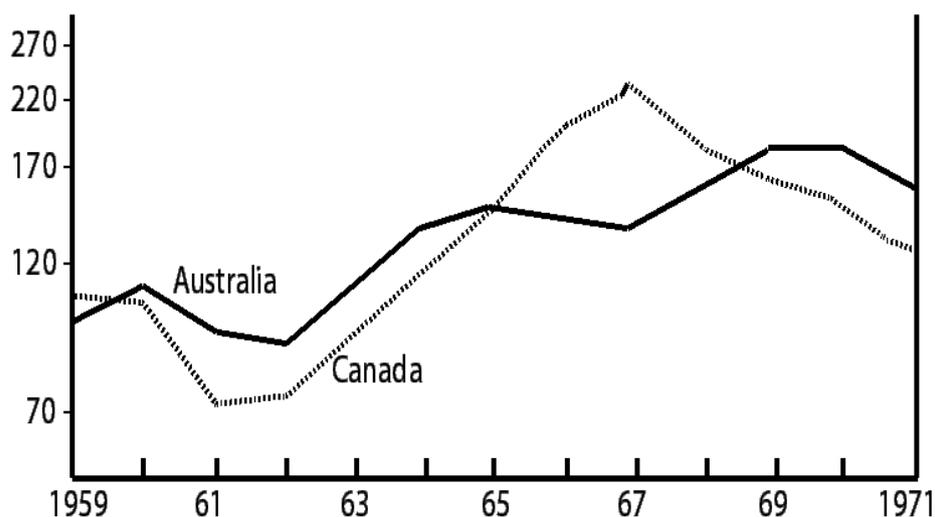


Figure 1.3. Number of immigrants in thousands to Canada and Australia, 1959-1971.<sup>2</sup>

(Ambert, 1995)

Maltese emigration to Australia reached its peak in the mid-1960s. At this time there was an economic recession in Malta as the British withdrew from their naval establishments at the same time as the Australian economy was expanding rapidly. Table 1.4 shows the number of people born in Malta and living in Australia for the Australian Census years 1901 to 2011.

Table 1.4  
*Malta-born Residents in Australia, by Year*<sup>3</sup>

Census Year	No of Malta-born	Census Year	No. of Malta born
1901	59	1976	26 836
1921	158	1981	27 629
1933	392	1986	26 948
1947	596	1991	25 727
1954	6 789	1996	24 122
1961	17 572	2001	22 315
1971	25 681	2011	20 835

<sup>2</sup> Source: Jones, (1973) *Modern Migration from Malta*, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Jones, (1973) *Modern Migration from Malta*, p. 110

As can be seen from the above table, the number of Malta-born residents living in Australia, most of whom settled in Victoria, reached a peak in 1981 and from then on has been in a gradual decline, no doubt a result of the deaths of those older migrants who arrived from the 1960s onwards.

The Maltese were not political refugees but they were assisted in their migration by the Maltese Emigration Department. Most arrived in Australia as family sponsored migrants whose passage costs were assisted by the Maltese Government. The government also supplied its emigrants with special allowances for disruption and for dependents in Malta (Jones, 1973, p. 108). Most were nominated by relatives already in Australia. In most cases therefore, Maltese migrants to Australia were not compelled to work for the first two years after their arrival on government projects often located in geographically difficult environments.

Table 1.5  
*Percentage Age Distribution of Emigrants and of the Total Population of Malta<sup>4</sup>*

Destination	0-14	15-24	25-44	45-59	60 and over
(i) Emigrants from Malta, 1965-1970 inclusive					
Australia	24.5	40.7	21.2	6.4	2.1
Canada	18.2	54.8	21.1	4.3	1.5
United Kingdom	14.5	59.5	21.4	4.0	0.6
United States	25.2	28.7	33.7	9.4	3.0
(ii) Population of Malta, 1957					
	37.4	14.9	23.2	13.9	10.5

Table 1.5 (above) shows that it was the 15-24 year old age group which was being drained from the Maltese population. In this age group are the young people setting out in their

<sup>4</sup> Source: Collated from data in Annual reports of Department of Labour and Emigration (Valetta), and Census of Malta, 1957 in Jones, (1973) *Modern Migration from Malta*, p. 110.

working careers. The children 0 – 14 are a much smaller percentage of emigrants than in the general Maltese population suggesting that it was singles leaving Malta not married couples with children.

Table 1.6 (below) shows the discrepancy between the number of males and the number of females migrating to Australia between 1965 and 1970. These are indicative of the disproportion of males and females leaving Malta.

Table 1.6  
*Marital and Sex Structure of Adult Emigrants and Total Adult Population (Adult = Over 15 Years of Age)*<sup>5</sup>

Destination	Percentage unmarried	Number of males per 100 females unmarried <sup>6</sup>
(i) emigrants from Malta, 1965-1970 inclusive		
Australia	33	201
Canada	42	244
United Kingdom	55	255
United States	30	142
(ii) population of Malta, 1957		
	37	91

Reflecting the employment demands and opportunities prevailing in Australia at that time, migrants of skilled and unskilled manual worker categories, dominated. Unfortunately, Malta needed these tradesmen as well, in order to rebuild the country's infrastructure destroyed in the Second World War.

As can be seen in Table 1.7 (below), the destination countries were depleting Malta of her foremen, supervisors and skilled operatives as well as her unskilled manual workers, which

<sup>5</sup> Source: Jones (1973) *Modern Migration from Malta*, p.110

<sup>6</sup> Sources: Calculated from data in Annual Reports of the Department of Labour and Emigration (Valetta) and Census of Malta, 1957 contained in Jones (1973), *Modern Migration from Malta*, (p. 110).

she herself needed to re-establish infrastructure damaged in the war. However 83.9% of migrants to Australia were recruited from the four lowest levels of occupations compared with 51.8% in the Maltese general population, in 1967. Forty nine percent of the migrants to Australia were, at the most, semi-skilled while unskilled labourers and agricultural workers, (who are included in this latter group), were 45.7% compared with 18.3% in the Maltese population. It would appear that the more skilled workers in Malta had fewer reasons to migrate.

Table 1.7  
*Percent Distribution by Socio-Economic Grouping of Economically Active Emigrants\* and of the Economically Active Total Population<sup>7</sup>*

Socio-economic Group**							
Destination	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
(i) emigrants from Malta, 1965-1970 inclusive							
Australia	3.4	6.4	6.3	34.3	3.9	35.1	10.6
Canada	7.4	10.5	6.3	47.9	4.7	19.9	3.3
United Kingdom	5.9	12.7	14.6	31.6	5.8	28.7	0.7
United States	11.4	8.5	8.7	40.4	5.2	23.8	1.9
(ii) population of Malta, 1967							
	15.4	17.7	15.2	27.2	6.3	11.0	7.3
Legend:	* At the time of registration with the department of Immigration						
	** I Administrative, professional and managerial						
	II Shop keepers, shop assistants and clerical workers						
	III Personal service workers						
	IV Foremen, supervisors and skilled operatives						
	V Semi-skilled manual workers						
	VI Unskilled manual workers						
	VII Farmers and agricultural workers						

<sup>7</sup> Source: Jones (1973) *Modern Migration from Malta*, p. 111

A Single Young Women Migration Scheme, under the auspices of the Catholic Church, had, by the end of 1968, helped more than 500 young women to migrate to Australia (Jones, 1973). One of the members of the original Maltese Migration Board was interviewed. He explained that, after the Second World War, the population of Malta was exploding. Most of the people were illiterate and finding work was difficult. As many as five thousand residents, mostly men, left one village, leaving their wives and children behind. Some of them were just young boys (approximately 50 he recalled), who lost contact with their families because of their illiteracy. At times, the Migration Board even wrote letters on behalf of the family left behind in Malta, in the hope that someone in Australia could read it for the recipient.

So many males leaving Malta led to a situation where there was a marked sexual imbalance in that country. It was estimated that more than 1,000 young women had no hope of being married, and so the Migration Board worked to diffuse the situation by teaching young women English (when most of them were not literate in Maltese) and teaching them typing and office skills to help them gain work in Australia. Many in authority seemed genuinely surprised that approximately 50% of the women whom he sent to Australia married men from ethnic backgrounds other than Maltese. The Board also accepted the responsibility to send someone (usually a priest) to accompany the migrants on the ships to help them settle in their new country. As a people, they were very religious. The new arrivals were supported by the community already in Australia and eventually they, in turn, sponsored others to Australia. The Board Member interviewed spoke of the generosity of the migrants who sent money back to their relatives left behind in Malta, and commented that the first wave of post war migrants were predominantly illiterate and originally wanted their children to become 'hard-workers'. It was very different, however, for the next generation. He also pointed out that those who came after 1955 could speak English, a more helpful situation for them.

The migrants were very poor and arrived with nothing. Some were reported as living in converted chicken sheds, without proper sanitation, but in time they all owned their own homes. (As a research officer in the Town Planning Department at the City of Springvale in the 1980s, the researcher saw plans (no longer in existence) showing such chicken sheds as homes for the migrants.) From the Board Member's own observations he was able to speak of those Maltese who had settled in Queensland working the sugar industry and who had invented diverse implements to plant and harvest sugar cane.

### **1.3.1 Maltese migrants and Catholicism**

Maltese migrants arrived in Australia from a background where “the Roman Catholic religion . . . has long characterised Maltese culture, as moulded by historical experiences” (Ata, 1988, p. 177).

*Maltese have carried their religious beliefs and practices with them, and as a rule they have clung steadfastly to them with a tenacity that has surprised other Europeans who were more accustomed to anticlericalism, irreligion and secularization (Ata, 1988, p. 177).*

In Malta it was estimated that even in the 1980s, “the vast majority of Maltese continued to celebrate religion, ritualistically and socially” (Ata, 1988, p. 177). In fact, it was believed that at that time, 75% of Maltese in the Maltese Islands were church-goers. In Australia that figure was over 50%, a figure which when compared with Malta, was low, but when compared with the national Catholic average in Australia was more than twice as high. They were also doing their best to raise their children in the faith, which would explain why the

Catholic schooling system was their choice for educating their children. Regardless of their social class, most Maltese tended to participate actively in parish life, (Ata, 1988, p. 178) according to Maltese migrant chaplains. The 1976 census claimed that of the 55,890 people who were born in Malta, 50,475 professed adherence to Roman Catholicism (Pittarello, 1981, p. 25).

Arguably the most important event in Maltese history was the expulsion of the Ottoman forces by the Order of St John of Jerusalem and Rhodes (later known as the Knights of Malta) with the aid of the Maltese in 1565, after which the Holy Roman Emperor ceded the island to the Order. Although the island had been ruled by the Arabs from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Christians were regarded as ‘People of the Book’ and although treated as second-class citizens, they were allowed to follow their own beliefs. During the Order’s rule (from 1530 to 1798), however, Malta was run by a religious order whose Grand Master was the temporal ruler while the spiritual head was the Pope. The importance of this period in Maltese social history was that “it laid the foundations for an intense monolithic religiosity - . . . a situation which hardly permitted the Reformation to make any headway” (Ata, 1988, p. 179). During the 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a number of religious feasts assumed a popular quality and became in time synonymous with Maltese culture.

Napoleon expelled the Knights from Malta in 1798 but the Maltese, appalled by the “irreverent and immoral excesses committed by the Bonapartist troops” (Ata, 1988, p. 180), laid siege to the French, who were trapped inside the fortified city of Valetta until they surrendered to the British in 1800. Several times, while travelling in Malta, the researcher was told of the appalling tale of how the Bonapartist troops used the ancient tomes, many of which dated from the arrival of the Knights in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century and kept in the National Library of Malta, to light their fires to keep warm during the Maltese winters. Learning from

the mistakes the French had made, the British, who ruled from 1800 to 1964, on the whole permitted the Catholic Church a privileged place in Malta. “Bishops were successively knighted, and Protestant proselytization kept to a minimum” (Ata, 1988, p. 180). At the time of the transfer of power from France to Britain, in private letters to Granville Penn, author, in 1809, of a treatise entitled “The policy and interest of Great Britain with respect to Malta”, Sir Alexander Ball wrote:

*The Maltese are bigots in religion, and it is necessary to treat their prejudices with deep indulgence. When betrayed and deserted by the Order, they submitted to the French, and would not have revolted, if their churches had not been plundered, and if their religious prejudices had been respected. They are much influenced by their priests, on whom it is highly necessary to keep a watchful eye* (Frendo, H (1988) cited in (Ata, 1988, p. 180).

Church and State were clearly connected and unlike, in Italy or Spain, anticlericalism was not an issue.

During the British period, parochial structures further developed at the same time that the population increased almost threefold from about 100,000 to 300,000 (Ata, 1988, p.181). With only 122 square miles as total land area, Malta became one of the most densely populated lands on earth, leading to emigration all over the Mediterranean as life became more crowded and resources became stretched. After World War II, this tendency towards migration stretched to lands such as Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia. When they emigrated the Maltese migrants brought with them their own liturgical, sacramental, devotional and confessional religious practices together with their religious feasts and

ceremonies. To the Irish church in Australia, this enculturated form of Catholicism was completely alien. On the other hand, at least until the mid-1960s, the Maltese migrant to Australia found, “society outside of the Catholic fold . . . alien and sinful” (Ata, 1988, p. 182). Sexual morality had always been one of the rigid tenets of the Maltese Church, and divorce, oral birth control and abortion, practised under certain circumstances by some Catholics in Australia, were expressly forbidden to the Maltese.

“The family is arguably the most highly prized value in the general religious disposition of a Maltese: based on mutual respect and the love of children” (Ata, 1988, p. 183). In part this was expressed in the way Maltese parents helped their marrying children financially to set up house. In turn, the children were expected to look after their parents in their old age. How did this fit in a society where the aged were granted a government pension to maintain their independence?

By 1986, Victoria had 27 Maltese ecclesiastics, excluding the sisters, - the highest number of Catholic priests by ethnic origin in the state. This was higher than the number of priests of Irish origin and a disproportionate number to the size of the Maltese community in Australia! Every substantial migration movement from Malta, especially after 1948, took with it an accompanying priest, who was usually highly educated, able to speak the appropriate language of the country to which the group was migrating, as well as Maltese, and who also acted as “a community leader, interpreter and translator, confessor and counsellor and intermediary to important transactions” (Ata, 1988, p. 184). Various social activities were initiated by and formed around the churches. Involvement in community activities such as the Good Neighbour committees, the Parents and Citizens groups at the schools, Trade Unions, or community projects (such as new swimming pools) was not normally undertaken by the migrants themselves. In some cases, their representation was left to the Maltese priest

(Ata, 1988, p. 185). Eventually (mainly from 1986 onwards), a number of Catholic schools were established, at least in part, by Maltese sisters.

To the unskilled Maltese Catholics, a very long way from home, Australian Catholicism was very unlike that of Malta, especially after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), although the Australian church was much interested in their plight, or at least in their religious observance (Ata, 1988, p. 189). “They were poor then and with the racial prejudice which was so common among Australians until recent times, they were not particularly welcome” (welcoming speech given in 1954 by the Bishop of Rockhampton to the Maltese sisters arriving in Mackay, quoted in (Ata, 1988, p. 188)). To the Maltese, religion was not simply going to Church. “Maltese religiosity was not theological; it was not enlightened, not informed or too consciously or articulately expressed. Much of it was by rote: it was inbred, part of Malteseness” (Ata, 1988, p. 190). It encompassed all elements of their lives; social, cultural, doctrinal and devotional and inquisitiveness and rationality were not common, and perhaps sinful. Due to the very low level of religious education in Malta, most Maltese Catholics, although very moral, would have had a generally low level of religious knowledge. However, they very much missed the religious festivals that were such a large part of their lives in Malta.

Ata (1988) argues that while “religion continues to be a central value to the Maltese Catholic settler in Australia, . . . the single most noteworthy element in the Maltese life style would be its family-centric base” (p. 196).

### **1.3.2 Maltese migrants and education**

Census data indicates that by 1986 there were 119,504 first generation people of Maltese background living in Australia (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993, p. 9.). The participation of

the males in this group in the work force was extremely high compared with the national average. For first generation males, 20.8% were employed in the trades compared with only 12.3% on average in Australia, but only 6.7% in the professions (Australian average 10.2%) (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993, p. 10). It is possible that this is the reason that the Maltese community has settled and remained predominantly in industrial and urban centres. Young Maltese women tended to be employed in clerical work (34.3%) although the percentage of women who were wage earners was only 36.2% compared with the national average of 46.6% (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993, p. 10). However, in (Cauchi, 1990), (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993) attention is drawn to the fact that young people of Maltese background were entering post-secondary education in very small numbers compared with children of other migrant groups while significant numbers of Maltese girls in particular were among early school leavers.

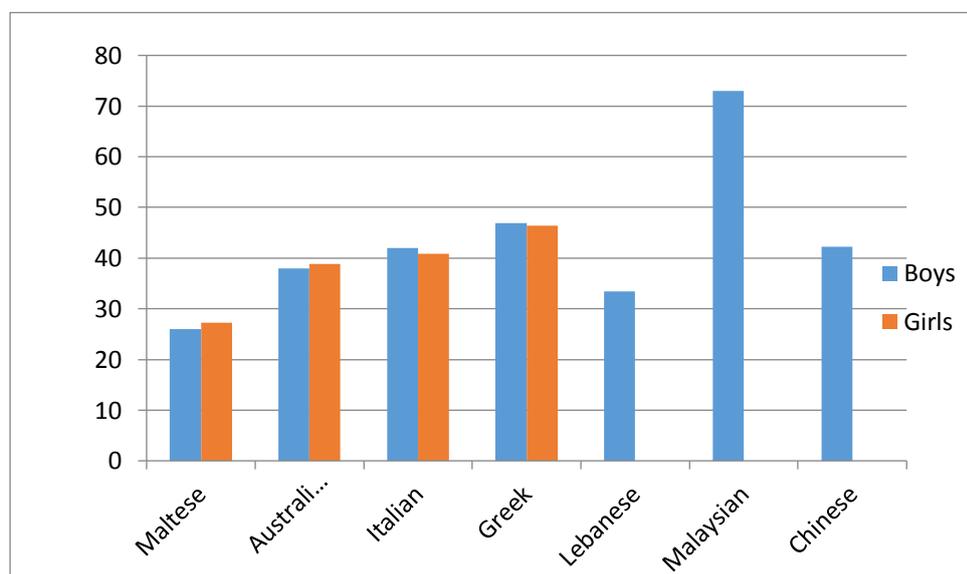


Figure 1.4. School retention rates - ethnic communities.

In the area of trade qualifications, however, Maltese students are well represented, although very few females were included amongst these numbers.

Figure 1.4 depicts the percentage of young people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds who remain in secondary school until the end of their schooling. It clearly shows that few Maltese young people remain at school until Year 12 – fewer than any other ethnic group.

Census data suggests that this under-representation which appears in the first generation of Maltese continued on into the second and third. It is suggested that low aspirations of Maltese families leads to low levels of participation in upper and post-secondary education (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993, p. 12). Cauchi, 1990, (cited in Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993) blamed parents for the fact that their children were leaving school early, claiming that “Maltese parental attitudes may militate against encouraging education beyond year 10, which is considered adequate in their view”, (p. 53).

Education in Malta had been a limited affair from quite early in the country’s history. In 1616, the Jesuits opened their first school which, it was intended, should eventually become a seminary. However the order was expelled in 1639, much to the dismay of the Grand Master Lascaris who canvassed the Jesuits to restore their presence on Malta, albeit with a wide spread of nationalities and different provinces. He went on to say, that “since the Order of St John needed more soldiers and sailors than doctors and lazy people – of whom the island had more than enough to the detriment of his principality – he preferred to see no more teaching imparted in the College” (Vella, 1969, p. 11). Both the Knights and the British were concerned that there would be too many professionals for the needs of the population. They preferred a more practical form of education which they believed the country needed and which the government projected. Although the British needed civil servants for both the army and the navy, who needed to be educated, their main need was for skilled dockyard workers. Higher positions in the public service were held by British nationals (Gellel & Buchanan, 2011). The British kept the Maltese down in the social scale, the latter frequently

having a very servile attitude to the British, who had low expectations of the Maltese and who exhibited attitudes of snobbery towards them (Gellel & Buchanan, 2011). Bowles & Gintis 1976 (cited in Sultana, 1991) believed that:

*We have a segmented labour market which needs different kinds of workers organised in a hierarchical relationship with regards to each other, with regards to financial and status rewards, and with regards to those who own capital and the means of production. It is vital for the survival and reproduction of capitalist societies to somehow ensure that the population does not all end up in the same occupational strata. Society needs a variety of socialization mechanisms to direct different groups towards particular locations in the labour market (p. 235).*

Not so very different from the requirements of Grand Master Lascaris. So “it has been established that a student’s origins - in Malta as elsewhere – influence, if not determine educational achievement” (Sultana, 1991, p. 223).

Compulsory primary school education in Malta was not established until 1949 and secondary schooling was not widely available until the 1970s. Britain was the colonial power ruling Malta in the 19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and when it took over from the French in 1800, “the education system was in a very poor state” (Cassar, 2001, in Sultana, (Ed), 2001, p. 159). There were no schools in the larger towns, let alone in the small villages, but even if there had been any schools, “it would have been quite difficult for the majority of Maltese families to send their children to such places due to the general poverty of the populace as a whole” (Cassar 2001, in Sultana (Ed), 2001, p.159). Even when, in 1837, the first boys’ schools were opened in Malta, no law existed which obliged children to attend. Until 1924, “students

attended classes only if and when they liked and could” (Cassar, 2001, in Sultana, (ed), 2001 p. 169). This meant the numbers fluctuated so much through the year that there was no fixed school population, which made the organisation of a learning programme almost impossible. In 1924, the Maltese Government passed the Compulsory Attendance Act which obliged any student who registered at a Government or private school to attend until he/she was 12 years old.

As late as the 1970s Prime Minister Mintoff closed the faculties of theology, arts and science, reverting to the faculties present in the old university (1592) which had only the faculties of philosophy and divinity. In 1769 a medical school was added. A new university was later created which encompassed the faculties of education, architecture, engineering and economics. Tuition was confined to the sons of Persons of Consequence on the island and those studying for the priesthood. As the knights themselves were all educated it would appear that under their rule, only the native inhabitants of the islands were to be kept uneducated to serve the others as military personnel. Even today, the numbers of residents in those occupations requiring tertiary studies are kept to manageable numbers by the quota systems which operate to limit entry to the University of Malta. In the 1980s the university had only 600 students, up from 200 in the 1960s. (Conversations with citizens in Malta). Such quota systems also operate in Australia. Brincat (2002) explained that a definite class structure existed in Malta, based mainly on economic lines. Most people were lower class, working at the dockyards, in building or as merchants. Before the war, only a few people, such as the priest, the lawyer and the doctor were educated and were much respected in the villages. The police officer was also classed as educated, because he had at least completed primary education and so could read and write (Gellel & Buchanan, 2011). It was very difficult to change class. By the 1970s, most people had reached secondary education.

However, there was no Teacher Training College in Malta until after the Second World War. To teach in a Government school, one needed to sit for the ‘Senior Oxford and get good marks. The ones that came 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> from the whole of Malta were offered a five year scholarship to study for a Head Teacher in the UK. The University of Malta had several faculties but not teaching.<sup>8</sup> Migrants to Australia came when illiteracy was still wide spread.

### 1.3.3 Maltese migrants and literacy

Defining a literate person as ‘one who can read and write’ Brincat (1998) devised the following table (presented as Table 1.8) using the Census information from 1911, 1921, 1931 to indicate the gradual improvement in the literacy rates in Malta, before the Second World War.

Table 1.8  
*Rate of Literacy/Illiteracy in the Maltese Population above Five Years Old, Various Censuses, 1911-1931*<sup>9</sup>

Census years	Persons five years and upwards	Able to write	Percent	Unable to read	Percent
1911	181,756	39,641	21.81	142,115	78.19
1921	185,873	54,801	29.49	131,072	70.51
1931	207,477	81,188	39.13	126,289	60.87

The illiteracy figure did decrease after the introduction of compulsory education legislation, but by 1995 it was still 11% of the population over 11 years of age. 52% of the population did not complete secondary school (Malta, Census, 1995). This statistic was not evenly distributed throughout the population. Table 1.9 shows the illiterate proportion of the population of Malta by age according to the 1995 Census.

---

<sup>8</sup> Information obtained via Edwina Mallia from her mother in Malta about her experiences as an aspiring teacher in the early 1940s

<sup>9</sup> Source : Brincat, V., *Malta Under Self-government, 1921-1933*, (1998) p.18

Table 1.9  
*Illiteracy in Malta by Age Group*<sup>10</sup>

Age Range	Percentage Illiterate
Aged 16-35	15%
35-54	44%
55-64	18%
64+	23%

The Director of Elementary Schools blamed politics for the slow progress in improving the education of the population (Brincat, 1998). The Nationalist Party, aided by the Church (whose language was still Italian) dominated the language and educational issues for most of the years between the World Wars and they were insistent that the language of instruction in Malta be Italian, despite the fact that only 15% of the population could speak Italian compared with 23.36% who could speak English.

In 1922, a Public Lotto Act was passed in order to finance education. The British authorities, under the guise of withdrawing ‘paternalistic support’, did not provide any financial support for education, leaving the Maltese to raise large sums of money for education infrastructure (Brincat, 1998, p. 17).

Another factor affecting the lack of higher educational achievements was the issue of language. It was only in 1934 that Maltese became an official language and up until the 1950s, pupils in schools run by English and Irish sisters in Malta were actively discouraged from using anything other than English at school. As a consequence, “they were often assumed to speak English, even though their command of the language, if existent at all, was developing and often of minimal proficiency” (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993, p. 28). However, in 1931, although more than 60% of Maltese were illiterate, 16.2% could read and

---

<sup>10</sup> Source: Malta Census. 1995

write Maltese well, and another 22.93% were literate in another language (Brincat, 1998). Some literacy was essential to enable the Maltese to communicate with loved ones living outside of Malta.

Brincat (1998) reports that, from the 1920s, urban parents were taking the schooling of their children more seriously but, in the rural areas absenteeism was still quite high. “Children would be kept away from school to help their parents in the fields . . . it is reported that peasant and farm children had more knowledge of harvests and herds and displayed little interest in education”. Their parents were often also uncooperative. This situation continued well into the 1940s (Brincat, 1998, p. 24). Teacher standards were hard to maintain because many left teaching as soon as they could to join the Civil Service. Teachers’ salaries were equivalent to those paid to labourers (Brincat, 1998). Up until the 1930s, Italian was the language of the Courts, but when in 1934, Maltese was added to the list of official languages, English became the language of administration and Maltese, the language of the Courts (Brincat, 1998).

A lack of knowledge of the school and schooling in Australia has been attributed in the past to particular cultural processes at work in the Maltese community (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993, p. 61). Terry et al believe that in large part this is due to the fact that Maltese parents were not receiving adequate information about their children’s education and were often excluded from the decision making processes. Where school notices and information were available in languages other than English, Maltese was not one of them. The perception that all Maltese parents spoke English meant the schools did not feel that they had to provide support in this area (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993, p. 66).

Discipline of a corporal nature was frowned upon in Maltese schools. As far back as 1901, “teaching staff at Mosta Boys’ School were sometimes warned not to use the ruler to enforce discipline” (Cassar, 2001 cited in Sultana (ed), 2001, p. 171) and were under threat of being reported to the Director of Public Instruction (Cassar, 2001).

Suggestions that some Maltese had been compelled to leave Malta for political reasons, were alluded to by the interviewees. Such a situation seemed to be confirmed by one interviewee who spoke of leaving Malta because of his father’s involvement in the political campaign of the losing candidate in Malta’s first democratic election after independence. Although not exactly forced on to a plane, his father believed that the family would have been discriminated against by the winning candidate because of their opposing political involvement. .

#### **1.3.4 Racial prejudice in Australia**

One unexpected thing several of interviewees discovered on their arrival was the extent of the prejudice towards the Maltese whom the Australians did not consider as Europeans. This was at the time when Australia still adhered to the White Australia Policy. This racially discriminative policy limited migration to Australia to Europeans only and although Italians were regarded as European, Maltese were not. This seemed to be decided purely on the colour of their skin and several of the interviewees commented on the derogatory comments made by other people because of their skin colour (MF3AM, MF5OM, MF6OM, MF8OM<sup>11</sup>). There is some evidence to support this comment. In his article about the Maltese and the White Australia Policy, (York, 1989) notes Prime Minister Billy Hughes’s efforts in 1916 to win the referendum to allow conscription for overseas service for young Australian men. The

---

<sup>11</sup> Code names for interviewees in this project. See Appendix One.

labour movement within Australia opposed conscription, fearing that “conscription would result in the replacement of any Australian workers sent abroad by imported labourers who would work for low wages and under sub-standard conditions” (York, 1989, p. 2). Unfortunately for Prime Minister Hughes, a group of 214 Maltese labourers, travelling on the ‘*Gange*’, a French mail boat, was due to arrive in Melbourne just before the referendum was to be held. Only a few weeks earlier a group of 97 Maltese disembarked in Sydney from the ‘*Arabia*’ and to *The Worker* (Brisbane, 12 October 1916, quoted in (York, 1989) “the importation of coloured labour as represented by the Maltese ‘Black Menace’, was a ‘natural corollary’ to conscription” (York, 1989, p. 2). Of great concern was the fact that the men on the ‘*Arabia*’ were ‘mostly of military age and able’ (York, 1989, p. 2).

*The Worker* warned its readers:

*If you want to preserve your women folk from the contamination of the black man, be careful to vote ‘No’.* (p. 2)

Despite the fact that the ‘grand Empire’ vision saw the Maltese as ‘the Imperial brothers and sisters of fellow-British Australians’ (York, 1989, p. 1), Australia was not about to accept them in the political situation pertaining at that time. When the *Gange* arrived off Williamstown in Victoria, the Maltese on board were subjected to the iniquitous Dictation Test, whereby the government was entitled to require a prospective migrant to translate a passage which had been chosen from any language the government chose. The men were “mainly unskilled males from the backward rural villages of Malta’s sister island, Gozo” (York, 1989, p. 2) who had paid their own fares and who were not contracted labour, but even so they were subjected to the statutory restrictions under The Immigration Act 1901-

1920 which allowed persons the Australian government considered undesirable, to be tested in any language of the government's choosing. The language the government chose on which to test these Maltese was Dutch.

*All failed the test, and the lawful preconditions for their exclusion were fulfilled.*

*Their British status, and the passports they carried bearing the endorsement of Governor Methuen [of Malta], were rendered meaningless. The 214 Maltese British subjects had become 'prohibited immigrants' because they could not speak Dutch.*

(York, 1989, p. 8).

The *Gange*, a French vessel, carried the Maltese on to New Caledonia, where they languished for three months until a vessel could bring them back to Sydney, where they further languished for several months, until eventually they were permitted to enter Australia provided work was found for them. A significant number of them were given work as general labourers at the Mount Lyall mine in Tasmania, while another large group went to work on the NSW Railways. However, further migration to Australia from Malta was prohibited for the duration of the war – a policy particularly difficult for Maltese residents of Australia who had returned on holiday to Malta and were stuck there. More importantly, considerable public opinion was mobilised against the Maltese and the AWU, at its Annual convention in March, 1917, condemned “the importation of Maltese *or other coloured labour* (writer's italics) to take the place of the boys who have volunteered to fight the Prussian military machine” (York, 1989, p. 14). In Sydney, as a result of the *Gange* incident, there existed “a brief but intense ‘Maltese phobia’” (York, 1989, p. 2).

With such a highly publicised media campaign mounted against them, it would seem quite conceivable that anti-Maltese attitudes would still be present when the post-WWII Maltese arrived thirty years later and indeed, several interviewees reported that they were regarded by some as Aboriginal, and therefore to be lesser individuals and one was referred to as ‘a darkie’. In fact (Cauchi, 1990) declares:

*there is no doubt that historically, in the early days of migration, blatant racism was rampant and the Maltese migrant was obviously the target of racist and disparaging remarks. . . . It is enough to listen to the average migrant who came to Australia in the 1950s to appreciate the degree of intolerance and abuse to which the average Maltese migrant was subjected (p. 101).*

Over time, particularly after the first of the post WWII migrants had arrived, things do seem to have improved in this area. At the time, Australian society didn’t know what to do with all these migrants and the first reaction was, ‘you must become like us’. The government policy was firmly fixed on assimilation.

### **1.3.5 The future for subsequent generations of Maltese migrants**

For the Maltese in Australia, life was very different from what they had experienced in Malta. Maltese society was very close and very family oriented. Children were instilled with great love for family and great love of country. When Dr Barry York (2011) commented on Maltese identity in Australia, he stated:

*In speaking of Maltese identity and culture, I think of five main components. These are: language, religion, family, love for (or pride in) Malta and Maltese history. (p. 1)*

He went on to say that it was doubtful that the Maltese culture and identity brought to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s would be preserved because of the inevitable influence on the younger generations outside their homes and probably beyond the parents' expectations and desires. Because Maltese was not a useful language to the Australian born, other than to communicate with family members, York (2011) believed that it was unlikely to be maintained much beyond the second generation.

Australia was many thousands of miles away, where the language was different, where acceptance was not guaranteed and where accommodation was also different. They had no difficulty getting jobs because of their reputation for hard work and the assisted passage offered by the Australian and Maltese governments was a great help. As a national group, the Maltese seem to have adapted well to their new home, making a huge contribution to society. However, living in Australia came at a cost to the Maltese. For many Maltese the biggest cost was homesickness. Telephone calls were not as easy to make as they are today, and were much more expensive, so that the migrants had to rely on letters. Those who were illiterate must have found it even more difficult as they would have been totally cut off from their families and their country. One of their first priorities was a strong desire to own their own homes, and then to find the best schools for their children. Their cuisine, however, stayed with them in Australia, enriching and diversifying Australian dining.

### **1.3.6 Achievements of the Maltese migrants**

The achievements of the Maltese migrants, despite the fact that their incomes were on average, much less than those of other ethnic groups in Australia, have been truly considerable. Cauchi (1990) claimed that, in 1986 Maltese-born males earned about 76% and females 62% of the wage of the Australian born. However,

*. . . the average Maltese migrant can transform his half-acre plot into a veritable garden to supply a lot of his family's needs. They help their family to build their own house, often a timber construction in the first instance. They have been having a second job long before the Maltese in Malta discovered this phenomenon. Many a wife has had to take a job to help with family finances, again, long before this has become acceptable in Malta. They have a capacity to work long hours. They are frugal and have a capacity to plan for the long term. They do not feel the need to fraternise in booze-clubs like many members of the other ethnic communities do. They have taken with them much prized technical skills which they learned in the Dockyard or through sheer necessity since their arrival. It is this way of life which may explain the markedly elevated house ownership by Maltese, (which is much higher than that of persons of other ethnic background who earn a much higher average salary), and the high standard of living which most of them enjoy. (Cauchi, 1999, pp. 120-121).*

### **1.3.7 How the Church managed the Maltese Catholics.**

They were 'very faithful Catholics' but the Church in Australia fought against the establishment of 'ethnic' Churches, as these had not worked to the betterment of the Church in other places in the world (eg. USA). However, the Maltese form of Catholicism was a long way from the Irish form which existed in Australia. As interviewees for this research, MM5OX, MF1AM<sup>12</sup>, commented, the Australian Catholics' excitement with the advent of St Patrick's day meant nothing to the Maltese, whose patron saint was St Paul, who, legend held, had been shipwrecked on Malta during his missionary journeys. Maltese festivals were

---

<sup>12</sup> Code names for interviewees in this research. See Appendix One.

not observed (MF1AM). MF1AM also pointed out how ridiculous it was to teach Maltese children Irish dancing, while MF7OM and MF13OM were amazed that the school could employ an elocution teacher to improve students' pronunciation, when a significant proportion of the school could not speak English at all. Neither did the Australian church observe the European way of celebrating saints' days with the big procession following and venerating the saint's statue.

Really, the Church in Australia did not know what to do with all the migrants and wanted them to become like the Anglo-Australians and be part of what was, in fact, a very Irish church. The Anglo-Catholic mentality did not resonate with the migrants, and even ethnic chaplains found it hard to find a church in which to worship. They had to 'beg' the local parish priests for use of their churches in which to celebrate mass in Maltese (and other ethnic languages). Eventually, the community adopted a church in West Melbourne (whose architecture was like the ones in Malta) and this became the Maltese centre although it was never officially the 'Maltese church'. York (2011) voiced his impression that for the Maltese, "religion is not strong among the second and third generation in Australia" (p. 2) quoting an analysis of Census data by Jones (1973, p. 41) which indicated that "Maltese Catholic religious affiliation declines over the generations", postulating the hypothesis that second and third generation Maltese in Australia grow in a society where there are many religions from which to choose (York, 2011, p. 2).

Table 1.10 below shows the religious affiliations of the Maltese migrants for those that were the original migrants (1<sup>st</sup> generation) and the two following generations who were born in Australia.

Table 1.10  
*Religious Affiliations of Maltese Immigrants using 1986 Census (Percentages)*<sup>13</sup>

	Catholic	Anglican	Non-Theist
1st generation	91.4	0.7	1.8
2nd generation	87.1	1.8	3.2
3rd generation	71.7	8.8	7.3

In general, the Maltese seemed to have settled very well. Most of the interviewees had worked hard to achieve their over-riding ambitions to own their own homes, sometimes more than one. The latter were often holiday homes for the family. The Maltese are recognised as very family oriented and had brought with them to Australia not only their love of family but also their capacity for hard work and a well-developed sense of responsibility. Their love of family and also their love for their birth country is very pronounced and easily recognised by other ethnic groups, and demonstrated by the frequency of the trips they make back to Malta to visit friends and family. This comment is not meant to indicate any disloyalty to their adopted country, however. Families in Malta have undergone considerable change in the intervening years. No longer are families as large as they were between WWI and WWII when a family with eleven children was not uncommon and twenty children was something to boast about. People have far fewer children. If this is the case in Malta, it would be more likely for the Maltese in Australia to also have smaller families, which is more the norm for all Australian families. Their love of country and its history still persists, however. Maltese-Australians are able to visit their parents' country of birth relatively easily but tend to resist pressure from parents and grandparents

---

<sup>13</sup> Source: (York, 2011, p. 2), *Maltese Identity in Australia*

*to impose a life-style or an outlook that is based on the values they grew up with in Malta; a Malta that, to a large extent, no longer exists as they experienced it. (York, 2011, pp. 2-3)*

York (2011) believed the Maltese have integrated very well and have entered every layer of society, every profession. Speaking with senior members of the Maltese community<sup>14</sup> about how they thought Australia had changed the Maltese settlers, it was suggested that their values had not changed very much, but their dress, the way they spend, the way they holiday, the way they enjoy life, the comfort, and the ability of how to take care of themselves have. Values, they suggested, were a different story.

One senior member of the community<sup>15</sup>, when asked about his experiences when he visited Malta, which he did on a regular basis, commented that he felt as if he had feet in both places. He believed he was very much Maltese in how he felt, but how he thought was a different matter. This country gives you a chance to really make decisions and to really make a lot of steps in faith, and sometimes you take courses of action that you'd never dream about. And Malta is a bit more protective was how he described the difference in his thinking. He agreed that life in Malta was more prescribed. In Australia, he commented that it was very different. Even the priest was much more able to live the life of his parishioners in Australia, but this he believed, came with more responsibilities.

---

<sup>14</sup> These members asked to remain anonymous.

<sup>15</sup> This person asked to remain anonymous

### **1.3.8 Maltese parental expectations of their children**

These senior member of the Maltese community<sup>16</sup> observed that early Maltese migrants were not anxious for their children to stay at school beyond the legal leaving age. Their ambitions were for their children to have a good job and a steady income. In Malta itself, the retention rate in Government secondary schools was very poor.

*The retention rate for boys, defined as the proportion of Class I students present in each subsequent year of schooling, drops to 38% in Class III, and to 14% in Class VI. For girls, the retention rate is just over 42% in Class III, but drops to less than 9% in Class VI. (Cauchi, 1990, p. 109).*

While some believe that Maltese families these days have much higher expectations for their children, this sentiment was not endorsed by Cauchi (1990) who stated:-

*As the cultural back-ground has changed in recent years in Malta, so have parental expectation[s] with regard to their children's education. This has not happened in Australia. (p. 61)*

Student exchange programmes offer more opportunities for young people to explore the world. In fact, the Victoria University in Melbourne has developed a relationship with University of Malta, one of the world's oldest universities, to their mutual advantage bringing more of Malta to Australia. This can also help the Maltese families to maintain their contacts with the country of their birth. Currently it has been observed that while first and second

---

<sup>16</sup> Who asked to remain anonymous

generation Maltese migrants still spoke Maltese, the third generation did not. Most of them understood the language when someone spoke to them, but they themselves did not speak it. Many of those in Australia who do speak Maltese, speak a very old form of the language. This particularly applied to those who migrated in the 1920s and 1930s, many of whom settled in Mackay in Queensland where the community numbers about 25,000.

### **1.3.9 The Maltese contribution to Australian life**

What did the Maltese contribute to Australian life? Observers believe that their love of family, their love of hard work and their faith, together with their love for both country of origin and also for Australia, were the crucial things. In Malta, it was observed that what you do is much more predictive, the expected thing to do is much more pronounced, while Australia allowed much more individuality. The way of thinking in Malta is still closed mentally in many ways. Responding to changes in the world is not easily achieved in Malta.

## **1.4 Polish Migration**

### **1.4.1 The politics of Poland**

From the beginning of the eighteenth century the fate of the region now known as Poland was decided on a very arbitrary basis. After the Great Northern War of 1700-21, the area (the Polish-Lithuanian state) was divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria. From this time, the governments and cabinets made decisions which arguably did not come within their area of competence or responsibility. This political authority made decisions on such matters, normally considered private, as the religious denomination in which the children of mixed marriages should be reared, whether a villager might build a new house, where Jews might reside, and so on (Jasienica, 1968, p. 74). “The outcome of the 1914-18 war created in the Polish lands, which gradually liberated themselves by their own efforts, a sort of institutional vacuum.” (Jasienica, 1968, p. 76). The empires of Prussia, Austria and Russia which had

partitioned the country, were no longer in existence and on 25 March, 1917, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies had publicly acknowledged the right of the people of Poland to their independence (Jasienica, 1968, p. 75). Poland had practised parliamentary government since the fifteenth century, making it one of the oldest countries in Europe to do so. Thus, elections were set for January, 1919 and the first government of this new Poland immediately introduced the eight hour working day, social insurance and labour legislation (Jasienica, 1968, p. 78). The first elections incorporated universal suffrage, electing the Sejm (parliament) as the supreme power.

At that time, the population numbered 27.4 million, 76 per cent of whom lived in rural districts and towns. Although Poland was an agricultural country, its agrarian structure was neither efficient nor workable. 44.8 per cent of the total agricultural land belonged to the rich farmers while the remainder was a collection of peasant landholdings, many of them less than two hectares. 2,100,00 farms of this kind accounted for less than 15 per cent of the total land area (Jasienica, 1968, p. 77). Although the Russian Revolution greatly influenced the situation in Poland, reinforcing the country's deeply-rooted traditions of social radicalism, rural Poles, while supporting their government's plans for radical agrarian reform, refused to acquire the land by force. After all, many of the peasant farmers themselves had been landholders for generations, albeit very poor ones with very small parcels of land. Such farm sizes only enabled farmers, at best, to be self-sufficient and prevented them from accumulating a surplus to make a profit.

The northern and western frontiers of Poland were not set until the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and incorporated not only the Russian segment but also those parts of the former Polish state which had been appropriated by Germany and Austria. Both the German and Polish governments of the time were prepared to tolerate the situation at the time of

signing, but ultimately the situation led to the conflict between the two countries which in turn led to the beginning of the Second World War. The new Polish state did not expropriate German owners, who were allowed to stay on in Poland, living and working on their properties. Unfortunately, the country so created at Versailles, stuck between two major powers, was not strong enough to defend itself. In the twenty years of its existence, the people of the “Poland of Versailles” succeeded in welding together the three sections of the country, affirming and immensely reinforcing its personality (Jasienica, 1968, p. 88). However, from the signing of the Treaty until Hitler assumed power, the Soviet press argued that the Germans had been cheated at Versailles and that the Polish ‘corridor, Silesia, and part of the province of Potznan should be returned to them. This was all done by Stalin in order to please and appease Germany! This set the scene for the Second World War. Using a trumped up threat of a Polish invasion of Germany, in August, 1939, Hitler’s armies invaded Poland, conquering the country in less than four weeks. War was declared between Britain and Germany on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939, marking the end of the short-lived independent state of Poland.

#### **1.4.2 Polish migration history**

Until 1914, which ended the period of unrestricted migration, Eastern Europe was responsible for more than one third of the emigration from Europe. The majority of these emigrants came from the persecuted national minorities in Tsarist Russia or were landless peasants and agricultural workers from Poland. This emigration provided a “safety valve” for Eastern European rural populations up until the end of the 1920s. Birth-rates were very high and uncontrolled while mortality rates were gradually falling, causing high rates of natural increase. Even industrialisation and land reform could not offer enough work places for the

growing population, causing increased population pressure in the land. For many, the solution was to emigrate.

The Second World War was the reason for enormous movements of people in Europe. Schechtman (1946, p. 10) calls “the transfer policy articulated and implemented by the Third Reich, . . . by far the most extensive and highly organized program in the whole field of population transfer”. It has been estimated (Kirk, 1947, p. 142) that a total of 30 million persons in 1943 moved from their homes as the result of military campaigns, refugee flights, forced evacuations, and the recruitment of labour to feed the Axis war machine. Eleven million German workers were conscripted for military service and, partly as a response to Germany’s need for labour, Poland was invaded. Thousands of young men and women were rounded up by the police and the army and forcibly recruited for work in Germany. By the end of the war there were 7.5 million foreign workers in Germany including 1.8 million prisoners of war, who, it is estimated carried out a quarter of the country’s industrial production in 1944. Without this foreign workforce, the Nazi war machine would have collapsed much earlier (Castles & Miller, 1998, p. 65). Sauckel, the Plenipotentiary for Labour in the Nazi regime (Homze, 1967, p. 113) cited in (Castles & Miller, 1998, p. 65) was quoted as decreeing “All men must be fed sheltered and treated in such a way as to exploit them to the highest possible extent at the lowest conceivable degree of expenditure”. As a result workers were housed in barracks under military control, given the lowest possible wages (if any at all), endured the most appalling social and health conditions with the complete deprivation of civil rights in situations which could only be compared to slavery (Castles & Miller, 1998, p. 65). The Poles, like the Russians and the Jews, were compelled to wear special badges indicating their ethnic origins. Many of them died as a result of harsh treatments and cruel punishments.

Of those who survived many were forced to join the refugee movements as the Axis forces retreated and law and order collapsed. They were joined by those who were the products of the Nazi policies of transfer and resettlement designed to eliminate ethnic minorities. Following the end of armed conflict, most of the refugees returned to their country of origin. By the beginning of 1948, 2,100,000 Poles had been repatriated to Poland from Great Britain, Germany, France and Belgium, where most had been refugees, forced labourers or members of the Polish armed forces (Isaac, 1949, p. 399). However, there remained 850 thousand displaced persons available for overseas migration (Kirk, 1947, p. 143). In July, 1947, Australia signed an agreement with the International Refugee Organisation, who were responsible for finding new homes for these people, to settle 170,000 displaced persons, 60,000 of whom were of Polish background (Drozd, 2001, p. 4). As well as these displaced persons, there were estimated to be a large number of persons who wanted to leave the post-war political and difficult living conditions for peace and security elsewhere.

At the end of 1921 Poland had a population of 27.4 million (70 per square kilometre), but by January 1, 1939 this had grown to 35 million (90 per square kilometre). In 1947 it was estimated to be 23 million approximately. It is estimated that of the two million Poles involved in forced removals, either to concentration camps or to forced labour in Germany, only some of those who survived were able to return to Poland before February, 1946 when a census was held. 703 thousand people returned from the west (mainly Germany) and 864 thousand from associated territories of the Soviet Union (Office of Population Research, 1947, p. 6). The census pointed to the changes to the age composition and sex ratio of the population.

Table 1.11 (p. 44) shows the age distribution of the Polish population in the years 1931 and 1946. It also shows the number of Polish women per 100 men in the same years. The figures

show how the number of children under 17 has declined as a proportion of the whole, reflecting how the conditions prevented children being born during the years of conflict. It also shows how the number of women in the child bearing years were 25% higher than men in the immediate post-war years, showing that increasing the population by increasing the birth rate was not going to be a rapid process.

The age balance was also expected to change due to a change in the mortality rate not only because of an improvement in public health services, but also because anybody with a chronic disease would have died during or immediately after the war.

Adding to this situation was the fact that although many repatriated people returned to their previous homes, the conditions were not the same – families had disappeared, houses had been demolished, housing was almost non-existent and businesses and/or occupations vanished. Farmers faced a situation where livestock, equipment and seeds were all in very short supply (Office of Population Research, 1947, p. 5). Even the territory classified as Poland was different from that which had been Polish prior to World War II. The state lost areas to the east to the Russians but had gained an almost equivalent area to the west from Germany and Austria. Here in essence was the situation for many of the Polish migrants who came to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s.

Table 1.11

*Polish Population Changes in Age and Sex Ratios between 1931 and 1946.*<sup>17</sup>

Age group	Per cent Distribution		Sex Ratio Number of Women per 100 men	
	1931	1946	1931	1946
Total	100.0	100.0	105.6	114.8
0-17	38.5	36.4	98.5	98.0
18-59	53.7	55.4	109.1	125.6
60 and over	7.8	8.2	118.6	126.8

In the years 1947-55, 71,721 people born in Poland were accepted into Australia. 60,000 of them were displaced persons coming from displaced persons camps in Germany after 1945, as refugees. The majority of these migrants were very young, mainly in their twenties. Family reunions made up the second wave of post war Polish migration, with 14,890 Poles coming, mainly from Poland, in the years 1957-66. Unlike most other ethnic groups, the choice of staying or returning to their homeland was not an option for the Poles.

Unlike the Maltese who migrated to Australia over many years, the Poles came in two distinct waves. The first was in the immediate post-war (in the 1950s), while the second was in the 1980s following the problems between the Communists and the Solidarity movement. Between these two waves, the country was ruled by the Communists, which must have been difficult for such a Catholic people. For neither group was the prospect of returning to their home land after migration a viable possibility. For the earlier wave, at least, there was also some fear that relatives in Poland could be targeted by the Communists because the migrants had not returned to Poland after the war.

---

<sup>17</sup> Source: Population Index, Demographic Changes in Poland: Pre-war and Post-war, (1947).

## **1.5 Conclusion**

The conditions which were in existence in Europe and in Australia at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, created a situation where thousands of people left their native countries to migrate to many places on the other side of the world, including Australia. These conditions have been listed and examined in this chapter together with the xenophobic attitudes prevailing amongst the Australian population at the time. It has been pointed out that these attitudes were also observable in the Australian branch of the Catholic Church despite the fact that directives had come from Rome instructing the local church as to how the migrants were to be treated. The policies of ‘assimilation’ which the Australian government adopted were examined and followed as they changed into ‘multiculturalism’. Under their policy of ‘assimilation’ the migrants were expected to become ‘like us’, adopting our ways and our manners and to only speak English at all times. A ‘real’ Australian drank beer and only recognised one form of football – Australian Rules! In 1972, the Whitlam government, having become aware of the futility of trying to achieve or enforce this goal, changed their policy to one where, while still being encouraged to learn English as rapidly as possible, it was realised that to settle happily, migrants needed to maintain many elements of their ethnic culture while simultaneously learning Australian ways. Also discussed were the conditions prevailing in both Malta and Poland before and after the Second World War and prior to their migration.

With the background to migration established, the next chapter will discuss the research which has already been conducted into aspects of the migrants (particularly the children) on their arrival in Australia. The physical conditions which existed during their education and some of the problems they encountered are also reported.

## Chapter Two - Literature Review

---

### **Part I: Historical Background to the Catholic Church, Attitudes to Migration and Catholic Schools**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In order to better understand the situation in which migrant children found themselves when they arrived in Australia, it is necessary to refer to a range of pertinent literature, specifically bodies of work which described the personal, political and educational climates which existed at the time. Of prime importance was the attitude of the Church itself to post-war migration and the people who experienced it.

This literature review therefore draws on and analyses literature from the following areas:

- The political situations in the countries from whence these migrants came together with the political situation in Australia prior to them coming;
- The role of the Catholic Church, both in Rome and Australia, and its attitude to migrants;
- The attitudes of Australians to the migrants;
- Research into Catholic schools and into the conditions under which the children were educated;

Ultimately the literature is synthesised to provide a pertinent background against which the empirical aspect of the research may be presented. The four areas of literature were selected for the following reasons:

- Post Second World War, there were many refugees in Europe who had been so for many years and did not have or did not want the ability to return to their country of origin. They were poor, with almost nothing of their own (not even an education, in

many cases) and they needed an opportunity to rebuild their lives far from the places where they had been so cruelly treated.

- The attitudes of the Catholic Church in both Rome and Australia, (which seemed to differ) were important to how the children under scrutiny were accepted and taught in Catholic schools. Their school experiences would colour whether they would succeed in life. Was the Church prepared to make allowances for the lack of education with which these children and their parents arrived in Australia?
- How the adults were treated in Australia was very pertinent to the children's sense of well-being.
- How the migrant children were treated at school by both the Religious teaching them or by the other children, formed their overall experiences.

The Church's attitude to migration and migrants differed between theory and execution in Australia, particularly when compared with directives emanating from Rome. Decrees issued from Rome defined the Church's attitude to migrants and their spiritual well-being, but local Religious seemed to circumvent the decrees. One of the most obvious deviations from Papal directives was over the issue of migrant priests who were to be allowed to establish congregations of their own countrymen. Although this was allowed in Australia, it could only be achieved with permission of the local parish to use his church when it was not being used for other purposes. This, in many cases, was not readily forthcoming as the local parish priest saw this as a criticism of his ability and a threat to his authority. Why the Australian Religious did so is vital to this study. Were they deliberately flouting Vatican rulings or were there extenuating circumstances? Perhaps they believed that the Vatican was not aware of the differing and unique conditions which persisted in Australia? Perhaps there were other reasons. It was therefore thought necessary to explore the available literature on Vatican

responses to post World War II migration which involved millions of displaced and alienated people. The attitudes and response to migration of the Australian Catholic Church also need to be understood and in particular, why they appeared to deviate from the central proposals. Therefore, evidence of the Church's response needs to be investigated.

Vital to any understanding of the migrant child's experience at school is an understanding of the state of Catholic education in Australia. Its history defines the attitudes, particularly of the Religious, to the education of Catholic children in Catholic schools and reference needs to be made to the contemporary literature to comprehend the physical and spiritual situation in which these children found themselves. Necessarily, the curriculum, the teaching methods, the quality of the teaching, the pupil/teacher ratios, the need for lay teachers as well as the physical surroundings in which the children found themselves all have some relevance to an understanding of their stories.

Studies which have been undertaken into the experiences of migrant children in schools, both in general and in specific ethnic groups, are essential to this study. Such studies allow the researcher to decide whether the information gleaned in this current study is supported or contradicted by evidence from elsewhere, or even if it is breaking new ground. If contradicted, a thorough re-investigation of the evidence needs to be undertaken to discover if the results are an aberration or if previous results have provided an unsupported range of evidence. This chapter attempts to examine the literature which addresses some of the areas of interest mentioned.

## **2.2 The Catholic Church in Rome and its Attitude to Migration.**

In 1952, Pope Pius XII released his Magna Carta for Migrants, the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia*, in which he decreed that every local ordinary was to make a concerted effort

to make sure that the spiritual care of migrants was entrusted to priests of the same language or nationality, and that such a missionary was, wherever possible, to be assigned a Church, chapel or public or semi-public oratory for carrying on his ministry. He did, however, place the mission to the migrants under the jurisdiction of the local priest.

In his commentary on *Exsul Familia*, Altmayer (1962) maintained that the Church understood the difficulties experienced by migrants and would not force them into the process of absorption (i.e. assimilation), a process which it believed, would take at least a generation. The Church, however was not eager to see a repetition of the 'alien' arrangement for Ordinaries (Tessarolo, 1962) as had occurred in major cities in the United States of America in the early part of the twentieth century.

Sometime after 1957, the International Catholic Migration Commission published a pamphlet expressing its concerns that many migrants had neglected their religious duties and lost their faith because they were uprooted from their surroundings. Because of this the Commission reiterated that at least in the beginning, migrants should be surrounded by a religious influence which echoed that of their homeland, by providing them with priests of their own nationality, language and culture. Contrary to the Australian Government's policy of assimilation, the Commission believed that migration would not be successful if, in order to be accepted, the migrants had to shed their culture, language, and the traditions which gave sense and dignity to their lives (Kampschoer, 1960). The International Migration Commission put special emphasis on the desirability of rural settlement of migrants as an answer to overpopulation and to the situation where many peasants were without land to work. All these Church sentiments and decrees were in direct opposition to the Australian Government's aspirations of assimilation, although they, too, intended settling migrants in rural areas.

### **2.3 The Australian Catholic Church and Migration**

Prior to 1939, this predominantly Irish-Catholic Church had become so, due to government policies which encouraged mainly migrants from the United Kingdom. Over the period 1861-1978, Irish Catholics were the second largest ethnic group in Australia (O'Donoghue, 2001). O'Farrell (cited in O'Donoghue, 2001) described the Irish style of Catholicism prominent in Australia and which was taught and reinforced in Australian schools, as clerical, authoritarian and non-intellectual. However, during the 1960s and 1970s in particular, Australia underwent a time of enormous social change, with the influx of non-English speaking migrants, including more than a million Catholics predominantly from Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Germany, Croatia, Hungary (Dixon, 2005). This Australian Church made no concessions for cultural differences in the ways in which the Catholic faith was portrayed or the importance of different observances in European Catholic life.

Table 2.1 shows the growth in the numbers of Victorian residents who claimed adherence to the Catholic Church, while Figure 2:1 graphically illustrates this growth in the figures over the same period.

Table 2.1  
*Catholics in Victoria, 1871-2001*<sup>18</sup>

Year	Number	Year	Number
1871	170,620	1966	889,495
1891	248,591	1971	1,003,826
1901	263,710	1976	990,457
1911	286,433	1981	1,064,514
1921	322,565	1986	1,104,044
1933	344,487	1991	1,236,961
1947	419,661	1996	1,262,143
1954	563,654	2001	1,310,390
1961	762,735		

Figure 2.1 illustrates this rise in the numbers of people in Australia who were identified as belonging to the Catholic Church. The numbers are plotted from 1871 until 2001.

