Rethinking Multiculturalism
Reassessing Multicultural Education

Project Report Number 2
Perspectives on Multicultural Education

Greg Noble
Megan Watkins

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University of Western Sydney
INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Greg Noble is Professor at the Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney. Greg has been involved in research in multiculturalism and multicultural education for twenty-five years. He has published widely on the relations between youth, ethnicity, gender and identity: see *Cultures of Schooling* (1990), *Kebabs, Kids, Cops and Crime* (2000), *Bin Laden in the Suburbs* (2004), *Lines in the Sand* (2009), *On Being Lebanese in Australia* (2010) and *Disposed to Learn* (2013). He has also produced reports for the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission.

Megan Watkins is Associate Professor in the School of Education and a member of the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney. Megan's research interests lie in the cultural analysis of education exploring the impact of cultural diversity on schooling and the ways in which different cultural practices can engender divergent habits and dispositions to learning. Her recent publications include *Discipline and Learn: Bodies, Pedagogy and Writing* (2011) and *Disposed to Learn: Schooling, Ethnicity and the Scholarly Habitus* (2013) with Greg Noble.

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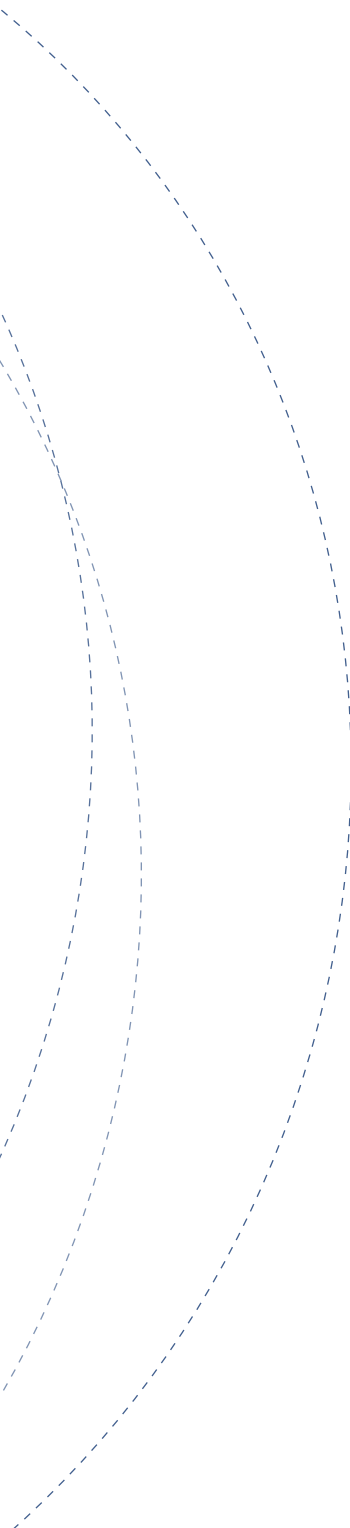Project Report Number 2: Perspectives on Multicultural Education**

Acknowledgements

The research informing this report was only possible due to the willingness and generosity of the teachers, parents and students from the 14 project schools to participate in focus groups and offer their valuable, and often frank, insights into their experiences, perceptions and understandings so useful in this project of rethinking multicultural education.

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Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the financial support of the ARC, UWS, NSW DEC and BOSTES. NSW schools are now faced with increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, as is the broader Australian community. The public funding of research is essential to ensure that we have the richest data for understanding the make-up of this diversity, the theoretical tools for making sense of how this diversity shapes Australians' lives, and the educational tools for addressing the needs that emerge amidst this diversity. It is hoped the insights gleaned from this detailed study will better prepare all teachers for the challenges this diversity poses, ensuring schools cater for the diverse needs of their communities and equipping students with the knowledge and skills they require to effectively navigate the complexities of the transnational and globalised world in which they live.

**Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education
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Executive Summary

Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education Project Report Number 2: Perspectives on Multiculturalism is the second report of Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education (RMRME), an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project between the University of Western Sydney (UWS), the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) incorporating the former NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) and the Board of Studies. It follows an earlier report, *Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education Project Report Number 1: Surveying NSW Public School Teachers* and will be followed by a final report *Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education Project Report Number 3: Knowledge Translation and Action Research*.
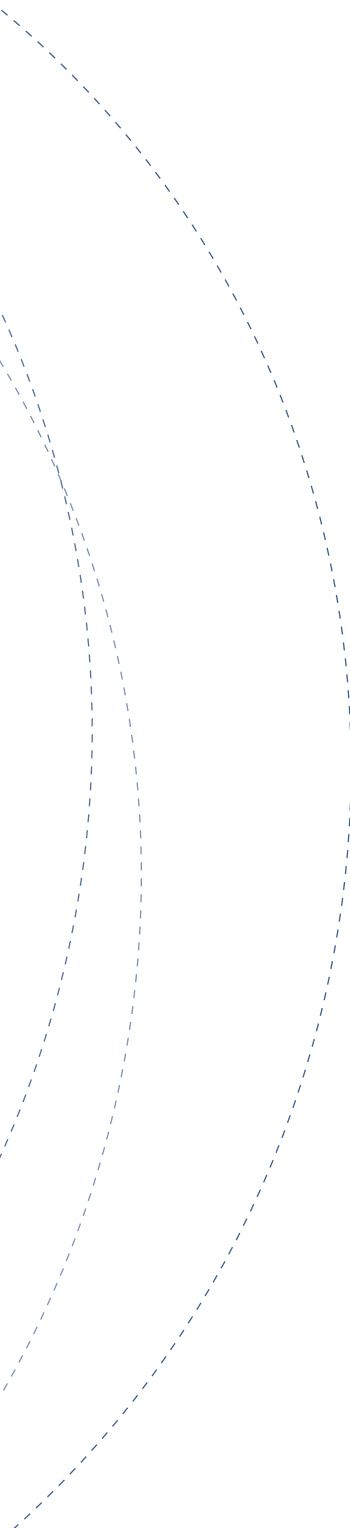
This second report provides an analysis of 42 focus groups involving a total of 222 parents, teachers and students in the 14 targeted schools. These included primary and secondary schools from a range of contexts: urban and rural, high and low socio-economic status (SES), and high and low levels of cultural diversity (see Table 1, p.9). The views recounted here are not intended to be representative of the schools themselves (which remain anonymous) nor of teachers, parents and students in NSW as a whole. Nevertheless, they provide a useful record of diverse perspectives to be found across NSW schools regarding multiculturalism and multicultural education.

The report documents the complex array of cultural backgrounds and forms of identification amongst students, parents and teachers in NSW public schools, which challenges conventional wisdom about the nature of cultural diversity. It finds, however, that there is something of a mismatch between this complexity and teachers' experience and expertise in multicultural education.

The report also finds that while there is little difference between the views expressed by teachers, parents and students regarding multiculturalism, culture and intercultural understanding, there is substantial variation *within* groups. This lack of a shared language poses real challenges for developing a strong basis for a shared dialogue in school communities of these pressing issues, reflected in the tendency in discussions of the goals of multicultural education to focus on dispositional rather than critical components.

Despite the absence of a shared discourse, competing understandings of culture shape people's perceptions of difference, and how these operate in explaining students' educational performance and parental participation in schools. These explanations tend towards reduced and essentialised characterisations of students and parents and, in some cases, may encourage forms of ethnic and racial stereotypes.

These findings indicate there is a pressing need for developing a strong socio-cultural curriculum and a shared critical language across educational communities which can facilitate the role of schools in addressing the challenges of a culturally diverse Australia.

Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education
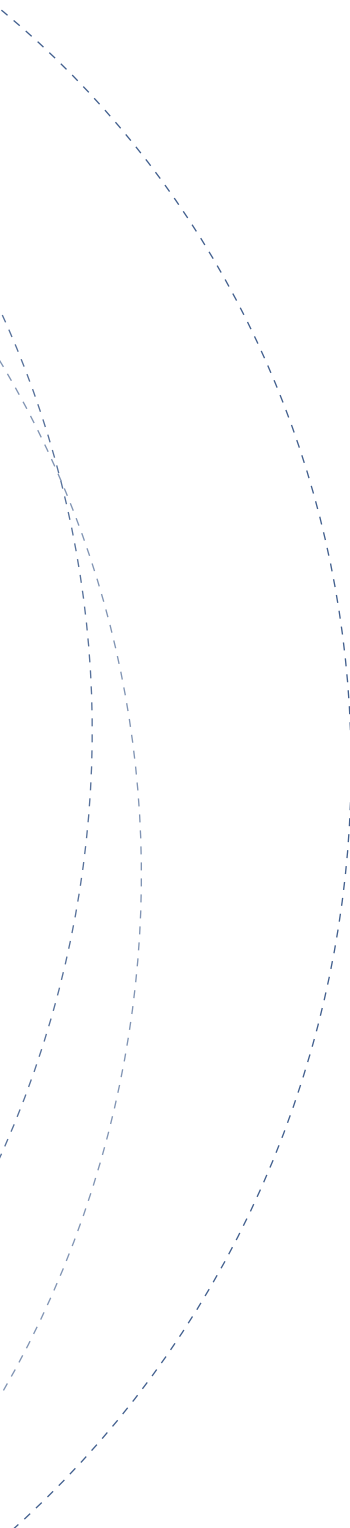**Project Report Number 2: Perspectives on Multicultural Education**

Introduction

This is the second of three reports emerging from the Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education (RMRME) Project, an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project between the University of Western Sydney (UWS), the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and the Board of Studies and Teaching Educational Standards (BOSTES) incorporating the former NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) and the NSW Board of Studies. The project has aimed to shed light on the challenges posed by the increasing cultural complexity in NSW public schools and their communities, the consequences for our understandings of multiculturalism and the role education can play in addressing these issues. The first report from the project *Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education Project Report Number 1: Surveying NSW Public School Teachers* (Watkins, Lean, Noble and Dunn, 2013), documented the findings of a state-wide survey of public school teachers. This second report examines focus group data from 14 schools and their communities, and a third, *Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education Project Report Number 3: Action Research and Knowledge Translation*, focuses on the school-based action research projects in these 14 schools.

The relationship between cultural diversity, multiculturalism and education has rarely been more pressing (Race, 2011). On the one hand, mounting anxieties around immigration and social cohesion has produced increasing opposition to multicultural policies (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). On the other, the changing nature of diversity has challenged some of the assumptions at the heart of multiculturalism (Ang et al., 2002; Vertovec, 2006). Within this context, multicultural education faces questions concerning its currency, its conceptual framework and its modes of delivery.

Multicultural education, of course, covers a wide range of programs which aim to prepare all students for successful participation in our culturally diverse society and meet the particular needs of students with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE): English as a Second Language (ESL)[i] education, multicultural perspectives across the curriculum, anti-racism initiatives, bilingual education, community relations, refugee programs, and so on. These programs, however, are quite diverse, aiming to achieve quite different goals, yet held together with a coherent, overarching philosophy. The NSW DEC (2013) states, for example, that 'Multicultural Education supports a vision of New South Wales as a community which values and benefits from its cultural and linguistic diversity to fully realise its social, cultural and economic potential'. It further explains that,

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i   In line with National Curriculum developments, the term English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EALD) has now replaced English as a Second Language (ESL) in NSW public schools. Given ESL was the term used at the time of data collection it has been retained for this report..

Multicultural Education includes a wide range of strategies which aim to achieve two goals: (i) provide all students with the knowledge, skills and values needed to participate successfully in our culturally diverse society and (ii) support the specific needs of students from language backgrounds other than English including new arrivals, refugees and students learning English as an additional language/dialect (NSW DEC, 2014a).

