

# An Australian Co-educational Boarding School: A Sociological Study of Anglo-Australian and Overseas Students' Attitudes from their own Memoirs

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*Subjugated to the anachronistic rhetoric of nineteenth century literature, Australian boarding schools are habitually depicted as the remanence of a pre-colonial era. These images continue to be dominated by the paradigm of cruelty popularised by Tom Brown's School Days. This paper analyses the aspirations and attitudes of a study group of Anglo-Australian and overseas secondary students at a co-educational boarding school through their own memoirs. The theoretical framework of humanistic sociology, as developed by the Polish-American sociologist Znaniecki combined with Smolicz's theory of personal and group social systems was adopted for this purpose. The humanistic sociological approach asserts that a researcher must accept cultural phenomena from the viewpoint of the participants. The lineation and delineations of data revealed that respondents believed the boarding houses in the research school encouraged independence from the primary group system of the family and that the school provided the atmosphere to achieve this cultural becoming. The study revealed an attitudinal shift in the group that welcomed the multiculturalism of the school and acknowledged the cultural monism of the home. Lastly, cultural data revealed that the boarding house represented an adjunct to the home as the source of primary group social value, not necessarily replacing the role of the family but co-existing with it, as part of the secondary social system of the boarding school.*

boarding, co-education, independent schools, humanistic sociology, multiculturalism

## INTRODUCTION

### **Defining a boarding school and a boarding house in Australia**

Defining a boarding school in Australia is problematic due to the limit of sociological studies undertaken in this country (Stewart, 2001). Rich (1989) asserts that boarding in Australia is a colonial reinterpretation of the architecture, educational philosophy and structure of the public schools of Great Britain such as Eton, Harrow, and Winchester. However, in order to find an appropriate definition it is necessary to refer to studies completed in Great Britain and the United States.

An American study asserts that Rousseau is the originator of boarding school education (Cookson and Hodges-Persell, 1985). However, it is more widely accepted that the Western tradition of boarding school education owes its origins to the rule and monasticism of St Benedict. This position is supported when we consider the foundation of Eton by Henry VI in 1440. Here the monarch endowed the college with many religious relics, including a fragment of the True Cross, so that it would not only become a seat of learning, but also pilgrimage. Another example is the English Benedictine Abbey at Downside. Founded in 1605, today this boarding school remains an integral part of religious life originally established for the education of the sons of the Roman

Catholic aristocracy. Sociologists Fox (1985), Kalton (1966), Lambert (1966; 1968; 1969; 1970; 1975), Punch (1977), Wakeford (1969), Walford (1986) and Weinberg (1967) concur that a boarding school is a non-profit organisation built for the specific purpose of residential education and benefit of the adolescent, often founded on religious principles, with a group of expert adults, who form the basis of a 'total community' as defined by Goffman (1961) where the whole community is subject to the authority of a single body, and live a regulated life.

Weinberg (1967) argues that in order for a *school* to be called 'boarding' there must be a residential population of at least 75 per cent. Conversely, Kalton (1966) suggests 50 per cent as a figure. In Australia there are a number of boarding houses which are attached to Independent Schools, however, the percentage of students who are boarders as part of the overall percentage of the school population is minimal. The research school for this paper fulfils Weinberg's definition, but is one of the few schools in Australia that does. The senior school comprises of seven senior boarding houses of approximately 65 students and two-day houses of about 70 students.

### Humanistic sociology

Adopting the humanistic sociological approach to the collection and interpretation of cultural data as developed by Polish-American sociologist Znaniecki this paper investigated the attitudes of secondary school students towards boarding school education in the multi-ethnic context of Australia. This study asked the research question: 'What impact does the experience of boarding school education have upon the social system of the student?'

The present study collected and analysed responses to an extended questionnaire written by students of predominantly rural and urban Anglo-Australian, and non-English speaking backgrounds. The respondents were asked the following questions.

