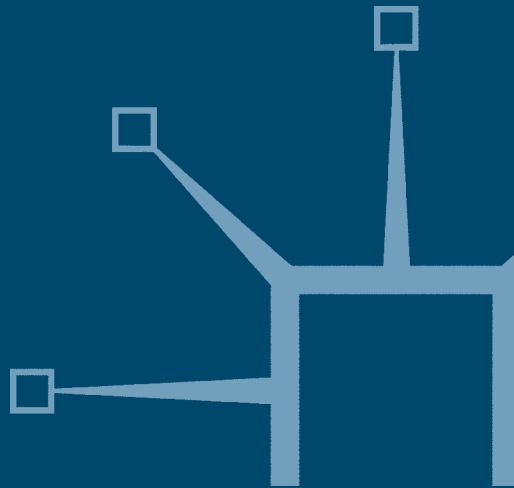# Motivation, Engagement and Educational Performance

International Perspectives on the Contexts for Learning

Julian G. Elliott, Neil R. Hufton, Wayne Willis and Leonid Illushin

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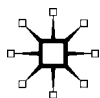
International Perspectives on the Contexts for Learning

Julian G. Elliott

Neil R. Hufton

Wayne Willis

and

Leonid Illushin

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Introduction

The roots of disquiet in England and the US about student performance

Humans are motivated to do many other things than learn and, when they are motivated to learn, it is often to learn many things that are not taught in schools. The focus of this book is upon motivation to learn in school.

In most of the countries of the world, the 'education' of their populations is currently seen as a key means of national flourishing, within an environment of increasing globalisation. Though their transformation, or demise, as a result of new information technologies, is regularly predicted, schools everywhere remain as the main vehicle for the education of rising generations and 'education', for the young, is taken to be centrally defined by school curricula.

Everywhere, some proportion of young people responds poorly to the demands and expectations of school curricula. This might be attributed to innate differences between individuals, except that the proportions of less successful students vary, between otherwise indistinguishable populations, in ways that can only reasonably be attributed to 'environmental' causes. One possible explanation of these differences between populations is that their young are differently motivated to learn in school. This book aims to explore aspects of young people's environments of learning which might explain observed variation in their motivation to learn in school.

That there is such variation is implied by a series of increasingly large and sophisticated comparative studies undertaken during the past forty years, which have produced a growing disquiet in England and the United States about their children's educational performance. Under the

auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and a rival group, Educational Testing Services' International Assessment of Educational Progress (IAEP), various studies have shown English and American children as underperforming in comparison with those in a number of Asian and European countries. A raft of smaller-scale studies of mathematical performance involving England (Burghes, 1996; Tancig *et al.*, 1998; Elliott *et al.*, 2001a) and/or the United States (Stevenson and Lee, 1990; Stigler *et al.*, 1990; Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Song and Ginsburg, 1987) have provided a broadly similar picture. Until recently, comparative studies of reading ability have also suggested modest performance by English and American students (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Brooks *et al.*, 1996; Brooks, 2000) although more recent investigations have suggested improvement (OECD, 2001; Mullis *et al.*, 2003), particularly in the case of England.

In 1996, a detailed review of the performance of students in England, sponsored by the Office for Standards in Education, lamented the declining comparative performance of students in England (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996). Shortly afterwards, findings from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Beaton *et al.*, 1996a,b), involving 500,000 students in forty-one countries, resulted in further dismay in both England and the United States, where students scored significantly lower in mathematics and science than those in several Pacific Rim and European countries. Concern in the United States about standards (in particular, a negative 'high school effect') was fuelled by the TIMSS finding that the nation's children fared comparatively worse as they progressed through the school grades. At the fourth grade, US students were above the international average in both science and mathematics. In the eighth grade, performance had declined in both subjects; they were still above average in science but were now below in mathematics. By the end of their schooldays (twelfth grade), US students were among the lowest performers in both subjects, with only Cyprus and South Africa, of the 21 participating nations, scoring significantly poorer. Examination of the most able 10–20 per cent of students in mathematics and physics proved particularly unsettling as, in both subjects, US students were outperformed by every other country.

The findings from a further round of tests with eighth graders (Year 9 in England), 'TIMSS-Repeat' (also known as TIMSS-R), were released at the end of 2000 (Martin and Mullis, 2000; Mullis *et al.*, 2000). While US students were now above the international average in both science and mathematics, most US media reports continued to be negative. In particular, concern was expressed that the relatively strong position of

US fourth graders, noted in the 1996 TIMSS studies, had not been maintained four years later. This finding threw into doubt the earlier claims that the encouraging fourth grade results were reflecting the impact of widespread educational reforms in the United States. Commenting upon the results, the US Secretary of Education Richard Riley noted that while

> ...American children continue to learn...their peers in other countries are learning at a faster rate...We need to work harder and better. (*New York Times*, 6 December 2000)

English TIMSS-R results for mathematics were broadly similar to those of the United States, yet were stronger in science (ninth position). In commenting upon mathematical standards, government ministers suggested that the recent introduction of a daily numeracy hour for every primary school student would soon show tangible results (*Times Educational Supplement*, 8 December 2000). The reasons for the strong science performance were not clear although it was thought that its positioning within the National Curriculum, commencing from the age of five, was a contributory factor.

The accumulated wealth of comparative data resulted in one of the periodic crises of confidence that often feature in England and the United States. One high-profile English commentator (Barber, 1996), subsequently appointed as head of the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE) Standards and Effectiveness Unit, concluded that despite the methodological weaknesses of individual studies, the results were so consistent that we

> ...would be living in a fool's paradise if we chose to ignore the results. (p. 24)

In seeking to explain the reasons for US–Asian differences in educational performance, Stevenson and Stigler (1992) outlined a number of important factors, several of which were largely independent of school or classroom organisation:

1. Education is more valued in the Asian home where a much higher proportion of time is spent studying;
2. Asian parents tend to be far less satisfied with mediocre performance than their American counterparts and their active encouragement helps

to ensure that their children spent a significantly higher proportion of time studying during out-of-school hours;

3. Asian classrooms stress the importance of the group rather than the individual;

4. Asian culture emphasises effort rather than notions of fixed ability. Stevenson and his colleagues suggested that the reverse was true for the United States.

In trying to account for comparatively poor achievement in England, Reynolds and Farrell (1996), clearly influenced by Stevenson's work, similarly listed a wide range of possible explanations for the differences between England and Pacific Rim countries. These were clustered under four headings: cultural, systemic, school and classroom factors. Cultural factors helping to raise Pacific Rim performance included the high status of teachers, the emphasis on working hard, high parental aspirations, the academic quality of teachers and high levels of student commitment. Systemic factors included time in school, with more and longer school days, a prevalent belief that all children could succeed, and concentration on a small number of attainment goals, most of which were academic in content. School factors included a strong emphasis on whole-class collaborative and supportive group processes, the use of specialist teachers, free time for planning and teacher collaboration and close monitoring by means of frequent testing, and monitoring by the school Principal. A key classroom factor was the use of whole-class interactive teaching which sought to ensure that everyone was keeping up with the material together. Other elements were the widespread use of textbooks to minimise the need for teachers to construct their own materials, and tight lesson timings to ensure that attention was maximally focused.

Reynolds and Farrell's review received much media attention although comments tended to overlook the cultural differences and emphasise pedagogical factors. This led to many high-profile attacks upon the teaching approaches that were thought to prevail in England. In particular, commentators seized upon the wide range of performance with its long tail of underachievement, and the authors' suggestions that the British emphasis upon individualisation might be responsible. Thus, philosophies and practices that emphasised differentiation, whereby each child was provided with learning tasks at a level and pace deemed appropriate to their particular needs, were seen as accentuating differences between students. In contrast, many high-performing countries appeared to have mechanisms that ensured that the range of student achievement was kept to a minimum.

Pedagogic solutions?

Perhaps the most influential outcome of the Reynolds and Farrell review was the widespread call for changed patterns of teaching. Drawing upon observations in highly successful Pacific Rim countries and in Switzerland (Bierhoff and Prais, 1995; Bierhoff, 1996), the Report argued for an increase in whole-class teaching,

> . . . not simply of the 'lecture to the class' variety, but high quality *interactive* teaching in which the teacher starts with a problem and develops solutions and concepts through a series of graded questions addressed to the whole class. (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996, p. 56, emphasis as in original)

This call was taken up enthusiastically by the then Chief Inspector of Schools in England and Wales (Woodhead, 1996) who argued that 50 per cent of primary school lesson time (60% in the case of mathematics) should take the form of whole-class teaching. Whole-class interactive practices from Switzerland, Germany (Luxton and Last, 1997) and Hungary (Burghes, 1996) were modified for English classrooms amid heavy media publicity.

Burghes' approach emphasised the need for greater clarity, precision and focus in teaching mathematical concepts, the use of student errors as illustrations for class learning, the use of homework as a central component of learning and greater emphasis upon whole-class interactive teaching. Others (Wilson *et al*., 2001) noted that in England, children appeared to spend longer periods of time on a specific task than did those in Eastern Europe, where lessons were often broken up into relatively short chunks. English practice tended to result in the commission of fewer activities in each session and a potential loss of pace, factors that have been identified as problematic in the teaching of mathematics in England (Ofsted, 1994; Straker, 1999).

In the United States, despite some evidence of its effectiveness (Evertson *et al*., 1980) one would nowadays rarely encounter calls for more whole-class teaching. Indeed, the trend would appear to be directly towards increasing the amount of individualised and small-group work, albeit with a strong collaborative emphasis. As in England, however, researchers have differentiated between 'traditional' whole-class teaching and whole-class interactive teaching, of which only the latter is considered to play a significant role in heightening achievement:

> Whole-class instruction in the United States has gotten a somewhat bad reputation. It has become associated with too much teacher talk

and too many passive, tuned-out students. But…whole-class instruction in Japanese and Chinese classrooms is a very lively, engaging enterprise. Asian teachers do not spend large amounts of time lecturing. They present interesting problems; they pose provocative questions; they probe and guide. The students work hard, generating multiple approaches to a solution, explaining the rationale behind their methods, and making good use of wrong answers. (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992, pp. 146–147)

Stigler built upon his earlier cross-cultural work by using TIMSS data to analyse classroom practice. In the light of their analysis of videotape recordings of eighth grade mathematics lessons in the United States, Germany and Japan, Stigler and Hiebert (1999) provide a series of recommendations that involve adopting aspects of Japanese teaching practices. The perceived success of this resulted in a seven-nation video study as part of TIMSS-R (Hiebert *et al.*, 2003).

Findings from international studies have impacted upon policy and practice in many countries (Owen *et al.*, 2004) although the value of adopting ('cherry-picking') the educational practices of other nations has been questioned. In a blistering review of Stigler and Hiebert's text, Hopmann (2000), for example, argued that the authors failed to take into consideration the important influence of factors outside of school, nor did they provide empirical support for the suggestion that differences in academic performance between these countries were related to the forms of instruction provided. Such criticisms were echoed by researchers in England (Alexander, 1999; Brown, 1999) who were equally scornful of the tendency to

… use international data selectively to give unequivocal messages about how to improve teaching. (Brown, 1999, p. 20)

Criticisms of calls for more whole-class teaching centred upon two issues. First, whole-class teaching approaches are evidenced throughout the world and thus it is rather disingenuous to relate these only to high scoring countries; it is equally important to understand why such practices have not proven successful in countries that have scored poorly. Secondly, there is little evidence to support the argument that one can cherry-pick approaches in successful countries and import these into very different cultures while retaining their effectiveness.

In England, concerns about standards in literacy and mathematics resulted in the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998)

and the National Numeracy Strategy (DfEE, 1999) in primary schools. Underpinning these was an emphasis upon interactive whole-class teaching. While modifications to the shape of lessons have resulted, deeper peda- gogic practices appear to have been resistant to change, and traditional patterns of interaction have persisted (Smith *et al.*, 2004). The precise forms that specific teaching techniques take are often conditioned by national cultural traditions that serve as a philosophical base upon which practice is built. In her study of English, French and German secondary mathematics lessons Pepin (1997), for example, has documented the very different ways in which whole-class teaching is conducted. English teachers tended to take a rather didactic approach in which concepts were explained from the front and students subsequently worked alone or in small groups while the teacher moved from one individual to another. French teachers, reflecting egalitarian rather than more individualistic traditions, took their students as a group through complex thought- provoking problems and solutions were reached collaboratively. German teachers, operating within a humanist tradition, also worked with the whole-class interactive, conversational style – in which students were often called to the front of the class to demonstrate their thinking (as commonly found in Eastern Europe), was widely employed.

Fuller and Clarke (1994) suggest that those who have considered what makes for effective learning (and schools) fall into two camps. One group, the 'policy mechanics', attempt to identify discrete teaching and wider school practices that are universally associated with student achievement. Such information is of great interest both to national governments and to supranational organisations, such as the World Bank, who have considered it possible to identify elements of school and classroom effect- iveness and subsequently import such practices. Offering neat solutions, researchers working in this tradition became, at least for a short time, the gurus of policy makers:

> . . . the academic community's jet-setting, high-tech, intellectual sharp dressers. (Alexander, 1996, p. 6)

Others, labelled by Fuller and Clarke as 'classroom culturalists', reject any notion that educational practices can be considered inde- pendently of the culture in which they are situated. Rather, they focus on the

> . . . implicitly modelled norms exercised in the classroom and how children are socialised to accept particular rules of participation and

> authority, linguistic norms, orientations towards achievement, and conceptions of merit and status. (Fuller and Clarke, 1994, p. 119)

For this latter group, attempts to derive culture-free conceptions of educational inputs (class size, level of teacher education, pedagogic practice) considered to have consistent, universal effects upon achievement are naïve and unlikely to generate meaningful understandings.

More recent international studies give the impression that the English government's drive to cover the basics of English and mathematics, and teach science from a young age have paid off. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) undertaken by the IEA (Mullis *et al.*, 2003) compared the reading performance of over 140,000 ten year olds in 35 countries using measures of understanding and use of language, rather than simple reading accuracy (decoding). Ranked third, children in England were, on average, among the most able readers, although, consistent with earlier findings, they also exhibited one of the widest spans of attainment. In the PIRLS study, children in the United States also scored well, achieving ninth place.

Another international comparative study of 15 year olds across 32 nations, the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) (OECD, 2001) undertaken in 2000, has similarly indicated strong UK performance in English, maths and science (seventh, eighth and fourth respectively), with performance in the United States rather closer to the international mean. Prais (2003) has heavily criticised both the objectives and methods of PISA. The stated desire of the study's designers not to assess mastery of the school curriculum but, rather, to assess how students might cope with everyday life situations is, he contends, likely to militate against education systems that emphasise more formal knowledge-based approaches. Prais also dismisses findings from countries, such as England, where almost half of the original representative sample of students failed to participate (n.b. the United States also had a very low participation rate).

Increases in test performance over time may not necessarily be indicative of meaningful improvement. Commonly witnessed outcomes of the introduction of high stakes assessment are teaching to the test and greater student familiarity with the measures concerned, leading to improved test techniques. While this may cause scores on the target test to rise, performance on other measures covering the same domain may not necessarily increase to the same extent. Thus Tymms (2004) points to several data sources that lead him to conclude that the apparently impressive rises in mathematics and reading in UK schools may be illusory.

The three milieux study

This book centres upon findings from our researches into achievement motivation in Eastern Kentucky, United States; Sunderland, in the Northeast of England; and St Petersburg, Russia. The origins of our research programme lay in several visits that we made to these regions, where we were immediately struck by a significant difference in workrate and educational standards, between superior performance in the Russian context on the one hand, and that of the Anglo-American on the other.

Consideration of Russia's educational standards in relation to those of other countries is difficult, particularly given its infrequent involvement in international comparative studies. However, commentators as diverse as Ross Perot and the World Bank (Canning *et al.*, 1999) have remarked upon the country's reputation for educational excellence. Anecdotal accounts of visits to Soviet/Russian classrooms and of the performance of émigrés to Western schools have frequently described performance in science and mathematics two to four years ahead of their Western peers (Bucur and Eklof, 1999). Visitor accounts have also frequently testified to Russian children's disciplined and motivated approach to learning (Alexander, 2000). Performance in TIMSS suggested performance largely superior to the United States and England and, prior to this, the OECD (1998) commented upon the country's high levels of academic achievement. More recent studies (OECD, 2001) are disconcerting and concerns have been expressed that standards may now be in decline as a result of recent social and economic turbulence (Dolzhenko, 1998).

Somewhat taken aback by the motivation and engagement of the students we observed in St Petersburg, particularly at a time when social and economic dislocation were causing major concern, we sought to investigate reasons for these apparent cross-cultural differences. We were mindful that in selecting discrete locations in three countries with a total number of more than 450 million people, we could not hope to provide a representative picture of a particular nation-state, and thus, have not perceived our work as aiming to make transnational comparisons, as such. Certainly, we recognised that Sunderland and Kentucky were comparatively underperforming regions in their countries, while St Petersburg was a city that encompassed a more highly educated student body than one might typically find elsewhere in Russia (Bakker, 1999; Canning *et al.*, 1999; Sobkin, 2001). For our purposes, it has been sufficient that the processes in which we were interested were situated in what could be expected to be different cultural milieux.

At the same time there were important similarities between the chosen milieux. In each, economic challenges appeared to be a significant threat to the maintenance of high levels of educational motivation. Their selection was influenced by another important factor. In each, major educational reform had been introduced as a means of raising standards (at state level in Kentucky, at national level in the other settings). These have resulted in changes not only to the content of the curriculum but also to school organisation and funding, and approaches to teaching and learning. While such initiatives may ultimately improve each of these nation's education systems (or, at least in the case of Kentucky and Sunderland, improve test scores), they did not appear to us to be addressing factors central to the difference in standards we observed. On the basis of our observations, discussions with educationists in the three milieux and extensive reading, we were unconvinced that changing curriculum content and pedagogy without also directly addressing underlying attitudes, beliefs and value systems would result in the gains that were desired by the reformers.

It is hardly surprising that in their efforts to 'drive up' standards, policy makers tend to focus upon factors over which they can exert more control. While systematic school-based reform may help to raise achievement, particularly in schools serving socially disadvantaged communities (Borman *et al.*, 2003), a narrow preoccupation with school-based factors can result in students, their families and the local and national community failing to recognise the importance of more pervasive influences. Our thinking, and the subsequent research programme, was influenced by the work of Steinberg (1996), who provides a damning indictment of contemporary American attitudes to education. Findings from his research programme demonstrate large-scale parental disengagement from schooling whereby acceptance of poor grades is widespread, a peer culture that is often scornful of academic excellence, and student lifestyles in which a high proportion of time outside of school is spent socialising, engaged in leisure pursuits and/or part-time employment. In the light of his, and others', findings, Steinberg concludes that too much emphasis has been placed upon school reform and insufficient attention given to attitudes, beliefs and achievement-striving behaviours.

Interested to gain more understanding of factors that influenced student motivation, we undertook a series of studies of the three milieux, over a five-year period, geared to exploring the complex relationship between schooling, educational reform, differing value systems and the impact of socioeconomic factors. In considering our approach, we were greatly influenced by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) approach to human development

that likens aspects of the ecological environment to a set of Russian Matryoshka dolls in which each nestles inside another. At the innermost level, the microsystem, lies the immediate settings in which an individual functions. Next, at the level of the mesosystem, one considers how these different settings, the school, the home, the playground, the shopping mall and so on interconnect. Exosystems, the third level, consists of some settings in which the individual is not even present, for example, the development of the young child may be affected by events that occur in the parents' workplace such as a promotion or pay increase. At the supraordinate level, the macrosystem refers to the comprehensive network of relational systems that operates within a culture. This includes such elements as educational and vocational opportunities, sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors and the various roles and responsibilities accorded by society to individuals on the basis of such variables as age, ethnicity and gender. As we note, in relation to recent transformation in Russia (see Chapter 8), the macrosystem may now be increasingly open to global influences (LeTendre *et al.*, 2001).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach contends that the scientific study of human development should concern itself with the progressive mutual accommodation between the developing individual, the dynamically changing settings in which the person lives, and the larger contexts in which such settings are embedded. Tudge *et al.* (1997) succinctly articulate this position:

Development is a function of factors that relate to the immediate activity in which one or more people are involved (the microgenetic level of analysis), age and developing characteristics of the studied person or people as they are developing over the life span (the ontogenetic level), the culturewide symbols, values and beliefs, technologies and institutions (factors relating to the cultural-historical level of analysis), as well as the development of the species (the phylogenetic level). There is hierarchical organisation but also interconnections at each and every level. Because of the interconnections, understanding development requires analysis that captures all levels, although the phylogenetic level, being virtually unchanging for all except those studying development over archaeological time, is rarely considered. This means, in effect, studying aspects of developing individuals, relations between those individuals and their immediately surrounding world (both people and objectives), and the broader cultural-historical context. Analysis at only one level is insufficient to make sense of development. (Tudge *et al.*, 1997, pp. 120–121)

In trying to gain a richer understanding of those factors that influence student academic motivation in the three milieux, we sought to draw upon multiple layers involving student perspectives and the views and/or influence of peers, parents, teachers, the culture of the classroom and school, educational practices, educational legislation and policy, socio-economic and sociocultural factors. Given the demands of such an enterprise, we decided not to undertake a detailed study of pedagogic practices in each milieu, as this would be a massive undertaking beyond the resources of a small team. Rather, we drew upon existing work to inform our analyses, in particular, the highly acclaimed comparative study of primary education in these countries (Alexander, 2000).

We saw the absence of ecosystemic perspectives as problematic for current theorising about motivation and learning. While the past decade has seen an increase in research examining how peers, parents and teachers separately influence learning and achievement (although peer influences upon motivation have, until recently, been relatively neglected [Ryan, 2000]) there is still a relative dearth of studies examining how motivation, engagement and learning occur within macrolevel states of affairs (Murdock, 2000). Of course, this largely reflects the dominant paradigm within educational psychology, which while beginning to draw increasingly upon methodological approaches from anthropology and sociology (Volet, 2001), too seldom contributes to broader multidisciplinary investigations that offer the promise of providing richer and more comprehensive understandings of social phenomena.

2
Psychological Theories of Achievement Motivation

In this chapter, we outline several key psychological theories of achievement motivation. In so doing, we identify a number of ideas and constructs that underpin much of the research we report in subsequent chapters.

Although originally the preserve of philosophy, it was in 1879, when Wundt established the first psychological laboratory in Leipzig, that a concerted attempt to explore human thought and behaviour scientifically was made. Wundt's method of introspection, which required individuals to provide an account of their experiences following exposure to events or objects, produced data that appeared unreliable and of questionable utility. Similar criticisms were subsequently made of the Freudian position that much human behaviour was motivated by unconscious influences. While highly influential in shaping our understanding of human behaviour, many see Freud's work as unscientific because it is insusceptible of being disproved. Furthermore, such a perspective may have little utility for educationalists as the suggestion that motivation originates from largely unconscious inner forces underplays the important role of personal cognitions and environmental factors and offers little value to those who seek to understand how educational practice can help shape student goals, interests, attitudes and values (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996).

During much of the twentieth century, psychology in general, and motivational theory in particular, was heavily influenced by behaviourism. While many theories emerged, they all emphasised the important link between stimuli and response. Perhaps the most influential of these, certainly in terms of the impact made upon educational practice, was that of Skinner (1953), whose theory of operant conditioning highlighted the importance of reinforcement in shaping an individual's behaviour.

Skinner's theory heightened our awareness of the importance of how we react to another's behaviour in increasing or decreasing its subsequent frequency. According to the theory, behaviour followed by a positive reinforcer is more likely to reappear subsequently. Thus, for example, if a student is rewarded by the teacher for revising for a test or helping with classroom routines, it is more likely that such behaviours will be repeated. Of course, what matters here is whether the student, rather than the teacher, perceives the consequence as rewarding. Whereas reinforcement increases behaviour, punishment is geared to decrease the likelihood of its reappearance. Thus, a student who disrupts a lesson may be kept behind after school in the hope that this will result in a diminution of such undesirable behaviour.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, the limitations of behavioural conceptions became more apparent and the importance of cognitive and social factors was increasingly highlighted. As a result, a variety of theoretical perspectives emerged, each employing their own distinct perspectives and terminology. In a detailed analysis of motivation terminology, Murphy and Alexander (2000) identified twenty key constructs which they saw as clustering around goal theory, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, interest and a variety of theories that are largely concerned with conceptions of self. These, together with a discussion of attribution theory, are briefly outlined below.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

> I'm trying much harder to get good grades this school year, as any F grades will mean that my summer vacation to Florida will be cancelled. (Kentucky student)

In the light of the insights derived from behaviourism, many educationalists continue to stress the central importance of reinforcement in motivating students to study. Thus, young children receive gold stars in their exercise books, older students gain commendations and, in some cases, material rewards are offered for academic success. At times, these can seem rather excessive. For example, in the drive in Kentucky for higher scores in 'high-stakes' testing, teachers offered a range of rewards for improved performance that included free breakfasts on test days, trips to a movie theatre and amusement park and a chance to win prizes such as prom tickets and limousine rides. One elementary school Principal even offered her students an opportunity to throw slime at her if they could equal or improve upon the previous year's test results (Anderman, 1997).

While often very powerful, providing external rewards for desired behaviour may have unintended consequences. In successfully controlling behaviour, the use of such forms of reinforcement may forestall the individual's capacity to self-motivate and self-regulate and thus have unintended negative long-term effects. For such reasons, Anderman (1997) states that while school-based schemes to raise performance, such as those outlined above, may prove effective in the short term, their long-term impact upon students' attitudes to learning could be 'disastrous' (p. 305). There is a real risk in such situations that gaining the reward becomes the main purpose for engaging in the behaviour, and its value as an important end in itself is undermined. In such circumstances, unless the teacher continues to provide such reinforcers, the behaviour will ultimately disappear. Furthermore, the use of external rewards may suggest to the recipient that the activity is not worth doing for its own sake (Covington and Palladino, 1999). An important distinction in motivational theory, therefore, concerns whether reinforcement is intrinsic or extrinsic. Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) states that an individual is intrinsically motivated when he or she engages in a task primarily because this is an enjoyable or fulfilling experience. In contrast, an individual is said to be extrinsically motivated when the individual engages in a task primarily in order to receive a reward or to avoid some form of punishment. For example, a child who works hard on a school project because the topic is interesting can be said to be intrinsically motivated; in contrast, a student who studies hard because her parents will reward her should she receive a high grade can be said to be extrinsically motivated.

For many parents and educators, the use of extrinsic rewards is justified on the basis that these can gradually be phased out as the maturing student increasingly recognises the value of the activity as an end in itself. However, there is some evidence to suggest that this ideal is not always realised. In a review of 128 studies, Deci *et al*. (1999) examined the effects of extrinsic rewards (tangible and verbal) on intrinsic motivation. They found that tangible rewards offered for engaging in, completing or succeeding on a task were generally deleterious to intrinsic motivation; however, this was not the case where the reward was unexpected. This does not mean that repeated use of 'surprise' rewards is advisable, as such a strategy can lead to raised expectations of 'surprises' and ultimately prove counterproductive. Verbal rewards, in the form of positive feedback, however, were found to have an enhancing effect upon college (but not school) students' intrinsic motivation, perhaps because these built up students' feelings of competence, although it was noted that this

effect might disappear where students work hard only in order to gain praise.

Others (e.g. Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000; Cameron, 2001) consider that the case against the use of extrinsic rewards has been over-stated. They contend that these may be particularly valuable where tasks are particularly uninteresting and suggest that such rewards may be important for the otherwise academically unmotivated. In reviewing findings from Deci, Ryan and Koestner's metaanalysis, they note that these drew from studies that considered the effects of external rewards on relatively simple, short-term activities. This may not relate closely to real-life learning situations. Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) suggest that where activities are complex and of lengthy duration, a combination of intrinsically appealing elements and extrinsic rewards may be necessary to assist students maintain engagement (Hidi, 2000).

Deci and his research team (Deci *et al.*, 2001) accept that the finding that rewards undermine intrinsic motivation only appears to apply to interesting activities. As they note, this is, of course, hardly surprising as in such cases, there is little intrinsic motivation to be undermined by rewards in the first place. While intrinsic enjoyment in learning is a central characteristic of the young infant, many adults bemoan the fact that this appears far less evident as the child moves through the years of schooling. With the advent of adolescence, in particular, academic tasks may often appear unappealing and uninteresting. Here extrinsic factors may play an important role in aiding motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) point out, however, that these may vary substantially in the autonomy they permit the individual. A student who completes homework to avoid detention and a student who sees this as necessary to gain access to a good career are both extrinsically motivated for instrumental ends, yet

> . . . the latter case entails personal endorsement and a feeling of control, whereas the former involves mere compliance with an external control. Both represent intentional behaviour, but the two types of extrinsic motivation vary in their relative autonomy. (p. 60)

Ryan and Deci (2000) differentiate between a number of types of extrinsic motivation. These range from externally imposed and reinforced forms of regulation, internal regulation prompted by the need to avoid guilt or shame and achieve a sense of pride and sense of worth, to more autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation where the individual identifies with the personal importance of specific behaviours

and perceives them as congruent with their wider value system. While behaviour in this latter circumstance is more volitional and valued by the individual, it is extrinsic because it is undertaken for an instrumental outcome rather than as an end in itself. However, more autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation do appear to be associated with superior engagement and learning (Connell and Wellborn, 1990; Miserandino, 1996).

Self-determination theory emphasises the importance of relatedness and perceived competence as important factors in maintaining behaviour that is not intrinsically motivated. Relatedness refers to a feeling of belongingness to others, whether peers, family or wider society, marked by warm and caring relationships. Perceived competence, in which the individual has a strong sense of self-efficacy, it is argued, will increase the likelihood of acceptance of the extrinsic goal.

Attribution theory

One aspect of achievement motivation that has greatly pervaded the broader literature on educational performance is that of attribution theory. Attribution theory assumes that individuals actively seek to understand and master their environment and themselves. In so doing, they seek to understand the reasons why events unfold as they do. For example, should a student fail an examination, he or she may attribute this to lack of effort, lack of ability, poor instruction, luck or a variety of other variables. Similarly, these factors may also be used to explain a successful outcome.

Many key ideas on motivation from an attributional perspective stem from the work of Weiner (1986). His model indicates that the perceived causes of an event are determined both by environmental factors (e.g. social norms, specific information relating to the particular circumstance) and personal factors such as an individual's general beliefs about such situations and about themselves. As attributions reflect an individual's subjective perceptions, different attributions for the same event may be made by the actors concerned.

Weiner considers attributions to be located in three causal dimensions: stability, locus and controllability. Stability refers to the extent to which the particular cause can change over time. For example, intelligence is seen by many as stable (although others would dispute this) whereas workrate can vary a great deal from one occasion to another. The second dimension, locus, refers to the extent to which the attribution is internal or external to the individual. Here, intelligence is perceived as internal;

in contrast, poor preparation on the part of one's teacher would be external. The final dimension, controllability, reflects the extent to which the factor(s) concerned are amenable to the individual's control. Here natural intelligence might be seen by some as uncontrollable yet the amount of time spent on homework can be increased or decreased. Each of these dimensions can have an impact upon the individual's psychological well-being. The stability dimension appears to have most influence upon our expectancy for success; the locus dimension is most related to our sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy; and our social emotions (e.g. guilt and shame) are most heavily tied to controllability (Weiner, 1986). According to the model, these expectancies, and their psychological consequences, influence subsequent behaviour, in particular, task engagement and persistence.

Weiner (1979) has argued that where the individual makes external attributions for success (e.g. to task difficulty or luck), motivation to persist is likely to be reduced. In contrast, internal attributions, where learners attribute success or failure to their own characteristics (e.g. high ability or hard-working), are more likely to result in increased motivation to succeed. In actuality, many studies of school settings (Blatchford, 1996; Lightbody *et al.*, 1996; Gipps and Tunstall, 1998) indicate that children tend to attribute success in school to internal rather than external factors. However, it is important to differentiate between those internal factors over which the individual has a high degree of control (e.g. effort) and those which are relatively fixed (e.g. natural ability). Where a student perceives failure to be the result of a lack of ability, they may feel that there is little that they can do about this. As a result, they may be less likely to exhibit goal-seeking behaviour than should they believe failure to be the result of not having worked hard enough. In drawing upon attribution theory to help our understanding of the reasons why some cultures, or subcultures, appear to perform more highly, many commentators and researchers, therefore, have focused upon issues surrounding the relative importance of ability and effort (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Elliott *et al.*, 1999, 2001a).

Attribution theory has helped us determine how individuals' understandings of the reasons why certain outcomes occurred might influence their willingness to increase or decrease their efforts. However, while the theory has provided important insights into cognitive, affective and behavioural consequences of outcomes, it does not provide insights into what it is that leads individuals to seek to achieve academically in the first place (Molden and Dweck, 2000). The development of goal theory represented an attempt to answer this question.

Goal orientation theory

Goal orientation theory has become increasingly influential over the past two decades and now appears to be one of the most prominent perspectives of achievement motivation (Patrick, 2004; Urdan, 2004). As Molden and Dweck (2000) point out, examining people's goals may help us gain greater insights into different views of the means to achievement, the reasons for success or failure and the importance, to the individual, of achieving the desired outcome. Thus goal theory was perceived as a more comprehensive means of understanding why students may be motivated to achieve.

Of course, there are different types of goals that relate to highly specific or more general outcomes. Thus Pintrich (2003) contrasts target or task-specific goals (e.g. obtaining a pass mark in a particular examination) with purpose goals or goal orientations. These concern more general reasons for wanting to do well, for example, why someone might want to pass the examination in the first place. It is these more overarching goals that are of particular interest to achievement motivational theorists.

In considering reasons that students offer for engaging in academic tasks, most goal theorists have argued that two different categories of goals are particularly important – *learning, task* or *mastery* goals and *performance, ego* or *ability* goals. Mastery goals operate when a student's main concern is with mastering aspects of learning as important ends in themselves. Here, the individual is interested in challenge, improvement, personal learning and growth independent of the performance of others. In contrast, performance goals are largely influenced by a desire to demonstrate competence in relation to others; thus, the motivation to achieve is conditioned by a desire to appear more accomplished than others and to avoid situations where a lack of skill or ability might be perceived by onlookers. In comparing these orientations, the literature has tended to conclude that mastery goals are more likely than performance goals to result in motivated and engaged learning approaches and, as a result, superior academic performance (Urdan, 1997; Pintrich, 2000a,b). A number of influential studies, conducted in the 1980s (e.g. Elliott and Dweck, 1988), demonstrated that an orientation to performance goals could lead to a tendency to 'helplessness' as a response to failure, resulting in 'low ability attributions for failure, negative affect following failure, use of ineffective strategies, and decreases in subsequent performance' (Molden and Dweck, 2000, p. 133). The responses of those holding mastery orientations tended to include effort attributions for failure and maintenance of positive affect and strategy.

Of course, much achievement in education settings is deliberately motivated by public recognition of performance, whether by means of teacher or parental praise, high academic grades or the standing of the university that the more able student eventually enters. Given that that some aspects of performance goals are likely to be valuable, a more differentiated analysis has been sought. Thus it is now frequently argued that it is meaningful to differentiate between 'approach' and 'avoidance' performance goals (Elliot and Harackiewicz, 1996; Middleton and Midgley, 1997), with some (e.g. Pintrich, 2000a) arguing that this distinction should apply to mastery goals also. Whereas the former types of goal are concerned with achieving a positive outcome, the latter centre upon avoiding something that is undesirable. In both cases, the individual is concerned about the perceptions that will be held about him or herself by important others such as parents, teachers and classmates. However, the way by which this may be achieved can differ. Students with a performance-approach orientation are concerned to appear more capable than their peers. In contrast, those with a performance-avoid goal would be preoccupied with ensuring that they did not present as less able than their classmates.

Although it was originally believed that the two orientations were orthogonal to one another, that is, one had either a mastery or a performance orientation, studies now indicate a more complex picture where both interact, and have differing influence for different motivational outcomes (Midgley *et al.*, 2001; Harackiewicz *et al.*, 2002; Pintrich, 2003).

The approach–avoid distinction has resulted in more sophisticated understandings about performance goals. Prior to this, research findings about the impact of performance goals on learning were inconsistent. Some showed a variety of undesirable outcomes such as challenge avoidance and surface learning (Elliott and Dweck, 1988), academic cheating (e.g. Anderman *et al.*, 1998), or a lowering of achievement values over time (Anderman *et al.*, 2001). Others showed positive gains (e.g. Elliot, 1997; Harackiewicz *et al.*, 1998) that, perhaps, ran counter to expectations. Differentiating between approach and avoidance goals offers the possibility of a more finely grained analysis although there still continues to be some debate as to their impact upon learning. While most researchers are agreed that performance-avoid goals are likely to have a negative impact upon learning, studies on performance approach are somewhat inconsistent. Thus, Elliot *et al.* (1999) report positive gains while studies by Middleton and Midgley (1997) and Pajares *et al.* (2000) suggest otherwise. In a study that examined four groups of students in maths classes on the basis of mastery and performance-approach goals (high

mastery/low performance, high mastery/high performance, low mastery/ low performance and low mastery/high performance), Pintrich (2000b) concluded that students with high mastery and either low or high performance goals tended to display similar, relatively adaptive profiles. Thus, students who were, in part, motivated by a desire to outperform others yet who were also eager to engage with and understand the academic material had an adaptive pattern of motivation, affect, cognition and achievement as those who were more focused upon mastery goals in isolation. In contrast, those with low mastery goals and high or low performance goals tended to display maladaptive patterns.

One must be cautious of offering overly simplistic analyses, however, and despite the wealth of empirical data available, it is still premature to argue unequivocally that educational reforms should be guided by achievement goal theory. Despite the evidence linking mastery goals to adaptive academic attitudes and behaviours,

> . . . research has failed to find consistent positive associations between mastery goals and academic achievement. (Urdan, 2004, p. 384)

Urdan notes that in relation to achievement, performance-approach goals have been found to correlate positively (Harackiewicz *et al.*, 2000), negatively (Anderman, 1999) or show no association (Midgley and Urdan, 2001). In a similar vein, Wolters (2004) found no evidence that performance-avoid goals predicted strategy use or academic achievement. He suggested that such goals may be more related to whether students became engaged, and stayed involved, with a task, rather than the nature of their cognitive engagement or level of performance.

The impact of goals is likely to vary according to multiple factors. Pajares *et al.* (2000), for example, suggest that performance-approach goals only serve to foster motivation as students progress through adolescence. Pintrich (2000b) points out that we still know little about the relative importance of different curricular areas, the moderating effect of other variables such as self-efficacy or academic achievement level, or individual differences in motivational trajectories over time. Similarly, context, while an under-researched element of goal theory (Pintrich, 2003) is likely to be highly influential, affecting students differentially. The influence of context upon goals is still far from clear (Linnenbrink, 2004). Context may influence students' goal orientation, that is, steer them towards holding mastery or performance goals (Urdan and Midgley, 2003) and differentially motivate those with contrasting goals. Those students, for example, for whom it is particularly important

to outperform one's peers are likely to be maximally motivated in those contexts where a major and public criterion for success is individual achievement in relation to classmates (Harackiewicz *et al.*, 2000). In a qualitative study, Turner *et al.* (2003) studied two elementary school classrooms, both high in mastery and performance classroom goals. They differed substantially, however, in affective climate with one classroom marked by a positive and supportive teacher presence while the other was more negative. The researchers found that student behaviour and performance differed in the two environments, suggesting that affective climate can be an important moderator of the effects of mastery and performance goals.

Other writers have focused upon alternative types of goals. As we discuss in Chapter 5, the most important goals for many school students are predominantly social in nature. Motivational theorists now appear to be taking greater interest in social factors (Urdan and Maehr, 1995) and, indeed, an attempt has recently been made to incorporate a mastery/ performance goal framework within the social domain (Ryan *et al.*, 2004).

There remains a question mark about whether goal theory can provide rich insights into the reasons why an individual chooses to engage or not engage in a task. Molden and Dweck (2000) question whether the emphasis upon motives, rather than the meaning of goals and outcome attributions, may result in a loss of psychological understanding of motivation.

> Without considering issues of meaning, one cannot fully address questions such as what *psychological processes* lead some people to fear failure whereas some others simply seek to achieve, *why* some people enjoy a task less after encountering difficulty whereas others enjoy it as much or more. . . . We believe that . . . The fundamental question that goal-based theories ask – 'What is the purpose toward which a person's strivings are directed?' – must be amended by 'What *meaning* does this purpose have for the person who has undertaken it?'. (p. 137)

As we discuss in Chapter 8, issues of personal (and shared) meaning appear central to the social and educational dilemmas impacting upon the motivation of many contemporary Russian students.

Self-worth theory

Attribution theory has highlighted the important role of effort in achievement. In both Western and Eastern cultures, trying hard is widely

seen as morally desirable and key to achievement. Thus, one might anticipate that students would value the commission of effort as an important source of their personal worth. Why is it then that that many people appear reluctant to be seen to be trying hard to the extent that they attempt to conceal their efforts from others, particularly peers? Self-worth theory (Covington, 1992; Thompson, 1999) may offer some answers to this question.

In Western society, human value is closely related to one's ability to achieve in competition with others (Gardner, 1961). As a result, one's ability becomes closely linked to perceptions of self-worth (Beery, 1975). In school, most children are likely to see their own worth in terms of their academic achievements and, as a result, academic failure, related to perceptions of low ability, results in a sense of shame and diminished self-evaluation. Such a perspective is not necessarily universal. Grant and Dweck (2001), for example, suggest that in some Asian cultures students may be judged by their effort rather than ability levels to an extent that the former takes on a trait-like quality and becomes more tied to a sense of self-worth.

Covington (1992) suggests that the need to establish a sense of self-worth results in a variety of motivational beliefs and behaviours. First, where one encounters success, there is often a strong tendency to attribute this to ability as this has a greater positive impact upon perceptions of self-worth than effort. Thus, according to Covington, in contrast to the presuppositions of attribution theory, personal needs can actively influence the attribution process. To maximise the impression that ability has been instrumental in gaining a successful outcome, the individual may seek to play down the amount of work they have undertaken.

Given the shameful implications of academic failure, it is not surprising that many individuals are likely to seek ways to protect their sense of self-worth. Thompson (1999) outlines a number of strategies: self-handicapping, procrastination, impostor fears, defensive pessimism and self-worth protection that may be employed, often in combination, in response to achievement-related anxiety.

Self-handicapping refers to a strategy by which a student identifies a handicap, real or imagined, that can explain future poor performance (Thompson and Richardson, 2001). This may be emotional ('I've been really stressed out recently') or physical ('I've hurt my ankle so can't perform my best for the athletics team'). If performance is greater than anticipated, the presence of the handicap just makes the individual's ability seem even greater. Procrastination refers to behaviour by which the individual avoids dealing with an issue in order that he or she will

not ultimately be seen as incompetent or inadequate. If one performs poorly it is always possible to blame a lack of effort; if performance, despite the dithering, is good, one's ability is confirmed. Those who harbour impostor fears are anxious that they will be discovered to be less intelligent than others appear to believe. Successes to date are considered by such individuals to have frequently been the result of good fortune. Defensive pessimism refers to a strategy by which the individual, fearful of failure, holds very low expectations in order that anxiety is minimised.

The strategy that has had most influence upon researchers and teachers, and which appears to be particularly relevant to attempts to encourage workrate and achievement, is self-worth protection. This describes a process whereby students intentionally reduce their efforts in order that subsequent poor performance is not associated with ability but, rather, with a lack of effort. Low effort strategies include opting out of activities altogether, avoiding study until the last minute (see procrastination above), selecting tasks or goals which are easily attainable (where there is little risk of failure) or, alternatively, very demanding (where failure is 'understandable' and nonthreatening) (Thompson, 1999). Such tendencies are particularly pronounced in those who already have low self-esteem or who are uncertain about the evaluations others have of them (Baumgardner and Levy, 1988). Such avoidant behaviour is, to some extent, context-specific as effort will tend to be greater in those situations where poor performance can be attributed to factors other than low ability and there is a correspondingly low evaluative threat (Thompson *et al.*, 1995).

Given that effort is seen as worthy, it is hardly surprising that guilt tends to feature in those who have not tried hard. Here there is a potential tension between two components of shame: humiliation and guilt. Covington and Omelich (1985) have shown that failure following high effort tends to result in feelings of humiliation, while low effort results in guilt. Thus, in classroom contexts, the child may feel guilty (in respect of parental and teacher perceptions) if he or she is not seen to be trying hard yet is also anxious about public humiliation, should such endeavours increase perceptions (particularly by peers) that he or she is lacking in ability. Many children, Covington argues, must therefore find a balance between the extremes of trying too hard (and so risking the humiliating consequences of appearing incompetent in cases of failure) and not making sufficient effort (in which case, they may face guilt-inducing disapprobation from teachers and parents). In many cases, fear of humiliation is the stronger source of motivation, particularly for males

(Miller, 1986; Craske, 1988). This results in many students attempting to preserve '...a sense of dignity in school' by which they may engage in a series of 'ruses and artful dodges' that 'reflect a primordial struggle for self-protection so elemental that many students are prepared to sacrifice even good grades for the sake of appearances' (Covington, 1998, p. 100). Ultimately, however, such strategies are doomed to failure; students are increasingly cut off from rewarding classroom experiences, externalised attributions for failure become less convincing, and ultimately students have little option but to attribute their lack of success to low ability. This results in the student feeling incompetent, hopeless, angry and emotionally burnt-out (see Thompson, 1999, pp. 29–43).

On the basis of the above, Covington (1996, 1998) argues that current educational policies that emphasise introducing greater competitive pressures upon students to work harder in the form of more courses, more hours studying in school and in the home, and more tests – 'a strategy of intensification' – are likely to be counterproductive in the long term.

One possible way of helping students to overcome fear of failure might be to ensure that the marks or grades awarded by teachers are inflated to encourage maximum perceptions for success. Covington (1998) argues against such a strategy, however. Wholesale grade manipulations appear to be largely ineffective in changing student performance (Goldberg, 1965) and where a change has been registered, this tends to be only for marginal students and the effects are of short-term duration. For Covington, the problem is not the use of rewards per se, but their use in competitive situations where issues of ability become paramount.

Expectancy × value theory/future time perspective theory

In discussing attributions in Chapter 4, we note that our American informants placed great emphasis upon effort as key to academic success, yet this did not mean that this latter goal was deemed sufficiently important to overcome other barriers to high level engagement. One important theoretical strand of relevance here is that of Eccles and her colleagues (e.g. Eccles, 1987; Eccles and Wigfield, 1995), whose work on achievement motivation stresses the value placed upon goals and tasks as key in determining why one activity is chosen over another. In examining the social psychological influences on choice of activity and persistence, Eccles' expectancy–value model emphasises, as key determinants, the relative value and likelihood of success of each available option. Expectancies and values, it is argued, are influenced by a wide variety of factors such as beliefs specific to the task (e.g. perceptions of task-related competence,

the demands of the task), the child's short- and long-term goals and their more general self-perceptions. These are, in turn, influenced by perceptions of what others expect of them on the basis of gender, activity stereotype, their own past achievement-related experiences and the influences of the broader cultural milieu.

The 'expectancy' component of the expectancy–value model is quite similar to self-efficacy, particularly to Bandura's efficacy–expectation construct (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). Expectancies are defined as individuals' beliefs about how successful they are likely to be in future tasks. The 'value' component is subdivided into four distinct types of values: attainment, intrinsic, utility and cost.

Attainment value concerns the importance to the individual of doing well on a task. Often task value will be higher in those domains (e.g. art, science or basketball) that are seen as central to the person's sense of identity. Intrinsic value, similar to the construct of intrinsic motivation, relates to the enjoyment gained from participating in the task or engaging in the particular subject domain. The utility value of an activity depends upon the extent to which it impacts upon current and future goals (e.g. obtaining a high grade, entering college, being in the same class as one's friends). Here, the intrinsic value of the task itself is of little importance. Finally, cost is seen as an important element that may reduce the value of the task. This refers to the negative aspects that accrue from engaging in the task (e.g. the requirement to make a large effort to succeed, negative experiences in undertaking the task, the loss of positive outcomes arising from the removal of competing options).

Research indicates a relationship between expectancies and values – as expectancies rise, values tend to rise as well, whereas declines in expectancies are associated with declines in values (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996). Expectancy beliefs predict teacher grades and test scores (e.g. students who expect to be successful in science tend to receive high grades in science), whereas values tend to predict choices (e.g. students who value science, find it to be useful and interesting, are likely to choose to enrol on future science courses) (Eccles, 1983; Wigfield and Eccles, 1992).

Eccles' theory ties in neatly with a perspective that emphasises a greater need to look at the influence of long-term goals. Future time perspective theories emphasise the motivational properties of future goals for present learning behaviour (Husman and Lens, 1999; Lens *et al.*, 2002) – aspects that have been largely neglected by educational research (Simons *et al.*, 2004). Simons *et al.* (2004) argue that by stressing immediate effects (either intrinsic enjoyment or enhancement of the self), the existing goal theory fails to take into consideration the importance of

long-term influences. Such a perspective is strongly consistent with our own and, we believe, borne out by the findings of our research programme.

Motivational theory and pedagogy

Rather more than in England, motivational theory appears to have had some influence upon US understandings about teaching and learning, with writers such as Bandura, Deci and Weiner having been particularly influential. In order to maximise motivation, it is seen as important that students have a sense of personal competence and of control, and perceive learning activities as meaningful and relevant (Seifert and O'Keefe, 2001). In considering reasons for the apparently poor performance of American students, commentators frequently remark that there is little enthusiasm for learning; students are often limited in their efforts and deals are struck with teachers that result in low-level demands (Powell *et al.*, 1985; Sedlak *et al.*, 1986). An important issue concerns the extent to which this can be laid at the door of pedagogy. Critics of American high schools suggest that problems reside in the low expectations of schools; classroom instruction that often appears remote from students' everyday lives and fails to excite and inspire; the limited opportunities that are made available for students to have a sense of agency or control (Bandura, 1997) over their learning and that lead to passivity and apathy; and constant comparison with others that often results in a diminished sense of self and self-protective responses.

Yair (2000) outlines a number of influential US educational programmes that draw upon motivational theories for their design. He cites programmes such as *The Coalition of Essential Schools* (Sizer, 1992, 1996), the *New American Schools Development Corporation* (Cooperman, 1994) and *Harvard Project Zero* (Gardner, 1983) as examples that stress the importance of authenticity (i.e. activities have meaning for students' everyday experience and future goals), challenge, choice over content and learning approaches, and relate to students' skills, interests and abilities. Where such factors operate, there is believed to be more likelihood of intrinsic motivation, a less passive orientation, increased feelings of control and a greater sense of personal accomplishment. Other US initiatives focusing upon teacher–student relationships and meaningful learning tasks, which appear to have had a positive effect upon student engagement, are outlined by Fredricks *et al.* (2004).

Yair (2000) studied the experiences of 865 students based in 33 schools in 12 sites across the United States. His results indicated that

where instruction was authentic, choice-driven and demanding of skills, students were generally more stimulated. In the absence of these factors, students tended to be bored and more emotionally depressed. Seifert and O'Keefe (2001) also highlight the importance of student emotions, particularly relating to feelings of competence and control. Their study of Canadian high school students found that a sense of perceived competence and of control, together with meaningfulness in the academic tasks provided, appeared to increase motivation and preclude the likelihood of work avoidance resulting from a desire to avoid humiliation (see 'Self-worth theory') or merely because of boredom and indifference.