It spells out its key principles: inclusive teaching practices which recognise and value all cultures, achieving community harmony through countering racism and promoting tolerance, enabling all students to develop the skills to participate in Australian society, supporting the learning needs of students from diverse backgrounds, the provision of English language programs to ensure equitable educational outcomes and promoting positive community relations (NSW DEC, 2014b). These accord with the various aspects of multicultural education spelt out by perhaps the key theorist of multicultural education, the American James Banks (2004, p.xi), who argues that multicultural education aims

to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. ...to help all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good.

Banks and his colleagues (2001, p.24) also argue that 'Multicultural education tries to create equal educational opportunities for all students by changing the total school environment so that it will reflect the diverse cultures and groups within a society and within the nation's classrooms'. These broad goals are realised through five dimensions of multicultural education: integrating content from diverse cultures, helping students understand how knowledge is socially constructed, reducing racial prejudice, fostering an equity pedagogy that addresses the needs of students from diverse cultural groups, and promoting a school culture which is both educationally and culturally empowering (Banks, 2004). Underlying these goals is Banks' (2009, p.8) claim that a democracy should aim 'to provide opportunities for different groups to maintain aspects of their community cultures while at the same time building a nation in which these groups are structurally included and to which they feel allegiance', and sees multicultural education having a key role in achieving this.

These goals are all worthy, but in practice they beg several questions. Are these goals understood and shared by teachers, students and parents in school communities? Are teachers and schools prepared well enough to address the diverse demands? How, in practice, do schools implement programs which seem to follow what might seem like competing rationales — social equity, cultural maintenance, community harmony, cultural awareness. There are also several conceptual
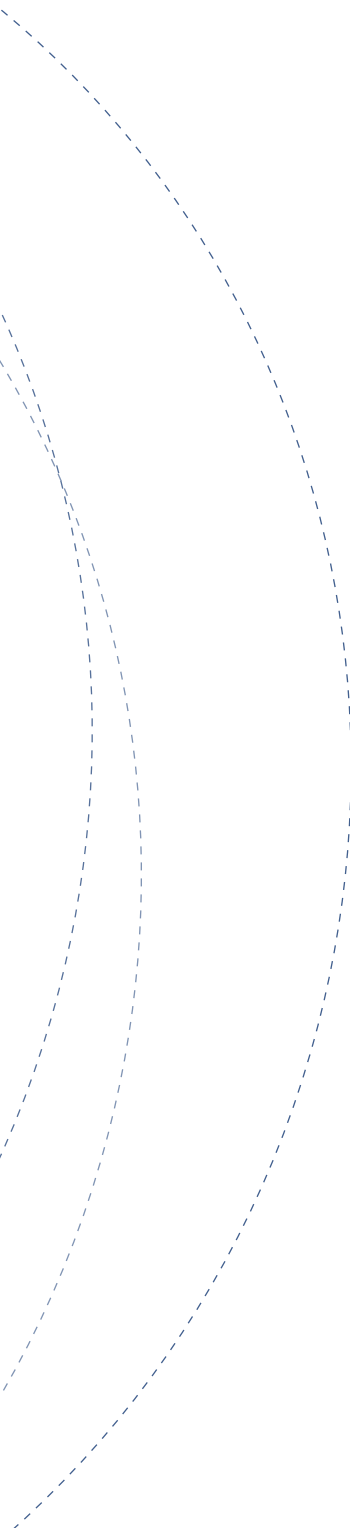
questions underlying these goals. What exactly are, for example, the 'cultures' that should be recognised and maintained through schooling? How is multiculturalism understood by teachers and their communities? How do the assumptions built into multicultural policies align with the lives of students in contemporary Australia?

The body of scholarship referred to as 'critical multiculturalism' argues that much of what passes for multiculturalism comes from a naïve perspective whose celebratory focus avoids difficult questions around relations of power, and fosters culturalist notions of identity that tend towards essentialism. In contrast, this perspective advocates a more critical and reflexive approach which enables a deeper understanding of the cultural complexities of the contemporary world (May, 2009).

