



## Indian tigers: what high school selection by parents pursuing academic performance reveals about class, culture and migration

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### ABSTRACT

The high academic performance of children from Asian backgrounds in many countries is commonly ascribed to cultural or class values and practices. This paper explores how factors relating to migration are also significant by examining the educational practices of a group of recently migrated parents from middle-class Indian backgrounds in Sydney. These parents privileged academic success in high schooling over the social and cultural capitals alternately or additionally emphasised by other parent groups. Using concepts from Pierre Bourdieu and Legitimation Code Theory this study describes how parental experience and capital prior to migration has a structuring influence on parental habitus that influences post-migration practices including the privileging of academic capital, intensive educational support and coaching and high school selection.

### KEYWORDS

School choice; Asian academic success; migration; academic capital; parental habitus

In Australian schooling there is a high degree of social segregation including ethnic segregation (Cobbold 2009). This is particularly notable in elite academically selective high schools, which in Sydney are dominated by students from a language background other than English (Ho 2011), most predominantly those from Chinese and Indian backgrounds (Vialle 2013). Media reports have largely ascribed this to the practices of Asian ‘tiger mothers’ as exemplified by Amy Chua (2011), with such parents characterised as demanding high academic performance which they facilitate by sending their children to supplementary ‘hothouse’ coaching (Watkins, Ho, and Butler 2017). In response Anglo-background parents are described as exhibiting a ‘white-flight’ reaction, avoiding schools dominated by this group (Broinowski 2015; Masanauskas 2015). But Australia is not exceptional in regard to the high academic performance of students from Asian, Indian and South East Asian backgrounds. This is an international phenomenon noted also in the U.K., the U.S.A., Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Singapore (Leung 2002; Teese and Polesel 2003).

Explanations for this have most frequently centred on descriptions of empiric factors relating to class and culture or ethnicity,<sup>1</sup> particularly relations between the educational achievements and social status of the parents (Reay 1998); parental cultural practices,

values and aspirations in relation to education (Teese and Polesel 2003; Francis and Archer 2005; Basit 2012) and the institutional interactions that flow from this. Of the latter, studies examining parental school choice strategies have documented the desire of parents for their child to associate with similar peers – a practice particularly associated with middle-class parents and parents focussed on academic performance (Reay and Ball 1997) – with the visible ethnic composition of students in schools having both a positive ('choosing for') and negative ('choosing against') selection effect. For instance Reay and Lucey (2003) found some parents chose schools based on their desire for their child to attend a school with a critical mass of children from the same ethnic background, while Bagley (1996) noted the presence of Asian children in schools was a key factor associated with avoidance of that school by other parent groups. When researchers have focussed on the intersection of class *and* ethnicity the overall effect has been that given choice, parents chose schools with populations socially and ethnically similar to themselves, thereby reinforcing social norms and reproducing existing class and cultural distinctions (Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe 1995; Bagley 1996; Crozier et al. 2008).

Studies focussed on culture have particularly concentrated on Chinese parents and cultural values broadly described as 'Confucian heritage culture' (Biggs 1996). Here, researchers have focussed on beliefs such as success being the result of hard work as much as innate ability (Lee 1996); the importance of high academic aspiration and effort and positive attitudes towards schooling (Chao and Sue 1996); and socially prescribed educative roles for Chinese mothers and fathers and children's obligations to act upon these values (Chao 1996; Choi and Peng 2016). Studies focussed on specific family educational practices that are presumed to have a cultural base have noted the effectiveness of structured out-of-school time and tutoring (Schneider and Lee 1990) and intensive monitoring of homework (Croll 2004). Modood (2004) has usefully framed 'ethnic capital' to describe how the effect of such practices can accrue collectively to a cultural group at times independent of class. In a similar vein, Lee and Zhou (2014) described how by restricting their 'frame' for success to other high achieving migrants, low socioeconomic status (SES) Vietnamese and Chinese families were able to use ethnicity as a resource for educational success. However, such culturist approaches have been problematised for the cultural essentialism they can produce (Watkins and Noble 2013), including the production of a 'model minority' stereotype that institutionally both enhances and limits such students' opportunities (Lee 1994). Nonetheless, cultural values and the practices that are presumed to follow remain a dominant explanatory focus of the field.

