



Bob Venables

supposed to knock on doors to collect the waste buckets, and people will not open their doors to men at night. In the poorer parts of Hongkong, people live in terror of robbery and violence—understandably so, in a city where a strange and pointless destruction marks so many muggings. Victims of a robber can be chopped to death merely for not having enough money.

On the other hand, the night soil women themselves will not work in the open stretches of land on the hillsides, for fear of rape or sexual assault. The men therefore do the rounds up and down the winding hillside paths, with a yoke on their shoulders balanced by two sturdy wooden buckets. They stride through the ever-rising curving alleys between long low houses of stone. There are only four men to the team and they collect from centralised latrines put in by the government.

The women in the urban rounds work in much bigger gangs of about 20. There are one or two young ones among them, but most are middle-aged. They tend to stick to the job: one has done it for 30 years. "I was a farmer's daughter," she says, "so I was used to a hard life. When I came to Hongkong, I had a friend who worked on the collecting, so she got me a job here too. I didn't mind it."

When she started working the rounds, in 1946, the pay was \$60 a month. Now it is about \$900 a month (about £85), which is considered to be quite good for unskilled labour. The workers are well looked after, with medical care and sick leave. Before the Urban Services Department took over the collection many years ago, it used to be done by a number of private contractors, and conditions were not too good.

Although the women all sit and chat happily before work starts, there is very little comradeship once work begins. Each woman has her round and she does her calls steadily, until she has been to every house

on her list. After work finishes at 6 am, just as dawn creeps up, they go home. They seldom meet each other outside work. Most of them prefer to keep the nature of their job private. The money is quite good, but the status of the work is not. There are some children who still think their mother does a factory night-shift, when in fact she works on the night soil rounds.

Nearly all the buildings from which they collect are prewar, which is thought to be old in Hongkong. They certainly look old among the building development which is taking place everywhere throughout the colony. They are often marooned in their seediness beside the most modern of buildings—a garish girlie bar, a gold dealer's shop. They are old-style Chinese buildings with crumbling balconies and dark stairways leading upstairs to even darker rooms and cubicles. These are the houses of the very poor; those who, for some reason, do not get public housing and live in urban squalor.

### Sharing a bucket

It is not unusual for such houses, usually three or four storeys high, to have six families, with four or five children apiece, living on each floor. Each has only a cubicle to live in. There may be only one kitchen, which all must share, and of course there are no main sewage pipes. This means that the families also share a large plastic bucket into which they each tip their chamber pots. At night, they put the buckets outside their doors and the night soil collectors take away its contents and tip them in the tanker, swilling out the bucket with disinfectant.

The service is free. The houses so serviced mark themselves by their outward look of destitution. Their tenants pay about \$40 a month rent for their whole family and earn their living by street trading or begging, as well as picking over other people's rubbish. The meagre rents cannot even replace the

stones which break off the balconies, let alone pay for a main sewage connection for the houses.

Some day soon they will all be gone: the houses, the collectors, the very, very poor. No more will the collectors groan and complain after Chinese New Year—their only official day off—as they stagger away with double loads, made worse by the fact that the whole family was home for the holiday.

But one oddity has occurred which might keep the custom going. A brand-new housing estate was put up on Hongkong's waterfront at the east end of the island. The multi-million dollar private housing estate was built by one of Hongkong's great business houses whose architects boast of the development's two and a half million dollar sewage screening plant. What they omit to mention, however, is that after the sewage is screened, and the solid matter is separated from the liquid, the Urban Services Department sends its sturdy men along to carry away the solids in big red plastic buckets.

Once the tanker has its 280 gallon tank filled, it returns to its home depot. There the load is pumped out on to a waiting barge. Two samples are scooped from the load, one at the start and one at the finish. These samples will be tested next morning at government laboratories for infectious diseases, especially for typhoid. If any positive result is found, then everyone on that round will be checked until the carrier is found and treated. The last outbreak of typhoid in Hongkong occurred about ten years ago, but the government is always on the watch for possible sources of infection.

Once the night ends, the men strip off their monk-like clothing and the women rip off their black rubber gloves and switch off their torches. Then they all head for home. Next night, they will be back.