A starting point of this project was the need to revisit our understandings of multiculturalism and the rationales and practices of multicultural education if they are to retain their relevance in the culturally complex worlds of the 21st century (UNESCO, 2009; Race, 2011; Noble and Watkins, 2013). This is especially pressing given the emphasis on a broader notion of global citizenship envisaged by the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008) and the foregrounding of intercultural understanding as a key capability in the new Australian National Curriculum (ACARA, 2013). The project grew out of earlier research which found a prevalence amongst teachers to make use of reduced and essentialised notions of culture in dealing with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A key finding was that the ways teachers understood notions such as multiculturalism and culture shaped classroom practices and the school's wider programs (Watkins and Noble, 2008). It is crucial then to interrogate these as ideas and as they inform and direct pedagogy and curriculum, and the wider set of school programs (Watkins and Noble, 2013).

About this Report

To address the task of rethinking multicultural education, the RMRME project undertook a number of activities: a large-scale survey of NSW public school teachers, focus groups with parents, teachers and students in 14 targeted schools and site-specific action research projects in each of these schools based on a series of professional development workshops. The project included primary and secondary schools from a range of contexts: urban and rural, high and low socio-economic status (SES), and high and low levels of cultural diversity (see Table 1, p.9). This report looks at the views of teachers, parents and students from the schools participating in the RMRME project. The views recounted here are not intended to be representative of the schools themselves (which remain anonymous) nor of teachers, parents and students in NSW as a whole. Nevertheless, they provide a useful documentation of diverse perspectives and experiences to be found across NSW public schools, including significant insights into the attitudes towards and the

role of multicultural education in contemporary Australian society. They also provide important background data for the action research projects discussed in Report Number 3.

The focus groups were conducted in the 14 participating schools during Term 4, 2011, prior to the commencement of the action research stage of the project in 2012. A total of 81 participants were involved in the student focus groups, while 74 people attended the parent focus groups and 67 teachers participated in the teacher focus groups across the 14 schools.

Discussions in the focus groups ranged broadly across a number of themes and issues, and with some variation in the issues posed to the teacher, student and parent groups. After establishing baseline information for each participant (including their own cultural backgrounds), the discussion encompassed: relations between students, differences amongst students (around learning and behaviour), issues around parent involvement in schools, understandings of key words (including 'multiculturalism', 'culture' and 'intercultural understanding'), attitudes towards cultural diversity, the goals of multiculturalism and multicultural education, the role of the school in a culturally diverse society, the importance of maintaining cultural identities, racism, belonging and Australian identity. The teachers were also specifically asked about their experience and training in multicultural education.

Chapter One begins by looking at the cultural backgrounds of participants across the three groups, suggesting that this tells us some interesting things about the ways people self-identify. It argues that this provides insights into the nature of cultural diversity in Australia, beyond the assumptions of early multiculturalism, and provides both resources and challenges for schools. It then goes on to consider whether teachers' expertise and training in multicultural education equips them adequately for using the resources and addressing these challenges. The second chapter probes these issues by examining how teachers, parents and students comprehend multiculturalism, including keywords such as culture and intercultural understanding, and how they perceive the goals of multicultural education. Chapter Three takes this further by exploring how these understandings permeate people's perceptions of cultural difference, and how these operate in explaining student learning and parental participation in schools. The conclusion then asks how, given these responses, teachers, parents and students see the role of schools in addressing the challenges of a culturally diverse Australia, and argues for the reinvigoration of a socio-cultural curriculum that can provide the basis for a shared, critical discourse around multiculturalism relevant to 21st century Australia.

Table 1   Profile of RMRME Schools, 2012.

School	School Type	Setting	Total Student Population	LBOTE* Student Population %	SES (ICSEA)**
Addington	secondary	urban	852	22	930
Barnett	secondary	rural	766	3	974
Beechton	primary	semi - rural	118	19	970
Binto Valley	primary	urban	268	25	1199
Eaton Park	secondary	urban	1109	59	1138
Getty Rd	primary	urban	807	79	1040
Graham's Point	secondary	urban	1341	46	1060
Harringvale	secondary	urban	967	83	1066
Hingston Valley	secondary	urban	1276	83	1097
Pentonville	secondary	semi - rural	1264	4	957
Smithton	primary	urban	527	70	1067
Thurston	primary	urban	178	47	895
Wellington Heights	primary	urban	907	95	1167
Wollami Lakes	primary	rural	380	27	924

* LBOTE is an acronym for Language Background Other than English.