However, while these approaches offer associations for how class and culture may reinforce social reproduction and specific exemplars of the effectiveness of particular practices for achieving academic success, what is not well described are the mechanisms of *how* families who share common practices but only some of the same empiric characteristics produce children who achieve notable academic results.

My aim in this article is to describe how the variables of class and culture as explored in the literature above intersect with factors relating to migration to shape the academically aspirational practices of some recently migrated families in Sydney. Specifically, this paper examines the school choice strategies of a group of recently migrated Indian-background families who pursued high academic outcomes from schooling in a region in Sydney. This group of families, I have named the *Credentialists* for the academic credentials they sought for their children, come from a larger study into the high school selection strategies of

parents. In this study, parent groups were constituted according to the key outcomes (or capital, see below) they wanted their children to acquire from schooling. In addition to Credentialists, three other groups were described: *Doers*, who largely sought social attributes, *Consolidators* who sought a combination of social attributes, social proficiency and a minimum level of academic achievement and *All Rounders*, who sought cultural distinction, social attributes and academic achievement. While groups were constituted according to their practices rather than empiric characteristics, in this study Credentialists were all from an Indian-background and had migrated within the last 7 years. These Credentialists described using a range of strategic educational practices including selection of desirable primary and high schools, cultivation of a like-minded peer group, the promotion of a competitive learning environment and home-based educational practices such as intensive homework support and supplementary tutoring to promote high academic achievement in their children.

To provide a language of description and structure to these practices Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus are used (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) which are operationalised by the specialisation codes from Legitimation Code Theory (Maton 2014).

### Theoretical tools

In Bourdieu's theory of practice all behaviour is situated within a *field* of action which has its own systems of practice and valuation. In this study, the field of action is school education. *Habitus* is an individual's dispositions that shape their ways of acting and understanding acquired over time. This is shaped by the fields in which they have interacted. *Capital*, which can be accumulated or exchanged in a field for other desired 'goods', exists in different forms. Bourdieu described three broad types of capital: economic capital, social capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), dividing cultural capital into three kinds: 'embodied', 'objectified' and 'institutionalised' (1977, 47), the latter of which is expressed and institutionalised in its major form, education. Bourdieu insisted field, habitus and capital operated relationally with each other and that any position in a field could only be understood in relation to the position of others in the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Grenfell and James 1998, 16).

To provide nuanced description of how these relations operate in the school field considered here, particularly the relations between parental habituses and the capitals they emphasise, the specialisation codes from legitimation code theory (LCT) are used. LCT is a sociological framework devised by Maton (2014) for describing and revealing underlying structures in knowledge practices and education, and in dialogue with the work of Bourdieu, provides dimensions to describe the resources and statuses constituting a field's organising principles, or *legitimation codes*.

### The research study

This paper focuses on data from five families and one primary school principal who were part of a wider study looking at the high school selection strategies of 28 families in 'Doongara',<sup>2</sup> a geographic region in Sydney. Doongara has 20 high schools in close proximity

and a diverse population that includes recent migrants particularly from China, India and Lebanon, second-generation migrants and longer established Anglo-background families from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. The research method was qualitative, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with families and key informant primary school principals. Parents were recruited via surveys sent to six primary schools in the area – four public schools and two catholic schools – and by snowballing. All parents had a child in the final year of primary school or the first year of high school. Families could nominate to undertake interviews as singles or as a couple. Using Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital, parents were classified into groups according to the key capitals they sought from schooling for their children. That is, groups were not based on empiric social categories such as class or cultural identity, but rather were constituted according to their common educational priorities. Key capitals recognised in the field of school education were institutional cultural capital in the form of academic marks (referred to as *academic capital*), forms of *cultural capital* including embodied dispositional knowledges (*how to act*) and capital showcasing distinction and forms of *social capital* particularly social networks (Bourdieu 1986).