# How West Indians do better at school (especially the girls)

Geoffrey Driver knocks on the head some educational myths about ethnic minorities.

For several years there has been almost a veto on collecting achievement statistics which could be used to compare the performance of so-called "immigrant" and "non-immigrant" pupils in our schools. The reasons are understandable, but they have led to a decade in which no such statistics have been kept—or else they have been kept without making them known to the public.

Earlier research, which largely focused on children of primary school age, implied that West Indian pupils in multiracial areas were doing less well than their English counterparts. So the accepted wisdom, in recent years, has been that these girls and boys will be "under-achievers." New research I have carried out shows this not to be so. Indeed, the opposite appears to be true.

I have investigated the recorded examination results for 2,300 school leavers in five multiracial secondary schools. Two schools were in the north of England, two in the midlands, and one in the Home Counties. All took both boys and girls. My main interest was in looking at the results obtained by West Indian boys and girls, and comparing them with their English classmates. But I also took account of some Asian results. In the period from 1975 to 1978 the schools' 16 year old West Indian, English and Asian school leavers showed the following characteristics:

1. West Indian girls and boys achieved results that were, for the most part, *better* than those obtained by English boys and girls.
2. West Indian boys and girls have in some cases tended to overtake their English classmates in the course of their *secondary school* careers (ie, between the ages of twelve and 16).
3. Among English pupils, the boys usually have better results at 16-plus than the girls. By contrast, West Indian girls do better than West Indian boys.
4. Comparing the results for English and West Indian pupils in English language, maths and science, I found it was usually the English boys and girls who got the poorest average results for these critical subjects.
5. Those Asian pupils whose results I noted in the course of comparing English and West Indian pupils, got higher average results than their classmates of other ethnic affiliation. Their only area of relatively poor performance at 16-plus was, not unexpectedly, English language.

All these statements are based on comparisons made of ethnic groups not only in the same school, but also within the same year. The boys and girls in each area of comparison experienced the same general academic programme.

In my view, the pattern can be explained

in term of the ethnic qualities which these boys and girls demonstrate—*positive* qualities which dominate their performance, and overshadow the influence of the system of schooling as a whole. Such positive qualities, and the strength of the cultural patterns which create them, are well recognised in the case of Asian children, but less so where West Indians are concerned. My results show that such influences are not only important, but even predominant, in shaping the lives and careers of children whose only experience in many cases is of life in Britain.

My tables of relative performance for English and West Indian boys and girls (overleaf), are based on a uniform grading system. This allows one to calculate the total achievements of pupils in all public 16-plus examinations. The tables confirm

that the trends among these 2,300 school leavers in different parts of the country, are as I have outlined them.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 give the rank order of average scores obtained by West Indian boys, English boys, West Indian girls and English girls, in 16-plus examinations in each school-leaving year for which reliable results were available, in each of the five mixed secondary schools I studied.

Table 1 gives performance in all subjects, averaged for all pupils who were registered as members of the two-year course leading up to CSE and O-level examinations. The

second table looks at the relative performance of the four pupil-categories (again by considering the rank order of average results in the 16-plus examinations) for the critical

*West Indian girls at secondary school . . .*



Janine Wiedel

The photographs are not of schools or children studied

basic subjects of English, maths and science, upon which much further education and professional training depends. The third table considers, specifically, relative performance in English language. What the tables show can be summarised as follows.

In an overview of all the 16-plus examination results obtained (table 1), it is the drastic difference between the girls of the two ethnic categories that stands out. (For a quick guide, just count the "firsts" in each row.) The rank orders for boys and girls run in different directions for the two ethnic categories. West Indian girls clearly tend to excel over West Indian boys, while English boys (though not so markedly) excel over English girls.

Where the critical subjects of English language, maths and science are concerned, the trend is again for West Indian girls to get higher average results than the other categories of pupil. The West Indian boys here tend to do less well than English boys, performing on par with English girls. Indeed, the difference between West Indian boys' performance in all subjects (table 1) and in the critical subject areas (table 2) may reflect their slightly greater tendency to take academically "fringe" subjects.

In looking at the data for English language (table 3), there are two sorts of comment to make. One is that this seems to be a subject in which English boys regularly get poorer scores than English girls. The other is that West Indian pupils generally seem able to get better marks for language skills than their English classmates. Given the special language problems which some may

have had because patois is used at home, this result is important in itself.