** ICSEA is a value based on parents' occupation and level of education. See ACARA (2013). 1000 is the median score. < 1000 signifies a lower SES and > 1000 a higher SES.

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CHAPTER ONE
Schools and Their Communities

Identity, Cultural Complexity and the Multicultural Resources of Schools

This chapter sets the scene by looking broadly at certain key aspects of schools and their wider communities: the self-identified cultural backgrounds of the teachers, parents and students involved, the cultural diversity of the schools they were part of, and the experience and expertise of teachers in areas of multicultural education. These issues are important not just because of the need to have a clearer and more nuanced profile of contemporary schools but, as 'national populations grow more diverse, … the need for educationalists to better understand and work with difference productively becomes increasingly critical' (Allard and Santoro, 2006, p. 115). It suggests, moreover, that a more detailed and nuanced picture of schools gives us some insight into the 'cultural resources' that are available within the wider school communities.

It is often claimed that schools are places which represent the broader nature of a culturally diverse society — at least in terms of their students and their families. They are, of course, but not uniformly so. Of the 14 RMRME schools, for example, one had less than 4 per cent of its students coming from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE), while another had a LBOTE population of 95 per cent. The nature of that diversity is often seen, however, in relatively straightforward ways, with student populations organised into lists of students' language backgrounds or countries of birth, for example. Yet diversity is much more complicated than that, once a range of dimensions are taken into account. Indeed, the nature of diversity in Australia is becomingly increasingly diversified, as elsewhere, due to intergenerational change, cultural adaptation, intermarriage, transnational mobility and the widening cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of Australia's immigrants and their children (Ang et al., 2002, 2006; Vertovec, 2006).

It is also often claimed that, while schools are places of great diversity, the teaching profession tends not to be so diverse, but to be disproportionately Australian-born in contrast to the wider population (McKenzie et al., 2011). This translates to a view of teachers as overwhelmingly monolingual, middle class and part of the Anglo-Australian mainstream (Santoro, 2013) and the curriculum is, as a consequence, seen to be problematically ethnocentric (Hickling-Hudson, 2004). This may be so, but it is rarely explored systematically, in depth or with nuance. It also means it may be assuming a coherence to teachers as a category that evades the complexities of the relationship between teaching, identity and ethnicity that evolve over time (Raible and Irizarry, 2007). Indeed, these assumptions are not necessarily borne out by the RMRME survey (Watkins et al., 2013). So it seemed useful to gain some insight into the diversities 'on the ground' by asking the students', parents' and teachers' groups how they described their cultural backgrounds.

Students

Many of the 81 students answered in fairly straightforward ways, drawing on categories of nationality and/or cultural ancestry:

Australian. [Hingston Valley HS]

I am Persian and American. [Binto Valley PS]

Aboriginal and Croatian. [Pentonville HS]

A more revealing picture is given when some of the groups at different schools are contrasted. So at Barnett HS, a school in a rural town, the students answered this way:

Australian.

Australian.

Australian.

100% Aussie.

Australian.

Australian.

Australian.

At Thurston PS, in the outer suburbs of Sydney, students responded this way:

I'm Tongan. [but born in Australia]

I am Samoan. [born in Australia]

I'm Egyptian. [born in Australia]

I have Mauritian and half Russian. [born in Australia]

I'm from Bangladesh but I wasn't born there, I was born in New Zealand.

I am Bangladeshi too. [born in Australia]

And at Getty Rd PS:

I'm Vietnamese and Australian. [born in Australia]

I'm Anglo Saxon and Australian.