Another group of researchers has examined those factors that might help to gain the interest of students (Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000). Here, an important distinction has been made between personal and situational interest. Personal interest is seen as a relatively stable and enduring characteristic of an individual. Situational interest is more transitory and is elicited by conditions in the environment that focus attention and generate affect. The implications for educators is clear: efforts should be geared to arranging learning environments that can maximise situational interest. While a proposition with which few would take issue, the practicalities of achieving this are more complex. One notion is to distinguish between those aspects of instruction that might 'catch' and those that might 'hold' student interest (cf. Dewey, 1913). However, while novel and stimulating practices may trigger situational interest, these are only likely to be maintained where relevant or personal meaning results. Thus, in a study of mathematics classes (Mitchell, 1993), computers, puzzles and group work served to spark interest in mathematics but could not sustain this over time. Higher levels of student involvement in the activity and the perception that the activity was meaningful, in contrast, appeared to help the students maintain interest.

For Yair (2000), simplistic either/or 'blaming' of student or school (Larson and Richards, 1991) for low achievement is misleading and unhelpful as this fails to recognise the multiple contexts in which students operate and their capacity to respond differentially in each of these. Arguing for a change in the 'ecology of instructional strategies' (p. 205), Yair sees the key means of increasing motivation, in both the United States and in England, as residing in teacher instructional practices. In England, however, high levels of centralised control over curriculum and pedagogy delimit the extent to which teachers have freedom to depart from centrally determined 'good practice'.

Motivation: An elusive construct

While theories and definitions of motivation differ substantially, it is widely accepted that they concern the particular decisions people take about engaging in a specific action, or series of actions, the extent to which they persist in such action, and the amount of effort they expend in pursuing and undertaking it (Dornyei, 2000).

Most motivational theorists make a distinction between cognition (the realm of motivational theories) and engagement (i.e. overt behaviour, such as effort and persistence in schoolwork). Ryan (2000) suggests that in studying cognitions, researchers are largely interested in two main questions:

> Can I do my schoolwork (e.g. attributions, self-efficacy beliefs, expectancy beliefs)? and Do I want to do my schoolwork and why (e.g. value, mastery and performance goals, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation . . .)? (p. 102)

Here, a distinction is made between motivation (conceived as a series of beliefs) and engagement (i.e. actual behaviours involved in undertaking schoolwork). Fredricks *et al.* (2004), however, see engagement more broadly in terms of behavioural, emotional and cognitive actions. In their conception, behavioural engagement centres upon participation, in particular, in academic, social and extracurricular activities. Emotional engagement concerns positive and negative reactions to the various participants and activities of school life. Such reactions, it is argued, result in affiliation to the school and greater inclination to work hard. Cognitive engagement concerns the willingness of the individual to apply the mental effort to grapple intellectually with challenging and complex material. These constructs overlap with others' understandings of motivation and, indeed, some writers use the terms 'motivation' and 'engagement' as synonyms (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004).

In our own work, we have preferred to differentiate on occasions between expressed motivation and actual behaviour. While it would appear that high levels of engagement are indicative of high levels of motivation (whether this originates from oneself or as a result of external pressures), our studies suggest that student statements about motivation are not always realised in action. This echoes a finding reported by Grant and Sleeter (1996) from their ethnographic study of a US high school. These authors noted a paradox whereby, in interview, their student

informants stated that they believed in school and valued education, seeing it as a means of fulfilling their aspirations, yet:

> . . . on a day to day basis, they invested minimal effort in it. (p. 222)

The literature is unclear about changing dynamics in relation to motivation and engagement. As Ryan (2000) points out in his discussion of peer influences, we know little about the extent to which changes in motivation lead to changes in academic engagement, and subsequently, educational achievement, or how socialisation impacts upon behaviour, with motivational beliefs changing in response.

While retaining the emphasis upon the cognitive, some motivational theorists (e.g. Kuhl, 1984; Heckhausen, 1991) suggest a 'predecisional' phase when the individual is engaged in decision-making and goal-setting and a 'postdecisional' phase which includes those cognitive activities engaged in after a decision has been taken. This latter phase is concerned with goal implementation in which volitional factors such as action initiation, perseverance and the overcoming of internal obstacles to action are involved.

It is possible, of course, that these two phases may not be well coordinated. One may choose to study advanced mathematics at high school, perhaps because of a desire to gain good academic grades, but a lack of interest in studying mathematics or competing attractions may limit the amount of energy expended in pursuing this goal. Similarly, students in school may be required to study a subject that holds little appeal, yet may embrace it enthusiastically because academic success is valued. We would, however, take issue with Pintrich and Schunk's (1996) argument that in school there is little predecisional activity on the part of students (p. 183). While, for example, students may have little choice about a requirement that they should study French, they must still determine whether this is an activity to which they are prepared to commit themselves. It is also important to recognise that in complex contexts such as school classrooms it is often difficult to determine, for any specific learning activity, where predecisional deliberation ends and postdecisional behaviour commences (Dornyei, 2000).

In our study of motivation in the three milieux, we have come to recognise the significant importance of volitional aspects as crucial in determining achievement. Many motivational theories, however, have tended to focus primarily upon choices rather than the processes by which goals are translated into outcomes (Snow *et al.*, 1996). For some theorists, the latter are often seen as the province of theories of self-regulation

(Zimmerman, 1990, 2000). Learners whose self-regulation is most effective are perceived as possessing a large range of cognitive and metacognitive strategies that can be flexibly utilised as necessary to accomplish academic tasks. They are motivated, have adaptive learning goals and are capable of sustained and persistent behaviour in ensuring their realisation. Self-regulation includes not only cognitive and metacognitive elements but also self-beliefs and affective reactions to specific performance contexts. In trying to extend and develop the relationship between motivation and self-regulation, Wolters (1998) has suggested that many studies adopt a simple causal model in which motivational constructs such as self-efficacy and goal orientation are utilised to help explain student selection and regulation of various learning strategies. He argues that such conceptions ignore the abilities of students to self-regulate their own willingness to invest effort and persist with tasks. Drawing upon such a position, Pintrich (2000a, p. 454) outlines a framework for processes operating during four phases of a learning cycle for each of the four major areas of self-regulation: cognition, motivation/affect, behaviour and context.

In writing this book, we have tried to consider those factors within a given milieu that encourage school students to orient to schooling, work hard and wish to succeed. We do not offer a specific model of motivation; nor, given the nature of our broad-brush data, do we wish to differentiate between motivation (as narrowly concerned with goal selection) and volition (or indeed, between motivation and engagement), or to locate the construct within broader theories of self-regulation. We are, however, interested in considering goals and volition, cognitions and behaviour, and seek to identify possible reasons for differences between the three milieux that emerge. In providing a cross-cultural account, we also raise a number of important conceptual and methodological issues concerning the adequacy of such theories to account for the differences in student motivation and behaviour that were revealed.

3
Culture and Practice in Education

Introduction

In this chapter we describe the settings in which we conducted our research. We then seek to provide an account of a number of factors in each milieu that seem of likely relevance for contemporary student motivation and engagement: the historical origins of schooling in each milieu, relevant recent shifts of debate, policy and legislation, and finally, given that student engagement and effort are so often driven by assessment, an account of the various forms of educational assessment that operate, and seek to explore their impact.

The three milieux

Eastern Kentucky

The sparsely populated area in which our research was conducted runs up to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The schools we visited were mostly situated in scattered, small towns, which served as centres for the surrounding rural areas. The land was hilly, with many shallow valleys drained by 'creeks'. On the west towards Lexington, small farms gave way to larger dairy farms and horse ranches. Eastwards, the higher land was thickly forested and the forestry industry together with nature conservancy were sources of employment. Nature and 'heritage' tourism, organised hunting and fishing, and rural crafts also supplied mostly modest incomes to some people. In the east, farms tended to be poorer, with tobacco and maize grown as cash crops. Many of the smaller towns have an old quarter of 'colonial-style' houses. Around these towns, many of the better-off had built themselves spacious new houses

in attractive valley sides, or in woodland, sometimes near natural or artificial lakes. Morehead was typical of many of the small towns in the region – with its main street of banks, morticians, insurance agents, car-dealerships, hairdressers, hunting and fishing shops, food and clothing stores, eating-houses, churches, courtroom, fire-, police- and petrol stations and its out-of-town retail park, with a number of chain eateries and supermarkets – except that it housed a substantial state university and a regional hospital. As a result, it was marginally more wealthy than other towns we visited and had a significantly higher proportion of more highly educated people living in the town or nearby.

Morehead apart, the region as a whole appears simultaneously much settled, but also insecure. A high proportion of the population, including many of the teachers, had grown up in the region, as had many of their families before them.

> This being a small community we already know a lot of the families. We go to church with them. We shop at the same stores. We talk with them and, for me for instance, I went to school with a lot of the parents. (Kentucky teacher)

Arguably a downside to this could be an anxiety about striking out elsewhere, to make a living:

> It worries [students] that they may have to leave eastern Kentucky. Some of them don't want to leave. (Kentucky teacher)

Apart from the professional classes, those who could derive an adequate income from farming or essential services were probably the most secure. Amongst others, perhaps with poorer, or smaller farms, living off the land – hunting, including for deer, or fishing – could still supplement a poor cash income and maintain a basic, but not necessarily precarious, sometimes, perhaps, a 'mountain man' existence. The regional economy as a whole was in transition from dependence on old coal and iron industries, to an attempt to attract new 'high-tech' industry and more high-value tourism. Those settlements where families had been dependent on the vanished mining or iron industries were the most economically depressed. In some of the old industrial settlements, insecurity could be quite high and not much offset by hope for a better community future. These areas in particular had seen the development of a post-industrial, often not well-educated, 'underclass'. In the more prosperous and settled farming towns, older values and ways of life, though significantly

influenced by the globalisation of communications, tended to underpin custom and practice, though there was a increased tendency towards two-person working households. Apart from the depressed industrial areas, where *anomie* may have affected a significant number of families, the nature of the regional economy was such as to place a high value on locally saleable practical capability, initiative and self-reliance.

Sunderland

The 'City of Sunderland' (population: c.300,000) actually comprises one very large, post-industrial town with ancient origins, which most natives would think of as Sunderland proper, the 'new town' of Washington, and several other smaller settlements all within 5 miles to the west of Sunderland. Apart from Washington, which was built to bring in new industry as traditional industries declined, the outlying small towns and villages mostly gained a living from coal-mining and quarrying.

The city has a scenic North Sea shore and the impressive lighthouse and harbour moles of what was once a major port. Not only is the city itself highly urbanised, it forms part of an urban 'North-Eastern' region. The region as a whole has a measure of cultural unity, which distinguishes it from other English regions. Despite modern media influences, the rhythms and idioms of local speech retain historic features native to the area, some of which never found incorporation within, and others of which are now lost to, standard English.

Sunderland 'proper', apart from its central administrative and business district, is made up of a set of smaller districts, many of which have a 'village within the city' character and psychology. Although having ancient roots, and despite extensive recent development, contemporary Sunderland still reflects its nineteenth-century growth and wealth. Its fortunes were founded on quarrying limestone for cement, and mining in the Durham coalfield, for both of which Sunderland was the major port, and shipbuilding on the River Wear. Other significant industries were glass making, potteries, the import of Baltic timber, paper and rope making. Each of these industries generated its own peculiar need for labour and often formed the core of a community, distinct from its neighbours. Although all of its traditional industries have seriously declined, their former existence is still partly reflected in the communities they left behind.

The current zoning of the city tends to reflect a complex mixture of residence by social class, with older and modern middle-class private housing estates, built from the early nineteenth century to the present; large and often rather under-serviced and peripheral 'council' housing

estates, built at various times throughout the twentieth century; and traditional, working-class village centres, with small and inexpensive private and rented 'cottages', sometimes improved as starter homes, by young couples.

Traditional industries left a legacy of a willingness to work hard, and, particularly in the case of shipbuilding, of high skill in industrial crafts. The last twenty years have seen a substantial influx of new industry – service, high technology and automobile. Together with a significant growth of its university and a number of major civic improvements, this may well prove to have reversed the City's decline. At the same time, some of the former communities of unskilled and often not well-educated workers, particularly in quarrying, dockwork and mining, have been left high and dry by the decline of their industries. As in Kentucky, education has a major role in enabling the youth of such communities to compete in a modern labour market, but it may struggle against long-ingrained attitudes, exacerbated in a number of cases by inter-generational unemployment.

St Petersburg

With a population of close to 4 million, St Petersburg is an often beautiful city, even where a little time-worn and neglected, in the old historic centre; alternatively monumental and soul-inspiring in architecture; replete with rich art galleries, museums, theatres and concert halls; home to a distinguished symphony orchestra and one of the world's most admired ballet companies. As Russia's capital, until 1921, and its second capital today, it also has evocative past associations with many of Russia's greatest architects, artists, poets, novelists, choreographers, dancers, musicians and composers. It remains a lively centre of arts and has added a rich new 'pop' music scene to vital folk music and jazz traditions. In the Soviet era, all the rich resources of the city were open to the people. Many of the young Russians we interviewed frequently expressed a feeling for their city, which indicated how much they valued it as a cultural 'treasure chest'. At the time of our interviews, most of the cultural riches were still available to St Petersburg citizens at attainable prices and the city itself, often architecturally inspiring, was open to all who wanted to walk about it, as many St Petersburg students reported they did. There was also a more general pride in Russian culture, which prevented, as might well be the case in both Sunderland and Kentucky, its rejection as not being for 'our sort of people'.

As well as relative cultural homogeneity, there was also significant economic homogeneity. Soviet Russia was a much 'flatter' society in

terms of the distribution of personal wealth than either the United Kingdom, or the United States. Although income differentials have now begun to widen considerably and some have amassed controversial fortunes whilst others have fallen below subsistence, the broad mass of people probably still enjoys incomes within a rather narrow range. Further, Soviet housing policies had obliged most people to struggle to get accommodation, reducing any tendency to the social zoning of the city. Recent possibilities of housing exchange and purchase may be leading to a tendency for some neighbourhoods more to reflect wealth and status, but most of those served by the schools we visited were still very socially mixed.

Historical roots of education

Kentucky

Prior to 1990, the development of education in the Commonwealth of Kentucky significantly reflected the early history of the state. The first settlers, from the 1770s onwards, acquired the richest farmland in the central, 'Blue Grass' counties and built up estates, establishing themselves as a rural 'gentry' (Clark, 1977). A development in 1838 permitted the cities of Louisville, Lexington and Maysville, where other richer and more powerful families lived, to operate schools largely independently of the state system. Early legislation also allowed smaller communities which cared about schooling to set up independent schools. As a result, that part of the education system administered by the state lost political input from the most highly developed communities and became largely rural, mostly serving the poor.

For later settlers, the available land was hillier, less fertile, further from the few good roads, and harder to de-forest (Harrison and Klotter, 1997). Many farming such land were cash poor, relying on family and, until the Civil War, some slave labour, and worsening their descendants' lot by dividing their principal means of subsistence – their land – amongst their heirs. A minority of other settlers, still less fortunate, survived by effectively reverting to a 'hunter-gatherer' form of life – as 'mountain men' in the heavily forested foothills and slopes of the Appalachians (Clark, 1997). From a very early stage, Kentucky was thus divided between a minority who could pay for – and whose families might prosper from – education and a majority whose way of life and struggle for livelihood made anything beyond basic literacy and numeracy an expensive luxury. Unlike the middling Puritan families, who founded

Massachusetts and who saw education for all as the prize of religious liberty and essential for personal salvation, for both the Anglican gentry and the labouring commoners who migrated to Kentucky

> The English policy of education as a matter of private concern was entrenched in the thinking of leaders. The majority of the population were illiterate and were opposed to a system of public education supported by local taxation. (Ligon, 1942, p. 72)

For the latter, farming was the first priority, and the longer the growing season, the shorter the school year. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the school year in Kentucky could be as short as three months, with only some larger districts where it is as much as six months.

Although there was Commonwealth-wide legislation for education, it was paid for by locally raised taxes. From 1852 until 1908, a 'school district' was formed wherever 100 children could be gathered to form a school. However, even in richer districts, local tax rates were often low, properties were under-assessed and taxes were not collected. Not surprisingly, 'poverty-ridden places found it practically impossible to secure anywhere near the funds available to the richer places' (Harrison and Klotter, 1997, p. 378). As a result, they tended to hire more poorly educated teachers, for shorter periods of the year. Where there were illiterate trustees – estimated at 20 per cent in 1907 – there could be problems of ignorance and impropriety, with some teachers bribing trustees to be hired. There were also significant opportunities for more direct political corruption, where county superintendents, whose office dated from 1884, 'might superintend the biggest payroll in the county in small places and through bus drivers, cooks, janitors and teachers they could command a significant voting group' (Harrison and Klotter, 1997, p. 377).

Against this background, educational progress in Kentucky only occasionally rose high on the legislative agenda and, even then, could be difficult to implement. In 1908, the last major legislation before 1990 created a stronger central governance for education at the Commonwealth level. It made the county the principal electoral and taxation 'school district', reducing the number of local education authorities, for a population then of 2.3 millions, from more than 8500 to around 120. It required that every county establish a high school within two years. However, the 1908 Act still mandated the support of schools through local, though now county, taxation with continuing wide differences between counties in their tax-take.

Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s integration of the separate systems of schooling for blacks and whites was brought about with a greater degree of political skill and harmony than might have been predicted (Harrison and Klotter, 1997). Though 'bussing' to overcome segregation into neighbourhood schools ignited riots in 1975, by 1991 Kentucky schools figured amongst the most integrated in the United States. The ending of the racially segregated 'dual' provision also reduced waste in the deployment of funding for schools. Other legislation tended to increase the Commonwealth tax component of school funding, but only went a little way to reducing the sharp inequalities across the state.

Major recurrent themes in the pre-1990 history of state education in Kentucky were a libertarian ideology, rooted in the self-reliance of the early settlers; a powerful general resistance to taxation; a commitment to local democracy, which, in the case of education, yielded inadequate funding to support efficient schooling; and, consequent provision for a relatively poor and formally uneducated agrarian society, which saw little need for more than elementary education.

Russia

Compared to most other countries, curriculum and pedagogy in Russia have been marked by an exceptional degree of continuity over time. For over two full generations, between the mid-1930s and the early 1990s, relatively minor changes arose incrementally through researched and planned development.

The main outlines of the schooling system were put in place in the early and mid-1930s. Schools were to be comprehensive in their intake and to serve a geographical area (*mikroraion*). School classes were not to be differentiated by ability. Students were to start compulsory schooling in September after they turned seven.

Development from the initial, post-revolutionary condition of low national literacy to providing ten years of secondary education for all necessarily involved an exponential development, particularly in the area of teaching resource. Free four-year education was made compulsory and brought in between 1930 and 1933. That had a dramatic impact on initial literacy with 94 per cent literacy claimed by 1939. Between 1936 and 1952 – delayed by massive disruption during the 'Great Patriotic War' – free compulsory education was extended over seven years. Ten-year schooling was brought in, in 1970 – three years primary, five years lower ('Incomplete') secondary education and two further years to 'complete' secondary education. There are currently proposals to

extend schooling to twelve years, by starting at six and continuing to 18-plus.

After 1917, there were initial attempts to develop distinctively communist curricula. However, Lenin was concerned about tendencies to devalue European high culture, which he thought had a meaning beyond class (Fitzpatrick, 1999). Perhaps more decisively, for Stalin, the new experimental curricula were seen as incompatible with the specialised division of labour necessary for the new Soviet state to achieve its modernising industrial aims. Once Stalin was in the saddle, an academic and encyclopaedic curriculum, which reproduced the approach of the Tsarist *gymnasium*, was adopted.

The curriculum put in place by 1937 had a strong bias towards mathematics and the sciences. As well as these subjects, it included Russian language, literature, history, geography, music, art, physical education and social studies. The Tsarist curriculum, much influenced by the German *gymnasium*, was founded on principles deriving from Comenius's seventeenth-century *The Great Didactic*, which celebrated a protestant religious impulse to stand in a right relation to God by the use of reason in the exploration of creation:

> To be a rational creature is to name all things and to speculate and reason about everything the world contains. . . . (Comenius, 1657/1910)

Although impelled by quite different impulses, the Soviet curriculum carried over concerns for an existential relation to knowledge and for its role in full human development. Thus the curriculum was encyclopaedic not merely in its formulation, but in the sense that it was followed in its entirety. Students were to take all subjects, throughout their compulsory education, without the option to drop some in which they were less successful or which they did not enjoy. Under the Soviets, this prescription of a common curriculum for all was reinforced by a commitment to egalitarianism in the distribution of the benefits of education. 'Pedology', the scientific study of child development and individual differences, was suppressed in 1936, to be replaced by the scientific study of pedagogy. At the heart of this pedagogy was a process of constantly checked and graded lesson-by-lesson learning, in which oral assessment of the success of personal study played a larger part than written.

Under the Soviets, academic education (*obrazovanie*) was conceived as part of the finally more important 'upbringing' (*vospitanie*) of the child towards becoming 'a new Communist man [*sic*]'. Undoubtedly the Soviet education system contained highly indoctrinatory elements, but

vospitanie also incorporated many elements of the socialisation and acculturation of the young (outlined in Bereday *et al*., 1960) that are, arguably, found in non-Communist societies. It seems likely that *vospitanie* could also trace some earlier roots in Russian Orthodoxy, which perceived a relationship between the state, family authority and values and the development of spiritual merit. Perhaps, too, there was some residual trace of the old values of the Tsarist peasant *mir* (village collective) in a further feature of *vospitanie* – a stress on learning in the student 'collective'.

Recognition of the potential role of the collective in learning arose from the work of Anton Makarenko with abandoned and delinquent children in the 1920s and 1930s. He taught that skilful adult intervention in a cohesive children's collective could be a powerful means for bringing about growth in social and moral learning. Children's desire for affiliation and friendship could be focused through their sharing in valued, common tasks, which in turn gained reflexive importance as a means of affiliation and friendship. It was part of an 'upbringer's' (parent's or teacher's) competence, especially in the very early stages of education, to develop the social skills for, and an attachment to, collective ways of working. As well as its impact in the area of moral education and character formation, the collective offered teachers a powerful means of managing class and individual motivation for academic learning. In effect, the class could be brought to share in standard-setting and to exert a peer discipline on student misbehaviour, or lack of effort in class and in home study.

Russia inherited a significantly effective and relatively simply structured and low-cost schooling system from the Soviet Union. Its challenge, since the fall of Communism, has been to sustain effective previous practice, whilst disburdening itself of discredited ideological baggage and attitudes, all amidst a wider social, economic and political transition.

England

For a society which pioneered the Industrial Revolution, England was surprisingly slow to develop a state education system. Until the late 1980s, the record is of an opportunistic, piecemeal and often grudging evolution, in which reform that could no longer be wholly avoided was introduced in just sufficient measure to push more radical visions back to the margins. It may be that the very success of Britain's industrial transformation bred complacency. Throughout the nineteenth century, neither individual wealth and position nor social honour owed much to schooling. For the landowning classes, study of the classics and the

cultivation of taste and *savoir-faire* through travel were thought sufficient for taking part in government, and served, too, as status-marking social adornments. For the new mercantile and industrial classes, the acumen and hard-headedness, and the practical inventiveness so valued in their businesses were not things taught in school, though, from the 1860s, the socially aspirant paid for their sons to be educated as 'gentlemen', in the private 'public schools' reformed for that purpose. Perhaps, too, as an island, Britain did not need to develop early the state-centralised military and civil bureaucracies – essential for land-based European powers – to mobilise armies and nations for defence. Thus, in Britain, the provision of an 'elementary' system of state schooling for the masses was not fully completed until 1891, when between the ages of five and ten education became compulsory and free. In the early nineteenth century, concerned to re-moralise a population destabilised by the agrarian, Industrial and French revolutions, the established and non-conformist churches competed to build new schools. From 1833, they received increasing state subsidy to assist with this task. However, their provision of schooling moved forward rather slowly, in the rapidly expanding industrial towns and, from 1870, districts were empowered to set up elected School Boards, which could levy a local rate and provide a secular elementary school. From the 1890s, the increasing provision of school places enabled the school-leaving age to be progressively raised until, by 1918, it was 14.

Progress was delayed by the prior existence of a time-hallowed charitable school system. By the 1870s, some of the charitable schools – the 'grammar' schools – were able to maintain a modest functioning in their own locality, by charging tuition fees at levels which restricted their entry to the offspring of the moderately prosperous. A handful of others – the 'public' schools – enjoyed national social prestige and recruitment by attracting the sons of the aristocracy and the wealthy. The growth and renovation of these, and new charitably founded schools, in the later nineteenth century put in place a socially hierarchical system – differentiated by parental status and wealth – of fee-paying day and boarding 'secondary' schools to cater for the education of the adolescent sons (and, later, daughters) of the upper and middle classes. This inheritance was to influence the structure and ideology of the state system at least until 1965. When state school provision was extended at the secondary phase, government focused on the partial incorporation and extension of the pre-existing, private, academic secondary school system. Under the 1902 Education Act, newly created Local Education Authorities (LEA) were empowered to create new, and fund existing,

grammar schools on condition that they offered 25 per cent of their places, for free competitive admission at around the age of 11. After 1902 and until 1988, the main reforming thrust in education was addressed much less to its content, or functions, than to the validity, utility and equity of the differentiation of students by school type.

Though initially widely welcomed as a great reforming measure, in retrospect, the 1944 Education Act did not so much reform, as systematise, sanitise and enshrine the pre-existing basis of differentiation. The most prestigious and successful private 'public' schools were not brought into the system. The elementary schools were beheaded. They were to provide 'primary' education in 'infant' (5–7), 'junior' (7–11) or primary schools (5–11). Compulsory secondary education was to continue until students were 15. Students between 11 and 15 were to attend one of three types of secondary school, 'grammar', 'technical' or 'modern'. Admission to all these schools was to be free, on the basis of competitive examination at 11-plus, with admission to grammar schools being the most selective, whilst the second tranche of candidates was to be offered technical schooling. 'Modern' schools were for the unselected. In practice, few districts provided technical schools. In most districts, parents and children perceived the choice at 11 as between 'passing' to go to the grammar school, or 'failing' and going to the 'secondary modern'.

By the late 1950s, it was becoming clear that the 'public' schools, if no longer aristocratic, nonetheless significantly retained the function of 'circulating an elite'. This attracted criticism from the political left. It was also clear that the children of working-class families were both markedly under-represented in the selective 'grammar' schools and, when selected, were then relatively under-achieving. On the left, this led to a querying of the ethos, curriculum and pedagogy of selective schools. On the right it was deprecated as a failure to develop increasingly needed human resource. However, it was selection at 11-plus that focused public consensus. Eleven was widely felt to be too early to differentiate for what were fairly crucial life-chances; some children's marked anxiety in the face of the tests was thought to mar performance; the power of the tests to predict future achievement was brought into question; public awareness grew that selection was a geographical lottery, related to the local availability of school places, with fewer than 5 per cent 'passing' in some districts and more than 40 per cent in others. The position was worse for girls than boys, with fewer selective places in girls' schools in most districts.

By the mid-1960s, there was an uneasy coalition between aspirant working-class parents, the political left and, crucially, many amongst

the middle classes, who feared for their own and empathised with other families where children had not passed or seemed unlikely to pass the examination. There was thus a sufficient consensus in favour of the abolition of selection at 11, but this was to prove a less than whole-hearted consensus in favour of comprehensive secondary schooling. Nevertheless, comprehensive schools have been established in the great majority of LEAs.

Comprehensive schools were set up to serve 'catchment areas'. Except where parents chose to pay for private education, their children were required to attend the school within whose catchment area they lived. Some parents found their children attending schools which they perceived as setting low educational and behavioural standards and acquainting their offspring with undesirable peer manners, attitudes and values. Mismatch between the aspirations of some parents and their experience of comprehensive education tended to be most extreme in some inner-city schools, where a catchment area could serve adjacent, but socioeconomically markedly different neighbourhoods and draw students from both advantaged and sometimes multiply disadvantaged homes. A further feature creating anxiety for some parents, with the removal of the selective grammar schools, was an apparent widening of the achievement gap between 'public' and comprehensive schools. Though ambivalent about selection, parents could still regret the loss of the 'sponsored' social mobility into higher education which the grammar schools had provided.

In the early 1980s, it might have seemed that selection for secondary education had gone cold as a political issue, but it is more the case that, over the last twenty years, a continuing commitment to the competitive differentiation of life-chances has sought a new legitimisation in the promotion of a principle of 'choice' and a 'curriculum of entitlement'. Though formally committed to achieving full 'equality of opportunity' – the principle elevated by the 1944 Act – the English education system remains geared to competing with the much more generously endowed and funded 'public schools'. As a result, it has yet to seek the means of a fully inclusive education for the whole of the youth population and is marked by 'a long tail of underachievement' significantly affecting at least a third of the young people.

Systems in transition

All three education systems have experienced landmark changes in the last two decades. In England, 1988 saw the passage of the major Education

Reform Act (ERA). In Kentucky, the no less sweeping Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was signed into law in 1990. In Russia, one of the earliest pieces of legislation of the new Russian Federation was the new Law on Education of 1992. Each came out of a particular background which is explored below.

Kentucky

As throughout its history, many of the immediately pre-1990 problems in Kentucky schools had to do with the funding of schools by property taxes. As late as the 1980s, not only was there the problem of low local property values, but properties were further underassessed and taxes went uncollected. This could arise because generosity from local tax assessors was appreciated by voters, who returned the favour by repeatedly re-electing them.

In the absence of tax funding, some schools relied heavily on students to raise funds through selling candy, magazines and Christmas ornaments door to door. In one community, such sales efforts raised $1.7 million – $200,000 more than was raised through taxes. At one point, state auditors observed that the Floyd County schools were fund-raising organisations and not educational institutions, since little attempt was being made to actually educate anyone there.

Hiring practices also continued to be a problem. When there were job openings, the priority could be to support the local economy and provide jobs to friends and family rather than to recruit the most qualified staff.

Once hired, school authorities sometimes pressured employees to support particular political candidates and causes. Teachers and other staff were often told how to vote in various elections. Teachers who refused claimed that they suffered retaliation for their refusal. The result of all these problems was that in many schools, the best teachers were not hired, and some of those hired were pawns in larger political games; they did not have the resources they needed to do their jobs; and the children were preoccupied with non-academic activities. By 1990 the state was ready to aggressively attack those problems in the form of KERA.

Kentucky Education Reform Act was one of the most extensive legislative attempts to reform education at the state level in America. It was precipitated by a lawsuit over school funding. In 1989, the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled that not only had the state failed to provide an equitable system of common schools, it had failed to provide an 'efficient' one

as required by the state constitution. The system as a whole was under-funded. The Supreme Court ruled that the system of common schools must be adequately funded to achieve its goals and that every child in Kentucky must be provided with an equal opportunity to have an adequate education.

The court judgment coincided with a wider consensus in the state. Consultants brought in by the Louisville business community to advise them on how to attract more business had told them they needed better schools. A very important lobby group, the Pritchard Committee, was calling for major educational reform. The two major daily newspapers in the state ran investigative reports exposing problems in the schools. For the first time since 1908, politicians felt that there was enough public support to raise taxes for education, without paying a price at the polls.

In the event, over 800 pages of new school law were passed by the legislature in April 1990 and signed by the governor in one of the most highly publicised legislative events in state history.

The key outcomes of KERA were the following:

• An assessment system (initially Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), later Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS)) was established to evaluate schools and provide 'rewards' and 'penalties' based upon student performance. Schools were to be assigned a baseline score against which achievement targets could be set. Schools below a threshold of expectation were to suffer 'penalties'. They would have to develop improvement plans, submit to the leadership of 'distinguished educators' and permit their students to transfer to a 'successful' school. Schools deemed 'in crisis' were to be eligible for special school improvement funds.
• Teachers were offered a major increase in opportunities for professional control, and school-based councils were established to empower teachers and parents and provide governance within schools.
• Help was greatly increased for students at risk of educational failure. There were to be new public pre-school programs for 4 year olds. Also, family-resource and youth-service centres were to be set up, where at least 20 per cent of the students qualified for free school meals.
• There was to be a dramatic increase in the use of technology in schools to put Kentucky in the vanguard of the use of computers.

• A new non-graded primary school was to replace the traditional age-grade elementary school.
• A newly created state board of education was to oversee the system as a whole. New nepotism laws were included to reduce hiring at the local level based upon family connections.
• There was both a dramatic increase in and an equalisation of school funding.
• There were significant improvements in teachers' salaries and new limits on class sizes.

Though irresistible in its moment, KERA has not been without opponents. Many taxpayers remain unhappy not only with the new levels of tax, but also with the improved processes of tax assessment and collection. Many school boards, superintendents and principals initially resisted KERA because of its clear intent to reduce their power. Some were forced out of their positions, others retired in frustration, and ultimately relatively few districts were left with openly hostile administrations.

The speed with which the Act was brought in generated many problems. Legislators seem to have felt that any reforms that were not made quickly would be likely to die on the vine, but a tight implementation schedule tended to render KERA very unattractive to teachers, many of whom felt that reforms were being imposed upon them without consultation. Even those teachers who were sympathetic were so overwhelmed by the scale and speed of change that many of them became resistant.

The Kentucky Education Reform Act also fell foul of religious conservatives. KERA identified 75 'Valued Outcomes' as the central goals of Kentucky schools, but the term 'value' was seen as the thin end of the wedge. Fundamentalists feared that the teaching of values would become a secular-humanist affair. The state department of education attempted to defuse the issue by changing the name to 'learner outcomes'. Their contemporary equivalents are usually referred to as 'academic expectations'.

Once implementation began, concern centred around high-stakes assessment. Assessment was developed as the KIRIS and was brought in very quickly. Implementation was anything but smooth. In an attempt to achieve 'authentic' assessment it was to be based upon 'portfolios' of students' writing, created over the school year. Few teachers or administrators understood portfolios conceptually and assessment that was intended to be 'authentic' was often intensively produced, as a special exercise, during a 'portfolio week'. Apart from the very large amount of

work which assessing portfolios created for teachers, there were serious problems with its reliability in some districts. This was not helped by the fact that in scoring their students' work, the teachers were also, in effect, scoring their schools for rewards or penalties.

There were also problems with comparing KIRIS results with those of other states. Significant increases in KIRIS scores were unmatched by scores on those national tests for which results were available. Though that may have arisen because KIRIS assessments were better aligned with Kentucky's educational goals, it added to the doubts about KIRIS, which led to its replacement by CATS.

Against this uncertainty, independent researchers (Kannapel *et al.*, 2000) found that average KIRIS scores for elementary students improved in all areas, with the greatest gains in reading, mathematics and science. Both high school and middle school averages increased as well, though middle schools improved the least. Even in the middle schools, all areas showed some average increase except for writing. Kannapel *et al.* (2000) also reported, of six sample schools, that KERA's accountability system 'motivated educators to encourage high performance in students who had not previously been expected to do well' though they noted that teachers could be more concerned with improving the assessment scores of their schools as a whole than with improving the learning of every student.

Kannapel *et al.* (2000) further found that the KERA reforms had evoked a greater emphasis on writing – a wider variety of teaching strategies and materials, better curriculum alignment with state assessments, more integration of subject matter, more computer usage, and an increase in the use of open-response test items and portfolio-type assessments in the classroom. Teachers, however, were still finding it hard to move beyond teacher-centred, memorisation-focused strategies to those that encouraged higher order thinking.

In summary, these independent studies found that, amongst the intended reforms

> Some (such as professional teamwork) were fully implemented, some (such as authentic assessment) were partially implemented, and some (such as multi-age classrooms) were for all intents and purposes abandoned. (Pankratz and Petrosko, 2000, p. 118)

More recently, Kentucky education has been substantially affected by the national, 2001, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The NCLB was largely shaped by the Bush administration, but was approved with bipartisan support.

The Act mandated

- increased accountability for student achievement, through account-ability measures set by individual states, rather than federal officials;
- more choices for parents and students, particularly those whose local schools did not meet established standards;
- greater flexibility for states, districts and schools in the use of federal funds;
- an emphasis on improvement of reading instruction in the early grades.

The No Child Left Behind Act reflects a compromise – between federal, state and local control of schools – in that federal regulations require that schools meet 'high standards', but state boards decide what those standards are.

There was considerable initial enthusiasm for NCLB. Its central goals were popular, and substantial increases in federal funding were attached to it. As implementation has proceeded, however, it has come under considerable criticism. The commonest criticisms include the following:

- Decreases in federal funding after initial implementation have created financial hardships for some states, which may withdraw from the programme.
- States, which initially expected considerable flexibility from the US Department of Education (USDOE) in the alignment of prior state goals and accountability measures with NCLB goals and measures, have found USDOE to be more rigid on these issues than expected.
- School choice for parents and students often does not work where there are no nearby schools, or nearby schools are already over-crowded, or refuse to accept new students into their district.
- The reforms put too heavy an emphasis on mathematics and reading, risking neglect of other academic disciplines.

At a more philosophical level, NCLB is subject to criticism for its implied emphasis on a prescribed academic curriculum on the grounds that

- assessments and curricular goals tend to reflect cultural biases contrary to democratic ideals,
- superficial knowledge of many subjects tends to be valued more than deep, meaningful engagement with a subject of interest,
- there is little room for individualising the curriculum to the needs of students.

However, these criticisms have not figured significantly in Kentucky. Kentucky policy makers have, by and large, bought into the assessment and accountability paradigm and have sought to relate NCLB requirements to pre-existing Kentucky reform standards.

There are, however, some fundamental differences between Kentucky's goals and those of NCLB. Kentucky's reforms have attempted to raise achievement in every area of the curriculum, not just mathematics and reading. Therefore, schools making great progress in social studies or the natural sciences might be rated high in the Kentucky system, but low by NCLB standards. Another important difference is that Kentucky's accountability system is based upon a relative scale – improvement compared to the school's initial baseline. In NCLB assessment, all schools in a grade level must have the same annual measurable objective.

Other academic assessment issues in Kentucky include the fact that the Kentucky system gives credit for student progress towards proficiency, while NCLB gives credit only for achievement at or above proficiency. Perhaps more profoundly, NCLB relies on standardised measures, whereas Kentucky's assessment system includes a much wider range of assessment activities and measures.

It is still too early to say how NCLB goals and processes will impact on school policy in Kentucky. In 2003, 59.9 per cent of Kentucky schools met their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. This compared with: Virginia – 58.8 per cent, Pennsylvania – 61.9 per cent, Florida – 16.5 per cent, Minnesota – 91.0 per cent and Washington – 77.6 per cent (http://www.schoolresults.org/). Thus, progress in terms of actual student achievement measures has been less than hoped for and this may stimulate some closer alignment of state and federal goals.

Russia

In the mid-1980s, the government of the then Soviet Union saw the problems of the education system as an under-production of the vocationally and scientifically educated and – associated with the growth of what was in effect a middle class – an over-production of the ten-year generally educated. They planned to reduce the proportion of students continuing into 'complete' secondary education to a third, diverting the other two-thirds into vocational education and training; and to increase the specialisation, particularly in areas of science, of the third who continued in secondary education. However, as *glasnost* got under-way, from 1985, these plans stood rather as an emblem of the gap between the Politburo's perceptions of need and those of reform activists.

Both the policy debates and the power politics of *glasnost* were complex and became bound up with the wider changes in the last years of the Soviet Union. Perhaps the core struggle was between an educational establishment, for which the Soviet Academy of Pedagogical Sciences became the symbolic 'front', and a group of reformers who after 1988 coalesced into, or around the Ad Hoc Scientific Research Group (VNIK) led by Eduard Dneprov. However, as both Holmes *et al.* (1995) and Webber (2000) make clear, the debates suffered from a lack of conceptual clarity. The battle lines were shifting and many individuals could align themselves with some of the several camps, at different times on different issues. If there was any clear division, it was between those – some obstructionist, some realist, some just puzzled – who queried how vaunted changes were to be implemented in practice, amongst whom were many teachers, and those who were rhetorically borne along by the desirability of their goals.

One major set of discussions had to do with the democratisation of education at all levels. For many reformers, this was associated with the decentralisation of the education system. Different Soviet republics wished to gain greater control over the education system, to make greater provision for the teaching of national languages and to deal more with local history, geography and literature in their curricula. There were also pressures for schools to be freed from bureaucratic control and given the management of resources. There were calls for schools to become more democratic, in terms of establishing consultative bodies and in their daily relations with students and parents. Some greater parity of resource and provision between urban and rural schools was also urged. As *glasnost* progressed, there began to be calls for the withdrawal of the Communist Party from ideological control of schooling.

A second major set of issues were to do with the claimed adverse effect of schooling on many students. One problem was the overcrowding of schools, which led to 'shift' systems of education. More crucially, it was thought that, for a significant proportion, schooling was alienating because it was ill adjusted to their interests, needs and capacities. For many other students, the same basic problem was thought to emerge in the different form of work overload, consequent stress and resultant high levels of poor physical and psychological health. However, the proposal that two-thirds of students might divert into vocational education at 15-plus was not seen as a solution. On the contrary, the right of all to pursue general education to the end of 'complete' schooling was widely upheld.

The response to these problems was rather seen as involving an increase in the diversity of school types and curricula and the development of a less authoritarian, more individualised and democratic pedagogy. In the area of curriculum, there were concerns about the veridicality of some subjects taught in school, particularly history, which a number of revelations about the past, surfacing under *glasnost*, brought into serious question. Some aspects of geography, which emphasised Soviet Union, rather than regional issues, also came under fire. In the case of literature, there were claims that ideological bias stultified the subject. More generally, there was a claim that the bias of the curriculum towards rationalistic sciences was inimical to the development of freedom of thought, imagination and creativity. Perhaps the only element of support for the 1984 reform proposals was for the development of greater specialism in the final two years of ten-year schooling.

The calls for reform gradually crystallised around a set of slogans: *decentralisation* (of the administration and management of republics, regions and schools), *democratisation* (of educational decision-making and of relations between the parties to schooling, particularly teachers, parents and students), *de-ideologisation* (de-Communisation of curriculum content and school control), *diversification* (of state school types and of alternatives to state schools), *humanisation* (response to students as different individuals with differing goals and potentials) and *humanitirisation* (an increase of time for arts and humanities subjects in the curriculum balance).

The post-Soviet development of education in Russia was initially governed by the 1992 *Law of Education in the Russian Federation*. The main aim of education, as declared by the Law, was to create conditions for personal self-determination in a modern society, cooperating with people of different races, nationalities, religions and political views, and yet maintaining national identity. This replaced the aim of 'bringing-up an all-round educated person – a possessor of Communist ideals and convictions'.

Key aspects of the 1992 Law, for present purposes were the following:

- The curriculum was to comprise three elements: *a compulsory core* laid down by the state, *a regional component*, to be determined by regional Ministries of Education and *a local component*, to be determined by each school, subject to local approval.
- The Russian state retained the right to define, and formally certify the attainment of, levels of educational, ethical and cultural development.

- The Russian Federation (RF) Ministry of Education was empowered to arrange for the inspection of educational provision throughout the RF and the five-yearly licensing of educational organisations.
- Though any organisation might establish a school, instruction which aimed to proselytise for any faith, creed or party, including forming an atheistic outlook, was prohibited.
- Students had the right to enrol in any school at which they could secure an available place. Competitive selection for available places in any 'special profile' school, lycée or *gymnasium* was permitted.
- Education was to be compulsory, and instruction in the prescribed curriculum was free up to the age of 16. Disruptive or delinquent students could be expelled after the age of 14. Admission to 16-plus education could be selective on the basis of examinations.
- The function of schooling was to provide for, and bring into meaning-ful inter-relation, instruction (*obrazovanie*), upbringing (*vospitanie*) and cultural development and edification (*prosveschenie*).
- Schooling was to be characterised by the fostering of democratic relations sensitive to individual differences.
- In providing schooling, the highest priority was to be given to the development of the potential of each individual in ways appropriate to her or his interests, abilities and health. Developing capacities serviceable to society and to the state were to take lower priority.
- Subject to meeting state and local educational standards, teachers were free to select teaching methods and forms of learning process as they saw fit. Teaching was to be apolitical, and social and humanities subjects were to be taught with critical objectivity.

Though delivering new freedoms, the Law also posed some problems. As Holmes *et al*. (1995, pp. 303–304) observe there was 'an abundance of slogans, concepts and principles in need of clarification' and some articles appeared to conflict with others. Vagueness in the framing of the Law also led to wide initial variation in the interpretation of school inspection and accreditation arrangements, and of the extent of permitted curricular freedom.

A major criticism of the Law might be that it omitted to mandate state funding for two important features of Soviet education: kinder-gartens (3–7 years) and 'additional' education. Kindergartens had catered for over 70 per cent of Soviet children. Though some local educational authorities continued to bear part of the cost, many kindergartens were obliged to charge fees, and the numbers attending are thought to have fallen below 25 per cent (Holmes *et al*., 1995).

Kindergartens provided a highly structured form of pre-school education designed to ensure a level start for schooling, regardless of parental level of education or support. Given the severe pressures on the family in the post-Soviet era, reducing this provision could not have been helpful.

'Additional education' supplied an important form of out-of-school, voluntary, curricular differentiation for committed and talented school students, in the Soviet 'Houses of Culture'. It is still provided, on greatly reduced funding, by local government, in places like St Petersburg, but is a shadow of its former self. In Soviet times, it offered compensation, on the basis of individual interest and choice, for the lack of curricular differentiation in schools. It enabled the fostering of talents of all kinds, whilst enabling the schools to focus on inclusive delivery of the common curriculum. The severe reduction in the provision of 'additional education' may necessitate the development of more differentiated and selective within-school education, undermining inclusivity and the comprehensive principle.

Other, possibly unforeseen but nonetheless adverse consequences seem to have arisen from giving schools new rights to expel students over 14 (*otsev*) and to select at 16. Many post-16 vocational schools were closed, when the industrial enterprises with which they had been associated cut them adrift, or fell on hard times. A number of those that remained adopted entrance examinations. Holmes *et al*. (1995, p. 316) reported that the number of vocational education and training places had reduced by 79 per cent. This, together with *otsev*, may have deprived a very large numbers of students, possibly as many as 2.8 million (Webber, 2000), of a post-14 place in the educational system. Since such former students are those with the poorest prospects of legitimate employment, there is a risk that they will present a major social problem for the future.

In terms of its intentions, the Act seems to have so far had mixed success. Communist Party control of education was removed in 1991, and the de-ideologisation of curriculum content followed rapidly. Sessions for the study of Marxist theory disappeared from school timetables and many teachers of literature, history, geography and social studies made the best shift they could, on the resources of information they could access, to teach their subjects in an unbiased way.

The decentralisation of educational administration to republics and regions was also largely successful. Some seized their new opportunities with an alacrity which caused some alarm at loss of control to central government. Others both negotiated with the centre and moved ahead

with independent deliberation. Yet others, fearful of breaking step, initially looked to the centre for guidance that no longer came.

Permitted diversification of schooling has had less success. Considerable initial interest focused on the possibility of new private and religious schools. They were seen as an aspect of democratisation and as potential leaders of innovation in schooling. However, few such schools have been founded and even fewer have the finance to compete effectively with the state system. It is estimated that they are attended by less than 2 per cent of students across Russia (Holmes *et al.*, 1995; Webber, 2000). Their principal niche seems to have become the provision of individualised education for students, with some element of special need and reasonably well-to-do parents.

The extent of the 'humanitirisation' of the curriculum – an increase of time for humanities subjects – seems to have depended on the availability of staffing to match a changed curriculum balance. In St Petersburg, by 1998, our sample schools reported a reduction of science subjects from 50 to 33 per cent of timetabled time, whilst humanities subjects had moved up to 40 per cent. However, this may well not have been matched in districts where qualified staff were harder to recruit.

Increasing democratisation of relations between teachers, parents and students seemed more to involve change in the operation of Soviet arrangements, than whole-hearted adoption of the 1992 reform. Each Soviet school had an active Parents' Committee (*Roditel'skii komitet*), made up of parent representatives for each school class. It brought the resources of the community into the service of the school and could raise concerns about the quality of schooling and teaching and the behaviour of students. The 1992 Law retained this committee, but added a School Council (*Shkol'nyi sovet*) which was to contain representatives of students and the community, as well as parents and teachers, and which might address any matter of concern to the school. However, relations between the powers of the School Council, the School Director, the local and the Federal administrations were not clearly spelled out in the Act, and few School Councils seem to have developed as intended. In at least one highly successful and otherwise innovative school, student representation had not been thought especially helpful. Thus, whilst the Parents' Committees remained a significant feature of all the schools in our sample, and were an important means of home–school links, the School Councils seemed to have found little more than an honorific function. Nonetheless, there was some real evidence of increased democratisation in the operation of the Parents' Committees. Whereas these were formerly the main focus for the leading and directive

role of the school, in the joint task with parents of *vospitanie*, they had become much more a means of soliciting parental support for the school and their children's education and informing parents how they could help. They were also significantly more open to parental complaints. They offered perhaps the most direct opportunity for the engagement of parents in their children's schooling of all of the three countries in our study.

It is difficult to evaluate the extent of the 'humanisation' of schooling – its response to students as different individuals with differing goals and potentials – as a result of the Act. Neither parents nor teachers seem to have fully realised as yet what this will involve. In Soviet times, teachers were required to take the lead in child-rearing, and were, in effect, empowered to educate parents in parenting, if necessary. Most parents' concept of schooling remains of the Soviet school and most seem to conceive their parental duty as preparing their child to adapt to schooling as they recall it. Russian teachers are consequently not yet under parental pressure to adapt teaching to individual need, as might be the case in other systems. At the same time, teachers' own skills and competence are closely bound up with familiar forms and practices of schooling. Though there is some experimentation with new methods of working, and some teachers have welcomed streaming in the very few schools that have so far adopted it, it seems likely that for most teachers, humanisation has seen a warming in the tone of relations with students and their parents and a more understanding approach, where students struggle with the curriculum.

The great majority of schools remain unselective, unstreamed, neighbourhood-comprehensive (*massovaya*) schools, serving students from 7 to 18. After the Act, some of these schools were in a position to adopt a new provision for the upper secondary school, in one or more of eight broad fields with some choice of subjects. However, there has been no great rush amongst schools to evolve in this way, no doubt because the more high status universities suggested they would not recognise study in the broad fields as sufficient preparation for admission. More commonly, enterprising School Directors have aimed to make theirs a 'school with special profile' – that is, one staffed and resourced to teach one or more subjects, say mathematics, or a language or the newly fashionable economics, to a high level.

Other schools have added, and no doubt most would like to add, in the final two years of schooling, prestigious *gymnasium* classes, which prepare students for admission to higher education, often with the assistance of an affiliated university. In a few cases, schools have been

able to develop the whole of their upper-secondary school provision to *gymnasium* level. Admission to *gymnasium* classes is selective, with students who have attended schools with *gymnasia* competing for places with others seeking to transfer from 'mass' schools.

Competition for admission is strong and some *gymnasia* have acquired elite status. This has resulted in their numbers increasing from 100 in 1991 to 1013 in 1998 (Filippov, 2000). In such schools, the pressure for *gymnasium* places may be such that the school operates *pro-gymnasium* preparatory classes for its own students in the lower secondary phase. Though legally obliged to make provision for all who live in its catchment area, such schools may try to 'cool out' students who show limited potential in the early secondary phase, encouraging their transfer to other schools. In effect, in these schools, selection has begun to reach further back down the age-range.