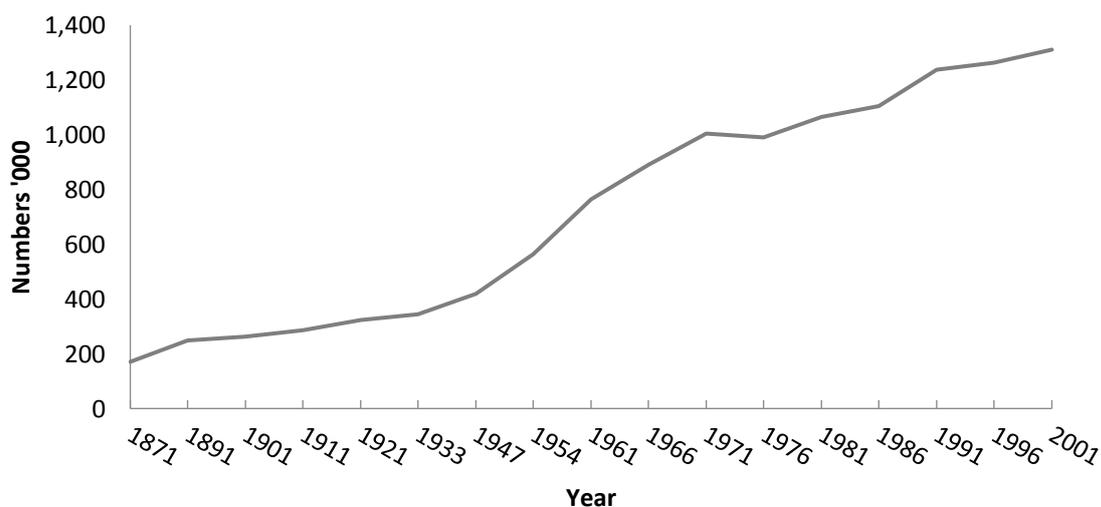


Figure 2.1. Catholics registered in Victoria from 1871 to 2001.<sup>19</sup>

By 1979 when Father Leonard Testa presented a paper to the Annual Conference of the Major Clerical Religious Superiors on the subject of Ethnic Vicars (Pittarello, 1981), the

<sup>18</sup> Source: (Dixon R. , *The Catholic Community in Australia*, 1996, p. 61)

<sup>19</sup> Source: (Dixon R. E., *The Catholic Community in Australia*, 2005, p. 61)

church was still struggling with the idea of multiculturalism as opposed to assimilation. Father Testa proposed that ethnic Vicars could be established in those dioceses where there were migrant chaplains, especially in capital cities, and that these ethnic Vicars would be assisted by the Directors of Migration in Capital Cities in forming the basis of reference for the Vicar and Commission for Ethnic Affairs. Although the proposal was endorsed at the conference in 1979, the 1980 conference reported that the proposal had been abandoned as it was seen as a criticism of the local priest. Pittarello (1981) believed , at that time, no research on the spiritual needs of Catholic migrants to Australia had ever been undertaken. There was a popular assumption that a common faith united locals and newcomers. This seems to have been unquestionably accepted among both pastoral workers and Catholic scholars. No allowance was made for differing cultural expressions of Catholicism.

the majority group within the Catholic Church. This occurred as new pastoral problems, exacerbated by the insufficient number of priests and Religious, started to appear. As well as this, new Catholic traditions had been introduced into the Church in Australia by different ethnic groups. This Pittarello (1981) explained was due to the fact that religion was an inseparable part of any culture and that faith was culturally received, implying that the symbols, devotions, laws, customs, and traditions which were adopted by all Catholics around the world varied in meaning and significance for people from different cultures . In effect, the Catholic Church around the world was not homogeneous but a “diversification of ways to share the same truth and pursue salvation” .

Table 2.2 (p. 53) shows the proportion of overseas born in the population of Australia for the census years between 1947 and 1981. The figures indicate that throughout this peak migration time, there was a higher proportion of Catholics among the migrants than among the total Australian population every year.

Although migrants from the British Isles made up the greatest proportion of migrants, their contribution to the Catholic population in Australia was quite small, leading to a situation where the Irish Catholics were becoming less and less the majority group within the Catholic Church. This occurred as new pastoral problems, exacerbated by the insufficient number of priests and Religious, started to appear. As well as this, new Catholic traditions had been introduced into the Church in Australia by different ethnic groups. This Pittarello (1981) explained was due to the fact that religion was an inseparable part of any culture and that faith was culturally received, implying that the symbols, devotions, laws, customs, and traditions which were adopted by all Catholics around the world varied in meaning and significance for people from different cultures (Pittarello, 1981). In effect, the Catholic Church around the world was not homogeneous but a “diversification of ways to share the same truth and pursue salvation” (Pittarello, 1981, p. 7).

Table 2.2  
*Proportion of Overseas Born in the Total and the Catholic Population of Australia from Census 1947 to Census 1981*<sup>20</sup>

	Australian Population		of	Catholic Population		of
	Total Population	Percentage overseas-born		Total Population	Percentage Overseas-born	
1947	7,579,358	9.8		1,587,458	Not available	
1954	9,006,530	14.3		2,060,980	17.8	
1961	10,508,186	16.9		2,619,964	22.5	
1966	11,550,443	18.4		3,036,116	23.2	
1971	12,775,634	20.2		3,442,634	24.4	
1976	13,548,504	20.1		3,482,848	24.2	
1981	14,576,330	20.6		3,783,488	23.9	

<sup>20</sup> Source: (Pittarello, Migrants and the Catholic Church in Australia, 1988, p. 144)

Table 2.3 (below) lists the percentages of Catholic adherents living in Melbourne in 1981, according to their place of birth. As would be expected, more than two thirds of Catholics living in Melbourne at that time, were born in Australia.

Table 2.3  
*Percentage of Catholics by Birthplace, Living in Melbourne in 1981.21*

Birthplace	Living in Melbourne	Birthplace	Living in Melbourne
Australia	66.41	Total Europe	27.18
UK & Ireland	3.81	Total Asia	2.88
Italy	11.76	Total America	1.12
Malta	3.02	Total Africa	1.61
Netherlands	1.02	Total Oceania	0.57
Poland	1.28	Total Overseas born	33.37
Yugoslavia	2.96	Not stated	0.21
Europe NEI	3.33	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>789,472</b>

The different percentages of Catholics according to their birthplace who were living in Melbourne in 1981, are illustrated in *Figure 2.2*.

<sup>21</sup> Source: Pittarello, A., *Migrants and the Catholic Church in Australia*, (1988), p. 145

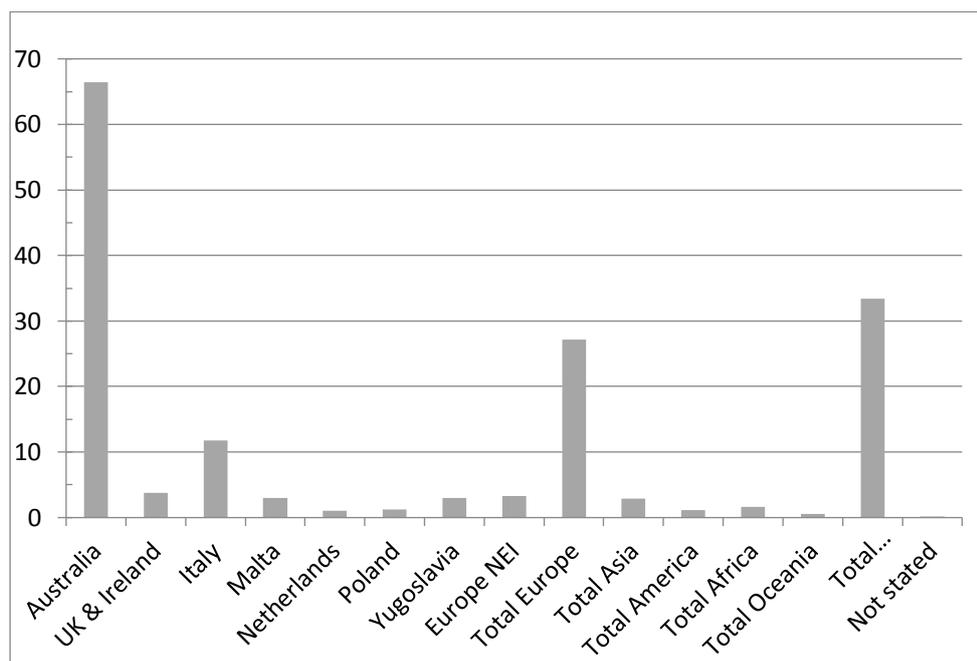


Figure 2.2. The different percentages of the Catholic population in Melbourne by their birthplace in 1981.<sup>22</sup>

Roman Catholic migrants soon became aware that beneath the familiar Latin liturgy there lay very great socio-religious differences between themselves and the predominantly Irish-Australian population of the Roman Church in Australia. Their religious practices were very enculturated. Even if there was a priest who spoke their language, the migrants complained that he could not hear their confessions in dialect, that he was unfamiliar with their local customs at baptisms, funerals and weddings, that he rarely understood, or sympathized with, many of those superstitions associated with family and village life in their district of origin (Price, 1963b).

Another problem had arisen because the pastoral workers who had been almost entirely of Irish Australian stock, as reflected the foundations of the Australian Church, had almost

---

<sup>22</sup> Source: Pittarello, A, *Migrants and the Catholic church in Australia*, 1988, p. 145.

nothing in common with half the members of the post-war Church and indeed ran the risk of alienating them from their religion. The training for seminarians and religious at this time, was also oriented towards those parishioners of Irish background.

Given the resistance to change which is part of the Catholic Church, adapting to the changes brought about in the years following the Second World War and the subsequent influx of migrants was both difficult and slow. It is not surprising that many migrants felt alienated from their religion and wanted to have their own chaplains speaking their own language and observing their own customs. Pittarello (1981) pointed out that Catholic migrants found themselves without anyone to represent them adequately among the power-holders and the decision makers. As a result, after more than thirty years of migrant presence the Church had kept migrants rather on the periphery. Summarising a questionnaire which he sent to religious orders prior to writing his report, Pittarello (1981) reported that even those superiors whose orders were engaged in teaching in schools, stated that they were not involved in any specific project in favour of migrants, except in teaching English as a second language. What they **were** doing was directed towards ‘assimilating’ the individual into the larger society – a strategy which in the larger society had already given way to a policy of ‘multiculturalism’.

This attitude in schools may well have been a contributing factor experienced by many migrant families where a ‘clash of culture’ existed, dividing parents and their children from each other because of their different cultural values. Furthermore, Pittarello (1981) reported that individual Religious were taking care of individual migrants and no mention was made by any Order responding to his questionnaire, of an initiative of co-operation or any project concerned with the wider migration issue within the Church, indicating that the Australian Church had not been able to resort to a comprehensive pastoral programme for Catholic migrants. This was the situation after thirty years of non-English speaking migration!

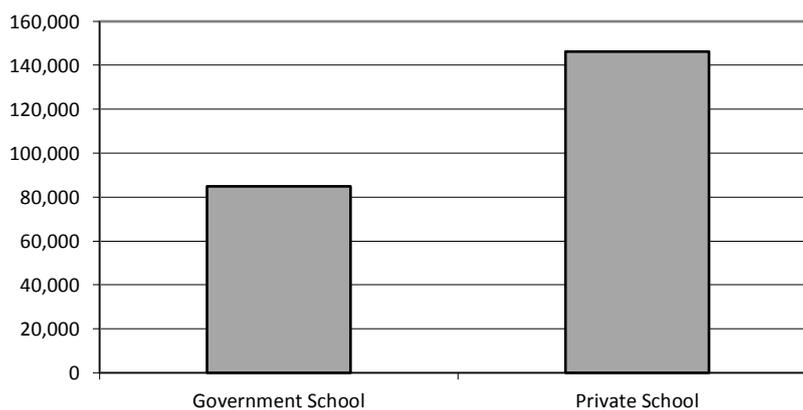
In parish life, the Latin Mass was celebrated with the priest facing the altar. Sodalities, such as the Holy Name, the Sacred Heart, the Children of Mary, effectively organised Catholics into Mass-goers and communicant members; long queues were to be seen at the confessional; communion was received, fasting from midnight; no meat on Fridays was the Catholic rule; Catholic children had to attend Catholic schools; the Rosary was the staple prayer; Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was held every Sunday evening; and participation in the St Patrick's Day march had about it the status of attendance at Sunday Mass. Archbishop Mannix gave constant warnings about the inroads of Communism within Australia's democratic society, repeating these warnings almost to the exclusion of the equally grave threat to the Church - the impending breakdown of the education structure of the Church built up from 1871 (McCarthy, c1986, p. 37). This is how Brother Frank McCarthy (McCarthy, c1986), described the situation in the Catholic Church in Australia when the first of the migrants began arriving.

#### **2.4 The Development of Catholic Education in Australia**

It is claimed that Australian convent education evolved from Ursuline and Jesuit origins in Europe (Barbaro, 2003). The Ursuline Order became the first female teaching Order of the Catholic Church in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The teaching methods of these sisters were adopted by the Presentation Sisters, as well as the Brigidine and Mercy Sisters, and the latter were the first to use the Ursuline style of education, which had become established in Ireland, in Australian convent schools (Barbaro, 2003).

It was the early Catholic bishops who instigated the establishment of conventual education to Australia, in the second half of the 19th century. At this early stage of Catholic education in Australia, Catholic denominational schools were lay staffed and publicly funded by Colonial governments. In 1885, in reaction to the "free, compulsory and secular" education acts of the

Australian states in the late 1800s, the Australian bishops had declared that Catholic parents were obliged to send their children to Catholic schools, and that those who sent their children to state schools without good cause were to be denied absolution at the confessional (Dixon, 2005). Not surprisingly, most parishioners did their best to comply, although at no time was the entire population of Catholic children attending Catholic schools. As an example of this, the situation in Australian schools on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1933 is illustrated in the following table (Figure 2.3. Roman Catholic adherents receiving instruction at different kinds of Australian schools, 30th June, 1933.). As can be seen, 35% of Catholic children were attending government schools.



*Figure 2.3.* Roman Catholic adherents receiving instruction at different kinds of Australian schools, 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1933.<sup>23</sup>

The 1844 Select Committee on Education, established by the NSW Legislative Council, reported that of the 25,675 children aged between four and 14, living in NSW, less than half were receiving any sort of education at all (O'Farrell, 1968). By the 1840s, it was obvious that organisation and centralization of the regulations was needed and administrative boards

---

<sup>23</sup> Source: *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia* No. 37: 1946-1947

were established. Eventually, the Churches objected to the state having control, especially over the textbooks, which the Catholics saw as being Protestant in content and tone (O'Farrell, 1968). Secularism was becoming more prevalent especially among the politicians. Here, religion was believed to work against freedom, progress and enlightenment. Protestants were becoming less supportive of a denominational education system which they saw as supporting Catholicism, and scepticism, agnosticism and indifference were taking the place of religion for many people. By the 1860s, the Australian bishops saw the state as forcing Catholic denominational schools to compromise their religious standards in order to qualify for government aid (O'Farrell, 1968).

When, between 1872 and 1893, all Australian states passed Education Acts removing state aid to Church schools, the bishops needed to staff Catholic schools in order to provide a Catholic education, not only for city schools, but also for little parish schools all over Australia, which provided a Catholic education for the children of the bush (Dixon, 2005). Lay teachers could rarely be part of the staffing not only because of the Church's inability to pay them, but also because the best teachers who were qualified to be employed in the Catholic system, had accepted higher salaried posts in the government education system. It was at this time that Father Julian Tennison Woods and Mother Mary McKillop established the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart (Josephites) in South Australia, an order dedicated to the education of the poor (O'Farrell, 1968). To protect their flocks from the poison of atheism deemed to emanate from the state education system, the bishops embarked on a quest to persuade teaching Orders from Catholic Europe, preferably from Ireland from whence most of the Catholic settlers in Australia had come, that coming to Australia should be seen as a mission to teach the unenlightened in the great South Land (Sturrock, 1995).

The call coincided with the establishment of a number of Catholic women's Orders in Ireland. For example, by 1886, almost 250 Irish women had entered Brigidine convents in Ireland (Henderson, 1997). This increase in the number of sisters being professed was reflected in the other Orders in Ireland. Ninety-one convents had been established in Ireland by 1850 (a majority by the Presentation congregation), with the number of sisters increasing eight-fold between 1841 and 1901 (Sturrock, 1995). Naturally, it was to these women that the Australian bishops, Irish themselves, turned to staff their schools.

Although the sisters, in many cases, were willing to come as missionaries to Australia, their local bishops frequently refused to release them because so many had left Ireland during the 1840s and 1850s that there were not enough missionaries to work in Ireland itself (Sturrock, 1995). However the first of the orders to arrive in Australia, the Sisters of Charity, arrived in 1838 followed soon afterwards by the Mercy, Good Shepherd, Presentation, and Dominican Sisters. Last to arrive were the Brigidine Sisters in 1883. Nano Nagle, the founder of the Presentation Order in Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, started her teaching activities with the poor children of Cork, an activity illegal in the Ireland of that time. Finding the task too big for the efforts of one individual, she and her supportive friend, Reverend Francis Moylan, invited the French Ursuline sisters, with whom she had been educated in France, to come to Cork. Eventually, four professed Ursuline sisters, who were Irish by birth, arrived in Ireland to teach. Eventually, the Presentation Sisters morphed from this beginning to teach the children of the poor in Ireland, and later in Australia, using the methods learned from their own Ursuline education (Kane, 1974). The Brigidines were used to rural conditions and in the main came from the same areas in Ireland as did their parishioners, and they too followed the Ursuline tradition of utility. Their teaching methods emphasized traditional behaviour both at school and outside it, as well as the submissiveness of the young girl to God. Critics of their

educational method, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, point out that it did not encourage a spirit of enquiry, a process of understanding or the ability to join in an open discussion (Sturrock, 1995). However, it was consistent with contemporary society's expectations of the roles young women were to assume in society.

In Australia, women religious were expected to establish European style convent 'high' schools for the further education of colonial girls. As each high school was established it was further expected that the sisters would take over the existing parish school, and with the withdrawal of government funding, religious sisters were increasingly sought to staff all parish schools. While the parish schools remained the responsibility of the parish and its priest, the convent 'high' school was owned and administered by the order which had established it at no cost to the Church. Over time, the latter schools became secondary schools in line with the State school system. They were considered select schools, available only to girls from affluent backgrounds. However, following Ursuline precepts, the income earned from the fees these families paid was used to fund an adjoining elementary school for the less advantaged (Barbaro, 2003). This was achieved with almost no money and with considerable hardship for the Religious involved.

Unlike the government schools which operated as a centralised system, the Catholic schools were a partnership of bishops, parish priests and Religious Orders (O'Brien, 1999). O'Brien asserted that, although to the observer, Catholic education gave the appearance of a highly centralised system, Catholic secondary schools in particular were formed of clusters and sub-systems tightly controlled by the Religious Orders. By 1963, when Archbishop Mannix died, Catholic education consisted of an eclectic collection of parish primary and secondary schools and various kinds of schools run by the Religious Orders with varying degrees of autonomy from the diocese in which they were located (Beare, in O'Brien, 1999). The

responsibilities in and for the parochial school were divided, with the parish priest acting as principal (and for legal reasons, the proprietor) while the responsibility for the appointment and transfer of the principal and staff, for curricula and all other policies lay with the religious congregations. Table 2.4 shows that the number of migrant Polish and Maltese children arriving in Australia between 1933 and 1971, who were aged between 0 and 14, the latter being the minimum school leaving age at the time. (The 1933 figures are the last pre-war until 1947 when the next census was taken.) While all the Maltese were Catholic, the same could not be said of the Poles. A significant number of Jewish children would have been included in the total number of Polish migrant children. The question about religion has been asked in every census in Australia. In 1971, the Jewish migrants numbered 7,769 compared with Catholics who numbered 6,125 and Roman Catholics (as respondents were asked to nominate their religious affiliations, both categories are assumed to be the same) who numbered 5,080.<sup>24</sup> This indicates that there were not quite twice as many Catholics as Jewish migrants, many of whom were born in Poland. As the question was voluntary, 2,834 did not reply and 1,393 claimed membership of other denominations.

Table 2.4  
*Numbers of Polish and Maltese Immigrant Children Aged between 0 and 14 in Australia between Census Years 1933 and 1971*<sup>25</sup>

Year	Poles	Maltese
1933	267	18
1947	150	18
1954	952	2026
1961	969	4205
1971	386	2220

<sup>24</sup> As respondents were allowed to categorise themselves Catholics and Roman Catholics are assumed to belong to the same religion

<sup>25</sup>Source: (Museum Victoria, n.d.) <http://www.museumvictoria.com.au/origins>

Figure 2.4 pictorialises the above information

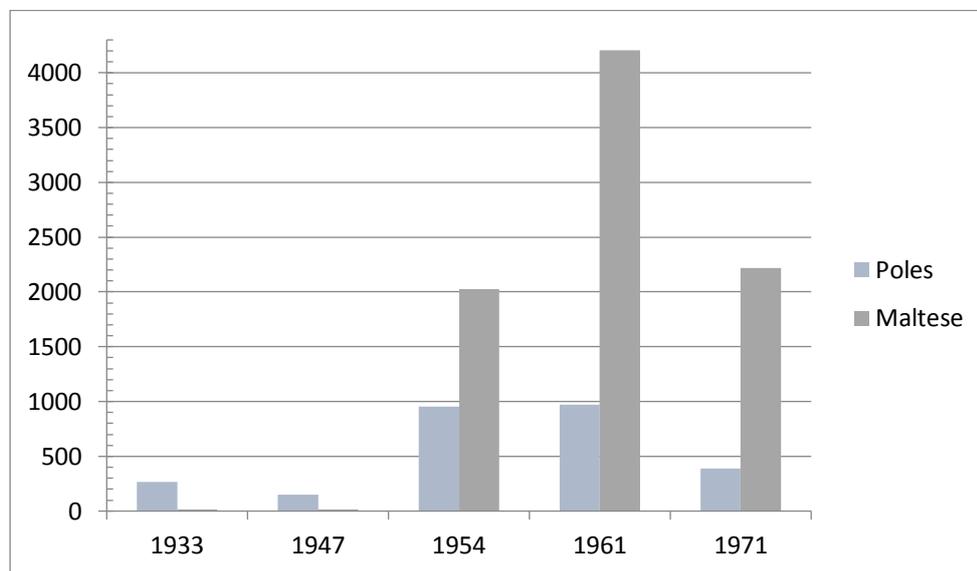


Figure 2.4. Comparison of Polish and Maltese children aged between 0 and 14, various census.<sup>26</sup>

Table 2.5  
Top Eight Occupations for Poles and Maltese<sup>27</sup>

	Poles	Maltese
Tradesmen, production-process workers	7,712	9,989
Administrative, executive and managerial workers	2,005	179
Sales workers	1,460	450
Service, sport and recreational workers	1218	1,071
Professional, technical and related workers	1170	314
Clerical workers	1095	1497
Workers in transport and communication	541	825
Farmers, fishermen, hunters, timber getters and related workers	226	109

<sup>26</sup> Source: (Museum Victoria, n.d.) <http://www.museumvictoria.com.au/origins>

<sup>27</sup> Source: (Museum Victoria, n.d.) <http://www.museumvictoria.com.au/origins>

Table 2.5 shows the differences in occupation as stated by both the Poles and the Maltese for census year 1971. As can be seen from this table, a significant majority of Maltese were employed as tradesmen, but very few as managerial, sales or professional employees. The Poles, however, while also having a significant number of people employed as tradesmen, also had much greater numbers employed as managerial, sales or professional employees. The children of the post-World War II baby boom who had been born after 1945 when their fathers returned from the war, entered the schools in the decade 1950-1960. This was the same decade when the Federal Government's migration scheme was making its first contributions to school populations. McCarthy, (c1985) estimated that at least 2,000 Austrian, 3,700 Dutch, 10,700 German, 12,000 Italian and 726 Yugoslav children arrived in Victoria between 1950-1960 (not to mention the Maltese and the Poles) (See Table 2:6 below) but the Federal Government was concerned exclusively with the education of adults in English. Stapleton (1998) estimated that at least 60% of these numbers were Catholic.

Table 2.6  
*School Age Children Migrating to Victoria between 1950 and 1960*<sup>28</sup>

Ethnicity	Numbers
Austrian	2,000
Dutch	3,700
German	10,700
Italian	12,000
Yugoslav	726

There was some criticism, at least in part from parents that in Catholic schools, religious education received much more emphasis than the secular curriculum, a bias believed

---

<sup>28</sup> *Source:* McCarthy (Catholic Education in Victoria; 1947-1962. , c1986)

common to educators who were Religious despite the fact that both Religious and lay teachers were teaching classes of sixty or even seventy children. The increase in numbers created another crisis – where were more teachers to be found and how could they be paid? Despite a marked increase in the number of vocations in the mid-1950s, there was a need for 120-200 teachers beyond the normal annual recruitment to meet the need of an annual increase in enrolments above normal enrolments of 6,000 children (McCarthy, c1986). Between 1948 and 1961 the total enrolment more than doubled (see Figure 2.5, pg. 67).

By the 1950s, the Catholic community had grown to be what the Irish bishops of the nineteenth century had worked for and dreamed of - a thriving Church based on the Irish model (Dixon, 2005). At that time, Catholic education in Victoria consisted of a network of primary and secondary schools controlled essentially by the religious congregations, with finance from the priests, the laity and the Religious who provided their services at very low cost. However, by 1963, the situation was very different. The system was on the verge of collapse (O'Brien, 1999). Half of Australia's post-war migrants were Catholics, and together with the post-war 'baby boom', enrolments in Catholic schools had escalated to a point where accommodation had become a great problem. The increase in the numbers of sisters and brothers who, unsalaried, were available to work in education did not keep up with the growing enrolments which required an increase in the numbers of lay teachers to teach in Catholic schools (O'Brien, 1999). Thus, parishes were under increasing pressure not only to provide funds for capital works (as had always been the case) but also for recurrent expenditure (including teachers' salaries). Parents and academics became concerned about standards of education in Catholic schools in view of the fact that many Religious had received only a cursory education in teaching, which was certainly not standardised between the Orders.

During 1954, an appeal was launched for teachers to try to reduce the size of the classes in parish schools. A memorandum, dated 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1955, (of unknown authorship, but presumed to emanate from the Archbishop's office) reported that 30 teaching vacancies had been filled by this method and thirty girls had applied for teacher training. By 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1957, another memorandum (presumed to be from the Archbishop's office) reported that the requests for about 80 teachers for the parish schools in the archdiocese in 1956 could not be met, although another 75 would be available from the training colleges at the end of 1957. In 1963, the Vicar General informed the parish priests of the diocese that, of the 200 lay teachers needed for 1964, only 130 at most would be available. He further informed them that it would therefore be "necessary to reduce the number of teachers per parish in order that the maximum number of parishes [would] benefit" (Moran, L P. Vicar General, Archdiocese of Melbourne, 1963). Despite this pressing problem with staff to pupil ratios being 1:60, the Archdiocese produced a document in 1959 which expressed concern at the proportion of Religious to lay teachers, who the authors believed, were neither old enough or experienced enough to staff the schools. The document went on to express the opinion that "the lay teachers' training scheme in Melbourne has prejudiced the allocation of religious teachers to schools in this diocese, with consequent considerable staffing costs" (Archdiocese of Melbourne, 1959 (p. 1).

There were even suggestions made in the 1960s by Brian Crittenden of the Sydney Education Office and Fr Patrick Crudden who had been Director of the Melbourne Catholic Education office which questioned the basic belief of Australian Catholicism that every Catholic child should undertake their education in a Catholic school. Their reasoning, in large part, rested on the premise that in the modern age, the Catholic Church would do better to permeate society in order to Christianise it, rather than separating itself from the non-Catholic part.

These men saw the obsession with the provision of schools as distracting the Church from its primary mission of evangelisation (Selleck, 1978).

Figure 2.5 shows the enrolment figures for the numbers of children in Catholic schools in the Melbourne Archdiocese over a range of years between 1939, before migration started and 1982, beyond the time frame of this study. The graph indicates that the numbers have been fairly constant from 1960 to 1982.

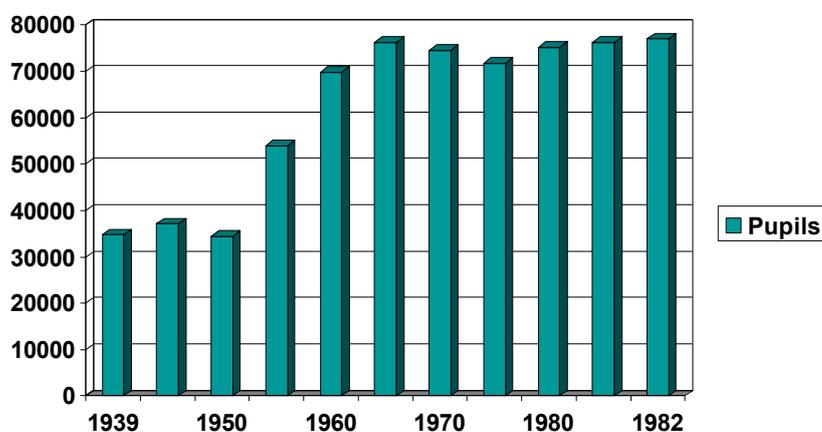


Figure 2.5. Enrolments in Catholic primary schools, Archdiocese of Melbourne, various years.<sup>29</sup>

While it took 50 years (from 1891 to 1941) for the number of children in Catholic schools to double from 450,000 to 956,000, it took only 18 years to double again to 1,876,000 by 1959. A large proportion of this increase was due to the children of migrants (Doyle, 1978). Despite a vigorous building programme, places in Catholic schools were not expanded quickly enough, and large classes and serious overcrowding became common (Selleck, 1978). O'Donoghue (2001) points out that although all schools struggled to cope with the challenge of a rapidly growing population, Catholic schools with their larger classes and

---

<sup>29</sup> Source: Doyle, A, *Tradition and Innovation in non-Anglican Post-Secondary Schools*, 1978, (p. 4).

overworked teachers responded with “rigid control and routine discipline” (p. 23). The Catholic Education Office report dated 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1958, commenting on the situation in Melbourne’s diocesan schools, observed “It is particularly unfortunate that many who cannot obtain places are new Australians, who need Catholic schools *to assimilate them into the Australian Catholic community*” (writer’s italics). Selleck (1978) related how, as far as school discipline was concerned, Catholic schools were reluctant to move from what he described as their ‘rigid adherence’ to an antiquated 19th century system based on strictness and formality. The Melbourne Education Office Report of 1958 mentioned that among the older teachers ‘there [were] still many outmoded and unsatisfactory over-regimented methods of teaching’ and that even younger teachers, who had been trained at good teachers’ colleges, tended to use such methods because they seemed to be the most expedient way of coping with the large numbers of pupils. Doyle (1978, p. 4) further pointed out that “about one-sixth of the teachers in Catholic secondary schools had no formal teacher training, which compared unfavourably with government schools” (p. 124).

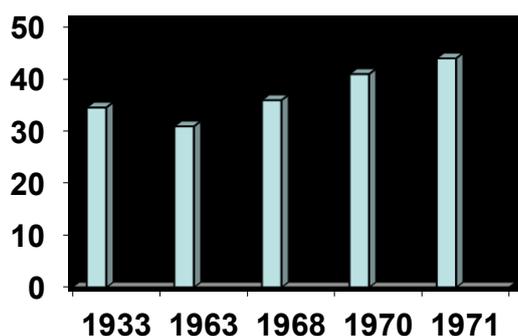


Figure 2.6. Percentage of Catholic children attending government schools.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Sources: (Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1946-47; 1956; 1965) and (Dixon R. E., *The Catholic Community in Australia*, 2005, p. 11)

Despite the developing situation, the Australian Bishops' Conference of 1969 reaffirmed its confidence that Catholic schools in Australia were of the greatest importance, ignoring the fact that the stated goal of Catholic education for all Catholic children could no longer be put into practice (Selleck, 1978). At the same time, Monsignor Bourke, the founding Director of the Federal Catholic Education Office, demonstrated that the provision of a place in both primary and secondary schools for all Catholic children who wanted one, was an option 'only in theory.' The Survey and Planning Office of the Melbourne Catholic Education Office in 1971, while firmly rejecting the possibility that the Church might withdraw from education entirely, acknowledged that to educate all Catholic children in the Catholic education system at all levels, however much it might be desired, seemed an impossibility, for both financial and manpower reasons (Selleck, 1978). By 1972, the Catholic hierarchy seemed to have concluded that their schools would be catering for less than 60 per cent (in fact not much more than 50 per cent) of Catholic children in the future (Selleck, 1978), - a radical shortfall from the ambitions of Bishop Vaughan in the nineteenth century<sup>31</sup>.

Vaughan regarded the education system which was being established by the NSW Government in the mid-1870s as a godless secular education. He condemned the whole proposal in July, 1879 in a pastoral entitled *Catholic Education*. He condemned schools established on 'secularist principles' as 'seedplots of future immorality, infidelity and lawlessness' which led Parkes (NSW premier) to abolish state aid. Vaughan then organised his own school system with religious teachers, whom he gleaned from the Marist Brothers,

---

<sup>31</sup> Source: Australian Dictionary of Biography, On-line Edition. [www.adb.online.anu.edu.au](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au), 2006-2014

the Jesuits and Mary McKillop's Sisters of Joseph. By 1883, 12,500 of Sydney's 15,200 Catholic children were in this system<sup>32</sup>.

Many of those who arrived in Australia after the Second World War were not used to a Church school system and could see no advantage in sending their children to one, particularly when it involved the payment of fees. Many migrant parents were also unaware of the distinction between Catholic and government schools and were often unable or unwilling to pay school fees (O'Brien, 1999). Pittarello (1980) pointed out that while the parish school was the most important structural entity in almost all Australian parishes, this was not the norm in Europe. He pointed out that in Italy it simply did not exist. Having to pay fees to enable their children to go to school, was a shocking concept for most of the migrants (Italian) whom he interviewed as part of his research.

## **2.5 Problems within Schools**

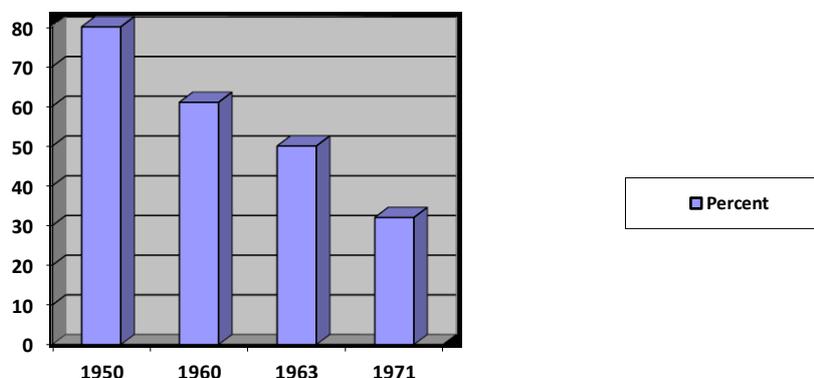
### **2.5.1 Overcrowding.**

Other pressures were being felt by the Catholic school system. Rising costs, increasing demands for more and better education, rapid urbanisation, the increase in the retention rate of secondary school pupils, the emergence of the middle-class together with an improved standard of living, the growing involvement of Australia in the region of South-East Asia, secularisation, and the influence of the mass media affected all schools (O'Brien, 1999). The Catholic school system suffered the added problem of the declining percentage of professed Religious available to teach in its schools.

---

<sup>32</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition. [www.adb.online.anu.edu.au](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au), 2006-2014. Entry for Roger, William, Bede Vaughan

Figure 2.7 p.70, illustrates the change in the number of teaching religious in this period of time as a percentage of the whole teaching workforce in Australian Catholic Schools.



*Figure 2.7.* Religious teachers as a percentage of total teaching staff at Catholic schools in Victoria.<sup>33</sup>

This additional problem, namely the relative decrease in the number of teaching sisters and brothers, placed added burdens on both teachers and parish alike. O'Brien (1999) argued that many of the Religious were badly affected by the extraordinary demands made upon them – physically, mentally and spiritually. Class sizes became huge; tales of one sister to 145 primary school children were not uncommon. By the early 1970s, 44% of Catholics were either European migrants or the children of migrants (O'Brien, 1999) so that in addition to huge classes, teachers were faced with teaching children from a wide range of cultural traditions and language backgrounds for which they had not been prepared (O'Brien, 1999).

In a report from the Melbourne Catholic Education Office, dated 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1958, it was pointed out that, even before the onset of migration, accommodation in Catholic schools was

---

<sup>33</sup> Source: Selleck, RJW., (1978), *The Catholic primary school*.

not adequate in comparison with accepted educational standards, and that with class sizes so large, it could not honestly be claimed that Catholic schools were giving a good education. It further stated that such crowded conditions were usually encountered in the sub-primary classes which meant that many children did not obtain a good grounding, leading them to develop habits that were educationally bad, as well as a ‘herd’ mentality at school. Love of reading was difficult to develop in crowded classrooms, as this can only be nurtured and encouraged – “the will to read cannot be drilled” (Catholic Education Office, 1958). The report suggested that without the love of reading, Catholic children could suffer at secondary and tertiary level, and even in their leisure time in post-school life.

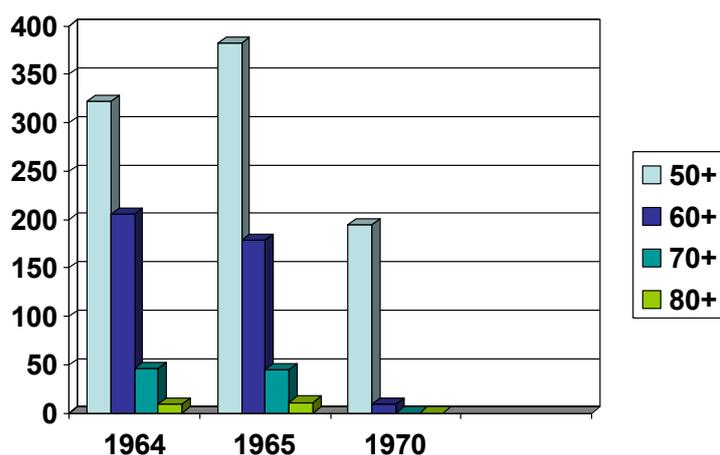


Figure 2.8. Classes in Catholic schools with numbers above 50.<sup>34</sup>

Figure 2.8 shows the number of classes which, over time, were accommodating very large numbers of children.

---

<sup>34</sup> Source: McCarthy, F, *Catholic Education in Victoria; 1947-1962* (c1986) (p. 38) and Martin, F, *Catholic Education in Victoria; 1963-1980*, (c1986) (p. 74).

It was at the primary school level that the Catholic system's inability to expand, was most pronounced. Monsignor Bourke pointed out that Catholic schools had most success in expanding in the final year of secondary schooling and least success at maintaining growth at the earliest years of primary schooling (Selleck, 1978). The decrease of 13,563 pupils in Catholic primary schools Australia-wide, between 1968 and 1972 was partly due to demographic factors, but also seems to have been the result of the inability to provide new schools in the newer outer suburbs of the cities. Parishes were unable to finance building programmes or pay the salaries of the lay teachers who were needed to teach the children. Furthermore banks had restricted credit which made it impossible for existing schools to develop or for parishes to build new schools (O'Brien, 1999). One result of this situation was the decision made in 1972 by the Melbourne Archdiocese, to give preference to primary schools (Selleck, 1978). While each parish attempted to provide a primary school education for its children, post-primary schooling was left to the Orders wherever they had land, money and teachers at hand. As was pointed out in the Report of the Melbourne Catholic Education Office 25<sup>th</sup> April 1958, regionalization and centralizing of post-primary education was needed, with a centralized administration and the closing of some post primary schools, leaving the primary schools as a parish responsibility. A special meeting was called by the Vicar General of the Melbourne Diocese, in June, 1965 to discuss the financial position in which parishes found themselves (letter to parish priests from Vicar General, (1965)). Among the topics to be discussed was the situation existing in a number of parishes which faced huge debts for capital costs and the payment of interest on loans. At the same time, some parishes had a high ratio of lay teachers to religious. Recognising the difficulties some parishes were experiencing, the Archbishop had approved Diocesan assistance to needy parishes for capital costs for regional schools and had recognised the necessity for some

parishes to have help in meeting their commitments to parish schools (Vicar General's letter, 1965).

### 2.5.2 Staffing

Another factor which affected the provision of sufficient Catholic schools in Melbourne was staffing. Although both priests and brothers taught in Catholic schools, the major burden of teaching Catholic children fell upon the religious sisters. Table 2:7 (pg74) compares the numbers of Priests, Brothers, and Religious Sisters and illustrates how much greater this load was for the sisters.

Table 2.7  
*Number of Religious Engaged in Teaching in Catholic Schools*<sup>35</sup>

	Religious Sisters	Brothers	Priests	Total
1900	3059	379	53	3491
1910	5081	466	53	5600
1920	6571	634	51	7246
1930	8277	778	61	9116
1940	10149	1041	84	11274
1950	11245	1532	124	12901

---

<sup>35</sup> Source: Fogarty, R, The coming of the Religious, (1959) in O'Donohue, TA (2001), *Upholding the faith: The process of education in Catholic Schools in Australia, 1922-1965*

<sup>33</sup> Source: Selleck, RJW, *Half a Million Children: Studies of non-government education in Australia: The Catholic primary school*, (1978), p.95.

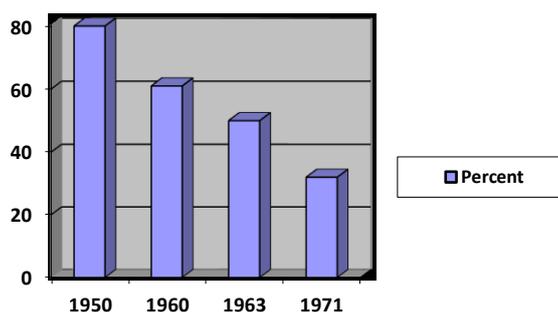


Figure 2.9. Religious teachers as a percentage of total teaching staff at Catholic Schools in Victoria.<sup>36</sup>

Table 2.8  
Percentage of Lay Teachers Working in Catholic Schools<sup>37</sup>

Year	Percentage of lay teachers in Victoria
1950	20
1960	39
1963	50
1971	68

While Figure 2.8 above demonstrates the growth in the percentages of lay teachers working in Catholic schools over a period of 20 years, Figure 2.10 visually demonstrates the increases in the numbers of lay and religious teachers in Victoria between 1964 and 1970.

<sup>37</sup> Source: O'Brien, A, *Blazing a Trail: Catholic education in Victoria (1963-1980)*, (1999) p. 14.

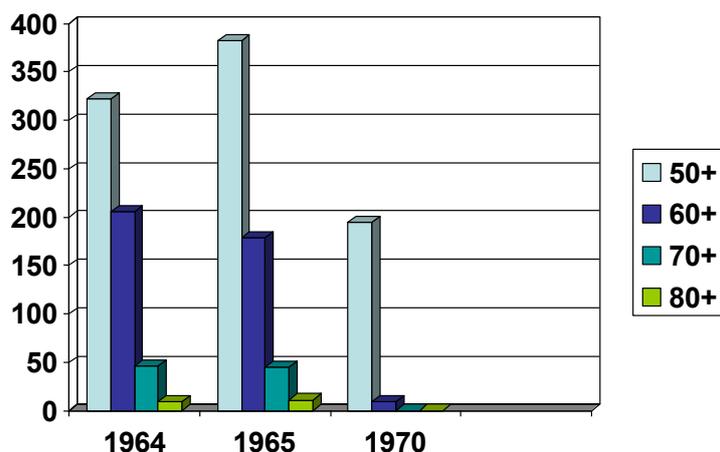


Figure 2.10. Numbers of religious and lay teachers in Catholic schools.

The trend was evident in the 1950s, when Fr John Kelly, the then Director of Catholic Education in Melbourne, commented that at that time the demand for teachers had made it impossible to staff schools with members of Religious Orders, inferring that he believed the situation could be reversed at some point (Selleck, 1978). By 1972, it was obvious that this was not about to happen and that much of the teaching done in Catholic schools would have to be met by lay teachers. A significant factor in this was the ageing of members of the Religious Orders. (Selleck, 1978) claimed that the staffing position in the 1970s was the reverse of that in the 1870s. Then it was believed that Catholic schools would not survive without the help of the Religious, while in 1970 they would not survive without the help of the lay staff.

Although the numbers of children enrolled in the Catholic schools were increasing, and class sizes were becoming excessively large, the average age of the Religious teaching in the schools was getting older. A significant number of these were 65 and older (Selleck, 1978). Figure 2:11 (pg.7 7) shows how even though the numbers of Religious were declining, the numbers of those under 25 was declining even more.

The change from Religious to lay teachers caused not only a change in atmosphere within the schools, but necessitated a change to the rather casual administrative procedures which had previously existed with regard to lay teachers. Clear, legitimate arrangements had to be made with regard to such things as sick leave, long-service leave, salaries and promotions including the possibilities of a lay head teacher/principal. All of these things had a huge effect on the way a school was to run its day-to-day affairs. Above all, money had to be found to cover these extra costs. At the same time, government funding was necessary for the survival of Catholic schools and no effort had been made to establish effective structures for the development and implementation of policies to take Catholic education into the 1970s and to the end of the century (O'Brien, 1999).

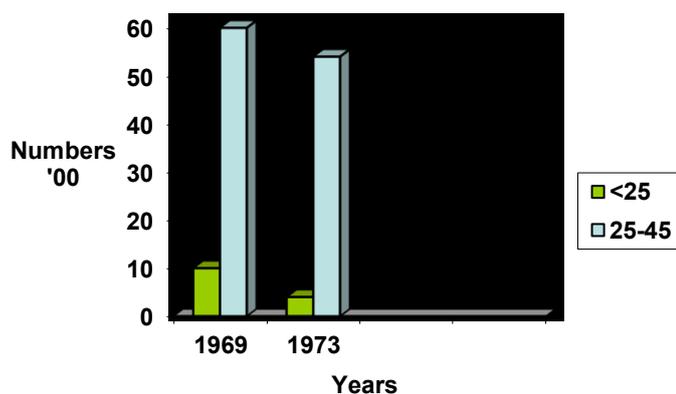


Figure 2.11. Ages of teaching religious.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Source: Selleck, RJW, *Half a Million Children: Studies of Non-Government Education in Australia: The Catholic Primary School* (1978, p. 95).

### **2.5.3 Authority within schools**

Another change to Catholic primary school education at that time caused a change to the position of the parish priest and his role in the primary school system. From the time Catholic primary schools were first established, they were firmly based in the parish with the parish priest as all-powerful in his own domain. With the challenge to the system from the great increases in post-World War II attendance figures, the parochial control that had existed in the 1950s and 1960s proved inadequate and led to duplication and inefficient use of resources. At the same time, with the decision of the Federal Government to fund Catholic schools, the power of the Catholic Education Office was increased at the expense, largely, of the power of the parish priest. The government bureaucrats preferred to deal with one overarching supervisory body than with a large number of parish priests. Through its control of matters such as staff recruitment, payment of staff salaries, teacher training and methods of religious instruction, the power of the Education Office had increased greatly. The authority of the parish priest was further eroded by the establishment of the Catholic Education Board in 1969 whose charter was to participate in the decision making process in all matters relating to the Christian education of the Catholic children of the Archdiocese. The Board caused a check to be placed on the authority of the priest through its decisive vote on such matters as the school fees to be set or the salary to be paid to teachers (Selleck, 1978).

Rising costs, increasing educational demands, rapid urbanisation, increase in the retention rates of secondary school pupils, the emergence of the middle class allied with an improved standard of living, the growing involvement of Australia in the region of South East Asia, secularisation, and the influence of the mass media impacted on all schools (O'Brien, 1999, p. 13).

Pre-service and in-service teacher education had to be improved and extended to allow teachers to adopt new ways of teaching children in view of the rapid technological changes that had occurred after the Second World War and because of the increased leisure time that had become available. Schools of up to and beyond a thousand pupils had principals as teachers who were expected to assume full time teaching duties (O'Brien, 1999). In addition to large classes in crowded class rooms, many teachers were teaching children from a multiplicity of cultures and language backgrounds for which they had received no training and had very little experience. Increasing numbers of Catholic parents were sending their children to government schools. Even so, those in authority in the Church believed that most lay teachers were not competent for leadership roles in the schools (O'Brien, 1999). In addition, no research had been undertaken into future population trends, projected growth centres or locations for new schools, let alone research into what ethnic languages might be needed in any particular school.

Australian Catholics experienced a new social, cultural and political climate which appeared post-war as many old prejudices were overcome and more Catholics moved into the professional classes and a higher socio-economic bracket. This upward mobility owed much to the Religious Orders which had provided the services, especially in education, which MacGinley (2002) believed, had made it possible. Table 2.9 (below) shows the numbers of women religious in Australia between 1901 and 1976, representing the situation MacGinley (2002) described, as the numbers of children enrolling in Catholic schools were rapidly increasing.

Table 2.9  
*Australian Religious Personnel, 1901-1976*<sup>39</sup>

Year	1901	1926	1951	1966	1971	1976	% change 1901- 1976	% change 1971- 1976
Sisters	3,622	8,141	11,245	14,622	13,869	12,619	248%	-10.09%

By the 1950s, decreases in vocations in western European continental countries had led to concern in the major regions of English-speaking Catholicism. In Australia, the post-War years witnessed a growth in vocations culminating in the mid -1960s in the highest overall levels of membership, in absolute numbers, in women's religious institutes since the orders had been established in Australia (MacGinley, 2002). However, while the number of Catholic vocations grew in the 1950s in Australia, even this post-war increase was not proportional to the growth in Catholic children wanting a Catholic education, which over the years 1951-1966 had increased by more than 50%. Unfortunately, this increase in those seeking vocations did not reflect the multi-ethnic nature of Australia's changing demography. Most of the entrants came from the existing Anglo-Celtic population. With the commencement of government funding, lay staff began to exceed and finally, by the mid-1980s, to eclipse completely, the Religious in the schools. The situation was further exacerbated by decreases in membership of the Religious Orders due to deaths and withdrawals. During the period 1966-1976, there were 1,704 deaths, 2,261 withdrawals and 2,187 entries, resulting in a net loss of 1,778 (MacGinley, 2002).

---

<sup>39</sup> Source: (National Statistical Survey of Religious Personnel, Australia 1976)

#### **2.5.4 Changed roles of the religious**

In 2005, the Australian Catholic Historical Society published an article entitled “The Historiography of Women Religious in Australia” (Burley, 2005). In the article, Burley referred to a history of the Parramatta Sisters of Mercy (McGrath, 1989) in which she raised the question about the backlash from the clerics and lay community, when the sisters withdrew in large numbers from Catholic schooling in the 1960s-1980s. She believed that the laity and Church hierarchy did not understand how the Mercy vision had suffered under the changed political and economic situation and the repression in the name of Catholic Schooling in Australia (Burley, 2005). Deidre Jordan (Gill, 1972) as a member of the Sisters of Mercy, delivered a paper on what she perceived as this crisis the teaching orders were facing during the 1950s and 1960s and the changes developing in the roles of the teaching Religious. She wrote of how those living the Religious life, saw it as a call to the evangelical counsels in their community, and only after that as a call to teaching or some other apostolic work. This wider ranging view of their calling, as Jordan (Gill, 1972) pointed out, was not the view of either laity or clergy, which lead to frequent conflicts. She claimed that Religious personnel were seen to be, as she saw it, a source of low-cost labour essential to maintaining Catholic schools (Gill, 1972). There were many sisters who were teaching at the time she wrote, whose original desire was to be a Carmelite, or to go to the Missions, or who did not feel any call to teaching, but were advised to become teaching Religious because they were needed to staff the schools, and to preserve their relatively low-cost structure. This conception of sisters, by definition becoming teachers, was so intertwined over time that by a process of association ultimately this came to be the norm (Gill, 1972). The advent of the Second Vatican Council, redefined the role of Religious all over the world (*Perfectae Caritatis*, (Flannery, 1996)). While the Presentation sisters saw Catholic education as their ‘main apostolate’ (Kane, 1974), they regarded the mantra of a Catholic education for every

Catholic child' as stemming from the time where Australia was considered a mission field. By the 1970s, other mission fields had emerged whose need appeared to be far greater than Australia's, as well as new non-educational needs within Australia itself (Kane, 1974). Henderson (1997) reports that for the Josephites, their work had diversified, and many of the sisters had moved away from teaching and into new fields. In Australia the Religious, teaching in the school situation, was able to redefine her role so that she could make the kind of contribution that stemmed from her unique religious commitment. No longer would she see her labour being an essential factor in the *economy* of Catholic education, as a motivating force to enter Religious life (Gill, 1972).

The concept of low-cost teachers worked against professionally prepared teachers and with time both the sisters themselves as well as the parents had different and higher expectations of the kind of teachers Catholic children required to meet the educational standards of the rest of Australia. For their own benefit, teachers needed to feel adequately prepared rather than teaching with the rudimentary early training which had sufficed in previous times of urgency. For many Catholics, it was more important to have a Religious in front of a class, than a trained teacher (Gill, 1972). [Many Catholics believed that Religious were marked with special abilities thanks to their years of preparation and the regular periods for their renewal of spirit (O'Donoghue, 2001).] To meet this demand, many Religious were teaching without initial training. There was a time when a sister would accept and undertake duties for which she was not prepared, as an act of obedience, but that time had now passed. The content and methods of teaching had changed by the 1970s and those teachers who desired to remain teachers needed to place a heightened emphasis on the professional preparation for their teaching and the increasing professionalization of their work (Gill, 1972). Catholic schools by then needed to provide teacher training for its teachers at least equivalent to that provided

by the state system and to permit their staff to undertake higher studies and to be allowed sabbatical leave. Although the Catholic community expectation was that the principal of a school *must* be a Religious, it became increasingly hard to justify such a situation if the appointment was to be based on knowledge and training and when many lay teachers were better qualified for the principal's position than the Religious on the staff. Gill (1972) pointed out that resolving this situation became even more difficult when the sister was not aware of her own deficiencies and wished to teach despite old age, advanced neurosis or inability to adjust to new teaching methods.

O'Donoghue (2001) claims that many of the methods employed by the teaching sisters were based on "the stress within Catholicism on accepting the Church's definition of a situation and following its rules and regulations as a means of salvation" (p. 61), a method by which their own religious lives were ordered and regulated. Eventually this method became reflected in school policy and practice. This created a situation whereby critical debate was actively discouraged, rote learning was promoted and intellectual concerns were "reduced to a functional, mechanistic production of credentials" (Angus, 1982, p.60).

The collegiate nature of many Religious Orders in making decisions, worked against the Religious school principal who could not delegate the *final* responsibility for decision making. There was also the commonly held attitude by the Catholic laity where lay teachers were not seen as equals. This attitude was also held by the Religious who were referred to having to *absorb* lay teachers, of *suffering* lay teachers, rather than building an integrated staff (Gill, 1972). The Religious themselves excluded lay teachers from the development of school policy, justifying this on the grounds that their training made them eminently more suited to determine policy and to administer the schools, particularly because they were totally committed to their work and not distracted by family obligations. The rules of many

orders actively discouraged the interaction of Religious with seculars making co-operation between Religious and lay very difficult, especially when the latter were usually referred to as ‘assistant teachers’. Never were the lay teachers seen as equals but in constant need of supervision, even in the most benevolent of situations (O'Donoghue, 2001). The situation did nothing to entice lay teachers into the Catholic system. The very low rates of pay in the Catholic education system compared with the government system was a further disincentive to lay teachers.

### **2.5.5 Laification of the schools**

Before the 1950s, almost the entire burden of teaching in Catholic primary schools fell upon the Religious (Mithen W. J., 1972) and lay teachers were comparatively rare apart from visiting teachers who taught physical education, elocution and other cultural extras at some schools. As can be seen in Table 2.10 taken from Mithen's (1972) figures, this situation changed dramatically between 1950 when classes were almost exclusively taught by Religious sisters and 1970 when sisters represented only about a third of the teaching staff.

Table 2.10  
*Relative Representation of Lay Teachers in Schools in Melbourne Archdiocese<sup>40</sup>*

Year	Per cent lay teachers	Per cent Sisters
1950	Very small	90+
1960	39	61
1963	50	50
1970	65.7	34.3

Mithen (1972) claimed that this extraordinary revolution in the nature of Catholic primary school staff in the Melbourne archdiocese was not as a result of escalating enrolments, nor could it be ascribed entirely to a falling away in the number of vocations to the religious life, although he conceded that both things undoubtedly played a part. He attributed the situation to the dramatic improvements made over this decade to the pupil-teacher ratio. These improvements can be seen in Table 2.11, which illustrates the great improvements made in this ratio between 1965 and 1971, when the classes which had huge numbers of pupils, were very much reduced in number between 1965 and 1970.

Table 2.11  
*Classes Sizes in Catholic Schools<sup>41</sup>*

Numbers of Pupils in Class	Number of Classes	
	1965	1970
50-59	382	194
60-69	179	9
70-79	45	0
80+	11	0
Total	617	203

<sup>40</sup> Source: Mithen, WJ, *Primary Education Today: Where is it going?* (1972, p. 125).

<sup>41</sup> Source: Mithen, WJ, *Primary Education Today: Where is it going?* (1972, p. 126).

Mithen suggested that the great influx of lay teachers over the next fifteen years had come from a number of sources. A small number came from migrants, and a much larger number from among married women, former teachers returning to the work force, with the most important source being the Catholic Teachers' Colleges, established in several dioceses and under direct diocesan control, where Religious and lay teachers prepared together for their future co-operative role as teachers in parish schools. Mithen believed that the sizes of these Colleges which were much smaller than a government college, posed some problems, particularly in the provision of adequate staff. This happened as a consequence of the smaller budget to which a smaller college, of necessity, had access. A smaller budget leads to a smaller number of lecturers who can be employed which in turn leads to a more limited range of courses. Lecturers in these Colleges tended to be overloaded with lecturing and/or tutorial commitments and sometimes were required to teach subjects for which they were not qualified. Frequently, they were given inadequate time for preparation and correction and for reading and research. In large part because of a lack of facilities to develop a curriculum of their own, the Catholic schools followed fairly closely the organizational patterns of the state schools as well as their courses and methods. This, Mithen (1972) suggested, was also as a result of the sectarian bigotries which once existed, giving Catholics a 'ghetto mentality' and a determination to show that their education system was as good as the secular one. Another problem encountered in parish schools was the almost complete absence of male teachers, mainly due to the very low salaries the schools were able to pay their lay teachers. Married teachers, in particular, found it very difficult to raise families on the salaries Church schools were able to pay.