I'm Chinese. [born in China]

I'm Syrian and Australian and New Zealand. [born in Syria]

I'm Chinese, Cantonese and I converted to Australian citizen when I was three years old. [born in China]

I'm Lebanese and I'm Australian. [born in Australia]

The contrast here is not simply that the first school is seemingly Anglo-Australian and the other two are culturally diverse. There is also an interesting contrast in the nature of the categories used. In the second school, like the first, most of the students used their ancestral or 'homeland' origin (often their parents' country of birth) as singular markers of identity (whether they were born there or not, or had become Australian citizens or not). In the third school, students mostly adopt a hybrid identity, adding 'Australian' to their ancestral category (also irrespective of whether they were born in Australia or not). Why these choices were made is not clear, but the fact that there are options in the ways students define themselves is important, and these choices are significant if a school is to understand its community. The other thing to note is that some students feel the need to add in further bits of information beyond the simple homeland or ancestry category: where they were born, when they became citizens, language background, etc. The complexities of self-definition are even more stark in other students' responses:

I don't really know, I think I'm mixed. I've got quite a lot, well my mum is Chinese and Indian and my dad is Scottish, Sri Lankan, Portuguese and Indian. But I was born in Australia. [Binto Valley PS]

My dad's side is Greek and my mum's side is Maltese. My mum was born, was born, in Australia and so was my dad. My mum's parents were born in Malta and my dad's mum was born in Egypt and I'm mostly Australian, I've got Maltese and Greek. [Beechton PS]

I'm Australian but Chinese. I was born here and then I went back to China when I was three years old because my parents decided that it would be a good idea to actually learn Chinese so we don't lose our language. And then I came back here when I was in Year 6, and then I speak basically Cantonese at home but it seems to sort of like have a mix a bit with English because I've sort of forgot about some words and things like that. [Graham's Point HS]

Here, not only do the identities become more hybrid, but the responses have to be more narrative, detailing something of the personal histories of migration and marriage. Moreover, they become more reflective as a consequence: sources of identity are often construed in terms of change (losing language) and 'amounts' (a lot, mostly). Lastly, a degree of uncertainty is evident in some students' responses.

Parents

There was a similar pattern of responses with the 74 parents. There were some whose definitions entail singular categories, while others articulate degrees of hybridity and complexity:

> Australian. [Addington HS]

> I am Palestinian. [Graham's Point HS]

> Chinese. [Hingston Valley HS]

> I define myself as Singaporean but we have obtained the Aussie citizenship. [Eaton Park HS]

> Fifth generation Australian, German heritage. [Barnett HS]

> Greek Australian. [Smithton PS]

> Well it is hard to say, I am just sort of Aboriginal but kind of there's a lot of white blood in me, mostly white blood, but I register more for aborigine, I don't know white, but—… I identify better as Aboriginal than as a white Australian. [Wollami Lakes PS]

Again, as identity is increasingly complex it has to be 'explained', and it often entails a degree of ambivalence:

> It is quite mixed, I am born to a Japanese mother and a Taiwanese father. I was born in Japan, raised primarily in Canada and I moved to Australia 17 years ago. [Binto Valley PS]

> Born and raised in France, French is the first main language, moved to Australia around 13 years ago now and I must say I am confused. … I've got the dual nationality, French and Australian, which adds to the confusion. [Binto Valley PS]

This degree of complexity amongst parents also has consequences for their children, so some parents start talking about their children's identities in the answers regarding themselves, because identity and diversity also have to be explained in family terms given their histories of settlement:

> I am Indian background but I was born in Fiji, born and bred in Fiji so I suppose we are called Fiji Indian, but totally Indian heritage wise… I came [to Australia] in 1987, so a while ago and when I was in Year 9, yeah, and my daughter though is a beautiful mixed background because my husband is Anglo Indian … So she is quite a bit of Portuguese, English and Indian blood in her, so yeah. Bit of mixed cultures there. [Harringvale HS]

If I was to classify myself, I would say I am mixed. I am half African from Zimbabwe and I am half Australian. But in saying that I am of European background. My dad is Italian and Irish … I say to people I am some African and Australian and my daughter — she is actually African, Australian and African/American. So yeah there is a mix there. But that is what I say and I am proud of both too. And I was bilingual at one point I lost it when I came here as a kid… I was born in Zimbabwe. My dad was born and bred in Australia. [Wollami Lakes PS]

These accounts indicate a need for a more nuanced understanding of the complex make-up of school communities and the need for caution in the ways people often use reduced cultural categories to identify students in schools.