The rankings in these tables 1-3 are given more weight by table 4. This is based on the numbers in each category who enrolled for school-leaving examination courses in their penultimate year of compulsory education. It shows the percentage who recorded any examination results at the end of the course two years later. By inference, you can deduce which categories of pupil tend to have higher drop-out rates: it is certainly not the West Indian boys and girls. On average, only 24 per cent of West Indian boys, and 22 per cent of West Indian girls, dropped out, compared with 36 per cent of English boys and 43 per cent of English girls.

The results I cite here are backed up by more detailed statistics in all cases. One of my main difficulties in gathering evidence was the lack of records about the courses that led up to the pupils' final year at secondary school. But where such evidence did exist from earlier years, it is noteworthy that it pointed to a *different* assessment of the relative standing of pupils. At one school, a reading test taken at 13-plus by one year-group of pupils (A3 in the tables) gave reading ages which showed English pupils to be doing slightly better than West Indians. Table 5 spells this out.

At another school, non-verbal tests were taken at 11-plus by entrants from local junior schools. These subsequently formed the groups described as B4 and B5 in my tables. Again at this earlier age the picture was of West Indian under-achievement, as

Table 5: A3 reading results at 13-plus

	boys	girls
West Indian	10.07	10.36
English	10.25	10.66

Table 6: B4 and B5 non-verbal test results at 11-plus

	B4	B5
West Indian boys	86.64	92.76
West Indian girls	85.87	81.18
English boys	94.60	96.74
English girls	92.39	99.46

table 6 shows. This limited data does confirm the evidence of other studies of younger children, notably the ILEA study carried out by Alan Little and his colleagues, and that by Redbridge community relations council. The crucial factor seems to be age. My evidence suggests that West Indian children may, indeed, do worse than their English classmates at primary school—or even into secondary school. Then they pull ahead.

These apparent trends undermine the idea of "cumulative deficit" in education. They suggest that ethnic communities, such as those represented by the West Indian pupils in my study, have resources to make up ground which to others may have appeared impossible.

Of course, the figures also suggest that there is a gross deterioration in the performance of the boys and girls from English families served by these schools. And it may be that the indigenous population of these areas has a worse level of school performance than the country at a whole. It was not within the scope of my study to make such general comparisons. A larger project is due to be carried out under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science, possibly in conjunction with the Assessment of Performance Unit.

I would argue that the most important finding of my study is the contrapuntal trend in performance for English boys and girls, and West Indian boys and girls. West Indian girls do better than West Indian boys, but English boys do better than English girls. These trends imply that the opportunities and resources available to young adults in the two ethnic contexts are quite distinct in terms of sex roles. To explain this, we must look carefully at the social structures of both English and West Indian families. Home affects the aspirations and achievements of young people who are growing up and seeking an identity for themselves.

The rundown physical, social and economic environment from which the five schools draw their pupils, contains a wide range of family and household groups. Various internal structures and mechanisms give these families stability and coherence. To understand them, we need to consider the experiences of individuals. Among West Indians, their experience before migration may help shape how they structure their father/mother/child relationships, and how they bring up their children to understand their responsibilities to others in their family and community.

A number of studies carried out in the West Indies have noted the diversity of

family and household arrangements there—particularly in areas where men are seldom the source of a stable income for their families. In such circumstances, the women are responsible for the family's subsistence. The key role of women, and the power they wield among certain rural Jamaican families, is suggested by Edith Clarke in the very title of her study, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*.

In rural Jamaica especially, economic and social conditions today make it almost impossible for young men to assume responsibility for a wife and family. Christian or legal marriages remains the ideal, but many couples cannot attain this in early adulthood. Alternative strategies and structures have therefore been devised to cope with such things as child-rearing.

In many cases, a young woman relies on the help of her mother and other blood relatives within the maternal home. In return, she must commit herself to ensuring the stability and status of the domestic kin group. In many families, this situation has recurred over generations. It puts little economic reliance on the bond between conjugal partners. It concentrates power, property and decision-making in the hands of women of mature years, whose daughters and sisters

may depend on them for shelter and support, when their children are being born and raised.