Figure 2.12 shows the marked rise in the number of lay graduates from Catholic Teachers' Colleges between 1955 and 1967.

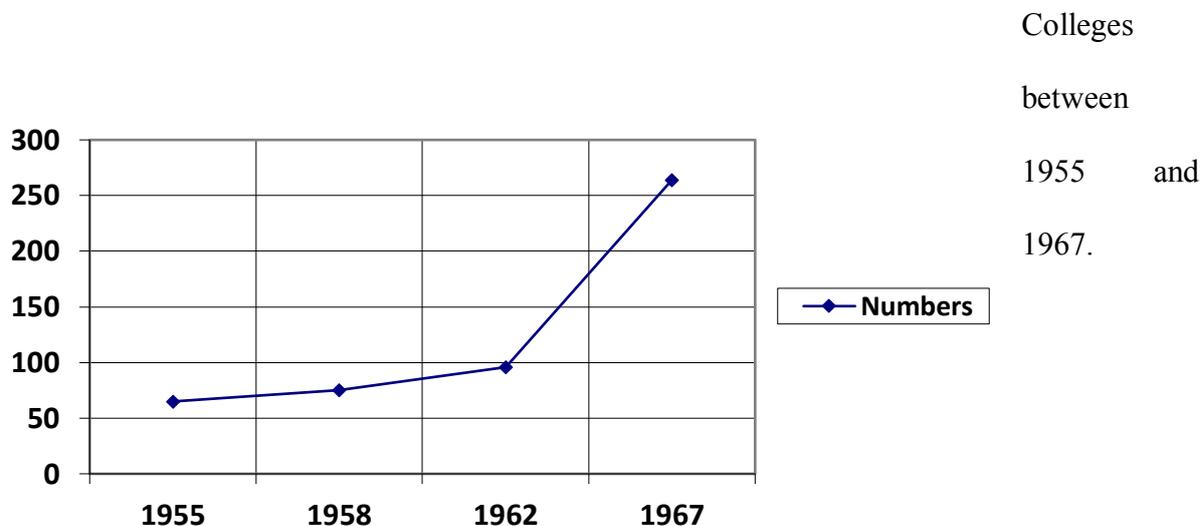


Figure 2.12. Lay graduates from Catholic Teachers' Colleges.<sup>42</sup>

Teaching methods were also in a state of change in that time. Contrary to developments in teaching which required the stimulation of interest with less emphasis on formal correctness and more on the development of conceptual understanding and the ability to ask the right questions, large class sizes could only allow for rote-learning.

To summarise, the Victorian Catholic parish school, which had served the community for almost one hundred years had become outdated. It had been staffed almost exclusively by members of Religious congregations and had extremely strong clerical influence in its day-to-day life. Most of its pupils had been drawn from Irish-Australian backgrounds. It had been extremely conscious of the need to present tangible evidence of its success, not only to those who supported it, but to the world at large; and had prepared its pupils for what it saw as a fairly static and predictable world (Dwyer, 1986). With the end of World War II, a dramatic

---

<sup>42</sup>Diocesan Newsletter, Melbourne, December, 1967 and Correspondence Catholic Education Office to the Archbishop, January 24, 1964

change occurred – there was a decade of the “Baby Boomers”, an influx of migrant children, and with the doubling of the Catholic population the schools were presented with the tremendous financial challenge of providing the needed classrooms and resources. There was also the increased demand for secondary education as the population became more affluent. To ease class sizes (many of which were over 100), lay teachers, many untrained and inexperienced, were employed to help.

Table 2.12  
*Teachers in Catholic Parish Schools*<sup>43</sup>

	1960	1970
Lay Teachers	507	1283
Religious	792	661
Total	1299	1944

As can be seen in Table 2.12 the number of lay teachers employed in parish schools rose by more than 125% between the years 1960 to 1970.

McCarthy (c1985) suggested that under the strain of such numbers it should not be considered unusual that classroom discipline in some cases tended to be harsh and that personal interaction between pupil and teacher was mainly formal. The Catholic Education Office Report dated 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1958, pointed out that “even before the rush of migration, accommodation was not adequate by good educational standards. In spite of the effort to keep pace with the increasing population, accommodation is even less adequate now” (MDHC<sup>44</sup> archives, 1996/3/15). Finance to build, extend or refurbish old schools was difficult until direct grants were given in 1964, firstly to secondary schools and later to

---

<sup>43</sup> Source: Mithen, WJ, *Primary Education Today: Catholic Education: Where is it Going?* (1972), p. 126.

<sup>44</sup> Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission

primary (Marginson, (Post 2000)). Without financial help, extending or upgrading Catholic schools was almost impossible.

Sister Emilian Greelish, RSJ spoke of her experience teaching in Werribee in the 1950s (McCarthy, c1986). Her story was concerned with the composite Grade six to Form two class she taught which had 99 children in it. There were too many children for her to get to know many of them personally and her only means of maintaining discipline was corporal punishment. Sister Brigid Maloney, RSM revealed that despite the fact that she had told the children they could say their sins in whatever language they liked, the parish priest said that the Act of Contrition had to be in English (McCarthy, c1986) an overwhelming difficulty for children who had problems with English!

Fr Frank Martin, who was appointed Director of Catholic Education in 1970, reported that as the 1970s began, there was a state of crisis in Catholic education. (It is tempting to wonder what condition he thought the schools were in, prior to this date.) He summarised the underlying causes in the following points. There had been a failure to build new parish schools in new areas from about 1965; the Secondary School Plan (to build more secondary colleges) had slowed down and was in jeopardy; vocations to religious congregations were diminishing; many sisters were questioning the wisdom of continuing in Catholic schools; the number of lay teachers was increasing; parity of salary with Government school teachers was looming as a major issue; and parents were becoming increasingly concerned with the standards issue as the size of classes continued to be well above those in Government schools, all contributing to low morale within the Catholic community.

Those who controlled the Catholic education system came slowly and reluctantly to the conclusion that there were no longer going to be enough Catholic women seeking a religious

vocation to be able to staff the schools that all Catholic children were required to attend. Religious were trained in the Catholic way and they also were very cheap to employ. However, the schools needed more teachers in order to improve the standard of education which existed at that time in many Catholic schools. By the time some of the children, who arrived towards the end of the time period under study, had commenced school, many of them were only taught by Sisters once or twice in their entire time at primary school. Most of the children were taught by lay teachers for a significant proportion of their school classes, even though such teachers, regardless of their training were regarded as very inferior to the sisters. The reduced class sizes, which the acceptance of lay teachers helped to achieve, would have improved the situation for the migrant children. In many cases, these teachers had received training at the government expense and would have had more skills on which to rely, in their day to day encounters with the children. As the Sisters got older and older, the system came to rely more and more on the lay teachers. Before this the situation in Catholic education was extremely dire and the education the children received would not have qualified or prepared them for secondary school. In fact the Catholic system in the past had expected most of the children to leave school at the end of primary school, but now the demand for a secondary education was more pressing. More Catholic parents could, like the rest of the Australian population, see the need for more education to ensure better employment for their children. These included the migrants who were looking for a better life for their children than the one they had received during WWII.

## **2.6 Part II: The Experiences of the Migrant Child in the Catholic Primary School in the 1950s and 1960s.**

### **2.6.1 The attitudes of Australians to the migrant**

Richardson and Taft (1968) undertook a review of social survey findings of Australian attitudes towards migrants. They pointed out that until 1949, when the large scale migration

of European refugees began, the Australian population was almost entirely of English, Scottish and Irish stock. Ninety percent of the population had been born in Australia and eight percent in other British countries. By 1968, Australia had received more than two and a half million migrants over the intervening twenty years with migrants by then representing approximately 20% per cent of the population.

Callan (1983) made the observation that it was the attitudes of Australian citizens towards migrants which largely determined migration policy, with the government implementing policies to encourage acceptance by residents of the migrants. All the models put forward to deal with cultural diversity up until the 1970s were promoted on the basis of the need to ensure Anglo-Australians were kept favourably disposed to large scale immigration, and to maintain national unity.

In 1948, at the beginning of post WWII migration, Australians were opposed to non-British migrants, with whom they were unfamiliar, and especially so to those who came from Southern Europe, Asia and Africa. In Melbourne, in 1948, eighty per cent of a sample taken was opposed to the large scale migration of Italians (Richardson & Taft, 1968). Eventually migration from Southern Europe which the government had initiated, was accepted by the people and over the twenty years until 1968, the number of people who held unfavourable attitudes to migrants declined considerably. The Australian attitude to Asian migration also softened to the point where in 1968, the Australian Labor Party ceased to advocate its traditional support of the White Australia Policy.

Table 2.13  
*Australian Attitudes to Migration (Percentages)*<sup>45</sup>

Gender	1961	1964	1961	1964	1961	1964
	Increase		Same		Reduce	
Males	40	63	39	31	23	6
Females	47	20	36	47	13	26
Persons	43	30	37	41	16	21

Table 2.13 shows the percentages of males and females in 1961 and in 1964 who believed that the number of residents coming to Australia should be increased, remain the same or be reduced. It shows that either men had become more favourably disposed to migrants or females had become less so. The survey included 1652 respondents in 1961 and 1775 in 1964. It noted that persons who were expecting a financial depression in the near future were much more unfavourable to migration. In the 1964 national sample, while 54 per cent of post-war migrants favoured an increase in migration, only 27 per cent of pre-war migrants and Australian born respondents were in favour of an increase.

The White Australia Policy had originated from the 1850s riots between white miners and Chinese on the goldfields. With the advent of Federation in 1901, an Act was passed to place certain restrictions on migration and to provide for the removal from the Commonwealth of prohibited migrants (ie non-white). Non-whites could be subjected to a dictation test in any language which the migration officer chose, even a language with which the migrant would be expected to have no knowledge. A study by Huck, (1968), Department of Political Science, University of Melbourne, compared the attitudes of a sample of Melbourne residents to the migration of eight selected ethnic and national groups in 1964, to those questioned by

---

<sup>45</sup> Source: Richardson and Taft, (1968), *Australian Attitudes towards Immigrants*, (p. 48)

Oeser and Hammond (1948). The sample was taken from what were described as ‘intact’ households, ie. those which contained a male householder and his wife.

Richardson & Taft (1968) believed that although the sample in Huck’s Melbourne study was very small and that, as 17 per cent of the respondents had some tertiary education it was an upwardly biased sample, it was still probable that there had been a general increase in positive attitudes towards migrants since 1948.

Table 2.14  
*Percentage of Melbourne Respondents (1948 and 1964) Who Were Favourable to the Migration of Eight Selected Ethnic and National Groups<sup>46</sup>*

	Melbourne sample Oeser and Hammond 1948 (n=370)	Huck 1964 (n=103)
English	91	97
Irish	65	89
German	36	81
Chinese	31	20
Greek	26	50
Italian	21	47
Jew	17	68
Negro	10	18

Table 2.14 indicates the attitudes of Melbourne residents who in 1948 and 1964 were questioned on their attitudes to different migrant ethnic groups.

---

<sup>46</sup> Source: Huck, Department of Political Science, University of Melbourne, in Richardson, A and Taft, R, *Australian Attitudes toward Immigrants: A Review of Social Survey findings* (1968) p. 49

Richardson & Taft (1968) evaluated the results of two national polls taken in 1961 and 1964 and two polls taken in Perth in 1960 and 1966. The polls suggested three possible attitudes towards the assimilation of migrants, and the respondents were questioned as to which attitude best described their feelings towards a variety of migrant issues. They found that 70% of all respondents objected to migrants using their own language in public places, but only 18% objected to the use of migrant languages being used in the migrant's own home. Sixty four per cent believed that migrants should be compulsorily naturalized, 55% objected to migrant national clubs, 47% opposed foreign language radio broadcasts while 73% objected to segregation of migrants in residential areas. The information gathered indicated a wide-spread belief among Australians that migrants should assimilate culturally as soon as possible. In the Perth studies, taken in 1966, 40% of the respondents believed that migration should be from Europe only (ie not from Asia or Africa). Richardson & Taft (1968) found that some prejudice existed towards migrants at that time, but it did not appear to be extensive. Where it was in evidence, it seemed to be amongst those who were aged over 40 and in unskilled employment, where migration was seen as an economic threat.

The Department of Psychology at the University of Western Australia conducted a survey in 1960 in which several national groups living in Perth were asked whether they considered Australians to be friendly to migrants of their national identity and whether they had personally experienced any discrimination. Sixty five per cent of British migrants thought that Australians were friendly and without ethnic prejudice towards them, while only 40 percent of Poles, 27 percent of Italians and nine percent of migrants from the Baltic countries thought the same. From this they inferred that the migrant groups did not see Australians in the same light as Australians saw themselves. Friendliness of Australians towards his ethnic group seemed to play an important role in the migrant's satisfaction with Australia.

Iredale and Hugo (1995) discussed a paper written by James Jupp (1988) entitled "*Australia's Settlement Service Provision: An Overview*" which listed the failures and successes of settlement policy and programmes. The failures included inadequate English language provision; unemployment; and lack of attention to refugees, small groups, women and the elderly. The successes were mainly in the areas of the policies and structures put in place for access and equity, to combat racism and to educate society as a whole.

## **2.7 Australia's Experience of Migration and School Education**

For many migrants, motivation for leaving their homeland was the hope to achieve a higher material standard of life than was possible in their home country, and to give their children a better material future. This led to a situation where frequently there was much pressure placed upon their children to do well at school. Thus, for migrants to Australia, the lack of educational success of their children may have added to the frustration in what they often perceived to be a land of apparent plenty for the majority, but not for them (Crowley, 1971). For many Australians at that time, when education was suffering from lack of attention during the war years resulting in poor infrastructure, insufficient and inadequate teachers, overcrowding and poor facilities, having migrant children with their need for greater attention in classes with their children was something not to be desired. In some instances there may well have been antipathy between various migrant groups and between migrant groups and Australians. Cultural factors may have worked to prevent the social mixing of children both inside and outside school, and what the school tried to do for the migrant pupil was frequently seen, whether consciously or not, as an attempt to undermine the ways of his family (Crowley, 1971). At a seminar on migrant education in 1971, teachers and bureaucrats were struggling with the question:

*Do we aim to have one large homogenous group, or many small dissimilar groups in Australian society? If the former, strangers must be absorbed into a unitary culture. If the latter, then Australians must learn to live amongst pluralism and migrants must come to realise that this is an accepted social policy. (Crowley, 1971, p. 17)*

People were starting to question the government policy on assimilation, but it took until the 1970s before things began to change. Mr A.T. Hird, one of the speakers at this 1971 conference, commented that he had left Australia in 1952 and that when he had returned in 1970 he was amazed to see how little had been done to address the problems implicit in a multi-nation population, which he believed had been obvious to all in the 1950s. Iredale (1997) claimed that the hidden prejudices and racism, both overt and unconscious, which still exist in many Australian communities, were still evident in many multi-ethnic schools.

These prejudices and racism worked against migrant children because assimilation expected them to become 'instant Australians' and any who struggled to become so, were regarded as not trying. Until 'Multiculturalism' became the buzz word, no help was given to migrant children to help with their English, no consideration was given to the fact that they did not speak English at home, and there was no help, particularly in reading for children whose parents did not speak or read English themselves. No help or advice was given to the teachers of these children as to what was the best way to teach children for whom English was a second language. In the very large classes and overcrowded classrooms, teachers could not help those children who could not keep up. And why would an overworked teacher want to help a child who 'was not trying'? Their schooling was a very hit-and-miss affair, with those who had teachers who understood their situations and appreciated their problems more likely to do better. To the general Australian population, the 'wogs' and 'reffos' were not

considered to be as intelligent as good ‘Aussie stock’, and were regarded by many people as inferior. It was against these perceptions and prejudices that migrant children gained their education. This type of ingrained racial prejudice would have pervaded their whole school lives, and in their interviews it is interesting to try to determine just how keenly this was felt and how they overcame it. That any of them achieved any sort of education is amazing.

## **2.8 Research into Conditions of Children at School and their Academic Achievements**

In their study entitled, *“To learn more than I have, . . .”*, Terry, Borland and Adams (1993) reported that Maltese students expressed concern over what they saw as barriers to their success in the classroom. These included teaching styles, lack of group work, and the jump from lower to senior levels of secondary school. They indicated that they were trying (as were other ethnic minorities) to operate in a setting which was under-resourced, and where teachers were struggling to cope with difference in such a way as to provide access and success for all.

Minutes of the Victorian Catholic Education Committee (1939-1969) dated 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1958 detailed the discussions about education problems apparent at that time. They pointed out that even before the advent of migration, school accommodation was ‘not adequate’ by good educational standards. Despite every effort to keep up with an increasing population, accommodation in Catholic schools at that time was even less adequate. Classes were very large and the teacher/pupil ratio was one to 60 at that time. By 1962, this ratio had dropped to one to 51.9 (*Annual Report of the Catholic Education Office (1963)*). As a result of this situation, children performing at a below average level could not be given extra help; training in Christian virtues and way of life became extremely difficult; in the early years many children failed to achieve good grounding in basic skills, while the love of reading was less

well developed than in other school systems. For those teaching in the overcrowded primary system, obtaining proper qualifications via after hours study, was too difficult at the end of a tiring day. Indeed, many of the older teachers were still using 'outmoded and unsatisfactory over-regimented methods of teaching' (*Annual Report of the Catholic Education Office*, 1963). Even younger teachers who been educated to employ more modern methods were inclined to fall back to these methods as the easiest way to cope with such large numbers.

## **2.9 Research into Migrant Children in Schools**

A comparative study of the initial adjustment of migrant schoolchildren in Australia was undertaken by Ronald Taft of Monash University in 1975 (Taft, 1975). Given the level of adaptation required by migrants moving to an alien country, especially when they had no competence in English, he undertook to discover if the social situation of migrant children put them under more or less stress than their parents. To move from a familiar home life where there was social support and familiar institutions and mores to one that was totally alien is not easy for anybody, but was potentially more so for a child whose parents, because of their lack of language competency, found it difficult to act as mediators between their children and a new society. With the passage of time, he suggested that, because of their superior command of the language, the children often become mediators between their parents and the outside world. However, on commencing school immediately upon arrival, their performance at tasks in which there was a continual emphasis on competence in literary skills, may not have been very good. This incompetence would also be demonstrated in their inability to perform well in culturally defined social skills and possibly in unfamiliar games and sports. It has also been noted that there were different expectations of migrant children by the established group than the expectations it has of its members. Such situations, it was claimed, could lead to maladjustments in migrant children.

It is a commonly held assumption in the Australian community that as soon as they reach the legal school leaving age (if not before) that migrant children left to go to work. However Brotherhood of St Laurence (1971) reported that this is not supported by parental comments. For many of the latter, education had not been available for a variety of reasons, and they were acutely aware of the potential for advancement of their children with a good education behind them. Of course, there were some families where economic necessity forced the older children to leave school to find work in order that the family unit could survive and the younger children could be educated.

### **2.10 Comparisons of Various Ethnic Group Children at School and their Adjustment**

Taft (1975) compared the differences in the adjustment process between families from South America who knew no English, those from Malta, whom he assumed were bilingual to some extent and those from Great Britain for whom English was their mother tongue. It was expected that those from Great Britain would adjust better than the others, with the South Americans worst and the Maltese in the middle. When they arrived, the British and the South Americans were taken to migrant hostels where they stayed for varying periods of up to a year, where the children attended a local school. In this environment, attended by a large number of their national peers, they were largely supported. It was a different situation when the families moved out into the wider community. On both their own assessment and that of their teachers, the children all settled well, especially the Maltese. Many of the children, the older ones in particular, questioned after a second year in Australia, surprisingly preferred their old friends in their country of origin to their new ones in Australia. Both teachers and parents, confirmed that for those few children who were not adjusting well, problems arising out of their language difficulties were their major handicap. As could be expected due to their language deficiencies, the South American and Maltese children tended to perform

below average in the class and many of the older ones tended to leave school. After two years in Australia, the number of Maltese children who wanted to go back to live in Malta was more than half and had risen higher than it had been after one year, despite the fact that they had a sound network of their extended families who had preceded them to Australia. Even so, the children were adjusting quite well, probably because they had been made aware of the sort of changes they would have to make when they arrived.

Although all the children increasingly reported moments of unhappiness over time, the disaffection did not seem deep, except in the case of the Maltese where it was very marked. Although the Maltese children knew some English on arrival, after two years the South Americans had surpassed them academically and seemed to have a much greater potential to improve. This Taft found very surprising considering most Maltese children had some competence in English on arrival and had a wide network of relatives for social support. He could only speculate as to the possible reasons.

*“Maltese parents tend to be over directive and controlling regarding their children’s futures”* (Cauchi, 1990, p. 57) quoting (Taft & Cahill, 1978, p. 50).

He has discovered that:

*“they see schools as lax in discipline, as shown by a lack of school uniform, student behaviour, answering back, lack of homework, absence of regular examinations and automatic promotion from year to year irrespective of performances”* (Cauchi, 1990, p. 57).

Cauchi quoted from his own research and that of Sant Cassia, (1983, pp. 57-60) both of which claimed, in common with other studies, that Maltese parents did not have very high aspirations for their children. However, he pointed out that “they are in no way different from the Maltese of equivalent social status in Malta” (p. 60), a situation which is illustrated in Figure 2.13

*“The drop-out rate is not any better than in State schools in Malta . . . However, what is different is that the proportion of children being sent to private schools in Malta, has increased enormously, ... indicating a shift of parental responsibilities”*  
(Cauchi, 1990, p. 60).

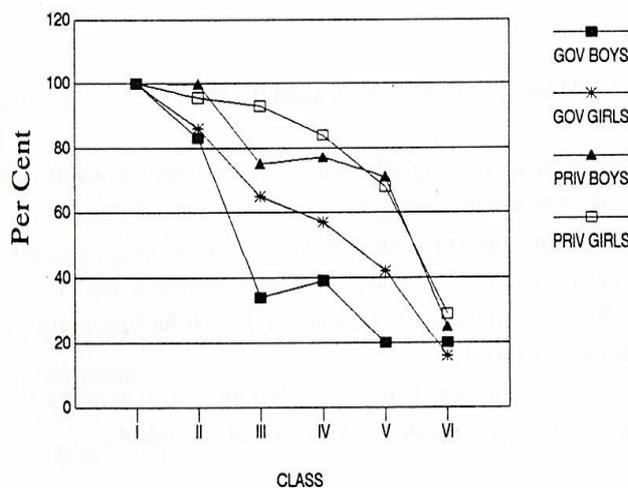


Figure 2.13. Retention rates of school children in Malta secondary schools, 1986-87.<sup>47</sup>

He went on to point out that:

<sup>47</sup> Source: Retention rates of School children in Malta secondary schools, School Education Statistics, 1986-87, Central Office of statistics, Malta, 1988 in Cauchi, *Maltese Migrants in Australia*, (1990)

*“as the cultural background has changed in recent years in Malta, so have parental expectation with regard to their children’s education. This has not happened in Australia”* (Richardson & Taft, 1968, p. 61).

Studies carried out by Terry et al (1993) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, examined the educational aspirations and experiences of the Maltese in Melbourne. Census data indicated that 119,504 first-generation people of Maltese background were living in Australia, the majority of whom had arrived before 1971. In fact, most of them had arrived in Australia between 1951 and 1961. The proportion of these who had low family income was comparable with the figures for Australian born and was much less than those for other Southern European migrants. However, a high proportion of them owned their own homes and did not move very far from the suburb to which they had first come, remaining predominantly in industrial and urban centres around Australia. Despite the comparative financial success of their families, girls of Maltese background made up significant numbers of early school leavers. In general, Maltese first generation women aged between 15 and 24, predominantly worked in clerical work (34.3% in 1986), while a significantly large number of the young men in the comparable age group, worked in the trades (20.8%). Both sexes were very under-represented in the professions. Very few Maltese background students were entering post-secondary education, and there seemed to be no change in the second and subsequent generations of settlers. In contrast with earlier studies, the study undertaken by Terry et al (1993) suggested that Maltese parents, who, in previous studies had been accused of low aspirations for their children and believed that year ten schooling was perfectly adequate, in fact, wanted the best for their children in their education and career choices, and were keen to take part in school activities. In this study, little difference between Maltese parental career aspirations for their sons and their daughters was detected. In common with

other migrant parents, Maltese parents did not receive adequate information about their children's education and were frequently excluded from the decision-making in this regard. Unlike other ethnic groups, however, Maltese children suffered from the teachers' expectations of their English prowess. Recognition of the fact that Maltese was their first language (not English), and that their parents had limited proficiency in the language or preferred to use Maltese, was not forthcoming. Although schools provided parents' information in other European languages, they rarely provided such information in Maltese and interpreters in the language were not available at parents' meetings. Schools did not provide language programs in Maltese, despite the desire of many Maltese students to maintain their ethnic language, leaving many Maltese to feel ashamed of their language which they saw as not as highly valued as other European languages. The authors of the study (Terry et al, 1993), pointed out that one of the outcomes of their study was the indication of the marginalisation of some long term minority ethnic groups in such areas as education, to the point where they have become almost invisible.

Briffa (1999) reported anecdotal evidence of intergenerational issues, particularly between Maltese girls and their fathers as well as between teenagers and parents. These included the maintenance of traditional values by older members of the community, especially in the area of cohabitation by young people before marriage, despite the fact that this was quite commonplace in Malta. Other evidence suggests that high expectations were placed on young families by parents, with newly married couples being expected to start a family early. Finding space to live away from their parents often proved very difficult. Traditional gender roles tended to be maintained with males being considered head of the household, with younger women being very critical that this system of patriarchy continued to exist. These

indications came as a result of early investigations of his study of family relationships and the second generation of the Maltese in Australia.

Calleya-Capp (1999) discussed the impact of Maltese culture on young Maltese Australians. Second generation Maltese children frequently grew up with two cultures. Unlike the Polish migrants who arrived with no family support at all, for the Maltese, the family was the most important institution. It provided care, love and support and most young Maltese would live at home until they married. Grandparents were usually part of the household. Home ownership rates were very high and the home itself was always well maintained. Because religion had such a strong influence on Maltese lives, young Maltese Australians were usually educated in Catholic schools, and the family passed on strong values and a very good work ethic. Calleya-Capp (1999) pointed out that it was sometimes difficult to convince young Maltese to continue their studies (which other studies have also observed), with much of the blame being attributed to the fact that these young Maltese Australians had difficulty with written English, even when their spoken English was quite good. Most of these young people entered vocational training programmes and undertook apprenticeships, as has been observed in other studies.

There are different views about the expectations of Maltese parents for their children's education with some commentators claim Maltese parents' expectations for their children's education were not very high (Terry, et al, 1993). These studies did not cite language difficulties as the reason very few Maltese young people finished Year 12, but that their parents wanted them in secure jobs and earning as soon as possible. Most parents believed that post-secondary education for their children was not necessary. Unlike most other migrant parents, who aspired for their children to be the doctors and the lawyers, no matter how unlikely they were to attain such a lofty career, Maltese parents wanted an

apprenticeship for their sons and an office job for their daughters (Terry et al, 1993). None of them wanted their children to be forced to work in the factories as they had when they arrived in Australia. Few of the children had any expectations beyond those of their parents'. Sultana (1993) attempted to address this under-investment in education and "to illuminate the context in which the marginalisation of Maltese students takes place" (Sultana, in Terry, 1993, p. 7). He spoke of how, when he was at University himself, the British academics who were lecturing, "often looked down on, or perhaps worse, did not acknowledge the dissonance between their world and mine. . . . It was apparent to me that these academics saw their cultural and linguistic frameworks as being the only ones of value" (Sultana, 1993, p. 2). This experience, no doubt was very similar to those encountered by migrant children at school in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, and Sultana (1993, p.2), himself, believed that "the personal narrative that I have drawn upon [is] useful in considering the situation in which many students of Maltese background find themselves in schools in Australia today". He contrasted the educational achievements of Maltese students in Australia with those of contemporary Maltese students in New Zealand where 40% of all Maltese background children enter universities, while a much smaller percentage entered higher education in Australia. Quoting his research undertaken in 1989 however, Sultana (1991), commented that "many working class students and parents consider formal schooling irrelevant as they preferred the apprenticeship route" (p. 7).

This is because the kind of learning offered in acquiring a trade makes sense to them. Being on the job places them closer to the point where hiring is so often effected. Uncertainty about material resources, for instance, can lead working class students to grab the first employment opportunity that comes their way, especially when the labour market is tight and the economy is in recession (Sultana, 1993, p. 7).

He went on to observe that:-

*There is . . . plenty of evidence to suggest that working class attitudes to work and career is (sic) based on the belief that it is best to gain access to a particular job and then, in the words of one of the students interviewed in the Terry et al study, 'work my way up' (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993, p. 51). Long-term investment in a game called schooling appears even less enticing when credentials no longer guarantee jobs, let alone good jobs. (Sultana, 1993, p. 7).*

He further commented that in his opinion, it would be necessary to undertake an observation of classroom processes in order to find out why Maltese background children underperformed in school. Such observations tend to demonstrate how students from working class and ethnic minority backgrounds end up with their realities, languages and self-respect diminished (Sultana, 1993).

Over time the Labour government in Malta reduced the wage differentials between manual and non-manual labour as well as between different working grades so that many would question whether it was cost effective to stay on at school (Sultana, 1991). A study conducted in Malta undertaken in a Trades School Questionnaire discovered that 37.1% of 680 respondents believed that education in Malta did not necessarily lead to the best paid jobs (Sultana, 1991). This was an indication, he reasoned, that the respondents “believed that skilled manual labour was highly rewarding financially” (Sultana, 1991, p. 225). He went on to say, that even if this attitude was empirically found to be false, “the proposition would remain valid as it is such perceptions which influence educational aspirations and investment” (Sultana, 1991, p. 225). Sultana (1991, p. 235) also referred to Bowles and

Gintis (1976) who argued that schools were effectively a sorting mechanism for maintaining the class status quo in society by providing different curricula and work tasks according to the class clientele they were catering for. They claimed that “it is vital for the survival and reproduction of capitalist societies to somehow ensure that the population does not all end up in the same occupational strata. Society needs a variety of socialization mechanisms to direct different groups towards particular locations in the labour market” (Sultana, 1991, p. 235). In fact, Sultana (1991) suggested that

*These students’ present school work is preparing them for occupations characterized by routine and mechanical labour, where there is little control over the tasks being done, and where obedience rather than questioning, understanding, and participation is desirable” (p. 237).*

Brincat (2002) explained that, within, Malta there existed an aristocratic class of old families and a middle class formed from those from the old professional classes, comprising such people as the notaries, lawyers and medics, etcetera, who were based in the villages where they “held sway over the common people” (p. 18). She went on to say that “the professional *professionisti* were erudite and proud of an Italian culture which gave them class identity. . . . Their standing in the village, where these *professionisti* were often the only literate people (*litterati*), constrained them to adopt top positions in social organisations” (p. 19). The primary concerns of the people who occupied this social strata were the “emancipation from British colonial rule and ‘constitutional progress’ based upon greater acquisition of civil rights of the people” (Brincat, 2002, p. 19). They aligned themselves with the pro-Italian political party and aimed to preserve their leadership and influence in the towns and villages in which they lived. “All literate people brought up in an Italian cultural environment were

assumed to belong to the same class, which differentiates itself socially from other classes in terms of both educational and cultural superiority” (Brincat, 2002, p. 20). These people became increasingly determined to maintain their place in society, both politically and socially.

For the best part of sixty years the political and social relationships of the Maltese came to centre round this ingrained supposition. As a result, it retarded progress in education, not for their offspring [who attended private pro-Italianate schools], but for the working classes, who found themselves between the cross fire of the Colonial State and this traditional anti-reformist middle class . . . (Brincat, 2002, p. 24).

In a paper delivered at the Conference *Italians in Australia*, sponsored by the Vaccari Italian Historical Society in November, 1985, Cahill (1985) discussed the schooling experiences of Italian migrant children in the 1950s. This was a period where knowledge was growing very rapidly and both population and its aspirations were rapidly increasing at the same time as social change was greater than the world had ever before experienced. While the total number of schools remained constant, their locations expanded. Many rural one-teacher schools were closed, but new schools were rapidly erected in developing outer suburbs. By the mid-1980s, however, the latter were looking rather dilapidated. During the ten years 1950-1960, the number of pupils in Australian schools rose by 57 per cent to 2.1 million, with the Roman Catholic system rising by 62 per cent (Cahill, 1985).

The reception of non-English speaking migrant children into the Australian education system went largely unnoticed because of the preoccupation of the population with two other major issues; the general crisis in education due to huge increases in the number of children eligible to enrol in schools (discussed previously) and the dispute over Commonwealth-state

relations. The research that was conducted during this period, did little to help the cause of non-English speaking migrant children with their schooling. Cahill (1985) pointed in particular to a study of 25,882 children in Queensland state schools who were born overseas or with one or more parents overseas born. This study concluded that such children performed as well as, or even better than their peers. This finding was accepted as 'the received wisdom' by educational administrators – a monumental failure in research, he believed. The research was meaningless because it contained definitional problems. It was based on parental nationality rather than birthplace and it included English speaking migrant children in the definition as well as overseas born children of an Australian born parent. Orthodox educational and bureaucratic belief was that "the experience of neither migrant children nor their teachers was any different to anyone else's" (Cahill, 1985, p. 2). It was not until the mid-1960s that initiatives were commenced to overcome the English language difficulties experienced by non-English speaking migrants.

Cahill, (1985) reported on some of the findings gleaned from interviews with 138 parents of Italian migrant children, who were interviewed about their educational level, and from their additional comments. Of the 138 parents interviewed, 30 of the children had received part of their education in Australia. Three had been born in Australia, and of the remainder, 13 (three males, ten females) received all their education in Australia. The educational achievements were not at all impressive, with an average school attendance of only 9.7 years. Only one reached tertiary level, with nine more reaching secondary school including three girls who attended business colleges. Most left at 14, the earliest legal age, while three more never progressed beyond primary school, and two of the latter left before the legal age.

Some complained about the fact that they were placed in school grades that were too difficult for them while others complained that the grade level was too low. One girl was put in with a

class of 10 year olds when she was 14, while another aged 15 was placed in Grade five – both of them in Catholic schools. Cahill (1985) regarded the results of his survey, although very small, as quite startling, believing that it was likely that most, if not all of those interviewed had done reasonably well in their Italian schools.

The major themes developing from this research point to the near total failure at school of migrant Italian adolescent children. This finding was born out by the results of a much larger study of South American and Maltese children, who were described as ‘intellectually maimed’ by their Australian experiences (Taft and Cahill, 1978, p. 21). Migrant adolescents have a lot more ground to make up than their primary school siblings and less time to do it in. In cultural traditions where family-centredness is the norm, non-performing students are easily sacrificed to the need to increase the family income when needs are most pressing to enable the family to become established. Such adolescents frequently become ‘factory fodder’ or worked, at best, at semi-skilled labouring work.

A second theme in the same study was that of the parents’ lack of knowledge of the Australian education system. They were unable because of their own lack of educational attainments and their lack of English, to either intercede on their children’s behalf or help with their school work. They were ambitious for their children in many cases, but were unable, because of housing issues at the time, to provide an appropriate working environment for study and were no help with English language development. For reasons of suitable accommodation and of job opportunities, many families were highly mobile, forcing the children to change from school to school and backwards and forwards between the government and Catholic systems when there was not necessarily any consistency in the way individual schools addressed the task of educating the non-English speaking children in their establishments. Cahill (1985) pointed out that the negative attitudes to education gained by

Italian adolescents in the 1950s are usually transmitted to the next generation. Despite their lack of educational attainment, Cahill (1985) acknowledged that none of the group had plans to return to Italy and many of them had become very successful business people.

### **2.11 The School Experiences of the Non-English Speaking Child in the Catholic Primary School in the 1950s and 1960s: General Migration Studies**

Vasta (1994) echoed comments made by Cahill (1985) when she described the school experiences of non-English speaking children during the 1950s until the 1970s. She claimed that from both a cultural and educational perspective, their needs were largely ignored. Many of those who arrived as adolescents dropped out within a few years despite official rhetoric claiming that the assimilation policy was proceeding quite well. In fact, in her opinion, “the discriminatory practices of official policy and community racism created an environment of migrant resistance and non-assimilation” (Vasta, 1994, p. 22). The assimilationist ideology, based on the work of such sociologists as Robert E Park and WI Thomas of the Chicago School in the USA earlier in the century, often caused conflict and confusion for migrant school children at this time. Park’s theory of the ‘race relations cycle;’ (Vasta, 1994) postulated that migrant groups passed through four stages; contact, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. In his opinion, it was essential that the migrant groups abandoned their own language and cultural practices in order to prevent separatism and ghettos which, he believed, threatened social cohesion.

In the early 1960s, NSW education authorities did not collect separate statistics for migrant children, implying that to single these children out statistically would discriminate against them when they were assimilating well. It was recognised by the mid-1970s however, that to expedite assimilation, the teaching of English to non-English speaking pupils was important, but that community groupings where they could speak their ethnic language at school, were

to be discouraged. Teachers strongly discouraged pupils from speaking their ethnic language at home. Italian migrant parents however, were determined that their children would retain their family language, as a way of maintaining their Italian culture. Negative reactions at school and in the general community worked against the language schools which had been set up to ensure maintenance of their original tongue.

At school these children needed lessons for those learning English as a second language, rather than to suffer the ignominy of being placed in remedial classes which undermined their self-esteem. Pressure on the children from the dominant culture even affected what they ate for lunch; pies and vegemite sandwiches instead of salami; Kraft processed cheese instead of the 'smelly' Italian ones. Many scuffles broke out when the non-English speakers were labelled 'wogs' or 'dagos' by the Anglo-Australians. In adulthood however, many of the migrant children who fought to become Australianised, became very involved in their ethnic heritage and were proud of their dual identities as both Australian and migrant, which may well have been fuelled by visits to their mother country, where knowledge of the language was needed to enable communication with the wider family.

Multiculturalism did not eradicate the problems of non-English speaking children, who did not reach the same educational potential as their Anglo-Australian peers. Part of the reason can be attributed to the fact that many migrant children were located in areas where schools tended to be understaffed and under-resourced, but their lack of English was also a primary cause. Vasta (1994) claimed that the fact that many of them stayed at school longer, did not necessarily imply that they were more successful in their education. She pointed out that, except for the Maltese, the migrant children were under-represented in technical and trades qualifications and had high rates of unemployment.

## **2.12 The Multicultural Aspects of Children and Catholic Schooling: Migrant and School Studies**

Cahill (1988), who in 1984 headed the Commonwealth Review of the Multicultural Education Program, wrote an article in the *Catholic Record* which outlined the multicultural perspective of children and Catholic schooling. He claimed that:-

*Multiculturalism can be based on Christianity's understanding of pluralism and on the notion of Christianity as a religion of the future. Education for a multicultural society is a future-oriented process of educational transmission which is based on the past and present shared experiences of the different socio-religious groups that have peopled and are presently continuing to populate the Australian continent. Its primary aim is to increase the opportunities for all children and young people (p.39).*

In the above mentioned review of multicultural education, it was found that whilst teachers in general favoured multicultural education, very few understood what the term actually meant. The Catholic schooling sector, at the national level, had no notion of education for a multicultural society, stated and supported by a theology of ethnicity and multiculturalism. Indeed, the Catholic Education Office in the Australian Capital Territory, argued that there is a specifically Catholic approach to multiculturalism, based on fundamental theological principles and values of truth, justice, freedom and the rights and dignity of each individual (Cahill, 1988). A more appropriate definition is found in a statement by the National Advisory and Co-ordinating Committee on Multicultural Education (1987), which states that:-

*The concept of equitable multiculturalism is concerned with (1) issues of equality of access and participation for ethnic minorities (2) intercultural understanding and (3) the development of cultural and ethnic identity.*

The nature of migration is such that it creates a tension between religious identity and cultural identity as opposed to the dominant culture. Membership of the former, indicates membership of a specific religious group which transmits a religious heritage from one generation to the next, while the latter similarly transmits its ethnic heritage. For young people of migrant backgrounds the tension exists because of the need to belong to both the host culture and the ethnic culture and being alienated from both to varying degrees. For them, there is a high level of ambiguity. Impressionistic evidence, Cahill suggested, indicated that the process of developing a mature ethnic identity is more traumatic and stressful for adolescent migrant girls than for others.

The presence of large numbers of migrant children in Catholic schools Cahill (1988) saw as an implication that the Australian Catholic identity cannot be totally explained by its Irish connections, but within that scenario there was a more fundamental connection common to all Catholics. He therefore believed that multicultural perspective in Catholic education should, ideally, be concerned with the transmission of ethno-religious heritage within a more general Australian Catholic identity which in turn is buried within a multi-ethnic Australian identity. He did not believe, however, that such a multicultural religious educational perspective should become embroiled in the more superficial pietistic observances dear to the hearts of many members of various ethnic communities, although they are seen very positively by so many members of the particular religious group,. In fact he suggested that religious education co-ordinators should, in these post-conciliar times, lead their pupils past

these to the core values and traditions of the faith. He pointed out that the Maltese and the Southern Italians, in particular are very pre-occupied with feasts and processions.

On the other hand, those schools that were receiving large numbers of migrant children who had recently arrived in Australia, were placed in some difficult situations. These 'reception schools' were geographically close to the migrant hostels and provided migrant children with their first experiences of government schooling. These schools received no prior warning that children would be coming to the school, nor how many of them there would be or when, nor what level of education they had obtained prior to emigration. This presented the schools with insurmountable barriers in their efforts to provide any sort of transitional programmes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Anglo-Australian parents were reluctant to send their children to schools with high migrant intakes, in case their children were overlooked as schools concentrated on the migrant children. They also were concerned that their children would not be stretched to their greatest potential if educationally the majority of children were struggling because of language problems.

Migration is controlled by the Commonwealth government while education is the State government prerogative, which led to a situation where the school received no information about the child's social and cultural background. Not only were schools landed with children with no knowledge of the languages they spoke or the countries from whence they came, they also lacked flexibility as far as staffing was concerned (Taft & Cahill, 1978) and were not able to appoint a teacher with appropriate language skills at short notice. At these schools the children only stayed for short periods as they transferred elsewhere when their parents moved out of the hostel and into the community and eventually into their own homes. In the first few years after arriving, migrant children often attended a number of local schools until the families settled permanently. Consistency of education and language help did not happen.

Decisions regarding the type and locality of migrant children's education needed to be made within days of arriving in Australia and frequently without any knowledge of what was available and where. It was common in Catholic schools for the Maltese migrant children, who were frequently below the age of the rest of the class, to be required to repeat a grade. Government schools seemed to be more concerned with the child's social adjustment with his peers than with ensuring that they knew everything for their age group scholastically.

One of the most prevalent criticisms levelled by migrant parents at Australian schools was their perceived belief that the schools spent too much time playing games and sport at the expense of the academic programme. The Maltese families firmly believed that the children learned more in their Maltese schools (Taft, 1978).

### **2.13 Migrant Children's Ethnic Backgrounds in Catholic School Learning Programmes: Studies of Australian Children Compared with Migrant Children**

An *Inquiry into Schools of High Migrant Density* (Anderson, 1975) made public the following findings. There was little evidence of any recognition of migrant children's ethnic backgrounds in school learning programmes. Despite the fact that primary schools in Victoria and NSW, where the inquiry had been undertaken, had much freedom in establishing their own curriculum, little attempt was made to broaden the experiences of either migrant or non-migrant children, even though teachers reported the lack of cultural experience of both groups. The majority of the staff at these schools was completely unaware of the backgrounds of the pupils they were teaching.

Although it was recognised by many that the teaching of ethnic languages should be a desirable part of the school curriculum, there was much opposition from educators who saw the teaching of foreign languages in school as an impediment to educational progress and

ignored if not actively discouraged it (Anderson, 1975). Another very serious deficiency the inquiry reported was the 'almost universal' lack of appropriate books in school libraries, in either English or in ethnic languages. Surprisingly, there were almost no bilingual dictionaries, phrase books or reading material which took into account structural grading as well as vocabulary control.

Yet another problem was that of the transfer rate of migrant children from school to school. In the early stages of migration into a new country, migrant mobility is very high and schools near migrant centres are particularly affected by the phenomenon. Not only does this affect the migrant children who must frequently change schools, but also has an unsettling effect on those who remained. The Inquiry commented that "the lesson program is in a constant state of flux" (Anderson, 1975, p. 16).

For the non-migrant child in such classes, little was done to stretch those who were more able and those who were lower achievers had few special provisions made for them. The Inquiry further reported that, while the incidence is not widespread, there were reports of traditional animosities being brought into the school environment. In some cases more numerous ethnic groups had formed alliances which tended to harass the children in minority ethnic groups. Cases were reported of parents who belonged to the minority group, refusing to send their children to some schools where this occurred.

Although not confined to parents of migrant children, these schools reported a low level of parental and community involvement. The main barrier for migrant parents was considered to be their lack of English. It was reported that in these high density schools, parents of the migrant children expressed some concern over what the schools were providing or not providing for their children, despite the fact that most were very vague about the whole

question of education. The parents were very critical of the schools which were conducting an education programme which was very different to what they knew as children at schools in their own countries and their lack of contact and/or communication with the schools did not help the situation. In fact the situation was that both parents usually worked and large numbers of the pupils at these schools were 'latchkey children'. Frequently parents saw the school as the means by which their children could achieve economic and status success. In many cases they had an almost 'blind faith' in the school and often had unrealistic expectations of and for their children. This situation, in large part, was attributed to the failure of the schools to make meaningful contact with the parents.

## **2.14 Conclusion**

The political and economic situations from which the migrant families had left their home countries, differed considerably between the various ethnic backgrounds. The Maltese had suffered terribly at the hands of the German and Italian bombers during the Second World War, because of their strategic importance as a major port supplying food and ammunitions to the British and Allied forces fighting around the Mediterranean. Their bravery was acknowledged by the British government, by the awarding of the George Medal for bravery to the entire civilian population, by the King. Although their lives were undoubtedly difficult, they did have their families surrounding them in these perilous times. Many migrated to a country where many of their relatives and countrymen already lived and had done well, and where they would be as far away from any future European conflict as they could possibly be. Poland, on the other hand, had been overrun by the Germans, and apart from the privations the adult population endured, the young people had been deported to Germany to provide slave labour on the farms or in the factories. The ties with their families had been severed and to go back to Poland meant living under a Communist regime which

many did not want to endure. After the war Australia was desperately short of manual labourers, and to meet the need, set up a large migration scheme. While many of the Maltese had children when they arrived in Australia, almost all of the Poles had none, having met and married in the refugee camps in Europe at the end of the war. Questions in the interviews were designed to try to discover how the various privations during the war affected the families of these children and how they coped on arrival in Australia.

As by definition, the study involved children who were educated in the Catholic primary school system, the attitude of the Church and the parishes in Australia to the migrants was probed. The Church in Rome espoused tolerance by the receiving countries towards the homeless refugees to whom they were giving sanctuary - as much from the dire circumstances in which they found themselves as from the influence of communism which was pervading their countries. Help to maintain their faith was of prime importance and priests who spoke their language were to be encouraged to minister to them. The Church in Australia had much the same attitudes as the local man in the street. Migrants were to be assimilated into the population as quickly as possible. The parish priest was required to give his permission to allow ethnic priests to minister to their flocks, in his church. To give such permission, was seen by many priests as undermining their authority and directing much needed funds away from the parish and into the coffers of the ethnic priests. Questions, therefore, were needed to be directed in such a way as to see how helpful the Church really was to these children as they struggled to find their way in an alien culture.

Racial prejudice was always likely to be an issue with Australians and the new migrants, the Maltese in particular. They were regarded by many Australians as black, and therefore inferior. They were infamously discriminated against during the time of the conscription debate during WWI and were prevented from landing in Australia. Propaganda was spread

about by union officials that black labourers were being sent to Australia as cheap labour while young Australians were being sent off to be ‘cannon fodder’ in France. The ‘bogey man’ rapist of pure Australian women was levelled against them. How much of this sort of attitude was evident in their treatment during their school years? Questions to ascertain this were included in the interview questions.

Finally, questions were asked concerning the physical conditions under which they were learning which were perceived to have an important effect. So too were the teachers and their teaching methods believed to be relevant. The interview questions were used to thoroughly probe these important influences.

The responses gained from the questions asked at the interviews will be discussed in Chapters four, five and six.

A great many factors affected the education of migrant children in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. The situation in the post Second World War Australia was difficult anyway because of neglect of education in favour of devoting resources both material and human to the war effort, but the increased numbers enrolling for schooling as a result of both migration and the increased numbers of children born as military personnel returned from the war, exacerbated an already difficult situation.

For Catholic migrants, despite the commonality of their Catholic beliefs which the Irish priests (and others) believed would bind them into the local church and thus assimilate them, the cultural aspects of their beliefs and their local customs in the places from whence they came proved to be factors which worked against such an outcome. When it came to educating their children, a parish based education system was not something all of the migrants had experienced before, and the disassociated nature of the Australian Catholic

system meant that there were quite different situations in different schools and in different areas. The resources were stretched to the limit – buildings, classrooms, teachers and teaching aids – and no thought or training had been given to how children could overcome their lack of English other than the conviction that ‘they would pick it up as they went along’.

Many of the difficulties which confronted migrants and their children in the 1950s and 1960s were common to migrant society as a whole and not just to followers of the Catholic Church. Some were familial while others were ethnically related. Some conditions had previously been experienced in other migrant receiving countries, but nothing was done to alleviate them. Prejudice, based on ignorance by the Australian population in general, coloured many of the interactions migrants experienced with the Australian born population and animosity existed between some ethnic groups. There was evidence of dissatisfaction among some migrant children both with the migration process and with a yearning for their home countries, which was probably related to their problems with their school and with fitting in with an alien society. It is a tribute to many of them that they achieved so much against such overwhelming odds.

Despite the many admirable research projects that have been undertaken over time, there seems to be very little evidence that the children themselves been consulted in any depth. The problems they experienced, firstly, at home with both parents working, neither of them able to help with their school work, either because they knew very little English or were indeed uneducated themselves. Secondly, because of the size of the classes and the sisters’ lack of understanding of the problems these children had and what was needed to help them, they were left to sink or swim on their own. Thirdly, so many of these families were incredibly poor, even in the lucky country, that very few people understood how difficult it was for them to provide for their children. Only the children themselves can explain what it

was like for them trying to learn at that time. Their own words are needed to tell their stories and there is little evidence to suggest that the ability to listen is any more prevalent today than it was in the 1950s and 1960s. There seems no evidence that there has been any investigation of what the sisters underwent trying to educate these children, without any extra help, either. It is important to document the contribution these remarkable women made to the education of Catholic children before they die as so many have already done. This thesis is undertaken in an attempt to address some of these issues so that we may acknowledge the difficulties and privations so many of yesterday's children experienced to become the successful adults they are today.

The above demonstrates that there are serious gaps and insufficient research in the understanding and knowledge of the overall experiences of migrant children in the Catholic primary schools in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s, with reference to racism and ethnocentrism at the time, ethnicity, cultural identity, teachers' attitudes towards migrant children, migrant children's experiences in Catholic schools, their adjustment to the schools' environment, and impact of these factors on migrant children's academic achievement.

In the following chapter, research design that was adopted for the empirical part of the study is explained and justified. Following that chapter, the data are presented and analysed in three separate chapters.

## Chapter Three - The Design of the Research

---

### 3.1 Introduction

This study sought to gather and analyse the narratives of Maltese and Polish adults about their experiences in the Catholic primary school system in the Melbourne Archdiocese in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition it sought to gather and analyse the narratives and experiences of another significant group in that historical situation – the teaching religious sisters. It was decided to limit the collection and analysis to two ethnic groups because the ethnic variety of post war migrants was extensive (Fact Sheet 4, 2009) and it was important not to gather such a diversification of stories that little could be learned from them. The decision to seek and analyse the narratives of Maltese and Polish migrants was made because much work has already been done on Italian migrants (Pittarello, 1988, 1986, Church, 2005, Travaglia, 1993, Paganoni, 2005, 2003) who were one of the largest groups, and certainly the largest Roman Catholic group of migrants at the time. The next largest Roman Catholic group to arrive was the Poles, and for this reason and because of the scarcity of research on the schooling experiences of Polish child migrants, (with Smolicz, 1992, Smolicz and Secombe 1981, and Birrel and Seitz, 1986, being some exceptions) these were selected for this study. The Maltese who came in numbers comparable to the Poles, were chosen because although they shared the same religion as the Poles, they could be seen to have some advantage, because having been under British rule for more than 150 years, they were presumed to speak English. In contrast to the Poles, they were sponsored in the main, by family members or friends already resident in this country, who could help them understand how things were done in Australia (Zubrzycki, 1964).

### 3.2 The Choice of Qualitative Research

The nature of the research design was determined by the research aims, which focused on the narratives and experiences of Maltese and Polish children who attended Catholic primary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne in the 1950s and 1960s, and the narratives of the religious sisters who taught them. These aims determined that the study should adopt a qualitative rather than a quantitative design. While quantitative research investigates the relationships between variables in order to establish an association or a cause and effect relationship, qualitative research is appropriate when the subject needs to be explored at some depth. Qualitative research aims for a rich view of the topic. This involves the researcher in gathering extensive and rich data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and in spending considerable time in detailed analysis of oral and written rather than numeric material. The method also involves descriptive writing, as mere figures will not adequately convey the data and its meaning. In this style of research, the researcher's aim is to tell the story from the subject's point of view, from a perspective of learning rather than one of expertise (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research allows the researcher to gain insight into the personal experiences of the individual, to gain understanding of meanings that are arrived at both through and in a culture and, rather than testing variables, to discover them (Corbin, 2009).

Ontologically the research was grounded in **subjectivism**, because it dealt with the subjective worlds of the participants, and with the informed judgements of the researcher who, in qualitative research, influences every aspect of the research from the choice of topic, through the development of the interview questions, to the information on which he/she focuses when analysing data and indeed the conclusions which he/she reaches at the end of the analysis. **Constructivism** was the selected epistemology, for this epistemology recognises that

knowledge is continually developed from shared learning, experiences and views, rather than being received whole and unchangeable (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

The participants' narratives were constructed from within their subjective worlds, from their own experiences and in socialisation with others. Through the processes of accommodation and assimilation, new knowledge was constructed in dialogue with the researcher. The theoretical perspective that emerges from a constructionist epistemology is that of interpretivism. This is concerned with seeking understanding from qualitative data and it includes a range of sub-perspectives including phenomenology, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism. The latter, **symbolic interactionism** was adopted for this research. Symbolic interactionism assumes that the researcher wishes to enter into the subjective world of the participant, in order to understand their experiences and perceptions. It does not assume detachment but rather informed involvement on the part of the researcher (Crotty, 1988). Grounded theory, and specifically **constructivist grounded theory** (Charmaz, 2009) was the selected methodology. As explained later in the chapter, grounded theory allows the researcher to develop an explanatory theory from the 'ground up', with the theory being derived inductively from the data (Vince, 2010, p. 431). Data collection was by way of **in-depth interviews** which elicit life history narratives or oral histories, where interviews were undertaken using some directed questions but essentially allowing the participants to tell their stories from their own perspectives. Table 3.1 (p.123) summarises the research design.

Table 3.1  
*Overview of the Research Design*

Ontology	Epistemology	Theoretical Perspectives	Methodology	Methods
Subjectivism	Constructivism	Symbolic interactionism	Grounded Theory	Interviews Life history narratives (Oral histories)
Observations, are influenced by the thoughts and feelings of the observer	Through the processes of accommodation and assimilation, new knowledge is constructed from the interviews	Situates social problems in historical and cultural contexts (Postmodern)	Allows theory to emerge from collected data which is analysed using constant comparative method	Interviews undertaken using directed questions, to establish oral histories

### 3.3 Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research as “an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colours, different textures, and various blends of material” (p. 13). Explanations of the material are not simple to convey and a general framework is needed to tie the data together. However some common elements do characterise this type of research, where results cannot be numerated. Qualitative research has been defined by Denzin & Lincoln (1994) as being “multimedia in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Their explanation goes on to say that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. Creswell (1998, p. 15) added that “the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting”. In essence, it is research within a given context. Rather than verifying an hypothesis, it tends to be more concerned with discovery, and concentrates on the how and why of an individual’s behaviour and thought processes rather than his/her actions or beliefs. (Ambert, 1995).

The method seeks “depth rather than breath” (Ambert, 1995, p. 880) and aims at acquiring in-depth and personal information about a small number of people with the object of discovering why people behave or think in the way that they do, rather than concentrating on a large number of people which arguably elicits more superficial findings. It lends itself to discoveries rather than verifications and frequently involves substantial modifications if not complete redirection of existing ideas. In this process of discovery, existing ideas can be challenged and may result in them being completely redirected, modified or extended. As a result the researcher may change the focus of the research from his/her original thinking to those which are dictated by the emerging research. The theory emerges as the researcher continues to shape and reshape his/her conceptual images to accommodate the ongoing observations. In so doing, the validity of his/her conceptualisations is constantly increased (Crotty, 1988). This does not mean that the method is not concerned with the findings of previous research however. It does mean that the researchers may shift their focus to areas of the research that the interviewees demonstrate to be important to them, rather than confining the interviews to those areas dictated to by previous research. Qualitative research has become very varied (Ambert, 1995). A primary goal of the research is to allow theory to emerge from the research through a mechanism whereby the researchers, after generating concepts for their research results, continue to refine and reshape them in accordance with their on-going observations, thereby continually enhancing the veracity of their findings.

### **3.4 Ontology**

Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being, existence and reality as well as the basic category of beings and their relations (Crotty, 1998). It informs the epistemology and theoretical perspective and could be described as the most fundamental branch of metaphysics. The name derives from the Greek words *ontos* meaning *to be* and *logos*

meaning *word*.<sup>48</sup> Ontology addresses questions concerning what entities exist or can be said to exist. Its main concern is with “what is” and asks questions about what actually exists.