- To what extent does boarding school life change you?
- To what extent does boarding school prepare you for life after school?

Znaniecki's approach to sociology presumes that individuals are active contributors in their social and cultural framework – or that the individual and his or her milieu represent one unity (Smolicz 1999, p.302). Consequently, humanistic sociology rejects the methodological unity of science. A humanistic approach needs a method that allows data collection from a participant's point of view thereby minimizing the influence of the researcher on the data assembled. Accordingly the analysis of personal documents such as letters, diaries and memoirs becomes the defining difference of Znaniecki sociology of *Verstehen* (Helle, 2000). This method permits the participants to express their ideas, beliefs, observations and values, aspirations and feelings, reflecting upon themselves, their situations as they perceive them, and their actions within a social system.

As Smolicz (1999) notes it was through the so called 'humanistic structuralisation' of natural phenomena that a researcher's active involvement begins at the point of analysis of data for the purpose of interpreting a participant's actions and situation with what Znaniecki (1963) refers to as the 'humanistic coefficient'. That is to say in the context of this study, how these cultural facts appear to the human individuals who actually experience them in the boarding school as a cultural system (Halas, 1985).

Znaniecki notes that a researcher needs to accept human values and activities as facts, just as human agents themselves accept them. Furthermore, he asserts that personal documents permit imaginative reconstruction of an individual's experiences and hence open up the possibility of the analysis of an unique human dynamic in social and cultural life.

Therefore according to the humanistic approach, if a researcher and reader accept these human values as facts we are able to share in the experiences of the respondents. Kloskowska further notes that memoirs reveal “the extent of individual variation within a cultural group”. From her observations she argues that autobiographical material is among the best data for “grass roots level research” which examines the “personal experience of individual, ordinary people” (Kloskowska, 1996, pp.466-467).

### Concrete and cultural facts in the analysis of memoirs

Mokrzycki (1971) says that imaginative reconstruction occurs when analysing other people’s experiences from their own writing at the same time as considering everything that is known about them. Humanistic sociologists refer to two types of data available from memoirs known as concrete and cultural facts (Smolicz, 1974; 1979; 1999 Smolicz and Secombe, 1981; 1989).

Confirmable facts or *concrete facts* include information such as the gender of respondents, their age, date-of-birth, and ethnic background, languages spoken and place of residence. The concrete facts collected in this study provide information about family background, if there was a previous connection with the school, present circumstances and life experiences. Sometimes this material is presented in the memoir. In this study a separate section which specifically asked these types of questions was included based on the practice of similar studies (Smolicz and Secombe, 1981; 1990). Table 1 summarises the data of respondents for this study.

Primarily the humanistic sociologist is interested in data that can only come from the respondents themselves. These data may include a description of their life, their fears, their hopes, their social situation, and their aspirations. Such material is referred to as ‘cultural facts’. These facts represent the verbalization of a respondent’s imaginative reconstruction in a social system at a particular time.

**Table 1. Concrete Fact Profile of Memoir Writers**

Memoir reference letter	Sex	Year started boarding	Age at time of writing	Residence	Place of birth	Languages spoken at home other than English	Ethnic identity	Religious affiliation
A	M	1996	18	Singapore	Singapore	-	American	Catholic
B	M	1996	18	Benella, Victoria	Hereford, UK	-	Australian	Anglican
C	M	1997	17	Gisborne, Victoria	Gisborne, Vic	-	Australian	Atheist
D	M	1998	16	Melbourne	Adelaide	-	Australian	Anglican
E	M	1997	16	Mt Gambier	Mt Gambier	-	Australian	Anglican
F	F	1998	16	Tokyo, Japan	Tokyo	Japanese	Japanese	Buddhist
G	F	1997	16	Bangkok, Thailand	Thailand	Thai	Thai	Buddhist
H	F	1998	17	Brunei	Brunei	-	Australian	Anglican
I	F	1999	17	Bangkok	Thailand	Thai	Thai	Buddhist
J	M	1997	16	Thailand	Thailand	Thai	Thai	Buddhist
K	M	1996	17	Geelong	Sth Africa	-	Australian	Anglican