The *gymnasia*, which enjoy a higher level of state resource and which can attract very well qualified staff, are also, as might be expected, amongst the schools which are most innovative in the areas of new curricula and pedagogy. To that extent, they are experimental sites for the trial of methods on behalf of the system as a whole. On the other hand, it must be uncertain whether innovations developed under favourable conditions will always prove transferable to less favoured sites. What is the case is that the development of *gymnasia* has the potential to undermine the former system of mass comprehensive schooling. In informal conversations with teachers in ordinary schools, there was a nervous recognition that a race had been joined and that some were perhaps already so far ahead as to be uncatchable. The effect for the *massovaya* school remained controversial.

Notwithstanding these changes, what was most marked, in all the schools, including those which had acquired *gymnasium* status, was the extent of continuity with the Soviet school. This seems to reflect both professional inertia and an absence of funding to implement the new curricula and pedagogy (Polyzoi and Dneprov, 2003). It was not possible to bring in new subjects without a considerable extension of initial or in-service teacher education. It was very difficult to revise teaching of the traditional subjects without new school textbooks, which not only had to be written, but made available, at considerable cost, across the whole system. Many of the teachers spoke of doing their own research and developing their own resources in order to innovate, but this was as often in curriculum content as in new pedagogy. In the case of the latter, at least some of the early advice given to teachers did not rise much above the level of exhortation to

strike out into the unknown. Understandably, responsible teachers were reluctant to abandon approaches in which they were skilled for untried novelties.

As indicated earlier, a very high proportion of parents still inculcated an early and substantial respect for adult, especially teachers', authority and a high valuation of a broad general education. They saw it as part of the parental function to present the child to school with an already well-developed understanding of, and favourable attitudes towards, school requirements and the demands of the learning process.

The basic features of schooling, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and *vospitanie* also remained as a significant part of the contemporary legacy of the Soviet school. The great majority of schools our research team visited in St Petersburg were still ten-year, neighbourhood comprehensives with 'mixed ability' classes, which students attended from their seventh to the end of their fifteenth or seventeenth years. The curriculum, although thoroughly 'de-Communised' remained encyclopaedic and although there were new subjects and an increase in the opportunity for options in the upper secondary phase, this more commonly still took the form of adding classes in additional subjects, or additional classes in prescribed subjects, rather than dropping subjects. Students still followed almost the whole of the encyclopaedic curriculum through to the end of their seventeenth year. They were required to take twenty hours of instruction in the nationally compulsory subjects, had some choice between options for a further twelve hours of instruction and could add a further six hours of fully optional instruction, in subjects for which their school could provide teaching.

Though there were developments in pedagogy, for many teachers these seemed to be, as yet, mostly new inflections within the standard lesson process, rather than significant alternatives to it. However, we would not wish that judgement to be misconstrued. Russian pedagogy has traditionally focused towards the detailed teaching of prescribed topics and there was suggestive evidence that there may well be more innovation of this kind than our data collection methods could confidently capture. Certainly the early 1990s saw a profuse variety of innovations, which were followed in the mid-1990s by a step-back to a more structured and externally monitored curriculum. However, many schools have continued with experimental initiatives in teaching and learning, by individual teachers and creative teachers' groups. According to Smirnova (1998) who sampled teacher opinion in St Petersburg, only 46 per cent preferred 'traditional lesson-forms' and only 33 per cent valued 'standardised (traditional) programmes and methods of teaching'.

Irrespective of years of teaching, 33 per cent of teachers said they had adapted the standard programmes, which suggests that a measure of teacher innovation remains very much alive.

In terms of general pedagogics, the class peer group was still encouraged, and continued, to display many of the features of a collective. The assessment process had not significantly changed for many years. Though the state 'Rules for Pupils', which were promulgated in 1943, had been withdrawn they remained recognisable in classroom practice, and student behaviour and discipline.

As might be expected, new formal arrangements for *vospitanie* have proven much more problematic to evolve. The displacement of Communism had removed a touchstone against which new proposals for *vospitanie* might be evaluated. Despite this, teachers reported still seeing *vospitanie* as an inalienable and proper part of their function and continued to foster their own de-ideologised versions of personal, social and moral education.

The 1992 Law was formulated in haste, under crisis conditions. Yeltsin and his associates thought it crucial to put in place changes that would be very difficult to reverse. The Law represented an uneasy and less than wholly coherent amalgam of responses to traditional Russian concerns, regional aspirations and rather abstract appropriations of democratic, market-liberal and progressive Western pedagogic theories.

In 1997, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin initiated the development of a new *Doctrine of Education* which was debated at a meeting of the All-Russia Conference of Educators in January 2000. The Conference recognised that support for education had reached a dangerously low level and that, if the aspirations of 1992 were to be fulfilled, further reform, especially of funding, would be necessary. The staffing of schools was perceived as a major issue. It was noted that 10 per cent of teachers were at retirement age, 33 per cent had worked in teaching for more than twenty years, the average teaching load was 24 hours, and many teachers taught for thirty or more hours. In most of the schools, outside large cities, the number of children in classes exceeded the level set by the law. Teachers' salaries were seven times lower than in 1990 and were less than half of the average industrial wage. As noted in Chapter 8, students' perceptions of the value and importance of education and scholarship are likely to be influenced by the transparent financial difficulties of many of their teachers and university professors and the general state of disrepair of many educational institutions.

England

At the same time as dissatisfactions were building about the comprehensive school, there was a significantly renewed concern for the role of education in Britain's national economic competitiveness. This was stimulated by the economic recession following the 1973 oil price shock. There was a significant increase in unemployment and subsequent rises in industrial productivity which were to permanently reduce the demand for unskilled labour. Since the 1980s, governments of whatever party have looked to the education system both to produce an adequate supply of highly educated labour to support economic development and to reduce the degree of educational underachievement which could threaten to produce a large, at best semi-employed underclass, perhaps permanently dependent on state welfare.

'Choice' was the legitimating slogan for many of the pre-1988 reforms of the Conservative administration. It was promoted both as an antidote to some problems with comprehensive schools and as a market mechanism capable of generally driving up standards.

Aspirant parents were a target group for a newly populist Conservative Party, which depended on extending its electorate to include the more recent as well as the 'old' middle class. 'Choice' was initially paraded as a palliative for the discontents of parents with inner-city 'neighbourhood' comprehensive schools. From 1980, parents could avoid their designated catchment-area school and seek admission for their child at any state school with spare places. Of course, choice only obtained in urban areas, where schools were near enough to each other to make it practicable. Though, from 1988, popular schools were required to fill places to the maximum, demand exceeded supply. Those best able to negotiate the bureaucracy of choice, and bear the costs of transport to school – essentially the educated middle classes – benefited most. In a similar exercise of class solidarity, and also under the banner of choice, the Conservatives gave some help to the private and 'public' schools, by a new input of public funding for an 'Assisted Places' scheme. Before its phasing out, in 1997, by the new Labour government, 33,000 students had all or part of their private school fees paid for by the state.

Constantly in the background was an ongoing nostalgia for and belief in the virtues of institutionally differentiated secondary schooling. Sloganised as 'Bring back the Grammar Schools', this neither commanded a political consensus nor convinced as a response to economic global-isation. However, again under the banner of 'choice', forms of disguised differentiation were experimented with in the creation, in 1988, of City Technology Colleges and Grant Maintained schools. Though these were

not at first permitted to select academically, they were allowed to choose students whose parents contractually undertook to support the schooling process and, later, some Grant Maintained schools were permitted to select on academic grounds. Though undermining the comprehensive principle, these developments were not extensive.

Other aspects of 'choice' were more obviously directed to the general improvement of comprehensive education. Here, the guiding metaphor was that of the 'market'. The underlying presumption was that consumer choice and the resulting competition between schools to stay 'in business' and flourish would in themselves suffice to raise both the quality and the diversity of state educational provision. (That it might prove practically impossible, as Crouch [2003] has pointed out, to create anything resembling a perfect market in day-schooling seems to have been overlooked.) In order to supply parents with 'market information', schools were required to produce prospectuses and publish students' results in public examinations. The latter were later nationally published as 'league tables' of school test and examination results. Clearer and more incisive inspection reports by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) of schools were also to be published at large.

In a related series of moves designed to compel schools to become more competitive, their government and management were remodelled along the lines of a public company. From 1986, each school had an independent Governing Body – in effect its board of directors – and was to report annually to parents. Business interests were to be represented, partly to counter a claimed anti-industrial and commercial bias in the education system and partly to bring business acumen to bear on the management of schools. Considerable new emphasis was given to educational management. There was a significant growth in training for head teachers and other senior school staff, often based on theory generalised from business practice. From the 1988 Act, each Governing Body was given a budget to run its school and the power to appoint and dismiss staff.

However, the very Act which completed the process of setting up schools as competitive businesses, capable of offering choice to the consumer, made the newly empowered Governing Bodies and head teachers statutorily responsible for delivering a rather tightly nationally standardised product – the National Curriculum. It is still not clear why a government so committed to market mechanisms for school improvement should have moved in this way.

Perhaps there was uncertainty about whether, left to take its own course, the market experiment could deliver, and quickly enough.

Meanwhile, the government still confronted a largely comprehensive school system, which it perceived as significantly underachieving with a high proportion of students and failing to prepare a future workforce for the challenge of economic globalisation. The response was to set in motion an attempt to drive up the quality of education right across the school system, regardless of school type, by imposing a common set of progressive educational standards.

The English National Curriculum and its associated national assessment system were set up by the 1988 ERA. With its prescribed content of nine predominantly academic subjects, the 1988 National Curriculum had an 'encyclopaedic' flavour and aspiration. Whether the academic-subject model of general education would prove either accessible to many students or the most relevant for the future of all was widely doubted particularly amongst teachers, but not otherwise widely debated. It was sold as a 'broad and balanced' general education – an 'entitlement' for all – the teaching of all prescribed content in all subjects to all students. However, it reproduced the English obsession with differentiation, in a yet more sophisticated re-legitimisation, which effectively undermined that ideal. Whereas differentiation under the 1944 settlement was 'horizontal', assorting 11 year olds for different types of schooling and curricula, differentiation under the 1988 Act was 'vertical', organising the notionally common 5–16 curriculum into a series of 'Levels' through which students were to progress. The 'entitlement' of all students to the common curriculum was the new basis of legitimisation. However, many students have been found unable to take up their full entitlement – that is, to progress through all levels in all subjects – so that in practice they experience a differentiated curriculum, which falls variously short of delivering the general education, in principle on offer. However, so powerful has this new legitimisation proved that student failure to take up their entitlement can hardly yet be ascribed to defect in the set-up, but is attributed to fault in the students, or their teachers, or their parents.

The formulation of the National Curriculum as a collection of academic subjects could be challenged in terms of its accessibility as a *common* 5–16 curriculum. Given its adoption, the failure to research and develop the consequently necessary *pedagogy* of entitlement and to provide materials, resources and an adequately educated and trained teaching force to maximise curriculum delivery were astonishing omissions. The response to their absence took three forms: the attenuation and re-focusing of the National Curriculum; an attempt to 'drive up standards' by a mechanistic evaluation of teaching and schools against de-contextualised

outcome criteria; and exhortation to schools to reach out to under-supportive parents.

Since the change in government in 1997, there has been significant further attenuation of the National Curriculum; the evaluation of teaching and schools remains rather mechanistic, though there is some increase in contextualisation and pedagogical support; an element of stigmatisation of under-supportive parents has been replaced by moral encouragement and practical support.

Recent trends, under both governments, suggest that a judgement has been made that the 1988 National Curriculum was 'a bridge too far'. Though, the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, involving closely prescribed daily literacy and numeracy hours to be taught each day in primary schools, does represent a recognition of the need to research, develop and disseminate an effective pedagogy of entitlement, and strategies for the sharing of wider pedagogical good practice via the Internet are in place, and there is substantially increased recognition of the importance of teacher education and re-education, in the raising of standards, these may have come too late to resuscitate the encyclopaedic aspirations of the 1988 Act.

Having put in place a National Curriculum for which there was certainly no shared and perhaps no generally known pedagogy of entitlement, government used instead the device of holding schools and individual teachers accountable for finding out how to deliver the curriculum. It immediately began to establish a national data base for the evaluation of school performance. Initially more prominent in the perception of schools was its reform of school inspection.

From 1839, school inspection had been carried out by HMI. During the 1980s, the Conservative government came to see HMI as part of an 'educational establishment' which it was held had presided over a long-term failure to raise standards. In 1992 it set up a new body, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) to manage the privatisation of inspection, which was to be carried out by contractors trained, approved and working to criterial 'Frameworks' closely specified by Ofsted. Each school was to be inspected every four years. The Reports of school inspection were to be public documents, and are now available on the Internet. Inspectors rate schools as 'Excellent', 'Very Good', 'Good', or 'Satisfactory', or as 'Underachieving', having 'Serious Weaknesses' or requiring 'Special Measures'. A school having 'Serious Weaknesses' can expect to be fully re-inspected within two years and visited at least once during that period by an HMI. In the case of schools requiring

'Special Measures', their LEA is required to monitor and support the implementation of an Action Plan. Schools having 'Serious Weaknesses' or requiring 'Special Measures' may experience the dismissal of senior staff and other teachers judged inadequate. They are also likely to experience a fall in student numbers and the related school income, as parents opt out the school.

Though inspection was initially more visible, as part of what is, in the United States, more frankly termed 'high stakes accountability', it has been matched, since 1993, when the national data base accumulated a sufficient run of annual data, by the statistical monitoring of school performance in comparison with other schools of similar type and from similar catchment areas.

The need to attenuate the curriculum and establish a draconian accountability process reflected the absence of a 'pedagogy of entitlement'. Some form of attempt to align with or enlist parents in the support of their children's education might be thought to form part of such a pedagogy. The National Curriculum supplied a public account of desired learning and achievement and schools were required to report to parents in relation to it. For those parents – perhaps a large majority of the new, broader middle classes – who were prepared to raise their children to accept schooling and value education, to discipline their children to study and to support their learning, the 'vertical differentiation' of the National Curriculum held out the possibility of their children achieving success, given sufficient sustained parental commitment. Other parents were harder to recruit as partners.

Under the Conservative government, although there was much exhortation and some stigmatisation, the considerable task of altering what were perceived as the unhelpful attitudes of a minority of parents was practically left to the schools. In effect, schools had discharged to them the responsibility of moralising and, if necessary, 'disciplining' parents as well as students. Some were successful in developing new ways of communicating with diffident or alienated parents and involving them in the life of the school, but for other schools, especially those with socially divided catchment areas, it was difficult to evolve an effective common approach. Arguably more positively, the Labour government, since 1997, has applied considerable new funding and set up schemes, such as 'Education Action Zones', 'Excellence in Cities' and 'Sure Start' under the general banner of 'social inclusion', which aim to break open cycles of deprivation and, amongst other social goals, to encourage and support families in entering into some effective partnership with their children's schools.

The current picture is difficult to summarise. A common National Curriculum has been put in place, but any related 'pedagogy of entitlement' is still in its infancy. However, the notion that all students were entitled to, indeed were mandated to, pursue the broad academic curriculum until the age of 16 has now been dropped and vocational courses for students aged 14-plus can replace some academic subjects. In general, these have less status and are rarely taken up by students who are likely to demonstrate the highest levels of achievement. Work-related learning, ostensibly important for all, but in practice geared to meet the needs of lower achievers, is once again seen as an important means of addressing some of the weaknesses of the education system, motivating students disenchanted by the traditional academic pathway and preparing youngsters for the world of work (Huddleston and Oh, 2004).

For the present, the curriculum formulation legitimates competition for life-chances amongst the broad middle groups in society, on the basis of rewarding some blend of ability and persistence. The academic curriculum is still, however, relatively inaccessible to an 'underclass' and sustained support, in many more basic matters than pedagogy, seems likely to be needed to assist its members to overcome their disadvantage.

At the same time, the present government has proposed a significant diversification amongst comprehensive schools so that about half become either 'specialist' (in one or more of technology, languages, sport, arts, engineering, science or business), or 'faith', or 'training' or 'beacon' schools. The other half would remain what the Prime Minister's Press Secretary rather unfortunately called 'bog-standard' comprehensives. The intention was to set up schools that would prove sufficiently attractive to be able to select the children of parents judged able to fulfil a 'home–school contract' to support their children's education. In a similar vein, a previous Secretary of State for Education urged schools to 'stream' (i.e. create narrow-band attainment groups ('track') for teaching in most or all subjects) and 'set' (i.e. create narrow-band attainment groups ('track') for teaching in a single subject) students in both primary and secondary schools and to consider 'fast-tracking' the ablest students so that they take 16-plus examinations a year or two earlier. Plans are also well developed to make additional educational provision for students identified as 'gifted and talented' and to identify their achievement through 'World Class' tests.

It is difficult not to see these proposals as yet another reworking of the constant twentieth-century educational concerns of the changing middle classes: to have schools which can focus undividedly on securing recognised achievement for their children; and to compete for entry

to the elite. Thus, the principles of comprehensive education and a National Curriculum are broadly accepted, provided that alienated members of any underclass are moralised, or restrained, or diverted from disrupting their effective operation. However, there is a fear that the National Curriculum may not bring youngsters on sufficiently quickly, or thoroughly, to compete with the products of the 'public schools' for entry to prestigious universities. Hence the concern for 'streaming', 'fast-tracking', World Class tests and 'Advanced Extension' awards at 17- or 18-plus.

It is finally difficult to resist the conclusion that the existence of a separate elite system of education militates against the provision of a 'curriculum of entitlement' in state schools. Fulfilling a 'curriculum of entitlement' implies deploying an inclusive 'pedagogy of entitlement' to bring as many young people as possible to comparable worthwhile achievements by the end of common schooling. It involves minimising student differentiation in order to maximise motivation. But competing with an elite system necessarily involves early differentiation and curriculum expedition, mechanisms likely to reduce aspiration and so motivation amongst the unselected.

It is far from established that any long-term educational advantage, either for the individual or society, accrues from *general* forms of differentiation which bring some students on earlier than others. There may well be some advantage in supplying *additional* education to those who show precocious talent in mathematics and physics, where original work seems often to be completed by the mid-twenties, and in music and dance, where relevant physical abilities benefit from early development. Except in these cases, which need not involve any general differentiation, the advantage seems to lie with those countries which maintain aspiration and motivation through common treatment for as long as practicable. It is of course arguable how long that can be.

In contemporary England, it is uncertain whether that argument will take place. The commitment to a National Curriculum may have so faltered that necessary energy will not be found to develop the required pedagogy. How much easier to slip back into the well-grooved thinking of differentiation. And, of course, the 'public schools' are still there, circulating the elite.

The assessment environment

There are important variations in assessment regime between our milieux. Assessment processes potentially send messages to students about what,

and how much, one should learn; how and why it matters to learn; and what are acceptable attitudes to learning. They also provide greater or lesser scope for teachers to use assessment motivationally.

In Kentucky, the school curriculum comprises a number of credit-rated courses of study, amongst which students have a greater or lesser measure of choice. Students have to accrue a sufficient number of credits for progression between years, or to graduate with the high school diploma. The formulation of courses and the allocation of credits is, in principle, within the province of the school, subject only, since KERA, to the state-mandated 'academic expectations'. The award of grades is very largely in the hands of individual teachers.

A cumulative letter grade for each course is formally recorded by the school and reported to students and their parents four times a year. Teachers have discretion in how they arrive at this cumulative grade. They keep their own record and, in deriving the grade for formal report, they are free to exclude a class set of grades for some work as unreliable or of less significance. That apart, a student's cumulative grade is normally arrived at by calculating an arithmetic mean across a year's grades. This is the student's Grade Point Average (GPA). The GPA for the final four years of schooling, in the senior high, determines the award of the high school diploma.

The award of the grades from which the GPA is calculated is very much a matter for teachers. They can give grades for a wide variety of work, some done at home, but probably more done in school time, in class, or in study-hall sessions. Assignments are mostly teacher set and assessed and may take the form of one-word or short-answer tests or the completion of practice exercises, both of which seemed to be used quite frequently amongst the teachers we interviewed. Other relatively common assignments take the form of brief written work, or practical or inquiry projects. It seemed likely that a student who was strategically attentive in class, who had been blessed with a retentive memory and who was reasonably articulate and accurate in the expression of recalled information could gain high grades. Students self-reported the attainment of 'straight A's', without much further work out of class, and teachers confirmed the feasibility of this, for a 'good' student.

Prior to KIRIS, it had not been common practice for teachers to confer about the grades they gave, nor were there clear public standards from which they could derive reasonably reliable guidance. In our sample, some teachers reported themselves as being more inclined to generosity, others to rigour in grading. It seems quite possible that a student who experienced the statistical misfortune of being taught by a complete set

of 'tough' graders might have her or his GPA wind up rather lower than someone who enjoyed the reverse fortune. Certainly students recognised the problem they might face in taking 'hard classes', unless these were 'weighted-up' for the GPA as 'Advanced Performance' classes.

More pertinently, there seemed little to prevent possibly quite wide divergence between schools in the award of grades. In the absence of controlled standardisation, teachers in any one school might to some extent converge on consensus about student grades. But, without some reasonably informed knowledge about standards across the system, they seem likely to norm their grading on those 'local' expectations, whether comparatively demanding or relaxed.

A possible advantage of relatively unconstrained teacher assessment is that it may free teachers to use assessment for the motivation and management of student learning. But any advantage gained in this way has to be offset against the cost: that teachers may fail to set sufficiently apt and demanding standards. Again, where the certification of 'exit' competence is unreliable, there may be inequitable consequences for the distribution of subsequent life-chances.

Possible unreliability in teacher assessment may matter less in Kentucky because admission to higher education is governed by the scores attained on tests such as the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) or American College Test (ACT). Students normally take these – involving three, or four tests, under strict examination conditions – early in their final year in high school. Though the high school GPA plays some part in admission to higher education, it is more likely to be taken as further evidence, of persistence, studious disposition and level of writing, than as crucial. One of the reasons universities use the SAT, or the ACT, is to do justice and identify talent, across variation between schools. In Kentucky, though the cost of pursuing further and higher education may be a deterrent, students have access to a generous provision. A high proportion of Kentucky students opts to remain within the state and, relative to demand, there is a plentiful supply of local higher education places. As a result, it may be that any variation between schools, in assigning GPAs, is without major adverse effects on the life-chances of students who enter higher education.

The impact of their GPA on the chances of those who do not is less clear. Here it may be that where much employment, outside the cities, is in farming, or small business, contacts and personal qualities may well play a more important role in securing desirable non-graduate employment than school scores. However, parity between different schools' GPAs may well become more of an issue and further standardisation

for the award of the high school diploma might well figure on future agendas.

Use of the SAT, or the ACT, decouples school from higher education admission in one other way. Admission to higher education in England is on the basis of examinations which test for higher level knowledge and understanding of the curriculum prescribed for the final two years of schooling. In Russia, the VUZy entrance examinations similarly test for higher level knowledge and understanding of the curriculum prescribed for Classes 10 and 11. By contrast, the SAT and the ACT are deliberately designed to stand relatively curriculum-free and identify potential for successful college study. They aim to test capacity for intellectual operations, upon what might reasonably be taken to be the common fund of knowledge across 17–18 year olds. Indeed, though the SAT is being revised to place greater emphasis upon academic knowledge, the present version can currently be considered as a *de facto* measure of general intelligence (Frey and Detterman, 2004). As a result, at the pinnacle of schooling, there may be limited reward for, and other qualities are needed than, the kind of curriculum-linked studiousness and beginnings of commitment to scholarship, which pay off in both English and Russian systems.

It seems likely that KIRIS and, now, CATS have impacted on the previously relaxed attitude to the validity and reliability of teacher assessment. KIRIS tests at fourth, eighth and twelfth grades. CATS tests some component in every grade above the second, and thereafter, alternately three and four subjects in Grades 4 and 5, 7 and 8, and 10 and 11. Though not expressly designed to assort students on standardised measures, student performance data is collected to derive performance indicators for school accountability. Because that accountability is 'high-stakes', the validity and reliability of the testing process has been a major issue. Concerns for validity have generated pressure to standardise the curriculum. Schools run a high risk in engaging with developments that are out-of-line with the ways they are going to be assessed. Concerns for reliability seem likely to be having an indirect and still uncertain implication for standardising assessment. It seems reasonable to predict both an increase in curricular convergence between schools and also an increase of at least informal standardisation of teachers' grades across the system.

Unlike in England and Kentucky, issues bearing on student assessment have not been central until very recently in Russia and then only as concerns university entrance. Apart from two occasions, at the end of a student's schooling, assessment is entirely comprised of teacher-given

'marks' and the assessment process is entirely managed within each school. Since the 1930s, the Russian education system has employed a single system of marking for every kind of required student performance, at every stage of education. All assessment, from primary school to university, is on a five-point scale: with '5' as excellent; '4', good; '3', satisfactory; '2', unsatisfactory; and '1', completely unacceptable. In practice, '1' is almost never used and '2' may be finally rather rarely given, since teachers will often allow a student to re-do work which would merit only that mark. For most students, especially from the secondary stage onwards, their effort is expended in trying to do better than '3' and get at least '4' whilst hoping for at least the occasional '5'. Only a small number of students can manage to achieve the ideal of a consistent set of '5s'.

Teachers are required to assess both the learning of the class (and the success of their teaching) in relation to the curriculum, and the development of individual students. In the case of the class, teachers are required to assess and give oral feedback about, but not to mark, all students' work as evidence of learning. Such assessment involves overlooking and evaluating students' written work in class, asking chosen students to rehearse what has just been taught, assessing and, for some but not necessarily all students, marking selected samples of written homework out of class and calling on selected students for exposition of study and learning homeworks, in class. Here the focus is on the overall range and depth of learning and, more particularly, failure of learning in the class. Teachers aim to sample the work and learning of those students from whom they expect, at any particular time, to derive the most guidance about the outcomes of their teaching.

In the case of individual students, teachers are required to mark, not all, but a sufficient number of assignments to justify the award of cumulative marks at four (sometimes now three) points throughout a year and for the whole year. Of course, there may be much practical overlap, in that marking for the purpose of arriving at an individual student profile will also supply part of the data for evaluating class learning. However, it is not expected to supply the whole of that data, and sampling with these two different aims enables class progress to be monitored, whilst individual progress is assessed, essentially qualitatively, on individual samples of assigned work, which may not match the samples chosen for other individuals, in the same class, let alone more widely.

In any student's sample, marks may have been given for written homework, for class tests, for offering explanations and answering

questions in class and for oral recall of material studied for homework. Whilst for some written homeworks, and all class tests, the whole class will be assessed on each occasion, in the case of class questions and oral recital, perhaps a third of the class at most will be marked for their response in any one lesson. Sometimes a high mark might be recorded for a spontaneously good answer in class. On other occasions, a teacher may announce, before a homework, that a high mark will be given to anyone who can come up with a good oral answer to a pre-specified question or problem. Particularly in the case of oral recall, teachers ensure that all the members of the class are called, over the course of three or four lessons.

Teachers are able to keep track of who has responded in class, because each teacher enters every mark that he or she gives in a combined class mark-book and attendance register – the *zhiornal*. The *zhiornal* has virtually legal status. Entries must be made correctly and may not be subsequently changed. The *zhiornali* are commonly kept in the office of the school's Deputy Director (Curriculum), from where they are collected by each teacher for completion. The Deputy Director (Curriculum) uses the *zhiornali* to monitor the assessment of the class and the attendance and progress of individual students. Parents may insist on seeing the *zhiornal* record for their child. When a class completes its secondary education, its z*hiornal* is retained in perpetuity by the district education office as the permanent record of a student's entitlement to certification.

As well as entries in the *zhiornal*, teachers may also make entries at each lesson in any individual student's day-book or *dnevnik*. In the Soviet era, students had to make their *dnevniki* available to the teacher, at every lesson, and to their parents. Though they are no longer legally required to be kept – at what is the third attempt at abolition, the first two under Lenin and Gorbachev – *dnevniki* are still in use in many schools, because of the critical role they play in partnership between school and parents. Where *dnevniki* have been retained, it is common practice, each Friday, for the students' class tutor to check and sign that they contain all the marks recorded in the *zhiornal*, before they are taken home to parents, who are also expected to sign them. Class tutors check partly because teachers may sometimes forget to enter oral work marks, but also because students may forget to remind teachers, or, nowadays, 'lose' their *dnevniki*, where the entered mark would be a poor one.

At the end of each 'quarter', or increasingly, trimester, each teacher makes a cumulative assessment, across her or his students' record of marks in the *zhiornal* for that quarter and awards a quarterly mark.

At the end of the year, the teacher makes a cumulative assessment across the quarterly marks and awards the annual mark.

The cumulative mark is not necessarily arrived at by taking an arithmetical mean. Rather, teachers pay attention to what they take to be the more reliable marks – deriving from work done under teacher supervision and so without parental, sibling or peer help – or those which they perceive as being more truly representative of a student's response to learning or development in the subject. Then, in relation to the weights they ascribe to the run of 'significant' marks, teachers arrive at the cumulative mark by a process of inspection and judgement.

Though the cumulation process seems to leave a great deal to their discretion, teachers are required to be able to 'defend' their marks. Challenges may come from parents who can ask teachers to refer to evidence and explain reasoning. Equally, teachers may have to justify grades to the Deputy Director (Curriculum) whose role includes a regular analysis of the record of marks. Deputy Directors will raise questions if there is an insufficient run of reliable marks; or if a cumulative mark seems anomalous; or if a student's marks in a particular subject vary significantly from those in a comparable subject or from their overall performance. However, whilst some near relation to 'objective' correctness may be expected to form part of a defence of marks – particularly at the end of Years 9 and 11, where the award of certificates and medals is involved – a teacher may also be able to defend using marks pedagogically, to the satisfaction of Deputy Directors and most parents. That is, a teacher might give a higher mark to encourage a striving student to develop, or a lower mark to spur a capable but coasting student to re-engage. If this seems problematic, it should be remembered that it is normal in St Petersburg schools for the same teacher to take the same class throughout its primary or compulsory secondary schooling. Everyone is assessed at the end of compulsory schooling, in Class 9, for the Certificate of Incomplete Secondary Education. Those who stay on in school are assessed two years later, at the end of Class 11, for the Certificate of Complete Secondary Education. Except at these final points of the primary and 'incomplete' secondary stages, the meaning of a mark can thus remain a matter between the student and the teacher.

At both 15-plus and 17-plus, though there are written examinations, there is a greater reliance on formal oral examination than in England or Kentucky. The state prepares and publishes a list of the question areas which will be tested. On the day of the examination, each student presents themselves to a panel of their teachers, having drawn a 'ticket',

on which are printed two or three questions, about 30 minutes earlier. They have to make an exposition in response to the question, answering any supplementary questions posed by the examiners to ascertain the depth and level of their understanding.

At 15-plus, there are two written examinations, in mathematics and Russian language. At 17-plus, there are four written examinations which normally test Russian language, Russian literature, algebra and one other subject. Written examinations may be quite arduous. For example, six hours are allowed for the literature 'composition', where, at the start-time for the examination, the five or six set topics are read out on television by a senior education official and copied to a blackboard by a teacher. The algebra paper may take up to four hours. One of the reasons for allowing so much time for written examinations is that students are supposed to aim at complete technical correctness in the way they present their answers and indeed, may not attain a '5' if they make any error. In the case of the Year-11 'composition', the six hours are intended to permit students to complete both a draft and a final perfect version.

For the great majority of students, both the oral and the written examinations are assessed by their own teachers. There must then be questions about the extent to which marks are standard across the system and in fact it is not clear that they are. Variability in the performance of students with the same marks, when they transfer from several 'feeder' schools, to a Class 10 *gymnasium* stream at a new school, suggests they may not be. At the same time, matters are not completely in the hands of the teachers. Apart from the within-school standardising function of Deputy Directors (Curriculum) there are three other features which may tend to have some between-schools standardising effect. First, use of the very compressed marking scale, where the teachers' decision is mostly between '3', '4' and '5', and for the great majority of students, between '3' and '4', is likely in itself to increase inter-marker reliability. Second, general, but quite stringent criteria for the use of the scale are published to teachers. Though these are open to some interpretation in the light of experience – so that if teachers are habituated to lower-performing students they might overestimate, and to higher-performing students, underestimate a mark – they are so framed that they should enable reasonably experienced teachers to rank students similarly. Third, whilst examinations are in progress, a district education officer may visit unannounced, sample a set of oral examinations in any subject and query marks, relative to other schools. Though a random and not necessarily frequent occurrence, this may serve to discourage

consistent overmarking. Finally, at least in St Petersburg, the city monitoring of the award of gold medals offers schools some feedback about their standards at the upper end. Gold medals are only awarded to students who attain a perfect set of '5s' for all subjects in their final year. Where students meet this condition their written composition, in Russian literature, is re-marked by a city panel of educationists. Schools that are over-generous in their use of the upper end of the scale will in this way get some feedback about their general notion of standard.

As for Kentucky, the reliability of teachers' assessments may be less of an issue than in England, because admission to institutions of higher education – VUZy – is by way of taking a four- or five-subject entrance examination. This was until very recently an examination set and assessed by the VUZ of a student's choice. Then, though students and their parents still attach value to the awards of school certificates and medals, these are less crucial for determining future life-chances. Consequently, particularly for the first seven years of a student's schooling, it is not essential that school marks be rigorously, 'objectively' correct.

There are, however, some new pressures which may lead to a more formal assessment. Formerly, the examinations for VUZy admissions presented something of a lottery. Each VUZ sets its own examinations and candidates could sit the examinations at two VUZy. Examination dates were arranged to attempt to accommodate this. But, prestige varied considerably between VUZy and some were able to be much more selective than others. Though candidates who failed to gain entry to either of their chosen institutions could seek to use their entrance exam marks to gain entry to a less selective VUZ, they exposed themselves to possibly adverse chance effects in their initial selection of VUZy. That is no doubt why a national entrance examination for higher education was been brought in. Interestingly, however, it has been suggested that the introduction of this measure, the Uniform State Examination, has resulted in students becoming overly concerned with the test content, with a concomitant decline in interest in the broader school curriculum (Davydov, 2004).

Another area where pressure for more standardised assessment might develop is in selection for *gymnasium* streams in comprehensive schools. Here, there is a rather complicated and evolving picture. Schools have to obtain official approval of proposals and undergo close inspection to gain approval to operate a *gymnasium* stream. Where approval is given, some schools select students for the stream at the end of Class 6 and these follow a *gymnasium* curriculum through Classes 7 to 11. Selection

is currently on the basis of the standard system of teacher assessment. However, some schools are attempting to group potential *gymnasium* candidates, giving them a more thorough preparation, in *pro-gymnasium* classes from the beginning of the secondary phase. In a smaller minority of schools, attempts are being made to identify potential *pro-gymnasium* students during the primary stage.

From the point of view of the schools concerned, 'creeping gymnas-ification' initiates a beneficial circle. *Gymnasium* status confers higher state funding, which enables the purchase of better resources and the hire of more highly qualified teachers. This leads to greater success for students in VUZy entrance examinations, which enhances the school's prestige, makes it more a desirable choice for aspirant parents, increases the number of applicants for places and permits yet more discriminating selection amongst would-be students, who complete the circle by increasing the percentage of high-prestige VUZy entrants.

It is not yet clear what the impact of *gymnasium* development will be on the system as a whole although, as we suggest in Chapter 8, increased school specialisation appears to have contributed to rising student demotivation and alienation. More pertinently for assessment, since *gymnasia* have obvious impact for the distribution of life-chances, they could lead to pressure for a more equitable system of admission to *gymnasia*, which could necessitate the development of more transparently objective, impartial and standardised assessment of students throughout the secondary phase.

In England, prior to 1988, except at 16-plus, the assessment of students' work was a matter for the schools. All teachers assessed class work. Secondary teachers also assessed homework and set end-of-year examinations. It was for teachers to decide which assignments would report marks.

The expectation was that teachers would maintain the collection of a reasonable run of marks as the basis for a valid overall year mark. How closely teachers' assessment was monitored by senior staff varied between schools. The relation between marks for end-of-year examinations and ongoing coursework could vary between schools. In some schools, only the examination mark decided how students were to be allocated to ability-grouped classes in the following year, though the coursework mark might be reported to parents. Only in the last couple of years of compulsory education might the requirements of the 16-plus examin-ations begin to impinge on students' consciousness. Further, 16-plus examination syllabuses were only partially assessed, permitting teachers and students some measure of flexibility in preparing for assessment.

It would be misleading to exaggerate the extent of pre-1988 freedom that teachers felt or the degree of control that they sought to exercise in practice. In secondary schools, particularly the selective 'grammar schools', the 16-plus examinations defined the character of the curriculum. Success at the end of compulsory schooling was measured in terms of the number, type and level of General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects passed. Secondary teachers' perceptions of GCSE standards influenced their assessment of students' work in the earlier stages of secondary education, all the more so since their schools commonly sorted age-cohorts into ability groups, whether for whole-curriculum instruction ('streaming') or by subject ('setting').

Whereas teachers in both St Petersburg and Kentucky report using assessment motivationally, it is not clear that, prior to 1988, despite having considerable formal freedom, teachers in England sought to do so. Secondary teachers could attempt to use assessment motivationally with classes which were not expected to take external examinations, but often found their students unshakeably demotivated by the knowledge that they were in lower ability groups. Though there was considerably greater scope for primary school teachers to use assessment motivationally, the mindset developed over more than twenty years of selection for secondary education similarly seemed to favour the differentiation function of assessment.

Whatever responsibility for, and freedom in, assessment teachers in England might have enjoyed, prior to 1988, they lost following the ERA. The former system of external assessment at 16-plus was added to by a system of legally required, national external assessments, at ages 7, 11 and 14, supplemented by a number of other annual national assessments, which are formally voluntary, but which have, in practice, been hard for schools to refuse to implement.

Assessment, at each of these stages was against prescribed 'Levels' in each subject of the National Curriculum and it became a new part of teachers' professionalism that they should be able to evaluate students' achievement against these and communicate results confidently to parents. Consequently, any scope for teachers to use assessment motivationally, as in Russia, or Kentucky, seemed severely curtailed.

It is important to note that 16-plus has hitherto been a decisive age for English students. After taking public examinations, they could leave school to enter the labour market, continue in the same school, or transfer from their 11–16 school to a Sixth Form or Further Education

(FE) College. For students seeking admission to higher education, the most common form of academic progression from compulsory schooling has been by way of 'Advanced (A-) Level' courses that are typically examined at age 18. Examination boards offer these in a wide range of subjects, though many students choose to follow between two and four of those subjects in which they excelled at 16. In order to enter the more popular universities, it is normal to take three A-Level subjects with the aim of gaining at least two 'B' grades. It is possible to get into less popular universities, for less popular subjects, with 'E' grades in two subjects.

As a result of ERA and related post-ERA developments, English schooling must, at the time of writing, be amongst the most highly assessed in the world. Of the eleven years of compulsory schooling, there are presently only two, Years 1 and 10, in which there is no nationally standardised test or examination, with results reported to parents. In the two years of post-16 education, students are currently assessed on a further six separate occasions. Many students who have experienced the full effects of this battery of assessments have reported high levels of stress. Proposals for fairly radical new arrangements are imminently awaited. They seem likely to reduce the overall assessment demand on students, but it is not yet clear whether they will reduce the present annually progressive discouragement, based on apparently objective information, for any students who fail to maintain at least average progress through National Curriculum Levels.

Effects of assessment environments

On our evidence, Kentucky appears to be the most relaxed of our assessment environments. It seems likely that the volume of work required is the least and that the character of assessment is mostly such as to reward some mix of favourable student attitudes to learning and sufficient recall, often of relatively recently acquired material. Teachers still have some considerable scope to use assessment motivationally, but may be forestalled, culturally, from making very high learning demands. The use of 'common knowledge' university entrance tests may reduce the need for abler students to develop the beginnings of scholarship in the later stages of schooling, with some reach back to earlier stages.

It seems to be Russia that makes the highest learning demand, in terms both of volume and of the frequency of the monitoring of learning. However, teachers have considerable scope to use assessment

motivationally, long durations of continuous contact with the same students, and extended opportunities to foster pro-attitudes to learning. The substantial use of oral assessment seems likely to foster learning in students who might struggle if written assignments were to figure more largely. The university entrance examinations expect and reward the development of scholarship across the school curriculum.

In England, for abler students the learning demand is also quite high, and learning is monitored in some academic depth. However, the learning demand may very much depend on a student's 'stream' or 'track'. Teachers have almost no permitted scope to use assessment motivationally and, since 1988, it seems likely that the frequency of impersonal and apparently objective assessment may have served to de-motivate many lower achievers. The tendency to rely almost exclusively on sustained written assignments may also have contributed to this. Whilst admission to university, by way of public examinations in subjects, does require some serious commitment to the acquisition of scholarship, which may reach back to earlier stages of schooling for the abler, it does not seem to produce that outcome for those for whom it becomes an unrealistic aspiration earlier.

Assessment systems are of considerable interest where it is desired to manage students' motivation to learn in school. Although they have to take account of local cultural norms, they may be one of the principal means by which those norms might be adjusted over time.

Traditions in education: A summary

Historically, in Kentucky the state education system effectively arose from the 'grass roots', upwards. In both Russia and England, their state education systems were imposed, downwards, by ruling groups. Prior to 1990, education in Kentucky had a history of persistent under-valuation and under-funding. With respect to Kentucky, the central question is whether strong traditions of personal freedom, local democracy and resentment of taxation, which countervailed against the upward growth of standards and participation in education, and which bequeathed norms of insufficiently competitive under-aspiration, will, in the medium to longer term, accommodate a significant new degree of central state imposition and control. With respect to Russia, the central questions are whether it was the collaborativeness and egalitarianism of schooling which invited, or undemocratic coercion which compelled, a high degree of compliance with an imposed education; and whether schools will prove able to maintain an uncoerced culture of collaborative

egalitarianism in a competitive labour market. With respect to England, the central question is how to foster and legitimate a high degree of normative compliance, with a new top-down imposition of education, in schools which have inherited competitive and elitist traditions and which serve a competitive labour market.

4
Student Perspectives

> *To students*: You forfeit your chance for life at its fullest when you withhold your best effort in learning. When you give only the minimum to learning, you receive only the minimum in return. Even with your parents' best example and your teachers' best efforts, in the end it is *your* work that determines how much and how well you learn. When you work to your full capacity, you can hope to attain the knowledge and skills that will enable you to create your future and control your destiny. If you do not, you will have your future thrust upon you by others. Take hold of your life, apply your gifts and talents, work with dedication and self-discipline. Have high expectations for yourself and convert every challenge into an opportunity.
>
> (*A Nation at Risk* – National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, pp. 35–36)

As illustrated in Chapter 2, and exemplified in the above quotation, motivation is widely seen by psychologists in intrapersonal terms, that is, as something residing within the individual. The seemingly unproblematic acceptance of a Cartesian dualism whereby mind is artificially separated from context (Prawat, 1998) is not a perspective that we share. Neither can we treat levels of the ecosystem in isolation, although for the purposes of conveying a complex account we isolate elements (students, peers, teachers etc.) in our initial analyses. Thus, this chapter seeks to highlight differences in student perspectives across the three milieux.

Having examined current developments in motivational theory and the broader educational literature on differential performance and engagement, we hypothesised at the outset of our research programme that the

following factors were likely to have a significant impact upon student engagement and achievement:

(a) students' perceptions of, and satisfaction with, their current perform-ance and workrate in school;
(b) the importance ascribed to effort, as opposed to fixed levels of ability or external factors, in explaining the reasons for task-related success or failure;
(c) the value placed upon educational achievement, and of being an educated person, as ends in themselves or as a means to achieve other desirable goals;
(d) peer influences, in particular, the acceptability, or otherwise, of out-ward shows of high levels of engagement and striving.

In approaching our analysis, we hypothesised that educational engage-ment and motivation would be reduced where satisfaction with relatively mediocre performance was widespread; where notions of fixed ability, or external factors (such as luck or teacher goodwill), as determinants of performance were seen as more influential than attributions to effort; where educational achievement was not perceived as having significant intrinsic or extrinsic value; and where peer influences were seen as having a negative effect upon students' achievement-related striving. Our subsequent analyses, outlined in this chapter, are clustered around these themes.

Perceptions of, and satisfaction with, current educational performance and workrate

It is widely accepted that students are likely to demonstrate limited motivation in circumstances where they lack confidence in their ability to succeed. As is discussed in detail below, the importance of positive self-efficacy and self-esteem is something that is widely emphasised by psychologists and teachers. While few would doubt the dispiriting and demotivating impact that results from a sense of helplessness, unrealis-tically positive perceptions about one's abilities or performance may also limit workrate as:

> Inappropriate judgements of confidence may interfere with students' recognition of their need to improve their achievement. (Lundeberg *et al.*, 2000, p. 152)

An emphasis upon deriving positive conceptions of self is a particularly American, and to a lesser extent, Western European phenomenon (Seligman, 1995), many writers having emphasised the tendency for North Americans to have higher self-perceptions than those in other cultures (Marks, 1984; Campbell, 1986; Heine *et al.*, 1999). Not only do average Americans possess a largely positive view of themselves (Baumeister *et al.*, 1989) but they tend to seek to maintain and enhance such a perception (Greenberg and Pyszczynski, 1985; Blaine and Crocker, 1993). Heine *et al.* (1999) argue that this is understandable in the context of the system of US cultural values where accentuating one's sense of competence is critical in reducing any subjective dissonance that might result from a discrepancy between 'cultural ideals of self-contained individuality' (p. 779) and realistic self-appraisal.

It is not surprising that this cultural phenomenon has often been reflected in studies of school students. In attempting to explain the comparatively poor academic performance of US children in international studies, a constant theme in the literature relates to American children's overestimations (Rosenberg, 1979; Wylie, 1979) that often bear little relationship to actual performance.

In an analysis of the performance of a subsample of 11 countries taken from the recent TIMSS study, Keys *et al.* (1997a,b) found that English, Scottish and US students had higher self-perceptions than any other country for both subjects examined, mathematics and science. Perhaps most striking was the finding that 93 per cent of the English and 86 per cent of the US students agreed, or strongly agreed, that they were doing well in mathematics compared with 44 per cent of children from Japan and 57 per cent of children from Singapore, two of the highest performing countries in the TIMSS study. A number of small-scale studies comparing achievement in the United States, Japan and China have also found that, despite poorer performance in mathematics and science, American students were more likely to think that these subjects were easy and that they performed well in them (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Becker *et al.*, 1999). Similarly, in comparing mathematics in Japan and England, Whitburn (2000) notes that the difference in scores between those who stated that they usually did well in mathematics and those who said that they did not was much greater in the case of the Japanese children. In another study involving a standardised mathematics examination undertaken by 13 year olds in six countries, US students obtained the lowest score yet had the highest proportion (68%) agreeing with the statement, 'I am good at mathematics' (Krauthammer, 1990, p. 78). In contrast, Korean students,

who obtained the highest scores, were least positive with only 23 per cent answering 'yes'.

While there may be cultural factors which require an expression of modesty from Asian children (Kurman, 2003), comparable factors seem unlikely to account for the TIMSS percentages of Western European countries such as France (68%) and Germany (69%) whose performance in mathematics was also found to be superior (Beaton *et al.*, 1996b). Echoes of a difference within Europe are similarly found in a comparative study of English, Danish and French 12–13 year olds (Osborn, 1999), where English children were less likely than their counterparts to believe that school was a place where it was difficult to succeed.

In his comparative international study, Burghes (personal communication) interviewed English and Scottish students for whom mathematical potential tests had indicated a degree of underachievement. Surprisingly, the children thought that they had been selected because they were doing well. This sense of misplaced confidence can be extended to students' perceptions about their future. In a comparative study of English and German teenagers, aged between 16 and 20, the English sample was considerably (and unrealistically) more upbeat about their employment chances than were the Germans. This gap seemed most striking amongst those with the lowest levels of skill (Evans, 2000).

Similar differences have also been noted for younger children. Kwok and Lytton (1996) found Canadian 10 year olds to have higher perceptions of their scholastic/mathematical abilities than Chinese peers. More positive academic self-concepts have also been found for 9-year-old American than German children (Schneider *et al.*, 1986). Oettingen (1995) found higher levels of self-efficacy in children from Los Angeles than in groups from Moscow and former East and West Berlin. Similarly, Stevenson and Stigler (1992) found American first and fifth grade children to be far more confident about their future performance than Chinese and Japanese samples.

In our survey studies we asked more than 6000 students to rate their ability in schoolwork on a five-point scale ranging from very good to poor. We found significant differences between the three milieux. As can be seen in Table 4.1, for both age groups, the Russian children proved to be considerably less positive about their abilities than their Western peers.

We found little difference between the two St Petersburg age groupings. Similar findings for the Sunderland students contrast to those of Blatchford (1997), where older students were less positive about their ability. A tendency for younger children to be more positive in their self-perceptions

Table 4.1   Children's perception of their schoolwork ability (%)

	St Petersburg		Kentucky		Sunderland	
	9–10	*14–15*	*9–10*	*14–15*	*9–10*	*14–15*
Very good	6	2	33	14	17	11
Good	19	21	37	35	48	51
Average	46	46	18	42	23	33
Not very good	26	26	9	6	9	4
Poor	3	5	3	3	3	1

was stronger for our Kentucky sample where, in comparing the two age groupings, differences centred upon the 'average' and 'very good' categories. This finding reflects other American research which has consistently indicated a decline in children's ability-related beliefs, particularly in academic domains, and a corresponding decrease in the value attached to these domains (Eccles *et al.*, 1993a,b; Anderman and Midgley, 1997).

We were interested to learn not only how the children viewed their current performance but also whether they felt they were working to their maximum or had potential for improvement. Table 4.2 indicates responses to several key questions in this respect. When asked whether they usually worked as hard as they could in class, the Anglo-American adolescent groups tended to answer affirmatively. In contrast, only 39 per cent of the Russian teenagers answered this way. A similar, if less marked, difference between the groups in the three milieux is also evident for the younger children. In similar vein, the Anglo-American children were more satisfied with their current achievements in school and less

Table 4.2   Children replying affirmatively to survey questions (%)

Survey questions	St Petersburg		Kentucky		Sunderland	
	9–10	*14–15*	*9–10*	*14–15*	*9–10*	*14–15*
Are you satisfied with your school achievements?	60	27	79	63	82	59
Do you usually work as hard as you can in class?	76	39	90	64	81	66
Do you usually work as hard as you can on your homework?	86	51	NA	48	NA	42
Could you improve your performance a lot?	84	91	77	75	72	72

likely to believe that they could make substantial progress by working harder. Interestingly, the only item where a rather different pattern emerged was that concerning homework. Given the low levels of homework provided to 9 year olds in Kentucky and Sunderland, only data from the older group could be examined. Here, a greater proportion of the Russian children replied that they worked as hard as possible. As we note in Chapter 7, the homework demands upon Russian adolescents tend to be intense and inescapable and this may explain a finding that initially appears to be somewhat puzzling.

Given that self-image is derived both from self-reflexive activity and from the appraisals of others (Felson, 1981), it is possible to suggest a number of reasons why students in the United States and England may often have inflated views of their abilities and of their future life-chances. First, it is possible that the high emphasis these two societies place upon individual achievement and the projection of a positive sense of self, can, in the case of many, result in a degree of cognitive dissonance in which the individual can only resolve the threat to his or her self-image by inflating self-perceptions, personal aspirations and expectations. Secondly, the same emphasis upon the importance of self-esteem, together with comparatively low adult expectations, may result in children receiving overly positive, congratulatory feedback for relatively mediocre performance from teachers, parents and peers.