Methodology is very influenced by “the beliefs and attitudes about the world we live in” (Corbin, 2009, p. 5), and these beliefs and attitudes are usually divided into subjective or objective ontological perceptions. Objectivism investigates what is observed rather than the thoughts and feelings of the one who is observed, and leads to fixed theories of knowledge, derived from objectively, mathematically or scientifically derived data. The aims of this study obviously did not fit into this classification, leading to the decision that **subjective** ontology was most appropriate. Subjectivism is involved with all knowledge which describes the conscious self. It posits the idea that all reality is filtered through the ideas and meanings given to events by individuals and groups. Theories of knowledge developed in this way are permanently evolving and changing – it is a process with fluidity and flexibility inherent in its method (Charmaz, 2009). This process involves investigating beyond what is currently known and entering into the world of the participants. Researchers try to see the world through the eyes of the participants and in so doing, add to the knowledge of the subject they are researching (Corbin, 2009). Research involving experiences of participants of their childhood more than 40 years ago, as in this project, and which is then interpreted by the researcher in a process of comparison and contrast with other participants, could only be classified as subjective. Therefore the basic ontology of this research is that of subjectivism. This approach to qualitative research requires the researcher “to identify their own ethnic, class, and gendered perspectives and to abandon the illusion that researchers, their informants, and the research setting do not influence each other reciprocally” (Ambert, 1995,

---

<sup>48</sup> [theapologiaproject.org](http://theapologiaproject.org)

p. 882). Reality is in effect filtered through the researcher's own culture. It should always be a continuation of the current knowledge of a topic, meaning that a thorough investigation of the literature available on the subject is obligatory (Kelly, 2009, Sofaer, 2002).

### **3.5 Epistemology**

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge which is embedded in the philosophical perspective underlying the methodology used in a particular study. The epistemology is inherent in the theoretical perspective which has been chosen (Crotty, 1998). This choice will lead in turn, to the appropriate choice of methodology and mode of data analysis. Epistemology illustrates the researcher's understanding of knowledge. Essentially it addresses how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). Because they affect the types of questions asked and the choice of methodology, epistemologies are sometimes called 'methodological perspectives' (Ambert, 1995).

As the ontology appropriate to the research was subjectivism, there were a range of epistemologies from which to choose the most relevant. These included objectivism, individualism, existentialism, constructivism, social constructivism, postmodernism, feminism, collectivism (Crotty, 1998, pp. 2-12). Of these, the theory of constructivism seemed best suited to the study at hand. It assumes that what we believe to be true and objective, is based upon our own perspective (Charmaz, 2000). From the individual's experiences a broad picture is able to be drawn and more encompassing generalisations can be made. These in turn may be modified as more information comes to hand (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The theory of constructivism which was widely attributed to Jean Piaget, who proposed that individuals **construct** new knowledge from their experiences through a process of

accommodation and assimilation (Bednar, 1991). Using assimilation techniques, an individual adapts experiences to fit in with an already established outlook on the world. In contrast, accommodation involves the individual incorporating new experiences of the world into his mental attitudes. These attitudes are adjusted to fit new knowledge. Initially, the constructions of meaning may have little relationship to reality, as is illustrated by the naive theorising of children, but the constructions become more complex with increasing differentiation and more realistic with increasing maturity and information. The theories so developed are subject to constant change as multiple perspectives are shared causing an individual's internal representations to change in response (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Cumulative experience also causes knowledge structures to alter. Thus each individual perceives the external reality quite differently depending on his unique set of experiences of the world and his beliefs.

This epistemological view was deemed to be the most appropriate for the proposed study, because the interviewer used the views of a number of interviewees to determine a realistic understanding of the situation in which migrant children were placed and their responses to their situation. By allowing the interviewees to describe the process by which they were accepted (or not) by the staff and children in their school, and in turn accepted their situation, the interviewer was able to investigate this process of constructing new knowledge.

### **3.6 Symbolic Interactionism**

Consistent with the epistemology of constructivism, the theoretical perspective of this research project was interpretivism, essentially meaning that interpretation and thus new knowledge occur through interaction between subjects and the phenomena (words, gestures, stories) they use to communicate their subjective worlds. Crotty outlined the three primary interpretivist approaches as: a) hermeneutics, where all experienced phenomena are

interpreted through the action of the one who experienced them; b) phenomenology, which is the descriptive study of the individual conscious experience from the perspective of that individual; and c) symbolic interactionism, where reality is experienced individually, and meaning results from interaction with the objects of that experience (Crotty, 1998, p. 71).

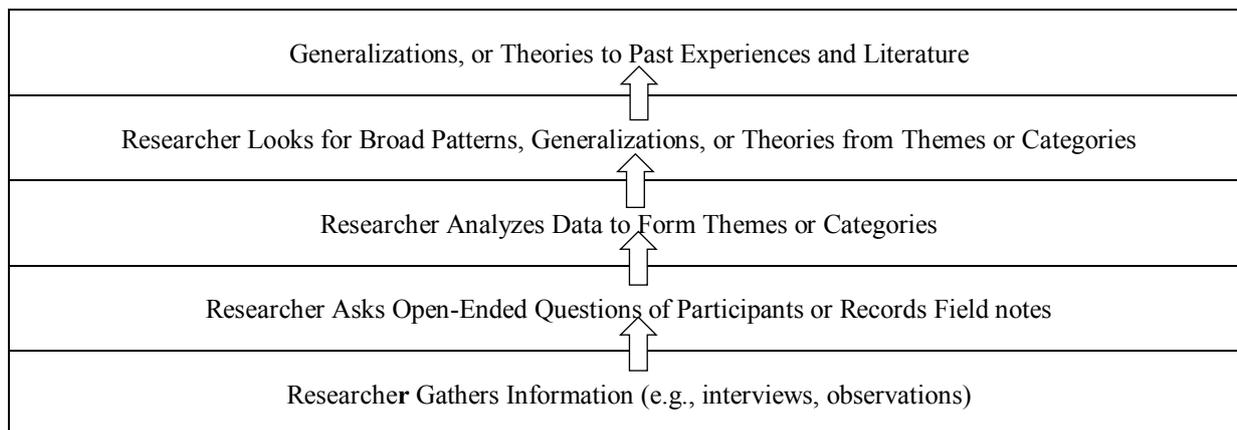
The third interpretivist approach, symbolic interactionism, implies that meaning is formed through a process of interaction. Introduced by the American philosopher George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) in the 1920s, symbolic interactionism is concerned with the meanings people make about their environments and lives, and the ways in which they communicate these, through words, stories and other verbal and non-verbal symbols. Each individual attributes a subjective meaning to their experiences and environments in interaction within the self, with others, and with the meanings ascribed by others to those experiences and environments (Blumer, 1986). Symbolic interactionism deals “directly with issues such as language, communication, interrelationships and community” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7-8). When analysing the narratives of informants in the research process, the researcher enters into the subjective world (perceptions, attitudes, experiences and values) of the participants (Crotty, 1998) and in dialogue with the researcher’s own context arrives at and continually tests interpretations of the meanings participants attribute to experiences and events (Flick, 2002).

### 3.7 The Methodology of Grounded Theory.

Grounded theory is a methodology which provides both a frame for qualitative research as well as guidelines for conducting it (Charmaz), 2009). Glasser and Strauss (1967) whose influential work initially developed the methodology, explained that grounded theory begins with the data and “systematically raises the conceptual level of the analyses while maintaining the strong foundation in the data” (Glasser and Strauss, 1967, p. 6). The following Table 3:2 visually illustrates the processes involved, as the researcher moves from gathering data through the series of processes until theories and their sub-theories (called ‘properties’ in grounded theory) emerge from a process of constant comparison and interpretation of data. The table shows how the researcher gathers data and progressively compares it to develop theories or generalisations to be applied universally from the individuals involved in the samples interviewed.



Table 3.2  
*Inductive Logic of Research in a Qualitative Study*



Symbolic interactionism together with grounded theory makes for a very strong theory-methods package, but grounded theory strategies may be successfully used with other theoretical perspectives. This package can be viewed as a specific form of ethnographic

inquiry that develops theoretical ideas via a series of carefully choreographed stages. Within grounded theory there are a number of epistemological variations.

### **3.8 Constructivist Grounded Theory**

One of these variations is Constructivist Grounded Theory. The method espouses the idea that knowledge is socially produced and that there are many standpoints from which this knowledge can be generated, both from the point of view of the interviewer and of the participants. Charmaz (2009) states that knowledge is dependent on social constructions and although the researcher constructs research processes and products, these occur under pre-existing structural conditions. Two of the main characteristics of grounded theory are the constant comparison of data to establish similarities which in turn become emerging categories, and the theoretical sampling of different groups in order to maximise the similarities and differences within the information (Creswell, 2003). These processes and products are part of emerging situations and are influenced by “the researcher’s perspectives, privileges, positions, interactions and geographical locations” (Charmaz, 2009, p. 130). They are not, in fact, neutral behaviour. Corbin (2009, p. 38) further explains that “it is not events themselves that are the focus of our studies”, but the meanings of the research. Those employing constructivist methodology acknowledge that interpreting research material is not a simple task because both the researcher and the participant are affected by other people and by circumstances. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the main focus of any study is not the event itself but the meanings “given to events and the actions/interactions/emotions expressed in response, along with the context in which those responses and the events occur” (Corbin, 2009, p. 38). While aiming to get a thorough understanding it is essential to make sure that external influences are acknowledged as much as possible and included in the analysis. These influences may include the participants’ beliefs, purposes, actions and the

reasons behind them. The participants' assumptions colour their actions although they may remain invisible unless such social causes are located.

Constructivist grounded theory proposes that data is constructed not discovered and that subsequent analyses are not objective reports or the only way of viewing the data. Qualitative researchers tend to research the everyday problems of ordinary people, taking into account such factors as social locations, cultural traditions and interactions between researcher and subject. It is constructivist grounded theory which tries to position the research in relation to the social circumstances. Those employing constructivist grounded theory emphasise interaction both at the time of data collection and during the process of analysis. Indeed, Charmaz (2009) describes constructivist grounded theory as deeply interactionist. For Charmaz, the method involves pragmatism and symbolic interactionism and emphasises structure and process. This perspective assumes that society, reality, and the self are constructed through interaction which rely on language and communication (Charmaz, 2006). It suggests strategies for collecting, managing and analysing qualitative data. Essentially it adopts a pragmatist approach which assumes the following attitudes: it involves a problem-solving viewpoint; views reality as indeterminate or fluid; assumes the researcher affects the situation by just being there; believes that there are multiple perspectives and aims to study how people act to solve problems which emerge. It also sees facts and values as developing and views truth as conditional. The approach employs an inductive, comparative, emergent and open-ended approach together with an abductive logic to refine and categorise the data collected and to arrive at a plausible explanation for information accumulated. In this way they create an interpretation of the aspect of life being studied in order to form working hypotheses which can then be tested against new observations. These hypotheses are continuously refined as new data comes to hand. Constructivist grounded theory proposes

that there are multiple realities as well as multiple perspectives on these realities. Through the interaction of researcher and subject data, is mutually constructed and is therefore problematic, relative, situational, and partial (Charmaz, 2009). Acknowledgement is made of the researcher's personal standpoints, situations and interactions which may affect the analytical processes.

As researchers, most people share some life experiences which are shared with the interviewees. At the very least, the researcher has undertaken some research into the historical or sociological background to the stories the interviewees are telling. Even when the experiences are not identical, what experiences and understandings the researcher has gained, colour (or bias) his/her reception of the information the interviewee is imparting. Corbin (2009) suggests that, as the researcher cannot void his/her mind completely to eliminate bias, previous experience should be used to examine other possibilities of meaning within the data. Care must obviously be taken to ensure that the researcher does not impose his/her experience on the data. In other words, it is imperative that the biases, beliefs and/or assumptions of either researcher or interviewee, which are the product of such things as their culture, the times in which they live, their gender, experiences and training, do not intrude into the analysis. To achieve this, the researcher must keep enough distance between himself and his/her interviewees to be able to clearly and analytically record the information they are receiving. It is important to question everything and take nothing for granted. Constructivist grounded theory is a refinement of the initial theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and was the branch of grounded theory that was used in this research, because of its recognition of the construction of knowledge between the researcher and the researched.

### **3.9 Issues of ‘Sampling’**

Bryant (2007) describes the main types of sampling most commonly used in grounded theory. The first is ‘convenience sampling’ where participants are selected in the basis of their accessibility; which is then followed by ‘purposeful sampling’ on the basis of the initial analysis of interviews; followed by ‘theoretical sampling’ which selects participants according to the emerging theory and concepts. In this study convenience sampling was undertaken in deciding which groups of migrants would be the appropriate ones to study. A sample was not necessary in this case as the study was limited to Catholic primary school children of which the largest groups at the time were Italian, Polish and Maltese. The two latter groups were asked to participate in this study and many letters were sent out to all the ethnic groups and community organizations to which possible research subjects could belong.

Snowball sampling was another type of sampling that allows access to hidden populations which are not accessible any other way (Goodman, 1961, Wejnert, 2005). In this method, the researcher randomly selects a sample of individuals from a finite population. Each individual in this sample is then asked to name (or refer) more individuals within the population. As this can then be a continuing process, the method is called ‘snowballing’ because of its resemblance to the increasing size of a rolling snowball as it gathers more snow to it, on its progress down a hill.

The first approach to finding interviewees, was to write letters to all the Polish and Maltese organisations listed on the webpages under the auspices of the two ethnic organisations. A few willing, individual Maltese interviewees replied. However, the Maltese Historical Society was one of the very few organisations to respond and from the president, some names of willing interviewees were suggested. In turn, some other potential interviewees were suggested. Several times at a social gathering, someone would respond as being both eligible

and willing or as knowing somebody who was and sometimes these led on to another interview.

A letter printed in *Kairos*, the Catholic newsletter, elicited a few Maltese responses, but the Polish interviewees proved much more difficult to find. There were a very few who responded to requests through the letters to the organisations, and these did not travel much further. One of the Maltese interviewees was married to a Polish woman who agreed to be interviewed. And so slowly the numbers started to rise. A friend who had contacts with the Ballarat Polish community managed to find one willing interviewee who then recommended three others. And so this is how snowball sampling in this instance, worked.

Goodman claims that the data obtained using this method of sampling “can be utilized to make statistical inferences about various aspects of ..... the population” (Goodman, 1961, p. 148). Wejnert (2005, p.1) describes snowball sampling as being used as a “popular enhancement to ego-centric sampling”, which is commonly used in network sampling and is composed of questionnaires and surveys pertaining to an individual’s attributes (amongst other things). In their research Doreian and Woodard (1992) found that snowball data provided a more accurate picture of the network they were investigating. One of the limitations of this type of sampling methodology is that the data is dependent on self-reporting and that it can be expensive in terms of time and money because the researcher needs to visit and revisit the field to conduct interviews. From this method of snowball sampling a further refinement has been developed called Respondent Driven Sampling. This uses the usual referral system as in Snowball Sampling but removes the researcher from the process once the first random sample has been selected. From this point the individuals randomly selected are expected to recruit other interviewees which Doreian and Woodard (1992) suggested should be remunerated in direct relation to the number of other interviewees

they recruit. They suggest that another advantage of Respondent Driven Sampling is that it can be used for more than one variable within the population.

While, as described in the research, this type of sampling is used with questionnaires and with remuneration, it became obvious that in the light of the extreme difficulty in finding volunteers to respond to general public requests for interviews, the Snowball Sampling method was going to be the only way to find interviewees. Not only were interviewees requested to recommend others, but any opportunities which presented themselves in social situations were gladly accepted. As people in the original interviews had responded to requests for assistance in response to advertisements in a variety of outlets, a case can be made that bias is minimalised. If this is accepted, a further case for minimalisation of bias could be claimed for the people these interviewees referred to the researcher. As this study did not involve network studies, the method would not be used to its full extent and in this case, will be associated with interviews rather than questionnaires.

Morse (2007) points out that sampling does not stop with the choosing of interviewees, but continues as the researcher analyses the data received in the interviews. She suggests that not all the stories warrant equal merit. Some will be useful, others useless while in others the usefulness may only be apparent as the analysis progresses. Some of them will provide better illustrations or descriptions and will therefore be used more often than others. She dismisses the suggestion that this is bias, calling the process of selecting and sorting, prioritising or devaluing as a legitimate part of the analysis process. Indeed, she suggests that “effective and efficient sampling strategies which change during the process of data collection and analysis, enable the researcher to complete the task with minimal waste,” (Morse, 2007, p.243)

### **3.10 The Method: Oral History Narratives Through in Depth Interviews.**

#### **3.10.1 Oral history narratives**

The first major sociological life history was written by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) entitled 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America'. In this study the authors claimed that when searching for abstract laws, life records "constitute the *perfect* type of sociological material" (pp. 1832-1833). They went on to state that it was only the practical difficulty of obtaining a sufficient number of records and the work involved in accumulating them that forces social researchers to use other materials in order to analyse and characterise the life of any designated social group. It provides a way of understanding the link between 'personal troubles' and 'public issues' which Goodson (1983) believes lies at the very heart of the sociological enterprise.

The method has never reached the status that Thomas and Znaniecki believed it deserved, mainly due to the many problems inherent in the method, including those which claim that it is "methodologically unsound and practically inefficient" (Faraday & Plummer, 1979, p. 773). The main objection is that there is no evidence that the life history of one individual can be extrapolated to apply to any one group of individuals. Methodologically, according to (Faraday & Plummer, 1979, p. 774) it is an "extremely wasteful, time-consuming and inefficient method" when a large number of people can be interviewed in a relatively short time compared with the extended time a life history takes to record. However, the method is one based on symbolic interactionism, which emphasises the symbolic, emergent and interactive nature of social reality.

#### **In depth interviews**

Yow (2005) put forward a definition of oral history phrased as follows: "oral history is the recording of personal testimony delivered in an oral form" (p. 3). It was apparent that the

only way to begin to understand what migrant children experienced at school at that time was to conduct a series of interviews. In a study which sought life history narratives it was apparent that from a spectrum of possible types of interviews, that in-depth interviewing was the most appropriate. Essentially, in-depth interviewing is unstructured interviewing. It is referred to in Taylor and Bogan (1984) as “repeated face to face encounters between the researcher and the informants directed towards understanding informant’s perspectives on their lives, experiences and situations as expressed in their own words” (p. 77).

This method was chosen before structured or semi-structured interviews because the assumptions underlying in-depth interviews were most closely identified with the focus of the study. The method of in-depth interviews assumes that people have interpreted their experiences, that they are able to share these interpretations, and that in communication with others are able to understand their interpretations. In-depth interviewing has the ability to allow a very wide range of perceptions to emerge, because it does not limit the informant to predetermined areas of discussion. This does not mean, however, that there is no underlying framework for the interviews, for they are always disciplined by the research questions (Minichiello, Aroni, Timwell, & Alexander, 1990). The ability of the in-depth interview to allow access to and understanding of the interpretations of reality that individuals hold, made this a valuable method for this study.

### **Conducting the interviews**

One of the most basic things which differentiate between quantitative and qualitative research is the type of questions which are asked. In quantitative research the questions are closed-ended while for qualitative research the questions are open-ended. In the latter research, the researcher does not use predetermined categories or scales to collect his/her data, but allows

the interviewee to choose the nature and direction of his/her responses. It is labour-intensive, both in collection and analysis. Using an in-depth interview in a one-on-one situation, the interviewee can answer as he/she chooses, interjecting topics of his/her choosing as well as giving individual meanings to the experiences being discussed. From this point new hypotheses can be developed. Thus, one-on-one interviews were the best possible way of finding out each individual's experience at a Catholic school in Melbourne in the 1950s and 1960s. Questions could be asked to clarify answers and to further probe an area that presented itself in passing. By, at times, following the topics interviewees wanted to talk about, information the interviewer had not even thought about, could be aired (Yow, 2005). 'Thick description' is a term used by Geertz, an ethnographer, who points out that hypotheses are generated, not from a single view of an experience but from "a large enough number of testimonies that a great variety in detail is explained" (cited in Yow, 2005, p. 7). Sometimes the interviewer can be surprised at the answers to the questions being asked, to the degree that the over-riding question may need to be revised. Care must also be taken in this type of interview that the researcher's attention is not directed to some aspects of behaviour or testimony in preference to others, due to the individual's assumptions. It is vital that these assumptions are acknowledged. Using a recorder to make a permanent, verbatim record of the interview means that the data can be revisited many times to ensure that none of the nuances of the given information are missed. Oral testimony breathes life into official documentation.

### **3.10.2 How participants were recruited.**

A series of interviews with volunteers who met the predetermined criteria, were undertaken by the researcher. These criteria were such that the interviewees had been migrant children educated in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne Diocese in the 1950s and 1960s or

teaching sisters in those schools. These geographic boundaries had later to be extended in order to find sufficient interviewees. An unbiased method of finding interviewees needed to be developed. A search of census statistics accumulated by the Australian Bureau of Census and Statistics over a number of censuses at the time under research, revealed that a very significant number of both Polish and Maltese migrants settled in and around the Melbourne suburb of Sunshine, presumably because of the proximity to the Migrant hostel at nearby Maribrynong<sup>49</sup>. The same material from later censuses indicated that the numbers of residents of Maltese and Polish origin had not moved very far from the areas where they first settled in Melbourne<sup>50</sup>. Investigations of Roman Catholic Church records showed that there were four primary schools in the Sunshine area at about that time. These were Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Primary School, Sunshine; St Bernadette's Primary School, North Sunshine; St Peters Primary School, Sunshine South West; and St Paul's School, Sunshine West. One of the four (St Peters Primary) was just too late to have been established at that time, so it was decided to approach the other three schools to ask if they would be prepared to send out information letters and application forms about the research project to the past pupils who had attended the schools in the time period relevant to the study. From this it was hoped to recruit interviewees who were likely to fit the profile required for the study. The letters and the postage were to be supplied by the researcher. This approach by mail solicited a disappointingly small number of responses – and a second letter did little better. Several approaches to the Catholic Education Office also went without response until after some considerable time a comprehensive questionnaire was received from this organisation. This asked a large number of questions which had no relevance to a request to

---

<sup>49</sup> Australian Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1954

<sup>50</sup> Catholics of Polish and Maltese Ancestry, by Parish, Australian Bishops' Conference based on Census 2001

mail out letters to the past-pupils lists of the schools and by this time alternative strategies had been developed.

Letters were sent, together with follow up letters to all the Maltese and the Polish organisations listed on the internet or in the telephone directory. These too had disappointingly few responses. However, contact was made with the President of the Maltese Historical Society who, while not eligible himself, was able to provide access to several people, who in turn provided access to some of their acquaintances. Thus, snowball sampling was established. Items in the Church paper 'Kairos' prompted some more responses, but the number of interviewees fell far short of the anticipated numbers.

An approach was made to the priest who ministers to Melbourne's Polish community, but he declined to either announce the study from the pulpit or to place a notice in the parish newsletter. Somewhat discouraged, the interviewer resorted to interviewing anybody who was recommended by acquaintances and who was willing to be interviewed. As discussed earlier in this chapter, here was another example of convenience or snowball sampling. Information obtained about the two different ethnic groups which have been selected to investigate was not easily gained. Finding members of the two ethnic groups who were willing to be interviewed proved to be extremely difficult. The Catholic Education Office was unhelpful to the point of being obstructionist and without their help, access to the schools in Sunshine and their past-pupil lists was not possible.

The Maltese interviewees were referred from the Maltese Historical Society and the Maltese Association, but no such help was offered by any of the Polish groups. Even the Polish priest who was approached, was not willing to participate. Therefore the amount of material which was able to be collected for the Maltese, was disproportionately larger than that gathered for

the Poles. The situation was even more pronounced when a university sponsored trip to Malta was made available and access to academics at the University of Malta was arranged to find answers to questions which the interviewer deemed were important to an understanding of Maltese attitudes and behaviours exhibited here in Australia and for which no local explanation could be found. Thus all things Maltese were comparatively easy to collect when compared with the Polish material. Of those Poles who were interviewed however, the stories were remarkably similar.

. A Snowball method of sampling where one interviewee was encouraged to refer individuals of their acquaintance who were willing to be interviewed, was employed. This involved asking those interviewees who had been referred by such organisations as the Maltese Historical Society or who had answered advertisements for volunteers, to refer eligible friends and family. Chance encounters at social events were often utilized. Even using this method it was not easy to find interviewees. Ultimately when potential interviewees were found, the Maltese were much more willing to be interviewed than the Poles, who had to be greatly encouraged in many cases, to subject themselves to being interviewed. In almost all cases, the Polish interviewees found the experience quite distressing – their memories obviously very painful. For many of them as children there were tales of violence and drunkenness in the families, sometimes not articulated but implied. On a few occasions, the interviewer was moved to tears at the direction their lives had taken because of their childhood.

This method of finding interviewees is called convenience or snowball sampling. Many of those interviewed were discovered by chance encounters where the research was discussed in a social setting. An approach was even made to the local Polish cake shop as Polish interviews were markedly fewer than the Maltese. This, however, was not fruitful as these

Poles and their friends were from the 1980s wave of migrants. Thus the number of Polish interviews remains much fewer than ideal.

The outcome of all this effort provided a sample of each culture which may not be representative of the whole community. It is most likely to be skewed towards those former migrant children who remained part of the Roman Catholic community and towards those who are well educated or who are friends and/or relatives of those who are.

To provide a more complete understanding of the situation existing in Catholic primary school education at that time, it was reasoned that those who taught the children at that time needed to be interviewed. In order to secure interviews with religious sisters who had taught migrant children during the years included in the study, letters were sent to those orders who may have had sisters still alive who taught in the time period in question, and who were prepared to be interviewed about their experiences. A small number of responses were received although not all were teaching in the Melbourne archdiocese. It was decided that although their geographical situations were outside the limits of the study, their teaching experiences would be very relevant and that they would, at the very least, approximate the experiences of those who taught under the auspices of the Melbourne archdiocese.

Table 3.3 indicates the type of respondent interviewed and the date on which the interview was recorded.

Table 3.3  
*Interview Schedule*

Name	Ethnicity	Date	Name	Ethnicity	Date
MF1AM	Maltese	30/06/06	MM8OM	Maltese	09/07/06
MF2OM	Maltese	04/06/07	MM9AX	Maltese	28/03/11
MF3AM	Maltese	08/06/06	PF1AX	Polish	14/04/08
MF4AM	Maltese	20/11/06	PF2OP	Polish	27/03/07
MF5OM	Maltese	01/04/07	PF3AX	Polish	20/03/07
MF6OM	Maltese	02/04/07	PF4AP	Polish	29/03/11
MF7OM	Maltese	02/04/07	PF5OP	Polish	11/04/12
MF8OM	Maltese	10/07/06	PF6OP	Polish	12/04/12
MF9OM	Maltese	06/07/06	PF7AP	Polish	22/02/08
MF10OM	Maltese	04/09/06	PF8OP	Polish	03/04/07
MF11OM	Maltese	16/03/11	PM1AP	Polish	23/07/07
MF12OM	Maltese	16/03/11	PM2AP	Polish	04/06/07
MF13OM	Maltese	08/05/07	PM3AP	Polish	25/07/08
MM1OM	Maltese	27/11/06	PM4OP	Polish	12/04/12
MM2OM	Maltese	21/05/07	RF1	Anglo	15/08/06
MM3OX	Maltese	13/02/07	RF2	Anglo	27/07/06
MM4OM	Maltese	10/07/06	RF3	Anglo	15/08/06
MM5OX	Maltese	28/08/06	RF4	Anglo	19/06/06
MM6AM	Maltese	06/03/07	RF5	Anglo	14/06/11
MM7OM	Maltese	18/08/09	RF6	Anglo	02/08/11

### 3.10.3 Analysing the data

Qualitative analysis relies heavily on the insight of the investigator (Bryant, 2007), and in the analysis of qualitative data nothing can substitute for the immersion of the researcher in the data. Examination of the data collected is achieved by working inductively from the particular to more general perspectives using themes, dimensions, codes or categories and continues until a narrative is formed. At no time is the researcher's influence absent from the study (Charmaz, 2006).

Having collected and tabulated the data, it was necessary to present the information in a form meaningful to anyone who is interested in reading it. Charmaz (2006) points out that as individuals we are involved in an interaction with the data we accumulate, and in the creation of theories about it. To interpret the data collected, constructivist grounded theory is used to construct meaning in these specific situations. The result is an interpretation of the data which depends on the researcher's viewpoint. Unlike most other research projects, the experiences of those being interviewed cannot be replicated. The theories which can be developed from the data may differ in what they include, how precise they are as well as their scope generality and applicability. In other words, grounded theory is never static but is continually modified as the researcher reflects on the data and compares it with other experiences. By comparing and modifying continually, grounded theory is developed and modified over time using data and insights for its establishment.

It should be born in mind, however, that the interviews are heavily reliant on the individuals' memories which may be slightly distorted over the 55 to 70+ intervening years.

The interview transcripts were coded, firstly according to the ethnic group to which the interviewee belonged, then by gender, then by whether or not they were born in Australia. The researcher begins by coding three incidents and deliberations in a transcript into as many categories of analysis as present themselves. A "category" in grounded theory is a main, underpinning idea. As these categories emerged and were identified, there was constant comparison backwards and forwards between transcripts in order to identify frequently occurring or key categories. By comparing the experiences recorded from each interviewee, an attempt was made to find common elements in these interviews. Similarities and/or

differences on the grounds of ethnicity, gender, and/or birthplace were noted and attempts were made to develop hypotheses which could possibly be applied in future situations.

This method requires “imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon” and regards truth as provisional (Charmaz, 2006, p. 126). It has been noted (Becker, (1993); Charmaz, (2006); Silverman, (2000)) that most studies using grounded theory tend to be less theoretical and more descriptive and that what is produced is in the form of ‘empirical generalisations’ (Charmaz, 2006).

The following Table 3.4 illustrates how the analysis of the data proceeded.

Table 3.4  
*Example of Data Analysis of Collected Data*

Topic	Discussed by	Subheadings	Bibliographic References
Class conditions	Discussed by 6 Poles 21 Maltese	Number of pupils	Doyle (1978)
		Number of teachers	Memoranda from
		Number of desks/space in the room	Archbishops office (1955-59)
		Number of books	Selleck (1978)
		Access to texts	O’Donoghue (2001)
		Method of teaching	Catholic Education Office report (1958).
		State of buildings	O’Brien, (1999) Fogarty, (1959) McCarthy, (c1985) Terry, Borland and Adams (1993)
Teacher Training		Religious as teachers	Mithen (1972)
		Lay teachers	Angus (1982) Gill (1972)
Discipline	Discussed by 10 Poles 15 Maltese	Severity	McCarthy (c1985)
		Fairness	

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Topic	Discussed by	Subheadings	Bibliographic References
Spoke English on arrival at school	Yes		O'Brien (1999)
	1 Pole		McCarthy (c1985)
	13 Maltese		Taft(1975)
	No		Cahill (1985)
	11 Poles		Vasta (1994)
Parents' English	9 Maltese		Taft (1978)
	Yes		Anderson (1975)
	4 Poles		Taft (1975)
	17 Maltese		Terry et al (1993)
	No		Taft (1978)
Problems in class	8 Poles		
	4 Maltese		
	Discussed by		Taft and Cahill (1985)
	3 Poles	Understanding what was required	
Age on leaving school	1 Maltese		
	1 Pole	Having enough equipment	
	4 Maltese		
	Discussed by		Laurence (1971)
Parents' Employment	Happy?	Happy to leave?	Terry et al (1993)
	7 Poles		Calleya-Capp (1999)
	6 Maltese		Taft and Cahill (1978)
	Disappointed?	Disappointed to leave?	Vasta (1994)
	3 Maltese	Parents' decision	Cahill (1998)
School fees	Discussed by		Iredale and Hugo (1995)
	11 Poles		Terry et al (1973)
	9 Maltese		Anderson, (1975)
Food	Discussed by		O'Brien (1999)
	4 Poles		Pittarello (1980)
	20 Maltese		
Culture	Discussed by		Vasta (1994)
	4 Poles		Anderson (1975)
	6 Maltese		

Topic	Discussed by	Subheadings	Bibliographic References	
Prejudice	Against migrants	Against migrant	Callan (1983) Richardson and Taft (1968) Iredale and Hugo (1995) Iredale (1997) Anderson (1975)	
	Yes			
	3 Poles			
	12 Maltese			
	No			
	9 Poles			
	3 Maltese			
	Against Australians			Against Australians
	4 Poles			
	1 Maltese			
Feelings towards Church/ Priest	Positive	Comparison with Church in their country of origin Feelings towards the priest and his activities	Cahill (1988)	
	4 Poles			
	17 Maltese			
	Negative			
	2 Poles			
	2 Maltese			

Using the methods detailed above, information was gathered from all three groups, - the Poles, the Maltese and the teaching sisters. This information was then collated according to the categories described in Table 3.4 in order to arrive at some consensus between the interviewees. Where there was no consensus, this too, was noted. Comparisons were made between and within these diverse groups in order to find common themes which could then be extrapolated to be meaningful comments about the groups as a whole, and their experiences.

Ultimately the key categories shown in Table 3:4 emerged from the process of constant comparison.

Table 3.4 Key categories that emerged from the data

For the teaching sisters-

- Training
- Classroom conditions

- Equipment
- Discipline
- English Literacy
- Perceptions of Ethnic Groups

For the Maltese and Polish students

- Personal backgrounds
  - Migration history
  - Birthplace
  - Family background
- Physical environment affecting learning
  - Teaching Methods
  - Classroom conditions
- Schooling
  - Beginning school
  - Paying fees
  - Learning English and the ‘Australian Way’
- School experiences
  - Discipline
  - Discrimination by Teachers
  - Discrimination by other Children
- Factors affecting futures
  - Overall experiences and preparation for later life
  - Self-perception of their abilities
  - Satisfaction with their schooling
- Attitudes of parents to education and their ambitions for their children
- Ongoing involvement in the church

Once the key categories had been identified by a process of constant comparison back and forth between transcripts it was time for closer analysis of the texts. This process revealed a number of sub-categories, in grounded theory called **properties**, which cohered around each

key category. It is these properties, within their general categories, that scaffold the discussions of chapters four, five and six of this thesis.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has explained and justified the research design that was used to gather and analyse the oral narratives of Maltese and Polish migrants regarding their education in Catholic primary schools in Victoria in the 1950s and 60s, and the religious teachers who taught them. For reasons explained in this chapter, the research design was based on subjectivist ontology, and on the epistemology of constructivism. In keeping with their epistemology, symbolic interactionism was used as the theoretical perspective, with constructivist grounded theory being the methodology and in-depth interviewing the method. In keeping with grounded theory, the analysis of the data proceeded by way of constant comparison between key categories and their properties, until an analytical story could be developed which displayed the theory that had been generated. In the following chapters, this story is told in detail, beginning with the narratives of the religious sisters in chapter four, followed by the narratives of the Maltese participants in chapter five, then the narratives of the Polish participants in chapter six, while chapter seven brings together common threads between these three groups of narratives.

## **Chapter Four - Perceptions and Testimonies of the Teaching Religious Sisters**

---

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the experiences of the Sisters who taught migrant children are recorded. In all, six former teachers were interviewed. They were asked about their teaching qualifications and experience, the desire they had to be teachers at all, the sizes of the classes they were teaching, the conditions under which they taught and the difficulties they experienced (See Appendix VI - ). The researcher believed that to have a complete understanding of the educational experiences of the migrant child in the Catholic primary school system, the insights which teaching Religious could provide into the circumstances of the conditions under which these children received their education, was vital.

Those parents who contemplated sending their children to school in the state system rather than the Catholic system, were threatened with excommunication, ensuring almost all Catholic children attended a Catholic school, if they could. “There was a need to meet the aims of the bishops to provide a place for every Catholic child in a Catholic school, particularly at a time when it was considered gravely sinful for a Catholic child to attend a state school.” (Jordan, 1972, p. 97). As there was no government financial support for the Catholic schools, there was also a great need to staff them as cheaply as possible. The cheapest school teachers within Catholicism were the members of Religious Orders, who staffed the schools regardless of their abilities or their reason for becoming a Religious (which may not have been to teach).

*. . . those now in religious life, and those applying for entry, see the call to religious life primarily as the practice of the evangelicals in community, and only after that as a call to teaching or to some other apostolic work. However this is not always the view of laity and clergy and there is very often a conflict between the perceptions the religious has, and the perceptions clergy and laity have of the role of the teaching religious, for few would deny that the pre-Vatican II teaching religious was seen to be, and saw herself as, a low-cost labour, essential to maintaining Catholic schools. There are many religious teaching today whose original desire was to be a Carmelite, or to go to the Missions, or who did not feel any call to teaching, but were advised to become teaching religious because they were needed to staff the schools, and to preserve their low-cost structure (Jordan, 1972, p. 97).*

If ever there were ‘unsung heroes’ in Australian educational history, these Religious sisters who were teaching children in Catholic schools in the 1950s and 1960s must surely warrant a nomination. At that time, the children who were attending Catholic schools at which these Religious taught came from diverse backgrounds creating many problems which the sisters had never experienced before. For many years these women taught under extreme conditions, without pay and largely without complaint. Before telling the stories of the migrant children it is appropriate to highlight the experiences of the teaching Religious. The six former teaching sisters, from four different orders, who had taught classes in the 1950s and 1960s in which there were large numbers of migrant children, were able to explain how the presence of large numbers of non-English speaking students affected the quality and the method of education these children received. Teaching sisters from the following orders were interviewed: Sisters of St Joseph (RSJ), the Faithful Companions of Jesus (SCJ), Sisters of Charity (RSC) and the Brigidine Sisters (OSB). Very little research has been undertaken into

the teaching experiences of migrant children of this time from the perspective of the teachers from Religious congregations, however the arrival of the migrant children, coming as it did in Australia at the same time as school infrastructure in Australia had been allowed to run down because of the need to focus on the war effort, and the number of children born in Australia had increased hugely (the Post War Baby Boomers), meant that schools, regardless of their ideological bent, were struggling to cope with a dire situation.

“One feature of the staffing of Catholic primary schools is its almost exclusively feminine character”, Mithen (1972, p.127) claimed. Just over 3% of teachers in Catholic schools were Religious Brothers (Mithen W. J., 1972) so it was not considered any advantage to this thesis to interview any of the Religious Brothers who had taught at that time and who may have been available to be interviewed. The brothers did not normally teach in the local parish schools, which were where most Catholic children received their primary education.

In 1972 there was a survey of female teaching Religious, undertaken in the United States of America to ascertain their own assessment of their work and to how satisfied they were with what they were achieving. According to information gained from this survey, their experiences were not very different from those of the sisters who taught in Australia. In the USA Eckert (1971) suggested that Religious were freer to devote themselves to their studies because they were supported by their orders without the need to spend time working to support themselves, without the distractions lay teachers experienced in keeping themselves and perhaps looking after a family. (However, as R5 mentioned, some of the sisters taught music after school to augment the monies coming into the orders to support themselves so as not to be a financial burden on their schools.) Eckert further observed that the American sisters “viewed their work as a service to God, which made even excessively long and dull tasks bearable” (Eckert, 1971, p. 25), a belief which from the interviews with the Australian

sisters also described many of their approaches to their work. There were very few complaints about their work or its conditions expressed by those sisters interviewed. As part of her teaching career, one of the sisters who told her story for this research, had actually been sent by her order to help with the overcrowding in the United States, only to find that the situation she had just left in Australia was much worse.

Recurring issues arose in the context of the interviews that provide a broader picture of the school lives of the Polish and Maltese children. These issues included the teacher training given by the various religious congregations, classroom conditions, teaching equipment/resources, approaches to discipline, English literacy and perceptions of ethnic groups. Each of these themes is now discussed.

#### **4.2 Training**

The problems which the teaching Religious faced in Australia were listed by Jordan (1972) in her discussions of the changing role of Religious. She enumerated the huge difficulties under which the teaching Religious laboured including the perceptions of many clergy and the laity where the “concept of a vocation to the religious life and the support of a low-cost school structure [had become] so intertwined by a process of association that ultimately they became one” (Gill, 1972, p. 99). Teacher training for the Religious was fragmented, piecemeal and at the direction of the order to which the Religious belonged. There were cases where teacher shortages in the past had been met as a result of the Religious principal of the school “creating and shaping occupations for those not qualified or not adjusted to teaching” (Jordan, 1972, p. 101). Unfortunately some of the sisters continued teaching into advancing old age, despite their deficiencies and the inability to adjust to new teaching methods (Jordan, 1972).

Jordan points to the tradition within Catholic circles that “it was more important to have a *religious* in front of the class, than a trained teacher” (Jordan, 1972, p. 99). She claimed that this attitude stemmed from the time when the Religious were seen as “defending the faith of an oppressed minority” (Jordan, 1972, p. 105), a cause with which Catholic parents, predominantly working class, identified. At this time, the expectations of parents and the community had changed so that Catholic schools were expected to provide academic excellence in a milieu where “religious faith and religious knowledge” (Jordan, 1972, p. 104) were integrated with academic pursuits in opposition to the ‘godless’ system initiated by the state. However, even in 1972, in states where registration of teachers was not imposed, many of the Rwere teaching without any initial training. Their lack of training (albeit that many had considerable experience) was highlighted when questionnaires from Church and Government authorities required statements of their teaching qualifications. The profession of teaching by this time was beginning to change and move away from the concept of the ‘3Rs’ which could be taught to large classes by teachers with little training. Mithen (1972) who was a consultant to Catholic primary schools in Victoria through the 1970s and 80s, pointed out that one of the problems with Catholic teacher training was more than just the teachers entering the profession who needed adequate preparation for the roles which they played in the schools, but it was also necessary to ensure that “those currently employed be brought to see the ways (if any) in which their past attitudes and practices are inadequate for future needs” (Mithen W. J., 1972, p. 141). He saw the need for extensive in-service education programmes.

Another of the traditions which was being questioned by the Catholic community was the insistence that the principal in a school *must* be a Religious, an appointment which, as the

number of lay personnel increased, could not always be based on the individual with the best knowledge or training for the job (Jordan, 1972, p. 100).

There were several Teachers' Colleges directed by the various orders which primarily trained teachers in their own ways and taught a curriculum of their own choosing. There was neither conformity to a teacher training syllabus nor uniformity to a curriculum other than the need to coach pupils to the standard required for them to be awarded a government scholarship to help with the costs of remaining in secondary education beyond the legal school leaving age. Because of the need for Religious to teach Catholic children, there was a 'climate of urgency' which resulted in very rudimentary training before they began to teach. Both the content and the methods of teaching had changed but many of the Religious had no opportunity for further training because of the shortage of teachers and the monetary costs of tuition, (Jordan, 1972).

As the teaching sisters who were working during the time frame of the research, came from different orders, their teacher training varied to some degree. R5 and R6 were members of an order whose *raison d'etre* was teaching, and their grounding was quite thorough, including a bachelor's degree in England for R5. R6 gained a bachelor's degree while she was working, and both eventually obtained Masters' degrees. They finished their associations with Australian schools as head mistresses of different schools established by their order. R2 had begun teacher training before entering the order, R4 had trained at a teachers' training college with her order, while R1 had received only six weeks training instead of the usual 12 months together with a 2½ year "apprenticeship" training afterwards. R3 had undergone the 12 months training usual for teachers.

Six weeks training could not be sufficient to give an individual adequate skills to enable effective teaching, even in the times when the 3Rs programme was able to be taught by teachers with only a small amount of training, to large groups of children. In education circles rote learning was being phased out in preference to adjustment to the pace of individual children and R1 must have struggled even with the help of a mentor, to teach the children anything meaningful.

R3 was disappointed that her membership of her order resulted in her becoming a teacher. She had become a Religious with the expectation of working with orphaned children in the Church's care, but was given no choice – the need was for teachers and most of the members of her order were so deployed. With the relaxation of control within the orders after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), she left school teaching and became a social worker – these days working with the aged in a country community. Her first teaching experience was in the Latrobe Valley, where, despite the fact that her training was for teaching Grades 3-6, she was given a class of 100 Grade two children and she did not know how to deal with them! To use her own words,

*I had no idea about teaching phonics or sub-primary teaching, . . . I had no idea what I was doing. This was my first year of a hundred kids . . . three quarters of them could not speak English. I could only speak English . . . so they'd just ask the kids next to them, and a lot of them learned from the child next to them. So you put an Australian child near the ones who couldn't [speak English] and that's how they learned . . . they were teaching each other in a language the kids could understand.*

*There was a lot of rote work done, copying down tables, copying down multiplication, copying down spelling. But there was no ingenuity . . . they'd go ahead with their readers, but you wouldn't have enough readers – we didn't have anything – we didn't have a library.*

R3 did not believe she reached the children in her first year, although the sister in the next class room helped her to improve her teaching. She believed she was a good teacher with a small group, but otherwise she had to resort to rote learning in order that the maximum number of children could learn. Her one regret about her teaching was that she could not help the slower children – there was not enough time and with very crowded conditions, she could not move easily around the classroom. In such a situation, migrant children who were not able to keep up because their lack of English prevented them from understanding what was required of them, or their understanding of the tasks was not as quick as the majority in the class, were left to cope alone. Those with less than average intelligence received a very limited education, while those with greater than average intelligence were no doubt, very bored.

R4 always wanted to be a teacher, particularly of poor children, and loved her experiences with the migrant children she taught in Melbourne's western suburbs.

*I wanted to be a teacher, a primary teacher. Never had an inkling for secondary school teaching. But I expected it to be a dedicated life, we'll say, mainly to the teaching of what we'd class poorer children.*

However she pointed out that although she enjoyed her work, the challenges she faced with the migrant children were much greater than those facing her friends who were teaching in the more established schools. How did she cope?

*I think then I was young and full of vim and vigour, and spent the first ten years of my teaching life in migrant schools.*

R2 explained to the researcher that she had cried every day for six weeks when she first started teaching. There were 40 Grade three children in the class she was given, who misbehaved most of the time. After her 12 months training she was just given the class and told to start teaching. Fortunately one of the more experienced sisters took her under her wing and mentored her as she gained experience. In addition to her teaching difficulties, she was faced with the challenge of a country school in a town in the north of Victoria, despite the fact that she had never been in the country before. Her lack of experience and her distress was, perhaps, communicated to her pupils who in response, misbehaved in indirect correlation to her control of the class. She, too, would have given her pupils a somewhat less than adequate learning year.

*I was trained to teach primary school teaching [sic] – one of the nuns at the convent got cancer and they had to bring a nun up from the primary school to take her place 'cause the convent couldn't afford to pay a lay teacher and I started off at ten shillings a week. . . . I actually could've been out earning money but it was helping to pay for me, instead of paying a teacher, they were rearing a nun.*

### 4.3 Classroom Conditions

Excessive overcrowding became the norm in all classrooms across Melbourne, but the situation was much worse in Catholic schools and especially in parish schools. Sturrock (1995) documented the situations in a number of schools cared for by the Brigidine sisters. She described how shocked the sisters had been when they arrived at their school in Springvale in 1955. According to Sturrock, “the need for a healthy and up-to-date knowledge of secular affairs was not pressed upon religious until the Second Vatican Council” (Sturrock, 1995, p. 103), suggesting that the sisters, especially those from country convents had little idea of Australia’s post-war migration policy. They were told by their Novice Mistresses that “a concern with the world did nothing for their spiritual growth” (Sturrock, 1995, p. 103).

In Springvale in 1955, one of the sisters had a class of 120 pupils, which later decreased to 90, but for the next 16 years she never had less than 70 children in her classes, all of which were either Preparatory level or Grade one students. In Noble Park, 150 children shared 100 seats, which became the accepted practice in many Brigidine schools, and most of the sisters taught classes with between 90 and 120 while some classes had up to four levels in a composite grade. When they started teaching in the western suburbs, they found that the floors were bare earth and there were no blackboards. In some schools, classes were given on verandas, turned into makeshift classrooms by the fathers of their pupils.

*Opening day 1955 was reported as ‘chaotic’, with parents crowding into classrooms, speaking no English, and children with unpronounceable names. It took time to persuade the parents to go home, and leave the sorting out to the bemused sisters* (Sturrock, 1995, p. 105).

R4 went to a new school in St Albans, where there were 170 children from Preparatory to Grade 4, being taught in two rooms – all that the school had available at that time. She taught in one room with another sister teaching in the other. Eventually there was a lay German woman teaching with them in a little room which later became a cloakroom, in between the other two class rooms. Other building was going on around them in the middle of the grass paddocks. In the second year there were another two rooms and another two classrooms. The school numbers also increased each year.

*We travelled out from Footscray on the train. We would be met at the station, the St Albans railway station, by all these little children and their parents, ... And we would walk hand in hand to school. Of course in those days we had our long habits and so on. The roads were unmade, as was our playground. So, in winter it was really a delight [?] sliding around in the mud in long habits.*

She described how the school was not sewerred at first.

*The night man used to come, and I can still see these three little brothers, triplets in my room. . . . Every time they would know when the night man was coming, and he wasn't supposed to come in the daytime. He was supposed to come [at] night, but there'd be the occasion when he wouldn't, and they'd always want to go to the toilet. [they] would be chasing the night man's truck . . . They loved to hold on to the back. So you can imagine.!*

When sent to her first teaching assignment after her training, R3, not at all confident of her ability, found herself teaching a Grade two class (having only been trained for Grades 3-6)

which had 100 pupils in it. Most of them could not speak English. Many of the migrant children were Polish with parents working as labourers in the hydroelectric scheme in the mountains in Gippsland and they travelled long distances to school each day by bus. The school was not prepared for the influx of pupils so only two main classrooms had been constructed and these were prefabricated buildings positioned in the middle of a paddock. Although children were encouraged to use the toilets at playtime, the number of toilets was inadequate and children had to be allowed to leave the classroom during lessons to relieve themselves.

She laughed at how the sisters had been taught about toilet time, when they were training.

*We'd been trained, in the training school, to hang a key on the door or a symbol on the door, so you didn't embarrass them saying, "do you want to go to the toilet?" So all these lovely niceties were taught to you in the training school. But there would be a rush every time the child went out. When they came back, everyone would be rushing to get the key off the thing, so that lasted a week . . . and mostly I tried to get them to go at play time. I don't know how they managed the toilets . . . it wasn't built for the numbers that were there.*

Provided the children were not 'encouraged' to 'hang on', those going to the toilet were probably only doing what they would have done at home and gone to the toilet when they needed to. Those who may well have been distracted or interrupted would have been the other children sitting in his desk especially if he was the middle child of three, and those in desks nearby.

Shortages of space and equipment decreed that children sat three to a desk. This situation would not have been comfortable for the children for very long, especially if their learning was dependent on them being 'passive sponges'. In some of this interviewee's teaching years, the desks reached up to the blackboard, meaning she could not walk around the room to inspect the children's work. The situation would not have allowed for much active participation by the children in the class. The interviewee talked about setting work for correction. There were so many children that the pile of work books:

*. . . was so high you couldn't possibly correct them, which was impossible, that was the frustration. There was nowhere to put them [in the sisters' accommodation] you didn't have a room, so if you brought home all these books, they're sort of stuck on a corner of the floor somewhere. . . . So trying to give back work that was corrected was a frustration.*

The teaching sisters lived in conditions that were nearly as bad as the conditions under which they taught. R3 was living with seven other sisters in a house that would normally hold only three.

*I got the measles . . . and my bedroom was a passageway for everyone to walk through and of course with measles you're not supposed to have any light. The light was always on, but I don't know how I survived that. . . . There was always noise . . . so you had no peace. . . . The little lounge room could hold – should hold four people, but there were eight or ten of us until they went out to another school. . . . The property was pretty terrible and we would have to live off what school fees . . . we would get – which was pretty poor.*

*Our mattresses were straw mattresses, of course, and they were pretty terrible, pretty uncomfortable, and there weren't enough blankets, but the mothers' club came in at Christmas, (so I was lucky) and realised how bad things were, and they bought all this stuff and changed our mattresses, got some blankets. The food . . . I know people used to bring a lot of stuff in and that's what we survived on.*

Even the laundry was a difficult problem.

*We had a big copper, we had a huge copper, and we must have put all our clothes together in the one copper. . . . You never cleaned your serge habits [laugh]. I don't know when they ever got clean. I don't ever remember cleaning them. We had one for school, couldn't wash them though, that's – we would brush them down with water and soap and things, somehow or other. They were pretty bad, wearing serge.*

R2 taught in a country parish hall where up to 300 children were all taught together. In one year she taught about 50 children in a composite class of Grade five and six combined as well as filling the role of principal of the school.

*. . . I was principal of the school in Beechworth and I would have had grade five and six and everybody had two grades. And we always had a student teacher and they usually get grade two and I trained the student teacher . . . they usually trained till they gave their final lesson which would have been two years. And then, because they had to be paid more, and the priests didn't have enough money, we shunted them to Melbourne or somewhere else.*

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

The trainee teacher taught Grade two children on the stage of the hall and studied for her qualifications at night. The work load was shared between three sisters and the trainee. As a further complication, Mass was celebrated in the hall on Sundays and if there was a Saturday night dance, it, too, was held in the hall, necessitating that all the desks were packed away. There was also a boarding component to the school and the boarders brought produce in from the farms when they returned after the weekend. The playground was a large paddock with lovely trees.

The children came from a migrant camp some distance away from the school. R2 claimed that:

*They could all speak English 'cause they had been in the camps. We didn't have non-speaking English except as an exception. And they picked it up much faster than their parents.*

Despite this she spoke of being very conscious of the migrant child and how suddenly they would be gone. Families often suddenly moved to Melbourne.

In 35 years of teaching, R1 had experienced teaching in schools in three states, both in the city and in the country. She started teaching with only six weeks training (although 12 months was usual) and worked as an apprentice for more than two years combined with some scholastic study. Her migrant teaching experience did not commence until she had been teaching for about seven years, when she encountered Maltese and Italian children who had very little English language. The grades she taught in Collingwood and Richmond had classes sizes from 35–50, but she had taught a Grade two class of 75 while she was in Sydney. Because parents had limited English and the children went home to 'difficult circumstances'

she did not set homework, so extra work had to be done at school. There were classes at lunchtime, morning and afternoon recess and after school to help with their English and every child was heard reading every day because no-one at home could help. The conditions in Collingwood were not very good. The desks were too close together and the toilets were condemned every time the inspectors came to the school. There was no help from the parents for school maintenance, as both mother and father were usually working. After school, the sisters ran classes, usually sport, because parents came home long after school finished and there was no after school care.

R4 had received primary teacher training at the teacher training college run by her order, and spent the first ten years of her teaching life teaching migrant children, encountering problems more challenging than those her colleagues met in the mainstream schools. All the practice teaching she undertook during her training was in mainstream schools which did not really prepare her for what she met in the western suburbs of Melbourne. In the beginning, three teachers educated 170 children between Preparatory and Grade four, in two classrooms in the middle of a paddock while the school was built around them. Two of the teachers were Religious while the third who came to help was a German woman who, although qualified to teach in Germany, was not qualified in Australia. She taught Grade Two in the cloakroom. In St Albans where the sisters were based, there were only five Anglo families in the whole district – everyone else was a non-English speaking migrant. As she had lived in the area before she entered the order, she knew all the Anglo families quite well. These Anglo families were a great help to her and the school. There was no sewer connection in the beginning, the roads were not made and the playground, which was also not made, became very muddy in the winter. Their long habits were not very practical in those conditions. These sisters, as with the previous interviewee, were still working until 5.30pm looking after the

children whose parents worked long hours, until they had to leave to catch their train back to Footscray to their convent. There were 50 children from up to 26 nationalities in her Preparatory/Grade One composite class most of whom had no English. As more classrooms were finished, more teachers arrived. R4 spent her Saturdays working towards her degree in Theology. She explained that many of the parents found work in nearby factories – Pelaco, Massey Ferguson, International Harvester, Holden and other companies. When the mothers gained employment they worked very long hours and this affected the working hours of the sisters.

*Our work wasn't from 9.00 until 3.30; they [the children] were there. We were holding onto them until 5.00 and 5.30 you know, when we had to go and catch our train home sort of thing, you know. We were sort of minding – a child-minding as well.*

Many of the children had only just arrived in Australia. They had probably only been in Australia about a year and had spent much of that time in the migrant camp at Maribyrnong. Their families had been able to get a little money together so “they could build these humble homemade shacks, one-room bungalows, all dotted all over” (R4).

From the western suburbs she taught in two other schools, (one in Gippsland and the other in the northern suburbs of Melbourne). Both of them were new schools in very similar situations to her first school in the western suburbs. They started temporarily in the church hall but within three years the new schools were built. They were more affluent communities, in established housing.

R5 and R6 belonged to the same teaching order and taught in the schools run by their order. R5 did not teach in a parish school, but in a country boarding school where she was teaching Polish girls who came from a nearby migrant settlement. The classrooms were in good condition but the classes were very crowded. She taught 72 girls in a Grade four/five composite class, but each girl had a desk to herself. Her work load increased by about one third and some class sizes almost doubled, although the numbers arriving were to some extent controlled by the availability of housing for the migrants. Money for the school was earned by the sisters who gave piano lessons after school. Sport was also taken after school and after the school day ended the sisters went back to the convent to supervise the boarders.

R6 taught Dutch migrants in Kew, not normally thought of as a migrant area. However, a Dutch priest had settled in the area and many of his countrymen had settled round him, to benefit from his knowledge on a wide range of settlement issues. Thus the sisters rallied to give the children of his fellow countrymen the best education they could, in classes which were always large. R6 taught a composite Grade four/five and because of the class size and the language problems with the children, a great deal of preparation was needed to be organised for each day. In an aside, she commented that at some point her order sent her to the United States of America for three years to assist with the huge numbers of children in the school classes there. For her it was easy work as the class numbers there were of the order of 25 compared with the 72 she was teaching in Kew. The schools buildings in this area which had originally been built by the Irish Catholics in the parish, were well built and made to last.

#### **4.4 Equipment**

The equipment and aids the sisters had at hand to help them in their work varied widely according to the schools at which they taught.

Both R5 and R6 seemed to have sufficient for their needs. Their schools were fee paying but they did not harass parents who could not pay. R6 commented that the Dutch parents were reluctant to help with fees for which they could see no necessity but for something tangible such as a reader, they were quite happy to pay. The parish priests were very supportive, seeing the school as central to their mission. R5 believed that the equipment she had at her disposal was adequate for the time. However, the situation seems very different from those sisters teaching in other places.