The research findings and analysis are divided into three parts. First are descriptions of what Credentialist parents said they wanted their children to achieve from school education and a commentary on how this capital contrasts with the capitals sought by other parent groups. Second is a description of Credentialists own capital inheritance and educational habitus and how this was formed in the pre-migrational educational field. Finally, there is a description of the practices Credentialist parents undertook to secure academic capital, how these uniquely match conditions in the post-migration school field and are in turn shaping the field.

### Educational pathways and the pursuit of academic capital

Credentialist parents were distinguished from all other groups of parents by their prime objective being the achievement of academic success from high schooling for their children. That is, alone among parent groups in this study they exclusively pursued *academic capital*, the key capital of the school education field. Credentialists had a clear set of formulations for recognising this: success in school could be measured in marks and position in a classroom hierarchy; progress could be understood in terms of test scores; and the ultimate aim from a school education was the achievement of maximum marks in the higher school certificate (HSC)<sup>3</sup> at the end of high school. Aashi, a nurse, typified this approach:

The thing, the Indian culture, the children when they're going to school, we are thinking they have to be the top in the class. Always, we are pushing, pushing them. As much as we have to pay, it doesn't matter ... we want them to study in the higher education.

That is, the purpose of school education for Credentialists, which Aashi's comments exemplify, was to provide a direct pathway to further study in university. Thus for Credentialist parents *academic capital* was the key strategic asset to be achieved from

schooling. As such, it was directly related to the further goal of qualification from university. Indeed, parents in this group described educational opportunities as a key motivating factor for migration to Australia and most expressed clear views on the relative merit – measured through international rankings – of both the school and higher educational systems in Australia. For instance for Aashi and husband Sadar, a social educator, the relative positions of the Australian education sectors had been carefully considered:

Sadar: One thing I tell you that by OECD countries standard, Australia's [school] standard is around 23. But when I compare to Indian studies ... Australian students are lagging, very much lagging of India.

Aashi But the thing is, the university is the best one ...

This encapsulates several key points made by Credentialist parents about the educational field: that Australia was a highly desirable destination for higher education studies and this desirability had a positive international measure; high schooling here provided a pathway to this desirable higher education; and Australian high schooling, while good enough, was not necessarily better than schooling in India – which was understood to be harder and more rigorous. Implicitly, if parents were to insist their children benchmark their studies to Indian standards, this could give them an advantage.

### *Competing capitals in the school field*

This pursuit of academic capital by Credentialists was in distinct contrast to the priorities of other parent groups in the study. Indeed, while all parents espoused a commitment to education, for other groups this did not translate into the same pursuit of academic capital: Doers primarily sought forms of social embodied cultural capital; Consolidators pursued social capital related to social bonding, and embodied cultural capitals relating to social proficiency and a 'baseline' academic capital; All Rounders pursued individualised embodied cultural capitals related to cultural distinction and leadership and a degree of academic capital. That is, other groups largely prioritised other forms of cultural and social capital instead of, or in addition to, a level of academic capital – though this was often expressed as having a minimum value 'enough marks for further study' rather than a maximised score. Credentialists did not pursue social or cultural capital outcomes *from* schooling, though they did seek social relations with other like-minded families *in* schooling that could enhance the acquisition of academic capital. In addition, unlike Consolidators and All Rounders, but in common with Doers, Credentialists also only pursued one form of capital. Thus they also can be understood to be concentrating their efforts in the pursuit of a singular form of capital, the dominant capital of the field.

Credentialist parents recognised this gap between their academic aspirations and the aspirations of other parents, characterising the aims of local parents as social and practical but lacking in academic heft and ambition. Prabal, who worked in finance, summed this up thus:

I had a bit of study discussion with colleagues. What I found here is, in preference to education, they give more emphasis on practicality of the person being groomed, whereas in Indian and Asian education, it's more of an analytical one – numerical abilities, analytic, those directions ...