American sociologists have coined the term 'strain theory' to describe the pressure experienced by economically disadvantaged individuals when their aspirations cannot be achieved by legitimate means (Cohen, 1955; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). In a country where the prevailing orthodoxy is that anyone can achieve their desires by working hard (Merton, 1938), a personal realisation that this would not be the case could result in frustration and, ultimately, criminality. One might, however, ask why so many disadvantaged individuals do not experience such frustration. One mechanism is to raise one's expectations for the future, even though these are highly unlikely to be realised. Inflating expectations of goal achievement not only has the powerful effect of bringing aspirations and expectations into alignment but also has the added benefit of helping the individual to maintain a positive sense of self (Agnew and Jones, 1988).

Children's perceptions of their abilities and performance are also likely to be heavily influenced by the messages they receive from their teachers (Entwistle *et al.*, 1987) although the impact of these may decline throughout adolescence (Juhasz, 1989). In Murdock's (1999) study of US seventh grade middle school students, the factors most associated with academic

engagement and disciplinary difficulties were the children's perceptions of the long-term expectations of their teachers. In analysing differences in academic self-concept of students in Germany at the time of reunification, Marsh *et al.* (2001) note that the comparatively lower self-appraisals of the East German students were, in part, influenced by the very public and detailed performance feedback provided by teachers. In doing this, teachers actively sought to encourage accurate student self-assessment through social comparison. Such practices, of course, closely resembled those operating in Russian classrooms.

In our study of more than three thousand 9–10 year olds (Elliott *et al.*, 2001a) in Sunderland, St Petersburg and Kentucky, we asked each child to provide a rating of how they thought their class teacher perceived them. At the same time, we asked these teachers to rate each of the children. These procedures were undertaken anonymously and neither children nor teachers learned of each others' ratings. The findings were quite dramatic and in line with our expectations. Children in Kentucky and Sunderland tended to overestimate teachers' perceptions with 68 per cent of the American sample believing that they would be seen as 'very good' or 'quite good' whereas, in reality, it was no more than 50 per cent. (These findings echo those found in the US *Youth in Transition* survey [see Bachman *et al.*, 1978] where a high proportion of low performers perceived themselves to be above average.) In Sunderland, the gap was greater (60 and 39% respectively). In contrast, St Petersburg children underestimated their teachers' perceptions of them, only 26 per cent believing that their teachers would think that they would fall in the above average categories, whereas, in reality, more than half did so. The opposite pattern pertained for 'below average' performance. Fifteen per cent of the Russian children were described by their teachers in such terms, yet 30 per cent of the children thought that they would achieve such a rating. Interestingly, the children's self perceptions were very closely related to how they thought their teachers saw them.

Why would Russian children underestimate their teachers' perceptions while the American and English children provide overestimations? It would appear likely that this phenomenon reflects the messages that the children receive from their teachers. Evaluative feedback may be given during oral classroom interactions or in the form of written grades or marks. Observational studies (Muckle, 1990; Alexander, 2000) note that Russian teachers tend to be more critical and challenging than English or American teachers, who may often be rather undiscriminating in their praise. Alexander (2000, p. 369) points out that, as in his earlier

study of English classrooms (Alexander, 1991), teachers were so eager to be positive and reinforcing that, on occasions, they became undiscriminating and '...ended up devaluing the evaluation to the point where its function was merely phatic'. The strong tendency on the part of English teachers to emphasise the positive has also been found in comparative studies involving France (Broadfoot and Osborn, 1993). It is likely that this emphasis upon the positive is, in part, the result of the exhortations of self-theorists and behaviourists that teachers should emphasise the inculcation of high student self-esteem and the reinforcement of desirable behaviour. In England, during the 1980s, great emphasis was placed upon increasing the proportion of positive to negative teacher comments. Noting English teachers' tendency to be very positive about children's work, Merrett and Wheldall (Wheldall and Merrett, 1985) created a significant industry geared to encouraging teachers to be equally positive about classroom behaviour. The resultant changes in teacher behaviour appear to have persisted in the 1990s (Harrop and Swinson, 2000). Similarly, a shift towards being more approving was observed in the United States. Whereas White (1975) found that, with the exception of the first two grades of schooling, teachers tended to express more disapproval than approval, by the mid-1980s positive comments were more frequent than negative (Wyatt and Hawkins, 1987). To some extent, the use of lavish praise by American teachers serves as a vehicle to promote enthusiasm (Stigler and Hiebert, 1999) yet, if it becomes devalued by overuse, its motivational properties are reduced.

In our interviews with Russian teachers (see Chapter 6), the importance of praise was also frequently highlighted yet our observations of classroom practice mirrored the finding of Alexander (2000) that here, praise is employed far more sparingly. Alexander notes that whereas in Russia, praise was reserved only for exceptional performance, in England and the United States merely doing that which was required was likely to be greeted by hyperbole (p. 375). In a telling note, he recalls a discussion with a Russian informant who commented that unlike the culture in American schools exemplified by the poster '100 ways to praise a child', there were only a handful of praise descriptors in Russian while '...the vocabulary of disapproval is rich and varied' (p. 375). The nature of this classroom dynamic is such, however, that despite resulting in less positive self-perceptions, such an approach does not appear to undermine the child's sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy or workrate. It is interesting to note that these perspectives are now being challenged by messages from Western psychologists and educationalists with some Russian commentators querying whether insufficient teacher and

parental approval might be detrimental to Russian children's self-esteem (Slobodskaya, 1999).

In addition to messages received in classroom interchanges, students also gain evaluative feedback in the form of written feedback and by means of publicly communicated grades. Again, evidence suggests that very positive messages are typically conveyed in the US and English contexts. In a comparative study of children in the United States and Japan (Ban and Cummings, 1999), for example, it was reported that American teachers awarded much higher grades to students ('A' grades were the most frequently obtained) and tended to offer praise far more frequently. This would appear to be no recent phenomenon:

> More than one mother shook her head over the fact that her daughter never does any studying at home and is out every evening but gets A's in all her work. (Lynd and Lynd, 1929)

In 1983, the US Governmental Report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education) criticised a tendency to provide overly positive messages. It saw the educational foundations of the United States as being

> . . . eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our future as a Nation and a people . . . If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. (p. 5)

The Report cited the opinion of one analyst that, for the first time in the country's history, the educational skills of the present generation of schoolchildren would not be at, or above, the level of their parents. In addition to international comparative studies, the Report pointed to the consistent decline in Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores between 1963 and 1980, worsening performance on standardised tests of academic achievement, and poor standards of literacy, science and mathematics. One means of overcoming the decline in SAT mean scores was to recalibrate the 1994 means (423 verbal and 479 math) so that a score of 500 was once again an average score (Ravitch, 1995).

A Nation at Risk (1983) expressed concern that grades in school had risen as average student achievement had declined. Their recommendation that grades should be seen as indicators of academic achievement appear not to have reduced an inflationary spiral in which A's and B's continue to proliferate in American schools and colleges (Zirkel, 1999). In a national

study of US college entrants, 31.5 per cent of students entering college in 1996 reported high school grades of A-minus or higher, compared to 12.5 per cent in 1969 (Weiss, 1997). Of the 1996 entry, 57.9 per cent considered their academic ability to be above average compared with 49 per cent of those entering in 1969. Similarly, Sykes (1995) cites an earlier study of entrants to college in which those reporting an average grade of 'A' rose from 28 to 32 per cent despite an average decline in their SAT scores of between 6 and 15 points. Another national study (Ziomek and Svec, 1997) similarly revealed that while high school grades had risen significantly, this was not reflected by academic performance, as measured by American College Testing (ACT) assessment. The inflationary factor appeared to be most significant for GPAs greater than 3.00. Sykes argues that grades no longer accurately reflect academic performance and the high proportion of

> . . . content-free A's have become tools of affirmation, therapy and public relations. (p. 31)

In a survey of more than a quarter of a million freshmen entering college in 2000 (Sax *et al.*, 2000) for the American Council on Education (ACE), it was noted that whereas the amount of homework undertaken in their senior year in high school was declining, academic grades were rising. In the survey, a mere 36 per cent reported studying or doing homework for six or more hours per week in the past year. This was the lowest figure since this question was first asked in 1987, when the figure was 47 per cent. Given that the respondents were college entrants, it would be expected that such figures would be significantly higher than if all high school students in their senior year had been surveyed. The reduction in homework appears to be having minimal impact upon academic grades. The survey indicated that 42.9 per cent of freshmen reported earning 'A' grades on average, compared to 17.6 per cent in 1968. A record low of 6.6 per cent reported 'C' grades on average, compared to 23.1 per cent in 1968.

American students appear to be increasingly confident about their future educational performance. The ACE study indicated that the proportion of students anticipating an average 'B' grade or better in college rose from 52.0 per cent in 1999 to 58.1 per cent in 2000. The figure for students in 1971 was a mere 26.7 per cent. Whereas 4.1 per cent of 1967 respondents expected to graduate from college with honours, the figures for 1999 and 2000 were 18.3 and 20.7 per cent respectively. In the 32-nation PISA study (OECD, 2001), US 15 year olds were among those

most likely to believe that they would have a white-collar occupation at age thirty (88.7% compared to an international mean of 76.1%).

Whether students recognise the effort and procedures required to attain such goals is less evident, however. In depicting US teenagers in 1999 as the most ambitious generation ever, Schneider and Stevenson (1999) point to a reality in which a significant proportion will fail to achieve their occupational goals. Students with unclear life plans were described as having 'misaligned ambitions' where there was a mismatch between their aspirations and the behaviour and knowledge they demonstrated in pursuing these. For example, members of this research team (Hafner *et al*., 1990) have drawn upon national data to highlight that while many eighth graders had aspirations to attend college, only a small proportion of them planned to enter a college-preparatory programme in high school. A high proportion of students who think that they will be going to college never actually do so (Agnew and Jones, 1988, p. 317).

There are a number of reasons why English and American teachers may provide positive feedback in excess of that warranted by the child's performance. Perhaps four of the most important are those that revolve around a belief in the importance of self-esteem, the need to secure a disciplined environment, the tendency for grades to be perceived as a reflection of the teacher's own ability, and a desire not to alienate parents.

The strong belief on the part of many teachers that high self-esteem is a precursor to learning is likely to play an important role in the messages provided to students. Broadfoot *et al*. (2000) note that, in comparison to French children, English students tended to be more vague about how well they were doing in school, partly, it seemed because teachers wanted to protect their self-esteem. However, the concern teachers have to boost children's self-esteem may be based on a false premise. Of course, as most experienced teachers will understand, children with major self-esteem and self-concept difficulties tend to struggle in school, for a variety of reasons (Elliott, 2002). However, a simplistic extrapolation from these, comparatively rare, clinical cases to the full school population is questionable. The assumption that boosting everyone's self-esteem will reap educational gains, is misguided and, as we indicate below, may potentially undermine performance. Indeed, there is mounting evidence to suggest that praise or success unrelated to actual performance can particularly undermine those students who are concerned to disguise a perceived lack of ability (Thompson, 2004).

Alexander's (2000) comparative study of primary schooling in five countries, England, Russia, United States, France and India, details the greater emphasis upon affective and behavioural issues in England and

the United States. The link between these two elements is unsurprising as those classrooms where there is heightened concern over discipline are also likely to witness teacher attempts to foster a positive atmosphere. One way of achieving this is by means of enthusiastic celebration of student achievement.

In the United States, many teachers complain that they feel pressurised by parents and school administrators to provide high grades even in cases where these are not deserved (Sykes, 1995). This results in what one commentator has described as an '...unholy marriage of low expectation and high marks' (Finn, 1991, p. 106). In England, there has also been a strong tradition of providing positive end-of-year reports to parents although often through motivationally focused comments such as 'trying hard', 'doing his best' and 'working to the best of her ability'. Such comments tend to be used by teachers as ipsative rather than normative feedback although it is not clear that parents and students always recognise this distinction. Task-related comments written on exercise books and perused at parents' nights or at the end of the school year often fail to provide parents with realistic appraisals of their child's performance. The use of highly differentiated activities in mixed-ability classes only serves to obfuscate matters further. Unlike the United States and Russia, however, external assessment of the English National Curriculum at ages seven, eleven and fourteen, and public examinations at sixteen and eighteen, while providing little information about the child's day-to-day performance, ultimately provide summative feedback that relates to national norms.

Russian teachers may feel little external pressure to provide good grades to students. In Russia, there is no tradition of standardised tests of academic performance and, thus, teachers have been unable to check the performance of their students according to national norms (Bakker, 1999). The Russian tradition of focusing upon educational inputs (content to be covered and hours of teaching) rather than outputs in the form of student performance has been criticised by the OECD (1998) and the World Bank (1996), both of whom have advocated the introduction of standardised assessment.

The relationship between academic self-perceptions and educational performance is clearly complex. Theoretically, having a high opinion of one's abilities should have a positive influence upon performance. Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997), for example, states that individuals who have positive views of their capabilities should be both highly motivated and high achievers. Thus a wide-ranging literature points to a positive correlation between self-perceptions and academic performance

(Vrugt, 1994; Marsh and Yeung, 1997; Martin and Debus, 1998) particularly when related to more narrow curricular domains (Marsh, 1990; Schunk, 1990). A similar relationship has also been found between measures of self-esteem/self-efficacy and school achievement (Zimmerman, 1995) although others have challenged this (e.g. Eaton and Dembo, 1997; Muijs, 1997).

It is folly, of course, to make claims about causality on the basis of statistical association (Damon, 1995). Even if a causal relationship were to exist, it is very possible that self-esteem may be the result of high achievement rather than its cause. Furthermore, statistical inference can only extend to the populations sampled. Stevenson and Lee (1990) note that variables that predict differences in performance between cultures may not be the same variables as those that predict differences among individuals within a culture. Thus any causal relationship between self-perceptions and educational attainment pertaining in one culture may not apply to cross-cultural comparisons. A finding that overestimation of one's abilities may be associated with higher levels of performance (Assor and Connell, 1992; Martin and Debus, 1998) should not lead us to believe that a country's performance will be improved by an increase in collective self-evaluation. Indeed, high levels of self-esteem throughout a given culture, unwarranted by actual performance, may undermine levels of achievement in relation to other cultures. In an analysis of TIMSS data, Shen and Pedulla (2000) found that while academic self-perceptions were positively correlated with academic performance *within* a country, when *between* country analyses were undertaken, the relationship was inverse, that is, children in higher scoring countries tended to have lower self-perceptions of academic competence. It is conceivable, therefore, that overly positive self-evaluations from lower performing nations actually reflect lower academic expectations and standards. To support this claim, these authors cite a TIMSS videotape study of Grade-8 mathematics teaching in the United States, Japan and Germany (Kawanaka *et al.*, 1999) in which the mathematics content in the American classrooms was adjudged to be lower than in Germany and Japan. Table 4.3 shows the perceptions of the grade levels of each country's Grade-8 mathematics classes, together with mathematics self-perceptions and performance as reported in the TIMSS study (Beaton *et al.*, 1996b). International differences between task demands, self-perceptions and actual performance are clear and suggestive of an association.

It is widely agreed that a child who holds an unduly negative perception of his or her ability in any domain is likely to be more difficult to motivate (Covington, 1992). Such individuals may tend to experience negative

Table 4.3 Generalised level of task demand, self-perception and TIMSS scores for 8th Grade students in United States, Germany and Japan

	USA	*Germany*	*Japan*
International grade performance equivalent of students in mathematics	7.00	8.00	9.00
Mean self-perceptions as to the ease of mathematics (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree that maths is easy)	2.41	2.20	1.89
Mean TIMSS Maths score for 8th Grade students	500.00	509 .00	605.00

Source: Shen and Pedulla (2000).

emotions associated with the activity, avoid placing themselves in failure situations, may underperform because failure is anticipated (a self-fulfilling prophecy) and be unlikely to persevere when failure is encountered (Pressley and McCormick, 1995). In such situations, the importance of imbuing in the individual a sense of competence and self-efficacy is widely understood and agreed. Whether one can extrapolate from this to suggest that high levels of academic self-efficacy are beneficial for all is more difficult. While, in any specific culture, those who feel good about themselves might be expected to be higher achievers than those who do not (indeed, there is some evidence that those over-estimating their abilities tend to be higher achievers [Martin and Debus, 1998]), it is possible that widespread overestimation of student abilities and performance running throughout a culture could result in student attitudes, teacher and parental expectations, and educational practices that militate against the highest levels of achievement. Several studies (Stevenson *et al.*, 1990; Stevenson and Stigler, 1992), for example, conclude that unduly positive estimations of children's abilities and low expectations negatively impact upon American children's academic performance. Widespread affirmation of mediocre performance may lead to an exaggerated sense of one's abilities or a mistrust of adult evaluations (Stevenson *et al.*, 1990; Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Damon, 1995).

Perhaps a strong desire to succeed is more influential than self-perceptions. Eaton and Dembo (1997), for example, concluded that while the Asian Americans in their study demonstrated lower levels of self-efficacy than Caucasian Americans, fear of failure, stemming from family pressures, best explained their high levels of achievement behaviour. Similarly, in their comparison of Anglo-French schooling, Broadfoot *et al.* (2000) suggest that fear of failure was an important factor in the higher levels of motivation exhibited by French children.

The importance of effort

In the light of insights provided by attribution theory, much work on motivation has focused upon the extent to which children believe that outcomes are the product of effort and whether they can raise their performance by working harder. If academic success and failure are a function of fixed ability, working harder will not be likely to result in significant gains. In contrast, if the amount of effort expended is perceived to be the key factor, the individual is more likely to be willing to try harder.

The relative importance of effort and ability attributions has been highlighted in recent considerations of American and British children's poor performance relative to countries in Southeast Asia (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Reynolds and Farrell, 1996). In contrast to the Asian emphasis upon effort, underpinned by Confucian beliefs, Western culture, it is frequently argued, is more influenced by notions of fixed intelligence and relatively stable levels of ability.

The attribution studies of Stevenson and colleagues have had a significant impact on US educationalists and policymakers as they purported to show that, in comparison with their Asian counterparts, American children place greater emphasis upon ability than effort. In one study, of fifth graders in Sendai, Tapei and Minneapolis, children were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement: 'The tests you take can show how much or how little natural ability you have.' The Asian children tended to disagree with this statement; the Americans were more likely to agree. The researchers argued that the higher achievements of Asian children result directly from their emphasis on hard work and effort; in contrast, an American emphasis upon innate ability results in low expectations about what can be achieved if children work hard:

> Whether children are considered to be bright or dull, the belief that ability is largely fixed leads parents and teachers to be reluctant to demand higher levels of performance from their children and leads to a satisfaction with the status quo. Until Americans change their self-defeating beliefs about the limits that innate ability places on achievement, we have little hope for improving the quality of American education. (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992, p. 112)

In our own comparative studies, we asked more than six-thousand 9–10 year olds and 14–15 year olds to rank four factors that were most

important factors in success in school work: luck, working hard, being clever/smart and being 'liked by teachers'. To our surprise, a high proportion of both the American (72% – 14–15 years; 79% – 9–10 years) and English (80 and 70%) age groups prioritised effort. While effort was the first choice for a majority of the Russian children (51%) (n.b. a similar finding for this age group is noted by Stetsenko *et al.*, 1995), for the adolescent group, 'being clever' tended to be highlighted (49% selecting this option in comparison with 36% choosing 'working hard').

As this emphasis upon effort ran counter to our own expectations, based, as they were on the seminal, and, at the time, largely undisputed, findings of Stevenson and his colleagues (Stevenson and Lee, 1990) our research team engaged 140 teenagers from the three countries in extended interviews (Hufton *et al.*, 2002). In all three milieux, the great majority of students attached greater importance to effort than ability as key to academic achievement although the St Petersburg students, in similar vein to the earlier survey study, were more likely to suggest that a definite talent for a subject was necessary if one were to receive the highest grade.

> I think it depends on whether you are oriented, predisposed to [academic] study. . . . I have a friend, who is not predisposed to one subject – so he can only get 'three' [on a five-point scale where 5 is the 'best' score] there.

> A lot of people said to me – if a person is not 'brain-prepared' to this particular area – he can spend hours and hours – this won't help.

> If the person who is not very talented sees the task and thinks – it is very difficult for me – he'll come home and work hard for the whole day. If he comes to school next day he will get a good mark. And if a very talented person works hard, only in this case will he get an excellent mark.

> [I am] not sure that everything can be achieved with hard work.

> . . . with most [students] it is true, they cannot do well if they are not clever.

> You can get a good result learning things by heart and sitting, but it is not worth it. Brainpower will help more.

> . . . if you just learn something by heart without understanding – it is silly – no use. I used to know a girl who knew the whole chemistry textbook by heart – but she didn't understand a word there.

I think there are certain subjects which require some special ability or talent. For me it is Physics. Hard work here may not necessarily bring best results.

It was still recognised that working hard could make a real difference:

It is possible [for a person who is not clever to do well at school] if he tries really hard, sometimes learning things by heart.

I don't have any natural talent in technical subjects like physics and chemistry so I have to learn them.

I don't think he can get the same result as the person, who is more clever. But he may get a significant success.

...if there is no brain, hard work alone can't get you excellent results. Though, I think one could get all 'fours' [on a five-point scale] still.

One informant stressed the importance of hard work but later explained that this would help to compensate for his intellectual limitations. When asked why he did not always receive high marks, he replied

Not enough...not enough brain.

Another boy stated,

I think it is fifty-fifty. If a person is talented, but doesn't work hard, he won't get good marks, not the best ones, because he may not do his homework and come to school thinking he can get everything at the lesson. And sometimes he may be able to do this but he'll get a good, not the best, mark. And if the person is not very talented he may see the task and think, 'This is very difficult for me'. So he'll come home and work hard for the whole day. If he comes to school the next day, he will get a good mark too. And if a very talented person works hard, only in this case, he will get an excellent mark.

Some Russian students emphasised the need to be clever to cope with some aspects of the curriculum (often the sciences).

I think that there are certain subjects that require some special ability or talent. For me, it's physics. Hard work here may not necessarily bring best results.

This girl stressed the importance of effort and ability then added,

> I don't have any natural talent in technical subjects like physics and chemistry, so I have to study them. I may understand something, but not always. As for humanities, I have some potential. I may sometimes not do the homework but will answer in class.

In contrast, the Kentucky (K) [and to a lesser extent, the Sunderland (S)] children tended to have greater faith that hard work would result in success.

> . . . anybody can get real good grades if they work hard. If you work hard and study and do all your work. (K)

> It might take a little longer than it would for others, but you can still get to the top. (K)

> You can not know very much, but you can find all the answers any-where in some kind of book, but if you know what you're doing . . . if you don't work very hard, if you don't get it done, you won't get as good grades. I think they count really for effort more here than anything. They just want you to try your best, and they give you a good grade just for trying as hard as you can. (K)

> That's the way my dad puts it to me. "If you get good grades, you're not lazy. Don't get good grades, you're lazy." (K)

> Somebody can be really clever, but not put the work in and they wouldn't get very far, where someone who worked hard would achieve the grades. (K)

> . . . if you work hard you can achieve cleverness, I guess. So if you keep working hard, you'll . . . you'll probably be pretty smart, when you just work hard. (K)

> if you work hard enough, where you want to go, you can do it in the end. (S)

> if you work hard you can reach your goals if you work hard at them. So, like, if your goal is to be in Harvard, you can work toward your goal and get into Harvard. (K)

> as long as you're a hard worker, you're gonna go far in life. (K)

> [people who are not very smart] . . . can learn just the same . . . I mean they can do it just the same as anybody else can, they just, lots of them don't even care. (K)

I think that people who can't do things, don't give it a chance, I think if they are trying, they will eventually start learning. (S)

you have to work hard. I mean clever is good, but working hard will beat clever. (K)

The Sunderland and Kentucky students were more likely than their Russian peers to see effort as entitling those who made it to some recognition of moral worth, in its own right, independently of the level of success:

. . . the way I look at it, as long as you try, then you've tried, that's all you can do, to the best of your ability. (K)

No matter if you got it wrong, least you could say, "Well, I worked really hard on it." (K)

. . . as long as you do your best then you have got what you want because you have done your best. And that is all you can achieve, your best. (S)

Though St Petersburg students often echoed these sentiments, they tended to take for granted the expectation that they would work hard. Thus, there was less of a feeling that commission of effort would be seen as being laudable. Rather, its absence was considered to be morally suspect.
    It seemed that many students believed that teachers recognised and rewarded effort as a virtue in itself:

if you don't work very hard, if you don't get it done, you won't get as good grades. I think [teachers] count effort more here than anything. They just want you to try your best, and they give you a good grade just for trying as hard as you can. (K)

Certainly students saw the rewarding of effort as morally compensating for differences in innate abilities:

not all people are born ya know, smart and, uh, as long as you work your hardest, it's all, that's all you can do. (K)

not everyone can be really clever, but as long as you can do your best, people are going to be proud of what you have done. (S)

if you're not clever, you are never going to be clever but at least you can try your hardest 'cause, like, clever people it comes natural to them, so they're not really making any achievement by just doing what naturally comes to them. (S)

In line with Nicholls' (1984, 1989) distinction between differing understandings of ability (see below), some students, in both the United States and England saw making sustained effort as a means of increasing ability:

> and, you know, maybe, the way you worked on it; maybe that can help you later, you know, on how to work on something else hard. (K)

> if you work hard, you can achieve cleverness, I guess. So, if you just keep workin' hard, you'll . . . you'll just probably be pretty smart, when you just work hard and work hard. (K)

> I think that if you work hard you are getting brainier, you are getting cleverer. (S)

> I think working hard because if you're very clever then if you work hard you might get even more clever. (S)

However, in both groups, as with the St Petersburg students, there was a recognition that levels of talent, or intelligence, made learning easier for some and harder for others at the extremes:

> Some kids are kinda born a little bit smarter. Things come a little bit easier to them, you know. (K)

> . . . in order to be smart, you have to work hard. . . . there are some people who just know this stuff. Just comes from . . . naturally. But with others . . . you're gonna have to study it . . . in order to know it. (K)

> Sometimes people seem to do well and they don't really work. (S)

> Like if you are quite daft, you wouldn't be able to do the level of English work, if you are quite brainy you would be able to do the work. (S)

> when you're clever, you just kinda have it, but almost anybody could work really hard and still get good grades. (K)

And, as with the case of the Russian student who knew the chemistry book, effort might not always be well applied:

> If you are clever you know what to write and you know what to do, but if you are just working hard it doesn't prove that you are being clever, you could be just copying down something and anyone can do that. (S)

There was also a recognition that in some subjects, special talent may be necessary to achieve the highest levels.

> in some classes if you work really hard you'll get a good grade and you'll learn something. In some classes [music] you have to be just really smart, because you can't just work really hard and get a good grade, you have to know it completely. (K)

And one student expressed the complexity of the relation between effort and ability as it obtains in all three countries:

> I think that not bright people can still work hard and get the results, but I think you still have to have a bit of cleverness in you and talent. (S)

In our more recent (as yet unpublished) researches in other regions of England and the United States, we have continued to obtain strong Anglo-American emphases upon effort.

How can these very different findings be reconciled with the oft-reported view that Anglo-American children emphasise ability and fail to grasp the importance of effort? One possibility is that this is largely a myth. In a review paper, Bempechat and Drago-Severson (1999) argue that the Stevenson data have been selectively reported and analysed in a way that accentuates effort–ability distinctions. They suggest that it fails to demonstrate a direct statistical link between beliefs in effort and academic achievement, and they point to other studies that indicate that achievement is more closely related to ability attributions.

One factor that might explain the difference in findings is that Stevenson's key data appears to concern parental rather than child perceptions. It would appear that Japanese mothers place more emphasis upon effort than do their children (Stevenson and Lee, 1990). Another reason may lie in the nature of some of the items. For example, in respect of the item, 'The tests you take can show how much or how little natural ability you have', affirmation by the respondent does not necessarily preclude a strong belief in the complementary importance of effort in achievement. It is important to note here that the concept of ability can be construed in two ways (Nicholls, 1984, 1989). One conception, exemplified in some of the earlier quotations, is of performance that is underpinned both by natural ability and by effort; the other is construed as fixed capacity. In the former case, the harder one works, the greater one's ability is likely to become. Thus the more able sportsperson, for example, may be someone who has natural gifts yet who has also trained

hard. The notion that being 'smart' reflected a combination of innate ability and hard work shone through in many of our interviews.

The notion that a tendency of students to make ability attributions explains poor Anglo-American performance is increasingly difficult to sustain. Bempechat and Drago-Severson (1999) point to findings from TIMSS in which eighth-grade students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that a number of factors were necessary to succeed in mathematics. English and American children (93 and 90% respectively) agreed or strongly agreed that hard work was important while only 45 and 50 per cent felt the same about natural ability. Interestingly, this latter factor proved far more important to children from Pacific Rim countries (Singapore, 84%; Japan, 82%; Korea, 86%). Russian children were not included in this survey. Even Stevenson's recent work has suggested a modification of his earlier views as an investigation into American, Japanese and German contexts (Stevenson and Nerison-Low, 1998) plays down any American emphasis upon innate ability. This echoes a series of studies of 8–10 year olds (Schneider *et al.*, 1986; Kurtz *et al.*, 1988) in which American children, their parents and teachers were all found to be more likely than their German counterparts to attribute academic outcomes to effort.

Similar findings to those of the US children pertain to England. In one study of approximately one thousand students, Chaplain (2000) noted that only 21 per cent agreed with the statement, 'You have to be clever to do well' (in school). Gipps and Tunstall (1998) provided short 'stories' about classroom performance to forty-nine 6–7 year olds. Effort was the most commonly cited reason provided by the children when asked to give reasons for success or failure in these vignettes. Of secondary importance was competence in the specific domain under consideration. These findings, suggest Gipps and Tunstall,

> . . . seem to question the oft-quoted Anglo-Saxon belief in ability. (p. 161)

As we have noted above, a belief in the importance of innate ability does not rule out a corresponding recognition of the importance of effort. In endeavouring to explain why the two St Petersburg age groups placed differing emphasis upon these two factors (i.e. the older students emphasising ability and the younger children, effort) and the other two populations all highlighted effort, we believe that this may reflect the high demands placed upon secondary students in St Petersburg where the best grades are unlikely to be achieved solely by a highly industrious

workrate. Perhaps Russian adolescents are realistic enough to know that however hard they work, only a small proportion are likely to excel academically.

Given that individual differences in explaining the reasons for academic success or failure are not significantly correlated with school performance (Stetsenko *et al*., 1995), one may query the extent to which attributions actually influence levels of motivation and engagement. The finding that high achievers tend to emphasise ability attributions should not lead us to conclude that such a profile is the *cause* of high performance. Similarly, the importance of ensuring that low achievers do not consider themselves incapable of succeeding should not lead to the conclusion that national differences are, in part, the result of differing emphases upon effort.

In our observations of educational practice in the three milieux, we were struck by the fact that there appeared to be little relationship between students' attributions and their corresponding behaviours. Thus, while our English and American samples, both through the questionnaires and in the interviews, expressed strong belief in the importance of effort, in comparison with their peers in St Petersburg, there was little reason to believe that this was actually realised in practice (n.b. see Alexander, 2000 for similar findings). A number of possible reasons for this phenomenon may be proposed. First, the ability–effort distinction may reflect the differing demands of school life. Secondly, children may fail to have the same understandings about what constitutes 'effort'. Thirdly, social goals may be more influential than academic goals (see Chapter 5 for discussion of peer influences). Finally, attributions are likely to be influential only if they relate to areas of activity that are considered important by the individual.

Imagine two educational contexts. In one, the academic demands are substantial and children are typically obliged to work hard throughout the day. In class, children are heavily engaged in learning that is supported by high levels of, largely completed, homework. In the other context, academic demands are low and classrooms are marked by a lack of engagement, off-task behaviour and, on occasions, a degree of student disruption. Undemanding homework is provided during lesson time, although many students fail even to complete this. In the former context, it is conceivable that it is the most able students who are seen to achieve maximally. In the latter, where good academic grades may be obtained more easily, it is those students who are seen to try hard who appear to profit. Where hard work is expected and evidenced, ability may be perceived as a more discriminating variable. Where it is rarer, effort may be a more salient

and influential factor. While it would be fallacious to suggest that St Petersburg and Kentucky classrooms typify such extremes, it may be that international differences in attributional beliefs noted in our studies were influenced, to some extent, by immediate classroom contexts.

Effort is unlikely to have intercultural (or even, perhaps, intracultural) norms and what is 'hard work' for one individual or class may be an 'easy passage' for another. This is not to suggest that high levels of effort are not valued in all cultures. However, our surveys, interviews and observations have indicated significant differences of understanding about what is meant by effort and 'hard work' from one location to another. Effort is a construct with both cognitive and behavioural components (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004). Thus, in relation to schooling, it concerns both the mental energy expended to learn and master the material, and the physical act of undertaking and completing academic tasks. In both respects, Russian demands tend to be high. Students in St Petersburg are expected to concentrate hard in their lessons for five, sometimes six, days a week and then study for several hours each evening. In comparison, children in Sunderland and Kentucky appear to have a less academically demanding classroom programme and enjoy considerably more leisure time in the evenings and at weekends.

Despite the widespread emphasis upon effort expressed by our Kentucky informants, accounts of the school week, as reflected by our interviews, seemed to suggest that schoolwork was not enthusiastically received:

> Monday you have to get up, and you have to get ready, and you're usually tired the whole day, and you don't really want to do anything, but you know you have to.

> From what I see, people work the hardest probably on Tuesday and Wednesday.... 'Cause on Monday, they're like, 'Oh man, we're back to school'. And Tuesday and Wednesday, they're like, 'We're here, we might as well do it'. And Thursday, they're like, 'Oh, it's gonna be the weekend in like two days', and Friday, they're like, 'I don't have to do anything.'

> They [*teachers*] don't give as much homework [*at weekends*] 'cause lots of teachers think that you should have the weekend for yourself, and that's your free time to do whatever you want.

> We don't do very much work on Fridays 'cause they...[the teachers]... don't want to go home and grade the papers and stuff during the weekend.

No one does anything on Fridays ... Friday's just like the relax day. I mean you might take a test or two, but you chill out.

[On] ... Friday they don't hardly make us work since it's the weekend and getting off. They don't much like us to have homework on weekends ... only if we're bad in class, they'll give us homework.

They don't usually give us any work on the weekends, they give us time in class to do it or something, or they just won't give us anything at all.

While effort was spoken of by our Anglo-American informants as a virtuous commodity, in these countries it is the sudden spark of imagination or creative idea that typically receives most approbation in the popular mass media. Several US commentators (e.g. Stevenson and Stigler, 1992) have made reference to the common use of stories and fables in Eastern cultures in which persistence, tenacity and hard work ultimately result in success. In Western television and film, this is a comparatively rare phenomenon. Here children frequently observe protagonists who are often uninterested in, and subsequently diverted from, an educational task (e.g. a school project) yet excel at the last minute as a result of a flash of inspiration or good fortune.

A further factor that will have a bearing upon behaviour is social (particularly peer) influence. Thus, irrespective of one's attributional beliefs, if it is not socially acceptable for an individual to appear eager or hard-working, many individuals will modify their behaviour accordingly. Thus the popular children's TV programme '*Sabrina – The Teenage Witch*' appears to encapsulate the American emphasis upon being a high achiever while endorsing the importance of not showing too much interest in the means of getting there. In contrast, the highly studious Willow Rosenberg and Lisa Simpson, characters in two other popular US TV shows – *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The Simpsons* – while portrayed sympathetically, are seen as socially gauche, and largely out of touch with mainstream peer culture.

Finally, attributions may only be important if they relate to spheres that are of significance to the individual. One may, for example, believe that whatever one's body shape, working hard in a gym will result in an athletic figure (an effort attribution), yet unless this is seen as a goal worthy of many hours of tortuous endeavour, the individual is unlikely to expend significant effort. Similarly, an individual may feel that working hard in school is key to success, but this is no guarantee that it will not be perceived that there are better things to do

with one's time. Clearly, the value placed upon educational success will be an important factor (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). As we demonstrate in this book, for many children in England and the United States, education is not uppermost in their priorities and, in such cases, a belief in the importance of effort will not necessarily result in a hard-working student.

In our study of 9–10 year olds (Elliott *et al.*, 2001a), we were able to link student attributions to teacher perceptions although, it should be noted that the proportion of children prioritising ability was rather small. Sunderland and Kentucky primary school teachers saw little difference in the academic performance of those emphasising effort or ability, although those who emphasised effort were perceived as being better behaved. The Kentucky teachers also perceived the 'effort' group as more highly motivated although this effect was not observed for the Sunderland sample. In Sunderland, the 'effort' group spent significantly more time on homework; in Kentucky, they spent less time watching television and more time reading books and magazines. There appeared to be very few differences with respect to the St Petersburg effort/ability groups. However, those who prioritised effort also emphasised the intrinsic enjoyment of studying, while those who highlighted ability were more likely to work for extrinsic rewards (qualifications leading to higher education or employment).

Our research findings indicated that prioritising effort or ability bore little relationship to observed performance in St Petersburg classrooms. It is, however, unclear whether this is because of mixed attributions (in our interviews, Russian teenagers saw both ability and effort as being important influences upon achievement) or because attributions are relatively uninfluential. Contextual factors will apply for both possibilities. The expectations and rigours of Russian classrooms are such that, irrespective of natural ability, one is unlikely to achieve highly unless one works hard. The students believed, however, that working hard, however, would not result in the highest levels of achievement unless one had a certain level of natural ability. Context also helps to explain the second possibility – that student attributions may have relatively limited impact upon actual behaviour. Given the very strong Russian emphasis upon collective engagement, expectations that students will work hard and beliefs in the importance of learning, it is possible that individual differences in attributional understanding have little bearing upon actual behaviour. Given such a scenario, students may work relatively hard even if they do believe that innate ability is a crucial element of high achievement.

The purpose and value of educational achievement and of being an educated person

The extent to which education will be valued and pursued in a society will depend both upon the traditional value that scholarship and erudition have held and the current economic and vocational opportunities that pertain (Broadfoot *et al*., 2000). In circumstances, such as those in contemporary Russia, these influences appear to be pulling in differing directions; as we note later in this text, the current economic crisis is beginning to exert a significant influence upon some children's orientation to, and take-up of, education.

Our surveys and interviews sought to ascertain informants' views about their schooling, in particular, whether this was seen as enjoyable, demanding, and intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding. Despite the heavy demands upon the Russian schoolchildren, and concerns about reduced motivation (Nikandrov, 1995; Likhanov, 1996) our surveys indicated that schooling was still comparatively popular with students (Table 4.4). Our findings reflect those provided by Glowka (1995) where 82 per cent of Russian youngsters liked going to school, in comparison with 25 per cent of German students. Glowka (like Alexander, 2000) believes that an important reason for this was that Russian teachers have endeavoured to make schools safe havens from the pressures of outside life. While Russian classrooms are marked by an element of authoritarianism that does not always find favour with Western observers, this reflects Russian tradition and seems to result in students feeling a strong sense of security (Muckle, 1998).

While enjoyment of school appeared to be less prevalent in Sunderland (and Kentucky), the message was still rather more positive than that obtained in a more recent survey of young people in the Northeast of

Table 4.4 Children replying affirmatively to survey questions (%)

Survey questions (respondents %)	St Petersburg		Kentucky		Sunderland	
	9–10	*14–15*	*9–10*	*14–15*	*9–10*	*14–15*
Those who quite or very much like attending school	88	78	69	46	64	46
Those who dislike school a lot	2	2	11	10	9	8
Those who cited interest/ enjoyment as the main reason for wanting to work hard in school	23	6	6	4	7	5

England (Centre for Public Policy, 2003). Here, the percentage stating that they enjoy school 'most of the time' ranged from 45.7 per cent in Year 6 (fifth grade) to a low of 24.5 per cent in Year 9 (eighth grade) before increasing slightly for older students. Differences may, in part, reflect subtle differences in the wording of question. Chaplain (2000), for example, noted that while 71 per cent of English and Welsh teenagers enjoyed going to school most of the time, 65 per cent stated that they were often bored and 58 per cent often 'get fed up' at school. Only 4 per cent saw school as a waste of time. Osborn (1999) reported that approximately half of her sample of 12–13 year olds enjoyed school with almost a quarter stating that they would like to leave as soon as they could.

In English and American contexts, there appears to be an expectation that teachers should make lessons enjoyable. In contrasting French and English schools, for example, Broadfoot *et al*. (2000) found that French children were more likely to expect lessons to involve hard work and effort, rather than be characterised by 'fun'. Thus, one English student informant stated that

> Children learn better if the teacher is interesting and makes it fun. If a teacher is really, really strict it makes the child hate school so they won't learn anything
>
> . . . a good teacher should be amusing and fun to have as a teacher. (p. 104)

Of course, a distinction should be drawn between enjoying going to school and enjoying lessons. For many young people, school is greatly valued as a place for socialising with friends:

> I quite liked school 'cause I had friends there. If I'd had no friends there I wouldn't have lasted.
>
> It's boring at home. It's boring at school but at least you see your friends and it's a bit more fun. (Centre for Public Policy, 2003, p. 15)

In the Northeast study (Centre for Public Policy, 2003), more enjoyed school than their lessons – a mere 17.9 and 19.3 per cent of Years 9 and 11, respectively, stated that they enjoyed their lessons most of the time. The proportion stating these were interesting most of the time was even lower (12.7 and 12.1%).

When asked in our own studies what made them want to study hard in school, the Russian 9–10 year olds were the only group in which a

substantial number prioritised the intrinsic enjoyment of studying (n.b. Russian adolescents reported a leaning towards academic subjects in contrast to the other groups' preference for practical activities such as art, physical education and drama). By adolescence, intrinsic motivation appears to have declined to the levels of the other cohorts. However, Russian children, of both ages, were more likely to cite interest as the reason why a certain school subject was preferred. The Sunderland and Kentucky children, in turn, were more likely to emphasise being good at the subject or finding it easy. In exploring reasons for working hard, a strong split emerged between the perceived importance of being an educated person and of gaining qualifications. In Russian culture, achievement in education and science have long been appreciated as sources of pride (Laihiala-Kankainen, 1999) and this may explain why more than half the St Petersburg teenagers saw 'being an educated person' as the most important reason for working hard (Table 4.5).

This difference of emphasis between having a pride of, and enjoyment in, being educated and seeing schooling in very instrumental terms also emerged strongly in our in-depth interviews. The importance of being cultured (educated) was a noticeable feature of the St Petersburg interviews:

> It is good to become an educated person to deal with people from a certain circle.

> An educated person will always feel well in the society.

> It is good to talk with the educated person.

> It is nice to feel yourself educated, to be able to talk with other educated people, feeling that you have got the same level of knowledge they do.

Table 4.5 Proportion prioritising being educated or gaining qualifications as reasons for working hard in school (%)

	St Petersburg		Kentucky		Sunderland	
	9–10	*14–15*	*9–10*	*14–15*	*9–10*	*14–15*
Being an educated person	44	53	30	20	17	11
Gaining academic qualifications for job/college	21	33	42	59	46	75

Source: Elliott *et al*. (2001a)

When the final informant above was asked what she would do if it were suggested that she should leave school to make money, she replied that she would choose to continue her education because

> I think that we are to become persons, not machines for making money...A man doesn't live for money only...something else is also important.

When asked what this was, she replied,

> Well, spiritual values, a soul...not only material things.

Many of the Russian students strongly rejected the suggestion that making money was what really mattered:

> There may be some truth in what you are saying because it is a sort of reflection of the state of things we really have here now. I don't know how it is in England, but here a lot of educated people – teachers, doctors, scientists do not have wealthy lives. This is upsetting to me. Some people observing this may think, 'What do I need education for? – I'll live better without it.' Well, for me now, education is obligatory. I wouldn't be able to live without it. I need a sort of spiritual thing to live on. The sort of life when you are rich and not educated – I think that this can't satisfy me.

> I think you still need education, well for yourself, to know something, to study history, to know your country better, to have some vision of the world.

> I personally think that money is not something to value. In this world it is more important to build your personality. I would think that you haven't reached your potential. The main things in life are family atmosphere and good friends.

Similar findings are described in a study of more than a hundred Russian and Finnish essays written by upper secondary school students (Laihiala-Kankainen and Raschetina, 2002). While students of both nations expressed a valuing of education, the Russians emphasised its importance in helping one become 'interesting', be capable of entering into conversation and being respected by others. In contrast to the Russian tendency to see education as an absolute value, and their concerns about the needs of society, the community or the state, Finnish

students emphasised its instrumental function in the acquisition of usable skills and its role in meeting individual needs and choices.

Although in our interviews we sought to sample students with varying degrees of commitment to academic achievement, instances of unmotivated St Petersburg students were rare. The following student was something of an exception, therefore

> Many teachers say I'm clever…but I became lazy recently, so I don't do homework properly. I think that if I start doing everything at home, I may become much better. To be honest, I feel like putting all my lessons aside and doing nothing. The thing I love to do most of all at the moment is just to lie on the sofa and dream about something.

> *Q*: What are you dreaming about?
> *A*: About everything…how to change the world…Like in the story 'Oblomov', that you may know.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this account is the student's literary allusion. Such a remark could hardly be imagined arising from the lips of less motivated students in Sunderland and Kentucky.

When one boy in Kentucky was told by one of our interviewers of the long hours of study that were typically undertaken by Russian teenagers and asked why he thought this was so different in the United States, he replied,

> Russia's like a poorer country isn't it?
> *Interviewer*: Yeah

> So if they want to be something, they've got to do good in school, so that they can get out of there and maybe move to America where there's better jobs…maybe they can go to (an American) college if they make good enough grades.

Given such sentiments it is hardly surprising, therefore, that the motto of the Kentucky Education Department is 'Education Pays'. In the United States, the value of education has long been closely associated with economic utility – an important factor given the traditionally strong emphasis upon monetary success by Americans of all social classes (Merton, 1938). The importance of education for getting a job was a strong feature of both our surveys and interviews. Similar to the other groups, the Kentucky students stressed the importance of education, but in almost every one of the interviews, its instrumental value in getting a college place and, subsequently, a good job was stressed.

Though unemployment was an issue in Kentucky, it did not dominate students' talk as much as in Sunderland. Rather, concern was more often expressed about the quality of employment available. College was seen as important by most respondents whereas the high school diploma, once a ticket to a sound career but increasingly of limited credibility (Sedlak *et al.*, 1986), was no longer perceived to be a passport to secure employment. One girl contemptuously informed us that

> . . . about all you can do with just a high school diploma is flip burgers at McDonalds.

When asked what she would say to a friend who advocated leaving school as soon as possible to get a job, she replied,

> I'd probably say, 'You're stupid' or 'that's dumb'. Because, I'm going to say, 'You're never going to get a job and you're going to be poor and you're probably end up on welfare, and you'll probably end up pregnant when you're sixteen or whatever, if you quit school.'

Similar perspectives were offered by other Kentucky informants:

> I'd say you're crazy because how, I mean, sure you could work someplace . . . McDonalds or some rinky dink old place, but you're not going to make that much money. And you're going to spend all your time in this one place, and for not a lot. I mean, you're not going to get a lot of joy out of it.

> I'd say, more than likely, 'You're not gonna make it' . . . 'Cause there's not a whole lotta, there ain't very many jobs left that you wouldn't need education . . . maybe digging a ditch or something . . . digging a hole . . . be about it.

> I would tell them in a nice way that they were crazy . . . There's this one girl I used to have friends with . . . Her parents just do odd jobs like yard sales and stuff . . . And they're constantly needing money. So you have to get an education in order to get a job . . . you can't live off the money that you get from working at McDonalds or something like that. That's minimum wage . . . In order to get . . . a good job, you've got to have a really good education.

In a relatively small number of cases, there was some recognition that education was more than merely a means to financial security although

this tended to be expressed as a secondary factor. When asked why she thought education was important, this girl responded,

> Because I've seen how my parents are and how they have good paying jobs and they can help me with their studies and they've progressed a lot in the world. They are like pretty smart and they have good friends and everything just seems to go a lot better, and they can make money, they can support their families, and sometimes I think that if you don't have an education, then there's no – I mean you can get a job at McDonalds or whatever – because most of the time you can't get a good job, and you can't support your family, and help them, if you don't have a good job . . . which is important with education, and then, just basically, knowing what's going on in the world and knowing about things is important too.

The value of homework for ends other than obtaining good grades and finding good employment was rarely expressed. Even then, the link to employment seemed to persist. When asked whether homework might be important, a boy replied,

> Yeah, it kinda teaches you to be responsible, and get your work done.

When asked how this would help, he replied,

> Well, when you graduate and get a job . . . you have to be responsible, and do your work and stuff or you'll get fired.

The perceived importance of education for one's future economic prosperity was undermined by a range of attractions that vied for students' time. In some cases, doing well in school was seen as permitting engagement in preferred activities.

> Good grades are . . . very important to me . . . it's not hard to get good grades, if you really try. And plus, you have to maintain good grades to be a cheerleader, or they kick you off the squad.

One of the boys noted,

> You have to have a good grade to stay on the basketball team.

Often, however, the high importance placed upon sporting activity appeared to impact negatively upon academic achievement. Not only was a high proportion of the students' out-of-school time used for sports and other leisure pursuits, but, in tailoring academic demands to accommodate this, teachers, parents and other significant adults indirectly signalled the community's priorities. In several schools we witnessed tannoy messages referring to non-academic activities, cutting across lesson time. Several students commented that homework was undertaken in lessons to assist the sports teams. Speaking of her final year at middle school, one girl stated,

Usually, we didn't have any homework unless it was a project or a paper, because we had a 45-minute study period. And it was at the end of the day, and we had 45 minutes and it was to do all your homework . . . for the kids who played sports and stuff. Like, well, everybody got it, but it was a big help to those who played sports because that way, you wouldn't have to worry, like if you had practice or you had a game or something, you wouldn't have to worry about it. We basically got all our homework done during that time.

Another informant stated that he usually managed to get all his homework completed during school hours. When asked how he could spend every night playing or watching sports (and during the basketball season rise at 4.30 a.m. for early morning practices) and dating, get by on only 5–6 hours sleep, yet still get a high number of A grades, he replied

The teachers take it easy on us, with the sports. They don't give us a lot. Like game days, we don't have any homework. Or, like this school's really big on football, and they're really big on the key players, so they kinda take it easy on us, really.

As an illustrative contrast, when asked whether knowledge of the arts, philosophy, history and the like would be valued in his community, a boy replied,

. . . people, they respect you for what you've tried to learn, and stuff like that, but I don't really think that you have to know all that stuff, 'cause 90% of the people in our society don't have a clue to anything like that.

Another answered the same question more dismissively:

> . . . It ain't that important . . . Common sense is the thing that gets it around here.

Grades, not education, were what seemed to matter. Even with almost four years to go before college, the relevance of grades was uppermost in the minds of many. Even freshman grades in high school were important because

> . . . colleges look at your whole high school record . . . that determines if you're gonna get in or not.

The number of Kentucky students who expressed strongly anti-educational perspectives in our interviews or surveys was very small. Those who spoke in such terms, tended to be from backgrounds marked by rural poverty. One boy informed us that when he got home after school he helped with the farm. As far as possible he tried to be out in the country-side, spending time with his horses. He hardly ever looked at television and did not join in organised school sports because

> Stay at school enough. I ain't gonna stay after school.

When asked if his parents ever asked about homework, he replied,

> They don't care . . . I don't bring nothin' home.