In her recent book, *Jamaican Farewell*, Nancy Foner showed that some of the traits of mother-centred family life, which Edith Clarke describes, are tending to reassert themselves in many West Indian households in Britain. The trend has been strengthened by the high rate of unemployment which afflicts unskilled workers, particularly West Indian men. It reinforces the previous patterns of family organisation in which adult males can be pushed to the margin of domestic life.

On their arrival in Britain, many West Indians made great efforts to adopt the majority's social forms, with the husband as provider. But it is now an unspoken assumption among many West Indian women that they, rather than their husbands or brothers, are the guardians of their family's good name and the providers of its staple income. Is it then surprising that the achievements of their daughters in school reflect that opinion?

By contrast, it is an equally unspoken assumption in many English working class homes that their daughters do not merit

encouragement at school. They must be married off before they become a social or economic liability to their parents. So, is it surprising that their results—which contrast so dramatically with those reported for West Indian girls in the same schools—also reflect the prevalent attitudes at home?

It is important to take seriously the capacity of members of any ethnic population, whatever their skin colour, to organise their own lives, to establish their own objectives, and to set out to achieve them in their own way, despite major social obstacles. Among these obstacles I would include predictive judgments by some theoreticians with universalistic or deterministic views of one sort or another.

In education we have seen the effect of these orthodoxies where ethnic minority pupils are concerned. Initially, there was the theory that such children were a problem because of their immigrant-ness, first in primary schools and then in secondary schools. Predictions were made that those "born here" would at a later date "improve" in achievement and behavioural terms, compared with their brothers and sisters who ... may pull ahead of both West Indian boys and English girls or boys ...

Table 1: Rank order for overall achievement in 16-plus exams

school	A	A	A	B	B	C	C	D*	E	E
leaving year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8-10	11	12
	(1975)	(1976)	(1977)	(1976)	(1977)	(1976)	(1977)	(75-77)	(1977)	(1977)
West Indian boys	4	1	3	2	2	3	1	=3	4	2
West Indian girls	1	3	1	1	1	1	4	=3	3	1
English boys	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	1	1	4
English girls	3	4	4	4	4	2	2	2	2	3

Table 2: Rank order for English language, maths and science at 16-plus

school	A	A	A	B	B	C	C	D*	E	E
leaving year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8-10	11	12
West Indian boys	=2	2	3	2	2	2	=1	4	4	3
West Indian girls	4	4	1	1	1	3	=1	3	3	1
English boys	1	1	2	3	4	4	4	1	1	4
English girls	=2	3	4	4	3	1	=1	2	2	2

Table 3: Rank order for English language at 16-plus

school	A	A	A	B	B	C	C	D*	E	E
leaving year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8-10	11	12
West Indian boys	=2	2	3	2	2	=1	2	4	4	=2
West Indian girls	4	3	1	1	1	=1	4	3	3	1
English boys	=2	1	4	3	4	4	3	2	1	4
English girls	1	4	2	4	3	=1	1	1	2	=2

\*leaving years for school D are conflated for reasons of statistical reliability

Table 4: Percentage of course enrolment appearing on 16-plus exam list

school	A	A	A	B	B	C	C	D	E	E
leaving year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8-10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
West Indian boys	60	80	79	77	83	91	94	82	41	73
West Indian girls	79	67	84	76	82	92	80	70	72	83
English boy	70	65	77	35	38	77	81	73	71	55
English girls	59	49	58	32	37	87	75	70	50	50



Richard & Sally Greenhill



had been "brought over." Yet differences have persisted; as time went on, the notion that such children could be seen as different on the basis of being "immigrants" became absurd. By 1974, even the Department of Education recognised this. It abandoned the practice of collecting "immigrant statistics," because many children born of New Commonwealth families settled here had no direct experience of life outside Britain.

The children in question—whether born "here" or "there"—could often be distinguished by certain physical characteristics, most noticeably skin colour. Sensitivity to racial prejudice and discrimination has pre-occupied many teachers, parents and children. The problems cannot be ignored. So the refusal of many teachers to identify their pupils ethnically in school records may seem laudable. However, by not collecting relevant information on pupil-performance, unfounded views may go unchallenged.