Credentialist parents expressed a range of views about the desirability of this approach. Prabal, above, championed academic capital not only for its instrumental value but also, particularly in relation to maths, the analytic training it instilled. That is, academic capital was made meaningful by its specific orientation towards further, specific, disciplinary study. This valuation of a knowledge base is recognised in the Legitimation Code Theory specialisation codes as having strong *epistemic relations*. These practices are oriented towards the field itself, in this case, the field of education (Maton 2014). This was in contrast to all other parent groups who favoured social and cultural capitals, *social relations* in Legitimation Code Theory, which are oriented towards personal disposition. Put simply, Credentialists' central concern was what their children were to get from school (expressed in terms of academic marks), other parents groups chief concerns lay with who their children became. While some Credentialists expressed reservations about the narrowness of an academic-only focus and the competitive pressures their children were under in this regard none ultimately wavered in their commitment to the achievement of high academic capital as the key focus of schooling.

### Capital inheritance and migration

The reasons for Credentialist parents' orientation towards academic capital to the exclusion of other forms of capital became evident when they described their own educational experiences prior to migration and the opportunities that flowed from this. For Credentialists, in their country of origin (India for four families, Sri Lanka for one) academic achievement was the singular strategic asset available to families like themselves. As one simply put it 'for a middle class family, it [schooling] is the only asset that we have'. That is, in their experience academic capital in the form of high value qualifications was the key to success and mobility. The majority of parents in this group had worked in other countries prior to settling in Australia and this mobility had been enabled by their credentials. For most, migration to Australia had been gained through a points system that heavily favoured tertiary credentials and work experience in key industries including IT, accounting and finance or medicine and allied health. Their academic capital – achieved in specific disciplinary areas – had proved an enduring and *transportable asset* that had enabled both migration out and career progression within a variety of countries. With few exceptions, they intended their children to follow this same path, often emphasising the same mobility-enhancing disciplinary pathways. For instance Meera, a teacher by profession, noted:

My daughter, she is good at science, she loves science, so she wants to go to maybe medicine, and my son he is very good at numbers and logic, logistics, so I want him to go towards finance.

For most Credentialists, this academic capital had been achieved in a highly competitive school environment where they were pitted against peers also striving for the same academic outcomes. Success or failure – attaining the necessary marks to be accepted into a desirable higher education program – was measured in fractions of a percentage:

Prabal: within India, the competition is too high

Meera: in their class, in their school, children they score 99.8 ... the same level

Prabal: the third decimal after the decimal, they select the first one

Meera: so we parents, all the time after our children, study, study (laughs)

This resonates with other studies on high achieving Asian families. Zhou and Kim (2006,17) studying Chinese and Korean families in the U.S.A. noted that, prior to migration, both groups had lived in countries of origin ‘where education is the single most important means of attaining social mobility [and] where families’ access to quality education is fiercely competitive ...’. For such parents the orientation towards the achievement of academic capital was formed in the crucible of a highly competitive school field. As Prabal and Meera’s comments above illustrate, Credentialist parents’ educational habituses, formed prior to migration, had been primed to operate within an education system that prioritised academic capital acquired within a fiercely competitive school environment, requiring rigorous study habits to succeed. This now influenced their post-migration parenting educational practices.

Parents were keenly aware of the continuity – and indeed amplification – of these schooling conditions in India as the self-identified middle class continues its growth there (Dickey 2012). The pressures this applied were illustrated by the experience of one family who had not originally intended their migration to be a permanent move. Aashi and Sadar had first migrated internally within India, then to Ireland and then Australia returning, as planned, to India once their eldest child was in high school. However, on this return they found that due to these dislocations, and after being exposed to differing systems, their child had slipped irretrievably behind the position of his classmates:

Sadar: He could not score anything there. He could not get any marks. That’s [what] the Australian studies are compared to. And the Indian students who are studying there, getting out of 100, in Physics, they’re getting around 80% and he’s getting 17%. Then, I thought, “That is not going to work.”

Despite paying for expensive private schooling, having assessed their child’s likely schooling outcomes, the family returned to Australia 3 months later. The position for Credentialists was thus that migration had to be a long-term success or one’s children had to be kept apace of the position of their Indian-based peers. Migration and education, as other studies have shown, are decisions deeply intertwined (Dustmann and Glitz 2011).