The following statements reflected the tenor of much of the interview:

> *Q*: Would your parents support you doing some extra things after school?
> *A*: I don't know . . . they don't like me staying after school and stuff.
> *Q*: Will your parents be upset if you quit school?
> *A*: They'd be happy – they didn't go through school either.
> *Q*: Would your father support you if you quit school?
> *A*: Be a lot easier on him . . . [he] wouldn't have to do so much work and stuff. I don't like nothin' about school . . . nothin' I want to learn. Gonna quit in two years…Next month I'm gonna miss two weeks…deer hunting…
> *Q*: What kind of job do you think you'll be able to get when you quit school?

A: Probably, shoe horses . . . [pays] . . . twenty five dollars a head. It's pretty good money . . . [I can shoe] . . . probably about five or six horses a day.

Q: Do you think that you can make it if you work hard?

A: Yeah. Don't do you to learn all this bunch of gunk, you know you, all you need to learn is to read and write.

Q: Can you read and write well?

A: Yeah . . . [pause] . . . can't read too good but I can write well.

The low regard for advanced education held by a number of Kentucky students confirms other studies such as those of Wilson *et al*. (1997) and Peters *et al*. (1986) (see Chapter 3). These writers describe the conflict, for rural Appalachian youth, between messages that formal education is a route to success and traditional values less oriented towards social mobility. Deyoung (1994) also notes that the very close family and community bonds often found in many US rural communities may not sit easily with the academic credentialism and individualism of modern US schooling. As is illustrated above, education for these individuals seems to be intrinsically valued just to the extent that it could help students to become and be recognised as 'smart', that is, able to handle themselves advantageously in social situations and achieve their life goals, whilst retaining good personal relationships. However, becoming 'smart' can go wider than this and, for some, did not involve much of, the 'book-smartness' that might be gained through schooling. For the great majority of Kentucky students, getting an education meant gaining good enough grades, partly by strategic choice of programme, to give them a good transcript at school graduation and open the way to desirable employment, for a majority by way of higher education.

It is important to note that many of the views expressed by our US informants are not unique to contemporary Kentucky, nor merely to rural areas of the United States. Neither are they a particular feature of present times, nor even, as Marks (2000) suggests, the past two decades. Looking back at studies published as far back as the 1920s, Sedlak *et al*. (1986) argue that there was no 'golden age' (p. 15) when interest in scholarship and academic standards were high.

Few of the adolescents who swelled high school enrollment figures after 1915 were conspicuously committed to the academic opportunities that the experience provided. They attended principally because graduating improved sharply their opportunities for employment or higher education and, increasingly, because their friends attended and

they welcomed the opportunity to enhance their stature among their peers by participating in extracurricular and social activities. (p. 16)

…it is clear that the problem of student indifference or disengagement from academic learning in high school is not a product of the 1960s and 1970s but one that has endured for at least 60 years. (p. 18)

In his ethnographic account of Utopia High School, Larkin (1979) noted the presence of an intellectual elite rarely found in high schools and largely absent from the sociological literature (p. 72). The presence of such a rare group was attributed to the presence of a large Jewish minority and the school's strong academic emphasis. For the remainder, students attempted to minimise their commitment as much as possible while balancing recognition of the coercive influence of grades. Perhaps more typical are findings from a study of Five Bridges High School (Grant and Sleeter, 1996) – an ethnography that fleshes out the limited academic demands made by teachers, the students' sense of boredom, their low interest in scholarship and the seeming irrelevance of the school curriculum to their daily lives.

Given the characteristics of the three milieux, ethnicity was not a major factor in our investigations. However, in considering broader US influences, we should be cognisant of the danger of disregarding ethnicity as an important variable. Studies have repeatedly testified to important differences between cultural groups regarding their general orientation to learning and motivation to work hard. Anti-intellectual attitudes are more rare in Asian-American children who, greatly influenced by parental demands for academic success (Siu, 1992), appear to be less prepared to embrace anti-intellectual high school values, and continue to outperform their peers (Hirschman and Wong, 1986; Eaton and Dembo, 1997) even when controlling for ability (Steinberg *et al*., 1992) and socioeconomic status (Ogbu, 1983). In contrast, the resistance of many Afro-American children to embrace formal education defies the best efforts of their parents (Bempechat, 1998). The anti-school orientation of many Afro-American children appears to be strongly related to peer influences in which the search for an ethnic identity, in a society perceived as racist, is seen as incompatible with school success (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986).

A strong emphasis upon gaining qualifications is as true of England as of the United States (Osborn, 1999; Centre for Public Policy, 2003). While success in the GCSE examinations is widely held as important and is a source of stress for many 16 year olds, this is not

because education is seen as intrinsically valuable but because success is seen as

> . . . an entry ticket for the next level of the competition. (Denscombe, 2000, p. 371)

In our interviews, Sunderland students, including those in private education, were much influenced by the poor employment situation in their essentially urban region and also by the English National Curriculum and its assessment. These created a climate largely favouring a type of vicarious utilitarianism. Those students who appeared to be sufficiently successful in relation to their ambitions, whether these were high or modest, largely accepted the National Curriculum as defining 'education', internalised its implied values and worked to comply with its requirements. They accepted schooling as helping them to become useful, or saleable, in relation to their various levels of aspiration, in future labour market.

> I want to make sure that I can get a good job when I leave school, so I work hard now, so I can get the qualifications I need, so I have a chance when I get older.

> If you get a good education you get good exam results at the end of it. Then you can go and get a good job.

A second type of response – pragmatic utilitarianism – was more often expressed by less academically successful students, who seemed unsure that they could become sufficiently useful by way of schooling to compete for any employment they desired. Though they were often not satisfied with their overall achievement, these students discounted the relevance, or importance, of areas of weakness and rather selected and focused commitment on any areas of relative personal or subject strength which they hoped – with greater or lesser realism – might recommend them in seeking paid work.

A recent survey of adolescents (Centre for Public Policy, 2003) has also highlighted the importance of qualifications as a means to employment in Northeast England. Here, 79 per cent of students stated that a desire for good qualifications encouraged them to work hard and 86.2 per cent reported that wanting a good job was an important motivator. However, some students were deterred by a sense that the qualifications on offer were not worth the effort and would not lead

them to obtain the job they wanted. This attitude appears to be particularly prevalent where young people come from homes marked by unemployment (Wilkinson, 1995). Corrigan's (1979) study of working-class boys in Sunderland highlighted an anti-school culture in which resistance to the values taught by the school was fuelled by a perception that their education was largely irrelevant to their vocational futures. Here is exemplified the greatest weakness of an education system that uses employment opportunity as its prime motivator. If those qualifications which are attainable for a particular individual are unimportant for future employment, as might be perceived by many socially disadvantaged young people, one may query whether education would retain any perceived value for them.

It is perhaps this dilemma that has led many schools to draw upon government funding for the improvement of inner-city areas to offer extrinsic rewards to students for examination performance. Thus in some schools, students are being offered cash inducements to achieve certain grades in their public examinations. Some schools have invested as much as £40,000 in one year to cover such schemes. While teachers in the schools testify to the motivational effects of the initiative, the comments of some of the students demonstrate the problems of employing extrinsic reinforcement. In a report in *The Sunday Times*, one student, about to receive £500 from his school, was reported as saying,

It is a bit more rewarding knowing that you have earned it.

Another student remarked that she was now doing more homework.

I have more momentum now as I know I am getting something for it.

Maybe such attitudes go some way to explain why the take-up rate for education post-16 in England is among the lowest in the industrialised world. As we note in Chapter 2, the widespread use of extrinsic reinforcers is unlikely to help convince students of the perceived intrinsic value of education and appears counter to the current aim of fostering a Learning Society.

5
Classroom Behaviour and Peer Influence

Theories of achievement motivation have traditionally focused upon the self although, as Schunk (2000) points out, self-processes are influenced by the individual's observations of models and by collective achievements. The past decade has not neglected such factors entirely, however, and an increasing number of motivation researchers are beginning to examine the role of social goals in achievement striving (Urdan and Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1996, 1999; Juvonen and Nishina, 1997; Ryan, 2000; Ryan *et al*., 2004).

While many researchers have considered parents and teachers, rather than peers, as the more important influences upon motivation (Ryan, 2000), the controversial work of Harris (1995, 1998) has suggested that peer-socialising influences may be more significant than those of parents. In similar vein, Steinberg (1996) contend that peers exert a greater influence upon academic achievement than do parents. The nature of peer and parental influence will vary in different contexts; one US study, for example, suggested that while parents have more influence upon students' long-term educational plans, peers exert greater influence upon day-to-day classroom behaviour (Steinberg and Brown, 1989).

The concept and study of the peer group are not unproblematic as this term has been used to describe a variety of groupings from one-to-one relationships, to small cliques, through to an entire age cohort (Brown *et al*., 1990). Research suggests that each of these will impact upon motivation – immediate, close friends (Berndt and Keefe, 1996), broader friendship groupings (Wentzel and Caldwell, 1997) and the larger social group (Kindermann, 1993).

Similarly, the study of peer influence in natural settings is methodologically complex (Ryan, 2000). The tendency of individuals to select friends who are similar to them, and also to overestimate such similarity,

makes it difficult to ascertain the nature and extent of peer group social-isation. Another complication concerns the tendency of researchers not to differentiate between shared and non-shared peer group experiences. For each group, there will be a shared set of common norms, values and standards that results in a general climate or ethos that impacts upon each individual (Kurdek and Sinclair, 2000). However, each individual will also experience the group in a unique way. Thus, both shared experiences and individual differences are important for understanding how peers affect development. To date, research has not successfully differentiated between these forms of experience in studying the impact of peers upon academic outcomes.

Despite such difficulties, research studies have confirmed the import-ance of the peer group as agent in the socialisation of motivation and engagement (Ryan, 2000). Kindermann (1993) showed that fourth grade students tended to associate with those whose levels of engagement in schoolwork were broadly similar, and also that an individual's choice of friendship group predicted future levels of engagement beyond that at the beginning of the academic year; similar findings have been found for adolescents (Kindermann *et al.*, 1996). In a study of middle school children, Ryan (1999) found that the peer group was influential in changing the extent to which students liked and enjoyed school and placed value upon indicators of academic achievement, such as good grades, yet had little effect upon how valuable and useful school was considered to be.

Sage and Kindermann (1999) suggest that the impact of differing groupings may vary, with friends impacting more on socio-emotional and personal identity development, and wider peer networks having greater influence upon classroom behaviour. Peer influences may also vary between students as a function of orientation and goals. In one observa-tional classroom-based study of fifth graders, they found that those students who were more academically motivated tended to associate with similarly inclined peers who, in turn, provided approval for on-task behaviour. In contrast, those who were less motivated associated with similarly less motivated peers and received affirmation for on-task behaviour only from their teacher. While the design of this study does not permit causal statements, it does provide a demonstration of the ways by which peers may shape the individual's motivational patterns. In a study of seventh graders, Summers *et al.* (2003) found that students low in mastery orientation were more influenced by close friends than other peers when estimating their own and others' mathematical ability. Such influence, however, did not pertain for high mastery-oriented students.

Bishop (1989) has highlighted the existence of strong peer pressure against academic commitment in US schools, where, he contends, there is limited competition between students for good grades and achievement is not measured against any externally imposed standards. When a student does try to excel, tensions and rivalries result such that many prefer not to be seen to try hard (Howley *et al*., 1995; Steinberg, 1996). Thus, while a student may believe that hard work is important to succeed academically, social pressure to succeed without significant effort being visibly expended (Cheney, 1993; Damon, 1995) may constrain their behaviour. Doing well, in itself, is not problematic; effortless success being generally admired by classmates. Indeed, peer acceptance is positively related to students' achievement scores (Diehl *et al*., 1998) and the extent to which they are favourably disposed to school (Ladd, 1990). As discussed in Chapter 2, making an effort is a risky enterprise for many children in the United States and England, for not only is this often counter to peer expectation, but also because trying and failing may give the impression that one is 'dumb' (Covington, 1992; Anderman and Maehr, 1994).

A strong emphasis upon social life has long been a feature of English schools. Thus it is unsurprising that British 15 year olds report boredom and indiscipline in school yet, at the same time, are more likely than the international average to state that they enjoy good social relationships with peers (OECD, 2002). In a comparative study of students in England, Denmark and France, Osborn (1999) notes the high importance attached to social relationships in English schools. Here, 'having a laugh' was perceived to be an essential aspect of classroom life. While it was generally acceptable to work in class, it was also expected that, at the same time, one should engage in classroom banter. Osborn quotes one of her informants:

> The main thing is just to have a laugh. Not just get on with work and not communicate with anybody because we don't like that. It's all right to get on with work but not to not talk or not have a laugh. (p. 297)

Findings from this study echoed those of an earlier investigation of students in English and French primary schools (Osborn, 1997), where it was noted that negative peer pressure could reduce a desire to be seen as academically successful:

> . . . many English children did not want to be best in the class, and felt lukewarm about getting a good mark or even praise for good work. Some children actually said they did not want to be seen as too good by the teacher; no French child said this. (Osborn, 1997, p. 49)

Peer influences that undermine educational striving seem to be most powerful in the case of boys and appear to vary across ethnic groups. Much work in the US, involving peer influence, has involved minority youth. One of the most influential researchers in this respect is Ogbu (1987), who has written of the fear of Black American youth that trying hard in school would be seen as 'acting White'. In contrast, it appears that an ability to resist anti-work peer influences helps many Asian children in the United States to perform highly.

Underachievement in boys has now become an international phenomenon (Myhill, 2002). Even in Russia, where standards of behaviour have long been recognised as high,

> . . . girls are distinctly more conformist than the boys and comprise the pillars on which the lesson stands. (Muckle, 1998, p. 37)

In analysing problems of social inequality in Russia, Sobkin (2001) notes that affluence seems to be a more discriminating factor in educational performance for boys than for girls. It seems that boys from poorer families face greater difficulty than girls, in similar conditions, in achieving academically.

In England and the US, many boys experience conflict between being a dutiful, hard-working student and acting in ways that are acceptable to dominant peers. The importance for boys of appearing 'masculine' in school in order to obtain status among peers is widely recognised (Adler and Adler, 1998; Swain, 2004) and many boys believe it to be undesirable to excel in academic or arts subjects; such perform-ance only being permitted in sports (Warrington *et al.*, 2000). Swain's ethnographic research (2004) showed how misbehaviour in the class-room was a means to raise status, and testing the boundaries of the school's authority, often through humour, was a key mechanism for building camaraderie among the boys. Jackson (2002, 2003) draws upon Covington's theory of self-worth protection to explain a culture of 'laddishness' in which a preoccupation on the part of many boys to appear disengaged and unmotivated is perceived to reflect a desire not to appear to be lacking in ability or to be seen as 'feminine'. However, as Swain (2004) points out, this is not a feature of all schools, and boys are less likely to have such concerns in more socially privileged schools. Such tensions seem to be less apparent in the case of girls for whom it appears to be more acceptable to peers to be seen to work hard in class as long as a 'cool' image is maintained outside of school (Warrington *et al.*, 2000).

One of the Kentucky students in our studies commented about male students who adopted a certain persona:

> I think it's part of their image, they're just trying to be like they don't care. They don't want anybody to know that they're like, some of them, really smart, they just don't try; so they try to hide this image, like they're too cool to get good grades or whatever.

Some Kentucky students commented upon social pressures not to be seen to be doing too well:

> *Q*: Is there any pressure on kids not to do well?
> *A*: Yeah, I think that there is a kind of pressure. Because if you get all A's, you don't really want to show anyone, because they're like 'Oh, you always get A's'.
> *Q*: You're aware of that, are you?
> *A*: Yeah, it's happened to me before. I've had pressure, the last couple of years. I was like, I didn't want to make all A's because I didn't really want to show, like everybody, I had made all A's. But this year, it's yeah, I want to make all the A's I can.

> One of the teachers puts the names of those who get A's in the test on the board. And them people on the board, we look at them, we give them dirty looks, and we'll call them, like . . . I mean we don't call them real bad names, but we call them Mr. Perfect or something like that, but they just think they're better than anyone else.

For many Sunderland and Kentucky children, a major concern was not appearing to be a swot (in England) or a nerd (in the US). Swots and nerds had in common high levels of application to study, which were resented as throwing a relatively poor light on other students' efforts and achievements. However, in ways that reflected an important difference between the out-of-school peer culture in the two contexts, it was more problematic to be a nerd than a swot. Though swots were seen as set apart in class and sometimes in their year group and might attract derision and sometimes physical aggression from some fellow students out of lessons, they were not construed more generally as misfits, beyond their undermining predilection for study. This reflected both a permitted diversity in the wider English adolescent peer culture and a relative freedom from domination by the norms of out-of-school 'in-crowds'.

Nerds were seen as possessed of unusual intellectual interests and enthusiams, excessively serious about study and predisposed to work far more than is necessary:

> [nerds] . . . will do work, and work . . . just work till. . . .
> *Q*: Why would they do it, then?
> *A*: You got me; I don't know.

Crucially, however, they also misread, were indifferent to, or were perceived as slighting norms of dress, behaviour, style and adulation in the wider peer culture. Though, like swots, they could come in for derision and aggression in school, they were also more likely to be seen as apart from adolescent collective social activity.

> I'm not friends with them, not because [they're nerds] . . . but just because they don't do the same things as me. I like people who are involved. . . . I like people I see in a lot of my activities. I'm involved in a lot of organisations. So I'm friends with a lot of the other busy people. So I don't really talk to people that just sit at home and you know, read the encyclopaedia, or sit on the computer all day.

Unlike other academically successful students, nerds appeared to run counter to the US approval for well-roundedness:

> *Q*: How do the others in your class react to people who do well?
> *A*: They respect them, you know. They understand that, the students who make good grades, you know, try hard and also try to improve, you know. . . . They're not all work and no play.

Another informant stated,

> I try to do a lot of things at once. I try to be social, do well in sports, have a good home life, do well on my studies, and all that, and then there's some kids who, they just base their whole life on making good grades. And I don't think it's . . . good grades are important, but I don't think it's that important. I think you should have other things to do. And so, if the kid's like that, then usually they're like, nobody likes them.

Another student protested,

> I'm not a nerd. I've got a life outside of school.

The negative influence of peers was far less evident in St Petersburg. Here, students who achieved highly and demonstrated appropriate personal qualities were respected and regarded both as an adornment by their class and as an asset to their fellows.

> I think that how a person is studying is less important than what sort of person he is. How he treats others, what sort of relationships he has. . . . The most important thing is that he doesn't become snobbish.

> I think that the students who have a sort of 'brain', who think well are the popular and attractive ones…They are respected for their cleverness.

> If a bright student is a nice person, not a snobby one, why should we treat him badly?

> I respect those who work hard and do well. In our class, there is no envy, we feel positively about [hard-working] students.

Interestingly, for one student, it is the ignorance, rather than the behaviour, of peers that seemed to be most annoying. When asked whether there were things about others' behaviour that annoyed her, one girl replied,

> I may be upset if I see that a student can't give a good answer; well I feel offended for him. I also don't like . . . well, it doesn't happen in my class . . . when one can't say something very basic, like the dates of Pushkin's birth and death – I mean it is ridiculous if you don't know that at the age of fifteen.

Those who had grasped a subject were expected to help classmates with their studies, working through and explaining problems and points of difficulty, and giving practical study advice from a student's point of view.
When asked how students reacted to high achievers, a boy replied,

> If I don't understand something, the first person I may go to to get it explained will be this sort of student, the very bright one. Then I may go to the teacher.

Such students were granted admiration, popularity and status, providing that their help was willing, friendly and unassuming. There was no

evidence that their success attracted hostility, rather, in some cases, sycophancy might be more evident:

> There may be some students who'll try to profit from those who are good learners. I don't have this attitude. I won't treat the person much better only because he can help me with my lessons.

Another response suggested more instrumental agendas:

> They try to make use of them . . . to copy from them and so on.

Students aimed to emulate high achievers as far as they could, and displayed equal concern to help each other to succeed, in class and in out-of-school peer tutoring. In St Petersburg, peer influence was generally perceived to be actively pro-learning and pro-study. This may help to explain why class disruption is normally rare, brief and minor. In general, our informants offered a picture of a class that shared precepts of propriety and due behaviour with the teacher. Within an accepted framework, they saw themselves cooperating amongst themselves, and with the teacher, in engaging with the demands of learning. Although St Petersburg students commented adversely on teachers who used their position to make negative personal remarks, and could sometimes make an issue of this, they were largely compliant with less than charismatic teachers who were perceived as pedagogically adequate. However, there was an expectation that teachers should be respectful of students.

Thus one boy stated that although those who engage in conflict with their teachers are usually 'not taken seriously' by their classmates,

> Last year we had a student in our class who didn't study well and almost all the teachers were sort of offensive to him, told him things which could damage his reputation and personality. So he had conflicts with the teachers but the class was on his side. It was a sort of solidarity with him.

If our teenage informants in St Petersburg were influenced by any wider adolescent peer culture, it had not so far, at least on the basis of their interview statements, impacted on their response to schooling.

The interview findings were strongly supported by our large-scale surveys in which we asked children about the influence of peers upon their own behaviour and workrate. Children in St Petersburg commented that peers tended to make them work harder (for the younger group, the

ratio of positive to negative influence was seven to one), whereas those in Sunderland considered their peers to have a deleterious effect upon their workrate. Somewhat surprisingly, the picture from the Kentucky children was mixed with a high proportion stating that peers had little effect upon them and the remainder indicating a relatively even split between positive and negative effects. This may reflect a failure of the students to recognise that peer influences not only take the form of explicit approval and disapproval but also involve more subtle internalisation of group behavioural norms (Kurdek and Sinclair, 2000).

In line with our US findings, Berndt and Keefe (1992) found a high proportion of seventh graders denying that their friends had any impact upon their school-related beliefs and behaviours. Urdan and Hicks (1995), in contrast, found that more than three quarters of their sample of eighth graders said that they were influenced by their friends, mainly in a positive direction. Interestingly, these same respondents tended to believe that their peers were more likely to be influenced in a negative direction. This finding raises questions about whether attributional bias or social desirability was the factor that influenced responses, and whether, as we note above, informants concentrated upon clear, direct peer messages concerning the appropriateness of academic engagement and failed to become aware of other important, yet subtle and indirect, influences (Ryan, 2000).

The positive messages from St Petersburg and the more negative Anglo-American picture are reinforced by reports of classroom behaviour. In comparison with the Kentucky and Sunderland respondents, the St Petersburg children reported considerably fewer disciplinary problems. For the adolescent sample, 7.7 per cent reported that bad behaviour and inattention 'often' occurred in lessons, while 33.8 per cent stated that this 'almost never' occurred. The Kentucky and English children presented a very different picture. Almost half of the Kentucky sample (49.3%) saw bad behaviour as happening often; only 2.7 per cent stated that this was an 'almost never' phenomenon. The Sunderland children presented a similar picture scoring 37.1 and 1.5 per cent respectively.

Differences between the behaviour of St Petersburg adolescents and those in Sunderland and Kentucky were mirrored by the 10 year olds. Although the younger cohort in all three milieux presented a more positive picture of classroom behaviour, the difference continued to be striking with four times as many Anglo-American respondents reporting bad behaviour as happening 'often'. Whereas almost half the St Petersburg children responded with 'almost never', this answer was provided by a mere 9.6 and 4 per cent of the Kentucky and Sunderland children.

Interestingly, the suggestion that student loyalty to peers would result in a disinclination to report classmates' negative attitudes and behaviour (Murdock, 1999) did not appear to be a feature of our English and American findings.

In both Kentucky and Sunderland, many middle-achieving students seemed habituated into delaying getting started and diverting into off-task talk and activity, not perceiving these as undermining, if carried on quietly. Where teachers sought to counter this perception, they had to exert considerable leadership, or they risked opening the way for challenging or disaffected students to initiate noisier and more hostile disruption:

> If the whole class just carries on and someone is not very nice to the teacher or something, then one person is going to end up joining in with them and they are not just going to do the work; like a herd of sheep they all follow. (Sunderland teenager)

Those more eager to learn were also disadvantaged by this classroom culture. One Kentucky student said that there were problems in some classes where the motivated were held back by those who were not interested. He was asked how the teachers could cope with whole-class teaching when some were interested and others were not:

> . . . they've been trying to figure that out for years.

He stated that in one class, worksheets were employed to individualise instruction but this did not really resolve the question:

> . . . it'll take some people who just, like, talk, awhile; answer one, talk awhile, answer one, it might take them half hour, forty five minutes to do a worksheet, and most worksheets, several of us can do them like, ten minutes . . . After we do our worksheets, we usually read in books and things.
>
> *Q*: . . . It's holding you back a bit, is it?
> *A*: Yeah, I think it is 'cause some teacher, he's gotta wait on them to get done, and they don't care.

However, if it was a norm to evade, or resist, teacher control, it was also a peer norm that teachers should be able to control their classes and those who did so with a forceful impersonality were respected as 'strict'. In effect, Sunderland and Kentucky students saw it as the teacher's

role finally not only to ensure academic engagement, but also, and importantly, mostly construed learning, in its fullest sense, as something which teachers enforced.

In both contexts, students were much more subject to the attractions of an out-of-school youth peer culture than in St Petersburg. Not only did these compete against homework for their time, but it offered an alternative means of gaining status, through participation in peer social life, sharing youth cultural icons and consumership of fashionable goods. It also reinforced the peer counter-culture, accentuating and validating differences in cultural interests and widening the generation gap between teachers and the taught. In Kentucky, much more than in Sunderland, schools sought to affiliate students to their schools through a wide range of activities centring on competitive sports, but though these provided an alternative means of peer prestige, they did not, in themselves, appear to encourage pro-attitudes to learning or education. Indeed, as we demonstrate in Chapter 7, such a preoccupation ate into the academic programme and conveyed unfortunate messages about the relative importance of scholastic achievement.

Our findings concerning behaviour and peer influences reflect those of other comparative studies involving either England, Russia and/or the United States. These tend to portray English or American classrooms as problematic, and Russian children as comparatively well-behaved. In an early study, in Moscow and upstate New York, Bronfenbrenner (1967) found that Russian 12 year olds were more resistant than Americans to promptings to engage in anti-social behaviour and more responsive to adult standards of behaviour. Even more telling, however, was the finding that the Russian peer group appeared to exert influence in support of such standards. In contrast, American peers were more likely to encourage deviance from adult norms. Two years earlier, Bronfenbrenner and colleagues (Devereux *et al.*, 1965) found that the influence of peers was even stronger in England than the US, with English children more ready to follow the promptings of other children to engage in socially disapproved activities rather than to adhere to the moral strictures of their parents and other adults. Bronfenbrenner (1967) noted that where the peer group was highly autonomous, as is the case in many Western societies, it is more likely that it will exert an influence that is oppositional to prevailing adult values. In contrast, social systems such as that which prevailed in the Soviet Union are more able to harness the powerful influence of the peer group to support and maintain existing adult values and objectives. The role of the peer group in the Soviet Union, he concludes, was not, as in the United States, left mainly to chance but

rather was the 'result of explicit policy and practice' (p. 206) whereby the peer group was used as an agent of socialisation geared to encouraging identification with societal values.

This does not mean, of course, that in their wider social dealings, Soviet youth were more moral or sociable than their Western counterparts. Harris (1998), in a discussion of Japanese–US differences, points out that it is important not to associate peer behaviour in classrooms too strongly with desirable personal qualities. The fact that Japanese children reinforce pro-social classroom behaviour and criticise classmates for misbehaviour and that they rejoice in each others' classroom achievements cannot be taken to indicate that they are 'nicer' than their American peers. Outside the classroom, peer bullying and cruelty is no less a problem in Japan than the United States.

Several other studies involving one or more of the three countries we studied have found findings similar to those we report in this chapter. Videotaped studies of eighth grade classrooms, undertaken as part of the TIMSS study, showed that, in comparison with Japanese and German classrooms, lessons in the United States were frequently interrupted and subject to distraction (Martin and Mullis, 2000). Findings from TIMSS also indicated that teachers in the United States were twice as likely as those in the Russian Federation to report that their teaching was extensively limited by students' disruptive behaviours. The Russian figure (21%) was the fourth lowest of 37 countries reported (see Akiba *et al.*, 2002). The proportion of English teachers reporting such problems was approximately mid-way between the Russians and Americans.

Instilling in children the importance of group needs rather than one's own, the development of high moral qualities and obedience to adults were key elements of Soviet preschool education (Tudge, 1991). While this may result in some loss of spontaneity and a reduced ability to help others in unfamiliar situations (Laihiala-Kankainen, 1998; Kienbaum and Trommsdorff, 1999), such socialisation practices result in high levels of task engagement and minimal disruption to classroom life. In this respect, Alexander (2000), has found similar patterns in his study of primary school classrooms in England, France, Russia, India and the United States. Describing the tensions evident in England and America where student autonomy and empowerment were highly valued yet teachers often had to work hard to maintain order, Alexander succinctly demonstrates how classroom practices and discourse, together with the operation of rules and routines, impact upon student behaviour. Adding to this complex brew, he notes that English primary school teachers were struggling to reconcile the dissonance resulting from the introduction

of externally prescribed and regulated lesson content and teaching methods with traditional communal and non-directive belief systems (n.b. similar tensions are also reported by McNess *et al.* [2003]). Teachers in Michigan were spared such intrusions, yet appeared to experience the greatest tensions between their professional belief systems and the need to maintain order and discipline. Thus, of the five countries studied by Alexander, the 'sharpest contrasts' were between Russia and the United States:

> In the one context the substantive messages about the nature of knowledge, teaching and learning and about behavioural norms and expectations were unambiguous yet also – bar the occasional brief reminder – tacit; in the other context they were the subject of frequent reminders by the teacher and often intense encounters ranging from negotiation to confrontation. (2000, p. 318)

Indeed, the striking sense of order in Russian classrooms (Kursk) was such that Alexander initially suspected that the classrooms he had visited had been specially selected and prepared by his hosts in order to provide a favourable impression; concerns we also raised on our own initial visits to schools in St Petersburg. In order to test this hypothesis, Alexander returned to Russia the following year as a tourist and visited schools informally. The classroom practices observed were almost identical to those of the earlier visit even though the second set of schools was in Moscow, 350 miles from Kursk.

It is interesting to note that despite the significant differences in behaviour perceived by the children in our own studies, these did not appear to reflect teacher perceptions. In our study of 10 year olds (Elliott *et al.*, 2001a), teachers were asked to rate the behaviour of the respondents on a five-point scale. It was then possible to compare student and teacher perceptions. Figure 5.1 illustrates these.

Figure 5.1 demonstrates that Russian teachers, unlike their charges, are rather less positive about behaviour in their classrooms. However, there does seem to be broad agreement between the teachers and their students that behaviour is generally sound. This reflects the high standards of behaviour in Russian classrooms that have typically been reported by foreign observers (Muckle, 1990; Glowka, 1995; Laihiala-Kankainen, 1998; Alexander, 2000; Hufton and Elliott, 2000). In contrast, the American and English teachers provide a picture that offers a very different perspective to that of their students.

Teacher ratings of children's behaviour (5-pt scale)

Children's perceptions of the presence of disruptive behaviour in their classes (4-pt scale)
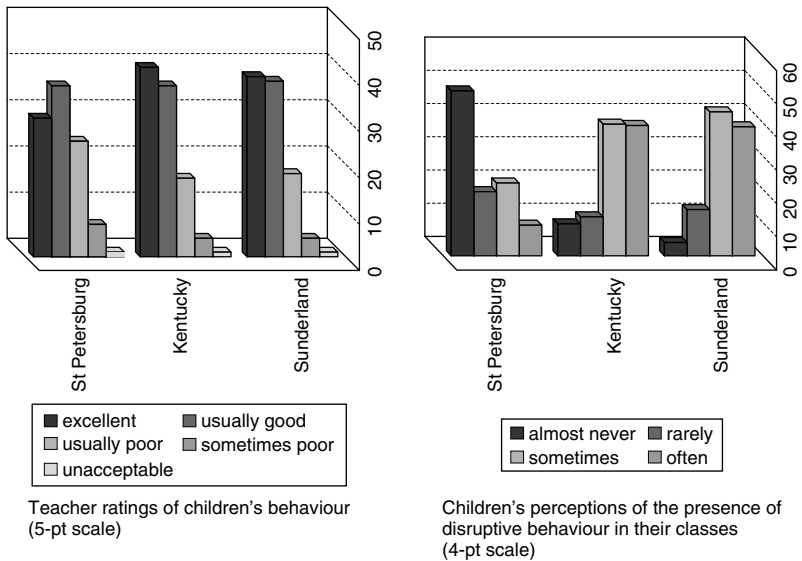
Figure 5.1   Teacher and child ratings of classroom behaviour
Source: Elliott *et al*. (2001a).

One contributing factor to greater Russian teacher scepticism about their students' behaviour may be the emphasis upon fast-paced, intensive whole-class teaching. For such an approach to be maximally effective, the teacher may need and expect highly responsive, cooperative behaviour from the whole class. In contrast, teachers in Kentucky and Sunderland (particularly those in primary school settings) whose teaching approaches may involve a large amount of informal peer-to-peer communication may feel less concerned about minor distractions and interruptions. However, this does not explain why student perceptions do not also reflect their teachers' views.

A further factor to consider concerns the nature of the scales employed. Whereas the children's scale asks for responses concerning the frequency of inattentiveness and poor behaviour, the teachers' scale asks for a rating of each child's behaviour using five descriptors (excellent, satisfactory, unacceptable and so on). Thus, patterns of behaviour that might be considered 'good' by one teacher might still involve behaviours that are perceived as problematic by the children. Given the data obtained from this and related studies, we believe that the Russian teachers demonstrated higher expectations of, or norms for, student behaviour than did their Western peers.

One of the ways of minimising disruption from uninterested students is to engage in an 'implicit bargain' (Sedlak *et al.*, 1986) in which teachers and students come to an unspoken agreement that few heavy academic demands will be made in return for an acceptable level of compliance. Where demands are low, such a bargain can include the following essential features:

> . . . relatively little concern for academic content; a willingness to tolerate, if not encourage, diversion from the specified knowledge to be presented or discussed; the substitution of genial banter and conversation for concentrated academic exercises; improvisational instructional adaptation to student preference for or indifference towards specific subject matter or pedagogical techniques; the 'negotiation' of class content, assignments, and standards; and a high degree of teacher autonomy in managing the level of academic engagement, personal interaction, and course content. (p. 7)

While such features may be instantly recognisable in many English and American schools, particularly those serving the most disadvantaged communities, they would rarely be recognised as features of Russian schooling. It would be fatuous to argue, however, that the difference rests merely in the professionalism and standards of the teachers. English and American teachers have been frequently criticised for having low expectations of children, particularly those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, yet these do not feature in a motivational vacuum. While preferred pedagogic practices may result in the provision of tasks that are more or less demanding of children, it is also likely that low teacher demands are as much a consequence of student disengagement as they are a cause (Steinberg, 1996).

It would, of course, be a folly to suggest that all Russian children are eager to learn and work to the maximum of their abilities. Although not a feature of our interviews, what we witnessed in our lesson observations was that rather than disrupting their classes, the less motivated students tended to withdraw into their own thoughts. In their comparative study of Russian and German classrooms, Glowka (1995) noted that whereas German teachers were confronted by disaffected students and had to exert themselves to maintain discipline, the attention of the Russian teacher

> . . . is fixed on his task, and he directs his teaching to those pupils who can stay with him. He does not notice the many pupils who

spend a whole school day hardly saying anything, who find no opportunity to be really active and to use their opportunities . . . In the Russian schools the pupils [as yet!] seem to rub along with this. (Glowka, 1995, p. 229)

The use of the phrase 'as yet!' may reflect recognition that social changes in Russia might reduce such compliance. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that Russian children's orientation to teachers may be declining somewhat, particularly in the case of boys (Bocharova and Lerner, 2000) and that older adolescents are becoming more critical of their education (Iartsev, 2000) (see Chapter 8). While such a transformation is a source of concern for social commentators, negativity in school is still unlikely to bear comparison with children in many Western countries.

6
Teacher Perceptions, Beliefs and Practices

In this chapter we report an analysis of teachers' perceptions of key influences upon student motivation. The analysis is based upon detailed interviews with 108 primary and secondary school teachers in the three milieux, undertaken at the end of the 1990s (Hufton *et al*., 2003). We found that, although there were differences between individual teachers within each milieu, teachers across all three milieux coincided in their views about what were the key variables affecting student motivation to learn in school. What they could not be aware of was that the parameters of these variables were strongly influenced by contextualised school practices and cultural pre-suppositions and values. In what follows, we look first at points of coincidence and then at some aspects of the contexts of apparent agreement. In conclusion, we consider the status of the points of coincidence, given the contextual differences.

Points of coincidence

Parental involvement

As teachers saw it, certain parental practices had a beneficial effect on student motivation. It helped where parents brought up their children to accept the discipline of schooling, normally supported the demands of school and took a regular interest in their child's school work. It was the St Petersburg teachers who were the most likely to worry where that interest became excessive.

> Some of the parents sit with their children and work together and maybe they control them too much. Maybe they need more freedom to do something alone. (St Petersburg teacher)

It also helped if parents checked that assigned homework was done, took a judicious part in learning at home and homework, and shared any problems in the upbringing of the child with the teacher. Further support for motivation might come where parents valued schooling because of its role in their own career and valued education as a form of human development:

> Those parents, who themselves had an education, and value it, tend to transmit that to their kids. (Sunderland teacher)

> If the family are highly educated, the students usually are motivated. (St Petersburg teacher)

Informing parents about their child's achievement was also seen as strongly motivating. Teachers in all three milieux thought that the most effective sanction was parental disapproval of progress, or behaviour, and consequent parental discipline. All had met parents who would not give support, or parents who would offer support, but then fail to deliver, or a very small number of parents from whom they did not wish to evoke the forms of punishment likely to be dealt out:

> One boy had some difficulties and I told the parents about it and they punished him – physically. It was bad for the boy. I decided not to warn them again. (St Petersburg teacher)

> I sent a boy home and I heard of him being beaten and I vowed I wouldn't do that again. (Sunderland teacher)

Teachers associated poorer student motivation with parental inability, or failure to supply support. In all three milieux, teachers identified some parents whom they perceived as too disordered, or self-centred in their personal lives, to be able to provide a secure and consistent domestic environment for their children's educational development:

> You have parents who find it difficult to cope on a daily basis organising themselves, let alone organising family and children. (Sunderland teacher)

Student–teacher relations

Teachers thought that students worked harder, in and out of class, where they liked and/or respected the teacher, also where they thought

that the teacher liked them as a person, recognised and valued their efforts and respected their aspirations and feelings.

> A lot of it is probably actually liking the teacher, that personal rapport. (Kentucky teacher)

> You will study better because you like the person you are taught by. (St Petersburg teacher)

> If they know that we really think a lot of them, I think they will try their hardest to make us proud. (Kentucky teacher)

Many teachers also thought that motivation was higher in classes where relationships generally were free of hostility and tasks were within reach.

Enjoyment of and engagement with learning

Teachers unsurprisingly considered that liking for a subject increased motivation. They also thought that liking a subject and liking a teacher were mutually interactive, so that liking a teacher could induce a sufficient engagement for a subject to become liked, and vice-versa.

Rewards, grades and sanctions

In all three milieux, teachers recognised that both symbolic and material rewards could motivate students. They thought that students tended to value symbolic over material rewards, as they matured. Teachers preferred symbolic to material rewards, seeing these as more readily transitional to student self-motivation. Praise was seen as an important symbolic reward for younger and lower-attaining students.

> The most important thing is to say that, 'You are a good student'. (St Petersburg teacher)

> It's encouragement all the way through! (Sunderland teacher)

> Any kind of encouragement and praise helps. (St Petersburg teacher)

Success was seen as rewarding in itself and many teachers thought it was important to arrange tasks so that students could experience success, which was then thought to be motivating for subsequent endeavours:

> I think doing well motivates them to do well. (Sunderland teacher)

The use of grades to motivate was controversial, both in terms of desirability and effectiveness, in all three milieux. The great majority of teachers wished their students to be motivated to pursue knowledge, or skill, or understanding, for future utility or for personal satisfaction. They thought that 'making the grade' they desired could, for some students, substitute for pursuing longer-term learning-goals. In terms of effectiveness, the use of grades was thought to be most effective with younger students, and to diminish with age. They were thought to be highly motivating to the most successful students, but to be progressively demotivating to those who persistently gained low grades.

Sanctions, such as loss of school privileges, or repeating work, or detentions, or suspension from school, were perceived as successful in proportion to the infrequency with which they were used with individual students.

Use of out-of-class time

In all three countries, most teachers saw computer games, watching television and too much 'hanging about' streets, yards or malls with friends as common ways to waste valuable time and distract from homework or more improving pastimes. However, there were also some in each country who thought that children were entitled to a 'childhood', which included a measure of permitted idleness, 'playful' leisure and socialising with friends.

Employment prospects

In all three milieux, teachers reported that future employment prospects were a factor in students' motivation. The effect of the factor varied with age, perceived personal threat of future unemployment and the current school achievement of students. Teachers did not see the risk of personal unemployment as figuring largely in the motivational calculus of most students under 13 in any milieu. Few students under 15 were actively pursuing specific career interests, but many aimed to get qualifications which would keep the door open to later educational progress in line with the level of their career aspirations. In all three milieux, teachers saw students' estimates of the likelihood of future unemployment as tending to have a negative impact on their motivation – the more so where students were lower achieving. However, the relationship between students' potential risk of unemployment and their motivation involved a number of complex intervening variables, which differed between milieux, and which are further considered, below.

Peer influence

In all three milieux, teachers thought that individuals' motivation to learn could be influenced by peer behaviours and attitudes.

Contextualising apparent coincidence

Despite high cross-cultural concurrence amongst teachers' opinions about student motivation, more detailed contextual examination highlighted a number of important differences.

Parental involvement

As we found, and as has been widely reported elsewhere (Grant, 1972; Dunstan, 1978; Muckle, 1990; Holmes *et al.*, 1995; O'Brien, 2000; Webber, 2000; Hufton and Elliott, 2000; Elliott and Hufton, 2003), high parental involvement in their children's education has been a norm for Russian parents since the 1930s. Whilst St Petersburg teachers' opinions about the importance of the parental role seem not to be sharply different from those of the Sunderland and Kentucky teachers, these have been understood as operating in a rather different context. Under the Soviet system, teachers were supposed to take the lead not only in the successful education (*obrazovanie*), but also in the 'upbringing' (*vospitanie*) of children. There was strong political and normative pressure for parents to accede to teachers' leadership. During *perestroika*, there was something of a backlash against teachers for their earlier propagandising role, but their continuing commitment to children's welfare seemed to have restored their standing. As a result, there had been a resumption of parents' commitment to close partnership in the child's education, assistance to the school and participation in the class committees that obtained under the Soviets, with the difference that parents were now more likely to negotiate, rather than simply comply with, the terms of the partnership.

By contrast, in both Sunderland and Kentucky, though schools were under strong governmental pressure to bring parents into a more effective educational partnership, the extent to which this involved the school taking the initiative in building the partnership had yet to be deeply habituated in many teachers' thinking and practices, or accepted as normative by many students and parents.

The Sunderland schools in which we sampled teacher views reflected the diversity of the city. Most catchment areas were to some extent

socially mixed, but some could have a predominance of students from one or another of the various kinds of background characterising the city. In some schools, the intake was more socially homogenous; in others, students might fall into quite distinctive groups. In these latter cases, it could be hard for schools to identify and project a common ethos for all their students, and the effects of disaffected groups could loom large as a problem for teachers. Many teachers saw parental support as correlated with family socioeconomic status. Thus a teacher in one school could say,

> It's a fairly middle-class area. The parents are keen that their children receive the best possible education. (Sunderland teacher)

Parents from other backgrounds tended to be perceived as falling into one of three types. There were those who were supportive, or very supportive of their children's education, but who lacked personal experience of what was involved in succeeding in school:

> They value learning in so much as they want the child to do well and they want the child to be praised and they want success. Their problem is that many of them haven't really experienced, or don't know what we mean by learning. (Sunderland teacher)

Others were perceived as uninterested in their children's education and resistant – sometimes to the point of hostility – to schools' attempts to undertake it:

> They see their own pleasure as being more important than their kids' welfare and they are selfish. (Sunderland teacher)

> Their ambition lies in a student getting a job, earning some money. (Sunderland teacher)

A third group was not necessarily resistant, but their lack of parenting skills was thought to prevent them offering practical support:

> They can see what they should be doing, but they are not able to enforce that . . . they are not able to carry that through with the child at home. (Sunderland teacher)

Few teachers had any doubt that long-term parental unemployment was a principal cause. One harked back to a time when

> We had better employment, particularly in the north east. We had factories, we had pits. We had all kinds of opportunities for manual, clerical and routine jobs . . . The 80s revolution made a much harder society, particularly for kids. (Sunderland teacher)

One perceived effect of unemployment was significant community and family stress and depression.

> They feel as though they are . . . they are on the scrap heap, sometimes, I think. That unfortunately rubs off onto the children. (Sunderland teacher)

> There's a lot of disillusionment . . . and apathy. It's just almost . . . they're in a rut and there isn't any sort of, you know . . . they can't set their sights any higher, to see any point in moving on. (Sunderland teacher)

> You have parents who find it difficult to cope on a daily basis organising themselves, let alone organising family and children. (Sunderland teacher)

It could also generate a serious narrowness of horizon and experience:

> We're also living in a close-knit community, in which people very rarely move out of the estate, never mind Sunderland. So what they see out there in their environment *is* their world, and they don't see much further than that. (Sunderland teacher)

A shortage of money could also limit leisure opportunities:

> They have to pay to get into the leisure centre, or into a disco, and in an area of social deprivation it's very difficult for them to do so. (Sunderland teacher)

In communities in which unemployment had become endemic, teachers could understand why some families might have settled for a, perhaps unavoidable, dependency and, sometimes, irresponsibility.

The state system has created a situation where all the things that they want and need in life are there without having to work for them. (Sunderland teacher)

The worry here was that children were being brought up in homes in which

. . . they're still managing to have a car and a satellite television, so they don't really see the value of work as something which is actually going to provide a means of advancement for them, personally. (Sunderland teacher)

From this, there might be two possible consequences:

They think the state will actually bale them out. They will get provided for no matter what, so they don't value education. (Sunderland teacher)

and, no less worrying,

They seem to live in an ideal world, where everybody has rights, but no responsibilities. They don't like the hard path of learning responsibility and that brings them into conflict with adults of all sorts. (Sunderland teacher)

When these factors combined, teachers thought that children could be growing up in

. . . homes where the parents don't really seem at all concerned about the child's education, or even their well-being. These are the parents who resent the school contacting them, resent coming in for meetings when it's about the child, who are more likely either to shout at the child or to say, 'Oh yes! Well I know he does that, but what can I do?' (Sunderland teacher)

and also where parents were unable to command the respect of their children:

The lack of respect I've seen people give to their parents is appalling. It really is appalling. (Sunderland teacher)

I hate to think what their parents go through at home. (Sunderland teacher)

A few communities were very near to social breakdown and isolation.

There's a mentality about not – what we call – 'grassing'. If somebody has done a misdemeanour in the community, there is a group of people who are frightened to say anything, because they are worried about repercussions. It's a mafia kind of state in that respect, in this particular area. (Sunderland teacher)

In such communities, members could

. . . bracket the police and the social services and, you know, schools and colleges, and so on, as another means of controlling their life and many of them don't like that and object strongly to it. (Sunderland teacher)

Such anti-authoritarianism could be in a circular relationship with delinquency and crime. Delinquency led to brushes with authority. Resentment of authority could be perceived to authorise certain forms of crime:

There are too many who turn to law breaking and sometimes it's at a very simple level. Car theft is a classic one. Underage drinking. Drugs. Theft from shops . . . Those sorts of things. (Sunderland teacher)

To a greater degree than these extracts can bring out, teachers often empathised with students (and their families) who were caught up in such cycles of deprivation. It was not that they approved of the behaviour, or attitudes, or that they relished dealing with it in school. On the contrary, they saw it as profoundly damaging for the students involved and often disruptive of learning and the quality of school life for other students, but they thought they understood its origins and held back from condemnation. Some of them saw themselves as in the 'front line' in dealing with it:

I am convinced that teachers, even more so, even than the police, now, in this society, are the one figure that they . . . still have some control over them, albeit tenuous sometimes. (Sunderland teacher)

Others thought it impossible to avoid substituting for inadequate homes.

> In this area, where there is very poor home life for a lot of children, we are the parents. (Sunderland teacher)

In Kentucky, teachers saw most parents as aspiring for their children

> Most of them want their children to go onto college. It doesn't matter what level – if you've got a parent that's a doctor, or got a parent that's just a labourer – most of them want their children to do well and to get a job and be a success in life. (Kentucky teacher)

> Most of the people in this county want better for their children than they had themselves. (Kentucky teacher)

but they thought that parental aspiration tended to decrease as the students got older:

> In the elementary level you have almost a hundred percent parent involvement with the students, but then as you get up middle school and high school, it drops off drastically. (Kentucky teacher)

Where this occurred, teachers thought that some parents did not

> . . . see beyond the scope of jobs in the area. So, you know, it's kind of hard to push your child to do something, if you are not really aware exactly what they should be doing. (Kentucky teacher)

Such parents wanted their children to do well

> . . . but they don't actually monitor their activities . . . they don't monitor their homework . . . they don't get real involved as far as *pushing* them to do better. (Kentucky teacher)

whilst there were others who did not

> . . . see a use for [education] . . . they want them on the farm, they want them to drive a truck, that type of thing. (Kentucky teacher)

Some were thought to actively resist the educative efforts of the school

Education is a threat to a number of our parents: 'Don't go beyond me'. (Kentucky teacher)

and sometimes to pose a real dilemma for teachers where they did not

. . . want any responsibility . . . but it makes them very angry if *we* do too much. (Kentucky teacher)

In some other cases, where there was support, it seemed to owe more to the desire to stand well in the community than to the valuing of education as such:

The majority of the parents in this county don't want the humiliation of their child not behaving. (Kentucky teacher)

Like the Sunderland teachers, the Kentucky teachers also reported problems arising where parental discipline was inconsistent or insufficient:

In many of the homes, parents say, 'You're grounded!' The next thing you know, they forgot all about that. So many . . . after they leave the school grounds, it's the same old habit. (Kentucky teacher)

and they, too, had met parents who

. . . tell me that they can't control their child, that anything they say or do doesn't work. (Kentucky teacher)

Alongside these more traditional problems for schooling, changes over the last two or three decades had swelled the size of a semi- or unemployed underclass, dependent on welfare, whose children were often multiply disadvantaged. Sometimes the problem took the form of domestic instability

Sometimes they don't have phones and sometimes they move frequently, maybe are evicted. (Kentucky teacher)

perhaps originating from extra-marital pregnancy or marital breakdown:

A lot of our kids come from single parent families and a lot of times, there may not be either parent – they're living with their

grandparents – and we find that to be probably the number one concern. I think it's a huge problem in our community. (Kentucky teacher)

In other cases, practical and emotional instability in the home generated insecurity for students so that

It's hard for them to concentrate and that's because of everything else going on in their lives too. And they have no values at home. (Kentucky teacher)

Where families had been unable to break out the underclass for some time, cycles of deprivation had established themselves:

If they were growing up in a home with welfare they tend themselves to go on welfare, because they don't have positive role models. (Kentucky teacher)

Sometimes, in such cases, a peculiarity of Kentucky state welfare law encouraged parents to keep a failing child in high school – repeating grades and delaying graduation – because the state paid out for dependent children. As one teacher explained,

They don't care if their kid graduates or not, because they know if they get a diploma, then they can't draw their cheque – their disability cheque. That's going to interfere with that, so they really don't care if they get a diploma. (Kentucky teacher)

In other cases, where relations with the school broke down, teachers thought that some parents, often those with children more in need of school help, abused another provision of Kentucky state law. This, which had originated as a result of pressure from some religious groups, permitted parents to remove their offspring from the state schools and provide instead 'home schooling'. Home schooling was supposed to meet certain standards, but teachers thought that it could happen that

When parents become angry with something – like the child is not receiving the grades they want, or if we are trying to discipline the child, or if we're trying to work with them with study habits – they will get angry, take a child out and say they are going to do home schooling. And the parents are not educated people. (Kentucky teacher)

Less extremely, but much more commonly, teachers were worried about wider changes in family life, affecting the more prosperous and successful parents, which they thought impacted negatively on child-rearing:

It's become a two-person working household and, too many times, kids go home and there's nobody there . . . and they simply get into things that they shouldn't. (Kentucky teacher)

Kentucky teachers also noted that, as adolescence progressed, it might not only be children who gained greater independence:

By the time you know the kids at this age [16] get their driver's licence, it gives the parents time to relax a little bit, you know, or to get back to doing things as husband and wife, for themselves, so they have a tendency to stray away from keeping their contact with their child, and it's probably more important at that age to keep contact. (Kentucky teacher)

In St Petersburg, the great majority of teachers reported significant, often practical support from parents. One teacher spoke for many, explaining,

I think, generally, as a society, we still appreciate very much the people with higher education and a lot of people believe that those who have got higher education work more professionally, work better in any area where they have to, and I think this would be one of the major reasons why parents would value school education because it will be seen as a preparatory step for higher education. (St Petersburg teacher)

Teachers in St Petersburg were far more likely than in either Kentucky or Sunderland to express concern that parents' interest might take counterproductive forms.