In terms of research outcomes the researcher was a teacher at the school during the study, thus the role of participant-observer was adopted. The limitations of this type of data collection are that some students may feel compelled to write what they believe they *ought* to say, rather than what they truly believe as fact for fear of a member of the school reading their complete responses. On the other hand the memoir method permits respondents to reflect on their answers unlike the time-consuming and expensive approach of recorded-interviews (Smolicz and Secombe, 1986). However, the most coherent of memoirs provide an excellent impression of the respondents’ social and cultural context at boarding school through their own eyes.

As Znaniecki (1930) notes in *Cultural Sciences* this method of data collection permits the researcher to trace the cultural ‘becoming’ of respondents through their written comments – or imaginative reconstructions. Znaniecki clarifies this by using the metaphor of a frozen stream of water to represent an individual’s consciousness as part of the social system of a stream of water. Znaniecki wrote that consciousness appears:

...as a freezing stream, on the surface of which smaller or larger lumps of ice are forming, floating with the current, coagulating, dissolving, but presenting while afloat a more or less solid bulk. Znaniecki (1930, p.378)

Znaniecki observes that an individual’s awareness, like the stream of water is an incessantly developing super-organic body. Through the analysis of memoirs it is possible to see that whilst being part of a boarding school an individual’s consciousness appears to freeze, melt, and change depending on the physical environment and the relationships between social systems. In memoir analysis cultural facts are recognised in the form of attitudes that are directly expressed by the memoir writers in relation to their particular social situations and experiences. They are often prefaced with phrases such as ‘I think’, ‘I feel’, and ‘I hope’. This is best embodied by two memoirs:

... it [boarding school] has changed me but I think that I have developed more. I also think that boarding school has given me an environment to mature within. (Student A)

Another example:

*I think that the most positive aspects [of boarding school] are the relationships and friendships one develops.* (Student B)

From this type of cultural data it is possible to reconstruct individual and group consciousness. Furthermore by adopting Znaniecki’s imagery of human consciousness as being a “frozen stream” we can see that the respondents’ memoirs in this study parallel this metaphor. Through concrete data the researcher is presented with “the surface” which is made up of “smaller or larger lumps of ice” that are still forming. Some memoirs are “floating with the current, coagulating, dissolving”. However, when analysed together they present a “more or less solid bulk” representing the social system of the boarding school.

Cultural facts articulate the experience of being or becoming a “lump of ice” in the “stream” of boarding school. These memoirs caught in a moment of stasis represent the experiences of individuals either “floating”, “coagulating” or “dissolving” as part of the social system. The significant achievement of humanistic sociology is that the so-called ‘humanistic coefficient’ which permits the researcher to analyse these facts at a moment in time.

### **The present study**

The rationale when considering this set of memoirs by boarders in a co-educational boarding school is to reconstruct as authentically as possible their school milieu as seen by the writers who have lived and acted in it. In Australia the method of collecting and analysing memoirs has been used to study the experiences of various ethnic groups (Smolicz and Secombe, 1981; 1982); for investigating the nature of core values in minority ethnic groups (Smolicz, 1987; 1992; Smolicz and Secombe, 1986; 1989; Smolicz, Lee, Murugaian and Secombe, 1990; 1997); and more recently ‘cultural becoming’ amongst university graduates (Hudson, 1995). In some of these studies there was a modification of the memoir method, in that participants were not required to supply full-scale life histories.

The data for this study was collected in two sections in July 2000 and July 2001. All respondents took part in this study voluntarily. The selection criteria for respondents was:

- all respondents were in Years 11 and 12;
- all respondents were between 15-18 years of age;
- all respondents were boarders at the school at least one year before completing the questionnaire.