R2 taught reading from set readers which she bought from money raised by the school Mothers' Club. R1 also benefitted from having enough reading books which the parents supplied and for those parents on very low incomes, a grant was available to assist in their purchase.

This situation was not the case for all the teaching sisters. R3 explained she had no reading books, no library and much had to be written on the blackboard. The children read from the board, necessitating her getting up very early to ensure enough work to fill in the day was written on the blackboard before school. R4's situation was even worse.

*We didn't have any money to buy beautiful charts. Our charts were made out of very humble brown paper or sheets of butchers' paper. . . . We would save every cereal box and Rinso box and Persil, as it was in those days, would all be saved and they would be the flash cards, as we call them. Every word would be on a card and then, each day, you'd have your pack of ten cards and you'd flash them and they'd say 'moon' – and that was how you taught. . . . I suppose looking back, we had nothing except what we personally had to give.*

*In the normal classroom with Anglo people, you'd have maths, or arithmetic as it was then, arithmetic; you'd have poetry; you'd have religion; you'd have spelling. But we didn't have to have all those things because we were only teaching the basics. So most of our time was preparing numbers and drawing two apples and two kookaburras against figure two and so on. Like it was more that type of thing until they could catch on, and then preparing little homemade readers, putting them in – stapling them into little booklets and getting them to read from those little homemade readers, reinforcing the words that we were teaching.*

When asked about books or paper for the children to write on, R4 replied:-

*The parents . . . we were very frugal in what we'd expect of them, but we would expect them, if the parents were working, to pay something towards it, you know, and we'd get the cheapest exercise books and things like that in bulk from whoever was offering that, and they would buy their things if they could. Of course there were families where dad nor mum did not work, so the school would just have to give.*

#### **4.5 Discipline**

The two sisters who taught in schools established by their orders (R6 and R5) were very anxious that it be understood that their order did not use the strap, or other forms of corporal punishment. Their founder, who had been a mother herself, had insisted that the children needed to be treated with an attitude of gentleness and respect. The difficult child especially needed to be carefully treated. They insisted that there was definitely no strap or other form of harsh discipline! They did however mainly teach girls. If there was a discipline problem with a student, a note was sent home to the parents who would discipline their own child.

R3, particularly in the beginning, found controlling the children very difficult and described herself as very naïve as she really didn't know about discipline. Surprisingly, it was the noise of all those children who were never quiet, which was one of the many difficulties which caused her most problems. She felt she did not really reach the children in her first year teaching and her biggest frustration was in not being able to get to help those children who were finding learning hard. She did not mention corporal punishment, however, but she did comment that she thought she was a good teacher with small groups, which was a long way from the class sizes she started out with in her career. On the other hand, R2 spoke of discipline issues when she was teaching Grade two with Grades three and four, mainly because the age groups needed to be disciplined differently. She acknowledged that some people had considered her hard when she was teaching, but she believed good discipline was imperative and delivered a "clip over the ears" for those needing discipline. She spoke of an incident where she had two of the boys in her class who were constantly fighting. Using good psychology she ultimately saw them become best friends.

*I did, I felt really smart that I'd thought up a solution without having to belt either of them [laughs] 'cause they were both at fault, they were bashing each other.*

Obviously she did 'belt' children when she felt the occasion called for it. She managed to keep discipline in the classes she taught by administering "a clip over the ears'. Very naughty boys 'got the strap'.

*And you had kids you know, who played up. . . . There's got to be discipline introduced into the school. Some would say I was very hard but if I said I'd do a*

*thing, I did it. And if they didn't like it, bad luck. I was never short of kids in the school.*

The only other sister to mention a discipline problem was R4 who mentioned that the only discipline problem she had was with Maltese children who resisted the sisters' desire for them to play with the children from other ethnic groups. These children were not good at social mingling outside their own ethnic community. At one stage, R4 explained that they had 26 different nationalities in their school. She found that many of the Maltese parents were very trying:

*They were very possessive of their children. The mothers who were not working would come up at morning recess and at lunchtime and feed their children hot soups out of thermoses. . . . And I would say "Look it would be better if little Jimmy would mix in and play". "Oh no, no, no, no." And they would want to keep them sitting along seats, which wasn't good socially. But they weren't – and therefore they didn't become - good mixers. . . . I can remember we had a few words with a few parents over things like this, because they were really against what we were trying to do. We were trying to mix them in with all nationalities and accept each other and learn the culture of each other, but the Maltese were very much about keeping theirs in sort of their little Maltese groups sort of thing, whereas other nationalities mixed in . . . which was sad because they could have contributed a lot, [because of their perceived better command of English] because children learn from children.*

#### 4.6 English Literacy

Taft and Cahill (1981) affirmed that although Australia has always been a country of migration, it is only since the 1950s that there has been a significant influx of non-English speaking people. They pointed out that the school systems “have been relatively inexperienced in coping with children from non-English-speaking countries” (Taft & Cahill, 1981, p. 19). “As the proportion of Roman Catholics amongst the migrants has always been substantial, parochial schools in areas of high migrant density have carried a relatively heavy burden in the task of absorbing migrant children” (Taft & Cahill, 1981, p. 20). For most of the time frame of this study, total assimilation (or Anglo conformity) was official government policy. Thus newly arrived children were placed in regular class rooms frequently at a level below their chronological age and treated like all other children, whether they were literate in English or not (Taft & Cahill, 1981). It was generally assumed that children adapted quickly and that assimilation would be hindered by any differential treatment.

R2 certainly seemed to subscribe to this way of thinking. She explained that because of the nearby migrant camp, all the children could speak English when they came to school, a claim which seems surprising at the very least as families did not tend to stay long in migrant camps. According to her “*we didn’t have non-speaking English except as an exception. And they picked it up much faster than their parents.*”

She did not conduct any extra-curricular English classes (not surprisingly in view of her workload) and held to the view that there was nothing like ‘the incentive of wanting to play’ in enabling migrant children to learn English quickly. The other children at school taught them colloquial English and in her opinion, the children anglicised themselves very quickly: “*The other kids taught them, slang and all and the local lingo.*”

She always set homework and expected it to be done.

R3 was not able to do very much for her non-English speaking pupils. While she did not necessarily subscribe to the commonly held view that the children would soon assimilate, sheer numbers (60% of the children were non-English speaking) and the insufficiency of teaching aids precluded any extra help. She was, however, acutely aware of the problem and did her best by trying to ensure that those who were not English speaking sat next to a child who was:

*I am always amazed, I think those kids . . . because they were teaching each other in a language that the kids could understand, rather than listening to a teacher who was teaching over their heads half the time, as teachers will, and not giving them the basic skills that the kids could understand. So I just let the kids teach each other.*

She spoke of her frustration in not being able to assist children who were finding learning hard.

Others of the sisters found themselves in different circumstances. Even with the coming of the migrant children, R1 only changed her teaching methods very slightly by being careful to teach the migrant children English and the 'Australian way'. The Maltese and Italians she taught had little to no English but within six weeks to three months they had picked up the language. Those children who were in infants grades were easier to teach but those who arrived when they were in Grades four, five and six found learning English much harder. It was necessary to go back to the infant readers in order to help them. She taught allowing for individual differences which was not easy as the children were at very different levels of achievement. As she knew the children went home to very difficult circumstances where

parents were unable to help, she set no homework but instead ran classes at lunchtime, at playtime and after school, especially to help with learning English. This also had the advantage of ensuring that the children were cared for after school as both parents usually worked until quite late. To ensure that the children had experience at hearing themselves speak English, she listened to every child read to her every day. She believed her teaching experiences made her more tolerant.

R4 taught with the assumption that she could not teach migrant children expecting them to conform to a rigid syllabus. She explained:-

*I began my teaching career in Sacred Heart School, which was an entirely migrant school, brand new school. . . . In the whole of St Albans, there were five Anglo families. That's all. . . . But they were a great help. And sometimes the older boys were a bit of a hindrance too because they'd teach the kids some naughty words, and they'd use them at the most inappropriate time.*

When asked about prior training or extra assistance she replied:-

*No. No extra migrant training or anything like that. We just seemed to manage. . . . It never ceased to astound me how quickly they did learn the basic words of the language. . . . Like once they got a few basic words, they were really brilliant the way they could sort of build on what they had.*

She began teaching in this entirely migrant school with pictures with three letter words underneath. Although her teacher training did nothing to prepare her for teaching migrant children, she knew she needed to gain their confidence and was amazed at how quickly they

‘caught on’. Maltese children who had some English helped the other ethnic groups who had none. One of her techniques was to get the children to draw pictures and then label what they had drawn. She did not teach such things as maths and spelling to begin with, but concentrated on the basics of language until the children were more competent and confident and they were able to take part in normal classes. At times there were as many as 26 different ethnicities in the classes.

R5 became aware of the problems with other languages when she began teaching in country Victoria. and realised that she needed greater patience to help the children to speak English. She conducted extra classes to help them learn the language and also ran evening classes to teach English to their parents, especially those women who were not working outside the home. Many of the parents took up the offer. She did not change the curriculum as many children had learned some English in the migrant hostel from which they came, but she gave special attention in class if necessary, for those who found the work difficult because of their lack of English. The number of migrant children they received in the school was largely controlled by the availability of migrant accommodation in the local community.

R6 believed that teaching principles did not change with the coming of the migrants, but the pace had to change to accommodate the non-English-speaking children. The language deficiency had to be taken into account by slowing the rate of instruction down for the migrant children. English speakers were given extension work while she helped the others so that they were not disadvantaged. It meant much more lesson preparation as everything had to be worked out and planned in the evening for lessons the next day. She thought it was great training for a new teacher! To ensure that the children were coping, she constantly walked around the desks to see what they were doing. The only real problems she had were with older boys who, because of their lack of English and frequently their lack of any formal

education, were out of their age group. She gave them plenty to do to keep them busy and not naughty. A few of these boys were able to re-join their age group if their English improved enough. However there was no outside help with non-English-speaking children and no suggestions of how to teach them. She believed that they did pick up the language very quickly. In an aside she commented that under this teaching regime she developed stress-related asthma, which lasted 20 years and which was only diagnosed much later. Despite her illness she was compelled to teach with the symptoms, because there was no replacement for her and no other teacher could add the enormous class to their own equally enormous class. The children, she believed, understood she was ill and were very well behaved at these times.

#### **4.7 Perceptions of the Ethnic Groups**

A research project was undertaken by Taft and Cahill, which “studied the characteristics and attitudes of members of families who had just arrived in Melbourne from South American countries or from Malta or the UK” (Taft & Cahill, 1981, p. 39). In this process the researchers interviewed students, their parents and their teachers. Two years later the process was repeated. They found that a greater proportion of the children who arrived without any English, remained at school until Year 12 than those who were Australian or who were English speaking migrants. Their aspirations were a better indicator in determining school retention than their IQ, their socio-economic status or their academic success. They described the school performance of the Maltese children as a whole, as ‘rather low’. The report went on to say that “the Maltese valued education less than any other groups and were more critical about the schooling they received” (Taft & Cahill, 1981, p. 36).

In their study entitled “The Australian School through Children’s Eyes,” Smolicz and Seacombe (1981) discussed the experiences of the Polish child at school. They quoted data

from the Migrant Languages Committee Report (1976) which showed that 55% of Polish Australian children of primary school age in 1975, were attending Catholic schools, a much higher percentage than the population as a whole or among most other ethnic groups. Many of these young people attended the Polish dance classes and the Saturday school which taught them language as well as their cultural heritage. This would indicate an interest in music as well as movement. This facet of their national characteristics was commented on by the sisters who were teaching them.

Although no direct questions were asked of the sisters in order to compare the various groups of migrant children, there were some unsolicited comments made which are reported here. R6 spoke of what fine people and what great migrants the Poles were. The girls she taught would try anything asked of them by the sisters. As a group they were very cultured people, skilled in ballet, dance, music and all the other arts. R4 commented that the Poles were very good at ball handling and skipping, but did not mention either their behaviour or academic achievements. She claimed that the Maltese children did not have the same skills.

*A few of the Maltese children began to get very stubborn that they wanted to . . . we tried to get them to join in this game. They never wanted to because their skills were so poor because they'd never practised. They'd sit around all lunchtime, which isn't good for any child. . . . Their social mingling then became very poor, so therefore you can have a discipline problem then . . .*

She agreed with R6 that the Poles were especially gifted in the Arts. R3 taught mainly Polish migrant children in her early years and she commented that the migrant accommodation from which they came was comprised of Nissan huts which were shared. The children roamed in

and out of these huts at will, without any sense of privacy and no sense of private ownership. They picked up things wherever they were without asking permission and appropriated some things for themselves. This she attributed to the fact that for their whole lives they had lived in makeshift refugee accommodation and had owned nothing personal.

*The Poles were very poor, very poor and I had an impression that they were sort of scrounging for a living; they would have probably been labourers, I would say. . . .*

*The Poles were very isolated, . . . I don't know [that] they were related very much, or had relations, so they eventually had to leave the camps eventually to find their own way. . . . [Amongst] the other [Morwell] Poles, not a lot of professional people there, but naturally they were much more scarred than what we had been, very much the hatred was very obvious, in a lot of the families. We started with them, terribly poor little houses, . . . they wouldn't put them with public neighbours, . . . they worked terribly hard, weren't given much, but . . . where they were going [they were] to live in portable houses. And in the heat of the summer there's no air conditioning, and no heating, no warmth, just living in huts they were then.*

In the 1960s R3 taught Maltese children. The Maltese families had been sponsored and mentored by family members or friends and so their experiences were quite different from the Polish families she taught in the 1950s. She described very differently the Maltese children she taught later in her career. She believed they were better off financially than the Poles and had been sponsored to Australia by relatives already in Australia but they found the learning hard.

*“It’s hard to explain the difference because Maltese were . . . family people and so they had lots of people round them, lots of relations.”*

The Maltese children tended not to socialise outside their ethnic group or mix with the other children which she believed inhibited their learning. It also meant that they did not learn many social skills outside of their own group. The Maltese game was soccer but in order to become ‘real’ Australians, soccer had to be supplanted by Australian Rules football. Although she did not realise it at the time, with hindsight she could now see that the schools were trying to ‘Australianise’ the children.

R4 explained that although the Maltese children she taught had some English, their parents were not highly educated. (The Poles she taught had no English). In her experience, the Maltese in her classes, because of their prior knowledge of some language, learned English first and then helped explain it to the others. She described Maltese parents as very possessive and very trying. The mothers came to school at playtime as well as lunchtime, bringing with them hot food in thermoses, and three times the quantity R4 believed the children needed. They wanted to keep their children with them, sitting on the seats in the playground, which meant that the Maltese children did not become good mixers. In her opinion, the Maltese parents wanted their children to associate with only those children in the Maltese group and believed that this was because they thought that, because of their English knowledge, they were somehow better than the others. (She did comment that to a lesser degree the Dutch children also tended to congregate together.) This worked against the sisters who wanted all of the 26 nationalities represented in the school, to play together.

Discipline became an issue with some Maltese children who refused when the sisters tried to force them to play with others. R4 put this down to the fact that in her opinion, the Maltese

children had not developed practical game skills and seemed to spend their time just sitting around. Consequently, they were not very fit.

*Talking about these migrant children, I think, well, they had the enthusiasm to learn and were able – the capacity to. . . . You had your bright children and your not so bright children. The Maltese are not the brightest nationality. . . . So even though they had a start on the others with English, it didn't mean by Grade five and six that they were going to be the best in the class. . . . The others were just so enthusiastic, I think, and just sharp learners that could sort of catch on. . . . I don't sort of know how to explain it, but I think while the ambition was there for them to learn, they did learn.*

In R3's classes, sixty per cent of the children had English as a second language, so she tried to place every non-speaker next to an Australian born child. Some of the migrant children learned very well, with some of them leading the class, but learning was by rote and the sheer numbers meant that they had to teach each other at times. The classes were always composite, meaning classes were always divided, there were no readers, no library and although there were government readers, there were insufficient for each child to have one. Thus, much work had to be written on the board, necessitating early arrivals at school for R3 to write the work for the day onto the blackboard. Most reading practice was done from the board. Still dressed in her heavy habit, she coached the football games and umpired inter-school matches.

R3 commented that the Poles she taught were very poor – continually scrounging for a living. The Maltese, in the 1960s however, were comparatively better off, in part because most had come out to family already in Australia. She also commented that with so much work to do,

the sisters had very little contact with their school families outside the school, and had very little idea of their circumstances.

Even those Religious who did not openly complain about their teaching experiences, obviously led very hard lives. Most could not give of their best even if their ambitions in entering their order had been to become teachers. Their training, for the most part was very cursory by any standard, and with the influx of the non-English speaking migrants things became extremely difficult for most of them. Class sizes were huge, equipment was in very short supply, discipline was difficult to maintain, there were no pointers to indicate how to teach these children English, no support for the sisters when they were ill and no in-service training to learn what had worked for other people. By the time the next wave of migrants arrived in the 1980s (mainly Poles and Vietnamese) much had been learned about how to teach migrant children and how best to help them. Even before the arrival of the migrants, Catholic Education particularly at the parish school level, was regarded by the general population as inferior. Catholics were under-represented at universities and in the professions.

In his essay in the on-line journal, Current Moral Theology, entitled “An Australian Perspective on the Role of the Moral Theologian in Church and Society”, Gascoigne (2013) described the pre Second World War Catholic community in Australia as follows:-

*Before World War II, the Australian Catholic Church was a minority community largely made up of working-class descendants of Irish migrants. Catholics generally had low social status and the Catholic community was tight-knit and somewhat defensive, in view of the influence of the protestant majority.*

He went on to say that:-

*A number of processes after World War II, . . . have now led to a situation where Australian Catholics form the largest religious community (about 27%) and have a similar socio-economic position to other Australians.*

He further commented on the Catholic community's "growth in size, wealth and social influence". Dixon (2005, p. 7) also commented on the changes in the status of Australian Catholics.

*The 1950s were a boom time for Australian Catholics. Numbers grew rapidly, increasing the proportion of Catholics in the Australian population . . . . The impact of all the effort expended on education was felt as Catholics made noticeable advances in socioeconomic status, drawing near to the Australian population as a whole in educational attainment and prosperity.*

It was without doubt, these self-less courageous women who endured extreme and often frustrating conditions who, without complaint, made this happen.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

As can be seen above, the sisters, in many cases were sacrificed to the great cause of the Catholic Education system. Their religious desires and their aptitudes were totally disregarded to enable the Catholic Church to provide every Catholic child (or as many as they could possibly accommodate), with a place in a Catholic school. Because of their sacrifices, especially because they accepted little or no remuneration for their services, Catholic schools could be kept operating at minimal cost to the Church. In some instances they became a de-

facto free child minding service for families, where both parents were working to improve the conditions for their families..

For some, the conditions under which they lived were basic in the very extreme while for others, in order to find enough money to live on, piano lessons after school, for interested children, enabled them to pay for their household expenses. Others supervised the pupils who boarded at the school, at the end of their teaching day. There does not appear to be much opportunity to get away from their pupils, except perhaps in the holidays.

There was no possibility of being able to have any time off at any time. To stay away from school because you were ill meant that another teacher had to teach a double class, which was a huge task for any teacher. So the sisters taught their classes until they were no longer able to get out of bed. It was also impossible that they could achieve any sort of in-service training. Apart from every other reason, most of them would have been too tired.

The conditions under which they taught were even less salubrious. The class sizes were enormous, with sometimes as many as 80 to 120 children in the classes. Rote learning was the only way and it involved long hours before school began, writing up work on a blackboard for children to copy. In some places there were few, if any, teaching aids and the resourceful sisters were forced to improvise in order to help the children learn in as useful a way as possible. Because of the great need for teachers, training was minimal and for those sisters, who were well aware of their lack of training, teaching before a class was extremely difficult. No one had any idea of how to teach children whose first language was not English, and each sister had to find her way to help them to the best of her ability.

All of the sisters were compelled at times, to keep discipline with physical punishment. Certainly, at that time parents smacked and sometimes beat their children without criticism

from other people, but some of the punishments described in later chapters, were extremely vicious and given for what seemed to be fairly trivial offences. By way of some excuse, teaching under such extremely difficult circumstances must have been very stressful while fatigue and frustration at their situation could push even the most benevolent of sisters to a point where they could lose control.

Many grieved for the children who needed extra help to progress but who were not able to receive it because of the class sizes. These children were left by the wayside as those who could cope moved on. Some of their experiences will be related in subsequent chapters.

To compound their difficulties, the sisters saw their role as encouraging the migrants in their care to learn English and to adopt the 'Australian Way' (ie assimilate) as quickly as possible. They were not alone in this as all of Australia saw this as the ultimate goal. It was many years after this time before Australians accepted that 'multiculturalism' was the way forward for the country.

These women were both generous and candid in their descriptions of their experiences teaching predominantly migrant children in the 1950s and 1960s. In many cases they had received only basic teacher training and no training at all in how to teach children who could not speak English. Each of them derived their own way, with some being more successful than others. The sheer size of the classes prevented them from using any method of learning other than rote learning and from teaching at the any level of ability and understanding other than that of the middle range. Those at either end of the learning spectrum had to be left to their own devices, either to sink or swim.

The success of their teaching methods were no doubt very varied, with those able to work to their own syllabus, most likely to be the more successful.

All the information which these women provided gives much illumination into how the migrant children experienced their primary schools. For most of them, their teachers were extremely overworked, their learning environment was very basic and overcrowded and aids, even basic items such as readers, were either not available or shared between them. Even for non-migrant children, education was gained under great hardship.

## Chapter Five - Stories of the Maltese

### Participants

---

#### 5.1 Maltese Migration History

The Maltese had been migrating to Australia since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when some arrived as convicts – mainly deserters from their British regiments. By 1933, nearly 400 Maltese were living in Victoria<sup>51</sup> and the number increased dramatically after the Second World War, when in 1948, an assisted migration agreement was signed between Malta and Australia. Twenty two interviewees who had been child migrants as a result of this agreement or were born in Australia to parents who migrated at this time, were interviewed about their experiences. Table 5.1 shows the periods of their arrival in Australia. Ten of the twenty-two interviewees arrived in Australia in the 1950s when large scale migration to Australia was just beginning.

Table 5.1  
*Participants' Year of Arrival in Australia (Maltese)*<sup>52</sup>

---

Year	Maltese	
	M	F
1950-1954	2	5
1955-59	1	2
1960-64	3	1
1965-69	1	2
Born in Australia	2	3
Total	9	13

---

---

<sup>51</sup> [www.museumvictoria.com.au/origins](http://www.museumvictoria.com.au/origins)

<sup>52</sup> Information given by interviewees.

Figure 5.1 visually depicts the year of arrival in Australia of the Maltese children who participated in the interviews, and shows that between 1950 and 1970, most of them were born outside of Australia.

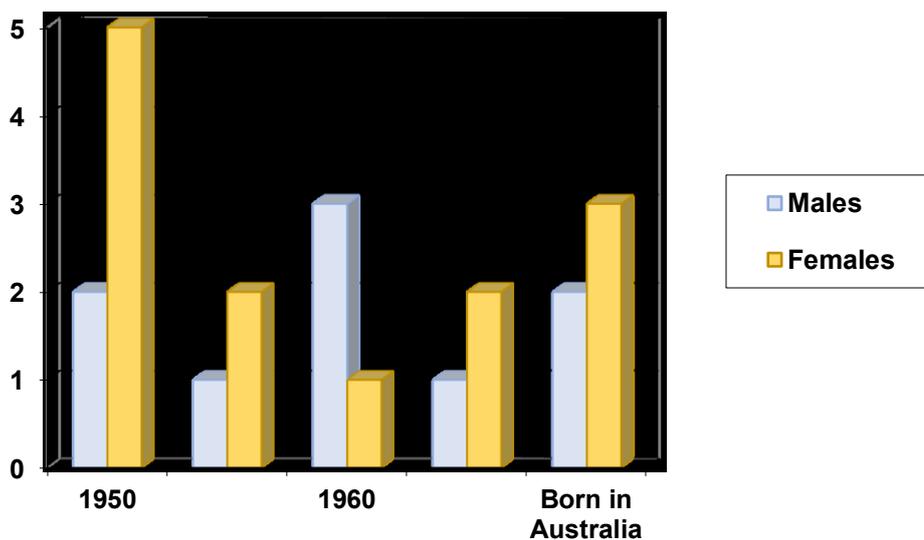


Figure 5.1. Year of Arrival in Australia (Maltese).<sup>53</sup>

Table 5.2 shows how the various groups were sponsored to Australia. While the Maltese were mainly family sponsored, the Poles were mainly sponsored by government.

Table 5.2  
*Sponsorship for Migrants, Settling in Australia*<sup>54</sup>

	Polish	Maltese	Total
Sponsored by Government	11	4	15
Sponsored by family	1	12	13
Not Expressed	0	6	6

<sup>53</sup> Source: Information given by Maltese interviewees

<sup>54</sup> Source: Polish and Maltese interviews

## **5.2 Birthplaces of the Interviewees**

Table 5.1 (p. 183) and Figure 5.1 (p. 183) show the period in which the Maltese interviewees arrived in Australia. The Maltese were, in the main, born outside of Australia. Their ages on arrival varied considerably, but all of those interviewed were of primary school age or younger when they arrived. One boy was born in Rome, after the Second World War, when his Maltese father, who was a doctor trained in Australia, was studying. Although his mother was Polish Australian he identified as Maltese but there was no indication that he had ever been to Malta.

Another Maltese boy was born in Lybia and although the family identified themselves as Maltese, these children had also never been to Malta. They had been born and educated in Lybia with a Maltese father and an Italian mother. They had experienced some life in Italy during the Second World War when they escaped from North Africa to Italy with their mother. This phenomenon of Maltese living in North Africa is mentioned in Chapter One. Malta has had a culture of migration for many hundreds of years because of the finite size of the resources on the islands and the ever increasing population. The Maltese language is related to Arabic and the geographic proximity of North Africa to Malta meant that they could return to visit their families relatively easily. It was not until after the Second World War that emigration to North Africa ceased to be an option and either Canada or Australia became the destination of choice for large numbers (Jones, 1973).

## **5.3 Family Backgrounds**

Of the twenty two families, fourteen of the fathers had worked for the British in Malta, most of them for one of the services. As the British were winding down their operations in Malta, and the country was working towards independence, those who had worked for the British were facing unemployment with very little prospect of further work anywhere in the future.

MM1OM mentioned that there was an element of prejudice in Malta against those who had worked for the British. No reason was given, but it is tempting to think that in the past, those who had worked for the British had been financially better off. In 1964, the first elections were held in Malta and at least one family, MF6OM's, left Malta because the father had been very prominent in politics in the lead up to the elections.

*Dad supported Olivier politically and handed out how-to-vote cards. The Archbishop labelled Mintoff, the Labour candidate, a Communist, but Mintoff won. Dad was frozen out politically and so he decided to come to Australia.*

There was much animosity between the political parties prior to the election and this man had supported the losing party. This would almost certainly, in the climate of the time, have meant that there would have been discrimination against him and his family if he had remained. At least one family had come because the parents believed that there would be a better life for the children in Australia (that of MF11OM and MF12OM). This father having emigrated in his 50s without any English, never really worked again although his children thrived. When asked what prompted this man to bring his family of nine children, to Australia initially, MM2OM replied:

*. . . Wanting a better life for us. Dad could see that there wasn't going to be – now, I'm just repeating his words, I was too young to know – but Dad couldn't see much of a future there for us, so he uprooted everybody and out we came, which was a huge move.*

MM4OM's father also brought his family to Australia for a better life.

*. . . basically, because at that time it was hard to make ends meet. My Dad came to this country with about five English pounds or Maltese pounds in his pocket, and that was it.*

Figure 5.2 portrays the fertility rate which applied to Australian families between 1972 and 1997. As can be seen, since the mid 1970's, the population growth has been lower than the replacement rate which will eventually cause the population to decline in real terms. In 1965 the fertility rate was 3.55<sup>55</sup>. During the war years, the fertility rate was very low due to the absence of males who were away fighting in the Second World War.

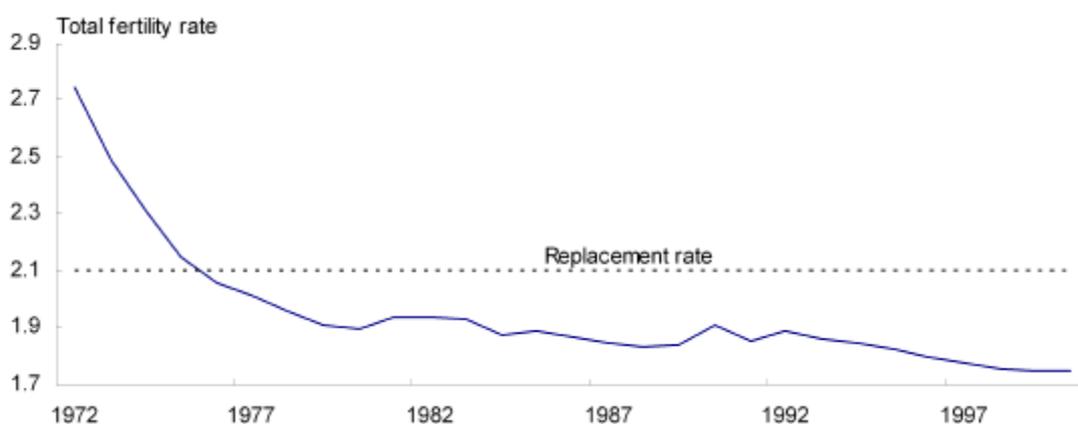


Figure 5.2. Australian fertility rate over time.<sup>56</sup>

By 1961 the Australian fertility rate had risen from the depression and the war years to a level of 3.55 children per woman from which peak it declined over time, until, it was lower than the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman in 1975.

---

<sup>55</sup> Source: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Families in Australia 2008, (p. 21).

<sup>56</sup> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Families in Australia, 2008, (p. 21)

Table 5.3  
*The Family Sizes of Those Maltese Who Were Interviewed For This Study*<sup>57</sup>

---

Number of Children	Number of Maltese Families
2	1
3	2
4	6
5	2
6	1
7	2
8	4
9	2
10	
11	
12	1
13	1
Total	22

---

---

Thus as can be seen in Table 5.3, the Maltese families tended to be much larger than the Australian ones. The Maltese family which had the largest number of children also took in boarders (MF50M). The interviewee described how the evening meals were always eaten in relays, because there were too many of them to sit at the table together. Now her mother cares for some of her 11 grandchildren while their mothers worked.

---

<sup>57</sup> Source: Data given by Maltese interviewees

#### 5.4 Beginning School

Fifteen of the 22 interviewed had commenced school in Malta. One of them (MF9OM), had commenced school at the age of two, because the sisters at the local school had insufficient children of the usual school age.

*My mum said that in Malta everything was a bit more free and easy I suppose and with the nuns, she used to tell her that if – I must have been showing some keenness. I remember looking at the children learning the alphabet and they said that as long as she doesn't wet herself, and she's not in nappies, she can come. So I used to go. I loved it.*

There were a number of complaints about where the children had been placed within the schools they attended in Australia. MM1OM<sup>58</sup> explained that he was at least 12 months older than the other children when he was placed in Grade two at his Australian school despite the fact that he had learned English at school in Malta. He was sent to a Catholic school, partly because of its proximity and partly because of the family's Catholic background, although two older siblings had gone to state high schools. He was a bright child and was first in the class within a year. He spent a lot of time helping the teacher because he was quick.

MM2OM had been in Grade three in Malta, having started school at four years old. He was made to repeat Grade three in Australia, which made him very resentful.

*When I was in Malta, . . . I wasn't a gifted student, but I was fairly capable. I know I could read Maltese, I'm fairly quick on the uptake, and then come to Australia and be made to repeat a grade, I felt socially that that was very unjust, and my mum was*

---

<sup>58</sup> Legend for identifying Interviewees, see Appendix One

*involved with my education more than Dad; Mum and I had tried to get school authorities to get me to be in – promote me to the point where I was in the correct grade level – year level, but no-one would co-operate with us on that.*

By his own admission he became a behaviour problem as a result.

*As a result of feeling resentful, I found ways of taking advantage of the situation and getting back at them, if you like, because I was more competent at English than a lot of the kids that I was in school with, and so there were various things that I got up to that weren't quite the right thing to do, . . .*

The school's idea of educating him was to put him in a corner of the Grade Three room with a whole pile of How and Why books<sup>59</sup>, which he read on the first day and then did nothing. So he started surreptitiously helping the other children with their English composition.

*I really took advantage. I was made the SRA monitor, and for the correct bribe, I could promote a child from green to gold or some miraculous thing for the provision of a cream bun for my lunch. . . . Not only was I adjusting to a new country that didn't speak my native tongue, no relatives to speak of, no friends at all, in a new school in a new country, and then having the indignity of coming from being a star in a classroom, to being the dodo who had to repeat, was a major challenge for me to deal with, and it was all based on the perception that my English wasn't good enough, . . .*

---

<sup>59</sup> How and Why Wonder books were a series of illustrated American books published in the 1960s and 1970s and designed to teach science and history to children and young teenagers.

He claimed that the sisters would not allow him to demonstrate how good his English was and were completely unaware of the challenges facing migrant families.

MF9OM was visibly angry about her school experiences. She had commenced school in Australia at the state school where she stayed for two and a half years, which she loved very much.

*Then somebody came knocking on the door that happened to be a priest, as my father says, I don't know because I was only a little girl, I didn't take any notice of that, he sort of put the fear into them about their short comings for not doing their obligation and insisted that I get taken out of what school I was at and sent to the local Catholic school. . . . I loved school, I loved school. Overseas that was the contrast. You were in a Catholic school because that was all there was on the island. There was no difference. But here Catholic schools are dreadful, they were dreadful. They were like jail. People were very mean and harsh, whereas in Malta they were just people, like as if you go to a shop, just people*

Table 5.4  
*Age on Arrival (Maltese)*<sup>60</sup>

Age in Years	Males	Females
0		1
1	1	
2		
3		
4		
5		1

<sup>60</sup> Source: Data provided by interviewees

Age in Years	Males	Females
6	1	
7	1	2
8	1	1
9	1	1
10	2	3
11		
12		
13		1
Born in Australia	2	3
Total	9	13

Table 5.4 shows the ages at which the children interviewed arrived in Australia. There seems to have been very little continuity as to where these children were placed when they arrived at their Australian school. Of three ten year olds, two were placed in Grade five while the third was placed in Grade six. The 13 year old was also placed in Grade six despite the fact that she could speak English very well and she did not find the educational standard very high. She eventually won a scholarship to a Catholic Commercial School. These anecdotes support the assertion by Taft and Cahill (1981) that ‘newly arrived children were inducted into regular classrooms, often at a level below their age equivalent, or into vocationally oriented streams’ (p. 26).

MM4OM had trouble with school, for at least two different reasons he believed; firstly, he was ten when he started school in Australia and although the school situation was hard he believed that the age he came to Australia made education more difficult and secondly that being illiterate, his father had no idea of what was required. This was compounded by the fact that he had attended several schools in the first few years after arrival:

*Well the first six months in Healesville, I was kind of lost. I had to make new friends. [Then] we came down to Williamstown and I was there for another six months in Williamstown. Went to another Catholic school there, and then we came to West Sunshine, and went to the primary school, Glengala, in West Sunshine. . . . Well, at first it was a bit hard because they couldn't work out where to put me. My English wasn't that good. It's much better now [laughs] but back then, I was sort of struggling.*

## **5.5 Schooling**

### **5.5.1 Paying fees**

Most of the Maltese families sent their children to the local Catholic school unless there was some problem concerned with getting the children to school. MF9OM had started school at the local state school but claimed that the local parish priest 'frightened' her parents into taking her away from this school and enrolling her at the local Catholic school. The family was very poor and the change of school meant that they had to find money for tram fares and an expensive uniform. After a humiliating experience with what she described as 'nasty' sisters over the payment of fees, she left the Catholic secondary school to enrol at the nearby State High School. Her mother, who was illiterate and did not speak English, and her father, who spoke English at a minimum level, were led to believe that it was a sin to send their children to a state run school. She believed the sisters were very unsympathetic about the payment of fees and lacked any understanding of the level of the family poverty.

MF1AM described how difficult it was for her very poor family (she was one of eight children) to find the money for school fees. She explained:

*Difficult Difficult. But that was always – Dad just worked overtime. And we probably hardly saw Dad. Well, whenever there was overtime, Dad had to take it. As simple as that. So to pay for the school fees, 'cause he had this thing about fee relief and just wouldn't ask for it.*

MF3AM explained how sometimes she had to tell the sisters that the family just didn't have the money. MF7OM told of how her mother worked in the school canteen to compensate for the times when they did not have the money for the school fees. MM2OM's family could not afford school fees beyond primary school as there were nine children in the family and the parish priest insisted that they went to a Catholic secondary school. Under no circumstances would his parents cross the wishes of the priest. As he explains:

*Went to a Catholic secondary school, which was quite unique in those days, 'cause there weren't many in the western suburbs and none of my brothers and sisters had been to anything similar in Malta, so I felt privileged by that, but because of that, my parents couldn't afford the fees, so a part time job was obtained for me and I used to work every night, after school, and full days weekends, so really, I had no real time for my own friendships or socialising, so I started work basically, when I was 12. . . . working in a milk bar, serving, filling up fridges and all sorts of things, and just working hours and hours every possible free hour and that money was then used to pay my fees.*

None of his siblings went to secondary school, but he completed a university degree and became the headmaster of a primary school. Surprisingly, his older brother went to a state secondary school but it was physically the nearest school to them, it was the easiest to get to,

and no-one expressed concern about it. MM4OM was part of a family of eight children born to illiterate parents. His father maintained the school bus in return for a substantial lowering of school fees. MF13OM, with 13 children in her family, explained that they were very poor and found it difficult to pay fees – they only ever paid the fees for one child. Her parents found it a great hardship, and uniforms were always second hand. At first they didn't have enough clothing to keep warm, which was very difficult, but then people gave them clothing.

MF9OM was very angry about the reason she left the Catholic secondary school in which she was enrolled:-

*My father was telling the nun he cannot afford to pay her the school fees in excess of that scholarship, and she wanted the money and he used to say to her, "We can't afford it. The scholarship is enough in the state system." She didn't want that, she wanted more money. So he took us out, took me out, . . . because the nun was horrible, she used to humiliate me because my parents wouldn't pay her the school fees. The idea of that scholarship was that for four years your secondary education was paid for and your books. But I think she kept everything. In the state system you got it, you got it, meant that you went and bought your uniform and you went and bought your books. But she kept the lot, and she wanted more money, as I say.*

## **5.6 School Experiences**

### **5.6.1 Discrimination by teachers**

The Irish sisters, in many instances did not seem to be very knowledgeable of other cultures or customs. One of the interviewees complained about the sister who argued about the correct way to pronounce his surname, which was Gaucci. When asked he pronounced his name as 'gow chee' which the sister forcefully corrected to 'gor see' and refused to call him

anything else. To the researcher, it seemed very arrogant to assume that the child did not know his own name. That he remembered the instance so long afterwards is an indication of how much it had upset him. MF4AM described her beginnings at school this way.

*I was put down the back. I remember I was always down the back of the room. I . . . could only speak Maltese. Maltese was my first language. I was put down the back of the room, but I could understand English. So any instruction or things like that, I generally managed quite well to do the work. . . . I ran away from school on more than one occasion in my prep year. But the time I did it the third time, a meeting was arranged between the teacher and my parents, and the upshot of the meeting was that Mum . . . said “She [the teacher} asked us to speak English to you from now on and that’s what we’re going to do”. So that was it. I said – and I remember saying, “Well, you can speak English to me but I will answer you in Maltese. . . . Her help was for me to stop speaking Maltese. . . . Before I got to school I could tell the time, I could do my shoe laces, I knew all my colours, and I could add and I could subtract. But it did me no good, because she (the teacher) was never interested.*

Her trauma was increased when the sister who was teaching her looked at her work (which was very good) and accused her of submitting someone else’s work. She still remembered how distressed she was:

*The other two who were sitting next to me said, “Miss, she’s not working. She hasn’t been working all day.” But – and she goes, “Was that true? Are you not working?” I stood up on the seat so she could see me (she was very small) and I swore at her in Maltese, and I ran out, grabbed my bag, and chuffed off home. I was a problem.*

MF2OM struggled with the teacher's expectation that she could not speak or read English and the fact that her parents, as migrants, were not respected in society. She very much wanted to be like all the other children. MF5OM was humiliated by her lay teacher who insisted that she pronounce 'th' in front of the class until she got it right. MM2OM found it infuriating that at primary school he was considered not very bright, despite the fact that he spoke five languages fluently and eventually gained a university degree.

*When I came here in October, I was placed in the correct grade for my age, which was grade three, but then I wasn't put up to grade four at the end of the year, I was made to repeat grade three, which meant that I was a year older than my peers going through school.*

When asked how he felt about this, MM2OM replied;

*Resentful; resentful for a very long time and for many reasons. When I was in Malta, I happened to be a particularly – I wasn't a gifted student, but I was fairly capable. I know I could read English, I know I could read Maltese, I was fairly quick on the uptake, and then to come to Australia and be made to repeat a grade, I felt socially that that was very unjust. . . . Mum and I had tried to get school authorities to get me to be in – promote me to the point where I was in the correct grade level – year level, but no-one would co-operate with us on that. . . . But as a result of feeling resentful, I found ways of taking advantage of the situation and getting back at them, if you like, because I was more competent at English than a lot of the kids that I was in school with, and so there were various things that I got up to that weren't quite the right thing to do, that I did as a result of all that.*

These things included, after being made the SRA monitor, taking bribes from his classmates in the form of cream buns for his lunch, to promote the classmate from one level of this scheme to another. He would help other children with their English writing or compositions for weekly amounts. He sold off that portion of the milk ration allocated to schools, which the children did not drink, to neighbours of his mother near where they lived. He became very 'cashed up' as he described it.

When asked why he thought he was made to repeat, MM2OM replied,

*I think they made me repeat because they felt my English wasn't good enough. So – and they decided that without really consulting me – not that you've got to consult with a nine year old boy, but you might, at least, give him the chance to speak and find his feet in a new country and a little bit of adjustment time, before decided no, he's staying in grade three, because that was the major factor in my life, at the time. .*

MM1OM began playing Australian Rules football at the age of 10. For some time he was kept playing on the boundary, despite being better than many others. He knew about the White Australia Policy and saw his treatment as discrimination and a practical example of this mind set. Believing that no one could see that a migrant could be good at the local game, he gave up. He was persuaded to return by the club president and by 13 he was team captain. In Grade 5, he was punched by another boy after being praised by the teacher. This however, he saw as an attack because of his achievements rather than his ethnicity.

### **5.6.2 Discrimination by other children**

MM8OM spoke of racial bullying at secondary school to the extent that he wanted to deny his Maltese heritage. MF2OM was also subjected to racist name calling. MF9OM spoke of a

feeling of not belonging in the primary school she attended because there were no other Maltese in the school:

*The thing I missed most about not having anybody Maltese was that I never felt like I belonged because I had nobody from my background. But over the years in Australia I have recognised that the Maltese people generally did not have the attitude and ambition that we had instilled in us, that they aimed lower, that their focus was different. . . . In Malta education was for the rich. . . . So you really would not have had a Maltese person around you because they would have been made to go out to work, or they would want to do that because that's what you had to do.*

MM3OX also found acceptance difficult. Although he looked ethnically Maltese, he had never been to Malta and only spoke Italian, the language of his mother and also the language in which he was schooled. He had also been evacuated to Italy from North Africa during the war. This feeling was echoed by MM5OX who came from a mixed marriage, where his mother was Anglo-Polish and his father Maltese. He looked Maltese but did not feel like one. He struggled to determine whether he was Maltese like his father, European like his mother or Australian as his school friends. MM9AX explained how he and his brother had very different experiences at school. They had mixed ethnic parents – his mother Maltese and his father a sixth generation Australian. He looked English, while his brother looked Maltese.

*My older brother will often say to me . . . you don't know what it's like because in those days kids were called wogs and ostracised and so forth. He said you didn't have to go through that. I kind of thought okay, you're right, I didn't have to go*

*through that, but you don't know what it's like to be blond haired and blue eyed, . . . which meant you have to play with the Anglos. . . . You've got this blond haired blue eyed kid who's raised in a southern European mentality, playing with these Anglos and not knowing the cultural rules and barriers.*

MF6OM was reviled by her classmates who thought she was an aboriginal because of her dark skin, something MF5OM also experienced. She was called 'the darkie'. MF4AM spoke of her experiences: "I remember some of the Australians would really pick on us too. So – not badly. I don't remember being bullied badly or anything. We just knew we kept away."

MF11OM had a miserable existence because of a facial disfigurement. The teasing only abated when the children got to know her. MM2OM endured much name calling right up to high school and was excluded from the playground activities because he was different. (There were very few migrant children in his school).

*I found it hard to fit in with any group of children. As my English got better, I found I was able to fit in better. Once they could see that I was reasonably competent in the classroom, then I had to prove that I was reasonably competent in the yard, and even though I was older than my peers, I wasn't very big, physically, and so, for some reason I kept being physically excluded. . . . [so I got] into a couple of fights to prove that I could hold my own and from that time onwards too, I was accepted as someone who could look after themselves and who could fit in physically as well as educationally. And that was fine.*

MM1OM recalls being taunted by a group of other boys who lay in wait for him and his Sri Lankan friend, every morning for several weeks until they tired of him fighting them. He also talked of “bully boy” tactics being employed in his Catholic High School.

### 5.6.3 Overall experiences and preparation for later life

MM8OM has no memory of failing but was not outstanding academically in primary school. However, he did well at secondary school, eventually obtaining a university degree and a career as a professional. MM7OM thought he was not very bright as he does not read well even now and his skill in mathematics is weak. When questioned about his school experience he responded: “I didn’t learn anything virtually. I can’t remember much other than going to school – I can’t remember any good memories.”

When asked about how well he read, he replied;- “*Not very well.*” When asked about his skill in maths, he replied, “*Shocking, very, very poor, very poor.*” When asked to sum up his childhood and school experiences, his response was:- “*Shit. Shit and shit. . . . My parents didn’t know what it was – education – I think it was just work and pay – earn money. . . . I was the oldest so I think I was just an income.*” His parents encouraged him to leave school when he was only 13. Now he wonders if his lack of success in school was because of his lack of English. Sadly, he saw himself as a failure, despite educating two sons to university level. MM6AM commented that his secondary school was critical of the poor standard of education he received at his primary school. MF9OM always felt that she did not belong, as there were no other Maltese at her school. MM4OM was the eldest of eight children who was required by his father (who was illiterate) to help build the family home from the two roomed, unsewered, unwatered, non-electrified shed with earth floors, in which his family lived. Although he was only 10, he was required after school and at weekends to either build

the extensions and improvements to the shed, or help cultivate the vegetable garden the family needed to supplement their food supplies.

*Didn't know whether I was coming or going. I found it very hard. And, being the eldest, there was no such thing as doing homework. I just had to go with Dad and help him with whatever he was doing.*

As a result he was always in trouble because he was not able to do any homework. He explained that any subject which required a knowledge of English was very difficult for him and the fact that he had attended three different schools in the first two years after he arrived in Australia was a: *“Tremendous problem for me. Tremendous.”*

As can be seen in Table 5.5, six of the female participants were satisfied with their progress in school and with the preparation it gave them for later life, but seven were not. Four of them had achieved tertiary qualifications, mainly as teachers, but of those so educated, one was a religious and another had been one. The other four were working in secretarial positions for a variety of professional employers.

Table 5.5  
*Satisfied with the Educational Progress?*

	Males	Females
Yes	2	6
No	7	7
Total	9	13

Two of the male participants were satisfied with their academic progress at primary school, but seven were not. Five had gone from school into tertiary education, and of the other four, only one had finished an apprenticeship. Two others had begun but not continued an apprenticeship. Both of these male participants had not done well at school, at least in part

because of their lack of English, while the ninth male participant drove trucks in his father's small contracting business.

One of those (MM8OM), who had become a lawyer, was his parents' only son with six sisters. (He was one of the older children). He spoke of how supportive of his educational achievements his father had been. When asked how supportive of his sisters' education his father had been, he seemed genuinely quite shocked. Of his six sisters, only the youngest had received any tertiary education and she had qualified as an infant teacher. Any education beyond mid-secondary was actively discouraged by his father who, in straitened circumstances, wanted the education money kept to educate the son. However, the youngest sister was born in Australia, 5-6 years after the next sister above her and family finances were then more able to accommodate her education.

In contrast to this, MF12OM, who was also born some years after the youngest of her six siblings, would have liked to have stayed at school to gain qualifications from a technical college, but was not able to because at that time, her parents were already on the old aged pension and unable to afford to keep her there.

MF13OM didn't really like school. She did love English and reading and spelling, but Maths frightened her. She did not properly understand arithmetic. Algebra was a total mystery, but she was too embarrassed to ask the sister for help. (There was very little individual help in those days at her school.)

#### **5.6.4 Attitudes of parents to education and their ambitions for their children**

In 1975 Professor Ronald Taft published a paper as one of a continuing series established by the Department of Sociology, La Trobe University which discussed the career aspirations of migrant schoolchildren in Victoria. As part of his study, he had administered questionnaires

to all Year eight students who were at school on one particular day in five schools which comprised three government coeducational high schools and one government boys' technical school and one government coeducational central school. "All of the schools were in areas with high migrant concentrations" (Taft, 1975, p. 50). Table 5.6 is drawn from Taft's study and is used here to support the discussion in this section in the study.

As can be seen from Table 5.6, of those Maltese who answered the questionnaire (and the numbers were too small to separate the results into genders) not one expected to continue on at school beyond Year 10. Apart from the Jewish respondents, about 50% of the other groups expected to stay at school beyond Year 10, with more boys than girls expecting this. The Maltese result is a significant deviation from the expectations of all other ethnic groups. It seems reasonable to suggest that their expectations reflected the expectations of their parents. The interviewees were asked to talk about their own and their parents' expectations of their career plans.

Table 5.6  
*Educational Aspirations of School Children in Australia in 1975<sup>61</sup>*

National Group	N	Educational Aspirations		
		Percentage aiming at Year 12 or beyond		
		Males	Females	Total
Australian	246	51	43	47
British (UK)	57	55	39	47
Italian	68	54	19	41
Greek	98	66	52	59
Yugoslav	48	56	52	54
German/Dutch	43	65	39	51
Maltese	21	*	*	0
Jewish	28	100	75	89
Total Sample	677	57	45	52

<sup>61</sup> Source: Taft, *The Career Aspirations of Schoolchildren in Victoria*, (1975, p. 58)

\*Numbers too small to be meaningful.

MF4AM spoke of the typewriter her father had saved hard to buy for her 14<sup>th</sup> birthday present so that she had a firm foundation seeking an office job when she left school. She was very ungrateful, because she wanted to be a teacher, an ambition her family had never encouraged or understood.<sup>62</sup> MF1AM commented that very few Maltese of her acquaintance had gone on to post-secondary education, whereas she had trained to become a member of one of the religious orders. Most of her contemporaries went into trades and married very young. She explained:-

*You've got to put that in with a lot of what women do at that age – whether they were supposed to [stay at] school or were they supposed to leave and get ready for marriage. . . . My mum and dad always valued school, and they certainly had no hesitation, and they were quite supportive actually. None of us wanted to leave school until we got to Year 12. . . . Mum herself went to school. She was in teachers' college a year behind me.*

MF2OM, too, had parents who valued education. Her father had worked in a bank, while her mother had trained to be a teacher until this was interrupted by the war. They were ambitious for their children and wanted them to have a good education. MF9OM spoke of how the Maltese families sent their children to the Catholic school without question:

---

<sup>62</sup> This story was told to the interviewer by MF4AM after the recording was turned off. It is repeated with her permission.

*I was at the first school for two years I think, two and a quarter years, which I loved very much. Then because somebody came knocking on the door which happened to be a priest, as my father says, I don't know because I was only a little girl, I didn't take notice of that, he sort of put the fear into them about their shortcomings for not doing their obligation and insisted that I get taken out of that school I was at and sent to the local Catholic school. It was a sin to send your children not to a Catholic school. In those days the Catholic system here used to say any state people are evil, bad, communists (I used to hear that word a lot) and socialists, and you were told what to think all the time, even at church and at school. It was awful. It was like Hitler system back to front. I hated it.*

In both church and school, the children were told that those whose children attended state schools were evil, communist and socialist. Parents were told that it was a sin not to send their children to the Catholic school, their feelings of guilt being encouraged by the priest. In her experience, the Maltese community did not greatly value education. They tended to lie about their children's ages to be able to remove them from school as quickly as possible, so they could get work in the factories and be earning money before they were 14. In her own case, she was the only member of her extended family who had a university degree, although many of her relatives criticised her father for allowing her to stay at school when she could be earning money in the factory to help pay off his debts. Fortunately her father valued education, even though he and her mother were not well educated.

There were no other Maltese in her classes in the later years of high school and her cousins had tended to marry at 17 and to have had a their first child before they were 21. She further noted that Maltese parents expected their children to have homework, and were quite

disturbed if their children had none. MF10OM commented that although her parents knew education was important a job was more so. Her salary was added to the family income pool and although she was not denied anything, her parents decided how she should spend her money.

MF8OM's father valued education and wanted his children to have a better life than the one he had lived, and although she had taken a secretarial position, her sister had an engineering degree. He helped them with their homework, encouraged them to use the library and bought them a set of Encyclopaedia Britannica. Both parents were very strict about their homework and housework had to be done at weekends. MF6OM's parents were both well-educated and were very ambitious for their children. Her father took them to the library every week and helped with their homework, but she could only study until Year 11 as there were insufficient funds for Year 12. At the time it was unusual for Maltese girls to stay at school beyond Year 10. Despite this, both of her parents expected an early marriage and both were angry with her when she was still single at 23, (her mother had been married at 16).

Being illiterate themselves, MF5OM's parents did not believe their children's education was important, especially so for girls. Her older siblings did not go as far as Year ten and her eldest sister, being 13 when she arrived in Australia did not go to school at all in the new country. She married at 17 and had her first child at 18. MF5OM, however wanted to stay at school but realised that family finances could not support her beyond Year 10, even though she had worked in a local store at weekends and after school from the time she was 11 in order to pay for her books and school shoes. She did however, observe that the most financially well off sibling was also illiterate. MF7OM'S father's ambition for his daughters was for them to have office jobs and not to have to work in a factory. Her mother wanted all the girls to marry when they were very young, to good Catholic Maltese boys. Both parents

attended church frequently, and her father found it difficult to accept that not all his daughters' husbands were Maltese or Catholic. MF11OM's parents confined their ambitions for their children to hoping they had marriage partners who were good both to them and for them. With this in mind, they were not encouraged to marry early and as it transpired, none of the children in the family married Maltese. She left school to work in a factory but didn't really like it, so she went to business college at night in order to help her get an office job. MF12OM and MF11OM are sisters although the latter was the youngest in the family by several years. Unlike her siblings, she was born in Australia when her father was 54 and her mother 42.

Both of her parents were old age pensioners before she began high school. Consequently there was very little money to spare for her education. Both sisters talked about not feeling very competent at school. They individually described themselves as slow to understand something new, but good when they had grasped it. Most of MF12OM's six siblings became blue collar workers, but she studied for bank qualifications after she left school, becoming a teller and eventually a loans officer in the bank where she stayed until she retired. MM1OM was another who believed he had been placed in the wrong class and that he should have been one year ahead. Although he had very little English when he arrived, by the end of the year he was among the top ten students in his class. He believed that the large classes, such as the one of 40-45 in which he found himself, were not problematic if you paid attention and absorbed what the teacher was trying to tell you. He further commented that there was no possibility of success if you did not as there was no waiting for less able students to catch up. As there were few Europeans in his school, he realised by the age of ten that he needed to understand his environment if he was to survive. He described himself as a 'loner' until he was in Grade 4-5 and believed he was a solitary child, who really did not know his siblings

despite having three of them. His parents obviously supported their children in their pursuit of higher education as he became an engineer, one brother was a lawyer, another a town planner, while his sister is a high school teacher. MM9AX was the only one of his family to attain a tertiary degree let alone a higher degree, despite the fact that his parents had told all their children that they would support them for as long as they wanted to stay at school. His father, who had only achieved a Grade six educational level himself, supported him as best he could:

*Their help was in amazing ways like they'd already told all of us kids, no matter how far we wanted to go in school, they would support us. . . . I'd go after school . . . to the Preston library and work in there and do a lot of work. And then dad would come at night when I rang and pick me up and take me home. I never got buses at night or anything like that. Things like on the weekend if I had homework to do, then that always took precedence over chores and that sort of thing; even family social events.*

Family functions for Maltese children were obligatory and to not attend could possibly give huge offence. That MM9AX was given parental permission to not attend was a large concession to his education. They also motivated him when he was feeling dispirited. They are very proud him and his achievements, although they really do not understand what he does. He pointed out that success in Maltese culture is measured by the fact that you own your own home and never receive unemployment benefits. Parental ambitions were usually for their children to be happy in whatever they chose to do, that they were financially secure and that they did not have to work too hard. MM2OM was a primary school principal and thus tertiary trained. None of his eight siblings had a similar level of education, but today all of them earn more money than he does. To achieve his academic goals he worked at three

part time jobs – playing guitar in a band, delivering bread at 3am and doing the bakery accounts. Together with his studentship, this money made him comparatively financially secure but with no time to spend it. When he actually started to teach, he suffered a pay loss:

*They expected us – they expected me not to work as hard as Dad did. They wanted me to have an easier work like they wanted me to do well, they wanted me to be honest, they wanted me to be the best that I could in whatever I did, but they were reluctant to see me not go into a business, but teaching, they just encouraged me to do the – like not just to be an ordinary teacher, you've got to be the best teacher you could be, you've got to be the most honest person, you've got to – it wasn't accumulate the most money, it was to be the best person that you can be, and I – you know, Mum and Dad, I think they were visionary with that sort of upbringing for me and for all of us really.*

For MM5OX's father, who was by profession a doctor, education was very important and lead to better opportunities. He had gone to an English University and expected his son to do the same.

MM8OM's father, was also very keen for him to do well, to an almost obsessive level. He saw his own work choices as being limited by his lack of education and wanted better for his son. He was not as keen for his six daughters to have that education, however. Although a number of them finished secondary school, none went on to tertiary education. All of them married very young, but developed businesses and careers after marriage.