They are quite tough with their children and they want them to study, to be very diligent. (St Petersburg teacher)

Very often people want their own ambitions to be fulfilled by their children. And sometimes they actually break children . . . break their spirit. (St Petersburg teacher)

A problem with parents is that very often they overestimate the abilities of their children and press their children far too much. (St Petersburg teacher)

Though far fewer in number that in Kentucky, or Sunderland, there was a small minority of families which failed to provide the otherwise normally high levels of support. Some of these were from the newly wealthy:

Some parents can say, 'She is only a teacher at school. She may have two degrees, but I can earn millions, but I am not educated'. So that's the problem. (St Petersburg teacher)

Whilst others were thought not to

. . . take care of their children because their only task is to bring them up to earn money for their drinking. (St Petersburg teacher)

Parent–teacher relations

The relationship between teachers, parents and students was affected by a major contextual difference between the milieux. Not only did Russian primary school teachers keep the same class from Years 1 to 4, but secondary school teachers – both subject teachers and form-tutors – also kept the same mixed-ability set of individuals through Years 5–9 of the 'incomplete secondary school'. This gave Russian teachers, students and parents a protracted period during which to learn about each others' traits and expectations. The Russian parent–teacher partnership was well habituated:

They often ring me up, because every student has my [home] telephone number, so we have this connection from both sides. I can ring them up and they can ring me up. (St Petersburg teacher)

Further, teacher–parent relationships could become quite close, where students and parents could relate to a specific set of ten or so teachers throughout a school career:

Lots of families of my children became part of my life – of my private life – because we have got celebrations in class with parents, lots of things to be done, to prepare and to organise this or that sort of event, to make the programme, to buy presents for children and everything . . . to celebrate their birthdays. (St Petersburg teacher)

One consequence was to allow most Russian teachers – working with form-tutors – to fulfil many elements of a 'pastoral' role:

 The form-tutor is a kind of 'second mother'. (St Petersburg teacher)

Moreover, their pastoral interventions could be early and timely, with a good chance of forestalling the development of more entrenched difficulties.

By contrast, it was exceptional for most classes in either England or Kentucky to keep the same teacher beyond a year (except, in England, for the two years leading up to the 16-plus 'school-leaving' exam). Consequently, each teacher had to 'learn' a new class – and each class, a new teacher – each year, with the assistance only of paper records and informal conversations with the previous teacher.

Discontinuity also had implications for Sunderland and Kentucky teachers' relations with parents. Each year, parents and teachers might represent an unknown for each other:

I could recognise them, like you are Mr and Mrs – I don't know – whoever. But I couldn't say, you know, 'You are…' and I think perhaps it would be nicer, on a more personal basis, to actually know . . . you know . . . where they have come from. (Sunderland teacher)

Given the limited possibility of contact over a school year, and the likelihood of change at the year's end, neither might think it worth investing the effort to come to know each other well. Parents might then feel reluctant to share deeper aspirations and anxieties with the teacher. Nor might the teacher welcome them doing so, except where a student presented a challenging behaviour problem, since there might not be much that could be done to help with deeper-seated or more long-standing learning and motivational problems, over one school year. Equally, teachers might be diffident about their ability to offer advice about student development, except as relating to the subject and year of prescribed study for which they were directly responsible.

English and Kentucky teachers had little opportunity to follow the development of individual students over a five-year cycle. St Petersburg teachers quite commonly described individual students as being at some – progressive, or more awkward – stage of development, whereas Sunderland and Kentucky teachers were considerably more likely to categorise individuals by their membership in a higher- or lower-achieving group, within their age cohort. The organisation of their work required

St Petersburg teachers to develop the pedagogical capability to not only respond to a wide variety of developmental patterns, but also put teachers (and, indeed, students) in a position directly to recollect and review relevant, earlier, shared teaching and learning encounters. As teachers 'recycled', picking up new Year 1 or Year 5 classes, they had considerable opportunity to come to understand learning, not only as a topic-by-topic response, but also in terms of how students incorporated it into prior understanding.

In the English and the Kentucky systems, aspects of 'upbringing', which were part of the St Petersburg teacher's everyday role, were more likely to be disaggregated and confided to bureaucratic structures of pastoral monitoring and official sanctions than left to the teacher:

> We have some teachers, Heads of Year, whose main function is to deal with the social welfare of the children . . . and if there were any particular concerns about individual students, information about those concerns would filter down to teachers via Heads of Year through the pastoral system, through form tutors. (Sunderland teacher)

These might have correctional or, more overtly in Kentucky, therapeutic overtones:

> Kids who are having problems, the counsellors will relay those problems to us, or just relay the portions that they can, about things that are happening. (Kentucky teacher)

The highly personalised relationships of the Russian system enabled teachers to combine academic and pastoral roles and work with parents in upbringing. In both the English and Kentucky systems, the fragmentation of the academic task and structural constraints upon the provision of pastoral care may have risked an alienating 'depersonalisation' of schooling for many students and parents.

> The school likes the parent–teacher contact to be through a structure . . . because the problem is, if you let teachers meet parents ad hoc, that might cause problems. Some may not handle a situation very well, so . . . they tend to shy away from that. (Sunderland teacher)

Enjoyment of and engagement with learning

Although teachers in each milieu reported that students were more highly motivated to study by topics or learning processes which excited

personal interest, there was a significant difference between them in the presumed role of interest in stimulating an adequate motivation to learn effectively in school. For St Petersburg teachers, whilst they certainly did not aim to teach uninterestingly, a student's personal interest was more an unpredictable bonus than something which conditioned their planning. In contrast, Kentucky and Sunderland seemed to feel professionally obligated to find interesting topics and ways of teaching:

> If you've prepared interesting work for them, and you're supporting them, and they understand what they've got to do, then that motivates them. (Sunderland teacher)

> We are here to teach them and we're supposed to make it fun, and make it interesting and relevant. (Kentucky teacher)

> A kid has to enjoy what you're doing. (Kentucky teacher)

At the same time in Sunderland, and more so in Kentucky, teachers accepted variation in interest, both across time and between subjects, rather as a 'given' of nature, than as a pedagogical challenge:

> All of us are interested in some things and not interested in others. (Kentucky teacher)

> [Everyone] slides periodically. That happens with all of us. Sometimes you know, in life, we have other things that are more important and we put things on the back burner. (Kentucky teacher)

St Petersburg teachers also saw students' personal interest as unpredictable:

> You have got as many motivations as you have people. (St Petersburg teacher)

They, too, recognised that students might dislike some subjects, and thought it was easier for students to learn where there was interest, but viewed not interest, but study as the prime prerequisite for learning. There was more involved here than a greater commitment to a work ethic amongst St Petersburg teachers. The English and American teachers were informed by a different theory of the relationship between teaching and learning than the Russian teachers. In Sunderland and Kentucky, teachers talked as though learning was primarily a consequence of classroom teaching, and so felt obliged to attempt to motivate their students

by making teaching lively and stimulating. As one of the teachers cited above states, there is a widespread perception in the United States that learning should be 'fun' although, more recently, increasing concern about international comparison has resulted in something of an academic backlash (Bempechat, 1998). In St Petersburg, as in other European countries, learning was perceived as significantly a consequence of studying, which it was the role of teaching to sequence, inform, guide and support. Certainly the St Petersburg teachers we (e.g. Hufton and Elliott, 2000) and others (Alexander, 2000; Wilson *et al.*, 2001) have observed were concerned to give fast-paced, varied and lively lessons, but these were set in a context in which the presupposition that preparatory study and subsequent reinforcing learning would take place was axiomatic.

Elsewhere (Hufton *et al.*, 2002) we have asked whether Russian pedagogy rather works to enhance the role of what Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) have termed 'situational interest' – that is, interest which is 'generated by conditions and/or stimuli in the environment that focus attention' (Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000, p. 152), and which fosters in students the capacity to deploy 'strategies to make their performance of tasks more interesting and eventually develop an interest in an activity that had been uninteresting' (Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000, p. 154). As they further point out,

> Focusing on the potential for situational interest in the material and mode of presentation may help teachers promote learning for all students, regardless of their idiosyncratic interests. (p. 157)

Whereas in Sunderland and Kentucky, teachers thought they should – but did not know how to – 'connect' to what was construed as student individual interest, in the St Petersburg context, though individual interest was seen as enhancing motivation, it was not relied upon.

Ability and effort

In all three milieux, teachers saw students' success in school as generally more down to effort than to ability:

> Anybody can be successful through hard work. (Kentucky teacher)

> A lot of achievement is based on hard work put in by the students. (Sunderland teacher)

> Without hard work, without industrious work, nothing can be achieved. (St Petersburg teacher)

However, these views reflected the need for students to meet local curriculum demands in order to count as 'successful', and the character and volume of these needs varied between the milieux. In St Petersburg, the teaching–learning-assessment process required a high and constant level of attention, to the total curricular demand, throughout the school week. The St Petersburg curricular demand – in terms of volume and depth – was probably the highest of the three. In Sunderland, the assessment process for students aged 14-plus called for a strong focus on the key pieces of coursework which would contribute to their public examination grades. The notional Sunderland curricular demand was probably not much less than the St Petersburg demand, but it was accepted both that students would progressively opt out of subjects and that some might aim for lesser achievement (lower 'Levels') than others. Thus, the real aggregate demand was lower than for St Petersburg. In Kentucky, traditionally, students had primarily needed to work hard to get a good grade on teacher tests and on a relatively limited number of relatively short coursework assignments. There was also greater opportunity for option, towards more personally favoured and also less demanding curriculum elements, than in either St Petersburg or Sunderland. KERA's emphasis on more sustained writing, for 'portfolios' and 'open-response' questions, was no doubt impacting on the Kentucky characterisation of effort, but it still seemed that success could be achieved with lower effort, and in relation to a less demanding curriculum, than was the case in either Sunderland or St Petersburg.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the great majority of Kentucky teachers predominantly valued hard work as the road to success. Few Kentucky teachers seemed to have a notion of ability as a fixed entity. Only a small number added to the valuation of hard work, the riders that

> It is easier for those where it comes natural. (Kentucky teacher)

> . . . there are those who do have some talent and those will excel a little bit further. (Kentucky teacher)

Some Kentucky teachers noted that some students seemed to have a notion of ability as fixed:

> Some of them think they have to have been born smart in order to grasp something, you know. Some of them have low self esteem and they think they can't . . . so they get that in their head and they don't work very hard. . . . That negativity transfers over and I think it keeps some of them from reaching their potential, or raising their potential. (Kentucky teacher)

The Sunderland teachers seemed to be at a transitional stage, moving, perhaps under the influence of National Curriculum assessment demands, to value effort as highly or more highly than ability. The majority would have agreed with the teacher who said,

> I don't think any amount of natural talent's going to make any difference, unless the child actually gets to grips with the actual learning that's involved. (Sunderland teacher)

but a number seemed to retain notions of ability as a fixed entity and would have agreed that

> . . . it is impossible to make up for basic lack of talent just by working hard, unfortunately. (Sunderland teacher)

and conversely

> . . . there are some students who don't work, who can still get better grades. (Sunderland teacher)

though few might have gone so far as to say,

> With natural ability . . . I think children will succeed, regardless of their circumstances, environment, or input from the teacher. (Sunderland teacher)

In general, the St Petersburg teachers thought that hard work was the more important. However, more like the Sunderland than the Kentucky teachers, a number of the St Petersburg teachers thought that, particularly in relation to the highest achievement,

> . . . each is important, but I think natural abilities take the first place. Natural abilities are a little bit more important. (St Petersburg teacher)

However, few, if any, seemed to have a notion of 'natural abilities' as 'fixed'. St Petersburg teachers rather expressed ideas of ability as developmental:

> . . . natural abilities are very important and if parents develop them from early childhood it's a good thing. (St Petersburg teacher)

> . . . those who make a lot of effort very often manage to develop their natural abilities and increase their information field. (St Petersburg teacher)

and metacognitive:

> . . . they can learn how to learn and it will immediately tell on their marks. (St Petersburg teacher)

Their general view is perhaps well summed up by the teacher who said,

> I believe that perhaps there are very few people who are exceptionally untalented in mathematics. Perhaps, if there are cases like this, it is a consequence of the fact that very simple things were explained to them in a very difficult way. (St Petersburg teacher)

Homework

As we note elsewhere, the level of homework demand reported by students and parents varied greatly between St Petersburg and the other two milieux. In our interviews with teachers we sought to understand their views about the place of homework and factors impacting upon its use. The expressed views can be summed up succinctly: in St Petersburg, teachers, because of the role of homework in the teaching–learning process, saw it as essential; in Sunderland, most teachers saw it as necessary in order to do well in school; and, in Kentucky, teachers varied in valuing it, but tended on the whole to make restricted demands for it.

Three teacher comments caught at the essence of the long-standing and deeply embedded St Petersburg approach:

> In our system, homework is an essential part of the whole teaching process. You simply . . . there are no questions . . . everyone does it. (St Petersburg teacher)

> We wouldn't know what to do and how to organise the process without any homework. (St Petersburg teacher)

> Studying is light and not studying is darkness! (St Petersburg teacher)

Another explained why:

> If they do not do their homework regularly, they cannot participate properly in the work of the whole class. (St Petersburg teacher)

Students who did not regularly do the often substantial amounts of homework could not meet the demands of the St Petersburg teaching–learning process. In that case, there was a further unacceptable risk that they would

> . . . try to find something for themselves to do and it usually involves other students, surrounding them. (St Petersburg teacher)

However, although homework was perceived as a necessity, its volume was controversial:

> Because many of our own children go to school, and we see that they spend so much time after school, all they do is . . . they do homework and they are not left with any free time. So we think it's wrong. (St Petersburg teacher)

But this was not a new controversy. It dated back to Soviet times and, though the volume of homework was thought to be problematic, including for children's health in some cases

> You always get parents at either extreme: some say, 'You give too little homework'. Others would say, 'You give too much'. And I can't quite work out where should I be as a teacher, in order to suit both. (St Petersburg teacher)

It was not clear that any change could be imminently expected, particularly since parents, though concerned about adverse effects, mostly expected their children to have plenty of homework, as they had themselves.

> Parents appreciate it. They don't like it when their kids don't have much work to do. (St Petersburg teacher)

The English state school system had inherited three different traditions, with respect to homework. It was never normally expected of children of up to 11, in primary schools. Between 1½ and more than 3 hours each school night, depending on the age of the young person, had been expected of students attending selective 'Grammar' or 'High' (secondary) schools, between 11 and 18. Whether the 11–15-year-old students attending the non-selective secondary 'Modern' schools were expected to do homework was a matter for their school and many required little,

or none, except for the usually small minority of students who were preparing for public examinations. As secondary schools became comprehensive from 1965, it was not unusual for the requirement for homework to reflect the 'stream' ('track') in which students were placed, with the highest attaining streams expected to approximate the old Grammar school norms and the lowest to do a good deal less. Since the introduction of National Curriculum assessment, and the public comparison of schools' test achievements, both primary and particularly secondary schools have come under some pressure to require something nearer the Grammar school norms from the great majority, if not all their students, as one means of improving their results.

Given this history, there remained many English parents who experienced a minimum demand for homework during their own schooling:

> Some parents see it as a form of punishment, you know. (Sunderland teacher)

and also some older teachers who were not wholly persuaded that the benefits to be gained from requiring homework from lower attaining children justified the acrimony that could surround insisting on it.

> It's a great deal of hassle to insist on homework, because the children here are very volatile. (Sunderland teacher)

All of the secondary schools in our sample had increased demands for homework on all students, and most of the primary schools had introduced some, particularly for the older children. However, these were relatively recent innovations, and a number of parents and a few teachers were at a transitional stage in their acceptance.

It is important to stress that the great majority of teachers required and chased up homework from the majority of their classes and that the majority of students were largely supported and encouraged by their parents to do mostly what was required. Indeed

> There's a significant number who actually sort of spend all the time . . . just about . . . doing homework you know. Students who are really conscientious. (Sunderland teacher)

But, in some cases, where an increase in homework demand was particularly recent, it was found

. . . very, very difficult to start a homework regime when they become 13, or 14, or when they are heading for GCSE. It's impossible. They won't do it. They can't change.

They need a small amount of homework, on a regular basis, from an early age. (Sunderland teacher)

For some parents, too, older attitudes prevailed:

Some children will say, 'Well my dad doesn't think that we should be doing homework', or, 'My mum thinks that you should just work at school and not at home'. (Sunderland teacher)

Some parents might go further and make no place for, or give a low priority to, their child's homework:

If they are stuck in a living room, with the television on and one parent vacuuming the floor, the other cooking tea, and small children running around, they don't get the chance to work at home. (Sunderland teacher)

They may be discouraged from doing their work because the parents want them to do something else. (Sunderland teacher)

And a couple of teachers thought that the new demands were unreasonable:

There's over much homework, you know, and the kids' social life has just disappeared. And they're staying up till 10 every night – this is Year 7s. (Sunderland teacher)

This notion of kids doing two hours of homework a night is appalling. I think it's disgusting. (Sunderland teacher)

In Kentucky, teachers did give students tasks to perform outside the lesson, but on the whole, their demands were not such as to occupy a great deal of time and students were often able to complete the tasks during the school day, in some combination of the last minutes of a lesson

I try to give them time in class to do their work. (Kentucky teacher)

and the daily tutor periods. Students reported that the greatest demands on them were when they had 'projects', which they thought could

involve unusual amounts of work, over several weeks, and when they had to study and revise for class tests.

Many schools did not closely regulate the amount of homework given

> There's no set policy for homework. Each teacher is allowed to assign what they want. We do have a chart. (Kentucky teacher)

and in a number of schools, where there was regulation, it was to prevent the amount of homework exceeding a prescribed maximum.

> In this school, there's a limitation put on it. Teachers are not to give any more homework than would cumulatively add up to an hour. (Kentucky teacher)

There were teachers who thought that homework had beneficial effects, but they tended to be constrained by local norms to restrict their demands:

> They called me 'the homework queen' and I had to stop this, because I couldn't get my work in. (Kentucky teacher)

Many more teachers were more ambivalent:

> I don't think that we need to burden the student down and give them hours and hours of homework, but I'm not so sure that a little bit of practice is not beneficial. (Kentucky teacher)

Others thought it pointless to swim against the tide:

> The reason why I don't give homework is because they wouldn't do it. They wouldn't do it. They don't like to carry the books. (Kentucky teacher)

And this tended to be reflected in the actual demands made, which were relatively low:

> Every week, I'll probably give them a one-page paper. I'll usually tell them around two hundred words. (Kentucky teacher)

> I try not to give homework for the weekend unless its a project, like star observation. (Kentucky teacher)

On the face of it, the relationship between lessons and homework might appear similar in all three milieux. Teachers appear to say similar things:

> What you do in the lesson is then backed up and consolidated by what they do at home. (Sunderland teacher)

> Homework is things that we have already done in class, but it would reinforce. (Kentucky teacher)

> There is always an intervening pedagogical link between the work and the homework. Either preparation or reinforcement. (St Petersburg teacher)

However, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that the relationship is at its most direct in St Petersburg and considerably more direct there, than in Sunderland or Kentucky. As in a number of other European traditions, St Petersburg teachers conceptualise educating, not as a 'teaching–learning' process, but as a 'teaching–*studying*–learning' process (Kansanen *et al.*, 2000; see also, Fenstermacher, 1986). The set-up in St Petersburg may be best understood as an ongoing studying process, in which intervening lessons serve to orient, direct and motivate study and clarify ideas, procedures and principles in topics under study. Teachers take a very detailed responsibility for securing step-by-step learning for all the members of their classes and this necessitates a very close relationship between each lesson and its preceding and following homeworks. This relation may be reinforcing

> There is a direct connection between what they did in the lesson and what task I give for home. Everything should be repeated after the lesson. (St Petersburg teacher)

or preparatory:

> If the students don't do the homework for the next lesson, they won't be able to understand the new concept I am going to explain. (St Petersburg teacher)

Teachers explained their theory of the function of homeworks as being

> . . . a sort of 'training' of what we studied in the lesson, a repeating. (St Petersburg teacher)

At one level, this was intended to secure memorisation of the material. As one teacher explained,

> We have a concept of 'long-term memory'. . . . We try to move all our knowledge to this type of memory. (St Petersburg teacher)

However, St Petersburg teachers looked for substantially more than rote recall from their students. They progressively expected an active understanding of concepts and principles and – though classroom process might play the main part in securing this – students engaged in home study knew that they should aim beyond memorisation, which in effect was the minimum that was expected of them towards such understanding. 'Study' in the St Petersburg context meant looking at what one had memorised for sense, meaning and its relation to previous knowledge. As one teacher put it,

> The idea is to start something in the lesson and to form it into a skill at home. (St Petersburg teacher)

This was sometimes reflected in the setting of differentiated homework tasks, where students were asked to move up the level of demand to the extent that they were capable:

> The first variant makes a direct connection between what we covered during the lesson and what I give for homework. The second variant is to broaden the mind of children. For example, I give a topic and they should find some additional material relating to this topic. And the third variant is creative, they should find something out themselves. (St Petersburg teacher)

There were two ways in which a student, who did not do his or her homework regularly, could not 'participate properly in the work of the whole class'. Not only would the individual get left behind, but he or she would fail to make a proper contribution to the shared learning process. Because

> Homework is very often working for oneself and working for the group as well. (St Petersburg teacher),

individual students had a strong social motivation to support their class peers, by the thoroughness of their own study. The degree of integration

of lesson and homework in St Petersburg schools was further pointed up by two other features of the teaching–studying–learning process. It was important not just for students to 'keep up', but for teachers to maintain the step-by-step momentum of learning:

> If the class couldn't do the home task, I try to explain everything which was unclear to students. I try to give them more explanation. (St Petersburg teacher)

> I ask them, even if they are ill, to read the material. (St Petersburg teacher)

In Sunderland, it was perhaps only in modern foreign language lessons that teachers saw lesson and homework as integrated in a similar way as in St Petersburg:

> Homework in languages relates totally to the work that they're doing in lessons. It will either be an extension or a reinforcement of what they're doing in class at the time. (Sunderland teacher)

Otherwise, although Sunderland teachers thought there was a clear relationship, it was comparatively attenuated in that though the topics of lessons were also studied during homeworks, *specific* learning was rarely assessed in the subsequent lesson and it was rarely necessary to have acquired a sufficient grasp of the homework topic in order to progress learning during that lesson. There might be no adverse effect from not doing some homeworks, and where there were ill effects,

> For two or three weeks they may be able to get by without it, until they were really faced with a problem where that prior knowledge was required. (Sunderland teacher)

The Sunderland teachers' approach may well have been conditioned by the often less than direct relationship between lessons and the GCSE examination coursework assignments:

> For Years 10 and 11, the real focus and the real sort of hard work is on pieces of coursework for just about every subject. (Sunderland teacher)

Teachers were also influenced by the serious possibility that a number of students either would not do their homework or would do it perfunctorily. In some cases, they did not want to disadvantage weaker students:

> Although [homework is] an integral part of the work, I want it to be a bonus really, so I don't want anyone to underachieve because of that. (Sunderland teacher)

In other cases, they had no doubt found it in their interests, in terms of classroom survival with poorly motivated classes, not to depend on student preparation in their planning.

> There's always a contingency plan for people who haven't done their homework. (Sunderland teacher)

The relationship between lesson and homework in Kentucky is essentially similar to that in Sunderland. Teachers perceive a close relationship, at the level of topic, and, as in Sunderland, intend homework to reinforce and, though perhaps less often than in Sunderland, to prepare for lessons. As with coursework in Sunderland, there are some problems for students who miss homeworks because

> Each homework assignment does count as part of the grade, but it's just part of the overall cumulative, so if they decided not to do one assignment, that's not going to affect their grade drastically. (Kentucky teacher)

But the Kentucky system still relies significantly on learning in class and does not expect a major contribution to learning from home study. As one teacher said – one might wonder at his professional wisdom –

> I tell my students this all the time, 'It amazes me how little homework you can do and still understand'. (Kentucky teacher)

Rewards, grades and sanctions

Although teachers in all three milieux thought that praise and success were important motivators, the extent to which they praised, what they praised for and the amount of effort needed to achieve success and win praise varied greatly between the St Petersburg teachers on the one hand and the Sunderland and Kentucky teachers on the other.

In St Petersburg, praise tended to be reserved for particularly admirable levels of effort and performance. Here, teachers had few qualms about being critical of anyone who appeared to be underperforming. In contrast, Sunderland and Kentucky teachers were more ready to praise in less discriminating fashion and sought to minimise situations where students might experience failure. There was a greater tendency here to believe that criticising students' work would prove demotivating, except for some high attaining students:

> You need to be careful how you criticise. Some people can take constructive – we'll call it criticism – and do quite well with it. Other students – I think you need to know your student – other students cannot take that, you know. (Kentucky teacher)

> The brighter ones often know why you are very critical of their grades. The less able feel as though it's a personal comment. (Sunderland teacher)

Although some teachers in both St Petersburg and Kentucky thought that praise was important in generating, or sustaining some students' motivation

> [Students] value the respect of an adult for their work and they – at this age, they cannot quite value their work in itself. They can't judge it yet. (St Petersburg teacher)

> It's hard to get these kids to really do anything. When they do something I just praise them a lot. (Kentucky teacher)

It was Sunderland teachers in particular who deployed praise as part of a pedagogic strategy. Sometimes this seemed rather indiscriminate:

> What motivates them? Success! Rewards! Praise! (Sunderland teacher)

> I always try to just tell them the good things and let them try and work out the bad things for themselves so that they feel that they got praise for it, rather than any criticism. (Sunderland teacher)

In other cases, praise was a precursor to advice as to how work might be improved – a sugaring of the pill:

> I always start with a negative and then move to the positive, and we look at the work, and we just go through, basically, key ideas as to how they could have improved it. (Sunderland teacher)

> I always point out the good points – where their strengths are. I point out where the weaknesses are and why I feel that they're . . . what those weaknesses are and why they have got that . . . and then try to explain to them how they can improve. (Kentucky teacher)

Success was seen as rewarding in itself and many teachers thought it was important to arrange tasks so that students could experience success, which was then thought to be motivating for subsequent endeavours. In Sunderland, praise was particularly likely to be used with low-achieving and poorly motivated classes:

> The less able ones, it's more a carrot, you know. 'Come on! Let's do this!' It's encouragement: reinforcing, praising. The brighter ones you can say, 'Look, this is not good enough', and 'You can do better than this', and challenge them to show you their very best work. (Sunderland teacher)

However, a concern to ensure feelings of success could result in the provision of undemanding assignments. Both Sunderland and Kentucky teachers reported that they attempted to maintain motivation – particularly for lower attaining students – by setting work that was safely within their capabilities.

> It's pointless and a useless exercise to give children work which they can't do and that is de-motivating, very much so. (Sunderland teacher)

> I personally give them work that they can succeed on . . . because they're easily discouraged. There's a lot of them just don't want to do anything . . . When they do something, I just praise them a lot. (Kentucky teacher)

The differential effect of grades upon high and low achieving students was clearly a concern in each milieu:

> The students who are most motivated are the students who get the best grades. I think the students who get the low grades are not motivated by grades at all. (Sunderland teacher)

> I say, 'Well, you're going to get a "D"', and they say, 'Well . . . I'm not going to get a "C"' . . . and kids switch off at that. (Sunderland teacher)

> Those students who just want to get by, don't care. If they make a passing grade, they're fine, they're happy. The students who are 'A' students, 'B' students, they take it to heart. (Kentucky teacher)

St Petersburg teachers also recognised the same relation between marks and motivation, but appeared better able to deploy it with greater pedagogical freedom to secure motivation. Also, St Petersburg teachers made an active and progressive effort, as students grew older, to wean them from an over-concern for marks, as such, towards valuing knowledge and understanding in themselves:

> What I think is important is not that students are motivated by grades, but they should be motivated by the level of achievement. (St Petersburg teacher)

> I think that children should understand that their studies should meet their spiritual need. So marks shouldn't play an important role. (St Petersburg teacher)

Sunderland and Kentucky teachers seemed more to encourage students to value and strive for marks, though there were teachers who tried to encourage students to value and learn more from oral and written qualitative comments.

It seems likely that there was some variation between milieux in terms of what, or who, was being marked and there was certainly significant variation in teachers' freedom to mark according to their judgement. As we note in Chapter 3 Sunderland teachers were the least free. In England, assessment was highly standardised against a set of Attainment Levels on the National Curriculum. To have an accurate appreciation of how any particular student stood against the national standard had become part of an English teacher's professionalism. This had the effect of discouraging English teachers from using assessment motivationally. Were they to do so, they could risk appearing to be professionally irresponsible or incompetent. However, constant impersonal comparison with public criteria could demotivate.

Kentucky teachers were also supposed to grade impartially, but had remained able to do so largely on their own set of criteria. Yet more importantly, Kentucky teachers were still to a considerable, though decreasing, extent free to design the class tests and assignments to be graded. From our student interview data, it seems likely that, in many cases, assignments were designed as much to permit the reward

of favourable attitudes to work, as of academic quality in its outcome. To that extent, Kentucky teachers were able to use assessment motivationally, but at some possible risk to level of learning.

St Petersburg teachers were not only free to use assessment motivationally, but this was a valued pedagogical skill in the Russian system. One teacher expressed the situation quite directly –

> Marks are a tool in the hands of the teacher. Yes, they're a tool. (St Petersburg teacher)

whilst another stressed,

> To motivate. It's always to motivate . . . (St Petersburg teacher)

Teachers explained how they used this 'tool':

> If I see that a child is working really hard, at the top of his or her abilities . . . and making serious personal progress, then I would be inclined to put a higher grade, rather than a lower. (St Petersburg teacher)

> If it is a student who usually does well, but now is getting like a '4' instead of a '5', I may deliberately give him, or her a lower mark to motivate. (St Petersburg teacher)

As one stressed, it was necessary for a teacher to

> . . . have an individual approach towards every person, so I know whom I can encourage – to whom I can put a lower, or higher mark. (St Petersburg teacher)

It was also

> . . . very important for the teacher to balance considerations in grading so that, on the one hand, you do not suppress a child by giving too many bad marks, but, at the same, you do not lower your criteria. (St Petersburg teacher)

It is not clear from our data how St Petersburg teachers perform this 'balancing act', but it seems probable that they are greatly assisted in doing so by the continuity of contact they enjoy with classes, within

which there is time to attempt motivation through grading and yet recover from any consequent tendency to adverse outcomes.

The extent to which teachers' assessments were standardised, as between teachers and schools, varied considerably between the three educational systems. Standardisation had been most thoroughly attempted in the English system, where arrangements were largely formalised by examination boards and local education authorities. One Sunderland teacher summed up the common experience:

> We have been to countless meetings, training about what they call 'the exemplification of standards', whereby we can look at kids' work from the other end of the country and go through a process of how we would mark it and compare that to what they have been given, to try and achieve consistency. (Sunderland teacher)

Also, within schools,

> Certainly within subjects, teachers try to – as near as possible – moderate by getting themselves together and by comparing pieces of work and coming to some sort of common agreement on the standard of that particular piece of work. (Sunderland teacher)

Sunderland teachers were clearly under professional and student and parental pressure to get grades right, and felt sufficiently able to do so to defend these where students queried them:

> [Students] sometimes think that we are trying to pull the wool over their eyes, saying 'Right. You're working at this level, you're only going to get a D grade', and a kid thinks they're going to get a B or a C, so they think we're just saying that to make them work harder when in fact we're telling the truth as it is. (Sunderland teacher)

In both Kentucky and St Petersburg, teachers were considerably freer to assign grades or marks according to their own judgement and without necessary reference to the views of colleagues or a common standard. As one Kentucky teacher said,

> I have no way of knowing about any other middle schools. (Kentucky teacher)

whilst another summed up what seemed to be the general position as,

> I think each teacher has a different set of standards and it goes into what they consider a 'B', versus what another considers a 'B'. (Kentucky teacher)

The St Petersburg teachers were even more direct about variation in standard:

> I don't look at somebody else's criteria . . . when I give my children marks. (St Petersburg teacher)

> The criteria are different because we're different people. Some make great demands. Some are strict, some are not. (St Petersburg teacher)

Though the Kentucky and St Petersburg teachers seemed to have large freedom to use judgement they were perhaps under greater constraints than might appear from the comments above. In Kentucky, the KIRIS (now CATS) tests, though conducted for the purpose of school accountability, have inevitably generated information about the comparability of teachers' grades, within schools and across the system. In St Petersburg, teachers could refer to published guidelines for curriculum assessment, and schools' Deputy Directors (Curriculum) monitored marks regularly, no doubt requiring some explanation of apparent anomalies. Nevertheless, in both systems, far more than in England, teachers were free to use marks to recognise other than cognitive–academic merit and to motivate – a freedom which was significantly exercised in St Petersburg.

The use by schools of external rewards for desirable achievement and behaviour appears to be increasing as a result of the pressures of high stakes testing. According to our informants, a number of Sunderland schools were experimenting with the use of extrinsic rewards to foster motivation. These mostly took the honorific form of cards sent home, or a telephone call to parents, though these might lead to additional material benefits, as one teacher suggested:

> The children here love to have a good card sent home. I think they get money for it from their parents. (Sunderland teacher)

In Kentucky, many schools used a much more developed system of material rewards which was controversial for a number of teachers. Examples might include:

> . . . time off from school. If you can tell students, 'Well, if you do really well on this we're going to have a pizza party', or 'We're going

to take half a day off', or something, that is the motivation for a lot of students. They like the idea that if they work hard they're going to get something for this. (Kentucky teacher)

I do trips. I always take them on a trip and 'Just now, if you do well...' I try to give a day of rewards of a movie, or something they would want to do. (Kentucky teacher)

Some teachers saw rewards as potentially inequitable, in that they could go to students who gratified by occasional improvement. As one teacher put it,

'You were good just today and I rewarded you.' Why not reward the one that's good *every* day? (Kentucky teacher)

Of much greater concern was that rewards were in effect institutionalising a form of payment for students' learning, with the possibility of discouraging intrinsic motivation. One teacher thought that students did not

...have that internal, built-in drive that, a few years ago, we saw in students. Today they want...they want to be paid if they learn. You know what I'm saying? They want immediate rewards and it needs to come immediately. (Kentucky teacher)

Another teacher agreed that students she was familiar with

...thrive on rewards for good grades. I think they are much more motivated by those outside factors than that inside feeling of, 'I'm doing a good job'. I think we have to – not necessarily bribe them – but we have to reward them an awful lot more than we used to. (Kentucky teacher)

A number of teachers more generally lamented that in their family as well as their school lives, many students had

...grown up with rewards for everything...material things. (Kentucky teacher)

Use of out-of-class time

Variation between milieux in motivation to learn in out-of-class time seemed clearly related both to local norms – about the relative priorities of school work, approved out-of-class activities and accepted adolescent

pursuits – and to the nature and extent of alternative opportunities for the use of time.

In Sunderland and Kentucky, teachers accepted students' daily entitlement to some measure of 'playful' or 'relaxing' leisure and to peer social activities. That young people had something close to a 'right' to 'leisure' was normative, in both milieux, though perhaps more so in Kentucky, where it seemed perceived rather as a 'freedom' from interference in 'private' time.

By contrast, whilst St Petersburg teachers agreed that students needed 'rest' breaks to refresh themselves during out-of-class study, most seemed to take for granted that it was study that was normative, for out-of-class time. This view seemed to reflect the reality of student experience where many hours each evening were spent on school-related study (Elliott *et al.*, 1999, 2001a,b). Despite the widening realisation that heavy school and homework demands may be seriously threatening the physical and mental health of a high proportion of Russian students (Filippov, 2001) only one or two St Petersburg teachers expressed the view that students needed less study and more 'leisure', as distinct from 'rest'. Although the amount of time students spent on study was a talking-point in St Petersburg, given the stance of most parents, it seemed unlikely to be reduced by much.

In all three milieux, leisure was perceived as problematic where it displaced the meeting of school requirements, risked physical or moral danger, or illegality, or engendered habits of unengaged, aimless drifting (expressed more as a problem by Sunderland teachers) with the additional risk of consequential boredom leading to mischief, or delinquency. However, whilst St Petersburg teachers could identify under-striving students who were relatively apathetic and variously 'at risk', and were concerned that their so far small number might be growing, this was against a background of a significantly higher expectation of out-of-class study. In plain terms, even 'apathetic' St Petersburg students might still be doing as much out-of-class study as the average Sunderland student, and more than all but the most committed Kentucky students. There were thus sharp differences, almost of 'kind', between Sunderland and Kentucky, on the one hand, and St Petersburg on the other – about the meaning of 'leisure', about students' entitlement to it and about the amount of it that was desirable – whereas differences between Sunderland and Kentucky were more of degree.

In all three milieux, teachers, implicitly or explicitly, distinguished between 'improving', acceptable and problematic uses of out-of-class time. All saw as 'improving', participation in organised sports, cultural

pursuits (such as art, music or dance) and activities which developed what were perceived as useful social and practical skills and socialised young people into constructive and positive attitudes. However, again, this apparent concurrence concealed potentially significant differences.

In Kentucky, organised sports were of high prestige:

> Certainly we have a big backing here for sports. Look at the size of our gym and the size of our school! (Kentucky teacher)

They could demand many hours each week, of practice and competition, from those who took part in them, and of cheering on from supporters. Teachers did not seem to perceive time spent in this way as competitive with the demands of study:

> Sure, our sports-folk and cheerleaders spend a lot of extra time, but I don't consider that leisure. (Kentucky teacher)

Views like these – a long-standing feature of US education (see Coleman, 1961) – were echoed by our student informants, many of whom commented that their teachers often permitted academic work to take a back seat to school sporting events. Other out-of-class activities – such as school bands, orchestras and clubs, and involvement with church and community activities at weekends – were viewed more or less approvingly, or at worst neutrally, by Kentucky teachers. They, too, were not generally seen as encroaching on potential study time.

In St Petersburg, teachers also viewed physical development through sport approvingly, but rather as part of a desirable all-round development of the individual. But they saw sport as standing alongside a wide range of other valued, voluntary out-of-class activities, which could include additional study in school subjects, after-school clubs and 'circles', and extra tuition, sometimes state-supplied, sometimes private, in music, a language, art or dance:

> Lots of them attend music studios and music schools and art studios. . . . Also sports sections. (St Petersburg teacher)

However, a significant difference in values is signalled in the St Petersburg teacher's unconscious echo of the Kentucky teacher's remark:

> When they study music, or arts school, should we call this leisure? (St Petersburg teacher)

Further, whilst in Kentucky, out-of-class activities tended in the main to occupy what would otherwise have been 'free' time for students, in St Petersburg, they had to compete with, and were often super-added to, the already quite heavy demands of home study:

> Some children have no time. They study every day. They do homework. They go to subject 'circles', to different studios to learn music and dances, and so on. (St Petersburg teacher)

Although approving of sport, and particularly school-organised sport, Sunderland teachers tended to be nearer to St Petersburg than to Kentucky teachers in the range of student out-of-class activities that they valued. As in St Petersburg, cost was perceived as a factor influencing some students' freedom to engage in some sports or cultural activities. Sunderland teachers also commented that, where students were active in such pursuits, the necessary time was often additional to that required for homework, giving such students rather busy lives.

> Some students are involved in almost everything, which kind of worries me. (Sunderland teacher)

Unlike Kentucky teachers – who seemed to view students' licit use of free time as a matter for them, or their families – Sunderland teachers tended more to feel, with St Petersburg teachers, that students' free time should be used 'improvingly'. They were the most likely of the three groups of teachers to perceive a majority of students as spending too much time unprofitably: neither on homework, nor on constructive or educative pursuits.

Of the students in the three milieux, perhaps the St Petersburg students had the greatest opportunity to engage in, and the least alternative to, improving pursuits. They had free or still relatively inexpensive access to the resources of a highly cultured city, still some support, though diminished, for multifariously educative activities in the former 'Houses of Culture' and schools which provided a range of relatively attractive popular and cultural activities, in contrast to the austerities of home and neighbourhood life. St Petersburg 15 year olds had begun to frequent or organise their own discos and other 'Western-type' youth entertainments, and this was a matter of greater or lesser apprehension amongst teachers. However, in terms of disposable cash, Russian 15 year olds did not constitute much of a leisure market, and cultural and educative pursuits

were still more available, cheaper and, in general, widely valued in the society. Apart from approved pursuits, teachers reported the most common, everyday 'rest' activities for their students as watching a little television and walking and talking for 30–40 minutes with friends. These they saw as normal activities, providing reasonable breaks in study.

> When they walk a lot, it is good for their health. (St Petersburg teacher)

By contrast, in both Kentucky and Sunderland, a lively youth subculture centred around popular music, teenage fashions and weekend disco dancing and 'partying'.

> It's youth . . . drinking. And Saturday night's the night to party, basically. (Sunderland teacher)

When contained within reasonable limits, this seemed to be construed as normal teenage behaviour by the majority of Kentucky and Sunderland teachers. Concern increased where there was consumption of alcohol:

> There's a lot of under-age drinking. I mean if you listen to some of these kids talking, it's quite frightening what they get up to. (Sunderland teacher)

Sunderland teachers also reported concern that

> There's quite a bit of drug taking. . . . A lot of things they get into, which they regard as leisure, are things we don't want them to do. (Sunderland teacher)

Whilst participation in non-injurious weekend social activities was largely seen as acceptable, teachers, in both milieux, were concerned about a significant number, usually of average or lower-achieving youngsters, who spent a considerable time on weekday evenings hanging around together, chatting, posing and fooling about. In Kentucky, this tended to take place on small town main streets and in shopping-mall parking-lots:

> Riding round in a car, in a parking lot, seems to be very popular with some students, especially on Fridays and Saturdays and Sunday nights. (Kentucky teacher)

In Sunderland,

> A typical out of school, evening by evening, experience is spending a long time on dark street corners . . . feeling pretty bored, feeling as if they have got nothing to do. (Sunderland teacher)

Teachers in both milieux thought this use of out-of-school time at best unprofitable and feared its potential to breed delinquency. They also thought that youngsters who spent long, evening and weekend hours watching television, or videos, or playing intellectually undemanding types of computer game, though safer, were hardly better engaged. St Petersburg teachers were also worried about an increase in these sorts of distraction:

> What is wrong with pop culture is that it doesn't involve any sort of hard work in your spirit. You come home, you press the button and it's there . . . But to read Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy is a hard job. . . . It's not an easy read . . . and you have to work with yourself, personally. (St Petersburg teacher)

However, it was Kentucky and Sunderland teachers, much more than St Petersburg teachers, who confronted an attractive, commercially enhanced youth subculture, which promoted significantly more immediate satisfactions than those offered by academic study and which competed with study for students' time.

Employment prospects

In both Sunderland and Kentucky, teachers saw a clear correlation between students' preparedness to study and the realistic likelihood, in terms of their attainment, of such study cashing out in a desirable career or job. Those students, who had clear prospects were likely to be highly motivated and hard-working, by local norms. In both milieux, there were other students who were prepared to 'travel hopefully', working variously hard to attain the qualifications which would make them viable in the market for better jobs, post-school, or admit them to further or higher education and enable them to postpone choice. In all three milieux, unemployment was a real issue and in Sunderland, and to a lesser extent Kentucky, the likelihood of unemployment seemed to divide students into those who worked hard in order to avoid it and those who judged they had little or no prospect of avoiding it and gave up on school. In St Petersburg, teachers perceived the prospect of unemployment

as predominantly acting as a spur to motivation, even for those students for whom unemployment was more likely. Further, a much higher proportion of students, than in Sunderland or Kentucky was motivated to work towards higher education, as a means of achieving a desirable career or job.

In Sunderland, the prospect of unemployment was clearly demotivating for some

> I would think a certain percentage feel that they've got very limited choice of what's going to happen when they leave school. (Sunderland teacher)

> Many of them feel that there's nothing for them out there after school . . . and that could be part of the reason for them not wanting to succeed. (Sunderland teacher)

But the picture was mixed and teachers also noted of many other students that

> Still they are motivated by the thoughts of a good job in the future. (Sunderland teacher)

and that

> There's an acceptance now, among students, that they must be educated to succeed in life, so I think that is a positive motivator for them to do well at school. (Sunderland teacher)

In this context, a number of teachers observed that students were often more highly motivated where they had a clear career aspiration

> Children who know what they want to do in the future – have a dream, or an ambition, of a job for the future – are clear about what they need to do to get to that point and they will use their education. (Sunderland teacher)

And some teachers thought that

> The less academic ones are probably more motivated now, because they know they will have to gain some kind of qualification . . . and, now, we have qualifications that we didn't have years ago. (Sunderland teacher)

In Kentucky, it seemed likely that only a minority of students was motivated – and then quite strongly – by aspiration to a professional career. Teachers in schools serving former coal-mining areas saw unemployment as having removed a previous source of motivation:

> They all knew they had to get their high school diploma in order to go to training, to get their mining cards . . . and I guess that was a goal. (Kentucky teacher)

With the closure of the mining industry, it seemed that the majority of students' aspirations were basically rooted in farming, service industry and small business life of their communities:

> If they know they're just going to go and work on a farm for their life, there's probably not as much motivation as there would be for someone who's going to be a medical doctor. (Kentucky teacher)

As a result,

> Maybe higher education is not the most important thing to a lot of students . . . Getting a good job I think is probably most of their concerns. (Kentucky teacher)

For the more aspirant, this could mean

> . . . getting into college . . . and being able to get into a major where they can earn some money. (Kentucky teacher)

For others, it was thought to lead to an uncertainty about the future, which made them take shelter in the securities of school social life, without necessarily encouraging them to make academic effort:

> I'll say, 'Well, what would you like to do when you grow up?' 'I don't know' – and I hear that more and more, all the time. (Kentucky teacher)

In St Petersburg, where the employment situation had also worsened significantly over the previous decade, teachers reported that concern both about possible unemployment and about relations between specific

educational achievements and employment had begun to influence students' motivation. They reported this as age-related – barely significant before about the 14th year and increasingly significant thereafter – especially amongst those students who stayed on for the final two years of schooling up to 18. Amongst those who left school at 15-plus, the St Petersburg teachers thought that some were now less motivated to learn in school because of the adverse employment climate. (Interestingly, this trend was not signalled strongly by student informants in our earlier investigations.) However, not only was unemployment an issue, but the city was in transition from a low-productivity, command economy, with virtually guaranteed employment, to a competitive market economy.

> Before, our students were sure that they would get a job . . . and now they have to compete with others. (St Petersburg teacher)

According to their teachers, at least at the time of data collection, in 1998–99, the initial effect on perhaps the majority of young St Petersburgers had been to increase their motivation in the new climate.

> The situation in the country makes them think about their future profession and their future life and prospects. (St Petersburg teacher)

> They see that it's not that easy to get a good job in life and that encourages them to work more. (St Petersburg teacher)

However, if the general trend was to increase motivation, students were also more likely to focus their efforts on subjects of greater anticipated relevance for their future careers.

> In the last two years, more students in Year 9 are thinking carefully about the demands of possible jobs. (St Petersburg teacher)

> Some of them have begun to view certain subjects in the light of their future career and if they think that they're not very useful, then their interest decreases. (St Petersburg teacher)

> They are more pragmatic in one way. They are less romantic. More and more of them know what sort of things they need, where they want to go for further education . . . and that is how their motivation has changed. (St Petersburg teacher)

Learning foreign languages has become very important and now it motivates them a lot. (St Petersburg teacher)

But, if they are less romantic, it could also be hard for St Petersburg students to evaluate what counted as realistic in the new competitive climate:

A lot of students have developed a serious interest in economics . . . and they are, in a way, very far from the reality, because the demand for highly qualified economists . . . has been met. (St Petersburg teacher)

It seemed likely that a similar situation might obtain in relation to the very widespread desire to enter further or higher education:

They all want to get into a good university, mainly to acquire a good profession, a prestigious profession – an economist, a lawyer, some position in international business. (St Petersburg teacher)

However, in Russia since the recent reforms, in order to get into university free

. . . you have to pass – not just to pass – all the exams, but to get highest marks in all of them. It's very competitive. (St Petersburg teacher)

Some teachers commented on the potential demotivating effects of these changes:

Some children realise that further education will involve payment, but they can't afford it, so they're not interested in school education, because they see no prospect for the future. (St Petersburg teacher)

My daughter's classmates, who graduated from technical universities, are working as shop assistants now. So what's the point? (St Petersburg teacher)

A major difference in perceptions of the motivational effects of an adverse employment climate, between Sunderland and Kentucky teachers, on the one hand, and St Petersburg teachers, on the other, lay in the Sunderland and Kentucky teachers' deployment of theories of subcultural influence. The St Petersburg teachers did recount difficult experiences with occasional individual students, and recognised the existence of a (growing) minority of 'problem' families, which they frequently associated

with parental 'drunkenness'. However, none offered an account of student demotivation in terms of wider neighbourhood or community influences. Indeed, it was not possible to attribute any sense of the term 'subculture' to any St Petersburg teacher's remarks. This may have reflected survivals from the Soviet past, of a rather 'flat' social structure and the continuing effects of policies of socially heterogeneous residential housing, or of a ubiquitous, egalitarian consensus about norms of behaviour and manners – fostered and enforced amongst children, not only by adults, but by peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1967; Tudge, 1991).