From the initial data it was decided that students of a non-English speaking background would be targeted to provide a more representative picture of the cross-cultural student context. With the help of a colleague who taught English as a Second Language this was achieved. All students were given three weeks to complete the questionnaire and all students received the same questions.

All respondents were required to complete 26 questions which provided concrete data and 23 which provided the source of cultural data. The personal statements which formulated the cultural data section of the questionnaire can be taken as memoirs in the Znaniecki sense, in that the participants were given the freedom to answer the question in whatever manner they chose. The data collected were limited in that respondents were asked to write on their experiences at boarding school rather than their whole lives. In length, the memoirs ranged from approximately 2,000 to 5,000 words, with the majority being around 2,500 words.

The analysis of these memoirs was based on humanistic sociological theory as applied to the study of culturally plural societies (Znaniecki, 1968; Smolicz, 1979; 1990; 1997). Each national, or ethnic, group was seen as having its own more or less unique set of cultural and social systems. These were referred to as *group social systems* to distinguish them from *personal cultural systems* which individual members constructed for themselves to meet their particular life situations. Individuals developed their personal systems in order to suit the group values available to them at the time. The concept of a personal cultural system recognised both the reality of the inner personal world of individuals and the fact that it is made out of the cultural values they learned as a group (Smolicz, 1979, pp.1-46; 1990b, pp.60-66; Smolicz and Secombe, 1981; 1989; 1990, p.20).

### **An Australian boarding school**

In 2002, the research school for this study described itself as an 'Anglican School for girls and boys'. Hansen (1971) completed a small sociological and historical account of the school before it became fully co-educational in 1976. Founded in 1855 as a boarding school in the tradition of the Public Schools of Great Britain it was described in 1889 as a 'thoroughly English public school, of the type of Winchester, Shrewsbury, or Cheltenham'.

Since Hansen's study the school has grown to four campuses. The student population of the main campus is 808 and incorporates students from Years 5-12 located on a natural bay in rural Victoria. Year 9 is spent entirely at a campus in the Victorian High Country where the student population is 210. There are two small preparatory schools; one in the local rural city with a student population of 114 taking students from Early Learning Centre – Year 4, which acts as a feeder school to the main campus; and a preparatory school in Melbourne with a student population of 372 with an Early Learning Centre – Year 8. The overall school's student gender ratio is 844 girls to 889 boys. Hansen (1971, pp.3-4) described the school's physical environment:

... the clock tower ... is squat and solid ... The quadrangle complex is of red bricks; all school buildings are of a piece in that the material has a pleasing homogeneity. The

other senior school boarding houses ... are not unlike some of the Winchester's houses in a late nineteenth century upper-middle class mode. A graceful war memorial cloister leads ... to the chapel. The chapel is rather elegantly plain in its interior, with a single rose window at the east, a tapestry reredos and a simple dark wood rood screen. There is an air of the English village church about it and, indeed, this is the village air of the school environment. Set within private property of some one thousand acres ... with a railway station almost its own, the place is in itself insulation against the wider world. Boys [and girls] see staff wives wheeling prams or escorting toddlers to nursery school, all within the context of [the college] ... Between periods and outside school hour's boys [and girls] move about with an unhurried easy nonchalance, shirts open at neck, perhaps wearing a house pullover...

The school is managed by a Council comprising of 18 individuals. Three positions are *ex officio*; the President, who is the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, the Archdeacon of the local diocese and the President of the Old Scholars' Association. Of these council members 7 attended the school as boarders. The other members of the Council are current and past parents of students of the school.

The Council is responsible for the appointment of the position of Principal (formerly Head Master) who functions as *pater scholaris* in the School. The Principal in turn is responsible for the appointment of academic staff. Over 90 per cent of the teachers is resident at the School. There are 60 male academic members of staff and 49 female academic members of staff. All staff hold bachelor degrees or higher and diplomas or degrees related to teaching. Besides formal academic responsibilities members of staff are required to be a tutor in one of the boarding houses at the school – which include formal boarding house duties, coaching at least one sport during the year, and being involved in the extensive co-curricular programme.