### Practices make the perfect match

With everything staked on a singular capital, Credentialist parents undertook a range of targeted practices to maximise their child’s opportunities to develop their academic capital in the school field. These broadly fell into three categories: education practices in schooling and pursuit of the ‘best school’; cultivation of a like-minded peer group; and home-based educational pedagogies. Cumulatively, these created conditions ideally matched to the constitution of the field of school education in Australia.

### Pursuit of the ‘best school’

A key strategic practice for Credentialist parents was to enrol their child in the ‘best school’ for both primary and high school. This was largely recognised by three key criteria: school performance results, desirable peer group and good teachers. For most, the main



evaluative criteria for these were the school's performance as ranked via published test results. This was made objectively easier since the introduction in 2008 of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), a series of nationally administered exams overseen by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The results of these tests, alongside other measures including HSC results and socio-demographic information, are published on the federal government's MySchool website on a school-by-school basis. While schools are not presented in directly ranked order, sufficient data is provided for secondary collectors including website and news sites to produce 'league tables' of the top schools. All parents in this group had researched schools on the internet for such ranked information. Thus, significantly, a key institutional construction in the Australian school field – externally administered evaluative testing and reporting of the results – created conditions that matched the parents' own pre-migration experience of schooling, a system also with recognisable *epistemic relations*, based around high-stakes testing and ranking. This alignment produced what can be termed a 'code match' (Maton 2014). That is, the rules that shaped the parents' pre-migration educational habituses were transferable post-migration due to similar conditions in the field. This enabled parents to recognise the *rules of the game* and realise achievement in the field by enacting familiar practices such as pursuing enrolment in schools most likely to produce high academic capital.

This had an effect within the school field itself. Four out of the five families in this group had children attending one primary school in particular, 'Bennett Park'. This school's population had doubled in less than a decade as its reputation as a high performing school spread throughout its (now) largely Indian-background school community. This reputation was particularly enhanced by the high number of students – around 60 per cent annually – who achieved places in academically selective high schools or selective high school streams. As a result, the school was now at capacity and enrolment was only possible if parents lived within the prescribed catchment zones.<sup>4</sup> The school principal noted he had seen flyers brought from India that specifically advertised this school as highly desirable and the school office regularly fielded phone calls from India and elsewhere abroad from parents wanting to know the precise catchment area of the school so they could secure a rental in this area prior to migration.

Credentialist parents also took considerable care to inform themselves of how the educational system worked, taking advantage of any advice provided by the school, particularly in relation to testing and academic selection. According to the principal of Bennett Park:

If we have a workshop on student welfare, or our student reinforcement system or on road safety we'll get 20 parents. If it's on OC (opportunity class), selective school or NAPLAN, we have a lecture theatre that sits 160 and we'll get 200.

Preparation for and participation in a series of externally administered tests in school was central to this. These started with the Year 3 NAPLAN tests, then in Year 4 were the keenly contested exams for entry into an 'OC' (opportunity class) which offer an enriched curriculum in years 5 and 6 in some primary schools and were widely perceived as providing a pathway to academically selective high schools. In year 5 was another NAPLAN and in year 6 exams for a place in selective schooling. Most parents in this group explicitly prepared their children for some or all of these exams through a combination of supervised



homework, trial test papers, additional homework from school and frequently, the use of private external coaching colleges, the latter which is explored below under ‘... supplementary schooling’.

At Bennett Park nearly all students sat these exams and children from all eligible Credentialist families undertook these tests despite the misgivings some had. For instance, while Uditi, an accounts officer, was ambivalent about a high-pressure school culture she still enrolled her son for the selective school test. When he did not achieve a place, she expressed both remorse at her own failing to sufficiently prepare him (by enrolling him in additional coaching) as well as frustration at a system she had unsuccessfully navigated:

... when my son did not get through the selective, I rang the selective school and I said ‘can you explain me what was the reason why?’ And she explained me 13,300 applications were done, and only 4,100 positions are there. My question would be ‘why did you accept 14,000 applications when you only have 4,000 positions?’ This is, you are saying you are forcing your kids, kids are working hard, that’s not their age to work hard ...