In contrast to St Petersburg teachers, those in Sunderland and Kentucky offered explanations of endemic demotivation amongst significant minorities of students – who they perceived as belonging to subcultural groups indifferent or resistant to schooling – further exacerbated by their higher likelihood of post-school unemployment. It seems as if little may have changed in the twenty-five years since Corrigan's (1979) study of working-class Sunderland boys. He found an anti-school culture that was marked by resistance to school values and practices and which was fuelled by students' perception that schooling was largely irrelevant to their vocational futures. Our Sunderland teacher informants, too, thought unemployment a crucial factor in motivation:

> What's the point of trying, if you're not going to have a job – and if you're looking at perhaps the third generation who haven't had jobs? (Sunderland teacher)

Their schools served communities, or neighbourhoods, which had experienced endemic, long-term unemployment, due to the decline of traditional industries. As they saw it, these communities had evolved ways of life, and associated ideologies, which involved reliance on state welfare, long periods of idleness, occasional contract work, casual and part-time labour not infrequently in the 'black' economy and, for some, profits from petty crime:

> Many families don't have a work ethic. They don't value education generally, because they don't see that one could actually have improved one's means of living by working hard at school and, if that's the case, they transmit that negative aspect to their kids. (Sunderland teacher)

In teachers' perceptions, the educational level in these communities was not high and for many members of the community, schooling was thought to have been an unrewarding, perhaps demeaning experience.

For many students from such backgrounds, teachers felt there was a tension between affiliation and loyalty to their family and community and the pursuit of education. Nor, except where such students were successful in school – which was rare – were they thought likely to see education as practically offering them improved personal life-chances:

> Many of them feel that there's nothing for them out there after school . . . and that could be part of the reason for them not wanting to succeed. (Sunderland teacher)

Many of these students were seen to be demotivated, often less in relation to realistic prospects of employment, than by their immersion in climates, and absorption of ideologies, of disempowerment.

A similar, though perhaps more anomic than consciously alienated pattern characterised some families on 'welfare' in the former coal-mining districts of Eastern Kentucky where loyalty to family and community, and the pursuit of education might sometimes appear incompatible (Peters *et al.*, 1986; Wilson *et al.*, 1997).

In sharp contrast to St Petersburg, Sunderland and Kentucky teachers were more likely to see some students as a sub-cultural 'hard core', whom schools were making many efforts to reach, but whom – teachers regretfully admitted – they did not yet know how to motivate to achieve on the prescribed curricula. Some teachers further thought that attempts to contain and counter the disaffection of the strongly resistant students could generate a custodial and punitive school ethos, which risked demotivating other students who otherwise might not align themselves with these groups. This latter effect was more remarked upon in Sunderland than in Kentucky, possibly because Sunderland teachers seemed to feel under marginally greater pressure to apply the rigidities of a prescribed curriculum more universally.

Whereas St Petersburg teachers recognised individual differences in motivation, perhaps differing at different stages of a student's school career, Sunderland and Kentucky teachers were more likely, from the point of view of motivation, to group students into categories. They tended to differentiate between

- High achievers who were motivated by versions of the parental, teacher, subject and reward influences reported above, and also by peer competition and rivalry.

- Lower-middling to upper-middling achievers, also more or less positively motivated by parental, teacher, subject and reward influences, but with a greater need for teacher praise and facilitated success, who tended to find competition threatening and who did not want to stand out publicly as successful competitors.
- School resisters, often drawn from school-resisting local sub-cultures.

For the first two groups, teachers thought that the requirements of prospective and desired employment increasingly conditioned students' motivation as they passed from their 13th to their 15th years. For the third group, motivation (and achievement and, often, behaviour) were perceived as declining with each year up to the school-leaving age.

Peer influence

In all three milieux, teachers recognised peer pressure as an influential factor in individual students' motivation to learn. One Sunderland teacher expressed a view with which his Kentucky and St Petersburg colleagues would have largely agreed:

> By and large they can be motivated to do well, or not, by the friends they keep. (Sunderland teacher)

There were, however, significant differences between the milieux. St Petersburg teachers were more likely to report peer effects as supporting and enhancing, but Kentucky and Sunderland teachers, as undermining and reducing motivation to learn. In talking about peer effects, St Petersburg teachers tended to focus on *classmate* influence on *classroom* behaviour. Their comments gave no hint that student attitudes were influenced by any kind of peer counter-culture. By contrast, Kentucky and Sunderland teachers were significantly more likely to see 'the friends they keep' as influencing students' adoption of attitudes and values prevalent in the local and wider peer culture, which they perceived as having a negative influence on learning and behaviour in school. Further, as between Sunderland and Kentucky, Sunderland teachers were more likely to relate the strength and direction of peer effects to categories of ('streamed') students than Kentucky teachers, for whom these seemed to be more a matter of individual personality and family cohesion.

In St Petersburg, there was a long-standing pedagogical tradition of fostering and encouraging collaborative learning in the 'collective' of the class. As one teacher put it,

> Individual and collective education are connected with each other because the group educates the student and the student influences the group. (St Petersburg teacher)

Another elaborated,

> If the class is a sort of group with good relationships – they are all either friends, or, you know, good to each other – the performance as a class will be better. (St Petersburg teacher)

Teachers in St Petersburg were able to identify situations in which peer effects could adversely affect learning yet, apparently to a greater extent than in Sunderland or Kentucky, they were normally able to count on the motivation of the majority of students:

> There are children who really want to study and the mood of the class does not influence them. (St Petersburg teacher)

Further, students were much more likely to attempt to emulate their successful peers than to try to bring down the learning level of the class:

> This class was joined by a couple of very clever students, very bright guys, and within a short period of time, it had become very prestigious in this class to be intelligent, to make good progress. (St Petersburg teacher)

Whilst we still do not fully understand peer dynamics in the St Petersburg classroom, the strong impression we gained, from both teacher and student interviews and classroom observations, was that they normally operated to support and enhance individual students' motivation to learn in school. What one teacher said, appeared to be quite widely the case:

> Some kids are really bright, and some kids are not . . . and those children who are not very bright, they try, you know, to catch up with the stronger students, not to look – as we say – not to look like a 'white crow'. (St Petersburg teacher)

In Kentucky, teachers seemed ambivalent about youth peer culture. Many of them were involved with, or morally supported efforts to channel youthful energy into sports, or church, or other community activities and accepted a competitive striving for excellence in these areas. At the same time they recognised that, in school, the peer culture could have serious negative effects on their efforts to establish higher levels of learning and behaviour.

> Usually the problem that you have in class is: they want to entertain one another. They're looking for somebody to get that response. (Kentucky teacher)

Where peer influence was strong, it frequently acted to demotivate. Teachers thought this was because students and particularly male students, wanted

> . . . to be the cool guy in the school and cool guys don't make good grades. (Kentucky teacher)

Being 'cool' might not normally involve joining

> . . . those kids who think it's cool to use obscene language, or it's cool to be crass, or rude, or they think it's cool to be mean. (Kentucky teacher)

But it frequently could mean that

> If you feel like you're going to get an 'A' in something, you've got to do something bad, so that you get at least a few 'B's, because – its a male thing, you know – you're a 'nerd' or you're an 'egg head', or whatever you want to call it, if you have straight 'A's now. (Kentucky teacher)

Students who did do well

> . . . don't want the other kids, sometimes, to know they do well. (Kentucky teacher)

Such perceptions strongly echo the findings of researchers discussed in Chapter 2 (e.g. Covington, 1992; Jackson, 2002, 2003).

The peer culture could also effectively empower a dominant student vis-à-vis teachers and school:

> I have a key kid in one of my classes, and he is a key kid on campus. He can turn a class bad in a flash, if he isn't feeling well. He can also get everybody in the class just really working, if he feels good. (Kentucky teacher)

Teachers recognised, too, that the peer culture could be monolithically unforgiving, not leaving

> . . . a lot of room for kids who maybe dress differently, or have alternative, you know, ways of thinking, or life, and its not always conducive to those kids who are a little bit different. (Kentucky teacher)

In Sunderland, teachers very much saw the direction and extent of peer pressure as depending on the 'stream' the students were in:

> The people who have got the work ethic are usually grouped together and you've got the odd one or two, who are on the periphery of that. (Sunderland teacher)

> In higher sets there is some competition to see who gets good results, who gets the best results, but that's only in higher ones. (Sunderland teacher)

Students could be influenced by the general attitude of their class to 'raise their game':

> If they see that other people in this same age group are working well and producing work of a good standard, then they might . . . it might motivate them to try and reach that standard of work. It's just by letting them hear other people's work. (Sunderland teacher)

But teachers certainly could not count on this as a regular, or large, effect:

> If you get the right sort of dynamics in the class, where virtually all the children are working well, it will pull the odd one or two in, but unfortunately it is more often the other way round. (Sunderland teacher)

Though obviously our teacher informants could not directly perceive this, there were also quite marked differences between schools in teacher perceptions of adverse peer effects. Thus, in one school a teacher could opine,

> The majority of students I think have good moral and social values instilled by their parents, although at times they are influenced by peer group pressure, which has a tendency to erode their values. (Sunderland teacher)

Whilst in another school, a teacher thought that

> Peer pressure here is everything. It influences the way they behave, the way they look, the way they do their work. Peer pressure here is the hardest I've ever seen anywhere and influences every part of their lives. (Sunderland teacher)

And another teacher, in the same school, could add,

> . . . but it's not just from people in school, it's from their fathers as well, and it's from people that they know outside – their so-called 'friends'. (Sunderland teacher)

What seemed to be most typically the case was that students tended

> . . . to sort of like 'flock together', so nice children stick with nice children and they all encourage each other to work, and challenging students all call each other 'swot' and discourage each other from working. (Sunderland teacher)

And where such discouragement obtained it could be extensive and powerful.

> Peer influence, I would say, is one of the key factors in children's not fulfilling their potential at school. (Sunderland teacher)

> It is a culture of running with the crowd. I mean you have to be seen to be doing the same as everybody else. (Sunderland teacher)

> They don't want to be seen as the 'swot', the person who works hard, the person who does their homework – does everything 'right'. They want to be seen as someone who has street credibility and is quite 'hard'. (Sunderland teacher)

This was especially so for boys, who were thought to be

> . . . far more susceptible to peer group pressure from the other boys in the class than girls. (Sunderland teacher)

So much so that, even where they would perhaps have liked to have been more motivated, boys thought it important to maintain a 'hard' external image, being

> . . . very, very reluctant to present themselves in class as interested, motivated, hardworking students, but on an individual level, if you talk to them about their work, they become much more focused and they *are* interested. (Sunderland teacher)

> I have some students who do their homework every single week and the rest of the class don't know that they do it. It's pushed under my door, or it's quietly placed in my room. And I don't make a big thing about it. (Sunderland teacher)

One teacher caught very well at the general picture that emerged from the Sunderland sample:

> Able people tend to mix with able students . . . be friends with able students. The less able tend to be friends with less able . . . and the demotivated already are friends with other demotivated students. Equally, the motivated students feed on each other and so the effect of peers is actually to widen the differential between the able achievers and the less able non-achievers. (Sunderland teacher)

On a more positive note, it was thought that, as a result of National Curriculum and assessment pressures,

> The students in class who want to do well are less accepting now of the behaviour of students who try to undermine a lesson. Disruptive students are now coming under peer pressure to let the others learn. (Sunderland teacher)

Conclusions

Our analyses have suggested that, regardless of milieu, teachers perceive the key variables influencing students' motivation to learn in school as being: the extent and character of parental involvement; the quality of

student–teacher relations; the extent to which school practices engage students with learning; the effects of rewards, including grades, and sanctions; students' use of out-of-class time: students' perceptions of future employment prospects; and, peer practices and attitudes. However, whilst we think it quite probable that these variables have effect in school systems across cultures, our discussions of context should make it clear both that the variables can take on very different values in different cultures and that, within a culture, there may be more, or less synergistic interactions between the variables. The variables, perhaps with others we did not identify, should figure in the organisation of our thinking about, and research into, motivation to learn in school. But, in considering what can be learnt from rather than about other educational systems, we still see no way of avoiding trying to understand them in their interactive wholeness, and considering implications for our own systems, rather than imitating features of others (Phillips and Ochs, 2004).

7
Parental Perspectives and Influences, Homework and Life Outside of School

Parental influence

Parental influence may take many forms, direct and indirect, and include those situations where parents

(a) actually assist in the undertaking of school-related tasks;
(b) model appropriate learning behaviours by means of personal example;
(c) act to ensure that school-related tasks are completed appropriately;
(d) demonstrate high expectations and provide support and encouragement for studying hard and persevering when tasks are difficult and unappealing; and
(e) help to ensure that conditions at home are appropriately structured in order to facilitate children's learning.

In considering the reasons why Asian children tend to perform more highly than those in the United States, many researchers have emphasised that parental influence in Asia appears to be greater for each of the above.

According to Stigler *et al.* (1985), Asian children are socialised to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of their family and community. Thus, parental desires and expectations tend to be more influential than the child's own interests. Given the importance in Asian culture of educational success (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992), parental values are seen as having a significant influence upon children's achievement motivation. Stevenson noted that in addition to communicating powerful messages about the value of scholarship, Asian parents often did all they could to ensure that studying at home was fully supported

and that competing distractions, including household chores, were minimised.

In contrast, many US writers have lamented the low priority placed upon academic study in the home context (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Steinberg, 1996). Such priority may be reflected in terms of actual involvement in supporting learning at different ages. Stevenson and Stigler (1992) note that American parents provide high levels of support to the preschooler but add that once the child starts school, it is often assumed that responsibility for learning has largely been passed on to teachers. In the case of Asian parents, however, the transition to school results in greater levels of parental support.

Although parental values appear to have rather less direct influence upon Anglo-American youth than in Asia, parental factors still impact significantly upon children. It has been suggested that the education level of parents is one of the most important determinants of educational attainment (Wofle, 1985), perhaps because of their greater ability to create social and physical environments most conducive to learning (Teachman, 1982). The importance of parents' expectations, attitudes and behaviours in influencing children's academic motivation and performance has repeatedly been demonstrated (Seginer, 1983; Coleman, 1987; Epstein, 1987; Fuligni, 1997), with clear relationships between parents' educational expectations and aspirations for their children and those of the children themselves (Trusty, 1998, 2000). However, it is necessary not to treat this relationship too simplistically, and high parental expectations may have less impact upon socially disadvantaged children, perhaps because in such cases, children recognise that their futures are comparatively bleak (Ogbu, 1987; Desimone, 1999).

In line with our ecosystemic approach to motivation, however, we would wish to highlight the important influence of values from beyond home and school, that is, those that permeate students' local and national contexts. In highlighting the long-standing anti-intellectualism of American high schools, where social and sporting success have often represented the pinnacle of achievement, Coleman (1961) demonstrated that these appeared to originate not from within the adolescent sub-culture but, rather, from students' socialising experiences within the wider community. Thus high levels of parental (and other adult) support for non-intellectual high school activities (e.g. participation in football or cheerleading) provided strong messages about what was most desirable and these directly impacted upon students' own value systems. Sometimes these contrast with espoused positions (Coleman, 1961) which may need to be treated with caution.

> (American) Parents talk a good game but communicate very mixed messages about the value of education. Few would claim that education is not a priority in their homes, yet for many, their actions belie their beliefs. (Bempechat, 1998, pp. 101–102)

Adult role models reflect different preoccupations in the United States, England and Russia. Historically, Soviet adults have tended to spend more time reading and studying than their American counterparts (Zuzanek, 1980). The perceived importance of learning for Soviet youth was heightened during the 1920s when both an interest in scientific and technological development and the prestige of learning mushroomed. Thus education was perceived not only as a means of social mobility but also a means of personal achievement. Such influences appear to have proven particularly influential for working-class youth, Russian time-budget studies showing a strong emphasis upon reading as a form of self-education in analyses of young factory workers' leisure time (Frankfurt, 1926; Ariamov, 1928; Smirnov, 1929).

Unlike England and the United States, levels of family affluence, or socioeconomic status, appear to have less influence upon Russian children's educational engagement and aspirations. In one study of 14–15 year olds in two cities, Moscow and Ivanovo (Shurygina, 2000), it was noted that the material conditions of the family were almost wholly unrelated to children's desire to enter higher education. However, the level of the mother's education was an influential factor. Shurygina (2000) split her sample into four groups on the basis of high or low income and of having mothers with either high or low educational qualifications. Thus, the groups were as follows

Group 1   Low income and low maternal education
Group 2   Low income and high maternal education
Group 3   High income and low maternal education
Group 4   High income and high maternal education.

Young people from Group 1 were least likely to aspire to, or expect, a higher education and a high income. The opposite trend pertained for those from Group 4. The most interesting data, perhaps, concerned the other two groups. Among Group 2 respondents, 86 per cent expected to receive a higher education and 16 per cent anticipated a higher than average income. In contrast, for Group 3, the figures were 66 and 25 per cent respectively.

While there was little difference between Groups 2 and 3, to the extent that they liked school and encountered few difficulties with their studies, the proportion indicating that they earned the highest grades varied substantially (55 and 40% respectively). This would seem to provide tentative support for the notion that, here, motivation is more closely tied to parental education than to familial affluence. While Group 2 respondents are more likely to believe that they are likely to enrol in an institute after school (51–41%) the reverse is true when asked whether they expect to have a lot of money in the future (41–56%).

For many children in Group 2, higher education appeared to have little utilitarian meaning in that it will have little bearing upon the individual's economic position as an adult. A similar view is put forward by Mezentseva and Kosmarskaia (1998), whose survey of young people in the city of Rybinsk showed a significant decline in the role played by education in conferring high social status. They note, however, that while its utilitarian value is non-existent, '. . . the view of education as an ultimate value still remains' (p. 8). For Group 4 children, higher education is less a means of entering a prestigious profession than it is a symbol of success and social prestige.

Shurygina (2000) describes three aspirational models that closely map onto the groupings employed above. The traditional Soviet model was one whereby success was primarily related to having a higher education and 'an "intellectual" profession' (p. 8). Families where there is a history of high educational performance but which are relatively impoverished still tend to reflect this model. The second model is that of the entrepreneur, where high earnings have little or no connection to one's education or an intellectually prestigious career. This was also present in Soviet society, where it is sometimes known as the 'parallel' model. Here, one might anticipate finding a high proportion of less educated but comparatively more affluent families. A third model, new to Russian society, involves the assimilation of both the above, involving a combination of both education and money and power. Here,

> . . . The educational status of their parents determines their striving for a higher education, and the material condition of the families compels them to aspire to a high level of earnings in the future. (p. 9)

For many highly educated, yet impoverished, parents, there appeared to be little alternative but to attempt to persuade their children to

succeed academically. For some parents, orientating their child to school was the only aspirational value that they knew how to transmit.

In England, government recognition of the importance of parents in encouraging their children to learn has primarily resulted in a conception of the parent as regulator and monitor (Crozier, 1998). This has resulted in the provision of home–school contracts and guidance relating to the amount of homework children of varying ages should complete each evening. In addition, there is an increasing trend of utilising parents to assist in schools in a voluntary capacity.

None of our Sunderland student informants conveyed a perception that parents saw school achievement as anything other than a means to examination success and subsequently, a desirable career. Any reference to a parental belief about the intrinsic value of learning and erudition was conspicuous by its absence. This is not to say, of course, that parents did not hold such perceptions; rather, that these were not explicitly picked up, or at least reported, by their offspring.

In the United States, parental concerns appear to focus upon teacher grades which are seen as influential in college selection. These are, to some extent, normative within each school. Crucially important are the results of external tests such as the SAT and ACT which are generally taken near the end of high school. However, as we note in Chapter 3, their content mirrors the school curriculum far less than do British examinations and, in many curricular areas, these cannot provide an external means of assessing relative performance and achievement.

Parental expectations and satisfactions

Influenced by the work of Harold Stevenson we have argued that satisfaction with mediocre performance is likely to result in reduced levels of engagement and, ultimately, lower standards. In comparison with Asian parents, Stevenson and colleagues found that American parents were far more likely to have positive perceptions about school performance. Stevenson and Stigler (1992) report a study, for example, in which mothers in Minneapolis, Taipei and Sendai were asked to indicate whether they were 'very satisfied', 'satisfied' or 'dissatisfied' with their children's school performance. Both at first grade, and then four years later, at fifth grade, a significantly greater proportion of American mothers reported being very satisfied. In contrast, Chinese and Japanese mothers were more likely to be dissatisfied. When the study was repeated in Chicago and Beijing, a similar pattern emerged. This gap was not, however, so apparent when ratings of kindergarten provision

were gathered – a feature Stevenson uses to dispel the suggestion that the Asian mothers merely employ a more negative rating scale.

Stevenson converted children's academic achievement scores into percentile rankings that indicated their performance relative to their peers in each city. Mothers were then asked to indicate whether they were satisfied with their child's performance. American children had to achieve much lower rankings than did the Chinese or Japanese children before their mothers would express dissatisfaction. When examining changes over the four-year period, Asian parents required higher rankings to remain satisfied; American parents were able to tolerate lower levels of performance before they expressed dissatisfaction.

In a subsequent study, parents in Chicago and Beijing were asked to predict the score their child would be likely to receive from a mathematics test in which the average score was 70 out of a maximum of 100. Although parents in both cities tended to believe their children would surpass the average score, the Americans stated that they would be satisfied with scores lower than their predictions; the Chinese would be satisfied only by scores surpassing those which were expected. Similar findings were found when the domain under investigation changed from mathematics to English.

In comparing American and Asian parental attitudes, Stevenson and Stigler (1992) commented that American perceptions of their children's educational performance is redolent of the Lake Wobegon factor,

> Where all the men are strong, the women are good-looking, and all the children are above-average. (p. 117)

Stevenson and Stigler castigated their fellow countrymen for their failure to accept the poverty of the nation's educational performance, stating that when findings from research studies demonstrated academic flaws, the typical reaction was to dismiss the results and criticise the studies. To illustrate, they cite commentaries from two newspaper columnists:

> Surveys that plumb the depth of our ignorance and that of our students are methodologically suspect. More importantly, the interpretation of these statistics in isolation is questionable. (Hoffman, 1989, p. A29)

> Well, here we go again. Once more, for the 3,207th time an Officially Important Survey has revealed that our children are a bunch of morons. This time, the Officially Important Survey reveals, they have proven a bunch of mathematical morons. And you know what? I don't think I care all that much. (Greenfield, 1991, p. D13)

In conclusion,

> The results add up to a very disturbing picture: highly satisfied American parents who apparently have little motivation for improving the quality of American education. (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992, p. 114)

Similarly, fierce criticisms of teacher and parental over-indulgence and insufficient emphasis upon hard work have been provided by a series of other researchers (e.g. Damon, 1995; Sykes, 1995; Steinberg, 1996).

There is a dearth of evidence about parental perceptions of their children's ability in England although there appear to be high levels of approval of schools (Barber, 1994; Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted], unpublished). Barber's large national study (1994) found high levels of parental approval of the quality of their children's schools; 83 per cent commenting that their child's school was of a good or very good standard. The findings from a survey of a quarter of million parents undertaken by Ofsted were similar, with only 6–7 per cent of parents expressing dissatisfaction with their children's schools. Barber commentated that such attitudes were a matter for some concern:

> Schools are often not as good as they [parents] think they are and their complacency is unlikely to encourage constructive change. . . . Put bluntly, the evidence suggests that parents' expectations are too low. (p. 6)

Studies of the attitudes of Russian parents are very few in number although there is some evidence that they tend to be rather less impressed about the quality of their children's schools (Glowka, 1995) than their English and American counterparts. In a study of parents in St Petersburg, Vershlovsky (1995) noted that only about one-third of respondents believed their children's teachers to be capable of providing a high quality education.

In our investigations in the three milieux, we explored the nature of parental satisfactions and expectations about their children's educational performance. In one study (Elliott *et al.*, 2001b) nearly 3000 parents of 10–15 year olds, from the same schools as for our earlier student investigations, were surveyed. Questions mirrored many of those asked of the students. One item centred upon parental ratings of their child's educational ability. In line with all of our other studies, Russian respondents were less positive. As Table 7.1 illustrates, parents of St Petersburg children were more likely to provide a below, rather

Table 7.1   Parental views of their children's performance in schoolwork (%)

	St Petersburg			Kentucky			Sunderland		
	Male	*Female*	*All*	*Male*	*Female*	*All*	*Male*	*Female*	*All*
Very good	<1	1	1	35	40	38	22	38	31
Good	11	15	13	27	27	27	42	39	40
Average	52	58	55	32	30	31	30	21	24
Not very good	26	23	24	5	2	3	5	2	4
Poor	11	3	7	1	1	1	1	<1	1

than an above average rating. In contrast, the figures for Kentucky and Sunderland parents are heavily skewed towards the positive.

In our earlier study of teacher perceptions we were able to compare children's perceptions of what their teachers thought about them with teachers' actual views. Using a similar approach, we compared parents' ratings in the present study with data from earlier studies (Elliott *et al.*, 1999, 2001a), which asked students of the same ages and from largely the same schools, what they believed their parents thought of their school performance. The data are provided in Table 7.2. It can be seen that, across cultures, student and parent figures match relatively closely. This supports findings from the literature that children's sense of academic self-esteem appears to depend more upon parental beliefs about their abilities than their actual performance as measured by teacher grades and test scores (Phillips, 1987; Holloway, 1988).

Table 7.2 shows that the children surveyed were less likely to report an 'average' position. In a majority of cases, the younger children showed a tendency to believe that parents were more positive than they actually appeared to be. The position of the older students is rather more mixed. The tendency of St Petersburg samples (cf. Elliott *et al.*, 1999, 2001b), be they student, teacher or parents, to report lower ratings than their Sunderland and Kentucky counterparts was clearly reflected by both groups.

In the table, comparison between actual parental ratings with children's views of their parents' perceptions should be treated with a degree of caution. Unlike our study comparing child and teacher perceptions, responses reported in Table 7.2 do not refer to the same child population, and parents were not making judgements of the same children whose responses are included here. Nevertheless, patterns in the data offer important issues for further consideration. In all three countries, children's ratings tended to be higher than those of parents, although national patterns (i.e. the rather more negative Russian perceptions

Table 7.2 Parental ratings of their children compared to children's perceptions of parental ratings (%)

	St Petersburg				Kentucky				Sunderland			
	Parent		Child		Parent		Child		Parent		Child	
Age of child	9–10	14–15	9–10	14–15	9–10	14–15	9–10	14–15	9–10	14–15	9–10	14–15
Very good	1	1	7	4	39	35	53	34	27	35	47	23
Good	16	10	24	19	26	28	29	35	39	41	37	47
Average	60	50	42	32	30	33	12	23	29	21	12	23
Not very good	19	29	19	33	4	3	3	5	5	2	2	5
Poor	4	10	8	12	1	1	3	3	<1	1	2	2

compared with the very positive ratings of the other two groupings) remained.

Similar to the findings in Stevenson's work in respect of American respondents, Kentucky parents reported high levels of satisfaction with their children's educational achievements, particularly in the case of daughters, and the majority thought that greater progress had been made over the past two years. However, a considerable number (69%) still thought that their children's performance could be significantly improved. Broadly similar findings were true for the Sunderland sample. In contrast, parents in St Petersburg were far less satisfied, and a higher proportion (93%) thought that significant improvement was possible. (Similarly, Glowka (1995) also found Russian parents to be less satisfied with their children's schools than their German counterparts.) In all three milieux, parents expressed greater concern about their sons.

When asked to look back over the past two years, 72 per cent of Sunderland parents thought their child was making better progress; only 3 per cent thought that they were doing worse – little difference emerging between the two age groups. The Kentucky sample was also very positive with corresponding figures of 58 and 9 per cent. The least sanguine group was that from St Petersburg with 38 per cent perceiving improvement and 23 per cent, a decline in performance. In general, children in the older age groupings in all three milieux were more likely to be perceived by parents to be underachieving.

St Petersburg parents were less likely to believe that their children worked as hard as they could on their schoolwork (44% agreeing that their child usually worked hard). Only the parents of the 9–10-year-old girls contained a majority believing that their offspring worked hard (60%). In contrast, a mere 28 per cent thought this true of their teenage sons. The Kentucky and Sunderland parents tended to be more sanguine with 71 and 82 per cent believing that their children worked as hard as they could. While for the Russian children, this trend was stronger for girls and for younger children, in none of the Kentucky or Sunderland age/gender subgroups was there a majority stating that their children did not work as hard as they could.

We subsequently asked those parents who thought that their children could do a lot better to rank order five factors that might be most helpful. These were – working harder in class, doing more homework, getting more help from the teacher, getting more help at home and getting more rest/sleep. Results are provided in Table 7.3. As this shows, the Kentucky and Sunderland parents placed much greater emphasis upon

Table 7.3   Parental responses to the question: 'Which of the following would be the most important in helping your child improve his or her performance a lot?' (% identifying the option as first choice)

What would help?	St Petersburg (%)	Kentucky (%)	Sunderland (%)
Working harder in class	34	46	40
Doing more homework	32	14	19
Getting more help from teachers	5	24	31
Getting more help at home	19	4	2
Getting more rest/sleep	10	12	8

classroom factors (the gap was particularly large regarding teacher help) and saw a reduced role for the home.

The lower emphasis upon homework, expressed by Kentucky parents, may reflect the fact that even high grades can be achieved without prolonged study outside of school. In our interviews with Kentucky students achieving high grades, it was noticeable that excellent grades could be achieved without undertaking a significant amount of homework. Many students who were on 'Honors' tracks reported studying for an hour or less each evening. As for the students achieving more modestly, homework was often completed during the school day, leaving the evenings free for leisure pursuits. For many, there appeared to be a strong belief that if one worked hard in school, success would follow:

> *Q*: How come that you are getting a 4.0 G.P.A. [when only doing about twenty minutes' homework each evening]?
> *A*: . . . if you pay attention in class and listen to what the teacher tells you, . . . you'll do good.

One boy stated that he was getting mainly A grades, with some B's, despite the fact that he could usually get all his homework completed in tutorial periods. When asked whether doing more homework would be helpful, he replied,

> I mean, it wouldn't hurt but it's the same things over and over and I already know them, so there's no use in trying to work them in . . . once it's in, it's in.

The focus of the St Petersburg parents may have been conditioned by concerns that they were unable to assist as much as they would have

wished. They reported having more difficulty than the other sets of parents in helping their children at home, with 33 per cent finding the content too difficult and 8 per cent having insufficient time. Fewer parents in Kentucky (23%) or Sunderland (29%) expressed either of these concerns.

A high proportion of St Petersburg parents were eager that their children should put their schoolwork before everything and were less inclined to state that they did not want their child to spend a lot of their free time studying. The parents of the younger children in Kentucky expressed similar beliefs although those of the teenage group were more evenly split. Sunderland parents, particularly those of the younger group, were far more likely to resist the idea that their children should work more during leisure time.

When asked what they thought motivated their children to work hard, parents in St Petersburg emphasised first, enjoyment and interest in studying, then secondly, the likelihood that this would help them get a better career. The Kentucky parents were split by age with those of younger children emphasising parental praise, and those of the teenagers highlighting career influences. A similar age split was found for the Sunderland group with parental praise and enjoyment of studying being perceived as important influences upon younger children and vocational factors applying to the teenage group.

Parents of St Petersburg children were considerably less assured about the quality of their child's behaviour in class. While a quarter of the sample considered their children to be 'good', a further quarter thought that they were 'sometimes a problem'. Such concerns rarely troubled the other parent groups with 66 per cent (Kentucky) and 70 per cent (Sunderland) rating their children 'good', and 9 per cent (Kentucky) and 7 per cent (Sunderland) seeing that they were sometimes problematic.

Where the child did misbehave, Kentucky parents tended to blame their child, Sunderland parents were more likely to attribute this to inappropriate peer influences. St Petersburg parents, particular those of the teenage group, were more likely to highlight the possibility that the lesson had been unstimulating. The quality of the lesson as an explanatory factor was rarely cited by Kentucky and Sunderland parents.

Confirming a general tendency of parents to de-emphasise peer influences, in all three regions a significant majority thought that their child's behaviour in school was not influenced by his or her friends. In those cases where friends were perceived to be influential, a significant majority saw this as having a positive effect.

The positive views of parents in Kentucky and Sunderland might be seen as puzzling given the poor performance of the United States and England in international comparisons and Kentucky and Sunderland's history of relative underperformance in national terms. St Petersburg parents did not appear to be swayed by the sound academic reputation of their country, and within that, their city (Canning *et al.*, 1999). However, in the absence of meaningful understandings of the performance of children in other cultures and contexts, parental opinion is likely to be based upon local norms and practices.

Attributions

In Chapter 2, we discuss the role of attributions in motivation and engagement. In their seminal cross-cultural studies, Stevenson and his team found that as for the youngsters, there was also a greater tendency on the part of Chinese and Japanese parents to emphasise effort over ability in explaining academic performance (Stevenson and Lee, 1990; Stevenson *et al.*, 1993).

In all our investigations in the three milieux, we consistently failed to find a strong US or English emphasis upon ability, whether canvassing students, teachers or parents. Thus, when asked about the most important reasons for succeeding in schoolwork, parents from all three regions prioritised effort (St Petersburg, 54%; Kentucky, 68%; Sunderland, 78%) over ability (St Petersburg, 28%; Sunderland, 11%; Kentucky, 16%). Luck and teacher disposition towards the child were seen as considerably less important factors in each country. When questioned about what appeared to be the most important factors in achieving a well-paid job/career, parents in all three areas, Sunderland (61%), Kentucky (40%), St Petersburg (38%), tended to emphasise a need for good qualifications. However, hard work (Sunderland, 20%; Kentucky, 38%) was also frequently prioritised by the Western parents; their Russian equivalents placed this factor behind the importance of having good contacts (27%) and being naturally clever (21%). In contrast, being clever was rarely prioritised in Sunderland (11%) or Kentucky (13%).

The extent and frequency of homework

The role of homework in aiding student academic achievement is controversial, with research studies reporting conflicting findings (Epstein, 1988; Olympia *et al.*, 1994; Cooper *et al.*, 1998) about its efficacy. Indeed, Farrow *et al.* (1999) go so far as to suggest that increasing

homework demands for younger children may even result in inferior performance. The value of homework may be determined by its nature and thus, in one context, where activities are often bolt-on and inconsequential, it may add little; whereas in another, where homework demands are core elements of pedagogy, it may be a key factor in achievement.

In US schools, homework is often undertaken in school, either at the end of lessons or during periods designated for independent study (sometimes known as 'home room' or 'study hall'). American students in TIMSS-R reported spending more time in class doing homework than students in the other countries; 79 per cent saying they 'almost always' or 'pretty often' were given time to do homework in class, compared with international average of 55 per cent. As a result, many children rarely find it necessary to spend prolonged periods on homework assignments at home (Stevenson and Nerison-Low, 1998).

Kentucky schools appeared to reflect the broader US picture in which homework is squeezed into a busy social and sporting calendar. One student, for example, stated that she had an average of about 30 minutes homework every night. She played sports three nights a week and watched her boyfriend playing football the other two nights. Usually her homework was completed at the end of the lesson. Often this involved two or three subjects, with about 10 minutes needed for each. When asked by the interviewer if 10 minutes was enough, she replied, without any hint of irony,

> In the ten minutes I'm doing it, I go at it really hard, you know and try to do it all right.

She then added:

> I have all As and . . . a high B and a low B . . . (but) . . . I don't want to be an over-achiever. Like some students I know, they spend all their time on schoolwork. They don't have lives outside of school, you know. Because all they do is study. And even my parents say that's not what you need to do. Sure, you need to concentrate a lot on school, but you can't make that your whole life, or you won't have any fun.

The trend for homework to be completed during the school day was reflected by many student accounts. One boy stated that he tried to get as much homework done as possible in study hall (a free session during

the school day where students have relative freedom to work on academic tasks of their own choosing):

> My study hall's third period, so I don't really . . . I only have the first three periods to do my homework . . . instead of . . . and some people have it at seventh period, so they can get all their homework done, before they go home.

One girl stated that homework

> . . . is like work that you kinda have to do because if you don't get it done on time in class, then you have to get it done at home, or else you'll get F's on it. You don't wanna get bad grades.

Some students preferred to use self-study periods for more relaxed activity. In one of our interviews, a boy was asked why he reported an hour's homework each night when others commented that they hardly did any.

> *A*: 'Cause I usually don't do it in the tutoring class . . . usually reading a book or a magazine. When I get home I do my homework.
> *Q*: And if you're sitting in the tutoring class reading a magazine or something, what does the teacher say?
> *A*: She just says, 'Just do something that occupies you' You know, like read a magazine, read a book.
> *Q*: If you were reading a western magazine, or something like that, would that be all right?
> *A*: Yeah . . . but if you've got homework, they'd like that a little bit better.
> *Q*: Would they let you play cards?
> *A*: If we're gambling, we probably couldn't.
> *Q*: How about . . . just for fun?
> *A*: There's people that play cards in there . . . It's called 'Magic'. I don't play it but some people do.

In England, the amount of homework appears to be closely linked to academic abilities of the students. Thus, children in the higher streams tend to receive more homework than those who encounter greater difficulty. Often homework was seen as uninspiring yet helpful for future examinations:

> In science . . . [classes] . . . we have been doing sheets . . . and then we get more for homework and I don't see much point in doing it

because I have already done it in class and it's just different questions, but at the same time it is more practice. Most of the time it is something you need for your [examination] course . . . and most of the time it is mostly course work that I get, things that I need to do for exams. Sometimes it is exam questions that we get to take home to do from previous exam papers, old exam papers that we can practise.

Students with lesser academic and vocational aspirations were more likely to consider homework as relatively uninfluential in terms of their subsequent educational performance, and to report that they were given homework tasks that were less clearly related to the more challenging aspects of classroom learning:

. . . sometimes, if you do a story, you can take your book home to finish it off, sometimes they [homework and classwork] do not relate. Sometimes, you can be doing a story and you might have to go home to draw pictures and things like that. (Sunderland teenager)

In Russia, individual ability does not appear to be related to the amount of homework provided. However, it appears likely that those who struggle academically may need to work longer than peers on their homework in order to keep up.

In our various studies, we have obtained measures of the amount of homework conducted in each milieu from surveys and interviews with students, and also by means of a parent survey. Our student surveys indicated that the amount of homework undertaken by our Russian informants was significantly greater than that in Sunderland or Kentucky. In our survey of 9–10 year olds, for example, 96 per cent of the St Petersburg children reported that they received homework on a daily basis. In comparison, the figures were 18 per cent (Sunderland) and 71 per cent (Kentucky). The duration of the homework for this age group was also much longer in St Petersburg with 36 per cent of the Russian sample reporting two or more hours of homework per evening in comparison with figures of 7 and 19 per cent for Sunderland and Kentucky samples respectively. For the American children, this figure does not appear to grow substantially as they move to high school. The pattern for the adolescent samples showed a similar trend – 29 per cent of the St Petersburg sample reporting that they usually spend three hours or more on homework per evening compared with 4.8 and 4.3 per cent for Sunderland and Kentucky samples.

When we asked parents to identify the homework demands of their children, a strikingly similar pattern to that provided by the students themselves pertained. Figure 7.1 shows the number of hours of homework reported by parents as being undertaken each schoolday evening and confirms the finding that, of the three regions, far more homework is routinely undertaken in St Petersburg. Indeed, a higher proportion of St Petersburg 9–10-year-old children study for two or more hours each night than do Sunderland and Kentucky 14–15 year olds.

Many Russian children attend school for six days each week so one might anticipate that they would receive rather less homework to compensate for this. This was patently not the case, however. These differences cannot be explained by a tendency for the Kentucky or Sunderland students to postpone their studies to the weekend when they have two spare days, rather than just the Sunday. Our parent survey indicated that Kentucky students tended to spend least time on homework at weekends with 14 per cent reported as studying for three hours or more, compared with 26 per cent (Sunderland) and 42 per cent (St Petersburg). The gap between St Petersburg, Sunderland and Kentucky children continues to increase as the number of hours studied at weekends is examined.

Such findings appear to reflect long-standing differences between the three countries. The figures we obtained from US students and parents map closely onto those provided from student responses to the 1999 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Here, only 5 per cent of 9 year olds, and 8 per cent of 13 year olds, reported spending
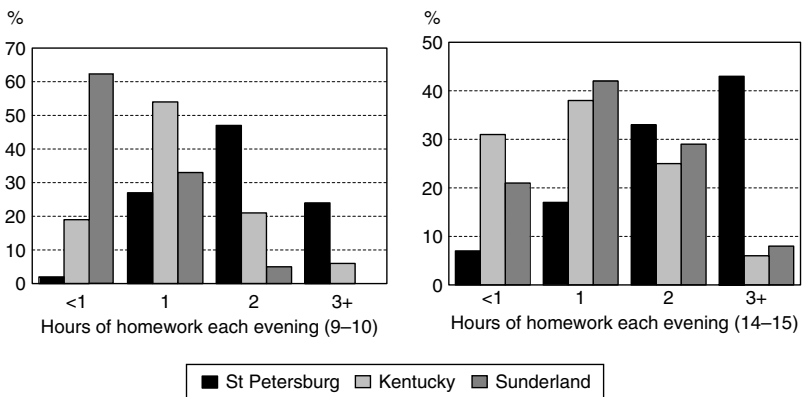
Figure 7.1   Parental estimate of hours of homework undertaken by their child each evening
Source: Elliott *et al*. (2001b).

more than two hours on homework the previous night. And 83 and 66 per cent, respectively, spent less than one hour. Seventeen year olds spent only marginally more time on homework than the thirteen year olds (Gill and Schlossman, 2003). Broadly similar US figures are provided from a large-scale survey of 10–14 year olds in New York (Ban and Cummings, 1999) in which 16 per cent of the respondents stated that they usually studied for two hours or more (3% three hours or more) each evening.

Our findings suggest that homework patterns have also changed little in Russia during the past four decades. One study of secondary school students (Zhurkina, 1973) conducted between 1967 and 1969, for example, revealed that they spent an average of 32–33 hours per week at school and a further 18–20 hours doing homework. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, they might often have as many as 6–7 hours of homework each evening. However, domestic demands upon their time were few and household obligations averaged only 2–3 hours each week.

The role of parents in encouraging and supporting homework

Studies of the relationship between parental assistance in homework and academic performance have proven inconclusive. This may partly result from the likelihood that while parental assistance is likely to result in improved performance, active involvement may be more likely to increase when the child experiences difficulties (Epstein, 1988; Desimone, 1999).

Cooper *et al.* (2000) found three dimensions of parental involvement in homework that closely map onto the four categories outlined at the beginning of this chapter. These were labelled autonomy support, direct involvement and freedom from distraction. Autonomy support described those situations where parents actively encouraged their children to develop sound problem-solving and decision-making strategies and to take responsibility for their learning. Direct involvement refers to more hands-on parental involvement in the homework activity. Finally, freedom from distraction concerned parental attempts to ensure that children worked in an appropriate environment without such distractors as television. Cooper *et al.*'s study indicated that parents of students in higher grades provided more autonomy support but exhibited less direct involvement or attempts to reduce distractions. In their conclusions, they sound a warning to teachers that they should be cautious about placing too many demands upon parents as active instructors as they may lack the necessary time and skill to undertake such tasks effectively.

In our research, we found that much of the motivation to study in England is fuelled by concerns about public examinations which are seen as vitally important for future vocational opportunities. Thus, it was not surprising that parental exhortation to work hard on homework tasks appeared to centre upon this. In the United States, where pressure to complete homework is related more to the award of teacher grades than to public examinations, parental pressure was less frequently reported, except where grades were seen to be slipping. Thus, one boy's father

> . . . cares about my grades but he doesn't really watch my homework or anything; that's really what mom does. He just makes sure that my grades stay up.

Another youngster commented, in respect of his parents' orientation:

> They really care but . . . they . . . say if I'm making good grades, like they come to open house and they hear the teachers say . . . like, I'm doing really well and everything, they take it as, 'He don't need the homework, lots of homework like some kids do'.

A significant proportion of the Sunderland children stated that their parents provided assistance with homework when asked. The majority indicated that parents checked that homework was completed and a minority also ensured that this was packed in their child's schoolbag in the morning. One student's observation reflected the feel of most respondents' comments:

> They [parents] ask me what homework I have got and when it needs to be handed in and if I have done it. If I am stuck, I ask them, and things like that.

There was no suggestion from any but a very small proportion of our respondents that parents saw homework as a distraction or an irrelevance.

The role of English parents in assisting and supporting their children with homework is often beset by tensions (Solomon *et al.*, 2002), with many feeling that they lack sufficient time or academic expertise (MacBeath and Turner, 1990) and others feeling marginalised and peripheral (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). However, it is possible that what is most important is not actual, hands-on involvement (which may reduce the development of independence and responsibility

[Desimone, 1999]) but, rather, clear signals about the importance of homework and expectations that it will be appropriately completed. Such messages are largely unequivocal in Russia, where despite a historically strong consensus between parents and teachers in which parental opinions and views concerning the operation of the school have been heeded (Alexander, 2000), parents have traditionally played only a minor role in the actual process of schooling itself (Grigorenko, 2000; Polyzoi and Dneprov, 2003).

Russian parents appeared less likely to scrutinise that homework was completed satisfactorily. Most of our St Petersburg informants stated that it was their own responsibility to complete homework and were often rather dismissive of questions concerning whether or not parents checked on its completion. Consistent with other findings that most parental help with homework takes place in the pre-adolescent years (Smirnova, 1998), many of our teenaged informants made reference to having reached an age where they were expected to assume responsibility for regulating their work:

> . . . they never check me. I was never punished for not doing it properly. It is just not acceptable in our family. They say I'm mature enough to answer for myself.

> I'm an adult now. I try not to bother my mum with my homework. . . . When I was younger, my mother used to control me. She was sitting with me until I had completed it.

Most parents, we were informed, scrutinised their children's grades, however, so would have been alerted to difficulties of non-completion or poor performance.

Although periodic crises of confidence in American education (e.g. Sputnik in 1957, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, reactions to recent international comparative studies) have led directly to calls for increased homework, a long-standing antipathy towards homework in US society has tended to prevail. Kralovec and Buell (2000) discuss the campaign against homework in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century and cite a 1901 Californian law that no child under fifteen years of age should be required to undertake study at home. Much of the criticism of homework at this time was related to perceived risks to children's health and the loss of important fresh air and sunshine, a sentiment reflected by a letter to *The New York Times* in 1935 that suggested that

> Homework is directly responsible for more undernourished, nervous, bespectacled, round-shouldered children than you can possibly imagine. (cited in Kralovec and Buell, 2000, p. 44)

In the 1930s several cities, including New York and Chicago, banned or limited homework. In the immediate post-war years, Hollingshead (1949) found that few high school students had to study for more than an hour or two a week out-of-school hours. In the decade following Sputnik, however, there was an increase in homework time as students were exhorted to match up to their Soviet counterparts as a matter of national importance, although this was only a temporary phenomenon (Gill and Schlossman, 2003). Even at this time, concern was being expressed that American students were studying far less than their German, Norwegian and French peers (Gallup and Hill, 1960). In its examination of what were perceived to be poor educational standards in the United States, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) reported that homework for high school seniors had decreased, with two-thirds of students studying for less than one hour a night. To remedy this, it recommended that more time needed to be spent on homework if standards were to rise.

Given the periodic calls for increased homework throughout the second half of the twentieth century, it might seem unsurprising that recent reports in the US media often give the impression that homework demands have now become too great and, as a result, students are suffering from overload. However, in their detailed analysis, Gill and Schlossman (2003) indicate that such beliefs are unsubstantiated by evidence from systematic surveys, and homework levels have changed little since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, other than a slight increase for elementary school students.

Gill and Schlossman (2003) ponder whether there is something distinctive to American culture that undermines perodic attempts to increase homework levels. Our research findings support those of others (Steinberg, 1996) who note that, for many American parents, homework represents something of an intrusion into the home. The place of homework has become a controversial topic in both England and the United States. An article in *The New York Times* (Zernike, 2000) about the decision of a school board in the New Jersey district of Piscataway to limit the amount of homework, to discourage weekend homework and prohibiting teacher gradings of homework captured the mood of many American parents. In Zernike's article, an interview with a former teacher, reflects the assumption of many in the United States that

education is the preserve of teachers and that schooling should not eat into home life (Kralovec and Buell, 2000):

> Today, homework is not so much an issue because of legitimate pedagogical concerns, but because of increasing pressure on parents' time. . . . It's not that parents don't want interaction with their kids, it's that when they get home from work, they don't want that inter-action determined by another boss i.e., the school. We don't want to have to again do someone else's chores. There are enough things we have to order our children to do anyway; there is enough stress in that relationship. Why aggravate it?

This separation of home and school was noted by Stevenson in his cross-cultural studies (e.g. Stevenson and Stigler, 1992). While Stevenson's work was predominantly centred in urban regions, such attitudes are also found in more rural areas where homework may be seen as interfering with social and domestic activities (Goodnow, 1988). In such regions, the strong ties of family and community may be strained by prolonged engagement in academic study (Deyoung, 1994) and the child runs the risk of being accused of '. . . going beyond yer raisin') a criticism redolent of the experiences of working-class grammar school children in 1960s England (Jackson and Marsden, 1962).

For many American youngsters, homework represents a distraction from other forms of work, either assisting with family chores or under-taking part-time employment. In rural Appalachia, helping out on the farm is a time-consuming duty that is often expected of children from a relatively young age and, traditionally, only a basic education has been perceived as necessary (Peters *et al.*, 1986; Wilson *et al.*, 1997). The requirement for Western children to undertake chores has, however, steadily declined during the past century (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991) and increasingly students have taken on work as a means of earning income. Steinberg (1996) notes that prior to 1950, less than 5 per cent of US students had paid employment during the school year. The figure is now in excess of 80 per cent. The average student in tenth grade works for approximately 12 hours per week and the twelfth grader averages 20 hours per week more than students in other industrialised countries (Martin and Mullis, 2000). (N.b. our study focused upon ninth graders whose time is considerably less constrained by paid employment.) This, together with the strong emphasis upon playing sports each evening, results in a culture where pressure is placed upon schools to minimise homework demands.

The 'scold war' – are schools or parents at fault?

In generating reasons for poor student motivation and attainment in England and the United States, it is easy to look for simplistic analyses and identify scapegoats – usually teachers and schools or parents. McCaslin and Infanti (1998) have coined the term 'scold war' to describe messages from academic and media sources that parents are reneging on their responsibilities to ensure that children accept the authority of the school and to succeed academically. These authors, strong advocates for parents, suggest that academic publications during the 1990s on the theme of parental promotion of children's motivation have had a 'distinctive air of accountability' (p. 288). However, many might take issue with this perspective and contend that the past two decades have witnessed the school, rather than parents, as the prime source of blame for student underachievement.

A well-known anecdote concerns a man searching for his car keys close to a street lamp. A passer-by asks him if he was certain that he had dropped them nearby, to which the man replies, 'No, I dropped them further down the street, but there's no light there!' This account can serve as a metaphor for attempts in England and the United States to raise achievement whereby the focus is upon that which can be most readily changed by policy initiatives. Thus, while as an academic, Barber (1994) lamented the low expectations of parents, in a later role as a government policy maker, he subsequently appeared to de-emphasise this as a key issue for direct action (see, for example, a speech to US policy makers [Barber, 2000]). Of course, it is hardly surprising that government interventions tend to focus upon those elements that can be more easily controlled (i.e. aspects of life in school); yet this may have the unfortunate effect of underplaying the important role and influence of agents outside of the school gates. As Steinberg (1996) notes,

> No curricular overhaul, no instructional innovation, no change in school organisation, no toughening of standards, no rethinking of teacher training or compensation will succeed if students do not come to school interested in, and committed to, learning. (p. 194)

Widespread emphasis upon educational reform in school involving high stakes testing and league tables of schools has lent support to the notion that responsibility for student achievement rests primarily with schools. This notion has been underlined by high-profile accounts of 'schools in crisis' (Kentucky) and 'failing schools' (England). While

educational reforms are likely to have raised achievement in both locations, the hidden danger is that the importance of parental messages is lost and responsibility for achievement rests with the state rather than the child and his or her family.