### A student's day

As summarised in Table 2 a typical student's day commences at 6.20am with a bell which summons student to get up, shower and make their beds. Students are expected to be at roll call at 7.00am with their beds ready for inspection of dormitories completed by a member of staff and a Prefect-on-Duty. At 7.15am students move to the main dining hall for breakfast. Once breakfast is completed students returned to their House by 7.45am to complete House jobs. At 8.00am students commence a morning preparation (homework) session before Chapel at 8.40am.

**Table 2. A senior student's weekday timetable at the school**

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6.20 am	Bell, wake-up, shower, make bed
7.00 am	Roll call and dormitory inspection
7.15 am	Breakfast
7.45 am	House jobs
8.00 am	Morning prep. session
8.40 am	Chapel
9.00 am	Classes
10.40 am	Morning tea
11.10 am	Classes
12.50 pm	Luncheon
1.50 pm	Classes
3.30 pm	Sport
5.30 pm	Dinner
7.00 pm	Roll call and evening assembly
7.20 pm	1st evening prep. session
9.00 pm	Break – 2nd prep. session
10.00 pm	Lights out for Years 10 and 11
10.15 pm	Year 12s may work in rooms – lights out before 11.00pm

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At 9.00am classes commence until morning tea when students return back to Houses before lessons start again at 11.10am until lunch. If a student is not involved in an activity, school band or school choir, lunch is taken in the dining hall at a leisurely pace. Academic classes end at 3.30pm whereafter student take part in compulsory sport, or activities. After this students change back into formal uniform for dinner (known as Number Ones) in the dining hall. Free time is enjoyed until 7.00pm assembly and evening prep. from 7.20 – 9.00pm. A break, showers, supper and then second prep is completed until 10.00pm. Lights Out are at 10.15pm for Years 10 and 11. Year 12 students work quietly in their own studies.

This timetable remains relatively unaltered except on the weekends where students have far more free time. All students must attend either compulsory morning Mass in the School Chapel or Benediction in the evening.

## OVERVIEW OF MEMOIRS

### The breadth of attitudes towards boarding school

Of the 45 respondents all noted that individual and group change took place at boarding school. The difference between individual's previous school and boarding school was noted in all 45 memoirs. These observations were evenly distributed as having both negative and positive impact on their perception of boarding school and life beyond it. The majority of respondents believed that boarding school had a positive impact on their ability to 'get ahead' after school. The most common description of boarding was that it made a student 'independent' from the primary social system of the home. These comments were often coupled with the context of learning how to tolerate and live with their peers for an extended period of time. The following example written by a Year 12 student from rural Victoria articulated this point:

*Boarding school makes you a more independent, free thinking person. Your parents are not around to tell you what to do, or to tidy up after you. However, it only works for those who enjoy it ... It makes you adapt more to the outside world. Some say that it shelters you – but not really. For it provides a smaller 'mock' community with everything going on ... It makes you more capable (it has made me) of coping with being on your own and doing things for yourself and more socially capable too.*  
(Student C)

The notion that the system of boarding school 'makes you more capable' was a recurrent theme. Respondent C was one of only three students who noted that boarding school represents a smaller community.