If the trends in performance that I report here prove to be general, proper monitoring of results at 16-plus would destroy the inflammatory and misleading theories of Arthur Jensen and H. J. Eysenck about "black" children's under-achievement. But more than this, it would show that ethnicity has positive and not merely negative associations for school achievement (though, admittedly, in a complex framework where nurture is as important as nature).

This, of course, raises the question of what ethnic affiliation is all about. It is clearly something which all of us need to understand more clearly. It involves kinship and upbringing; identification by others as belonging, or not belonging, to a particular community with its own life-styles; and individual choices about relationships, behaviour and the like. But whether or not we can define ethnicity adequately, it would seem foolish to suggest that it does not exist. The data from my five multiracial schools point unerringly to categorical differences between West Indian, English and Asian boys and girls in school.

How much more subtle the ethnic divisions and differences are between say, Sikh and Muslim Punjabis (among "Asians"), or between Jamaicans and Kitticians or Barbadians (among "West Indians"), we do not know. My teacher informants were either unable to recall which were which, or else had never been able to distinguish so subtly between the pupils involved.

It was also clear from the information they gave me that most teachers presumed either that the mechanisms and structures of social organisations and behavioural styles were not significantly different from one ethnic population to another; or else that these differences should not be given significance in educational policy and practice. This assumption of homogeneity may have led them to take little account of the difference in performance between West Indian and English girls. In accordance with the norms of English society, their prime concern tended to be with successful career preparation for boys. As it turns out, it is the average difference in the perfor-



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... in the critical basic subjects of English, maths, and science

... **mance of the girls** which leads to my conclusion that West Indian pupils in the five schools cannot be labelled under-achievers.

Let me now relate my findings more closely to other studies in the past 20 years, in order to point up the differences.

Most earlier studies failed to take full account of ethnicity. Seeing West Indians as individuals—with perhaps a different coloured skin, a different accent, even a different way of thinking about their experiences—researchers have shown little awareness that their children continue to take part in a living community, with distinctive social structures and cultural forms; and these elements are likely to have an

important influence as they grow older.

Earlier studies also ignored the possibility that upbringing in different ethnic communities may not necessarily cause the physical, social and intellectual skills of boys and girls to develop in parallel.

Those who have studied and compared the abilities and attainments of pupils of different ethnic categories in British schools have been motivated largely by considerations of social policy. Their framework of inquiry was dominated by the institutional constraints and concerns of schooling.

In 1966, ILEA researchers noted that 1,051 "immigrant" children, aged ten, performed significantly less well on tests of basic literacy and intelligence than did "non-immigrant" children of similar age within the local authority area. Tests of written and spoken English carried out by Alan Little in 1968, to assess primary school children in the ILEA area, also showed relatively poor levels of performance among children from New Commonwealth families (particularly those from the Caribbean), compared with other pupils in the population of 32,000 eight year olds tested. More recently the Redbridge study, based on test results from 600 junior school children in this East London borough, also showed that the West Indian children did less well on basic literacy and numeracy skills.

But these investigations did not analyse the later progress of their primary subjects.

A reappraisal is necessary of the views held by many educators about the supposed under-achievement of West Indian pupils. We must make more careful evaluations of school performances. The task is obviously one to be carried out within schools. In their recent study, *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, Professor Michael Rutter and his colleagues have underlined the huge variation in teaching styles between one school and another. So it is hard to make direct comparisons of performance between schools.

It may be, too, that pupils at schools outside the inner-city environment, shared by all five schools in my study, would obtain generally better results than those within it. But if suburban results were better, that would only demonstrate a lack of parity between schools, and not primarily between ethnic populations. It would also suggest that, where ethnic minority pupils are getting better results than majority pupils in their inner-city schools, these West Indian and Asian youngsters are a real and positive human resource in the struggle to rehabilitate and redevelop the physical, social, cultural and economic fabric of the industrial towns and cities in which they live. We must see to it that these human resources are properly used—by providing job opportunities, which at the moment do not exist, for many of these young people.

That, then, is the real message for policy-makers. We should be more sensitive to community and sex-role differences, not less. Educational progress, in this case at least, means being not only egalitarian, but also pluralist.

*Next week A. H. Halsey reports on a new assessment of the US Headstart programme*