MM7OM found school very boring. Like most others he had no help with English, and was very weak with maths. Both his mother and his father were too busy to help him with his

school work. He left school when he was only 13, having only completed year seven and felt that his father did not encourage him to stay because he wanted the money MM7OM earned in the shoe factory to supplement the family budget:

*He wanted the money, that's one of the reasons I never got on – not because of that, but I never got on with him. Not being educated himself . . . I think I was just an income. . . . You got about two pound 50 in those days and I didn't get a good start because my dad would get the two pounds and I would get the 50 because he was paying off the house.*

This continued for many years and he seemed for at least part of that time to resent his father for not having insisted that he stay at school. MM6AM stayed at school until he finished Form 5, when he left to drive one of his father's trucks in a quarry. He was able to help his father with the paper work for his business but his sisters left in Form four to work in the factories. Their mother gave the girls many household tasks to complete which were given precedence over school homework. She, herself was illiterate even in Maltese although she learned to speak English by speaking with an Anglo neighbour.

MM4OM arrived in Australia when he was ten years old, the eldest of eight children, three of whom were born after their arrival in Australia. He had been to school in Malta where he had learned some English, but on arrival in Australia he was enrolled in three different schools within a year as his father looked for work and built the family a home. School changing created huge problems for him; his English was not good and at ten or eleven he was placed in fifth grade, in a situation where there was nobody to help him, either with his English or

with his school work. His father could not sign his own name, although his mother had reached grade four or five in Malta:

*My father wasn't educated, he would not have known what was required. And the focus was more on what had to be done, not what you were sort of really learning at school. I don't think my parents ever got involved that much. . . . He didn't understand what I was going through and I didn't express it anyhow. I didn't tell my dad, look, I'm having trouble with this or this, because maybe if I did, then something could have been done for me. . . . The rest of the family did all right. That's why I'm sort of saying I came here at the wrong age, the wrong time. (He was ten when he came to Australia.)*

Each afternoon after school, his father collected him from school in his motor bike and side car and the two of them went to work, building the family home in Sunshine. This building work occupied all his weekends and prevented him doing any homework. His religious teachers (sisters) would not accept this as an excuse, and he frequently received 'six of the best' for non-completion of homework. He believed that the sisters had very little understanding of the migrant situation and no empathy with their problems. At the same time he volunteered the information three times, that school in Australia was more like 'play school' and that school in Malta was much stricter. However he did comment that the class in which he was taught in Sunshine, was a composite grade 5/6 with over 30 children in it, taught by one sister. Even sporting activities at school were closed to him because the family had no money for sporting gear or equipment. Of the other children, only the eldest girl was required to work at home with their mother. The younger children did better with their education, and had much better careers, not because of their parents' encouragement he

believed, but because they were younger, had better opportunities to learn English and were not burdened by excessive household tasks to be completed after school and at weekends. Many other Maltese children in their neighbourhood left school after grade 6, (many of them at less than official school leaving age) to go to work at Gilbertson's, the meat packers in Sunshine. When he left school and gained employment, all his wages were given to his mother to supplement the family income.

MF13OM came from such a large family that staying at school seemed not to be considered as an option. Her older sisters were teenagers when the family arrived in Australia and they were immediately sent to work in the factories, as she did when she left school. Although the younger children born in Australia stayed at school longer than the others, she did not believe that they really benefitted much for the extra schooling, as they all finally worked in the factories.

Quite a different experience was the one through which MM3OX lived. He had been born in Tripoli in Lybia, where there was a large community of expatriate Maltese. His father, too was born there, although his parents met in Malta. Although he was the third generation of his family in Lybia, they still maintained their Maltese citizenship. He has never been to Malta and could not speak Maltese. His schooling in Tripoli was at a Catholic school run by a French order where the tuition was predominately in Italian, with French as a second language. There was no English taught. In Australia he had many problems at school, mainly because he was ethnically Maltese, and so grouped with the Maltese pupils, but could not speak with them or share their life experiences. Both of his parents were well educated and had learned English as a second language up to secondary school level. Both could both read and write English, and although they did have aspirations for him to complete school, he wanted an apprenticeship and they did not seem to oppose him. His brother, seven years

older than he, had also worked his way through an apprenticeship when he left school, and had been quite successful in business.

### **5.6.5 Learning English and the Australian way**

Of those Maltese interviewed, 13 claimed to have good English on arrival, while nine claimed to have very little or no English. MF10OM, who claimed to be in the former group, was very critical of the Australian accent which she found difficult to understand. All of them asserted that there was no extra help for those whose language skills were not good, and in fact MM1OM who had been educated in classes of about 45, thought that the large numbers were not a problem for most of the class, but there was no waiting for those who were slow. MM8OM spoke of the lack of any sort of help with English and described it as a 'sink or swim situation'. MF13OM learned the language by reading the "John and Betty" books which she loved. As her parents were illiterate in Maltese, they were unable to help their children to learn English. Largely due to their poverty, there were no books in the house, but there were plenty of comics which she used to improve her language and reading skills. Although the majority of the children in her class were Anglo-Australian, a quarter of the class had Maltese origins while the rest were Italians, Greeks and Germans. She commented that the school had compulsory elocution lessons to help the pupils with their pronunciation, which, in view of the fact that many of the children had no English at all, she found rather strange.

MM3OX spoke of how confusing he found it to learn to both speak and read English at the same time:

*Even though I was Maltese, I couldn't speak the language, so I couldn't communicate with the other Maltese kids. (The language spoken at home was Italian.) And a lot of*

*Italians spoke different dialects, were [laugh] hard to understand. But it didn't seem as bad as it sounds, because I think I picked up English reasonably quick, because I probably had to.*

When asked about the greatest problems he had when he first started school, he replied:

*I think an issue was the English, learning the language. And I think that probably put me behind, I suppose, learning a bit of things. Because I remember when we first arrived, when we went to the state school they, because I couldn't speak English they put me in a lower grade, like a prep, when perhaps I need to go in grade one, or something like that. And then I went to Catholic school they said, no, better join your other age group, which meant I jumped a class and it was sort of like being thrown into the deep end.*

*. . . It probably took longer than what I think, because, like, reading books and things like that. I wouldn't pick up – I wouldn't have picked up a book until I was quite older.*

MF2OM believed that that it was the individual's own responsibility to learn. Seven of the interviewees claimed to have been put in the wrong class (always lower than they felt they should have been). One spoke of the stricter regime in Malta, another of the much higher standard she had been used to in Malta and yet another of the fact that there wasn't enough homework. A further criticism was about the arts subjects which were seen by one family as a waste of time. Sport was also seen as unnecessary, particularly for girls. It is interesting to observe that two of the boys quickly grasped the fact that in the city of Melbourne, where

sport was highly valued, excelling at sport led to acceptance. MM1OM realised that Australian Rules was the football to play, not the soccer which was played in Malta. When he became captain of the team by the time he was 13, his gifts were no longer overlooked. MM5OX was educated with the Christian Brothers who revered sportsmen. He had no skills with ball games, but discovered that he could swim well. He believed that this had at last made him acceptable with the other boys and the teachers. MM8OM was encouraged by the sisters to play sport to develop his physical abilities even though he was not at all 'sporty'.

#### **5.6.6 Children's assessment of their own abilities**

Many of the Maltese said that they did not believe that they were doing very well at school when they were in primary school, and even some of those who went on to tertiary education believed that they were not very bright before they entered secondary school.

MF9OM volunteered that she was clever at primary school and had won a diocesan scholarship into Grade 7. MF10OM would have preferred to have finished her schooling in Malta, and believed she would have been a linguistics teacher in Malta, instead of working in an office as she did when she left school in Australia. This was largely due to the fact that in Malta "jobs were hard to get and you needed all the qualifications you could get to obtain one". MF8OM applied herself at school and therefore 'got on', while MF6OM's school experience was a very positive one where she learned very well and was at the same level as the other children when she went to secondary school. MF5OM enjoyed school and received good marks, despite the fact that she spent a proportion of her school time baby-sitting in the crèche run by the sisters to help the migrant working mothers. She could afford this time as she was advanced at her lessons, which she attributed to the sisters' good teaching, so that she learned very well. In fact she was dux of the class in both spelling and tables while MF7OM did well enough at school to be put into the scholarship class in Grade seven (at which she

was unsuccessful). MF10OM also did well at school because she was too frightened not to work. She described herself as well prepared for high school. MF11OM believed that what she learned at school set her up well for her later life, although she commented that she thought she was slow. However, having worked in a factory when she left school, she was not satisfied and went to night school to learn typing so she could get a better job. MF12OM, her sister, also said she was slow to learn, particularly when she was trying to grasp something new. Once she knew it, however, she believed she was very good. Three times she volunteered the information that she thought she was ‘a bit slow’, some of which she attributed to her ‘perfectionism’.

MM4OM spoke of always feeling ‘3 steps behind’. He spoke of his first year at secondary school as being ‘a disaster’, where he couldn’t cope, particularly with algebra. He was ‘no good’ at any subjects which required English and he mentioned how he felt ‘lost’ most of the time, describing himself as ‘not achieving very well’, MM3OX spent a lot of his school time feeling ‘very confused’ and not understanding what schooling was all about. It took him a long time to learn to read largely, he believed, because he was learning to speak and read at the same time. It took him several years to ‘work out what school was all about’. He mainly enjoyed school but did not enjoy what he perceived as his lack of progress and his confusion about the process. For many years MM5OX did not feel as though he ‘belonged’. He felt different from the other children (he was the product of a mixed Maltese/Anglo- Polish marriage) and felt he did not belong in either group. He attended a Christian Brothers’ school in his later primary years and believed he was well prepared for secondary school, unlike his fellow pupils at the local parish school. At the Christian Brothers’ school, the school population was very appreciative of anyone with sporting ability, and he gained acceptance

because he proved to be very good at swimming and athletics, especially cross-country running, sports which were not available in the parish school.

MM8OM described his primary schooling as a very happy experience. Despite the fact that he subsequently became a lawyer, he believed that during the period of his primary schooling, he was not outstanding academically. He 'just cruised' along - not very brilliant but well behaved. MM7OM also believed he was not very bright and learned nothing at school and to this day does not read well and his knowledge of mathematics is very poor. He only completed Year seven at school and saw himself as a failure, despite his affluence and the two university graduate sons he had reared. In hindsight, he thought that perhaps his lack of English and the age at which he started school in Australia, meant that school was 'boring' and a disincentive to continuing his education. He left school when he finished Year 7, meaning he did not have the year eight requirement for an apprenticeship. His factory job wages were given to his father to help support the family. MM9AX also believed he was not as quick as his classmates at grasping new concepts. Although he subsequently went on to tertiary education, at that time he believed that he was learning at a standard well below the class average. It was his theory, which he pointed out that he could not prove, that the Maltese tend to process information differently from other people, processing only one piece of information at a time. At one time he believed it was a trait only present in his family, but having worked in Malta, and in the consulate in Australia, he now thinks it was common to all Maltese. His secondary school experience was very different, for by Year ten he was dux of the year.

MM6AM described himself as not very good at lessons. His parents, both of whom had very little education were unable to help him. Their next door neighbours who were Anglo-Australians allowed him to do his homework with their children who were the same age, and

who went to the local state school. When he got to Catholic secondary school, the teachers were very critical of the poor educational standard he and his contemporaries had been given at the parish school they had attended. They were given extra lessons after school so that they could catch up with the standard attained by children from other primary schools.

MM1OM, on the other hand, was very intelligent. On his own admission, his English, when he arrived in Australia, was very rudimentary. He had started school in Malta before the family came, but tuition had been in Maltese and he had only just begun English. He believed he was placed in a year lower than he should have been. He knew very little English in Grade two, his starting level, and by the end of the year he was in the top ten students in the class. No confusion for him! He explained that he coped with the change in language very well and by the time he was ten he felt he knew his environment very well and had come to understand the White Australia policy and to experience its effects on him, because, with his darker colouring and complexion he was at times considered non-white. He believed that the large classes were alright if you 'paid attention and absorbed', but he also commented that there was 'no waiting for the slow ones' in such large classes.

On the other hand, MM2OM was full of resentment at the way he was treated in his Australian school, not because he found it difficult to keep up with the rest of the class, but because it was assumed he would have difficulty coping with his school work and was placed in a grade where he was 12 months older than the other students in the grade. He had been a capable student in Malta. He felt socially deprived and resentful that no teacher would upgrade him. He spoke English better than most of the pupils in his class and the resentment at what he perceived to be an injustice led him to find ways to 'get back' at authority. The sisters did not appreciate his 'Huckleberry Finn' type schemes to improve his own lot. They believed that his English was not good enough to be with his relevant age group, and gave

him no opportunity to prove otherwise. His biggest problem was not being able to cope with his school work, but rather that he was perceived to be less intelligent than he was. He found this very inhibiting, leading to a loss of confidence, which took him a long time to overcome.

The comments made by the former pupils themselves seem to give some credence to the comments made by the teaching sisters cited in the previous chapter, where they spoke of the Maltese pupils they had taught, many of whom they believed were not very bright. The sisters used such phrases as “not the brightest nationality”, “these children found learning hard”, ‘their failure to mix with other ethnic groups prevented them from learning quickly and acquiring social skills” to describe their Maltese pupils.

#### **5.6.7 Education levels of parents**

Many of the interviewees’ parents were not literate and for those who had experienced some schooling, learning had been somewhat fragmented by the Second World War. Coupled with their language deficiencies, many Maltese parents were not able to help their children with their homework.

Among the participants, four had illiterate mothers and six had illiterate fathers, even in Maltese and of those who had some education, some only had a few years of primary education in Malta. There were a few parents who had finished secondary school and only one couple was tertiary educated. One mother undertook a teaching degree in Australia when the last of her children went to school. She studied at the university at the same time that her daughter was studying for a teaching degree. Even some of those who had no education managed to negotiate the Australian workplace. One father managed to work many years as a storeman, despite being illiterate and another, also illiterate, had managed a shoe store in Malta. For many of them, helping their children with homework was not possible (in large part because of their lack of English) and there were several complaints that all school notices

and reports came home written in English only, meaning that many parents had no understanding of their children's progress or difficulties. Even when notices from school started to be translated into other languages, Maltese was not one of them. The Maltese were assumed to speak English because Malta had been colonised by the British.

### **5.6.8 Discipline**

The sisters who taught these migrant children had a collective reputation for harsh discipline and corporal punishment which extended beyond the Catholic community. Even at a time when corporal punishment was accepted as the norm for children who were not behaving well, their use of the strap and other weapons was much commented upon. One of the questions asked at the interviews was on the subject of discipline and what the interviewees had experienced.

MM4OM spoke of receiving '6 of the best' from his teacher when he did not do his homework. As the eldest son (of an illiterate father) he was required to help his father after school and at weekends, to build the family home, converting it from an unlined shed with dirt floors, to a comfortable family home to accommodate his parents and the ten children, of whom he was the eldest. This was not considered an acceptable excuse for not doing his homework. MM3OX also spoke of receiving the strap. He described the corporal punishment as not a rare phenomenon and certainly not indiscriminate, although he did not elaborate and mention to whom it was mainly directed. It was meted out for quite minor things such as arriving late or talking in school. MM5OX had no 'fond memories' of his early school years. The sisters were very strict and he was singled out, he thought because he was not very clever. On one occasion, the sister broke a metre ruler over his legs because he had not ruled his borderline on the page correctly. Because of the resentment which had built

up over what he perceived to be an unjust positioning of him academically, MM2OM became a schemer – always wanting to ‘get back’ at the authorities.

*Because of my behaviour and my attitude, I did cop a fair bit of physical punishment in terms of straps and feather dusters and things on the backside and one on the hands and it was always the nuns who administered that form of corporal punishment. Well, I knew that if I talked during dictation, even though it was to help the kid next door, I'd cop something, you know, and that may have been one whack on the bottom. I once pinched a lolly; we were preparing the fete bags and were filling them with lollies and things in grade six and I pinched one, and knowing full well if I got caught I'll cop it. I got dobbed on, got caught and I copped it and never – I don't think the administration of corporal punishment, for the time, was anything out of the ordinary; I thought it was very appropriate.*

MM8OM also experienced the dreaded ‘strap’ but only once in Grade five when he forgot to ‘put out the mats’ on a rainy day, while MM7OM remembered being in trouble with the sisters and was ‘whacked’ by them.

*I remember one nun whacked me on the head with a book and I didn't do anything. She said, “That's in case you think of doing it”. They were pretty hard – one or two of them were pretty hard on us.*

MM6AM's experience was of sisters from a Maltese order in Australia, who were teaching in a class where three quarters of the class were Maltese. They were very strict and used the strap as the Irish sisters did.

Even the girls were not safe from the strap! MF12OM received the strap from the headmaster at the state school she attended, for talking. In the Catholic school she attended, she did not get much punishment, although as a timid child she was very frightened of the sisters, especially in their black habits. MF3AM was very also frightened of the sisters. She received the strap when she was in Grade one, because she dropped the end of a bench while waiting in the hall. The strap was also administered in Grade six for making a mistake in the practice exams. She did not think the sisters were cruel, but they were very strict and the punishments were very severe. This she excused, as an adult, on the grounds that there were so many children in the class whom they needed to 'get through to'. Her mother went to the school, however, to complain about the severity of the beating her brother received. Maltese parents, she explained, were very upset that the sisters used the strap at all! The strap came out every day in MF4AM's school. When asked how the teacher kept discipline, she replied:-

*Never a problem for me. They used the strap and the ruler. Frequently? In those days, . . . not on the same person. But every day it would come out.*

Despite being very small and often sickly, even she was hit with a ruler on one occasion. MF1AM, a teaching sister herself, described the two major facets of the sisters' behaviour as follows:-

*Some were good, some were shocking and some were terrible. . . . Had them all. Good, is just generous and welcoming and hospitable. . . . Shocking were insensitive, brutish. Terrible, violent. [Free with their punishment?] Absolutely. I think the biggest thing is people not being equipped to cope with classes of 58. . . . I wouldn't like to take 58 of them, many of whom could not speak English. I mean, like their*

*absolute frustration, I think, . . . must have been incredible. . . . If a teacher went berserk now, they'd find themselves with a wacking of law suits. So I think there are a lot more checks and balances. . . . I suppose the corporal punishment was meted out very quickly. Whether you're a spectator or at the direct end of it. That's what you remember.*

MF2OM did not describe any personal experiences, but she did comment that discipline was strict and caning was prevalent. MF9OM's experience of Catholic education was not a happy one. In her school 'kids were belted if their spelling was wrong'. They were strapped with a leather strap and they learned in fear. Even minor things were severely punished. Although she did not mention corporal punishment, MF10OM mentioned how bad tempered and intimidating the sister teaching her was. Also good with the strap was MF6OM's nun/principal/teacher, who, though an 'excellent teacher', was described as 'good with the strap'.

In contrast, MM1OM's experience was of very little corporal punishment with such as there was, administered by the sisters. MF11OM spoke of how very strict the sisters were particularly if you did not pay attention. She mentioned their rigidity, but she was not frightened. She knew she had to behave and her parents' attitudes to punishment were much the same. MF7OM only spoke of how caring and understanding the sisters were, telling the family not to worry if they did not have enough money for the fees as they understood how hard it was for migrants.

MF13OM explained that, although there was discipline, none of her family received it. With so many children in the family, they had to be quiet in their small house and they did not run around in the house. Those children who were cheeky or who answered back, did receive the

strap or the cane. She agreed with the sisters – they were there to learn not to play around. However, other testimony quoted earlier in this chapter, attests to the fact that sometimes the punishment was undeserved (in the children’s eyes) and indicates that at times the sisters were finding discipline very difficult to maintain.

### **5.6.9 Prejudice**

In his article entitled “An Australian Perspective on the Role of the Moral Theologian in Church and Society” (Gascoigne, 2013), describes the ‘intolerance of difference’ as one of the ‘key ethical challenges’ facing today’s moral theologian.

*Intolerance of difference is a long-standing moral weakness in Australian society, with its beginnings in the treatment of Australian Aboriginals by the early settlers and of Chinese miners in the gold rushes of the 1850s”. . . . Xenophobia continues to be exploited by some Australian politicians, particularly in relation to refugees and asylum seekers arriving by sea from Indonesia (Gascoigne, 2013) .*

Such attitudes were particularly in evidence when the European migrants arrived after World War II. Indeed, prejudice against any migrants was very common in Australia especially in the 1950s. Sir Arthur Caldwell, then the Federal Immigration Minister warned that Australians did not ‘warm’ to southern Europeans and that the assimilation of foreign migrants, with a foreign language and a foreign culture could not be achieved unless both migrants and the community were prepared to work towards that end (Borrie, 1949).

Australians had lived as an outpost of the British Empire since the country was first settled by Europeans in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their geographic isolation meant that they had had very little contact with other cultures, which they perceived as far inferior to their own. They did

not welcome New Australians in many cases and had to be 'sold' on the idea of taking in what were, at first, refugees from the war torn countries in Europe, as a humanitarian gesture. The Commonwealth Government paraded as public knowledge that migrants were lucky to find a home in Australia. . . . Migrants had been rescued from post-war Europe and as 'New Australians' they were assimilable (Callan, 1983). According to Callan (1983), the situation in Australia was such that the "Australian identity which historically was xenophobic, isolated and dominated by real or imagined threats to safety," (p.123) was wide spread. To some degree these attitudes still seem to be evident in Australian society as is evidenced by the treatment of Asian and Middle Eastern refugees arriving by boat from Indonesia.

As so often children reflect the attitudes of their parents, exploring the prejudices they encountered while they were at school was considered important to understanding their whole school experience. The most frequent complaint was about the attitudes of the other children to their school lunches which would now be considered gourmet food. Their mothers packed lunches with thick bread cut from fresh loaves, with what we now call 'antipasto' – which the other children derided. All the Maltese children wanted was to be like the other children with sandwiches cut from pulpy white bread spread with butter and Vegemite, or a meat pie covered in tomato sauce. MM9AX, for example, talked of his lunches being 'sneered at', as did MF7OM. MF10OM described how the first thing she did when she married and left home, was to buy both vegemite and processed cheese. Now her mother's 'despised lunches' are considered 'gourmet'. As a family of wine drinkers, rather than beer quaffers, they were not considered 'Dinkum Aussies'.

A 1978 survey conducted by the ministry for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs concluded that eight out of ten Australians held some form of anti-migrant attitude. Yet another study by Stoller (1966) indicated that "half of [his] sample of school children expressed negative

attitudes towards migrants from mainland Europe. Sixty per cent of migrant children were aware of such attitudes”.

However, there were other prejudices which, while not intended to be so, were much more difficult to cope with. One of these was perpetrated by the sisters who made assumptions about these children and their parents which were not based on fact. One of the complaints heard was of the lack of expectations of the migrant children, assuming that their previous education had been somewhat inferior and their abilities much lower than they actually were. MM2OM was very resentful of the fact that he was placed in an age group which was a year younger than his chronological age despite the fact that he spoke English better than most of the other pupils in his school class. He had been a capable student in Malta and felt unjustly deprived socially. No-one would listen to him to address his concerns or give him a chance to prove himself and he ended up employing many anti-social behaviours to ‘get back’ at the school authorities. He ‘learned to be very cunning’, but being perceived to be less intelligent than he was he found very inhibiting and led to a loss of confidence which took him a long time to overcome. Ultimately he went on to tertiary education and became the headmaster of a Catholic school. MF4AM understood English when she started school, but was placed at the back of the classroom, despite being very short, because, she believed, the sisters thought she could not understand and they were not interested in what skills she had accomplished before she came to school. In fact, when she did do something very well, there was no reward of affirmation because it was believed someone else had done it for her. Like MM2OM, she was very resentful and would not work for the sister.

MF2OM also commented that the school’s expectations of their migrant children were very low. She was not expected to be able to speak English and certainly not to be able to read, although she had learned English at school in Malta and her parents were fluent in English,

Italian, French and Maltese. MF1AM's parents were assumed by her teachers and the general public, not to have been to school although they had been educated in English in Malta and married after they had arrived in Australia. This made it difficult for the family to negotiate Australian society. She commented that the school taught Irish dancing to their migrant children and celebrated St Patrick's Day, a saint about whom Maltese children knew nothing, while ignoring the celebrations the Maltese observed for St Paul, the patron saint of Malta. This, considering that the school population was 98% Maltese, was in her estimation, a subtle form of prejudice probably born out of ignorance. Yet another form of racial humiliation was experienced by MF5OM. Her teacher made her stand up in class and repeat the sound 'th', arguably the most difficult sound for migrants to pronounce, in front of the whole class until she was able to pronounce it correctly.

In addition to what was really institutional racial discrimination, these migrant children had to endure racial discrimination from many different directions. MM1OM understood that to be accepted he needed to play Australian Rules football but although his skills were better than many others, he remained on the boundary. He protested by giving up football, until the club president talked to him and persuaded him to return. By 13 he was captain of the team. He believed that his treatment was due to the belief held by many Anglo Australians, that only they could play the local game. He also described the arrival of the Sri Lankan boy whom everyone wanted to punch (the reason did not seem to be anything other than that he was there and he was different). He stood up for this boy and together they fought the rest until the priest broke up the altercation. The other boys waited every day for a week or so to attack them on the way to school, until they tired of it. MM8OM was not aware of any racial bullying until he went to secondary school, where he desperately wanted to deny his Maltese background. MM9AX described how the Principal of his Catholic primary school required

the boys to dig up the oval during school time because he believed that this was all they were suited to. They lived in a high migrant area.

MF2OM experienced the ignominy of being called ‘wog’ and ‘dago’ with the differences in clothing and food especially being very obvious. It really bothered her to the extent that she wanted to be the same as the other children. In the community her parents were treated differently because they were Maltese. It hurt her to hear the neighbourhood children speaking disrespectfully to her father who ran a neighbourhood shop. She commented that many other Maltese children were in her class, but the staff had very low expectations of them. They were not expected to be able to speak English let alone be able to read. On the staff assumptions, they were categorised as less than other children in the class and they were left to pick up English as best they could and with no help. However the children all played together regardless of ethnicity. MF3AM explained that her sister experienced much discrimination because she was darker skinned. She was older than MF3AM and had felt the bigotry very keenly. She permed her hair so that she looked more European.

#### **5.6.10 Self-imposed discrimination**

MF9OM spoke of her love of reading, but in her school there were no readers and no library. Eventually she learned of the municipal lending library, but her mother would not allow her to join. “It is not for people like us” she was told “we are different”. Despite her parents’ sense of where they should stand in the community, she went on to tertiary education and became a teacher.

#### **5.6.11 Still in the Church**

During the interviews one question was used to elicit the response of the Maltese participants to their attitude to the Church and their continued association with it to find out if the Maltese respondents were still part of the Church and regular attenders at Mass. If there had been any

negative responses, it would have led to some further questions as to whether their school experiences had affected their participation in the Church. Of the 22 interviewees, eight did not reply to the question but not one of the others said he/she no longer was part of the Church. Fourteen of them replied that they were still regular attenders at Mass and thus still participants in the Church. Not one of them, regardless of whether their school experience was good or bad, used their school experiences as anything negative in connection with the Church. However, MF3AM commented that although she was still practising her religion, their school experiences did put some of her siblings off the religion. These included her two brothers.

Regardless of what criteria is used to assess the conditions under which migrant children were educated, their passage through Catholic primary schools was not an easy one. They were placed in year levels within these schools which they believed did not reflect their educational ability, they (and their parents) were assumed not to speak any English, but at the same time they were assumed, because Malta had been a British outpost, not to need to have school notices written in Maltese. Some of them were very resentful that they were perceived to be unintelligent despite much evidence to the contrary, if anybody could be made to listen to their complaints and those of their parents. For many of them, their parents were not educated themselves and their educational expectations for their children were much lower than those of both Australian born and of other migrants (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993).

#### **5.6.12 Conclusion**

The physical conditions these young Maltese endured were also endured by all children who were being educated in Catholic Primary schools between 1950 and 1970. The overcrowding and lack of teaching aids and teachers with little experience, sometimes without aptitude and at other times without inclination were shared not only by a variety of migrant groups but by

the Anglo-Australian children who were born after the Second World War and who lived in the newer areas of Melbourne where there was little infrastructure and few facilities. Children who lived and were educated in areas of Melbourne well established before the war, were a little better off as the schools had already been established.

However, migrant children had extra problems. Their problems were first and foremost connected with language. Only a few of these Maltese students knew anything more than a little English. There were a few who complained that they knew and understood more English than they were given credit for, but most found the lack of English was their greatest problem. Like most Australians, the sisters who were teaching them, were unaware of the conditions under which they had lived and learned in Malta. Therefore there were no allowances made for the strangeness under which they were taught in Australia. The sisters had received no training in teaching non-English speaking children, and most either believed such children would learn from the others in the class who did speak English, or they would pick it up as they went along. No special consideration was given for those who were struggling, and class sizes, in many instances were too large for any extra help to be given to individuals.

Parental expectations in some cases, were not such that an education beyond Year 10, was expected or encouraged. Many parents hoped for an apprenticeship for the boys and an office job for the girls so that their children would not have to work in the factories as they had. But, there were some parents who encouraged their children to finish school and in some cases to go on to tertiary studies. Most of these supported their children but while they were very proud of what their children had achieved, they did not understand what they were doing in their working lives. Some of the children stayed at school contrary to family expectations,

some working in local shops after school and at weekends from the age of about 12, to earn the money needed to pay for books and fees.

Almost all of the families were very poor when they arrived in Australia, and they worked very hard to establish themselves in their new country. Paying fees was often a great difficulty. Sometimes the parents paid in kind, sometimes only one child in a large family was paid for – the only one the parents could afford to pay fees for – the rest were supported by the parish for their schooling.

Discrimination was apparent in some of the class rooms – often because of the lack of knowledge of other cultures exhibited by the teaching sisters. Even after all these years, the interviewees clearly remembered the embarrassment of overt discrimination and the frustration at being unable to demonstrate that some of the preconceptions held by their teachers were totally erroneous. Other children, as children do, taunted the migrant children at times, but most of the interviewees spoke of how all the children in the school played together regardless of ethnicity.

Only one of the parents of those interviewed appeared to have been sponsored under the Government Immigration Scheme. Almost all of the rest were sponsored to this country by friends or relatives. Thus there were people in Australia (often quite large extended families) who helped them with accommodation and information when they arrived and provided them with some social interaction, at least while they were establishing themselves. There was an active Maltese community in Melbourne and each shipload of emigrants brought with them their own priest who helped them with secular problems as well as spiritual ones. And for those who could not settle, there was always the possibility of returning to Malta at some later date.

The Maltese had suffered much during World War II but during all their hardships they had suffered together as families. They arrived as families - many of them with several older children who commenced their schooling in Australia mid-way through primary school. (These older children did not seem to progress through school as quickly and easily as those who began with the Preparatory Grade, or to stay till the end of schooling.) To the Maltese, the family unit was of greatest importance.

Many of the interviewees spoke of the harsh discipline inflicted by the sisters with some of them recalling how angry their parents had been at the severity of the punishments. Corporal punishment did not seem part of the Maltese child rearing practices and they were shocked that a Religious would resort to such methods.

Echoing the Sisters' assessment of their Maltese students, the students themselves, expressed their opinion that they believed that they were not very bright when they were in primary school. For several, their scholastic ability did not become obvious until they had entered secondary school. For some, the discovery led to higher study and professional employment. Of those who had received some education despite the fact that their parents were not at all well-educated.

All of the above problems that the Maltese children described, had profound effects on how they experienced their education. Not all of them achieved much success academically, although all of those interviewed seemed to have succeeded very well in life and to have justified their parents' sacrifices in coming to Australia. Others seemed to have achieved academically despite their education experiences. Even the interviewees, as students, realised that with such huge class sizes and very few resources, their teachers could not help those who were struggling. "Struggling" seems to describe most of their experiences.

The interviews given by these Maltese migrant children of the 1950s and 1960s gives a very rich and illuminating account of what the education system was like in Catholic primary schools in the 1950s and 1960s and what their class room experiences were like in a situation of overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient resources. Of those who had received some education before they arrived in Australia, many found adjustment very difficult. Their frustrations are eloquently expressed in their interviews.

Classroom experiences were very varied according to where they went to school and who was teaching them. Most were upset at the beatings given with a cane or a strap, and others were very resentful at the class levels to which they were assigned. Many thought the education level they had left behind in Malta was superior.

To Anglo Australians, the consensus of opinion seemed to be that what problems the migrants had were common to all of them. The next chapter, however, will show that this view of the migrants who arrived after World War II, was not valid. In this chapter, the experiences of the Polish migrant children are discussed and analysed, and it becomes clear that their experiences were often quite different to the Maltese.

# Chapter Six - Stories and Testimonies of the Polish Interviewees

---

## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the information given by the Polish interviewees is presented and discussed. There are not many of them and it proved very difficult to find any Poles prepared to talk about their families and their experiences as migrant children in Catholic primary schools. Indeed their experiences adjusting to life in Australia in a migrant family were very difficult for them to talk about, even though most of the children were born in Australia. Those that were born in Europe, were only very small when they arrived here. None of them had experienced education in their former countries. Their feelings about the class room conditions and the teaching methods, as well as their problems at home, all affected their school life and their learning experiences. Although there were so few of them, those Polish interviewees who permitted the researcher into their lives, gave a rich and insightful account of their school lives in those years. It was surprising how similar their experiences and their backgrounds were. To begin, however, and to place their accounts in the context of the families' World War Two experiences, a discussion of Polish history and migration history is most important.

## 6.2 Polish Migration History

The first settlers of Polish origin to arrive in Victoria came in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and were few in number (Kaluski, 1985). A significant number did, however, settle in Sevenhill and Polish Hill River in South Australia where they eventually built their own Church and a school. Although the school was an Australian school, Polish was taught as a subject and religion was taught in Polish. Eventually the school was closed in 1925 due to the small

number of pupils and the Church also was closed in the 1920s. In all, several hundred Poles had come individually to Australia by 1900 leading to the first Polish organisations being founded in Brisbane and Melbourne in 1913 and in Melbourne an Australian section of the Polish Labour Party existed until 1919 (Kaluski, 1985). It “organised a Polish library and financial assistance for the Polish socialists in Poland and in Russian prisons” (Kaluski, 1985, p. 25).

During World War II, as well as killing over two million Polish civilians and three million Polish Jews, the Germans sent three million ethnic Poles to forced labour camps in Germany from whence they were liberated in 1945. About 300,000 of these and about 250,000 Poles who had escaped from Poland to Germany in 1945, before they were liberated by the Red Army, could not and did not want to return to their homeland in Communist Europe. Together with the 200,000 strong Polish army in Western Europe, most of whom refused to go back to Poland, these Poles were accorded refugee status. Some of them came to Australia.

*Polish ex-servicemen, the veterans of the Tobruk siege and Polish pilots meritorious in the Battle of Britain, were the first non-British national group allowed to settle in Australia. The first group of them came to Australia in the second half of 1947. Altogether Australia accepted about 4000 Polish ex-servicemen from the British Army. The next group, numbering a few thousand, were Polish refugees from camps in India and East Africa as well as some Poles from Great Britain. The third and the largest group who came to Australia in the years 1949-51 were the Displaced Persons from the refugee camps in British, American and French occupational zones of Germany and Austria. This group numbered over 60,000. (Kaluski, p. 31).*

Of the total number of Polish migrants to Australia in the period 1947-55, (71,721) 66,551 came between 1949 and 1955. Of these, 10,000 were not of Polish ethnic origin but were Ukrainians and Belorussians. A further 12,000 (20%) were Polish Jews (Kaluski, 1985). Between 1957 and 1966 a further 14,890 people came to Australia mainly from Poland, where the 'harsh emigration policy' (Kaluski, 1985) was relaxed in order that dispersed families could re-unite. However there were other reasons for migration. The 1954 census registered that there were 36,000 males of Polish descent in Australia and only 21,000 females (Kaluski, 1985). The relaxed policy allowed some of the men to bringing Polish fiancés to Australia to relieve their loneliness. These women were described as pre-war fiancés but in reality were effectively 'proxy brides'. Proxy brides were married by proxy in Europe to men already living in Australia. These 'marriages' were regularised by the church when the women came to Australia.

Table 6.1 shows the years of Polish migration to Australia by the Poles who were interviewed for this study. This table indicates that most of the interviewees arrived in the years when most Poles emigrated to Australia.

Table 6.1  
*Year of Arrival in Australia (Polish)*<sup>63</sup>

---

1945-49	1
1950-54	4
1955-59	0
1960-65	0
Born here	7
TOTAL	12

---

---

<sup>63</sup> Source: Information given by the Polish interviewees

The graph in Figure 6.1 shows the years in which the Polish interviewees arrived in Australia. Most of them were born in Australia, their parents having been married in the refugee camps in Europe after the Second World War. Many of these parents were very young when they were taken from their homes and were probably only in their mid-twenties when they were married.

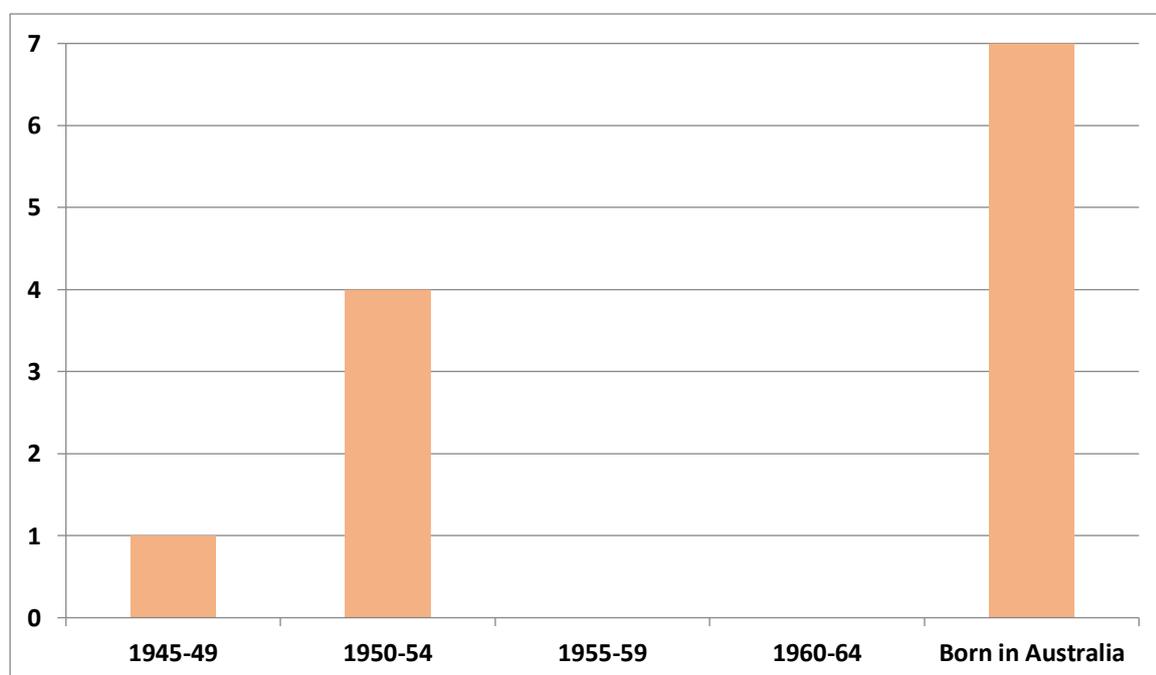


Figure 6.1. Year of arrival in Australia (Polish).<sup>64</sup>

### 6.3 Birthplace of the Interviewees

Unlike the Maltese, many of whom were born in Malta, half of the Polish interviewees were born in Australia. Of those who were born in Europe, none were more than five years old when they arrived in Australia and none had been to school before they came to Australia.

---

<sup>64</sup> Source: Information given by the Polish interviewees

All four of the children born overseas had been born in a refugee camp. The family stories were very similar. All the mothers had been taken from their families to work as slave labour in Germany. The fathers had all been either prisoners of war or slave labour in Germany. Only four of the Polish parents were educated and could help their children with homework, five had little or no education and with one family whether they were educated or not, was not clear.

#### **6.4 Family Backgrounds**

PF2OP's mother was taken by the Germans from Poland into Germany to work as forced labour. In time she escaped and went home to work on her family's farm. However, the next time the Germans came looking for slave labour her father nominated her to go in preference to her brother who was more use to him on the farm. She found herself working in a factory. These were such painful memories for her that she never again communicated with her family, even after the war. PF2OP's parents met while working in the factory and later both went to the same refugee camp. Her father had been in the Polish army and was severely wounded before he was sent to a POW camp. The only refugee destination of which they had heard was the USA but her mother was not accepted because of her poor state of health. A friend, who was coming to Australia, provided a sample of her healthy blood which they used to gain acceptance for her, as a potential migrant to Australia. None of them knew anything about Australia – there was no understanding of what they should expect and no chance of ever returning to Poland. Most of the Poles did not want to return to a Poland ruled by a communist government.

PF3AX's mother and uncle were taken to work for the Germans as farm workers, which they did for five years.

*On the farms, . . . my mum and my uncle were taken to a farm. This farmer needed help because his young men went off to the war. There was only the old people, the grandparents and the parents . . . left at the farm and they couldn't work the farm. So that's why they brought the Polish young people to work.*

Her paternal grandfather had abandoned his family when her father was 12. Her father was too busy trying to survive to be concerned much with schooling. Eventually he was caught stealing food and was sent to the Dachau concentration camp. After three years there, he was neither psychologically nor physically healthy.

*. . . He was working in Germany and he stole some food and they put him in a concentration camp – Dachau – and then he stayed for about three years. . . . So psychologically he was not one hundred per cent nor physically as a result of being mistreated and here he just had labouring jobs. . . . Eventually he had an accident at work and crushed his leg, and then the company – he didn't have proper witnesses – and it was their fault but everything was hidden, . . . but there was a cable which was faulty which was hidden and he didn't get a good payout . . . the little bit of money didn't pay off the mortgage of the house. And no one would employ you and he was only about 45 and he never worked again. He died at 58 – a broken man really.*

PF4AP's father arrived in Australia as a displaced person. He had survived on the streets looking for food during the war and it was his responsibility to find food for his whole village. He went searching for things like fruit trees which still had plenty of fruit. On arriving in Australia under the Assisted Migrant Scheme, he was indentured to work on a sheep farm in western NSW. Contact with 'Dinkum Aussies' there did not impress him and

caused him to forbid his children to have anything to do with them. His plan was to return to Poland when it became safe to do so, and maintaining their Polish identity was extremely important. Her mother married him by proxy when she was 16. PM2AP was another whose mother was taken at 14 -15 years old to work as slave labour in a Polish city and whose father had been captured while fighting with the Polish army.

PM2AP reported that his parents very seldom mentioned their lives in Europe and then only briefly. He sensed that it was probably very difficult and very tragic. He did know that his father had also been taken from Poland as forced labour. He was very stoic about it, but his son believed that the story of the forced labourers was never really appreciated.

*They never ever said very much. The only times we really got any inkling of what it was like. . . . But when we were kids and all the adults got together, the drink would flow, the music would go, they'd dance and sing and then things would go very quiet and they'd start reminiscing. And we would come in and see what the hush was. We were always out. So we figured out that if we came in very quietly and sat behind the doors that were open and the ears flapped, you'd get little snippets of what was going on. But I mean, you know, you'd hear a little bit and then it got a bit boring and you'd choof off again.*

PM4OP's parents were also forced into labouring for the Germans. After the war they did not want to go back to a Communist Poland and so found themselves in a refugee camp which is where they met and married. His mother and her sister had been separated when the Germans took them from their home village. They did not see each other again until 1977

when PM4OP's family made a visit to Poland. The sister had been repatriated to Poland after the war. They were illiterate orphans who had worked as domestic servants before the war.

PF5OP told the story of her parents, both of whom had been taken from their families by the Germans – her mother at 15, her father at 22 (in the beginning he was categorised as an essential services employee because he worked on the railways). At 22, he was blond, tall, fit, handsome and with blue eyes and was actually recruited by the Germans for their Aryan breeding program. For good Catholics, this was highly immoral, so he escaped from the train. When he was inevitably recaptured, he went to the workhouse to be used as slave labour. Many of the parents married in the refugee camps with the notable exception of one mother who had been a proxy bride at 16 and had come to Australia to live with a man 11 years older than herself whom she had never met. She apparently needed to escape a difficult family situation in Poland.

PM1AP's grandparents had migrated to Australia in the early 1950s, via England because of 'some argument with the communists'. His grandfather had left Poland before the Second World War to procure military equipment for the Poles and was unable to return to his home country before the war commenced. His grandmother had been left in Poland on her own with the children during the war. After the war, when the family migrated, his father had been left behind in Poland to finish his university studies. Unfortunately because of his lack of English, he was never able to work in his chosen profession in Australia and so earned his living as a house painter. PF1AX's parents were refugees after the war – her father from Poland and her mother from the Ukraine. How they came to be refugees was not explained. When the Second World War began, PF6OP's mother was 11 and her father 14. Her father had been in gaol for three years for reasons that were not explained and then was sent to Germany as slave labour. He met her mother when he was 19, presumably in a refugee

camp. Although she knew her mother had been digging trenches, neither of her parents talked much about their war time experiences. Her grandfather was taken by the Germans leaving her grandmother, her mother and her mother's brothers to work on farms. After the war her grandmother was not able to leave Communist Poland and from then on was permanently separated from her husband, although they were never divorced. Neither of her parents had much education. They were sponsored by the Government of Australia, but she did not believe they were refugees. They arrived in Australia with only one suitcase and went to Bonegilla, a former wartime military camp, which had been turned into migrant hostel accommodation, until her father could find work. This he did in the western district of Victoria, when he worked to build haysheds and barns for local farmers. They lived in a small town out of St Arnaud<sup>65</sup>. There was no help from the local people so they stayed with the local community of religious sisters until they were able to find accommodation they could afford.

PF7OP'S parents were also reluctant to talk about their experiences during the war. Her mother was sent at 12 to live with her grandparents to work on the farm, situated near Krackow. Her father, who had left school at the age of nine in order to earn money for his very poor family, had been taken by the Germans to work in the mines. His two brothers were taken to fight for the Germans. On the last day of the war, the Germans shot them. She believed her father was about 24 and her mother about 18/19 when they met, although it is not clear as they had no birth certificates and there was very little documentation about their lives before Australia. She also commented that she believed her father would not have

---

<sup>65</sup> St Arnaud is a small country town 244 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, Victoria. At the 2006 census there was a population of 2272. At the time PF1AX's family settled there, it was commonly believed to be approximately 3,400. (Source: Council officer at Northern Grampians Shire., March, 2014)

enjoyed school very much even if he had been able to go, as he never liked being told what to do.

Table 6.2 (p.249) indicates the family sizes of the Polish interviewees.

Table 6.2  
*Number of children in the Polish families*<sup>66</sup>

Number of children	Number of families
2	7
3	3
4	2
TOTAL	12

### 6.5 Beginning School

Because the children had not been to school before they started in their respective Catholic schools in Australia, the issues experienced by the Maltese about the level at which they should be placed within the Australian school system, were not relevant. Table 6.3 shows the ages at which the Polish children arrived in Australia.

Table 6.3  
*Age on Arrival (Polish)*<sup>67</sup>

Age in Years	Males	Females
2	0	1
3	0	2
4	0	0
5	1	1
Born in Australia	3	4
Total	4	8

---

<sup>66</sup> Source: Information given by the Polish interviewees

<sup>67</sup> Source: Information given by the Polish interviewees

PM1AP described his feelings about going to school as follows:-

*I think there was that initial apprehension with – because I was in this world where I didn't know what was going on to some extent, but people were looking after me, so I just got on with it.*

PF8OP described herself as an all-rounder at school. She managed to cope with her school work and could not remember having any difficulty with any subjects. She spoke of 'plodding along' at school, passing all her exams. Her younger sisters did better at school than she did because they were adapted to English and the Australian way. Despite this, her sisters left school after Grade eight, while she stayed till Form four. She claimed that she just 'floated around' at school and blamed it on the dreadfully violent situation at home.

At the age of six, PF5OP, who knew no English, was sent to school in a Victorian provincial city. Her mother had kept her at home until she was that age because she believed that her daughter would learn English more quickly and better when she was older. As her mother was working she had to get herself to school. Because she was terrified of the little dog that barked at her when she went past, her mother hid a big stick in a drain pipe so that she could defend herself if necessary. As both her mother and father went out to work, PF5OP, was at home alone till very late when she was this age. In the holidays she was left alone all day. Her mother set an alarm clock so that she would know when she had to leave for school, and she was not allowed to have anyone in the house when her parents were not there. Until she went into the locker room at the school, she had never seen large numbers of children en masse and she felt lucky that a Polish friend looked after her.

*My mother walked me down to the school. . . . She couldn't always be with me because she worked. That day she took time off work. . . . My friend, she had already started school. . . . She took me by the hand and took me into the locker room, . . . and because I was an only child and I lived with those other Polish people . . . but I had never seen a mass of children **ever** (her emphasis) and I walked into this cloakroom and there were kids, yelling and screaming as children do. . . . The noise! I can still hear the noise in that little cloakroom. I didn't know how I was going to be able to cope with all that noise.*

The neighbourhood children taught her English words but no sentences – these she had to work out for herself. All the teachers were Loretto Sisters - and she had never seen a Religious Sister before. However, she was not frightened of them. Any bad experiences seemed to come from her lack of English. She recalled putting up her hand for 'no Mass' when the teacher asked which of the children had attended Mass on the previous Sunday, because she had no idea what she was being asked. On another occasion she made the Sister very angry because she had been told to apologise for something she had done and she had no idea what the word 'apologise' meant. She believed that she and the other migrant children were discriminated against because of their inability to understand English. Other than her problems with English, she did not remember having any other problems at school – she enjoyed it. This could, at least in part, have been due to the fact that there were at least six other little Polish girls in her class at school. Her memories of her first birthday party invitation seemed as clear as when she received it. She talked of seeing jelly for the first time, and of the sponge cake and the white triangular 'fairy bread', so unlike anything her mother cooked, and of the new dress she was given to wear.

PF4AP went to school at the age of four and could read and write a little.

*Because I was the youngest in the family, I was starting to read. I could write my own name. I remember doing that, not needing the instructions by the teacher to write my name on the back of the pastels box. Strange what you remember. So I could actually read a little, write a little. I could write the alphabet actually. And I went to preschool and I was already speaking English there and interestingly was able to converse. I knew who to speak English to and I knew who to speak Polish to.*

Her first teacher was a young lay person, whom all the children loved. It must have only been a small school, in Carlton, an inner city suburb of Melbourne, because there was only one class at each level, with lay teachers in charge of the lower grades and Sisters teaching the more senior grades. There were only 33 pupils in her first class but no other Poles. Most of the migrant children were Italian. The headmistress was known to be strict but her mother enjoyed their conversations – she believed it was a treat to be talking to a Religious Sister whom she saw as having authority by reason of her closeness to God. For her this reflected the school values. Her mother was far from happy, however, when the family moved to Broadmeadows which was, at that time, an outer northern, low socio-economic suburb.

*My mother tried to get us into the Catholic school in Dallas, Holy Child, but they would only take one of us and not all three of us. They couldn't commit to my mother. They were unable to confirm when we would all be placed together, so my mother felt that it was not right to break up the family, so she didn't put us in the – she sent us all to the state school together, so we went as a family. And we were given religious instruction once a week. . . . My mother was very upset. She was really devastated*

*because the people coming out of Poland, Warsaw, Krakow – Krakow which was close to Auschwitz, and Warsaw, that was completely destroyed, then they were communist, so the sense of religion gave them their freedom. And it gave them something to strive towards because your soul will be free. And she was devastated. I remember her being very upset about us not being able to go to the Catholic school and commit to her values, her ideals.*

Besides, the pupils at the Catholic school wore a uniform and looked more disciplined and much smarter.

PM3AP described his first school class as having ‘stacks of children’ (estimated at about 50) with one teacher, being held in a huge shed in Dandenong. He believed that the Polish community had made representations to the Catholic Church to allow the Polish children to attend, but wanted them quarantined from Father O’Donnell, the parish priest who was later identified and posthumously convicted as one of the worst paedophiles in Australia’s history. The Polish and their priests regarded him as an ‘ignorant oaf’, who could not even speak Latin. Although no allegations were made, the Polish priests who tended the Polish Mass, insisted that the boys wait for them outside the sacristy until they arrived. They were very angry when the boys went in without them, obviously not keen for their boys to be alone with someone they clearly knew was a paedophile. PM3AP spent two years in kindergarten before he was allowed to attend this school. He believed that the parish priest made it difficult for Polish children whose families attended Polish Mass. He was regarded as a very vindictive man who penalised those attending the Polish Mass because he felt the money from the collection should go to him and not the Polish priests. He made things very difficult for the Polish community. In the school this interviewee attended, Prep and Grade one were

taught together by a Dutch lay teacher and a Religious Sister. He was not aware of any problems and revealed that punishment took the form of having to kneel and say their prayers. One year everything changed! The school was required to conform to the State Government's scheduled holidays and were no longer able to take religious feast days as holidays. The sisters saw it as sacrilege that they had to come to school on St Patrick's Day. He could not recall feeling 'uncomfortable' in the class situation and was happy being educated, but was amazed, as a teacher himself, at how the teachers kept discipline with so many children. He was good at school and good at sport, although the facilities for sport were 'pretty tight'. He defined 'pretty tight' as 'not much' and he believed it was a 'make your own fun' generation. He played organised sport after school. After he completed Grade one, the school moved to new premises where there was a huge oval where the children played scratch games of cricket and football at lunchtime. He described himself as 'a classic case of a weak positive result of Catholic education', and thought that the Presentation Religious Sisters who were his teachers in primary school were very professional teachers, but the lay teachers in secondary school were 'pretty pathetic'.

There were at least 60 (and perhaps 80) in PF1AX's class at school in North Sunshine. Everybody had a seat and a desk, but one of her friends was in a class where the children sat three to a desk. If a child was absent for a day, they lost their seat and had to sit on the mat. In her classroom there was no room for anything other than the desks. She felt intimidated by the class size and would only raise her hand to respond if she was absolutely positive the answer was correct. Rote learning was the only teaching method employed to teach the children, be it religion, the alphabet or anything else. She likened it to learning a catechism, but it did not in any way teach the pupils to think.

PF6OP first began school at Burke's Flat, in country Victoria where she journeyed on a bus to school. From there she went to the State School in St. Arnaud. She believes that the state school principal reported them to the priest, who came to school to make them come to the Catholic School. Like good, practising Catholic Poles, they just did what the priest said. The priest also told her parents they were not producing enough children, causing her father to leave the Church for more than nine years. He only returned with the birth of his third daughter.

Twenty children were all that were in the classes at the school, staffed by the Mercy sisters, which PF7OP attended in 1960. There were no lay teachers. One section of the building was the Church. She did not have any problems with the school, but being away from her mother was very frightening. Her mother came to the school every day with her lunch – she was very reluctant to have her child away from her, even at school. Her mother had found conceiving a child very difficult, and PF7OP was 'the miracle child'. She was not allowed to go out to play without supervision in case she was hit by a car, or abducted. Although there were no other Poles at the school, it was not an issue and she achieved at school very well. Eventually the class sizes increased to 30-32, but it was not overcrowded. In all, it was a very pleasant experience. She particularly loved playing with the other children, as, with her only sister nine years older than herself, she was virtually an only child.

PM4OP attended four primary schools after he arrived in Australia, one of which was a state school. He saw very little difference in the two systems, but he believed that his education suffered because he changed school so often. In the Catholic system, there were many European migrants from many different countries. There were about 30 children in the classes in Ballarat where the family finally settled but he didn't really have any problems and 'breezed' through. Sometimes some words did not make sense to him, but he had no trouble

with spelling or reading and never wanted not to be there. Just as with the previous interviewee, school was a very pleasant experience and there was no violence directed towards him. He described himself as ‘a goody two shoes’ as far as schoolwork was concerned, but didn’t do as well as he could have. He just ‘coasted along’ but won the religious prize two years in a row. He always passed everything.

## **6.6 Paying Fees**

When questioned about school fees, PM4OP conceded that it was probably hard for his parents to pay school fees.

*But again, that was something we were never aware of at the time. They never grumbled or sort of made you feel as if you were making life difficult. And I am sure it was very hard for them, four kids.*

PF8OP realised paying fees was very difficult. Her father was a gambler and never gave her mother any money for housekeeping. So she had to work to keep herself and her four girls and PF8OP remembers her mother ‘scratching around’ to find the money for the fees. It was necessary to pay them to preserve her self-respect. Fees for PD5OP’S family – her father worked two jobs and her mother worked as well – were never easy to find. They had a ‘poor but good life’, were never hungry and always happy. Like many of the other Polish families, PF4AP’s family struggled to pay fees in the Catholic system so they were grateful that she had a short time at the local state school where there were no fees, However, her mother was very upset as, like many of those who came out of Krakow and Warsaw, she was very religious.

*I felt that I did miss out on . . . I enjoyed going to the Catholic school for our religious training. Would've liked to be part of it. Felt that because it was very hard – as I think about it, there were three groups for religious instruction. There was Protestant, Anglican and Catholic, and so we would go off into our respective ways. And that actually did in itself create a sense of cliques and it was hard to break through those cliques when those teachers weren't there. So there was a little bit of animosity. . . . Occasionally there would be a little bit of taunting.*

PM1AP could not recall his parents having any difficulty paying fees. Neither could PM2AP remember any difficulty and could remember taking an envelope to school with the school fees in it. PM3AP reported that it was not difficult for his parents to pay fees because the house was built before his parents' marriage, by the Polish community working together to build each other's homes, and they did not have a mortgage. He had their wedding photograph, taken in the lounge room of their house. The religious sisters allowed PF6OP'S family to pay what they could afford in fees and everything they needed was second hand from the school shop. Fortunately her mother was a very good seamstress and sewed costumes and mended for the sisters as a trade-off for the fees. Other things suffered for PF7OP's family so that they could pay the fees. They were a priority.

## **6.7 Learning English and the Australian Way**

None of the interviewees had received any extra help with their English, while they were at school. In most cases their parents did not have any English experience either. In fact, many of them had received almost no education at all, most of them having been caught up in both the depression of the 1930s and the Second World War. PF2OP's mother would not allow the children to speak English in their home. "None of that language is to be in this house"

was her decree, because having lost everything else they had, she did not want them to lose their Polish culture. Her mother confiscated her school books as she entered the house so no homework could be done, so that there was no opportunity to consolidate what she had learned at school. She was very conscious of her poor language skills, which were not helped by the fact that her mother required her to complete a range of household tasks before any homework could be attempted. Her mother refused to learn English until her husband died, with the consequence that she cannot now communicate with her grandchildren, none of whom can speak Polish.