Some respondents noted that boarding school made them aware of other individuals as forming part of a new social system that they had entered:

*Boarding school life does change you significantly. Mainly because you are living so close to so many people. This tends to make you far more aware of those around you and the need for you to treat them well. I also believe that boarding school changes your perception of others, in that whilst you are boarding – you realise that everyone around you has at least one talent or goal that they are focused on.* (Student D)

Coupled with the phenomena of individuality was a sense of being 'empowered' which suggested that respondents believed they would be able to deal with others in potentially stressful situations as a consequence of the totality of a boarding school community:

*... you are better equipped at dealing with people in stressful situations and perhaps better at figuring out what people want you to say. I think it also helps you form a core*

*of friends which you can rely upon outside of school for support. From my experience it gives you enough confidence to believe that you can achieve anything you want, but not without working for it. (Student E)*

This phenomenon was not only mentioned by students who identified themselves as being Anglo-Australian. One female student from Thailand wrote that since being at boarding school:

*I am more confident, more responsible. I can look after myself better than before. Boarding school helps you to understand others and care for others. It teaches me how to respect others and listen to their opinions. It is good because it prepares me for when I leave the school for the bigger world. (Student F)*

A female Anglo-Australian living in Brunei commented that boarding school life:

*... has changed me to an extent that I am now able to cope with life ahead. Where I can't depend on my parents to make decisions for me and can independently go and find what I really want in life. It has changed the way that I think about people. It has also changed some of my ways of living, to live in a group, a community where we have to respect as well as be responsible for our actions there we do, in the eyes of our peers ... to care and look out for one another. (Student G)*

She clarified this stating that:

*It has really helped me [being at boarding school] in decision making and also prepared me for life without my parents. The fear of never seeing my parents ... I have now overcome as ... I have realised that I can always keep in touch with them, even though I am so far away ... It has also helped me to realise what I would like to achieve after school. (Student G)*

These positive comments about individualism and independence were countered by one student who noted that:

*There is a lot of 'hype' about boarding school making you become independent but I don't think it's true. Many students are pampered by teachers or friends. To a certain extent boarding school prepares you. If there is one thing you can use from boarding school, it would probably just be your experience with handling others. (Student I)*

### **Evidence of shifting attitudes towards boarding school**

An advantage of the memoir approach to the collection of cultural data is the ability to trace evidence of cultural change through analysis. Znaniecki (1968) notes that cultural change can be seen by observing the dynamic tension between individual attitudes and social values as articulated in memoirs when compared to each other (Halas, 2000). This study observed change in the attitude of respondents towards boarding school, including the factors which influenced the change in these attitudes. Most of these changes in attitudes noted that the privilege of attending boarding school was positive.

For example one respondent wrote:

*Before I came to the school it was obvious that I needed independence and a little more structure in my life. I don't think that I had many problems with interacting with people although I had a slight temper. Now that I look back and you've asked me about the likes and dislikes of my old school I've realised that I am very fortunate – and I've never really appreciated what I had ... There is no doubt in my mind that boarding school in my mind has helped me tremendously in learning to deal with people in a variety of circumstances. (Student A)*



Another recorded the change in his perception towards boarding school once he was in Year 12, House Captain and a School Prefect:

*I was struggling academically at my old school – I was not a bright cookie at all! I only got into my old school on the interview. Here I've realised that the people in my House when I was in Year 10 were not actually people I got on with (at first). Now I am a lot more willing and open to new people and ideas. I think it's because I've been given a position of responsibility within the school ... I want to do well, lead etc, but in my own different way. (Student B)*

One overseas student noted that:

*During my first few weeks at boarding school, I was mostly homesick or actually sick. It became a disadvantage because everyone was getting to know each other I was in bed. When I started boarding I had no idea how I would communicate or interact with strangers because my old school never had new people. But I think coming here developed my social skills and confidence. (Student E)*

### **Attitudes towards cultural pluralism at boarding school**

Due to the tuition fees required to attend the research school the student population was not representative of the socio-economic population of Australia at large. This observation paralleled the findings of sociological studies carried out at American and English boarding and American Prep. schools (Cookson and Hodges-Persell, 1985: Fox, 1985: Kalton, 1966: Lambert, 1966; 1968; 1969; 1970; 1975: Punch, 1977: Wakeford, 1969: Walford, 1986: Weinberg, 1967). However, the student population of the school was culturally plural and reflected the multicultural population of Australia. Of the 45 memoirs (17 written by girls and 28 by boys) analysed for this study 28 writers identified themselves as Australian, five as Thai, four as Chinese-Malay, four as Chinese, one as Malaysian, and one as American. Twenty six per cent of the respondents lived in rural Australia, 40 per cent lived overseas and inter-state, 20 per cent lived in metropolitan Melbourne. The students came from nine senior boarding houses within the school and recorded the association of the house as a personal group system in the case of each of the respondents. The respondents came to regards the members of their house in the same light as they regarded members of their family, namely, they provided their personal primary values.