In focusing upon economic ends, many American parents unwittingly send out messages that devalue the importance of education as intrinsically valuable. In their study of anti-intellectualism in US schooling, for example, Howley *et al*. (1995) argue that the instrumental worth of education is not, as in Asian countries, balanced by a recognition of its intrinsic value in the intellectual development of the individual but, rather, is merely considered to be a key to a 'good job'. In similar vein, Tye (1985) laments a growing instrumentalism, which militates against the intrinsic valuing of education:

> The belief that the reason a person goes to school is to get a good job and earn more money as an adult has robbed our society of two important values. First of all, it deprives young people of the feeling that what they are doing *now* is important. All the rewards seem to be somewhere in the future. Secondly, it deprives society of the understanding that learning has value in itself and not just as a saleable commodity. This greatly reduces the range of knowledge that is considered worth having, and creates a population of narrowly-educated citizens. (pp. 337–338; emphasis as in original)

Similarly, education in England has also tended to be a stepping-stone on the way to a good career and, in the case of the more disadvantaged, a means of escape. The danger of such an instrumental view of learning is that it may discredit

> . . . a view of education that would support an intellectual climate in schools better suited to the cultivation of talent. (Sedlak *et al*., 1986, p. 66)

American and English parents are less likely than those in many countries in Eastern Europe or Southeast Asia to emphasise the importance of schooling for the development of more narrow academic achievement. Stevenson and Nerison-Low (1998) note that American parents often stress the importance of school in developing independence, individuality and well roundedness, virtues considered to be as important as academic success. In addition, schools are often seen as responsible for helping the child to cope with much personal and social learning

that has formerly been the prerogative of the family (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992).

The strong Western belief that parents should ensure their children's happiness may also result in lower demands and over-protectiveness (Bempechat, 1998). Succeeding in school, however, requires deferment of gratification and a recognition that learning may often be time-consuming, demanding and unenjoyable. Bempechat (1998) stresses the importance for parents of high expectations and their need to communicate the message that temporary failures and setbacks are a necessary part of learning. An easier solution, however, is to adopt grade inflation, in which everyone gains improved grades irrespective of absolute performance, yet which results in parents having a wholly unrealistic understanding of their child's true performance (Sykes, 1995).

Leisure

It is important to note that the lifestyles of our Kentucky informants, outside of school, were in no way suggestive of indolence. Indeed, their lives were often filled with activity that was primarily recreational in nature. As they moved through high school, it was likely to become a greater part of their lives, but, for the fourteen and fifteen year freshmen with whom we worked, evenings were primarily about having fun. For many Kentucky students, who were unable to access big-city attractions on a daily basis, sports activities were central to their lives. The following lifestyle, described by a teenage girl, reflected the experience of many:

> After school, we usually go into the gym and put our bags in the locker room. And then we go out and we talk to our friends for a little while… about fifteen, thirty minutes. And then we go back into the locker room and get changed for volleyball practice, put up the nets and then go through volleyball practice until…we get done at five, but we stay until six to watch the varsity a bit. And then we go home.
>
> *Q*: How many nights a week is that?
> *A*: Five.
> *Q*: You do this every night?
> *A*: Unless we have a game…we have games two to three times a week…After Christmas I do basketball.
> *Q*: So it's the same sort of pattern only a different ball?
> *A*: Yeah.
> *Q*: And in the summer?

A: In the summer I usually either play softball or soccer . . .

Q: Does everyone play sports all the time?

A: My big brother plays basketball, baseball and football. And my little brother plays soccer.

Q: What do people who don't spend a lot of time playing sports do?

A: Most people go hang out at places in town . . . on Saturdays and Friday nights everyone hangs out on mainstreet. . . .

Q: Do you do that?

A: No, that's the people who smoke and do all that stuff.

Q: What proportion of the youngsters in your school, in your year, who have this sort of life . . . like you do in terms of sports?

A: I'd say it's probably about eighty percent.

In comparison with the Sunderland and St Petersburg students, the Kentucky students appeared to be more heavily involved in a wide range of community activities. An Honors Role student described his busy weekends:

A lot of weekends I'm in the Future Homemakers of America. I'm in that and we've had a lot of things on the weekends, like baby shows, we have to do for fund raisers. And I'm in a lot of Champions Against Drugs and we do a lot of things on weekends usually. And there's football games on Friday night; I play in the varsity. And then the day after, Saturdays, I'm usually tired. Sometimes I go to the YMCA . . . and play basketball and lift weights with my friends . . . sometimes I go to the movies with my friends. [On Sundays] . . . I go to church in the mornings and then my grandparents' and eat . . . then usually go home and watch the football.

One girl reported a lifestyle similar to many of the Kentucky students with whom we spoke. On most evenings she would return home from cheerleading practice or playing soccer at about 5.00 p.m. She would usually have about 30 minutes' homework, although, on some occasions, large projects could take up about two hours. She would eat, talk on the phone or watch television. At about seven, she would either go to a friend's house or go to a soccer game until about 9.30 p.m. She would then return, shower and get ready for bed. Friday nights were reserved for football matches. During the weekend, social, sporting and church-related activities filled up most of the time; homework normally taking no more than an hour over these two days.

In our survey study of adolescents, more than 20 per cent of our Kentucky sample stated that they anticipated spending three hours or more that evening on sporting activity (compared with 7.9% in St Petersburg and 9% in Sunderland). The US responses were subsequently confirmed in our interviews, where many informants indicated that they participated in, or were involved in supporting, sporting activities (often organised by the school) several evenings each week. Travelling to schools some distance away resulted in much of the evening being taken up. A significant number of the Kentucky children, who lived in more distant rural communities, also spent a considerable amount of time hunting, fishing and riding quad-bikes. Church was a significant part of the family life of many and this often involved not merely attendance at services, but also participation in Sunday school and church youth group activities.

In England, the proportion of children engaged in part-time work has also increased, although, as in the United States, this tends to be the preserve of older adolescents. Reporting upon findings from a nationally representative youth cohort study, Payne (2003) notes that in Years 12 (11th grade) and 13 (12th grade) 45 and 59 per cent of full-time students, respectively, were currently in part-time employment. Hours worked tended to be lower than in the United States with weekly hourly means of 11.8 (Year 11) and 12.2 (Year 12). Payne's analysis demonstrated that working long hours in a part-time job was associated with poorer results in public examinations even when possible confounding factors were controlled for. However, as in Kentucky, Sunderland students, aged 14–15, did not appear to spend much of their free time engaged in paid employment.

In comparison with the students from the other milieux, the Sunderland children's lifestyles tended to be rather less active in many respects. Much of their spare time revolved around watching television and meeting up with friends. Boys often met to play informal games of football while girls tended to prefer to meet and talk. A local shopping mall was a preferred place for many to congregate. On Friday and Saturday nights, a number of students, despite their age, followed the local Northeast tradition of dressing up and heading 'for the bright lights', usually pubs, clubs or the movies.

Given the importance attributed to study, it is hardly surprising that many of our St Petersburg teenage informants ruled out any suggestion that part-time work might be an option. Nevertheless, it transpired that life was not all work. In examining our adolescent survey data, we were initially puzzled to note that children in St Petersburg tended to go to

bed later than the other groups. We subsequently discovered that this was because homework demands were such that other teenage interests could often be accommodated only by postponing bedtime. The cost to the children's health, however, resulting from student exhaustion has increasingly become a matter for concern (Baranov, 1998).

The evening pattern of one girl resembled that of many of our teenage informants:

> I come home at about three or four. Some days we may stay a bit after lessons because we may be on duty. So I come home, eat something and do my homework until I go to bed. I also go to private English classes or may visit a museum. I also watch *Santa-Barbara* episodes (a US soap opera) on T.V. I go to bed at 10.00, well, I try to . . . It is a sort of dream. My parents try to make me go to bed at 10.00 but yesterday I did it at 2.00 a.m . . . because of homework.

When asked about the nature of school 'duty', this girl commented,

> There may be some things I am to discuss with our classteacher – like how to organise a festival or a celebration or some other class things. We also celebrate everyone's birthdays – so I may stay and think about it. When I'm on duty . . . it means that there is a sort of rota, so I have to stay and do some cleaning about the classroom.

For many Russian children, finding a quiet space to study was difficult:

> I've got a [bed] room. I have to share it with my brother but because I'm always doing my homework, he goes to another room not to disturb me. Until he goes to bed, I may stay there. If he falls asleep quickly, I may stay there or I may move to the kitchen.

Another informant stated that despite attending school for six days a week she still had to study for at least three hours each evening. She also squeezed in extra classes in English and drama. Afterwards she would rest, listen to music or read Russian classics. Homework was undertaken in her bedroom alongside her older brother, aged eighteen, with whom she shared the room. Living in a communal flat with several other families made life difficult:

> We don't have a proper bathroom in our communal flat, so we go to our grandmother's to have a wash and to do the laundry.

Another informant attends school for five days a week but Saturday school was scheduled to commence shortly. Homework (usually undertaken in hourly periods) usually takes three to four hours each evening. She lives with her mother

> . . . in a communal flat where we have only got one room. This room is pretty big so I have a sort of 'my corner' there. Even if the TV is on and my mum is watching it . . . it doesn't interfere . . . I concentrate.

One student reported that most evenings she was too tired or had insufficient time to go out with friends although in the summer she often likes to visit the city centre:

> . . . Peter and Paul's fortress, Nevsky Prospect, maybe a park . . . there may be a festival in the centre . . . so we mix with others, may meet some guys and so on . . . we just walk, talk about funny things, laugh. It is a sort of healthy life – no night bars and so on.

Of the three groups, the St Petersburg children tended to spend least time on recreational pursuits and, as noted above, social life typically involved walking with friends around the city. About half of our informants stated that they took an extra evening class in a school subject or an area of cultural interest. Given their geographical location and cultural history, it is hardly surprising that they tended to be more likely to visit local theatres, museums and concert halls.

8
Russia: A Society in Transition

> In times of dramatic social changes, it is particularly true that adolescents are the last children of the old system and the first adults of the new.
>
> – Van Hoorn *et al.* (2000, p. 4)

> The individual's own developmental life course is seen as embedded in and powerfully shaped by conditions and events occurring during the historical period through which the person lives.
>
> – Bronfenbrenner (1995, p. 641)

Our achievement motivation study data were obtained in the late 1990s from a population who began their schooling in Soviet times and whose childhoods will have differed greatly from preceding or subsequent generations. From the securities and certainties of the Soviet system they must now confront an unpredictable and, for many, daunting future. Perusal of the contemporary Russian social science literature provides a stark image of a society where there is immense anxiety about changing values and behaviour on the part of the country's young people; for many social commentators, the situation is critical. The long-term impact upon youngsters of the sudden and dramatic social change across much of Eastern Europe during the 1990s is still unclear although there is some evidence to suggest that the effects upon children varied according to relatively small differences in age (Van Hoorn *et al.*, 2000). Given such rapid change, the views and perspectives reported in this book may not wholly reflect those of the current generation of school children in St Petersburg. Certainly, it would appear that our studies took place at a transitional period when schooling was

seen as a means of maintaining some sense of order and stability (Alexander, 2000; O'Brien, 2000), yet also was beginning to become challenged by shifting goals and values.

In our investigations we found few examples of students who were departing from traditional educational values although there were some signs of a recognition that things were changing. One student, for example, stated that pressures to conform were stronger when he was younger,

> . . . It used to be so when I was younger, like, you know, all 'pioneers' should study well . . . so you are a pioneer . . . be good and all this stuff. Now everyone makes his own decisions.

One girl remarked upon a downside of the changing times:

> I don't like some aesthetic, cultural values of today's young people. They are swearing sometimes or use slang . . . don't look after their city and so on.

Many factors impact upon the attitudes, orientations and behaviour of Russian students in the first decade of the present century. These include political and economic upheaval, changes in employment practices, family dislocation and an increase in the proportion of single-parent households (Rybinsky, 1996), widespread shifts in societal values, a weakening of the prestige of education and the professions, a deterioration in the quality of nutrition, increasing rates of ill-health and a diminishing role for education as a means for social mobility. In turn, these seem to have influenced an increasing number of teenagers to turn away from a collectivist orientation, hold a more instrumental view of education and adopt materialist values (Chuprov and Zubok, 1997; Williams, 1997) in which the only kinds of knowledge and skills of worth were those that could be applied in order to bring their possessor immediate benefits (Andreev, 2003). Increasing numbers of students have sought university placements, for some to avoid conscription in the army or unemployment, and most popular are those courses that offer the greatest financial rewards (economics, finance, law, foreign languages and so on) (Rutkevich, 2000).

Strong trends towards competitiveness and individualism have been reflected in the education system by a plethora of structural and pedagogic reforms, many of which have resulted in the development of socially divisive educational hierarchies and inequalities (Konstantinovskii and Khokhlushkina, 2000). One important element

in the disaffection of many young people is social differentiation resulting from the rapid increase in the number of specialist schools and curricula (Cherednichenko, 2000). Reflecting the marketisation of education, the most able students and the most skilled teachers gravitate to well-resourced specialist schools, often by means of strict policies of student selection, and teachers invest increasing energy in those with most academic promise. At the other end of the educational scale, many students appear increasingly alienated (Andriushina, 2000), particularly those for whom learning is a struggle and who find themselves in unfashionable schools. Many students appear less oriented to their teachers (Bocharova and Lerner, 2000) and express concerns that school curricula have changed too little and fail to prepare young people for the new economic pressures that will mark their passage into adulthood (Iartsev, 2000). Although many new pedagogic initiatives have been piloted, many educators have proven highly resistant to these, believing traditional methods to be more helpful in overcoming Russia's difficulties (Belkanov, 2000; Mitter, 2003). Given all the above, it is not unsurprising that school drop-out rates have steadily increased since the end of the 1980s (Grigorenko, 1998; Cherednichenko, 2000) and by the mid-1990s up to one and a half million young people were neither working nor attending school (Likhanov, 1996). The end result of these divisive developments is an increasing trend towards social exclusion that mirrors that more traditionally found in Western society.

The importance ascribed to any activity by a given society may be signalled by the resources that it makes available for its pursuit. While financial support for education has increased recently, young people in school will have witnessed constant hardship. Teachers' wages have often been unpaid and the material condition of many schools has become very poor. The impoverishment of educational institutions and teaching staff, where a university professor often earns less than a street trader, cannot have passed unnoticed by Russia's young, whose respect for educated adults may be affected accordingly. White (2001) illustrates this by relating an encounter with a woman who broke down in tears when recounting a conversation between her son and his teacher-father:

You have two degrees, yet you come to me begging for cigarettes. (p. 11)

During the mid-1990s, the nation's GDP declined approximately 2.5-fold; spending on education declined by at least 3.5- to 4-fold

(Rakhmanin, 1997). According to an estimate provided by the Duma Committee for Education, actual financing of education declined 5-fold between 1991 and 1995 (see Rutkevich, 1997, p. 31) and has since represented an increasingly smaller proportion of government spending year on year (Andreev, 2003) .

As instrumentalism takes hold, many appear to have recognised that the material position of young people in Russia appears not to be greatly influenced by how hard they work or by their educational level (Zubok, 1999). Rather, what matters is the nature of their employment, something that is often independent of performance at school or university, and in some cases is inversely related.

> Roughly speaking, the more education one has nowadays, the less money one earns. (Nikandrov, 1995, p. 54)

This trend appeared to have taken root before the fall of the Soviet Union. Kitaev (1994), for example, cites a 1991 survey of 15,300 school leavers in the Moscow region, which indicated that a growing number were willing to accept jobs which required little education but

> . . . promise more 'grey' (tip-taking and the like) income – waiter, hairstylist, taxi driver etc. (p. 117)

One might say, however, that little has changed in respect of the relationship between education and career. Under the Soviet system, employment was centrally controlled and guaranteed, and opportunities for advancement and remuneration were often made available irrespective of the individual's level of education (Kopytov, 2000). Indeed, one might contend that this phenomenon may help to explain why education in Russia has long been valued as an end in itself. Differences in life standards were minimal – the old Soviet joke being that under capitalism, wealth was unevenly distributed, whereas under socialism, poverty was evenly distributed – and even those who had wealth had to conceal this for fear of being persecuted for economic crimes (Nikandrov, 2000). What has now changed is a shift to large-scale inequality, a growth of individualism and an unstable economic situation in which entrepreneurial skills can bring about immense wealth. Such factors have resulted in a shift from the traditional regard for learning as an intrinsically valuable end in itself, and a sign of a cultured person, to an emphasis upon education as a means to achieving individualistic goals of success and prosperity. In strong

contrast to our own research findings, Ruchkin (1999) found that 'to be an educated and spiritually rich person' occupied only tenth place (out of fifteen) in rankings of 17 year olds. Perhaps this reflected a greater perceived pressure upon Ruchkin's older group to confront the reality of their adult lives?

Unlike England and the United States, relative economic deprivation in Russia appears traditionally to have had less bearing on differential educational achievement, although this now appears to be changing. A further complication has been the radical shift in the social order: those at the socioeconomic top of society were at the margins only a few years ago, whereas those who were recently at the socioeconomic top are now often at the margins (Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2000). High levels of education may prove to have limited value for coping with societal change, for example practical abilities have been recently found to be more predictive of positive psychological health than analytical intelligence (Grigorenko and Sternberg, 2001). Given such a volte-face, it is now difficult for many Russian parents to have confidence in the messages they would wish to pass on to their children, or for children to learn from their parents' example (Shurygina, 2000).

Socioeconomic stressors are compounded by massive problems of child ill-health and chronic fatigue, factors further exacerbated by the oppressive educational workload (Filippov, 2000, 2001). Baranov (1998), an officer of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, presents a calamitous picture of the health of Russia's children. Noting that two-thirds of the population live in areas suffering from ecological problems, he reports that by the time they leave school, only 10 per cent of children can be considered healthy (n.b. Andriushina [2000] reports a figure of 25% for children leaving Moscow schools where affluence is likely to be somewhat greater). The number of young women suffering from chronic disorders has increased from 44 to 75 per cent; digestive problems, linked to poor nutrition and high levels of stress, have become the more common forms of childhood disorder, and levels of mental health have declined significantly. Stress-related neuroses and diseases are most prevalent in those schools (*gymnasia*) that cater for the more able scholars; up to half finishing the school day showing signs of excessive fatigue. Baranov estimates that the study load on Russian school students is four to five hours higher than is healthy. Dneprov (2003), a former Minister of Education in the Soviet Union and in Russia, has illustrated the overly demanding curriculum by pointing out that in Russian physics textbooks 1300 concepts are introduced compared to

600 in England and 300 in the United States. Filippov (2000), at that time the Minister of General and Professional Education, similarly criticised the overload of the school curriculum. He noted that new subjects, together with the expanded content of traditional subjects, have resulted in a study load for ninth-grade students of 167 hours per week but

> ...as we know, there are only 168 hours in a week. The result of such overload is obvious...illness...[and]...a lowering of the quality of their knowledge. (p. 91)

The rejection of Soviet emphases upon country and collective, and the irrelevance for many young people of the strictures of their forefathers, have, according to several commentators, resulted in widespread alienation. Thus, Karpukhin (2000a) attributes the widespread anxiety and depression, characteristic of many Russian young people, to a perception that they have become 'alienated from the cultural and historical values' that the Russian people have lived by.

> Without culture, a person is deprived of the foundations of life that give it meaning. (p. 52)

In this climate, it proved difficult for teachers to know what to do for the best. Schweisfurth (2000) talks of the 'unfilled gaps' in the curriculum which concerned teachers now that Communist indoctrination had been removed. As one of her informants remarked,

> We forgot completely the past, but we do not have the present. (p. 7)

The weakening of mechanisms of social regulation that largely operated through state and societal institutions has resulted in a vacuum, whereby young people's value systems are increasingly gleaned from mass culture and mass media (Karpukhin, 2000a). Less time is spent reading and, instead, youngsters are inclined to spend more time socialising with peers (Zvonovskii and Lutseva, 2004). To the lament of Russian intellectuals, high culture has now been overtaken by mass culture, the amusements of which are

> ...easy to appreciate and only oriented towards exploiting human emotion, they do not compel people to give deep thought. (Zvonovskii and Lutseva, 2004, p. 80)

Allied to this is the perceived loss of meaningful ideals and values:

> . . . the desanctification of attitudes toward the world and society, the decline of the ideal, exalted, romantic aspect of life, have been accompanied by its banalification, rendering it more bourgeois and susceptible to the laws of the market, converting it into a commodity. The old symbols and imagery, which expressed lofty and oftentimes unattainable ideals are being turned into products of mass spiritual assimilation – but an assimilation that is illusory, limited to audio-visual familiarity. Ideals are being turned into products of mass spiritual consumption rather than assimilation. (Erasov, 1994, p. 217)

Powerful youth subcultures have sprung up (Sergeev, 1999) and peer groups have become more autonomous and akin to those in Western societies. Thus it is hardly surprising that traditionally powerful pro-adult, pro-school peer influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1967) now appear to be declining.

Lisovskii (1999) notes that under socialism, one could feel socially protected, education was free and employment was guaranteed. 'Honest poverty' and concern for country and collective traditionally under-pinned much Russian behaviour (Van der Wolf and Roeser, 2000). The advent of a 'predatory capitalism' (p. 58) challenged the value system of the older generation and this has resulted in a 'spiritual vacuum', particularly for the young, which has resulted in a growth of immorality and a loss of spirituality. Allied to this has been a changing perception of work from something that was widely perceived as being individually meaningful and socially valuable, to an activity that is primarily a means of making money, legally or illegally (Kim, 2000; Ol'shanskii *et al.*, 2000). A by-product of such shifts has been growing recognition, on the part of many young people, that economic success may not be achieved by following societal strictures on how this should be achieved, which in turn, has for many, resulted in a sense of anomie (Zubok, 1999).

This breakdown of traditional values and codes of behaviour together with a sharp decline in the meaningfulness of socially productive work have resulted in greater acceptance of and involvement in criminality. In one large study of young people from twenty Russian cities, for example, it was found that 18 per cent of respondents thought it possible that they might join criminal gangs, and 9 per cent saw this as a normal way to make money (Karpukhin, 2000a). Karpukhin (2000b)

reports that more than a third of the young people surveyed believed that wealth could not be acquired by honest means. Such attitudes appear to be reflected in young people's behaviour. In 1994, a government report (DUMA) reported that in 1993 there had been a 33 per cent increase in acts of juvenile delinquency compared with 1990. Juvenile recidivism increased by 60 per cent over the same period. In a comparative study of Muscovite teenagers in 1982 and 1997, Ol'shanskii *et al*. (2000) reported a significant reduction in the presence of moral considerations when students of the 1990s were asked about important aspects of their lives. When asked, for example, to complete the sentence, 'In order to be liked by another person it is necessary . . .', 17.6 per cent of students in 1982 stressed being moral; fifteen years later, this response was offered merely by 2.4 per cent. Fifteen years later, what appeared more important were personal resources such as money and appearance (3.8% in 1982; 15.1% in 1997). The survey also demonstrated a shift in focus from an orientation to others to one emphasising oneself.

9
Summary and Conclusions

The study of achievement motivation has typically focused upon factors that differentiate between students within specific contexts; often the US high or middle school. Here, students have typically been compared on the basis of psychological constructs such as goals, expectancies and attributions, and differences have been used to predict academic engagement and achievement. However, this neglects pervasive influences at different levels of the ecosystem that may operate upon the great majority of students within any given context. As a result, suggestions for increasing student motivation and engagement may fail to address important phenomena.

In this chapter, we try to pull together a diverse range of factors that appear to impact upon motivation in the three milieux. Intriguingly, a similar picture emerges when student, teacher and parent perspectives are examined. Of course, in undertaking such an enterprise we are unable to identify the precise nature of relationships between factors, or specify the degree of influence that these exert, individually or in combination. Such a lack of precision may be anathema to those educational psychologists who wish to see their discipline as something akin to the natural sciences. However, we believe that by drawing multiple factors together, the accounts we offer can provide important insights and yield valuable understandings that can complement and extend those obtained by more controlled investigations.

Eastern Kentucky

In this text, we have documented a powerful tradition of anti-intellectualism within the United States, throughout the twentieth century. Despite

periodic expressions of concern about American children's educational performance in comparison with peers in other industrialised nations, sporting and social success were, and are likely to continue to be, the twin goals for many high school students.

Within the United States, Kentucky has long been recognised as a low-performing state. Historically in the rural environment of Eastern Kentucky the needs of the land were more salient than those of the mind, with anything other than a modest education traditionally seen as something only for the elite. For the vast majority, basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, and the ability to exercise 'common sense' were deemed sufficient. Underpinning this perspective was a general resistance to taxation and a perception that only basic skills were necessary for those who would work the land. A more subtle influence, perhaps, resided in the fear that one's children might start 'goin' beyond their raisin' by becoming overeducated and feeling intellectually superior, being distracted from their commitments to family and community and, ultimately, migrating from the region in search of a more desirable lifestyle. Having pride in one's home was one means of coping with negative external stereotypes that depicted the region as one beset by ignorance, poverty and unsophistication. Such external impressions might understandably lead some to withdraw, rather than compete, an inclination perhaps exemplified by a local aphorism:

> If you can't run with the big dogs, stay on the porch. (cited in Wolf *et al.*, 2000, p. 384)

However, any sense of regional inferiority in relation to the wider US did not extend to academic self-perceptions which reflected the national picture. Thus, in comparison with our St Petersburg samples, Kentucky students tended to have much higher self-perceptions, were more likely to believe that their teachers and parents also perceived them highly, were more satisfied with their school achievements, were more likely to think that they worked as hard as they could and were less assured that they could improve their performance a lot.

As Stevenson and his colleagues have noted, while confidence in itself is not necessarily undesirable, misplaced belief in one's efforts and achievements may result in lowered expectations. Such perceptions may be a function of individual differences but are also likely to be influenced by systemic factors, a point noted by many US commentators. Stigler and Hiebert (1999) have pointed to the comparative low demands of many US classrooms and highlighted how relatively undemanding

tasks result in comparatively higher self-perceptions, yet poorer performance. The long-standing tendency of awarding high grades for schoolwork, noted by *A Nation at Risk* (1983), was not overturned as recommended and creeping grade inflation continues to be a source for concern. The drive to provide such grades is, in part, a response to pressures placed upon teachers by students and their parents and, in part, due to the strong emphasis upon developing and sustaining students' self-esteem that, when applied non-contingently, results in unrealistic levels of teacher and parent affirmation. As we note, students' self-perceptions closely mirrored their understandings of their teachers' evaluations.

Our findings regarding teacher responses to student behaviour mirror those reported by Alexander (2000). We found St Petersburg teachers to be more discriminating in their praise and more prepared to employ criticism when a student's work fell below a certain level. In contrast, Kentucky (and Sunderland) teachers tended to see praise as the default response, even when this was not merited. Thus it is hardly surprising that students in these two mileux tended to believe that their teachers had more positive conceptions than was actually the case.

Our study of parental views indicated that Kentucky parents tended to hold similar perceptions to those of the students. In comparison with our St Petersburg sample, they were more satisfied with their children's workrate, their behaviour in class and their academic achievements. When asked how their children might make more academic progress, they were considerably more likely to emphasise school-related factors. In contrast, the St Petersburg sample placed greater emphasis upon additional parent and child efforts in the home. Here the Kentucky parents' views illustrated the disengagement between home and school that several US writers have lamented. Again, this is no recent development, Bronfenbrenner (1974) having written extensively of the increasing detachment of the US school from the home – a phenomenon that has made school

> . . . one of the most potent breeding grounds of alienation in American society. (p. 60)

It seems likely that the school effectiveness and improvement movement, which has resulted in notions of 'successful' and 'failing' schools, and which places significant responsibility upon the school for maximising student progress, has also helped to reduce any recognition that responsibility for children's learning should not stop at the school gates. Our findings that Kentucky parents, compared to those in

St Petersburg, were less likely to want their children to put schoolwork before everything and more likely to report that they did not want their children to spend a lot of their free time studying, reflected the desire to achieve the 'well-rounded', less pressured, happy and self-confident student that other American studies have frequently described. Research in the United States, however, suggests that schools that focus upon broader social and affective goals appear to be less successful in heightening academic achievement than those with a more narrow preoccupation with building an academic climate (Phillips, 1997).

In line with attribution theory, the strong emphasis placed upon effort as a major factor in academic achievement should be welcomed. Our findings, obtained both from surveys and interviews, and consistent across several samples involving both students and parents, appear to contradict those of Stevenson and his team with respect to US and Asian students. However, other researchers (e.g. Bempechat and Drago-Severson, 1999) share our conclusions that attributions to ability are not key factors in undermining a large proportion of US (or English) students. Nevertheless, attributions to effort may not necessarily result in high workrates if other powerful influences are not conducive to working hard.

'Effort', of course, is a relative term. Against local norms, our Kentucky respondents thought they were working hard (a finding in this geographical region echoed by Wolf *et al.*, 2000). Thus, for these students, there was little contradiction between their endorsement of the value of hard work in school and their actual lifestyles. Permitting 'homework' to be undertaken during lessons seemed likely to reinforce students' belief that adequate effort was being made, as would the reported achievement of high grades in school, with little homework.

A belief in the potency of effort may not translate into action in situations where the perceived outcome is not greatly valued. As we note above, academic prowess, beyond a basic level, has not been traditionally valued in rural Kentucky. Our informants were far from idle, however. The level of engagement in sporting, community and other leisure activities was often high and our informants tended to lead highly active, often demanding, lifestyles. Adolescent sleep deficit was reported as a concern for teachers and parents; however, it was not typically incurred through meeting academic demands. For many students, part-time employment could be expected to take up an increasingly high proportion of time in the later years of high school.

To several members of the research team, the emphasis upon sporting achievement that permeated the schools and their local communities

was striking. It was likely that this directly and indirectly affected academic performance. Sporting activity cut into the hours available after school for study and several students informed us that academic demands were sometimes reduced when sporting events were taking place. One can only guess at the more subtle, subliminal messages that are conveyed about the relative importance of sporting and academic success which permeate throughout all levels of education. Many non-US academics are astounded by the prestige attached to university sports and the resource that is made available for scholarships and facilities. Weak students may be admitted to colleges largely because of their superior sporting skills. Salaries for university sports coaches can be phenomenal and easily outstrip those of the academic faculty. Such a preoccupation filters down into the school system. If one were to observe a typical US school team event, one would expect to find large crowds of parents and other members of the local community bedecked in T-shirts, jackets and vests adorned with the team logo. In contrast, students showing similar commitment to academic endeavour can run the risk of being labelled as nerds unless they can demonstrate other social and sporting qualities that can help them to be perceived as 'well-rounded'.

A further important distinction resides in cultural understandings about what is meant by the notion of hard work. Our investigations suggested that with respect to academic activity there were very different understandings between the Kentucky and Sunderland students on the one hand, and the St Petersburg students on the other. Kentucky students could typically find no paradox in, or conflict between, their stated espousals that they needed to work hard on their studies, at the same time as describing daily routines indicative of minimal study out-of-school hours. Understandings of what it means to work hard in, or out of, class are as we note above, largely normative. While systematic examination of classroom practices was not a feature of our studies, our observations and interviews were consistent with reports in the literature suggesting that classroom demands in many US schools are fewer and less intense than in Russia (Alexander, 2000). In many high school sessions that we observed in Kentucky and St Petersburg, there was a clear difference in pace and content. In the Kentucky schools, some lessons commenced in rather casual fashion and instruction often stopped, in our opinion, somewhat prematurely at which time students were encouraged to commence homework tasks. As some informants noted, if one were to commit at this time, and during other 'free' sessions, much homework could be completed without a need to study at home.

While there was little evidence that a significant proportion of students perceived academic achievement as significantly meaningful in terms of personal development or in achieving status and respect from others, its extrinsic value was widely recognised. We were intrigued to see glossy door hangers saying, 'Quiet! I'm doing my homework! Because I want to be a millionaire!' Students were motivated to achieve good grades, largely in order to advance their future vocational prospects. A high school diploma was no longer seen as sufficient, and the great majority expressed a desire to go to college. Our investigations suggested that, by and large, students felt they could achieve their goals by investing levels of energy and commitment significantly less demanding than those of their St Petersburg peers.

Several commentators have suggested that the curriculum and assessment system in US schools can reduce student motivation to pursue deep study. Powell *et al.* (1985) liken the US high school to a shopping mall where students can select from a wide choice of subjects that may lack any meaningful coherence and which results in a curriculum that is a '...mile wide and inch thick' (Prais, 2000, p. 74). Although students seek to score good teacher grades across subjects, unlike the majority of other industrialised nations, there are no external public examinations in each of the academic disciplines. Rather, the key measures are the SAT and ACT tests that equate closely to measures of intelligence and that sample only a small number of curricular areas. More recent initiatives, such as the growth of high stakes testing and the NCLB Act are criticised for testing a narrow range of academic skills and for encouraging a surface approach to learning.

Researchers are increasingly recognising the important role of peer influences in achievement motivation. One important influence is classroom climate. Kentucky (and Sunderland) students reported considerably higher levels of disruption in their lessons than did their St Petersburg counterparts – a finding hardly surprising given the wealth of existing research findings reported over the past four decades (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1967; Alexander, 2000). In addition, students' efforts may be affected by a variety of other peer influences, although our Kentucky findings were somewhat equivocal in this respect. Unlike Sunderland students, who reported being influenced in negative ways by their peers (i.e. were less likely to work hard and concentrate on their studies) and St Petersburg students, who reported the positive effect of peers; Kentucky students reported a relatively even split between positive and negative influences. Of course, peer influence will operate at a more subtle level and students may fail to recognise the

extent to which the culture of their classrooms affects their behaviour and attitudes. As we note earlier, academic success has long tended to be valued by US school students yet, in many cases, this is ideally achieved without demonstrating significant effort or commitment.

Sunderland

In many respects, the perspectives of our Sunderland informants did not differ greatly from those in Kentucky and, in most cases, the clearest distinctions emerged between the Anglo-American groups and those from St Petersburg. The positive self-perceptions and satisfaction with current workrate and performance (mirrored by teachers and parents), the attributions to effort, the instrumental value placed upon educational success, and the more negative impact of peers were all, more or less, features of both milieux.

A child's view of the world and how he or she operates within it will derive not only from their immediate personal experiences but also from the wider social context and its history (Mills, 1970). Running throughout the history of English education has been the thorny issue of social class (Halsey *et al.*, 1980). For some sociologists (e.g. Reay, 2001), the patronising views of those such as Robert Lowe (1960/1867), a nineteenth-century key policy maker, have not fully disappeared:

> If the lower classes must now be educated . . . they must be educated that they may appreciate and defer to a higher civilisation when they meet it.

Reay argues that education for English working-class children has primarily been about failure, about being 'found out' to be a 'nothing', a person of little consequence. In contrast, children of the middle classes are inculcated into a belief that failure is unacceptable and belongs elsewhere. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that, in Britain, socioeconomic status appears to be a particularly significant factor in adolescents' educational achievement and participation (OECD, 2003; Steedman and Stoney, 2004).

In our investigations, social class appeared to be a particularly salient factor in Sunderland. Nowhere is this more powerful than in relation to formal assessment which, according to Reay (2001), is a primary means whereby working-class students derive feelings of worthlessness. Unlike their US counterparts, students in England are ultimately driven by the desire to achieve in public examinations at age sixteen and, for an

increasing number, eighteen. These exams are the passport to further and higher education and a more attractive vocational outcome. Those students who 'do the math' and calculate that their examination performance is unlikely to enable them to achieve desirable outcomes, may find it difficult to be motivated to exert substantial effort. Thus, as students move through secondary school, the difference in workrates and expectations widen. This was most obvious in relation to academic demands outside of school. Unlike the Kentucky context, where the low incidence of homework was relatively uniform, and St Petersburg, where more homework might be needed for the student who was slower to grasp the material, in England, homework demands seem to increase for the more high achieving students in the more affluent schools as exams draw nearer.

It is hardly surprising that in Sunderland, a city where approximately one quarter of its political wards are amongst the most deprived 5 per cent in England (City of Sunderland, 2004), many students lack energy, motivation and drive. Living on bleak council housing estates, where unemployment rates can exceed 50 per cent, within families experiencing second- or third-generation unemployment, many children have limited expectations for the future and cannot see education as a meaningful route to escape disadvantage (Wilkinson, 1995). Unlike many St Petersburg youth, who have become more entrepreneurial as a result of the current economic situation, the most disadvantaged in Sunderland are unlikely to see a way to improve their lot. It is, perhaps, a bitter irony for such young people that the motto of Sunderland's Coat of Arms states: 'Nil desperandum auspice deo' – that is, Do not despair; trust in God. This contrasts with the well-known Russian proverb that states: 'Trust in God, but do it yourself.'

Local educationists often use the descriptor 'apathy' to describe the key problem in respect of a significant proportion of Sunderland adolescents. This is reflected by findings from a study of young adults in four geographical areas of Britain (Ashton and Maguire, 1986), in which particularly high levels of hopelessness were observed in Sunderland. Rather than being depressed by the experience of unemployment,

> Many [Sunderland] respondents appeared to face the prospect of long-term unemployment with resignation. (p. 5)

The researchers noted that there appeared to be little criticism of the performance of their schools in preparing them for the world of work, thus

> . . . reflecting a certain fatalism that there was little the schools could
> have done about their situation. (p. 30)

As we have already noted, policy makers are likely to focus their
attentions upon those aspects that are more readily amenable to
change. However, it would appear that many of those factors that have
most preoccupied current debate in England – pre-school education,
class size, teaching method, homework policy and streaming – appear
to have a significantly more limited role in determining basic skills of
literacy and numeracy than social class, parental interest and peer
group pressure (Robinson, 1997).

St Petersburg

In visiting many schools and universities in the United States and
Russia, the two English authors of this text had many opportunities to
speak with students, teachers and academics with direct experience of
schooling in both countries. Invariably, our informants have spoken of
a significant gap in academic demand and levels of motivation and
engagement. One Russian mother, an academic now working in a
highly rated US research university in Tennessee, informed the first
author that, in Russia, she worried continually about her teenage son
who was studying all hours and just managing to cope with the academic
demands. Now at a prestigious American high school, he was consistently
scoring all 'A' grades, yet she was still worried as he now appeared to be
engaging in minimal study. At a Florida high school, renowned for its
superior test scores and the wealth of many of the students' families,
the first author met two students who had emigrated from a minor
Russian city during their adolescence. Their cynicism about the relatively
low academic demands they had encountered on their arrival was only
marginally tempered by their approval of the magnificent resources
that were available in their new school. These, of course, are little more
than travellers' tales that have little credence in serious social science.
Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to ignore totally the anecdotal
experiences of visitors to other cultures and those who have lived in
both countries when the messages conveyed are so uniform.

   The most striking feature in our studies in St Petersburg was the way that
so many of our observations seemed to reflect long-standing phenomena.
In our investigations we found schools to be still essentially similar to
those described by writers during the past half century; indeed, remarkable
continuity appears to be a defining feature of education throughout the

twentieth century. In a telling account, Schweisfurth (1998), researching in Perm, some 1400 km east of St Petersburg, reported that

> Teachers were bemused and amused when queried about the reasoning behind such classroom routines as putting books in a certain place on the desk, or raising hands in a certain way. Things had always been so and they hadn't really thought about it. (p. 3)

Russian parents and grandparents have shared with their student offspring similar experiences of learning as a member of an unselected, all-ability class. As a consequence, family members know fairly reliably what their children's education will involve. They are likely to know how to monitor their children's learning, to be able to contextualise and understand school reports and to share perceptions of workrate, behaviour and progress with teachers, who, in turn, usually have a detailed knowledge of each child. Although not in itself a motivational factor, students' relative inability to conceal or misrepresent school expectations and demands facilitates parent engagement and parent–school collaboration in monitoring motivation.

St Petersburg students, their parents and their teachers consistently appeared more demanding in their perceptions and standards. There was always a consensual sense that more could be achieved if the workrate was increased further. Although the teachers did not rate the standards of their students as poorly as their charges believed, they were still less positive than their Anglo-American colleagues and were far less reluctant to employ criticism when standards fell. Russian parents were more likely to believe that the means to increased progress was situated within the home, as well as the school, and that the family had a supportive role in this respect.

Demanding workrates appeared to be normative in St Petersburg. Indeed, Russian commentators have expressed alarm about the high levels of stress and fatigue resulting from the demands of schooling. Russian schooling is formulated to move students together through a progressively demanding curriculum. Students asserted that they would be unable to cope with lessons without several hours of independent study each evening. It was in this context that Russian teenagers observed that hard work alone was often insufficient to achieve the highest grades and that some definite talent for a subject was necessary. That is, ability emerged as the finally discriminating variable, where high levels of academic effort could be taken for granted. In Kentucky, by contrast, a lesser curriculum demand, coupled with greater variation

in viable levels of academic engagement, seemed likely to accentuate students' perception of effort as the discriminant variable.

The Soviet system emphasised a demanding and encyclopaedic curriculum that, alongside the wider 'vospitanie' (upbringing), was the means for becoming 'a new Communist man'. A system of neighbourhood comprehensives and mixed ability teaching, in which absolute consistency of input was centrally dictated, resulted in a reduced tendency for the major disparities in effort and attainment that are particular features of the English context (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996). A conscious striving on the part of teachers to engage all the children in the class, which contrasts with the greater time off-task that can result from more individualised approaches of English and US schools, maximises attention and involvement in learning (Alexander, 2000, p. 366). A tradition of high classroom demand, where only exceptional performance will result in the highest grades, and long hours of homework have persisted to the extent that contemporary commentators have expressed concern about their effect upon children's physical and psychological health.

Our student, teacher and parent informants in St Petersburg were considerably more likely than their Anglo-American counterparts to perceive education as something intrinsically valuable. When it was suggested to students that they might consider putting aside their studies to engage in more financially lucrative enterprises, the great majority were dismissive of the suggestion and pointed out the importance of education as a means of personal growth as well as economic advancement. In their environment, the value of being cultured, articulate and erudite was still widely accepted. Such attitudes may be important in maintaining motivation in situations where students do not perceive a clear link between academic effort and future vocational prospects. Where education is seen in highly instrumental terms, students who lack a belief that they can achieve sufficient examination success to gain access to desirable occupations, may be more likely to become disillusioned and opt out. This is a strong feature of education in both England and the United States, particularly, perhaps, with regard to certain ethnic groups. As we note elsewhere, however, increasing instrumentality on the part of students is now becoming a concern for Russian educationists.

A long-standing recognition of the powerful role of the collective in learning has resulted in mechanisms that continue to promote pro-social peer influence. In this respect, our findings about positive classroom behaviour and peer influences echo those not only of Alexander in the 1990s and Muckle in the 1980s, but also Bronfenbrenner in the 1960s.

As Alexander (2000) notes, the classroom is highly ordered and, in comparison with the United States and England, significant indiscipline is rare and may to lead to a strong sense of security on the part of students (Muckle, 1998). High achieving students are generally respected and seen as sources of help and of collective pride.

A factor that one might anticipate would result in lower levels of motivation and engagement in Russia is the somewhat stultifying emphasis upon learning received knowledge that has long been a particular feature of the Soviet years. The heavy ideological stance of the Soviet era resulted in an educational system with a

> . . . strong emphasis upon factual content, a reluctance to admit to controversy or uncertainty on any point, a consequent tendency to reduce aesthetic or . . . philosophical subjects to a catalogue of stereo-typed statements, little consideration of the child as recipient of all this, a strongly formal atmosphere, and stress on classroom rituals. . . . The subject most of all, and the teacher in second place, are firmly in control of all that happens. (Muckle, 1990, p. 104)

Indeed, some have described this process as dehumanising and 'directed at the destruction of school pupils' individuality' (Westbrook, 1994, p. 107). While classes can appear authoritarian, it should be noted that authoritarianism is rooted in the Russian tradition (Glowka, 1995) and is still valued by many (McFarland *et al.*, 1996). Many Russian adults look back fondly upon their education during the Soviet period (Schweisfurth, 2000) and there appears to have been widespread acceptance that while not always 'fun', education had a meaningful and valuable purpose.

For many children, the need to accumulate a huge range of facts across a wide range of compulsory subjects is unwelcome. Unlike the progressive tradition in much of England and the United States, where active learning, problem-solving and collaborative groupwork have been seen as means to increase student engagement, the Russian emphasis upon rote learning represents an approach that would, in many Western contexts, be expected to result in much unrest and disengagement. However, of the three groups, children in St Petersburg reported liking school the most. Perhaps this reflects the safety and security that many Russian children feel in schools, or merely the fact that 'Russian children are almost unbelievably tolerant of boring lessons' (Muckle, 1998, p. 37). It is something of a paradox, perhaps, that the growth towards the democratisation and humanisation of

Russian schooling is taking place at a time when concerns about student motivation are increasing.

To the casual classroom observer, Russian academic practices may seem to be inimical to the methods advocated by Western motivational theorists. However, we concur with Alexander (2000) that superficial 'cultural colonialism' (p. 69) can blind us to the significant achievements of Russian education. In trying to understand the motivational role of Russian classroom contexts that may seem to be ill-suited to Western ideals of individualism, democracy, autonomy and positive affirmation, we believe that the following explanation may have some currency. As a result of pervasive cultural influences, Russian students are strongly motivated to the extent that they construe teacher correction as help and value it throughout their schooling. Because education is valued in itself, maturing students increasingly aim to achieve mastery goals (i.e. concern themselves with understanding the material) rather than performance-approach goals (where the focus is on performing better than one's peers). Performance-avoid goals are influential, but take the form of a sufficient commitment to adequate performance, because poor performance threatens to undermine solidarity with collaborative peers and could present as ingratitude to helpful teachers. Because 'education' is defined by the school curriculum, to which teachers are the best guides, students feel little need to value choice of learning task, or autonomy in tackling tasks, especially where prescribed instructional tasks may be felt to be 'authentic'. Though ability is finally decisive in securing the best marks, effort applied to successful memorisation is sufficiently rewarded for students to maintain a sense of self-efficacy in proportion to their readiness to expend that effort, throughout most of their schooling. There is little scope for the effects of other than very short-term expectancy on motivation, where learning involves steady, guided and measured steps, along a generally valued, prescribed path, and where it is accepted that the cost will be the necessary effort. Student agency finds (a narrow, but real) play in the development of increasingly effective study, learning and metacognitive skills.

Chapter 8 has shown, however, that dramatic social change can greatly disrupt long-standing traditions and perspectives. However, in the long term these may be relatively resistant to modification. Just as an individual may find it possible to change an established pattern of behaviour for a short period, yet eventually find themselves retreating to their former ways, so may a form of social regression emerge after initial change. In reflecting upon society and education in Russia, Andreev (2003) notes that his country is rejecting 'infatuation with the

West' and turning back towards 'age-old Russian ideas, moral precepts and way of life' (p. 8). Citing a study in 2001, in which Russians noted educational progress as the major achievement of Russia in the twentieth century, Andreev argues that education is once again central to social values. Recognising the irrevocable influence of the market place, Andreev notes the value of education for achieving a good job and salary. Nevertheless, he adds, surveys of university students indicate that

> . . . much greater importance is attached to being educated, the opportunity to become an educated individual. It turns out that these days being educated is, in the minds of young people in Russia, primarily a way of affirming their personal worth and social self-identification, imparting meaningfulness and social significance, regardless of having a bank account and so-called prestige factors. (pp. 12–13)

Conclusions

In books such as this, it is the convention that authors should draw upon reported findings in order to provide a series of recommendations for improving educational performance. It is our position that this could hardly serve any useful purpose. Our research has led us to agree with Miller and Goodnow (1995) that teaching and learning practices are culturally embedded within broader socialisation practices, which themselves reflect underlying value systems. At the same time, if we do not feel able to make positive recommendations, there are nonetheless certain strictures that we feel do emerge from our research.

There can be little serious doubt that much poor motivation, if not generated, is exacerbated by formal differentiation between peer students, whether at the level of the classroom, the school or the system. Here, the Russian experience of managing differentiation is informative. It suggests that reducing formal differentiation amongst students need not be incompatible with high achievement for those capable of it. By contrast, it is arguable that, in the English system, early and persistent differentiation procures positional advantage for a minority of students, at the expense of longer-term educational gains for the majority. Nor is it clear that the minority which benefits needs early differentiation to do so. Thus, without refusing an appropriate place to differentiation, it would seem advantageous to seek to delay and minimise its adverse effects to the greatest extent compatible with achieving other, validly competitive system goals.

We may not have wholly absorbed some implications for individual human development of the fact that, in many educational systems, education is now not so much offered to, as required of, students. This is not a new development in Russia, but it is in England and Kentucky and, again, the Russian experience may be suggestive. Since we can hardly expect students to be motivated to meet the requirement on them, unless the education we are requiring has potentially valuable human meaning, there are obvious implications that curricula should instantiate such meaning and pedagogy share it . But it may also be that teacher–student relations need to become more 'engaged': that is, if I am going to make you learn, I must also help you more to learn, and this may mean my being more concerned – and having the practical means to be more concerned – for you as a developing human, with a history and a future, than is captured by thinking of myself either as a 'curriculum deliverer' or as a 'facilitator of learning'. At present, we suspect we do not really have the conceptual frameworks to describe and evaluate teachers' professional relationships with students which partake of both 'child- and subject-centredness'. Motivating many young people to learn on prescribed curricula may involve developing and acting within new forms of discourse.

Finally, if the function of schooling is centrally conceived as the preparation of students for the labour market, we can hardly be surprised if motivation to learn generally correlates with students' estimates of their future marketability. As a Kentucky teacher succinctly put it,

> We sold kids a bill of goods there, for a while, 'Go to college. You'll have a great job', and that's not necessarily true anymore . . .

But, education is the means of many more human goods than the economic. Motivating many young people may involve finding ways to celebrate and value those goods which steer between cultural elitism and pragmatic utilitarianism.

We think these could all be ways forward to increase overall motivation to learn in school, but we are not optimistic that they will prove politically available, in any of our three countries, at any time soon. We would expect each state to determine its own values and goals and the price it is prepared to pay for these. We would not expect England to quickly give up premature differentiation; Kentucky, pragmatic utilitarianism; or Russia, a cultural canon which constrains individuality in the pursuit of non-economic goods.

The kinds of shift in thinking that would be required can be illustrated by an American example. Following TIMSS, the US government (as in England) sought to emulate the performance of those countries that achieved most highly. Thus, in 1989, President Bush announced Education Goals 2000, in which one goal was that by the year 2000, US students would be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement. But, this was never likely to succeed for, to achieve this, more than the sorts of reforms offered by KERA, despite some isolated school successes (Wolf *et al*., 2000), would be necessary. A commitment to academic learning, and a radical change of student lifestyle would be required that would never meet with the approval of the populace.

In the course of our study, we asked a Kentucky teenager what would happen if a new Principal came into his school and sought to introduce greater academic demands that would necessarily eat into out-of-school time. The boy immediately and confidently replied,

He wouldn't last two weeks. The parents would run him out of town.

This off-the-cuff, but assured, remark says volumes about what truly matters in many communities in the United States and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in England, and is indicative of perspectives that will not easily be changed by target setting, high stakes testing, pedagogic reform or any other externally imposed school-based policy initiatives.

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