Uditi was not the only parent to express regret at their child’s failure to achieve a selective place. The principal of Bennett Park described fielding (and refusing) requests from parents that their child repeat year 6 in order to sit this test again. But Uditi’s seemingly contradictory impulses demonstrate the struggle evident in some Credentialists between reproducing schooling practices that had served them previously (or were being practised by their peers) and shifting towards the more socially oriented practices of local parents. Credentialist’s habituses may have been formed in a competitive school field but this did not mean they interpreted this as an unquestionable good and more than one highlighted their relief that school testing in Australia was not yet as highly pressured as in India.

### *Cultivation of a like-minded peer group*

The presence of a like-acting peer group was crucial to Credentialists who sought school environments populated by families like themselves. That is, those who were serious about academic achievement and would facilitate a competitive learning environment to achieve this:

Meera: ... we parents talk about a child’s performance – how is your daughter doing? How is your son doing? How much he scored in the test, those sort of things. We ask about how our children are rating, who is on the top? ... we also feel happy when our friend’s children score good marks and we set them as an ideal student for our children.

Desirable peers were commonly characterised as other Indian-background families, though Chinese-background families were also described as having similar practices and were thus also regarded as desirable school peers. This peer referencing accords with the ethnically delineated ‘frames for success’ Lee and Zhou (2014) describe Vietnamese and Chinese-background families in the United States using. The effect of this is to shape a school sub-field where comparison in performance and practice are only made with other (mostly) ethnically framed peers rather than the broad school population.

Parents specifically avoided schools with a reputation for low achievement and lax discipline – generally judged by observed public student behaviour. This was most frequently expressed as a concern about safety. Of particular concern were schools that did not have

sufficient numbers of students from like-families who would also insist on a culture of extended study activities, the chief anxiety being their child would become the target of bullying for such practices.

### *A home-based educational pedagogy and supplementary schooling*

The crucial linchpin was a collection of home-administered educational practices including intensive homework oversight and support, structured after school time and the limiting of extracurricular activities, additional homework tasks and the purchase of supplementary coaching. These were all directed towards the acquisition of academic capital and can be described as a collection of intensive *home-based pedagogic practices*. For instance, while families in all groups talked to varying degrees about overseeing their children's homework, Credentialists set aside time to be present beside their child while homework was done, providing direct instruction and assistance. This was supplemented with additional homework tasks – parents in other groups and the Bennett Park principal commented on pressure from this group for more homework – which could also include the use of supplementary textbooks. Prabal and Meera for instance, brought in maths textbooks from India because they felt the way in which the subject was taught in Australia did not provide a sufficient foundation or opportunity for mastery:

Prabal: In maths, here only 4 or 5 problems to solve. It doesn't give much practice to a child. But in India, in each method they get at least 20 sums to practice ... here you just learn the formula, then learn how to apply it, but they're big jumps ...

The most visible of all these strategies was the utilisation of out of school tutoring from commercial coaching colleges. Parents reported this was for additional test practising, to cultivate an attitude of hard work and study discipline, and as a compensation for parental lack of knowledge. Ultimately though, its purpose was maximising the marks their child would achieve in any test situation. Thus, even when used compensatorily, the focus remained on the acquisition of academic capital. For instance, one parent was interviewed outside an after school 'Shakespeare's English' class in a coaching college. She had enrolled her child in this as he was due to study Shakespeare the following year in school and she was doubtful of her capacity to assist him with this. Most commonly, however, out of school tutoring was used as direct preparation for the externally administered exams outlined above and at its most intensive the Bennett Park principal characterised some children as spending their entire school holidays '8 hours a day, 5 days a week' in such institutions.

In these home pedagogic practices, Credentialists share much with the Chinese-background parents of high achieving children described in previous studies: they too regulated the home environment, limited extracurricular activities, provided intensive homework supervision, set additional homework tasks (Fan and Chen 2001; Hong and Ho 2005; Huntsinger and Jose 2009) and sought enrolment in academically desirable schools (Lee and Zhou 2014). Because such parental practices have coincided with parents' membership of a group that can be delineated by (Chinese) culture and class, it has frequently been assumed it is these factors that provide causal explanation. However, with Credentialists demonstrating this same suite of practices, and despite their own attribution of this to (Indian) culture and class, these factors offer little

explanatory power for why these practices particularly are favoured. A more productive approach is provided by Sriprakash, Proctor, and Hu (2016) who, studying the use of private tutoring by Chinese-background families in Australia, concluded that rather than simply being a reflexive ‘cultural practice’ this practice was driven by a parental desire for explicit and visible instruction. They found the Chinese-background parents were effectively blind to the ‘invisible’ progressive pedagogic approach of Australian schooling and supplementary tutoring, with its visible pedagogic practices (which mirrored parents’ own educational experience), bridged this gap.