Through concrete and cultural data it was possible to conclude that cultural monism existed in the great majority of the primary social systems of the students' homes. As a result of the social secondary group system provided by the schools offering the International Baccalaureate, teaching Chinese, French, German, Japanese and Spanish, having an Overseas Students Committee, holding Overseas Students Day, and Festive Lunches in the Dining Hall many personal statements acknowledged the existence of cultural monism in the primary social systems of the home. It was at this point, that some memoirs revealed the possibility of the secondary social system of the boarding school becoming an adjunct of the primary social system of the home. Because of the particular kind of intimacy of the boarding houses, a number of students came to regard it as virtually a primary group system, analogous to their family. In this case the school students, who initially formed a secondary social system, came to acquire personal primary connections if they resided in the same boarding house.

This observation was noted by both Anglo-Australian and overseas students. Therefore it was possible to assert that boarding school as a social system has significant potential in cultivating positive attitudes towards multiculturalism. The majority of Anglo-Australian memoirs articulated positive statements about the cultural pluralism that existed in this institution. In particular,

reference was made to language as an example of cultural identity. Anglo-Australian attitudes were summed up by one respondent who wrote:

*I think it [language] is quite important as it is part of a person's personal cultural connection. Most overseas students have particularly strong friendships with their fellow expatriates. This is reinforced by the fact that they have their own language.* (Student C)

An American student reflected on the role of language for students of a non-English speaking background stating that:

*... language is a barrier in boarding school and there is no way of getting around it unless you're willing to take risks, explore and want to meet people who are essentially different to yourself ...* (Student A)

A Thai student reflected stating that:

*Language is quite an important part of personal identity. Many people come together because they speak the same language and have a similar cultural background. It's easier to find interest in the other person and start a friendship.* (Student I)

The intricacy of this issue was acknowledged by another Thai respondent who wrote:

*A lot of teachers would say to us speak English. I know that sometimes it is rude to speak Thai in some places.* (Student G)

A male Thai student wrote of his uneasiness with the experiences of this cultural pluralism when he wrote that they sometimes felt:

*Insecure and stayed away from everybody ... only close to friends that ...speak my native language.* (Student J)

Nonetheless, six Anglo-Australian memoirs appeared to remain ambiguous in their attitudes towards cultural pluralism. One such memoir noted that:

*... whether you live on as farm or not does not determine if your friends are going to be from the country. For instance, you may live in Hamilton but you can come to this school to escape the country life.* (Student E)

This was clarified by one stating that:

*People will ... be classified by their language in the School.* (Student J)

The acceptance of cultural pluralism by the boarding school was supported by values clearly articulated in the majority of personal statements of the overseas and Anglo-Australian students that collected.

### **Evidence that the boarding house acts as a primary social system or a second home**

Smolicz (1999) acknowledged the use of memoirs to analyse cultural phenomena as the defining characterization of Znaniecki's humanistic sociology. The act of writing a memoir not only documents an individual's cultural context and experiences through their own eyes, but also revealed to what extent an individual felt part of a given cultural group, or their cultural becoming of a group.

Znaniecki's (1939) theory on social systems was significantly developed by Smolicz (1979, pp.146-147) which followed his crystallisation of the writings of Cooley (1909) and Gordon

(1964) when he claimed that it was possible that social systems could be divided into 'primary personal' and 'secondary personal' types. Elaborating further, Smolicz cited the home or family as a primary personal and group system. A school, a university or an office represented a secondary group social system.