PM4OP first heard English on the plane which brought him to Australia, when the hostess spoke to him while the plane was grounded in Columbo due to a mechanical malfunction. It appears she was asking him if he needed anything, but he had no idea what she was saying. His mother, with no access to education, was able to speak only a little English after many years of being in Australia. With hindsight he believed he should have tried to help his mother learn English when he became competent. They came to live in a provincial city with a community of other Poles. There were five other Polish families in his street, four more in the next street and two more close by. There were five or six more families in a nearby suburb and they all socialised together. He acquired his English from the children at his first school which only had 15 pupils in total.

*I remember one incident, we were all sitting in the playground, I don't know, there would have been 15 of us. It was a tiny little country school, Grade one to six. And everything – all the kids out in the yard were 'bloody' this, 'bloody' the other and we were sitting under the big trees having our lunch. And an aeroplane flew over and I said to the kid next to me, 'oh we came to Australia in one of those bloody things'.*

*And I got strapped for swearing. And I thought, 'hang on a minute, how come they don't get strapped. I hear them saying that all the time, what's wrong, what's going on here?' I learnt very quickly, careful what you say to whom.*

On the whole however, he found no problem with learning English and 'breezed' through his school work, despite the fact that he changed school several times.

*I can't remember it [English] - I can't ever remember it being a problem that I could not understand. I can remember the word, R-I-P-E, and I'm thinking that can't be right because what's this ripe? I know right and not right. Now, fruit's right, it's okay to eat. What's this ripe business? Took me a while to work that out. I used to think they'd write ripe and I'd sort of think, oh well, they must know what they are on about. It just doesn't gel.*

PF2OP's mother worked against her ever adopting the Australian way of life. Because her mother did not allow any language but Polish in the home and would not allow homework until all the household chores (which included feeding all the animals on their mini-farm) were finished, she did not feel confident speaking English until she left school. PF4AP had similar experiences.

*We spoke Polish at home. If we spoke English, my father would get very upset and would tell us to stop speaking English. So, basically, if we didn't speak Polish, we weren't welcome in the house. He wanted to retain – he respected his heritage, his culture and he didn't want to lose that. He didn't feel that by moving to Australia, that we would lose our Polish identities. And we found over the course of time that*

*the identity here, the traditions that the people lived with here, were stronger than what they had retained in Poland. So there was this sense of not wanting to let go because they had geographically relocated. [My father] intended to go back. . . . He always said that if communism left Poland, he would go back tomorrow, but by then that was 1990 and we were too established by then to leave, and there were PM3AP grandchildren as well. So the family had grown, so it made it difficult to leave. . . . So, in the end it was just too difficult. He was too old to go back and start again. [I] was not allowed to bring friends home, particularly if they were Australian. Forbidden. . . . That was dad. I was not able to socialise after hours – it got harder as we got older. . . . No, I was not allowed to bring home friends. My mother allowed me to, provided my father didn't find out. Very discreet. Very, very discreet. . . . We felt that we were – I don't know if pawns was the right word, but we did what our father told us to do and what he expected us to do. He dressed us. We didn't like what he dressed us in because he would find – most of our clothes came from second-hand brotherhood.*

As a family, they never socialised outside the Polish community and her father's edicts prevented her ever going to class birthday parties, or to school camps or any other activities where she would have contact with non-Polish individuals. Only at school was she allowed any non-Polish interaction. Non Polish friends were not permitted to visit. Not surprisingly she married at 19 to get away from her autocratic father. She married another Polish Catholic whom she met at the Polish community dances. Her husband was a little older than she and insisted she continue her tertiary studies after she was married and before they had children.

PM4OP was always a well-behaved, hard-working child who was good at his school work. He described himself, when he was a schoolboy as a 'goody two shoes'. PF8OP observed that the youngest of her siblings did better at school than she did because they were more adapted to 'the Australian way of life' although she did not elaborate on what her definition of that expression was.

PF7OP was very anxious to be an 'Aussie', although her parents would have liked her to have been a mixture part Polish and part Australian. She refused to speak Polish and even when her parents spoke to her in Polish, she would answer in English. When she first started school, her mother came every day to bring her lunch and check that she was all right, but after a while she stopped her mother coming because it made her different. For lunch she always wanted white bread and vegemite for her lunches, not the rye bread and antipasto which her mother gave her.

## **6.8 School Experiences**

PF2OP found school very difficult because of her poor English language. Her parents wanted to go to the USA, the only destination country they knew about. However, her mother was not accepted on health grounds. Then a friend gave her blood to substitute for her mother's and she was then accepted for Australia. No one knew anything about Australia and had no understanding of what to expect. They only knew that they could not go back to Poland. Her mother allowed nothing English in the house, not even her homework books, so that she constantly felt laughed at because of her poor language skills.

PM4OP found school to be a very pleasant experience, with no violence towards him from the other pupils.

*As you get older, I mean I suppose at St Pat's, you'd mentally question things but you wouldn't open your mouth if you knew what was good for you. . . . [question what?]  
Well. the rigid discipline. I don't know that I ever questioned the religious education part. I mean, you were brought up a Catholic.*

PF8OP had a very violent home life with a drunken father who physically abused her mother and gambled all their money away, forcing her mother to go out to work in order to provide for her daughters. Because of her home situation she just 'floated around' when she was at school. She described herself as just plodding along and could think of nothing in those school years which really stood out. By contrast, PF4AP described her primary schooling as a happy time to be there. She found that her environment was very 'balanced' and she herself was very optimistic. Especially at high school, she was grateful to her class mates who, knowing she would not be allowed to come to any of their birthday parties, asked her just the same. She spoke of feeling trapped by her father.

*I just remember my last birthday, I turned 18, finished VCE exams, and one of the boys phoned me and said, "If you're home in the afternoon, I'll come over and just say happy birthday," which was really sweet. Okay, and so he turned up with another girlfriend at the door, which I was very surprised, and then the whole year level turned up with a little birthday party. . . . Because I didn't have one and they had – so they provided the birthday cake and the drink. They bought the lemonade and the cups, and they all cleared up before my father came home. So the people accepted how my father was very protective and they recognised that he wasn't being hostile, but they could see that I was trapped by him.*

In order for her to have a birthday party, everyone had to collude with her mother to deceive her father. Her father even controlled them to the extent that he went back to Poland to find his son a suitable wife.

For PM1AP, school was a very pleasant experience. He felt he was accepted and he enjoyed studying. He was a very capable student but:-

*Actually, I was quite a fussy sort of student. I wasn't sure if I was always . . . coping, but I tended to be very fussy. For example, I used to rub things out and rub things out. For example, I used to press very hard on the page and rub and rub and rub, and on one occasion I rubbed a hole through the paper. . . . And that became a problem in itself and I was worried I was going to get into trouble.*

One of his fondest memories he always associated with school was the smell of hot meat pies from the canteen.

*The smell of hot pies in the winter! It had that unique smell about them. There was something. . . .*

PM3AP too, always wanted to go to school and to illustrate this fact, he boasted that during all his high school years he had only ever been absent from school on six days. He could not recall ever having felt uncomfortable in the school situation and was very happy being educated. Like most of the Polish parents of these interviewees, his considered that a good education was extremely important. PF5OP also enjoyed school and couldn't really remember any problems, other than that of poor language skills that marred her school years. However, many things in Australia were totally different from her experiences in Poland.

*When we first came to Ballarat we shared a house with two other families - we had a room each and we shared the kitchen and bathroom. I had never seen jelly in my life and one of the ladies made jelly and I can still see it with the lid on it and it was standing outside to set because there was no refrigeration . . . I could see the rain coming down which was why she had a lid on it. I can still see it . . . I did enjoy that jelly – I loved it.*

Her mother, however, was very distressed at the way her First Communion was organised. The little girls in her class all wore cream skirts and cream twin sets. In Poland little girls wore long white dresses and held a candle. She could not send the photos of the First Communion back to relatives in Poland in case they thought she could not afford the correct long white dress. So she redressed her daughter later in the correct Polish attire and had her rephotographed. On one occasion she was asked to a birthday party.

*I remember being asked to a birthday party. I had never been to a birthday party and Mum bought me a gift and a new dress – it was all girls. – must have been 12 or 13 girls and they showed us into this room and they had the table laid out. . . . It was like a dream for me. I had never seen a table laid out like that before and they were playing games and things and they were all dressed up beautifully. I was just amazed . . . and sponges – I'd never seen a sponge before, ever, because Mum and Dad cooked different food. We didn't have sponges in Poland. It was so smooth and melted in your mouth. I'd never had sausage rolls . . . and fairy bread and the sandwiches – they were white bread and all our sandwiches were brown bread. It was just like I was in Fantasy Land – these are the things I remember.*

PF7OP stopped her mother coming to school every lunch time with her food. She felt it made her different when all she wanted was to be ‘one of the gang’. Her mother was reluctant to be separated from her, even to go to school – terrified that harm would come to her.

PM4OP was confident enough to be able to withstand the pressure at school to be part of the ‘footy’ culture:

*. . . football, what did I know about it? And it was cold and it was wet in Ballarat’s winters. . . . I just couldn’t see the point in standing round in the sleet and the hail and the ball never seemed to come down where I was put. And I’d catch colds and eventually I thought, this is stupid, I’m not going to that. So I didn’t turn up. Did you bring a note for not being at sport, Master PM4OP? No, sir. And why didn’t you come? It’s too cold, I’ve got a cold. It was wet, I never get to see the ball. No excuse, you make sure you turn up next Monday. Yeah. All right then. . . . I didn’t turn up. So for the next six weeks I didn’t turn up. I got two straps each Tuesday or whatever for not turning up. And I think in the end, they just gave up on me. I never went.*

To have endured two smacks each week with the dreaded strap rather than give in, attests to the determination of his nature.

## **6.9 Discrimination by Teachers**

PF1AX spoke of two much bigger and older Maltese girls who were put in her class because they could not speak English. She was very upset because they were ridiculed because they knew no English and therefore couldn’t know what to do. What really shocked and upset her

was the fact that it was the Religious Sisters who were Maltese themselves who were doing the ridiculing. (Maltese religious sisters arrived in Melbourne in 1957 to take responsibility for running the Catholic school in North Sunshine). She herself was accepted because she was good at sport but she did not find school a pleasant experience. Only the friends she made ensured that it was not all bad.

PF2OP felt she was always 'laughed at' at school because of her poor language skills and recounted how the Religious Sisters ignored her and never asked her any questions, rather than embarrass her because of her poor language skills. In reality, the sisters discriminated against her even though with the best of intentions. They did not however, offer any extra help with her English.

#### **6.10 Overall Experiences and Preparation for Later Life.**

PM3AP was the only person in his Year 12 class who went on to university. It was not school which was driving him on to university, but his parents who were ambitious for him – for them, education was really important and they went through his school reports with him to make sure he understood where he was going wrong. He did not believe he did well at the HSC exams, because the class was not well taught. The exam did not cover what they had done in class but his results were good enough to get him into the university although they were not excellent. He described himself as a classic case of a weak positive of a Catholic education. PM1AP had three attempts at Year 12.

*I actually had three attempts at Year 12. I attempted the HSC twice and failed and I improved slightly the second time. I'd done well up until then. At least I thought I was doing well. I was probably a B or a C-grade student. Had some A-grade results.*

On being asked if he became nervous doing exams, his reply was:

*Yes. Yes, and I was very slow just to get ideas together. So the third time I actually did TOP, the Tertiary Orientation Program instead and I got through that year. I attempted a Certificate in Business studies, but only got part way through. I had a lot on my plate and then I attempted accounting studies as well at night, but I was also recently married at the time, so working full time, I don't think I really appreciated the amount of effort required with [it] all.*

Although he had won a scholarship to secondary school, many personal problems at home affected his school work once he entered secondary school. Anecdotal evidence from one of his friends alluded to his very violent and abusive father from whom he had to protect his mother.

PM4OP made his parents and parents-in-law very proud when he won a teaching studentship to Monash University. Neither his mother nor his father were very well educated (his mother had been orphaned and in pre-war Poland, orphans were not educated but sent into domestic service at a very early age), but they provided all they needed for school and encouraged all their children to stay at school.

*No such things as hand-me-downs in our family. We all had the right uniform and it was always clean and all that. Anything at all that they can do to make it. . . . They pushed, they pushed. And I mean pushed in terms of encouragement just to stay on and all the rest of it. So that – yeah, it's always – even Mum in particular was very proud of her boys. When they came home and we got a little prize or a certificate. God, she'd be displaying it and all this sort of stuff.*

PM2AP enrolled himself at the local state school at the beginning of Year six. He believed that he learned better at the State School and felt he had a better understanding and was better prepared for high school which he attributed to the teachers and their different methods. This year at the state primary school, he believed affected his later learning because his teacher encouraged him to do well whereas at the Catholic School he could remember no such encouragement. While his parents encouraged him to get a good education, they were not overly ambitious for him. They were however, prepared to stand by him through his university education.

PF6OP believed her lack of English affected her ability to answer questions in her later schooling. This was coupled with the fact that the family had moved nine times in seven or eight years, around western Victoria when she was small. She rarely spoke Polish at home.

*Mum and Dad made us talk to them in English so that they could understand and learn English. So we more or less – for nine years when we lived in St Arnaud, I rarely talked Polish. It was always in English so that Mum and Dad could learn it. [Eventually] My mother could read and talk and everything. And the same with my father.*

She left school after Year 10, although her father had wanted her (indeed all his children) to finish school, to go to university and to become a doctor. Although all the children were in comfortable circumstances, none of them went to the university and, indeed, none of them finished school.

For PF1AX school was not a happy place, except for the friends she played with there. She felt inhibited by the class size and too frightened to put up her hand unless she was positive

the answer was correct. Wrong answers earned a smack on the hand with a piece of linoleum. Rote learning was the only teaching method, regardless of whether the subject was religion, alphabet or tables. She likened it to learning a catechism and bemoaned the fact that the pupils were not taught to think. School was not a good experience. The boys in the class were always in trouble which she believed was due to the fact that it was impossible for boys to sit in one spot all day and learn.

PF4AP's school experiences were coloured by her father's wholehearted dislike of all things Australian. Polish was the only language permitted to be spoken in the home. Her father did not allow her to bring friends home or to play with the neighbourhood children after school. He did tolerate friendship with one girl whose mother was of European background and whose father was an air force officer and provided they were discreet about it she was occasionally allowed to bring this friend home when her father was out. Although she was invited, she was not permitted to go to any of the birthday parties given for her school mates, nor was she allowed to go to the cinema as her father was fixated on her being a virgin when she married and the cinema could be her undoing. School camps were not allowed until Year 12 when her mother pointed out to her father the advantages of the contacts she could make for later business life. She was sad to think of all the wonderful times she missed out on when she was growing up. After school, because her mother was working outside the home, PF4AP peeled potatoes, vacuumed every day, dusted and made beds. Her brother was required to mow lawns and paint the house while their father was at work. The only socialisation she was permitted was with the Polish community – Polish language classes on Saturday morning, dance classes on Friday night, Polish dances on Saturday night and Polish Church on Sundays. When his children went to the Saturday dances, their father went too. He even travelled to Poland to bring back a proper Polish wife for her brother. Not

surprisingly she felt trapped by him and got married at 19 to a Polish man she met at Polish dancing. He was five years older than she and had finished his university degree. She met him in her last year at school and he encouraged her to undertake her degree, which led on to her achieving senior positions in banking and philanthropy.

Table 6.4 (below) shows the responses given by the interviewees when asked if they were satisfied with their academic progress.

Table 6.4  
*Satisfied with the Educational Progress?*<sup>68</sup>

	yes	no	Not known
Male	4	0	-
Female	2	5	1
TOTAL	6	5	1

---

### **6.11 Children's Assessment of their own Abilities**

PF7OP found school a very pleasant experience and believed she learned very well without extra help - even with English. PM2AP did better, in his estimation, at the state school, which he attended on his own initiative, an indication that he was coping well with his school. He ultimately gained a university degree. PM4OP didn't have any problems with school and just 'breezed through'. Sometimes words didn't make much sense to him but he had no problems spelling or reading. He never wanted *not* to be there. PM1AP enjoyed school, especially the challenge of study, and loved to read, especially the classics, and ultimately won a scholarship to secondary school. PM3AP could not remember any sense of

---

<sup>68</sup>Source: Information given during the Polish interviews

struggle at school. He too, won entry to a university, while PF5OP also believed that, other than her English, she had no problems at school and enjoyed being there.

On the other hand, PF1AX, although she learned English comparatively easily, was constantly petrified that she would make a mistake. She was critical of the universal rote learning techniques employed at her school and that the children were not taught to think for themselves. PF6OP believed that her lack of English to answer questions, affected her later learning.

*Even though I spoke it, I couldn't write it properly. There was too many, like – um too many, ah words that are spelt the same, spelt differently but they sound the same, . . . and I could never work out the 'theres', . . . and the 'twos'. And I had a lot of trouble with my English, and pronunciation and working out, um, where to put the commas and the [full stops]. . . . All you did was – if you didn't get it right, you missed out on play time. . . . Well that was what it was like in those days. You know, you got punished for getting it wrong. . . . I enjoyed school. The only thing I didn't like was English. I could never pass English. Didn't matter how hard I tried. . . . You didn't have help like you – you do these days. 'Cause I never passed any, um, grade. . . . If a kid goes and gets you know, [into] strife or anything like that with adding up or whatever, they'd always bring somebody to give them a hand. In those days, you didn't. You just had to struggle the best you could. . . . I mean I used to pass quite good with all the other subjects, it's only English. And because I didn't pass English, I would always fail for the 12 months. So the nuns would just automatically put me up to the next grade. Every year I'd just go up.*

When asked if experiences at primary school affected her later life-learning – she replied:

*Oh well, it'd have to, seeing that I couldn't understand English – it just got worse. . . . I could read that. It's just that I couldn't write it. . . . We used to have to learn spelling. So you'd get, like, you know, 40, 50, 60 words and you'd have to stand around the classroom. And then if you got it wrong, you had to sit down. But while it was right you just stood there until you were the last person. . . . So I mean I could always learn to spell and things like that. It was just putting the words together I had trouble.*

On being asked the same question, PF2OP replied that she only felt confident with her English when she left school. This would have adversely affected her school work.

PF8OP described herself as an 'all-rounder' who could cope well with school work. She could not remember having any difficulty with any subjects, although elsewhere she described herself as plodding along at school, mainly due to the situation at home, with an abusive father who also gambled all their money away. She left school in Year ten for an office job.

## **6.12 Education Levels of Parents**

“The Polish people are also very ambitious. They encouraged their children to study, to climb up the social ladder. Today there are Australian politicians of Polish origin, academics, artists, journalists and writers, lawyers, medical practitioners, managers, and businessmen and women. Poles are everywhere.” (Kaluski, 1985, p. 11).

While Kaluski may well be right about the ambitions, the Polish migrants who came to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s were not themselves, well educated. Much of their lack of

education was attributed to the disruption to education by the war. But as PM3AP pointed out, that although Polish relatives in Poland when he visited, described his father as the best and brightest in the village, he would never have gone to the university even if the war had not intervened, because under the peasant culture it would not have been appropriate. By the time he was born, his parents could read and write in English and also spoke fluent German.

PM1AP's parents were educated in Poland. His father had stayed behind after the rest of the family emigrated so that he could finish his university studies, only to find that his English was not good enough to be allowed into his profession, although his skills were in great demand in Australia. All he needed was to perfect his English. However the need for incoming money for the family ruled out such a course of action. His mother went to secondary school – an unusual academic level for the majority of the Polish families who took part in this research. Although when he was a child his parents' English embarrassed him, they had arrived without any English and fairly quickly they could read newspapers and maintain a conversation. As an adult, he now appreciates how difficult it was for them.

PF7OP explained that her parents (like many others) were unable to help with her homework. Her father was nine and her mother was 11-12 when they left school. Her father's family were very poor and they relied on him to earn money for them. She did comment, however, that she did not believe her father would have enjoyed school very much because he did not like being told what to do. Despite their previous circumstances, her parents taught themselves English, by reading the newspapers. When she went shopping, there were many things her mother had never seen, so her mother picked what she needed by looking at the pictures on the labels of each item. PM2AP'S parents were also not well educated although his mother stayed at school until she was 12. He commented that he was probably a little

disappointed that they didn't try harder to learn English, particularly his mother who only spoke Polish at home.

PM4OP reported that his father never learned English and his mother very little. His mother was illiterate in Polish as well. She and her sister were orphans who were separated and sent out as domestic servants. From the time he was six years of age it was his responsibility to take his parents to their appointments and to be their translator. He was happy when his mother's English improved to a level where she was able to take herself to medical appointments.

PF5OP's parents had both left school in the middle of their primary schooling because they were needed to help with the harvest. This was very common especially for girls who were needed to help with the farm work. The Germans then took her mother, leaving behind four boys, to work as slave labour in Germany. Neither parent learned English very well. PF2OP's mother was literate in Polish to primary school level but refused to learn English in Australia.

PF4AP's father was 11 and in Grade five when the Second World War broke out. During this time he survived on the streets.

*Whenever he could, he would go on journeys to bring food back for the village, for his family which was very small. . . . But I suppose extended family and friends, he just had a responsibility to bring back food for them whenever he could. So he'll just go off on journeys, which is picking fruit off trees as well, and bring it back.*

When, at 19, he arrived in Australia in 1949 as a displaced person, he knew no English. However, he gradually learned to speak English because his workplace involved dealing with

the public, and eventually he could read English well enough to be able to read the newspapers in order to keep up with current events. On the other hand, her mother who was 16 when she left Poland in 1956 as a proxy bride, had completed the equivalent of Year 10/11. She managed to learn English quite quickly after arrival, eventually entering the work force in an administrative position. While they were living in Carlton, she was learning Italian in order to be part of the community.

PF8OP's father could not read English. His daughters read to him, translating the contents into Polish. Her father also needed her English language skills to fill in his tax return forms, which he could not read. It was while reading his mail to him that they discovered he had not been paying the mortgage and their house was scheduled for a mortgagee's auction.

### **6.13 Discipline**

Many of the respondents spoke of what they saw as excessive disciplinary methods employed at the schools they attended. PF6OP spoke of the detentions she received because she was not able to write, but there were other punishments as well.

*If you got caught talking, you'd get the strap. And you had one nun that used to walk around with a long stick that was – well, I don't know, how long's that? [Two feet]. Yeah, it was long. And she'd come across and whack you on the back of the – on top of your shoulder or across the head. And if you happened to have lifted your desk to go and get a pencil or a rubber or – and she didn't like it she'd come up and she'd just slam it on your hand. But they were very cruel, the nuns. . . . Some of them were cruel. Others, like there was one there that I really liked. You'd get into trouble and she'd tell you to stand outside the door, and when the class was finished she would come out and give you the strap. Or she'd get the strap and she'd, um, hit it on the*

*wall or on the seat, and she'd tell you to cry so that the kids thought that you got a belting. But she never touched you. And then you'd have others that were, . . . very cruel.*

PF1AX spoke of how she was reluctant to put up her hand to answer a question in class because she was never positive that she had the answer correct. Any child who gave the wrong answer was given a smack with a piece of linoleum (which she said was very painful). Four times she received such punishment even though she was a very quiet, well behaved child. She commented that some of the boys were hit daily.

When she changed schools from one run by Loretto Sisters to another run by the Mercy sisters, PF5OP she found she was in trouble because she had ruled up her page in the way the Loretto Sisters had taught her, which was not the way the Mercy sisters did it. She was made to buy a new book in order to rule it up the Mercy way. This would have been difficult for such poor migrants to afford. The discipline at the school was very strict, but she expected it and the religious sisters were strict about uniform, too. PF7OP was frightened of the sisters at her school. Some of them were very strict and some she described as 'wicked'. She believed that these religious sisters gave the strap for anything they did not like. She had been sent to the Catholic school however, because of its reputation for strictness.

For not going to football training PM4OP received two strokes with the strap on his hand, every week that he did not attend, which he accepted and knew beforehand that this would be the result of his non-attendance. However, he commented on the physically violent brothers who, when he was in Year 12, laid into the footballers with their fists. As a teacher himself, he commented that some brothers were not suited to being teachers. Of the religious sisters in his primary school, he thought they punished their pupils within the standards of the day.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

However, one of them he called 'strap happy'. Discipline in his Catholic primary school was not excessive but PM2AP described some of the harsher sisters as 'old battle axes'. PM1AP was another who did not think the discipline at school was excessive.

*You had to pay attention. If you didn't pay attention, you were either told off or you'd receive a smack either on the hand or on the backside.*

However, he described one occasion when the teacher had lost control and 'went over the top'.

*There was one chap who'd been misbehaving, . . . leading up to it and one day the teacher, who happened to be a nun, just snapped. We were in [a] little small room which contained all the cleaning gear. . . . It was either the feather duster or the little broom from the sweeping pan, and she picked up one of those and she just laid into him. I have never seen anybody lay into a child. . . . He was crying. He came back to the – he returned to his desk. He was very sore on his backside. He was rubbing his back side. As it turned out, the teacher left not long after.*

He found the whole experience very distressing and he heard later that she was no longer teaching.

PF8OP had first-hand experience of corporal punishment. She 'wagged' school to meet the boys in the toilet when she was only in the preparatory grade. The punishment was very painful and was particularly shocking as there was no corporal punishment at home. The punishment was given in front of the whole prep class and delivered by the priest. The Religious Sisters were observers on this occasion but they reported her to the priest. The next

door neighbour in her street had a son who received so many beatings that he took his son away from the Catholic school. In Grade three and four she had a very nasty teacher who, if she didn't strap you would beat you across the head. Smart children learned which teachers you could not 'rub up the wrong way'. About 20% of the class 'copped it frequently' because they 'rubbed the teacher up the wrong way'. These children received more than their share of beatings.

PF4AP knew that the strap was used as a form of discipline in her school – not by the young Religious Sister teaching her but by the older Sisters. She was glad that she never had any personal experience of it, but she knew it was used.

#### **6.14 Family Relationships**

PF4AP commented that many of her father's Polish friends were card players, and that her father had to supplement his salary by taxi driving, the inference being that he lost money playing cards. She was grateful that university education was free when she and her siblings went to university. Although her father was fixed on a university education for his children, he would certainly not have been able to pay for it.

PF6OP described her father as violent and a drinker until he died. Her mother spent much of her time trying to keep the peace. She couldn't wait to be married so she could leave home. She had to wait till she was 22, an age where the community thought of her as an "Old Maid". When she did get married it was not to a Pole. PM4OP's parents separated when he was 19 and went to live in separate cities in Victoria. His father had never been financially responsible, and his mother managed quite well on her own. Despite the separation, they were never divorced. Although his parents did not insist, he married a Polish girl he met at a Polish camp when he was 14.

PF7OP had a father who did anything that was bad. He and her mother did not get on very well and there was much fighting. Her father was always a heavy drinker and her mother was always leaving him and then coming back. Her father was not violent when he had been drinking, he just became very silent and she feared him. She perceived him as the person who hurt her mother. As a family, especially as she grew older, socialising as a family became less frequent, which her mother blamed on her father's drinking, which increased as he grew older. PF8OP also explained that they had no contact with the Polish community because they couldn't take their father out socially because of his behaviour.

In what the interviewee perceived to be a gross understatement, PM1AP explained that many personal problems at home affected his school work. The impression given, although not expressed in words, was that his father was a very violent man, and he saw it as his duty to protect his mother from his violent behaviour.

### **6.15 Prejudice**

PF7OP was one of the few Polish children who mentioned any sort of discrimination. As she recalled there was some name calling, but her much older sister was subject to a lot more of it. An unusual form of prejudice was that experienced by PF7OP's mother.

*Mum would try to involve herself with the school fund-raising. She would make cakes and things, but they were not the kind of cakes the Australians ate, so we would end up taking a box of fruit or something.*

She apparently had some sort of barter system with the local Italian fruit growers.

### **6.16 Self-imposed Discrimination**

PF4AP never socialised outside of the Polish community. She was not permitted to socialise with her classmates outside of school hours, nor was she permitted to go to the cinema or go on holidays - even as a family. All this because her father did not think Australians were suitable companions for his family. She regarded it as fortunate that the man she wanted to marry was Polish and met with her father's approval. She married at 19 as soon as she left school – in large part to get away from her controlling father. Discrimination by others towards her was not mentioned.

It was PF2OP's mother who would not allow her to have anything that was not Polish in the house, while PF5OP's father vetted her friendships, particularly with boys. They had to be Polish and Catholic. His reason? He didn't want to not be able to communicate with them. He never learned to speak English very well.

### **6.17 Other Problems Faced by Polish Migrant Children**

These Polish children had very hard lives which must have impinged on their school lives. Of the 12 interviewed, eight had fathers who had been taken from their families to work as slave labourers for the Germans, or were prisoners of war or had been in a German concentration camp. Seven had mothers who had endured similar privations. Three mentioned heavy drinking and three spoke of violent fathers who hurt their mothers, (although only one couple separated after 20 years of marriage) while two mentioned card playing which ate into the family income. Another spoke of how her father was always involved in anything bad. Four of them were latch-key children, at home alone while their parents worked and another's mother who worked night shift, was asleep when he got home from school. The parents worked long hours and five of the interviewees mentioned either double shifts or more than one job. Four of them commented on the ill health of their

parents, which led to early retirement or chronic health problems and comparatively early deaths. This was attributed to their experiences in Europe during the Second World War. Five of the children told of how husbands and wives were separated in the migrant camps when they arrived in Australia. While some of them were housed in different huts, others were separated by long distances as the fathers found work. The fathers were only able to get back to see their families at weekends and if they were trying to build a home for their families, in their spare time at the weekends, it might only be Christmas and Easter. The women left in the hostels often found seasonal work fruit picking or canning in the factories leaving their children with one of their number who had a small baby and could not work otherwise. (They saw disturbing parallels to what the Germans had done to them in Europe.)

#### **6.18 Still in the Church**

Of the twelve respondents in this part of the study, only two maintained regular contact with the Catholic Church and went to Mass regularly. Three volunteered that they had no contact with the Church at all anymore and the remaining seven did not answer the question. Those who no longer attended Church did not comment on any connection between their lapsed practice and their school experiences.

#### **6.19 Conclusion**

The stories the Polish children told were in the large part, very sad. For most, their parents' experiences during the war were so dreadful that they were scarred by them for the rest of their lives. Almost without exception, these children arrived at school with very limited, if any, English language. No help was afforded them and they struggled on as best they could. No help was available from their parents, and the school was not able to help much either. The very crowded and cramped conditions under which they learned, the rote learning which was all that was available, the class sizes, and the sometimes vicious disciplinary actions to

which the teachers resorted, would have been enough to kill a desire to learn in many children. It all seemed to be accepted as part of being educated. Many a child could have perhaps been very critical of an education gained under such circumstances, but predominantly these children claimed to have enjoyed their school lives and really had very few complaints.

Their experiences of school and of life in Australia were very difficult. They experienced an almost total lack of understanding by those people in authority at the school, who seemingly did nothing to ease their way. Their home lives all seemed very similar and very difficult as well.

Their stories demonstrate that there are serious gaps and insufficient research into the understanding and knowledge of the overall experiences of migrant children in the Catholic primary schools in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s, with reference to racism and ethnocentrism, at the time, ethnicity, cultural identity, teachers' attitudes towards migrant children, migrant children's experiences in Catholic schools, their adjustment to the schools' environment, and impact of these factors on migrant children's academic achievement. Their rich and colourful stories explain what a Catholic primary school education was like in the 1950s and 1960s for Polish migrant children. As none of the Polish children had been to school before they began their education in Australia, they had no comparisons to make and were not having to learn English at a later age than 5 or 6. Their parents' ambitions for them, in the main, gave them great encouragement to do well at school and to become the best that they could be.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

In the following chapter an attempt will be made to ascertain the similarities and the differences between the experiences of the Polish and those of the Maltese children, described in the previous chapter.

## **Chapter Seven - Differences in Experiences**

---

### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the differences between the experiences of the migrant children who attended a Catholic primary school between 1950 and 1970, the period when most of the post-World War Two migrants arrived in Australia, are explored. Using the data presented and analysed in the previous three chapters, the characteristics of each ethnic group are first compared to ascertain how much variety is evident within one ethnic group and in which areas of their experience it is most evident. If there is significant variety within the ethnic group, it will be necessary to determine how much, if at all, the experiences at school were a result of the variety of their migrant experience, and how much was a result of the conditions in Australian Catholic schools. Where the experiences within an ethnic group are quite similar, the two ethnic groups are compared to determine whether there are similarities or differences between the two. Where there are differences between the two groups the evidence collected in the interviews is probed to ascertain the reason for these differences. To complete the analysis of the interviews, the experiences of the teaching sisters are thoroughly investigated to find out their interpretation of the school experiences at the time and to take note of any pertinent comments they may have made regarding their perceptions of the two ethnic groups being studied.

### **7.2 Migration History**

Quite early in the research, it became apparent to the researcher that there is no such thing as 'The Migrant Experience' but rather a broad range of migrant experiences. Quite apart from the individual differences that any person's own personality and circumstances contribute to their experiences, there has emerged information which undeniably showed that the ethnic

group to which an individual belonged, coloured the way immigrants adapted to and were accepted into life in Australia when they came in the 1950s and 1960s.

### **7.3 The Catholic Church's Response**

Interviews showed that for many of the migrants, the Church was neither empathetic nor helpful when they arrived in Australia. There was little evidence of the enactment of Pope Pius XII Magna Charta for Migrants (*Exsul Familia, 1952*) within the Australian Catholic Church. Migrants were, at times, reluctantly allowed a priest from their own culture and who spoke their language, but these priests were placed under the supervision of the local priests who were unwilling to share part of their fiefdoms (and the money associated with them) with the migrant priests. Several of the interviewees commented on this situation. (PM3AP) spoke of the parish priest (later convicted of paedophilia) who was not very helpful to the Polish priests, because he resented the money, which he believed was rightfully his and which was given by the Poles to the Polish priests. He punished the Polish community by trying to keep their children out of his school. PM3AP was forced to repeat a year at kindergarten before he was allowed a place at the school. Another Polish child (PF6OP) spoke of the State School principal reporting her family to the parish priest who insisted that she and her sisters change schools and go to the Catholic School. MF9OM was very angry when the parish priest also made her transfer to the Catholic School when he discovered that she was attending a State School, where she was happy and doing well. Her very religious parents could not argue with the priest and she believed she was forced to attend a school which was not of the same standard as the State school, and where there were very large numbers of children and little equipment. The move meant that for her very poor parents an expensive uniform had to be bought, school fees had to be found and a bus fare was also necessary.

A number of interviewees commented on the fact that they had no idea who St. Patrick was and could not understand the need for a special holiday, when the Maltese in particular, had St. Paul as their patron saint. The need to learn Irish dancing was also incomprehensible to them. All of this was seemingly in direct contradiction to the aims and decrees of *Exsul Familia* (1952). The Catholic Migration Committee's recommendation that the religious needs of migrants should be cared for by priests of their own nationality, language and culture, worked against the Australian government (and the Australian Church's) declared policy of assimilation. Although the 1979 Conference of Major Clerical Superiors endorsed the utilisation of ethnic Vicars, by the 1980 conference, this was withdrawn as it had been interpreted as a personal criticism of the local priest.

#### **7.4 Teaching Methods**

The teaching methods used by the various orders, stemmed from their own training under the Ursuline tradition of utility. It emphasised traditional behaviour, with the individual being submissive to God. Some of the sisters, themselves, felt frustrated at this method of teaching which they explained was necessitated by the huge numbers they were teaching in their classes. R3 commented on the rote learning method as did several of the interviewees (PF1AX, MF1OM, MF9OM). Sturrock (1995) pointed out that this method of teaching did not encourage a spirit of enquiry, a process of understanding or the ability to join in an open discussion, a view which these people endorsed. As MF1AM suggested, they were 'schooled not taught'. These comments by both sisters and pupils, endorse Selleck's (1978) comments describing the rigid adherence to what he described as an antiquated 19<sup>th</sup> century teaching system. The Melbourne Education Office in its 1958 report, also criticised what it saw as 'outmoded and unsatisfactory over-regimented methods', while Doyle (1978) also commented on the proportion (approximately one-sixth) of the teachers in Catholic secondary

schools, who had no formal training. As there was little consistency in the teaching practices or the geographic locations of the schools within the state, it is not surprising that the sisters had very different experiences with their migrant pupils. To a large extent, the pupils' experiences were affected by the method of learning (eg MF1AM, MF7OM, MF9OM, MF6OM, MF11OM, MF3AM, MM6AM, PM2AP, PM3AP). PF1AX suggested that the main reason so many of the boys received such vicious corporal punishment was largely because they were made to sit still all day at a desk – something little boys find impossible to do.

The teacher training for the Religious varied considerably depending on the order. R2 described, not only her own training experiences but also how she had been involved with training younger lay teachers in her school, later in her career. R3 described her very inadequate preparation for teaching – something she had never wanted to do and which was not remotely like the reason for which she had joined her order. R5 and R6 on the other hand attained degrees and their order supported them as they both worked towards Master's degrees in Education. However, their order seems more the exception rather than the rule.

### **7.5 Differing Maltese and Polish Experiences**

There were huge differences between the Maltese and the Poles both in their pre-migration experiences as well as in their post-migration experiences. The Maltese have had a history of migration over many years, dictated by the comparatively small size of their islands. They have needed to maintain the islands' population under 300,000 because of the lack of resources, especially water, experienced on the islands. Prior to the Second World War migration was mainly to the north coast of Africa. In almost all cases, the Maltese were sponsored out to Australia by friends or family who took them into their own homes (which were already overcrowded) until they were able to move out into places of their own, (See

Table 5.2). Very soon after the war, the Maltese and Australia governments reached an agreement about the migration of the Maltese as, after the devastating consequences of the war, there would not be sufficient employment to maintain so many people in Malta itself. The Maltese government helped to heavily subsidise the transport costs for those who migrated and to financially help the families they left behind until such time as the migrants were settled.

The Poles had no such history of migration other than seasonal migration to neighbouring European countries for work and the only changes to their homeland seemed to be as the boundaries changed with the acquisition by neighbouring countries of parts of their country for their own benefit. The Poles came as part of the Refugee scheme which was established after the war. They arrived as government sponsored migrants, required to work for the Australian government for two years, mainly labouring in large infrastructure projects at the governments choosing. (See Table 5.2).

Of those Poles who were interviewed, all had either been born in Australia or had arrived when they were very young, at some time between 1949 and 1954. The Maltese on the other hand, had mostly been born outside of Australia and most of them had arrived at some time between 1950 and 1970, (Table 5.1, Table 6.1).

Both groups had endured terrible conditions during the Second World War. For the Maltese, this led to the entire population being awarded the George Cross by the British, 'to bear witness to the heroism and devotion of its people,' for their bravery in the face of repeated attacks by the Germans, on the strategically placed Maltese islands (BBC news 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1942). (The George Cross is woven into the flag of Malta). The British had serviced their naval fleet on the island of Malta and had used it as a stepping off point for their military

personnel, launching ground attacks on both Italy and North Africa and airstrikes on neighbouring islands. Despite the privations, the Maltese had remained as family groups although some of the men were separated from their families who were sent away from the places where bombing attacks had happened. The Poles, on the other hand, had either been torn from their families by the Polish army to serve in the defence of their country and quickly ended up in POW camps, or by the Germans who removed all those young people who were teenagers not yet old enough for enlistment, to work as forced labour in German factories or on German farms. Although the decree came from the Nazi high command, that all those who were employed as forced labour had to be fed and housed to a minimum standard, this was never policed and many labourers were starved and beaten and were housed in sub-standard conditions (Kruk, 1973, 1977).

Many of the Poles only found quite close relatives many years after the war had finished, in part because of the dislocation of families in Poland and in part because of the fear that families in Poland might be targeted for reprisals for having families outside the communist influence. Almost all of the Poles came as refugees from the war, having lived in refugee camps in Europe (mainly in Italy and Germany), and in most cases, having met and married in the camps. They had been very young when taken from their families, and were still quite young when they were in the refugee camps. For this reason, most of the Polish interviewees were born in Australia, when their parents were on the way to becoming settled. The Poles were sponsored by the Australian government at the request of the international refugee bodies who were working to assist the homeless and stateless after the war. They arrived with nothing – no families, no skills and no money. They were placed in migrant hostels, frequently with their wives and children being housed in country towns many miles from where the men were working, labouring for the most part on projects of the government's

choosing for an obligatory two years. After that the families were expected to survive on their own. The interviewees described conditions of extreme poverty and hardship and many of their parents emerged as psychologically damaged people with much drunkenness and violence, mainly among the men. Gambling was common and some wives had to go to work in order to have something with which to feed their children, as their husbands gambled or frittered their wages away (PM40P, PF4AP, PF7AP, PF8OP). There was no extended family to offer help in times of crisis, but the Polish community cohesion was very strong and they all worked together building each other's houses and providing social outlets for non-English speaking people to overcome their loneliness. Many of the older Poles never learned to speak English at all, ever after many years in Australia. The researcher found it interesting that the only Polish child interviewed whose parents were one of the few who learned to speak good English, lived in a small rural town where nobody spoke Polish. These parents waited for the children to come home from school each day to find out what they had learned so that the parents could learn it too (PF60P). Those Polish parents who spent most of their lives only in contact with their Polish community did not have the same need to learn English.

Another of the hardships which the Poles endured was that they knew they could not go home to Poland, even for a visit, because of the perceived risk that they would not be allowed to leave the country to return to Australia. They also feared that their presence might provoke Communist government repercussions on their relatives.

The Maltese, too were, in the main, very poor when they arrived in Melbourne but in almost all cases they were sponsored to Australia by friends and relatives, who, in many instances, opened their own homes to provide short term accommodation for those who had newly arrived. The Maltese had been leaving Malta for many years because of the limited resources on the islands, so the idea of migrating to another country was not an unknown concept.

They also had the advantage of being able to return to Malta to visit friends and relatives whenever they had the means and the inclination. Many families which were very large in Malta, had numerous siblings and cousins here in Australia, and following the Maltese tradition of familial support, there was plenty of help for new arrivals. Although the privations caused by the war, such as the bombings and the hunger when food supplies were exhausted and relief could not get through, were certainly not insignificant, they had not experienced the cruel physical treatment, with no familial support that many of the Polish immigrants had endured. To further aid their migration, the Maltese government had reached an agreement with the Australian government very early in the Australian migration process, to facilitate the immigration of the migrants and to help pay their passages in a similar way that British migration was facilitated. There was very little prospect for work for young unmarried men immediately after the war in Malta and the government needed to have fewer mouths to feed and house. With each shipload of migrants leaving Malta, the church sent a priest to look after their spiritual needs and to help them to settle in their new country. His role was to help them, particularly those who were not well educated, to deal with officialdom in Australia. Many of the groups that came out to Australia came from the same villages, particularly in Gozo, which gave them further support and they congregated in the same areas in Melbourne, frequently in Sunshine where they were close to the factories where they could find work (Catholics of Maltese and Polish ancestry, by parish, Archdiocese of Melbourne, 2001)<sup>69</sup>. Gozo had the reputation of having more illiterate people because they were predominately an agricultural region and saw no need for education. In

---

<sup>69</sup> Source: Dixon, R., These figures were given to the researcher by Dr Robert Dixon, chief researcher for the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference. He printed them for the researcher from special cross references that the Bishops' Conference had commissioned from the ABS for their own research. They are not publicly available.

the villages only the lawyer, the doctor and the priest were educated and were very much respected. The policeman had a certain level of respect because he could at least read and write (Sultana, 1991).

Family sizes for the Polish refugees were much smaller than those of the Maltese families. It was unusual for the Polish families to have more than two children, but for the Maltese, the family sizes tended to be much larger than two children (Table 6:3, p. 244, Table 5:3, p. 188). Maltese families usually had a considerable extended family with which, in true Maltese fashion, they had frequent contact, whereas the fractured lives the Poles had endured meant that families were split asunder and the parents came as a single couple without any form of extended family on which they could rely for support. If, for any reason they were struggling, there was no one to help and no financial back-up in case of job losses or illness. The Maltese families only rarely socialised outside the extended family.

While the Maltese had the luxury of making a decision as to whether they stayed in Malta or migrated, the Poles had no such opportunity. They had to leave the refugee camps and the only choice was to where they wanted to migrate. Even then, their first choice was not necessarily the one they were granted (Kruk, 1977, PF2OP).

## **7.6 Birthplace of the Interviewees**

Very few of the Polish interviewees were born outside Australia. The few that were, were not born in Poland but in refugee camps in Europe. Most of the children were born in Australia and thus had no experience of any other educational regime with which to compare the one in which they found themselves in Australia.

In contrast, 15 of the 22 Maltese interviewees had commenced school in Malta (or somewhere else around the Mediterranean) before they immigrated to Australia. Those

children who emigrated when they were approximately ten years old or more, did not seem to do as well in school in Australia as those who were younger. Their language skills were less well developed, and some of them were required to spend considerable amounts of time helping their gender appropriate parents with the domestic situations at home (MM4OM, MM7OM, PM4OP, PF2OP, PF4AP, MM2OM, MM6AM, MF9OM, MF5OM, MF7OM, MF8OM).

Although the education of both the Polish and the Maltese parents was severely interrupted by the Second World War, the teaching sisters almost without exception, perceived the Polish families as being ‘cultured’ with noticeable skills in the arts and athletics (R6, R5, R3). The children’s ball skills were particularly commented on. On the other hand, the Maltese families were perceived to have had no interest in either the arts or in sport, particularly for girls, resisted them joining in and regarded such pursuits as a waste of time for their children (R4, MF2OM). The sisters never mentioned ‘Maltese’ and ‘culture’ in the same sentence, but there were many comments about how very family oriented the Maltese families were (R3, R4).

With their large workloads, many of the sisters had very little contact with their school families outside the school, and really had very little idea of their circumstances.

## **7.7 Schooling**

### **7.7.1 Paying fees**

The payment of fees was not easy for either of the migrant groups. They were all poor, with their finances badly affected by the World War which had been preceded by the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Polish interviewees commented that many of them had not been aware at the time that their parents were finding it difficult to pay the weekly amount. As adults they realised how difficult it must have been for their parents and were grateful that

they were not made to feel responsible for the family having to go without and that their parents did not grumble. Some families paid their fees in kind and preserved their self-esteem in this way. If anything was going to suffer in the families, because of their poverty, it was not going to be their education.

The Maltese were more inclined to complain about the fees. Those who were taken from the local state primary school at the insistence of the parish priest complained about the additional costs at the Catholic school. This included the costs of the more expensive school uniforms as well as the tuition costs. Their families were much larger and feeding and clothing large families were their prime concerns, not their education. Secondary school education was impossible for many families who could not afford the higher fees at secondary school and whose parish priest had insisted that none must go to the state high school, only to the Catholic secondary school. One boy who wanted to go on to secondary school was obliged to go to work at 12 years of age in order to pay his own school fees. He came from a family of nine children. Some families made contributions to the costs, while others found the Religious Sisters very unsympathetic and with no understanding of the financial problems facing the families. One father took his child away because he felt the sisters just wanted more and more (MF90M). Taft (1975) researched the differences between the attitudes of the Poles and the Maltese towards education and found that educational ambitions were much lower amongst the Maltese, and their ambitions for their children academically were very modest. This may have had some bearing on their attitudes towards the payment of fees. Taft's research and that of a number of others (Cauchi, (1990), Gauchi, (1983) Taft and Cahill, (1978), Meade (1981), San Cassia (1983)) also commented on the lack of academic ambition the Maltese seemed to have for their children. A number of the Maltese interviewees endorsed this lack of academic ambition their parents had for their

children (MF4AM, MM8OM for his sisters but not him, MM7OM, MF11OM, MF5OM, MF10OM, MF9OM, MF6OM MF13OM, MF6AM, MM4OM). Several of the Maltese interviewed had parents who were illiterate in Maltese, a reflection on the fact that education was not compulsory in Malta until 1947.

Despite what the children reported about the religious sisters' behaviour over the unpaid fees, the sisters had different recollections. Two of the sisters who taught in the country, stated that they did not harass parents who could not pay their fees and commented that the parents produced money much more readily when they knew specifically what it was for (for example, for a reader). The sister who had least in the way of support or equipment commented that as the school itself was so poor they did expect the parents to pay something towards the exercise books and writing materials, even though the sisters purchased the cheapest quality items at bulk prices. Where the family had no-one working, any payment was waived and the school absorbed the costs. No suggestion was made that children/families were harassed or humiliated. Understanding for people who were desperately poor was their recollection.

### **7.7.2 Discipline**

Both groups spoke of the brutality and cruelty of some of the sisters. The punishments included beating with sticks, slapping with a flexible piece of linoleum, desk lids slammed on hands and so on. Even the well behaved children received physical punishment on occasions. The children were discouraged by the threat of punishment from attempting to answer questions. A wrong answer earned you punishment (PF1AX, MF3AM). One of the respondents commented that the boys, ill equipped by their nature to sit still while lessons were rote learned by an immobile class, received a much higher level of 'strapping' than the girls did. One Maltese mother came to school to complain about the excessive treatment

meted out to her son (MF3AM), while another parent took his son away because of what he perceived as gross cruelty (MF3AM).

R2 knew that some people considered her hard as far as discipline was concerned but for her, good discipline was imperative and usually took the form of ‘a clip over the ears’ for those needing discipline. That parents objected to this form of punishment is surprising as at this time a ‘belting’ for disobedient children, delivered by their parents was an acceptable form of punishment. The ‘wooden spoon’ was the punishment of choice for many families. Very naughty boys ‘got the strap’ a form of punishment in Catholic schools that even Protestant children had heard of. R2’s attitude was that if parents did not like the sort of discipline she enforced and the method she employed to deliver it, they didn’t have to put up with it. There were plenty of other children to fill the space if they left. As families were threatened with excommunication (MF9OM) if they sent their children to a state school, it seems that parents were placed in an impossible situation.

One of the Maltese interviewees who had been educated at this time, later became a teaching sister herself. She described her fellow religious on the one hand as ‘generous, welcoming and hospitable’ but there were others about whom she used the terms ‘insensitive, brutish, terrible and violent’ (MF1AM). These characteristics she attributed to the huge work-loads and frustrations the sisters experienced in trying to deal with those conditions as well as the large non-English speaking members of their classes. As she pointed out, experiences of excessive punishment are the ones pupils remember unfortunately, because of their horror for a little child. MF1AM pointed out that “whether you’re a spectator or at the direct end of it, that’s what you remember”. The expectation of punishment if they did not provide the correct answer to a question the sister asked, prevented many of the children from ever putting up their hands to try to answer (MF2OM).

R4 commented that due to the Church's policy of staffing schools with every available female religious, regardless of their original intentions of entering the order, a significant number of the teaching sisters should never have been allowed to teach. They were temperamentally unsuited to the profession and in their frustration tended to mete out excessive and inappropriate punishments, giving all sisters the same reputation.

### **7.7.3 Learning English and the Australian way**

The lack of assistance to learn English was universal. Neither the Poles nor the Maltese had any help with learning in an environment where English was the second language for the families. Several interviewees mentioned that it was the individual's own responsibility to learn English as quickly as they could (MM8OM, MM2AM, MM3OX, PF5OP). Class sizes and the teachers' lack of understanding of how to teach English as a second language, resulted in those who were a little slower than the majority of the class and who could not keep up, just being left behind (R3). In the interviews with the teaching sisters, some of them mentioned organising after school and lunch time classes for those for whom English was not the language spoken at home (R6). Some also arranged classes for the parents who were illiterate in English. These arrangements were not mentioned by the interviewees and as far as adult classes were concerned, it is difficult to imagine how parents who were both working and who accepted overtime whenever they could to augment the family finances, could possibly find the time to attend. The only parents who were mentioned as being proactive in trying to learn English were those who were the only Polish/non-English speaking people in a small Western District country town, in Victoria (PF60P). They couldn't wait for their children to come home from school so the parents could learn what the children had learned that day. Without English, they had no way of communicating, except with each other.

Almost no help was given to children to help them with their English. It was expected that they would 'pick it up' from the other children. Many of the children spoke of the difficulties they experienced learning English (MM3OX, MM4OM, MF4AM). Those who were older found it much more so (MM4OM, MM7OM, MF10OM). Even those children who were able to speak reasonable English did not write well. PF6OP explained that although she could speak English, spelling in particular was extremely difficult. Words like to/too/two were her undoing. She passed well in every other subject but English, although her handwriting was never very good. As very few of the Polish children interviewed had been born before their parents arrived in Australia, speaking English was not such an issue for them. With many of their parents non-English speakers (and in fact many were illiterate in their first language) for both Polish and Maltese children, help at home to hear their reading was non-existent which for many of these children meant that a love of reading was not developed. Without this love of reading, the Catholic Education Office, (1958) believed that Catholic children would suffer at the secondary and tertiary level. MM4OM and PF6OP endorsed this comment, claiming that they had suffered in the choice of their career because of their lack of literacy. Frequently, the older children were encouraged to leave school early in the large Maltese families, because their wages from a job were needed to supplement the family budget. In effect the older children subsidised the younger ones' education.

Many of the Maltese spoke of the difficulties they experienced with mathematics. Some of them were deliberately steered in the direction of humanities courses as their teachers perceived them to not have a natural affinity with maths, a perception the pupils themselves endorsed (MM4OM, MM7OM, MM8OM, MF13OM).

R2 was quite convinced that the migrant children learned English in order to be able to play with the other children – a great incentive – which enabled them to learn English very

quickly. The English they learned from their playmates was colloquial and she believed the children ‘anglicised’ themselves very quickly. It does not say a great deal about her powers of observation, that she did not notice the numbers of immigrant children who were falling by the wayside educationally because of their lack of English competence. R3 placed an English speaking child next to one who could speak English so they could learn from each other, because class sizes were so huge she could not help them herself. R1 volunteered that the children who arrived in Australia when they were old enough to be placed in Grades 4, 5, 6 found learning English much harder – an opinion with which those Maltese immigrants who arrived at this stage in their education could only concur (MM7OM, MM4OM). Only the sisters who began a new school in the western suburbs were able to make any sort of changes to their curriculum to accommodate the non-English speaking children and that was because all the children were non-English speaking. Until the children were competent with the language, these sisters believed that the formal curriculum taught in other schools could not be attempted (R4). Such accommodations for non-English speaking children are not mentioned anywhere else in the research interviews. Lucky the children who were so educated! These sisters taught as many as 26 different ethnicities in their classes.

Some of the Maltese complained about the teaching in Australia and were critical of the time wasted, as they saw it, on arts subjects and on sport, particularly for girls, that the standard was not as high and that the children did not work as hard (MM4OM, MF10OM, MF5OM, MF7OM, MM2OM, MF1AM, MM6AM). Two of the Maltese boys realised when quite young, that the way to acceptance in Melbourne was through sport – one in football and the other in swimming (MM1OM, MM5OX). The researcher was impressed with their insight when they were so very young. The Maltese seemed to accept the Australian way of life and just coloured it with their own Maltese touches, but some of the Poles were quite different.

There were parents who fought against the 'Australianization' of their children by forbidding English to be spoken in the home and refusing to allow the children to participate in extra-curricular activities with the Australian born community (PF4AP, PF2OP). This, in part, worked against the parents who were estranged through language from their grandchildren and whose children left home as soon as they could. This, in the case of the girls, was often through early marriage.

Class sizes were one of the problems which made it impossible for the sisters to do very much for their non-English speaking pupils. Slower children could not be helped because of the sheer numbers which prevented the teachers from moving easily about the classroom. Migrant children who could not keep up because of their lack of English were left to cope on their own, (or ask the child next to them). For this reason R3 instituted a policy of alternating English and non-English speaking children in the desks. Several of the sisters commented that the non-English speaking children learned the language from the other children, surprisingly quickly, and with very little help from their teachers (R3). One of the sisters told how she did not set homework because there was no-one at home to help, and she had to hear every child read every day, herself (R5). This enabled the migrant children to hear themselves speak English every day and for the sister to help them improve their pronunciation. The class sizes and the lack of sufficient equipment necessitated the rote learning of all subjects, which hardly encouraged an inquiring mind. Enough work to keep the children occupied for a whole day, had to be written on the blackboard before school, meaning that the teachers had to arrive very early at school to achieve this (R3).

## **7.8 School Experiences**

### **7.8.1 Discrimination by teachers**

Some of the Maltese complained that the teachers' expectations of their abilities were very low (MF5OM, MM2OM, MM9AX). One interviewee reported that the headmaster at his school, told the boys that digging up the school oval, which he had set them to doing, was as good a vocation as they were ever likely to achieve. Even when they demonstrated what would normally be considered as remarkable achievements (ie the ability to speak five languages or the completion of work which was deserving of a 'star') they were not valued and dismissed as not relevant or 'copying' (MF4AM, MM2OM). They were readily dismissed as not being literate in English, an assumption which, in some cases was just not true (MF1AM). There seemed to be no way of convincing the teachers that their assumption of illiteracy in English was not so. By way of contradiction, many teachers assumed the children had some English because of the British colonisation of Malta since 1800. The children could not win. Even at sport, it was not believed that immigrant children could be competent at Australian Rules football and if they trained with the team, they were never selected to do anything other than be a reserve player (MM1OM). Others complained that they were not interested in Australian sport but were compelled to attend training sessions even though their sporting interests and prowess were for soccer, the European game (PM4OP).

Poor English lead to some of the Polish children being ridiculed because of their poor communication skills. Fortunately, most of the Polish children found their school years a very happy time, on the whole. One Polish girl spoke of how distressed she was when other children were ridiculed by the religious sisters for their lack of English (PF1AX). What shocked her even more was the fact that sisters who were doing the ridiculing, came from

non-English speaking backgrounds themselves, and should have been expected to know how difficult it was to learn a language which was not the one spoken at home, proficiently enough to be able to understand it as the language of instruction.

Even when the sisters were trying to be kind to the immigrant children, by not asking them questions rather than calling attention to their poor English skills, they were treating them differently to their other pupils and so exercising a form of discrimination (PF2OP).

None of the teaching sisters were aware of any form of discrimination on their part towards their pupils but several spoke of the need for the children to learn the “Australian Way”. This would have been accepted practice in those days of an official assimilation policy. This attitude, under multiculturalism, was gradually abandoned, but at the time it was promoted, it was a form of discrimination. One of the criticisms of the Maltese children and their parents was that the parents seemed to want to keep their children apart from the other ethnic groups, which the sisters saw as undermining their policy of all in together, regardless of ethnicity (R4).