This desire for a visible and explicit pedagogy accords with the practices of Credentialists as exemplified in both their use of external, exam-focussed tutoring and the use of supplementary textbooks with a greater volume of instruction, scaffolding and practice examples as outlined above. This lack of pedagogic visibility was especially evident when parents compared their Australian experience of the home–school relationship to that in India. This was particularly in relation to notions of mutual accountability between teachers and parents. By parents’ accounts, in India the home–school relationship is more intertwined, and revolved around regular student testing with results promptly sent home for discussion:

Sadar: ... when they come to the class and they [teachers] will follow us up to our examinations. So everything ... If I am not doing perform well, they directly call parents ‘That this is lagging, this is lagging, this is lagging.’ But in Australian system, I never had that. So we push the children ...

Indeed, despite good relations with specific teachers, Credentialist parents experienced the school system in Australia as unstructured and overly reliant on individual student motivation:

Sachit: Out here, it’s more a do-it-yourself kind of thing – this is what is there and then you go and learn. So it’s basically a shock for somebody who is coming from overseas ... it’s like, “okay, if you are good in one subject or two subject or whatever is your interest, you can develop in that.”

Overall Credentialist parents expressed a more explicit vocabulary for educational practice than other parent groups. They sought to use their own educational capital through the implementation of learning principles and practices they had experienced in their country of origin, including as a compensation for what they saw as a lack of explicit focus in Australia:

Meera: School people here, they’re not too pushy. They used to say ‘don’t push your son too much, he’s alright’

Prabal: that’s part of our education, in our education ... you need to sit with them, they explicitly say ‘do this’. Here they say ‘don’t push them, don’t push them.’

Meera: my son’s teacher will say, don’t push him too much, he’s doing perfectly well, he’s doing alright. As a mother and also as a teacher I felt it was not enough.

Their focus on the pedagogy illuminates how the school field connects to class, culture and practice in forming a series of dispositions that accord with the ‘scholarly habitus’ that Watkins and Noble (2013, 8) described. This is encapsulated by Prabal, below, summing up what he considered the necessary practices and attitudes for success:

One is hard work, it's always there and timeliness, and commitment. These three will take you wherever you want to be. So we have told them timeliness, you shouldn't be lazy ... and perseverance in the right direction. If you fail once, don't stop there, analyse it, what has happened? We always say there is an opportunity with every failure.

## Discussion

In this study, I sought to describe how a group of parents seeking academic success from school for their children came to have this priority and act upon it. By describing this in terms of Bourdieu's field, capital and habitus, the operations of each element and the relations between them provide a microcosm that illustrates how a particular group of families – externally recognised by their ethnicity – could come to dominate academic achievement in the school field. By constituting groups according to the key capitals they sought from schooling, the priority of the Credentialists, in contrast to other parent groups, was clear. This also enabled a description of the key capitals in the school field. This revealed both the singularity of the capital sought by this group from schooling and their epistemic orientation towards the acquisition of academic capital, the dominant capital of the school field. This stood in contrast to the social and cultural capitals sought from schooling by other parent groups. Through the descriptions of the parents' own academic capital and its role in their social mobility, including their ability to migrate, the utility of their prioritising academic capital became clear. The competitive crucible in which parents' own academic capital had been forged produced lasting influences that shaped their educational habitus and influenced the priorities and conditions of schooling they sought for their children, including selecting high schools focussed on academic success and the construction of a competitive peer group. However, replication of past conditions of success alone is no guarantee of future success. A description of how the school field is constituted in Australia, particularly how the institutionalised national testing regimes and publication of results of NAPLAN and the HSC – both direct measures of academic capital – reveals an epistemic 'code match' with Credentialists' own orientation. This illuminates the advantage Credentialists' capital orientation gives them in the field. That is, Credentialists, alone among parent groups, exclusively seek the dominant capital of the school field and their educational habituses, forged in an academically competitive pre-migration environment, provide them with the knowledge and the know how to operationalise this capital through a suite of practices aimed at academic success. These included individually oriented practices including a focus on academically selective schooling, the fostering of a competitive like-minded peer group, and home-based pedagogic practices including intensive homework oversight and additional homework tasks, the limiting of extracurricular activities and the purchase of supplementary coaching. As such, their educational habitus functions also as a capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Broadly this study accords with previous work that has noted the nexus between class, culture, educational achievement and the reproduction of educational advantage (Dustmann and Glitz 2011). A specific focus on academic capital and orientation towards university study has also been noted in previous studies of Asian parent groups (Basit 2012; Lee and Zhou 2014). Many of the parenting strategies documented in this study to achieve this have also been previously noted including intensive parental involvement in education