Humanistic sociology asserts that individuals acquire cultural meaning and social values through their primary and secondary personal cultural systems. At first it appeared that from the material documented in the cultural data of students' memoirs the phenomenon of 'independence' from the primary social system of the home appeared to come from their experiences of a supportive secondary system of the school.

However, when Smolicz's theoretical framework was applied (See Table 3) an anomaly appeared which suggested the emergence of an alternative primary group social system to that found in the original theory. Smolicz observed that relationships which took place in primary social systems were personal, intimate and on-going. Conversely, the secondary social system developed relationships which tended to be more formal, distant and spasmodic. In this research study it was discovered that individuals formed two kinds of personal primary bonds, one drew some of their personal values from the family and the other from the boarding house.

**Table 3. Classifications of social systems in a co-educational boarding school**  
(adapted from Smolicz (1979, p. 149) *Culture and Education in a Plural Society*)

Type of System	Primary	Secondary
personal	primary personal system	secondary personal system
group	primary group system <i>(family)</i> ----- <i>(boarding house)</i>	secondary group system <i>(School)</i>

From cultural data collected the social system of the boarding house for the majority of respondents represented an adjunct to the primary social system of the home within the secondary group system of the school itself. This proposition was supported by extracts of three memoirs which commented on the relationship between students and the academic staff who acted as boarding house tutors *in loco parentis* with some of them actually providing virtual primary personal values for the students, or even perceiving themselves in this way. An Anglo-Australian student wrote that:

*I have found that you have to understand that staff are human too ... (Student A)*

This observation was personal and intimate. It revealed an appreciation of the flaws and complexities of a member of staff faces when working in the primary group system of the boarding house on one hand and the school on the other. Another boarder adroitly noted:

*It is a difficult position for both teachers and students at boarding school. It must be hard ... to develop a friendship with a student and maintain professionalism at the same time ... (Student B)*

Another stated:

*Some ... teachers here are ... inspirational ... a lot of this depends on personal relationships ... I think of some teachers as friends because they have helped me*

*through difficult times. I think I trust some of them as much as any other student.*  
(Student C)

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the boarding school presented a formalised occupational structure which framed the initial relationships between students and teachers. Here at school, relationships are more formal or controlled in the sense that they are part of an occupational dialogue – the student and the teacher – the educator and the educand as discussed by Znaniecki (1998, pp.154-160).

From the personal statements collected it was possible to see that the relationships among students and among students and staff, in the boarding house tended to be personal, informal, and involve the entire human personality. These memoirs concurred with Americans Hillman and Thorn (1996, p.3) claim that boarding school ‘is just a microcosm of all social life’.

From the cultural data shown it appeared that the pedagogical success of boarding school was in the personal atmosphere, support and comfort of the boarding house. The boarding house acted as a primary personal system to that of the family co-existing with it rather than replacing it. The boarding house acted as a community belonging to a larger collegiate body and hence formed part of the school as a secondary social system, but it transcended that role when it assumed primary connotation in the lives of boarders. Hence, the attitude of ‘independence’ readily discussed in memoirs was the result of an apparently symbiotic social system which interacted with the family.

The memoir methodology of Znaniecki permitted the researcher to analyse the comments of individual students and showed what they believed to be the central points about boarding school. Overall their comments were positive and revealed boarding school as a critical social system for the transition of the new values embodied by the multiculturalism they experienced in their lives at boarding school. It also revealed a number of Anglo-Australian and overseas students who were in the process of re-evaluating and re-interpreting the advantages and disadvantages of boarding school as a social system as transmitted to them by parents, friends, family and teachers. These comments showed how they believed that the experience of boarding school was significant in fostering independence and an attitudinal shift towards embracing multiculturalism as experienced in the secondary social system of the school – which for some students became just as, if not more important, than the more culturally monistic primary social system of the home.

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