### **7.8.2 Discrimination by other children**

Some of the Maltese interviewees were subjected to racist name calling, but only one reported feeling so bullied by some of his peers in secondary school that he wanted to deny his Maltese heritage (MM8OM). Two reported being called ‘*darkie*’, having been mistaken for an aboriginal child (MF6OM and MF5OM), another spoke of being called ‘wog’ and ‘dago’ and being made to feel different (MF2OM). In a school where there were few migrant children, one boy complained that he was excluded from playground activities because he was ‘different’ (MM5OX). Others who had parents of mixed ethnicity complained that they were judged on their appearance rather than their abilities (MM9AX). Feeling as though you belonged to one racial group and looking like another was a difficult situation for some of the

interviewees (MM9AX). The Polish interviewees mentioned no such problem with their peers. Most were keen to point out that the children always played together as a group rather than along ethnic lines.

### **7.8.3 Overall experiences and preparation for later life**

In the main, the Maltese interviewees did not regard themselves as ‘very bright’ (MM6AM, MF13OM, MM9AX, MM5OX, MM4OM, MM3OX, MM7OM, MF12OM, MF11OM). Several of them used this expression to describe their school achievements, although some of them went on to tertiary education and careers in a professional role. Several of the religious sisters who were interviewed also commented that they did not believe the Maltese children, on the whole, were very intelligent (R3, R4). It would seem that these children tended to be slow developers. Two boys who had arrived in Australia when they were in late primary school, believed that they had missed out on an adequate education, because they were too old at that age, to learn English quickly enough to be able to utilise it for their school work (MM7OM, MM4OM). Both boys came from large families where their parents were illiterate and did not appear to value education. The immediate salary in the hand was of much more use to the family unit than book learning.

The Polish children, in the main, did not really have much of a problem with their school work. “The Polish people are also very ambitious. They encouraged their children to study, to climb up the social ladder”, (Kaluski, (1983), p.11). All the males involved in the study were quite satisfied with their educational progress, but only 25% of the females were as satisfied. Little can be deduced from these figures however, as the sample numbers were very small. Some of the religious sisters who taught Polish immigrant children commented on how very cultured were the Polish families in their school (R6, R4). In one incident the sister described the Polish woman who came in her work clothes to parent-teacher meetings

because she did not have time to go home to change beforehand. As she worked in the wire factory in the town, she was quite dirty, in particular with very dirty hands due to the manual labour at which she was employed. This woman, during the evening, sat down at the piano and played with consummate skill, the most beautiful classical music (R6). It would appear that much of their culture was suppressed during the war (and no doubt not appreciated by many Australian workers who at that period in Australian history were not known for their appreciation of what Europeans would have recognised as culture).

Both groups were critical of the rote learning methods that were employed at that time for their education. As one female stated “we were schooled, not educated” (MF10M, MF90M) and were certainly not expected to think for themselves. For both groups their physical surroundings were not conducive to good learning. Overcrowding, shortages of equipment, including books and other writing materials, all combined to give them a very poor education, especially by today’s standards. That some of them went on to university at all is quite remarkable. Even the sisters were aware of the limitations of the teaching methods they were enforced to employ, but the sheer size of the classes and the lack of adequate funding for the schools, necessitated rote learning. These comments endorsed Angus’s (1982) description of Catholic education which allowed no critical debate, and where rote learning was the only way.

#### **7.8.4 Attitudes of parents to education and their ambitions for their children**

It was here that the biggest difference between the two groups was most evident. The two groups of parents, Polish and Maltese had very different expectations for their children. Taft (1975) conducted a study to discover the educational aspirations of immigrant school children (Table 5.5, p. 230). Of the 21 Maltese students who answered the questionnaire, not one expected to continue on at school beyond Year 10. One hundred per cent of the Jewish

children expected to continue their education to Year ten and beyond, while approximately 50% of all the other ethnic groups were aiming to stay at school till Year 12 or beyond. Several of the Maltese migrant children interviewed, spoke of the family need for them to go to work as soon as possible to add another wage to the family budget to help the family as a whole. This seemed to be more prevalent when the children were among the eldest in a large family. (MF5OM, MF11OM, MM7OM, MM8OM, MM2OM, MM4OM, MF13OM). In Malta, the British required tradesman in the dockyards and paid better money than could be earned in many professions. So, up until the end of World War II, most Maltese saw no benefit in an advanced education.

For the Maltese, even where the parents acknowledged that a good education was very important, they believed a job was more so. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Maltese children, in many circumstances, were encouraged to leave school before they were legally permitted to do so, by falsifying their ages or by their parents just taking them away from school. Their salaries were added to the family income pool and as one man claimed, his father did not see him as a child but as a potential income (MM7OM). Of those children who did stay on at school until Year 12 and beyond, some reported that the Maltese community scoffed at their parents for keeping them at school when they could be out earning to help pay off the family debts (MF9OM). Even for those who were earning, it was frequently the parents who decided on what the children could spend their allowance, which they received from their salary. One father seemed to reflect the feelings of the whole community when he stated his ambitions for his daughters was that they have office jobs and not have to work in a factory (MF6OM, MF7OM). It was also pointed out that success in Maltese culture is measured by the fact that you own your own home and never receive unemployment benefits (MM9AX).

### **7.8.5 Satisfaction with their schooling?**

Of the 22 Maltese former pupils, only eight were satisfied with their educational progress and only six of the 12 Poles were satisfied. With the Maltese, it was mainly the males who were dissatisfied (seven out of nine) while with the Poles, it was mainly the females (two out of eight). MM8OM's comment that he did not have any good memories from his school days, saddened the researcher terribly. He believed he did not learn anything and his sense of failure was very obvious. His reading was not good and his mathematics skills were very poor. He believed his parents, illiterate themselves, did not know what education was and encouraged him to leave school when he was only 13. MF9OM commented that in Malta education was for the rich, which according to Brincat (2002), was absolutely true. Compulsory education for all children in Malta was not introduced until 1949 (Sultana, 1991).

It is interesting to note that a significant number of Maltese pupils volunteered that they did not consider themselves to be very bright academically when they were in the primary school system. Their assessment of their abilities was endorsed independently by the teaching sisters (R3, R4). A number of those who assessed themselves as behind the rest academically when they were at the primary level went on to higher degrees in professional careers, doing quite well scholastically when they reached secondary school. The boy whose headmaster told him he was heading towards a career digging ditches as he made him and his Maltese friends dig the school oval, eventually became a university lecturer (MM9AX). There is no way of researching this phenomenon with the information gained from the interviews, so the researcher can offer no explanation. Perhaps the Maltese were just late developers, but there is no real evidence to support this. Expectations by the authorities that the Maltese spoke English because of their colonisation by the British over a period of more than 170 years,

were not founded in reality and no extra help was given to the children with their English. At least two of the sisters (R4, R1) were upset because the Maltese parents discouraged fraternisation with the other ethnic groups at the school. The sisters believed that, as the children already spoke some English, they would have been invaluable in helping the other non-English speaking children to start to learn. Several of the sisters commented that the children learned English quicker and better (at least in the beginning) when they learned from other children. One referred to it as the great need to be able to join in and play (R2). When finally, school notices and reports began to be written in languages other than English, Maltese was not one of the languages selected. The myth persisted that the Maltese spoke English!

The Polish children seemed to be very prone to being ‘latchkey children’ – children who came home to an empty house until their parents returned several hours later (PF8OP, PF6OP, PF5OP, PF2OP, PM4OP). They also were left alone in the school holidays while their parents went to work. Often they were quite young when this was first happening with one child being only six years old. This did not seem to be a problem with the Maltese children, and was not referred to in any of the Maltese interviews. One explanation may be that there were in most cases, extended family or friends who may have looked after the children while the parents worked. It may also be that fewer of the Maltese mothers, particularly those with large families, worked outside the home. Several of the mothers looked after boarders as well as their large families, in order to earn extra money.

## **7.9 On-going Involvement in the Church**

The majority of those Maltese interviewed, and who answered the question, told the researcher that they were still part of the Catholic Church and most still went regularly to Mass. The Poles, on the other hand, were only a very small group and only a few answered

the question about their on-going involvement in the Church. Attendance was maintained in only a minority of the cases studied. No real significance could be taken from these responses and it is impossible to draw any conclusions as to whether school/Church made them less likely to attend Mass or whether it was just part of the universal reduction in Church attendance being experienced in many European countries regardless of the denomination. (The number of Catholics attending Mass weekly has declined considerably since it reached a peak in the mid - 1950s when more than two thirds of the Catholic population attended Mass on a weekly basis. The 2011 National Church Life Survey reported that only 12.5% now do so (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2013).

## Chapter Eight - Discussion

---

Although both the Maltese and the Poles were post Second World War migrants, their respective journeys towards becoming integral parts of the fabric of Australia society, were very different. For instance, the Maltese came to Australia with the help (including financial help) and blessing of their national government. They were sponsored, in the main, by family members or by friends who provided them with somewhere to live and information on how to negotiate Australian society and bureaucracy. Not so the Poles! They came from refugee camps, mainly in Italy, because they could not or would not be repatriated. They had spent the war years as either forced labourers or as prisoners of war of the Germans. They came to Australia knowing no one. Most of them had met and been married in the refugee camps or soon after they arrived in Australia. They were indentured to the Australian Government for two years while they worked off the cost of their fares to Australia and were usually housed in camps in quite remote country areas of Australia where they were employed on large infrastructure projects. They were desperately poor and had no family to support them when they were in trouble. The Maltese, on the other hand, frequently had many relatives who were either already living in Australia, or came soon after them. Despite the fact that many families had large numbers of children, they doubled up with extended family or friends until they were able to move into a home of their own.

The Maltese had experienced great privations as a nation during the war but they had been with family in their own country while they did so. The Poles had lost all contact with even their most immediate family and in many cases, did not even know if they had survived the war. Many were frightened that, under the communist regime, there would be repercussions for the family in Poland if the authorities found out that relatives were alive and well in the

west. The Maltese, on the other hand, were free to come and go between Malta and Australia whenever they had the inclination and the means to do so. Until the communist regime collapsed, the Poles could not go back to their place of birth.

On the whole Maltese families had more and older children than the Poles. Many of the children had been born in Malta before the families immigrated, some of them in their teens. Most Polish children, however, were not born until their parents arrived in Australia. The parents had been removed from their families when they were quite young and did not reach marriageable age until they were in refugee camps after the war. For the Polish children, it was a little easier when they got to school because they, being younger and not having been to school in another country beforehand, were able to learn to speak English much more easily. Those Maltese children who were older, struggled more with English and sometimes gave up school early because of it.

The Polish interviews revealed that family life was frequently a very violent one, with fathers drinking heavily, gambling away their wages and beating their wives. This was not mentioned or even hinted at with the Maltese families. Both groups worked incredibly hard to build and own their own homes, with the Polish community, in particular, combining their efforts to help each other build their own homes. Until this was achieved, both groups lived in cramped, temporary accommodation.

There was wide disparity in the attitudes of the ethnic groups towards education for their children. Like most migrant groups who arrived in Australia after the Second World War, the Poles were keen to see their children as the doctors and lawyers, attaining positions of prestige and wealth through education, as they themselves had never been able to do. Many of them worked extremely hard, often making large sacrifices and encouraging their children

to reach their potential. The Maltese ambition for their children academically, was much smaller. The academic level which they believed was adequate was that which they attained by the minimum leaving age. Higher academics were not necessary for their children whom they expected to either gain an apprenticeship or work in an office. Some of the interviewees spoke of the older children being sent off to work in the factories to help the families to establish themselves in the new country. Thus individual ethnic groups seem to have quite different settlement histories and experiences. There is strong evidence to suggest that there is no such thing as *the* ethnic experience, but rather a variety of them mainly based on ethnicity.

As for the immigrant children themselves, there were many things that they found difficult when they first arrived in Australia. The most challenging obstacle to their success was their lack of English. It appears that the older the children were when they started school in Australia, the more difficult the problem was to overcome. This applied mainly to the Maltese children as all of the Polish children started school in Australia in the beginning grades. In general, no help was given by the sisters to these children, to enable them to learn to speak English. In the main, the sisters expected them to learn English from the other children and were unaware that children from a non-English speaking background would need much more help than this in order to progress with their studies. Those who realised that the migrant children were not keeping up with the rest of the class were unable to be of much assistance because of the sheer volume of work with which they had to cope.

Class sizes were another issue which made education for all children, Australian born or migrant, less than ideal. In many schools, particularly Catholic schools, class sizes were huge and the infrastructure struggled to cope with them. The researcher spent her Year 12 in a country high school in country Victoria, housed in an open shelter shed which was unlined

and unheated in the middle of winter. School buildings had been neglected during the Second World War and the influx of children born when their fathers returned from the war as well as the migrant children stretched the accommodation beyond its capacity. For many children at this time, school life was difficult. For Catholic children it was more so.

Coupled with the facts that both space and class sizes were difficult, many parish schools were desperately short of money leading to situations where there were insufficient readers and other work books for each child to be able to use one. This further increased the teachers' work load as it necessitated most of the work being written on a blackboard before school. Rote learning then became the only way of teaching – a passive method which did not encourage individual initiatives.

Religious were expected to teach regardless of their inclinations or abilities. They were the unpaid labour the Church needed to staff their schools and were worked to the limits of their capacities. Some of them were disappointed that the reasons for which they joined their order were subsumed by the need for teachers. Often their training was far from adequate, causing them considerable distress. Even the conditions under which some of them lived were overcrowded and difficult. Homework books, if the teacher had time to mark so many, could not be taken back to the convent because there was nowhere to put them.

Many children, particularly Maltese children, had many after school chores to be done at home. For many families these took precedence over homework. Latch key children, (among whom the Maltese were not included) who went home to an empty house, were often responsible for looking after younger siblings and for preparing an evening meal for the family. Homework not done, earned the child corporal punishment of some kind when he/she got to school.

Discipline then became an issue. Children who sit passively all day, particularly boys, tend to become restless and this in turn leads to misbehaviour. Some Religious gained reputations for behaviour which today would be considered brutal and constitute an assault on a child. It is easy to see how Religious, teaching under the extreme conditions under which they taught, could become extremely frustrated with the frustration leading to beatings for naughty children, sometimes in excess of what would be considered appropriate, even in those days.

The Religious, particularly those who were not encouraged to develop any knowledge of world affairs, were frequently culturally unaware of the background situations of their pupils. The impoverished living conditions, the necessity for mothers to work outside the home (a practice heavily criticised by the Anglo community anyway), the difficulty to find money for school fees, the inability of parents to learn English when every moment of their day was accounted for in trying to earn enough money to feed and house their families, were not apparently known to many of the Sisters. Their lives were so very remote from their school families it would have been difficult for them to fully comprehend what their pupils' lives were like.

Their pupils commented about the irrelevance of some of the school activities that were provided for them. What relevance did the St Patrick's Day parade have for children who grew up with St Paul as their patron saint? Where were the extravagant community street parades with the statue of their saint carried aloft, which they had enjoyed in their former countries? What use did these children have for Irish dancing? Many of the Polish children went to the Polish dancing classes organised by the Polish community. Probably the most ridiculous activity was the employment of an elocution teacher for some of the school classes, for children who could not speak English at all. They could employ an elocution teacher but not a teacher of English, particularly as a second language.

The attitudes and methods employed by the Religious, however, were not hugely different from those of the general public in Australia at that time. Australians believed that the sooner migrants forgot all their past lives and experiences the better. Assimilation was the government policy and the migrants were expected to become just like the rest of us as quickly as possible. Understanding of their past lives was not considered necessary and the learning of English was not thought of as a particularly difficult exercise. Indeed, migrants were severely criticised if they spoke in their first language in public.

The fact that some of the parents of the interviewees tried to isolate them from what they perceived as a corrupting Australian culture in order to maintain the culture of their homeland indicates that cultural misunderstanding was not only on the Australian side. It was also apparent that many of the Polish parents were psychologically very damaged as a result of their experiences during the Second World War. Drunkenness and violence were frequently mentioned or were alluded to during the Polish interviews. Gambling and card playing were also frequently mentioned.

The issue of the perceived lack of academic ambition the Maltese seemed to have for their children is only partly explained by the fact that compulsory education for all children was only achieved in Malta in 1947. It does not seem to totally explain the difference observed between the Maltese and all other ethnic groups. As one of the Polish interviewees pointed out, her father was the brightest boy in his village, but no amount of intelligence was ever going to ensure he was sent to a university – the social structure of pre-Second World War Polish society was never going to allow the son of a poor peasant to attain more than the most basic education. But he had academic ambitions for his children, all of whom attained a university degree. Perhaps it was a by-product of British colonialism which had existed in Malta for more than 175 years which led to the Maltese mindset. Did the British keep the

professional positions in the country for ex-patriot Britons? Nothing in the interviews explained this attitude that valued money and a job above education. Research in Malta suggested that the best paid jobs with the best opportunities for promotion were in the Naval Dockyards where there were apprenticeships for the boys and office jobs for the girls. If this is so, then it could explain why the Maltese saw no need for more education beyond the Intermediate level at the age of 14 or 15. This issue will have to be left to another study to resolve.

In the intervening 40 to 60 years since these migrants arrived in Australia, many of the educational problems that the interviewees mentioned, have been addressed. English is now taught as a second language to immigrants who arrive without any understanding of it. Class sizes are kept to much lower numbers and teachers are much better trained. Certain standards need to be kept in order for the school to be given government funding. The Sisters who worked so hard for the children of the Church, to the point where, in some cases, it affected their health, have been largely replaced by lay teachers who are university trained and well paid. Australians now embrace multiculturalism and are interested and informed about the countries and culture from whence these immigrants come. In schools the diversity of cultures is celebrated not condemned.

The migrants of the 1950s and 1960s have settled extremely well in the main. They have adapted to Australia and Australians but have incorporated the changes into their original culture and brought a further dimension to Australian culture with their food and celebrations. Many large scale construction projects in Australia owe their existence to the labour of the Polish migrants especially. Much of Australia's manufacturing industry would also not have succeeded without the migrant workers.

While many of the experiences of migrant children in the Catholic Primary school were common to both Maltese and Poles, clearly there were many instances where they were not. Most differences could be attributed to the very different experiences the families had undergone before their arrival in Australia. There was little understanding of any of this by anybody in Australia and there was nothing done to help them, particularly by the schools or the parishes, for many of them the only community contact they had. It would seem that as far as refugees are concerned, Australians have learned very little in the last 45-65 years.

As well as their own achievements, the migrants of that time raised their children to be successful, both academically and in business, despite the fact that many of them were illiterate themselves. Disregarding the difficulties of their beginnings in Australia, Polish and Maltese immigration would seem to have been a win/win situation both for Australia and the migrants.

## Chapter Nine - Conclusion

---

### 9.1 New Learning

What significance does this research have for those of us who are in Australia today? If nothing else it provides a record of what the times were like in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s. It points out the situation which existed in Australia at the end of the Second World War – the infrastructure which had been neglected in order to maintain the war effort and the need to invest in huge projects in order to service the rapidly growing population. Such projects were beyond the capabilities of the available manpower and labourers were needed to undertake them. The Japanese had demonstrated as no one had before, that Australia was sparsely populated and a ripe target for takeover by heavily populated countries in other places in the world. The population was not averse to migration provided it came from the United Kingdom and was like ‘us’. This pool of labour, however, was not sufficient to meet Australia’s need. There was a pool however, which was available and could meet all Australia required – the displaced persons and refugees living in make-shift accommodation in Europe where they had been stranded since the end of WWII. It was these people who became Australia’s first migrants in the late 1940s and 1950s and who bent their backs to make Australia grow. They were joined by the Maltese who had also suffered badly during the war. Their country had a long history of migration and the people were faced with a severe unemployment problem when the British military establishment, the biggest employer in Malta, began to reduce its labour force so that employment opportunities were considerably reduced now peace was achieved and life returned to a more normal situation. The naval dockyard had been the largest employer of labour for 150 years but now it was beginning to withdraw its garrison as the war ended. Faced with the huge amount of damage

to buildings and infrastructure, unemployment and fear of being in the centre of another war zone, many Maltese (assisted by their government) looked for a better life in a country thousands of miles away from any potential war zone that they could envisage.

European migrants were indentured to the government for two years until they were deemed to have worked off the cost of their passage. Following this, they were free to find employment wherever they wished which meant that their children were often uprooted from their schools and moved to another. Two children spoke of being in trouble because they ruled the pages in their work books in the way they had been told by one Order of Sisters which was different to the way the order running the next school desired. Such petty fussing could not have been helpful for their learning.

What is totally revealed is the almost complete lack of understanding the people of Australia had for the migrants, what they had experienced before they came to Australia, including what the conditions were under which they lived when they arrived in Australia and how they were treated. The children had to cope with a new country, a new language and parents who not only had no, or at least very little, knowledge of English and who in many instances were illiterate in their first language. Their teachers were overworked, the classrooms were substandard and they had no equipment. In their frustration the teaching Sisters resorted frequently to corporal punishment. No one had any empathy with what these children were experiencing. Rarely did anyone ever listen to them and no one helped them to develop coping skills.

This research has provided some small insight into the lives of the teaching Sisters as they struggled to be superwomen, in most cases worked off their feet, making up curriculum for

non-English speakers as they went along. In some cases they had very little knowledge of the living conditions of their pupils, but most recognised how very poor they were.

However much this study has uncovered there are limits to how much this information can be legitimately extrapolated. The sample sizes are very small and the interviewees were difficult to find. The Poles, especially were very reluctant to talk about their lives in Poland and often needed much persuasion to talk at all. Much more than they told during the interviews was inferred, and in a larger study than this, would have been more vigorously pursued. The difficulties in sampling resulted in the Snowball Method of sampling being used. While this proved to be the most effective way of finding interviewees in this instance, it has the potential to bias the sample so that it is weighted towards one line of referees and acquaintances. However, the stories of the Polish migrants were so very similar, it is difficult to imagine that larger and potentially less biased samples would tell a different tale. They were very damaged people who came to Australia, and who struggled to overcome the brutality of their previous lives.

While it is possible that time could have dimmed recollections of their experiences on arrival in Australia, the traumatic things these people remember are their clearest recollections of the time. As one Maltese interviewee pointed out when speaking of corporal punishment, it does not matter how many good things happen to a child, it is the traumatic ones which live on in memory and colour everything else.

As far as the Sisters are concerned, they are becoming very old and for some, memories may not be as clear as they once were. For many of them the requirement to accept all of life's challenges without complaint (which the researcher was told was a requirement of some orders at the time) affected their recollections. For some who told of their teaching

experiences with the migrant children, as a trouble free period in their lives, frequently, in answer to another, more oblique question, revealed huge workloads and difficult teaching conditions about which they made no complaint. The researcher learned not to necessarily accept all their stories at face value.

The researcher believes that further study into the Sisters' stories is extremely important. Age is catching up with them and if their stories are to be captured at all, now is the time. They glued the Catholic school system together when it was becoming overwhelmed by sheer numbers and when it was desperately under resourced and under equipped. It seemed to the researcher that their vital contribution has never been adequately acknowledged.

Further study into the reasons why so many of the Maltese interviewees believed that they were not very bright during their primary school years would be another interesting area to pursue. Even those who went on to tertiary education commented on this phenomenon. Most complained of a difficulty with mathematics in particular. The Polish interviewees made no such observation and in many cases were taught in the same schools by similar teachers. This almost universal self-perception of not being terribly bright seems quite strange. The teaching sisters also commented that the Maltese children were not very smart, so that it was not just the children who observed the phenomenon. Why it seems to just be the Maltese children has not really been explained in this study and the answer to this would be of interest to know.

How can the researcher summarise the experiences of the migrant children in the Catholic primary school in the 1950s and 1960s? The words which immediately come to mind in most cases are - difficult, deprived, traumatic, unsympathetic, non-empathetic, rigid, rote learning with no opportunity for individual help. The surroundings under which they learned were

basic in the extreme in most cases, with few resources to aid them with their learning. The lack of any sort of play equipment worked against them developing stronger bodies and refreshed minds. It is only with hind sight that several of the interviewees can acknowledge that the lack of the English language coloured and adversely affected all their school experiences. No extra help with learning English and no understanding that even those who could speak English passably well, could not necessarily read it or write it well, limited their future lives. Class sizes were ridiculous and the Sisters were overworked and unable to help individuals who were falling behind. Their frustrations with their inability to help individuals seemed to be transferred to the children via the dreaded strap. What sort of education you received was a lottery depending on which school you attended. With no standardisation of teacher training or curriculum, ensured that very few went beyond the primary school.

One can only admire the tenacity with which so many of these immigrant children went on to become valuable citizens contributing to Australia as successful members of society.

The researcher feels the need to point out that under current day definitions, the Maltese would have been defined as ‘economic refugees’. No one thought this a derogatory term when they came. Why now?

## **9.2 Catholic Education in the 1950s and 1960s**

*RQ 1. What was Catholic education like in the 1950s and 1960s?*

This project records the problems within the education system in Australia at that time and in particular, the Catholic education system with its idiosyncratic management and structure. It describes the lack of cohesion and the fragmented syllabus and the lack of any accepted standard in teacher training with regard to the staffing of the schools. It speaks of the decaying buildings and the need to find a way to establish new schools in new suburbs where

many of the city's extremely poor were making their homes in makeshift hovels without running water, sewerage and sometimes, even electricity - where the roads were not made and the school buildings floated in a sea of mud in the winter time. In these schools which were housed in buildings often as makeshift as the houses in which these impoverished people lived, the teaching Religious struggled to give migrant children an education.

### **9.3 Backgrounds of Maltese and Polish Children Arriving in Australia**

*RQ 2. What were the educational and social backgrounds of the Maltese and Polish children when they arrived in Australia?*

As most of the Polish migrant children were born in Australia, they had no educational experience to compare with what they encountered when they got to school in the Catholic system. Their lack of English seemed to be the biggest hurdle confronting them, but their parents' ambitions for their futures helped them to achieve. Some of their parents never achieved fluency in English, even after living in Australia for over fifty years. Many of them achieved material success despite the difficult beginnings and lived in very nice middleclass houses in Melbourne, frequently not far from where they began life in Australian – in the Western suburbs.

Socially, they were very deprived. There was no extended family as they had been separated from their families during the Second World War and most of their social life was as part of the Polish community which was very active and helped many of their countrymen to settle in Melbourne. Many of their parents were psychologically, very damaged people. Alcoholism was very common amongst the men and family violence was either referred or alluded to in many of the interviews.

In contrast, many of the Maltese were born in Malta and being much older than the Polish interviewees when they arrived in Australia, had received some education in their country of origin. Many believed that the education they had received in Malta was far superior to what they had received in Australia, based mainly on the fact that schools were allocated according to the pupil's examination results. Examinations appeared to be undertaken every year. Those who arrived when they were placed in higher grades in the primary school, did not appear to do as well at school as those who arrived later. Although many educators believed that they spoke English because they had been ruled by the British for more than a century, such was not the case for many of them. School notices were not translated into Maltese, an oversight much criticised by the interviewees in view of the fact that other ethnic groups were granted this concession. Their parents, on the whole, were not academically ambitious for them and wanted their earnings to reduce the family debts.

Socially, they were well supported with large numbers of extended family around them, some of whom had already settled before the interviewee's family had arrived. Most of their social life was centred on the family activities.

#### **9.4 Classroom Experiences of Newly Arrived Maltese and Polish Children**

*RQ 3. What were the classroom experiences of Maltese and Polish children as newly arrived students during the 1950-1970 period*

The Maltese interviewees complained that they were put in the incorrect year level for their age and educational experience and the variety of year levels into which pupils of similar ages were placed would seem to confirm the complaint. As there was no uniformity of procedure and curriculum they seemed to have been placed in a class at the whim of the teaching staff who had no idea of educational standards in Malta. Those who tried to

complain were not listened to. Having had no experience of school before coming to Australia, the Polish students had no such complaints.

Discipline for all of the students was corporal and at times quite vicious and frequently for very minor infringements, such as giving the incorrect answer. Some spoke of being too frightened to put up their hands to answer the question for fear of being punished for an incorrect answer. Few complained of the rote learning method of teaching, but those that did, commented that it did not encourage a culture of inquiry amongst the pupils. They were taught, in part, to enable as many as possible to qualify for a government scholarship at the end of primary school.

#### **9.5 Nuns' Experiences of Teaching New Arrivals**

*RQ 4. What were the nuns' experiences of teaching new arrivals, especially Polish and Maltese children during the 1950s and 1960?*

Nothing and no one prepared the Sisters for the influx of immigrants into Melbourne. Like the rest of the Australia Anglophile citizens, they were convinced that the migrants had to become 'like us' as quickly as possible. This included learning to play Australian Rules football, and observing the celebrations for St. Patrick Day. The Maltese had St. Paul as their patron saint and were not happy that their saint was not seen as having the same importance as St. Patrick. The Sisters, largely unaware of world events at that time, had little or no understanding of, or empathy with, other cultures. None of them had any training in teaching English as a second language and each seemed to apply strategies of her own to help. The general consensus seemed to be that the children would 'catch on', learning from the Australian born children. This did seem to work in many cases but not all, especially when the children did not arrive in Australia at an age when they were in late primary school. Even

those who succeeded in learning to speak good English, frequently had no one at home to help with their reading and language. As has been observed, a number of the Maltese parents, illiterate themselves, placed no interest in an education for their children.

## **9.6 Nuns' Teacher Training**

*RQ 5. What teacher training had the nuns received?*

The teacher training the Sisters received varied hugely depending on which order they belong to. For some of them it was very rudimentary and gave them no extra skills or information on how to cope with children who did not speak English. Indeed some received training which was not appropriate for the year level they ended up teaching, even without the added dimension of non-English speakers. In some other orders which were dedicated only to teaching, the standard was much better. Because of the enormous teaching loads these Sisters managed and the absence of any sort of substitute teachers, there was very little opportunity for in-service training where they might have been able to exchange experiences with the other Sisters and to compare the coping strategies they had developed.

## **9.7 Nuns' Views of How Teaching Approaches affected Polish and Maltese Children's Learning**

*RQ 6. How did the nuns see their approach to teaching these Polish and Maltese affected their learning?*

The class sizes in most cases, were huge and the only method of teaching the Sisters were able to employ, was rote learning. This involved much before school work for the Sisters who needed to write on the blackboard much of what needed to be done by the children during the day. Several despaired that with classes so huge, they could only teach to the middle of the abilities. Those who were slower than most of the children, were left behind because the teacher could not give them any extra attention to help them understand, a

situation several of the Sisters deeply regretted. However, some teachers had been to class reunions from the migration period being researched, where they encountered many of their former pupils. They were very gratified that so many of them had done very well in life and were well established in their chosen occupations.

Some of the Sisters commented that while they thought that the Polish were very cultured people, the Maltese they taught were not very 'bright'. Surprisingly some of the Maltese interviewed described themselves as not very smart and slow to 'catch on'. Even those who eventually went on to succeed in tertiary education, did not believe that they 'blossomed' until they had begun secondary school.

Subsequent migration waves benefitted enormously from what the Sisters had learned from their 1950s and 1960s experiences with teaching non-English speaking pupils. These experiences were gained under great hardship and both teachers and pupils are to be commended for the way they coped with their ordeals.

## **Appendix I - Legend Used to Identify Interviewees:**

---

1 <sup>st</sup> letter	M	Maltese
	P	Polish
2 <sup>nd</sup> letter	M	Male
	F	Female
3 <sup>rd</sup> letter		Place in category
4 <sup>th</sup> letter	A	Born in Australia
	O	Born overseas
5 <sup>th</sup> letter	M	Parents Maltese
	P	Parents Polish
	X	Parents of mixed ethnicity

## Appendix II - Ethics Approval Letter

---

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



---

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

<p><b>Principal Investigator/Supervisor:</b> Dr Richard Rymarz Melbourne Campus</p> <p><b>Co-Investigators:</b> Dr Kath Engebretson Melbourne Campus</p> <p><b>Student Researcher:</b> Christine Creaser Melbourne Campus</p>
---

<p><b>Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:</b> Experiences of the migrant child in the Catholic system in the 1950's and 1960's</p> <p><b>for the period:</b> 23 November 2005 to 1 October 2007 (Subject to annual review)</p> <p><b>Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:</b> V200506 9</p>
--

The following **standard** conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)* apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "K. Pashley".

Signed: .. ..... Date: ....23/11/2005 .....

(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

## **Appendix III - Letter Inviting Individuals to Participate**

---

Dear Participant

You are invited to take part in an audio taped oral history project documenting the experiences of the migrant child in the Catholic Education system in the 1950s and 1960s. This is being conducted under the auspices of the Australian Catholic University and being supervised by Dr Richard Rymarz and Dr Kath Engebretson of the School of Religious Education at the Patrick campus in Melbourne. The researcher/interviewer will be Mrs Christine Creaser, a PhD student in the same department,

The study is an oral history project undertaken in an attempt to record and better understand the experiences of migrant children in the Catholic education system in the 1950s and 1960s. The experiences will be recorded on audio tape and will be the result of interviews loosely following a list of predetermined questions to allow those being interviewed to describe their experiences unhampered by a rigid questionnaire. The duration of these interviews will be a minimum of two hours at a place and time of the interviewee's choosing.

Apart from the allocation of the time by the interviewee, it is not perceived that there will be any adverse effects or discomfort to you, the individual. It is possible (although not definite) that a second interview could be requested to further elaborate on the first.

The researcher hopes to gain a better understanding of the experiences of migrant children in the Catholic education system which can be passed on to future educators to assist them in avoiding some of the pitfalls and encouraging some of the good things when planning for future immigrant children. The experiences of the respondents will be documented for future generations and you, as the respondent, will have a recording of the interview which you can play for your family in order that they may understand how difficult it was you when you came to Australia. You have the right to refuse an audio taped interview but still take part, with the interviewer taking notes. It is possible that a book could be published based on the research findings.

If at any time you, the respondent, do not wish to continue the interview, you would be perfectly free to discontinue the process at any stage. You would also be able to reverse any decision to allow the information given up to that point to be used in the findings. No justification of such a decision would be required.

Your identity would be known only to the researcher and the information given by you would be labeled anonymously to disallow identification by anyone else. Only if permission is given beforehand is any information likely to be attributed directly to you.

If you require any further information regarding this research project, you are encouraged to contact either Dr Richard Rymarz or Dr Kath Engebretson or Mrs Christine Creaser, using the information supplied below.

Dr Richard Rymarz  
School of Religious Education,  
Australian Catholic University  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065

Dr Kath Engebretson  
School of Religious Education  
Australian Catholic University  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065

Mrs Christine Creaser  
c/- School of Religious Education  
Australian Catholic Education  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065.

If you have given permission for your interview to be recorded on audio tape, you would be most welcome to a copy of that interview for your family archives. If you have not allowed recording on audio tape, you may like a typed record of the notes taken. Whichever recording type you have allowed, a copy of the research findings would be made available for your records, if you would like one.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor and Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the address below:-

Chair, HREC  
c/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065  
(03) 9953 3158

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other to the Supervisor or Student Researcher.

Yours sincerely

## Appendix IV - Consent Form for Interviewees

---

### Consent Form

**Title of Project:** Experiences of the Migrant Child  
in the Catholic Education System in Melbourne in the 1950s and 1960s.

**Names of Supervisors:** Dr Richard Ryamrz  
Dr Kath Engebretson

**Name of Student Researcher:** Mrs Christine Creaser

I,.....(*insert your name*) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity (the oral history project documenting migrant experiences of the Catholic education system), realizing that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

**Name of Participant:** .....

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Signature of Supervisor:** .....

**Date:** .....

**Signature of Student Researcher:** .....

**Date:** .....

## Appendix V - Framework of Questions 1

---

### **Migrant children's experiences of Catholic Education in 1950s and 1960s.**

1. What is your name?
2. Where were you born?
3. If you were not born here, how old were you when you arrived in Australia?
  - 3a. How many siblings did you have?
  - 3b. Where were they born?
  - 3c. Did they speak English when they arrived?
  - 3d. What language did you speak at home?
4. Had you received any schooling before you came here?
5. If yes, where and for how long?
  - 5a. Could you speak English when you arrived?
  - 5b. Could you read and write English before you arrived?
6. Where did you first go to school in Australia?
7. What age were you when you started at School X?
8. How many children were being taught in your class?
9. Who was teaching you?
10. What was the greatest problem you encountered in this class?
11. What other problems were there?
12. Were there other children from your ethnic group in the class?
13. Do you feel this helped or hindered you?
14. Tell me about your school experiences in those years.
15. Was it a pleasant experience?
16. If not, why not?
17. How well did you think you learned at that time?

18. Did you have any extra help to learn English?
19. Did your experiences of primary school affect your later learning?
20. Were your parents able to help you with your schoolwork?
  - 20a Had they been educated in Malta?
  - 20b Could they speak English?
  - 20c Could they read and write English?
  - 20d What work did they do?
21. Were they involved with the school in any way? Eg. Parents groups, working bees, etc.
22. Was it difficult for them to pay fees? Was fee paying the usual thing where you came from?
23. Did you play with an ethnically mixed group at play time?
24. Did you play with an ethnically mixed group after school?
25. Do you currently have much contact with your schoolmates of that period?
26. Do you currently socialise very much outside your ethnic group?
27. Have you undertaken any post-secondary qualifications? If so, what have you studied?
28. What do you do for a living?
29. What did your siblings do when they left school?

## **Appendix VI - Framework of Questions 2**

---

### **The experiences of teachers of migrant children in the 1950s and 1960s.**

1. What is your name?
2. When did you enter the order?
3. When did you start and how long have you been teaching primary school teaching?
4. What did you expect your life to be when you entered the order?
5. Was the reality very different?
6. Did you expect to be teaching?
7. What training did you have for the tasks you were given in the school?
8. How did your teaching change with the arrival of the migrant children?
9. What were the conditions under which you were teaching? Did they change very much?
10. What were class sizes like?
11. What was the equipment like?
12. Did you have any help with children who could not speak English?
13. Did you have much contact with the parents of the children you were teaching?
14. Were they supportive in any way?
15. How difficult was your job at that time?
16. How effective do you think your teaching was under those circumstances?
17. How many of the children you taught went on to further academic studies?
18. How long was it before conditions under which you were teaching improved?
19. What were the best and the worst of your teaching experiences?

## Bibliography

---

- Altmayer. (1962). ,Commentay on exsul familia. In Tessarolo, G, (Ed) (1962), *The Church's Magna Carta for migrants*, New York, The Society of St. Paul.
- Ambert, A, Adler, PA and Detzner, DF (1995). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 57, (November, 1995): pp. 879 – 893
- Ancel, B. A. (1973), *Theology of the local Church in relation to migration: idealised idea of the role of the church in migration*, CIRC papers 10: pp. 42-52
- Anderson, A. (1975). *Inquiry into Schools of High Migrant Density*. Canberra: The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Angus, L. (1982). Class, Culture and Curriculum: A study of continuity and change in a Catholic school. Continuity and Change in Catholic Education: An Ethnography of Christian Brothers College. In R. Bates, L. Smith, L. Angus, & B. Watkins (Eds.), *Continuity and Change in Catholic Education: An Ethnography of Christian Brothers College*. Victoria: Deakin University.
- Archbishop of Melbourne. (1967, December). Diocesan Newsletter.
- Ata, A. W. (1988). *Religion and Ethnic Identity: an Australian Study* (1988 ed.). Richmond, Victoria: Spectrum Publications.
- Barbaro, A. (2003). Recovering the origins of a convent education in Australia. *Journal of the Australian Historical Society*, 24, 46-56.
- Becker, P. H. (1993, May 2). Common Pitfalls in Publishing Grounded Theory Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 3(2), 254-260.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Bednar, A. K. (1991, June). Abstract at the Least. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 4(2), 98-100.

Borrie, W. (1949). CH III: Post-war Immigration Policy. In *Immigration: Australia's Problems and Prospects* (pp. 14-30). Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

Borrie, W. (1949). CH VII Assimilation. In *Immigration: Australia's problems and prospects* (pp. 82-97). Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in Capitalist America*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Briffa, H. (1999). *The Maltese in Australia: Family Relationships and the Second Generation*. (M. Cauchi, H. Borland, & R. Adams, Eds.) Melbourne: Europe-Australia Institute, Victoria University of Technology.

Brincat, V. (1998). *Malta under Self Government, 1921-1933: An evaluation of how the Maltese used Self-Government during the Inter War Period*. Msida: University of Malta.

Brincat, V. (2002). *The Maltese Middle Classes, 1880-1940 History*. Msida: University of Malta.

Brotherhood of St Laurence. (1971). *Two Worlds: School and the Migrant Family*. Melbourne: Stockland Press.

Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (2007). *Grounded Theory in Historical Perspective: An Epistemological Account*, pp. 31-57. In A. Bryant, & K. Charmaz (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K, (eds) (2007). *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*.  
Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Burley, S. (2005). An Overview of the Historiography of Women Religious in Australia.  
*Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, 26, 43-60.

Cahill, D. (1985). The Schooling Experiences of Italian Immigrant Children during the  
1950s. *CHOMI, Reprints R 495*.

Cahill, D. (1988). Children and Catholic Schooling: A Multicultural Perspective. *The  
Australasian Catholic Record*, LXV(1), 34-43.

Cahill, D. (1988). Children and Catholic Schooling: A Multicultural Perspective - Part 2. *The  
Australasian Catholic Record*, LXV(2), 194-210.

Callan, V. J. (1983). Anglo-Australian Attitudes towards Immigrants. *International  
Migration Review*, 17(No 1), 120-137.

Calleya-Capp, C. (Ed), (1999). *A Cultural Framework to understand Young Maltese  
Australians*. Melbourne,: Europe-Australia Institute, Victoria University of  
Technology.

Canadian Government. (1962, 1968). *Commonwealth Immigration Acts Statistics*. Ottawa:  
Department of Immigration and Manpower.

Caruana, C., & Scerri, S. C. (1983). *Malta*. (Department of Foreign Affairs, Ed.) Canberra:  
Australian Government Publishing Service.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Cassar, G. (2001). *A Village School in Malta: Mosta Primary School 1840-1940*. In R. G.

Sultana (Ed.) (2001). *Themes in Education: A Maltese Reader*, San Gwann, Malta: Enterprises Group (PEG) Ltd.

Castles, I. (1991). *Religion in Australia*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (1998). *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Catholic Education Office. (1958). *Catholic Education Committee*. Melbourne Catholic Education Office

Catholic Education Office. (1963). *Annual Report of the Catholic Education Office*. Catholic Education Office, Melbourne.

Catholic Education Office. (1964, January 24). Correspondence to the Archbishop.

Cauchi, M. N. (1990). *Maltese Migrants in Australia*. Melbourne: Maltese Community Council of Victoria.

Cauchi, M. N. (1999). *The Maltese Migrant Experience*. Ghajnsielem, Gozo: Gozo Press.

Charmaz, K. (1996). *New Ethnographies: Review Symposium*, (pp. 390-394), *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 25.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Teachings of Anselm Strauss: Remembrances and Reflections, *Sociological Perceptions*, Vol. 43(4), S163-S174.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Charmaz, K. (2009). *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation*. In J. M. Morse, P. N. Stern, J. Corbin, B. Bowers, K. Charmaz, & A. E. Clarke, *Qualitative Research* Vol. 11(6), (2011), Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc.

Church, J. (2005). *Per l'Australia: the story of Italian Migration*, Carlton, Victoria, Miegunyah Press in association with the Italian Historical Society COASIT.

Cohen, I., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education* (6 ed.). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics. (1946-1947). *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, Canberra, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics.

Connell. RW, (1973), Attitudes towards immigrants among Sydney teenagers, *Australian Psychologist*, Vol. 8, pp. 193-202 quoted in Callan, VJ, 1983, Anglo-Australian attitudes towards immigrants, *International Migration Review*, Vol.17 No.1., pps 210-237 .

Coombs, H. (1944). The Economic Aftermath of War: The Economic Problem. In D. A. Campbell (Ed.), *Post-War Reconstruction in Australia* (pp. 67-120). Sydney: Australasian Publishing Company.

Corbin, J. (2009). In J. M. Morse, P. N. Stern, J. Corbin, B. Bowers, K. Charmaz, & A. E. Clarke (Eds.), *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation*. Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Crowley, D. W. (1971). *The Migrant and the School*. Melbourne: Australian Frontier.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2008). *Community Information Summary: Poland born*. Australian Government, Canberra.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2009). *Fact Sheet 4 - More than 60 years of Post-war Migration*. Australian Government, Canberra.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2008). *Families in Australia*. Retrieved 2008, from [www.dpmc.gov.au](http://www.dpmc.gov.au)

Dixon, R. (1996). *The Catholic Community in Australia*.

Dixon, R. (2001). Catholics speaking Maltese at home, by parish, Archdiocese of Melbourne. *Australian Bishops' Conference*. Australian Census.

Dixon, R. E. (2005). *The Catholic Community in Australia*. Adelaide: Openbook Publishers.

Dixon, R. E., & Powell, R. (2012). Vatican II: A Data-Based Analysis of Its Impact on Australian Catholic Life. In N. Omerod, O. Rush, D. Pascoe, C. Johnson, & J. Hodge

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

(Eds.), *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church* (pp. 292-320). Mulgrave, Victoria: Garrat Publishing.

Doreian, P, and Woodard, K.L., (1992), Fixe List versus Snowball Selection of Social Networks, *Social Science Research* 21, pp.216 - 233, Academic Press, Inc.: Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Doyle, A. (1978). Tradition and Innovation in non-Anglican Post Secondary Schools. In J. Cleverly (Ed.), *Half a Million Children: Studies of non-Government Education in Australia*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Drozd, E. (2001). *They Have Come a Long Way: The Settlement of the 1980s Wave of Polish Immigrants in Melbourne*. Melbourne: Australia-Polish Community Services Inc.

Dwyer, B. (1986). *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads*. Blackburn: Dove Communications.

Eckert, R. (1971). Religious Faculty Members View Their Jobs - A Second Look. *Counseling and Values*, 16(1), 22-27.

Faraday, A. W., & Plummer, K. (1979). Doing Life Histories. *Sociological Review*, 27(4), 773-798.

Flannery, A. (1996). Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of the Religious Life, *perfectae Caritatis*, 28 October, 1965. The Basic Sixteen Documents. In A. Flannery (Ed.). New York: Costello Publishing Company Inc.

Fogarty, R. (1959). Chapter 7, The Coming of the Religious. In *Catholic Education in Australia (1806-1950)* (Vol. II, pp. 257-303). Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Frendo, H. (1988). Maltese Migration from the Maltese Islands and North Africa after 1945.

In J. Jupp (Ed.), *An Encyclopaedia of the Australian People*. An Encyclopaedia of the Australian People: pp. 580-590, Australian National University.

Gascoigne, R. (2013). *The Australian Perspective of the Moral Theologian in Church and Society*. (C. Vogt, Editor) Retrieved from The Role of the Moral Theologian in Church and Society: [www.catholicmoraltheology.com/an-australian-perspective-on-the-role-of-the-moral-theologian-in-church-and-society](http://www.catholicmoraltheology.com/an-australian-perspective-on-the-role-of-the-moral-theologian-in-church-and-society)

Gellel, A. M., & Buchanan, M. T. (2011). The impact of cultural religious values upon pre-service teachers' perceptions of their role as educators in Catholic religious schools. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 32(3), 317-328.

Gill, P., (1972) (Ed), *Catholic education: where is it going?*, North Melbourne, Cassell Australia.

Glasser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

Goodman, L.A., (1961), Snowball Sampling, in *The Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp.148-170. Institute of Mathematical Statistics.

Goodson, I. (1983). *The Use of Life Histories in the Study of Teaching*. (Hammersley, Ed.) Duffield, UK: Nafferton.

Henderson, A. (1997). *Mary Mackillop's Sisters: A Life Unveiled*. Sydney: Harper Collins.

Holt, H. C., Borrie, W. D., Craig, J., Karmel, P. H., & Stevens, B. (1953). *Australia and the Migrant*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Homze, E. L. (1967). *Foreign Labour in Nazi Germany*, Princeton, Princeton University Press

Iredale, R., & Fox, C. (1997, Autumn). The Impact of Immigration on School Education in New South Wales, Australia. *International Migration Review*, 31(3), 655-669.

Iredale, R., & Hugo, G. (1995). Australia's Population and the Global Links. *International Migrant Review*, 29(3), 826-834.

Isaac, J. (1949). European Migration potential and Prospects. *Population Studies*, 2(4), 379-412.

Jasienica, P. (1968). The Polish Experience. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3(4), pp.73-88.

Jones, H. R. (1973). Modern Migration from Malta. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 60, pp. 101-119.

Jordan, D. (1972). Crisis and Change in the Role of the Teaching Religious. In P. Gill (Ed.), *Catholic Education: Where is it Going?* (pp. 95-119). Melbourne: Cassell (Australia).

Jupp, J. (Ed.). (1988). *An Encyclopedia of the Australian People*. Canberra: Australian National University.

Kaluski, M, (1985), *The Poles in Australia*, Blackburn; AE Press.

Kampschoer, L. (Ed.). (1960). *World Refugee Year*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Catholic Migration Commission.

Kane, K. (1974). *The Presentation Sisters: Adventure in Faith*. Melbourne, Victoria: Congregation of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Kelly, M. (2009). The Role of Theory in Qualitative Health Research. *Family Practice*, 27, 285-290.

Kirk, D. (1947, April). European Migration: Prewar Trends and Future Prospects. *The Millbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, 25(2), 128-152.

Lummis, T. (1987). *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence*. London: Hutchison.

MacGinley, M. (2002). *A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia* (2nd ed.). Darlinghurst, NSW: Crossing Press.

Maltese Emigration Department. (1960-1970). Annual Reports of Department of Labour and Emigration. In Jones, H.R. (ed.), (1973). Modern Emigration from Malta. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 60, 101-119.

Marginson, S. (2000). *Education Policy*. Retrieved from Entry Prepared for The Oxford Companion to Australian Politics: [www.education.monash.edu.au/.../oxfordcompanionaustralianpolitics0804.pdf](http://www.education.monash.edu.au/.../oxfordcompanionaustralianpolitics0804.pdf)

Martin, F. (1986). Catholic Education in Victoria: 1963-1980. In Catholic Education Office of Victoria (ed.), *Catholic Education in Victoria: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (pp. 65-98). Melbourne, Dominican Press.

Mather, J. (Ed), Migrant Languages Committee Report, the Teaching of Migrant languages in Schools. (1976). cited in Smolicz, & Secombe, (1981) *The Australian School through Children's eyes: a Polish-Australian View*, Carlton, Victoria. Melbourne University Press

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

McCarthy, F. (1986). Catholic Education in Victoria; 1947-1962. . In Catholic Education Office, Victoria (ed.), *Catholic Education in Victoria: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (pp. 36-49). Melbourne, Dominican Press.

McGrath, M. S. (1989). *These Women: Women Religious in the History of Australia, the Sisters of Mercy, Paramatta, 1888-1988*. Sydney: New South Wales University Press.

Mithen, W. (1972). *Primary Education Today. Catholic Education: Where is it Going?* (P. Gill, ed.) Melbourne: Cassell.

Mithen, W. J. (1972). Primary Education Today. In P. Gill (Ed.), *Catholic Education: Where is it Going?* (pp. 120-142). Melbourne: Cassell (Australia).

Moran, L P. Vicar General, Archdiocese of Melbourne. (1963, September 12). Circular to Parish Priests.

Morse, J., (2007), Developing Qualitative Inquiry, (2007), *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 17., pp. 567-570., Sage Publications

Morse, J. M., Stern, P.M., Corbin, J, Bowers, B., Charmaz, K., & Clarke, A.E. (Eds.), (2009) *(Developi,ng Grounded Theory: The Second Generation*. Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc.

Morse, J. M., Stern, P.N, Corbin, J, Bowers, B, Charmaz, K and Clarke, A.E., (2011), *Qualitative Research* Vol. 11(6), Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc.

Museum Victoria. (n.d.). Retrieved from [www.museumvictoria.com.au/origins](http://www.museumvictoria.com.au/origins)

O'Brien, A. (1999). *Blazing a Trail: Catholic Education in Victoria (1963-1980)*. Melbourne: David Lovell Publishing.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

O'Donoghue, T. A. (2001). *Upholding the Faith: The Process of Education in Catholic Schools in Australia, 1922-1965*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

O'Farrell, P. (1968). *The Catholic Church in Australia: A short history: 1788-1967*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.

Office of Population Research. (1947). Demographic Changes in Poland: War and Postwar. *Population Index*, 13(1), 3-8.

Omerod, N, Rush, O, Pascoe, D, Johnson, C & Hodge J, (Eds.), *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church* (pp. 292-320). Mulgrave, Victoria: Garrat Publishing.

Paganoni, A. (2003). *Valiant Struggles and Benign Neglect: Italians, church and religious societies in the diaspora: the Australian experience from 1950 to 2000*. New York, Centre for Migration Studies.

Paganoni, A. & Coulbourne, P., (2005). *No weary feet: the history and development of mission work among Italian migrants in Australia*. Rome: Centro Studi Emigrazione

Pastoral Research Office. (2013). A Profile of the Catholic Community. *Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*. Retrieved from , pro.catholic.org.au

Pittarello, A. (1980). *Soup Without Salt: The Australian Catholic Church and the Italian Migrant*. Sydney: Centre for Migration Studies.

Pittarello, A. (1981). Report on the Care of Migrants by Religious Orders. *Conference of Major Superiors of Australia*. Sydney: Centre for Migration Studies.

Pittarello, A. (1986). Multiculturalism and the Catholic Church. *CCJP Occasional Papers*(8).

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Pittarello, A. (1988). Migrants and the Catholic Church in Australia. *The Australasian Catholic Record*, LXV(2), 141-158.

Price, C. A. (1963). *Southern Europeans in Australia*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Prowse, Bishop C Catholic Diocese of Sale. (2011). Australian Migration - Borders or Persons? : Seeing migrants and refugees with the eyes of faith. *Bishop Joe Grech Memorial Lecture*. East Melbourne: Australian Catholic University.

Reid, S., Dixon, R., & Connolly, N. (n.d.). *See I am doing a Good Thing: A Report on the 2009 Survey of Catholic Religious Instituted in Australia*. Melbourne, John Garratt Publishing.

Richardson, A., & Taft, R. (1968). Australian Attitudes Towards Immigrants: A Review of Social Survey Findings. *International Migration Review*, 2(3), 46-55.

Sant Cassia, P. (1983). Unemployed Youth in Sunshine: The Maltese Case (Unpublished Study). In M. Cauchi,(1990), *Maltese Migrants in Australia* (pp. 57-60), Melbourne: Maltese Community Council of Victoria.

Schechtman, J. B. (1947). European Population Transfers 1939-1945., *Geographical Review*, Volume 37(3), p.520.

Selleck, R. (1978). The Catholic Primary School. In Cleverly, J (Ed.), *Half a Million Children: Studies of Non-Government Education in Australia*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire..

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research; A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage Publications.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Sisters' State Advisory Groups, The National Team, Special Groups of Brothers and Clerical Religious and the Research Office of the Major Superiors of Religious Women. (April, 1977). *National Statistical Survey of Religious Personnel, Australia 1976*. Australia, Conferences of the Major Superiors of Australia

Smolicz, J., & Secombe, M. (1981). *The Australian School Through Children's Eyes: A Polish-Australian View*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Sofae, S. (2002). Qualitative Research Methods: Methodology Matters. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 14(4), 329-336.

Stapleton, D. (1998). A Changing of the Guard: the change of Leadership of Catholic Secondary Schools in Post World War II Victoria. *AARE Conference*, (pp. 1-10). Adelaide.

Stoller, A. (Ed) (1966), *New faces - immigration and family life in Australia*, Cheshire, Melbourne, for the Victoria Family Council.

Sturrock, M. (1995). *Women of Strength Women of Gentleness: Brigidine Sisters - Victoria Province*. Melbourne: David Lovell Publishing.

Sultana, R. (2001). Social Class and Educational Achievement in Malta. In R. Sultana (Ed.), *Themes in Education: A Maltese Reader*. Msida, Malta: Mireva Publications.

Sultana, R. (1993). Let Me Dream: Transforming Educational Futures. In L. Terry (Ed.), *Forum for Migration and Multicultural Issues* (pp. 1-11). Victoria University of Technology (VUT), Melbourne: Faculty of Arts, Victoria University of Technology.

Taft, R. (1975). The Career Aspirations of Immigrant Schoolchildren in Victoria. (*Paper No. 12*). Melbourne.

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Taft, R., & Cahill, D. (1978). *Initial Adjustment to Schooling of Migrant Families*. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education.

Taft, R., & Cahill, D. (1981). Education of Immigrants in Australia. In J. Bhatnagar (Ed.), *Educating Immigrants* (pp. 16-46). London: Croom Helm.

Terry, L., Borland, H., & Adams, R. (1993). *To Learn More than I Have: The Educational Aspirations and Experiences of the Maltese in Melbourne*. Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology.

Tessarolo, G. (1962). *The Church's Magna Carta for Migrants*. New York: The Society of St Paul.

Thomas, W. I., & Znaniecki, F. (1918). *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Boston: Gorham Press.

Travaglia, J. (1993). *Growing up Italian in Australia: eleven young Australian women talk about their childhood*. Sydney: State Library of NSW Press

Vasta, E. (1994). Youth and Ethnicity: The Second Generation. *Family Matters - Australian Institute of Family Studies*, 38(August), 21-25.

Vicar General. (1965). Special Meeting on Catholic Education for All Parish Priests. Melbourne.

Wejnert, C., & Heckathorn, D., *Respondent Driven Sampling and Social Networks: A New Sampling Method*, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Marriott Hotel, Loews Philadelphia Hotel, Philadelphia, PA, (August 12, 2005) (Unpublished).

The Experiences of Migrant Children in the Catholic Primary School in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s.

York, B. (1989, November). The Maltese, White Australia, and Conscription: 'Il-Tfal Ta Billy Hughes'. *Labour History*, 57 (1989), 1-15.

York, B. (2011). *Maltese Identity in Australia*. (Malta Emigration Museum) Retrieved 2001-2012, from [www.maltamigration.com](http://www.maltamigration.com).

Yow, V.R., (2014), *Recording oral history A guide for the humanities and social sciences*. Rowman and Littlefield, Maryland, USA

Zubrzycki, H. (1964). *Settlers of the Latrobe Valley*. Canberra: ANU.