(Fan and Chen 2001; Hong and Ho 2005) and home-based pedagogic practices such as highly supervised homework support (Croll 2004; Huntsinger and Jose 2009) highly structured out of school time (Schenider and Lee 1990) and the use of supplementary schooling (Watkins and Noble 2013), particularly to make pedagogy visible and explicit (Sriprakash, Proctor, and Hu 2016). Such practices, aimed at fostering a disposition towards academic learning and the achievement of academic success have been usefully framed by Watkins and Noble as a 'scholarly habitus' (2013). The desire to create a desirable peer group, in part by restricting the frame of reference for achievement to only those peers also engaged in such scholarly practices, accords with the work of Lee and Zhou (2014). Modood's (2004) description of how this 'norms enforcement' creates a form of 'sociocultural' capital he terms 'ethnic capital' (100) provides a useful description of how group practices can extend a benefit to individuals who share some, but not all, sociocultural characteristics

This study adds to this body of work by using Bourdieu's notions of field, capital and habitus relationally to describe how the structural conditions for academic success by Credentialists are created both by conditions in the field and created by them in the field. It demonstrates that while Credentialists' priority for academic capital and their educational habitus to acquire this had been shaped by factors prior to migration, their ability to convert this to academic success in the Australian school field is also due to the 'code match' with conditions of this field – particularly the high-stakes testing and reporting regime and school choice policies which also favour the academic capital they prioritised.

## Conclusion

Although only a relatively small sample, this study provides insights into how a group of Indian-background parents, while defining themselves by class and ethnicity, found success due to a combination of pre- and post-migration factors that shaped their schooling priorities and practices but also crucially produced a match with the dominant markers of achievement in the current educational field. These include the advantages that accrue from the singularity of focus on the dominant capital of the school field – a capital Credentialist parents also possessed – and an educational habitus attuned to the practices needed for the acquisition of this. These strategic practices included the seeking of schools that prioritised this capital, the creation of a competitive learning environment with like-peers and implementing home pedagogic practices to aid the acquisition of academic capital. Most crucially however, the practices and interests they aligned themselves to also matched the dominant capital and practices in the school field of their migration destination. It is this code match between parental habitus, school field and dominant and transportable capital, that brings together the externally described aspects of culture, class and migration, that enables Credentialists and their children to succeed.

## Notes

1. 'Ethnicity' and 'culture' are frequently and problematically elided in the literature (Watkins and Noble 2013). In this paper 'culture' is used to describe identifiable group practices and

‘ethnicity’ is used to denote either a self-referenced identity by study informants or as an empiric descriptor as used in other studies.

2. All names including participants, schools and areas have been anonymised.
3. The HSC is a set of assessments and examinations at the end of high schooling that produces a final cumulative mark. Admittance into study programs in higher education is based on this mark.
4. Each public primary and high school in NSW is assigned a geographic ‘catchment’. If a student resides within a school’s catchment area enrolment is guaranteed. Families may apply to enroll students in schools outside their catchment area however these enrolments are at the discretion of the school principal and are frequently constrained in high demand schools.

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