Teachers

The increasingly variegated nature of cultural diversity in students' families is often contrasted with the absence of such diversity amongst the teaching profession. While this is a real contrast, it nevertheless downplays the degree of complexity that exists amongst teachers. The state-wide survey conducted as part of this project found that the cultural profile of public school teachers in NSW is more complicated than generally acknowledged, once country of birth, ancestry, faith, languages spoken and the ways teachers self-identify their cultural backgrounds are all taken into account (Watkins et al., 2013). While the responses that the 67 teachers gave in the focus groups were not as varied as the students and parents, there was a noticeable echo of the patterns found in the other groups.

So again, taking a whole group approach, there was one semi-rural school — Beechton PS — which fit the view of teachers as overwhelmingly Anglo, all identifying as 'Australian'. On the other hand, most of the 14 schools reflected degrees of diversity, either in terms of personal origins or in terms of family heritage, even when there was an Anglo-Australian dominance, as at Eaton Park HS:

I'm an Australian-born Korean.

I'm Australian but my mum is Vietnamese and my dad's Chinese, but we speak Vietnamese at home and like my brother, so I speak English with him.

I'm Australian of convict blood.

At Hingston Valley HS:

I'm Australian from an Italian background.

I tell kids I'm a Skippy bush kangaroo. I refer to myself as Anglo Celtic background.

I refer to myself as an Australian with Lebanese background.

I'm an Australian with an Estonian background.

Just an Australian.

As an Australian with a Ukrainian background.

I'm Australian with an Indian background, we speak Tamil at home.

These accounts already reference a degree of hybridity which was found elsewhere:

> … basically I identify as being Australian but my mother's family is a couple of generations Australian, but her mum came from an Irish background and her dad from an English and Scottish background. My father as I mentioned, identifies as being Ukrainian, but his mother came from a German-Polish background and they lived in the Ukraine, so it's quite — I guess I'm a hybrid, I think I yeah … I could speak four languages before I came to school but when I went to school, I was always the child that was called out to the ESL tests and things. [Getty Rd PS]

Again, many teachers felt compelled to go beyond categories to explain histories of complexity:

> I am born in Fiji, lived in the Pacific until I was 17, lived in New Zealand for 6 years and then came here, so I just don't know. I still feel Fijian, but yet I don't know. [Binto Valley PS]

Detailing histories means that past (and possibly future) changes to identity can be accounted for:

> I was born in Italy and I think for a long time I considered myself very Aussie, but I think probably the last few years I've gone back to the Italian background a little bit and thinking a lot more about the Italian and thinking maybe going back to visit and listening to Italian music and getting a little bit more that way. I mean I am still Aussie but the Italian is coming through a lot more. … I always sort of neglected it, and I think it also had a lot to do with being almost ashamed of being Italian back then, and I'm certain when I was at school younger, and it's come back now that I'm feeling a little bit more patriotic to the old country. [Getty Rd PS]

Sometimes a detailed account doesn't guarantee certainty of identity:

> Um, well my father's father was from Norway and my mother's family are from England, Scotland and very much entrenched in that … southern English way of being, so I had very sort of strong ties to that because of my maternal side and my grandmother and my great aunt speak very correctly, the Queen Victoria's English … so I have had

that kind of European connection and I don't know if I see myself as — I don't even really understand what being Australian is to tell you the truth because it is something that I don't really feel like … the thing about being Australian is that you don't feel really completely tied to any one place. Because I've grown up in areas that are very culturally diverse and I was fortunate … I was probably one of the only Anglo type children so I had a really good exposure to different cultures and took that as being, that's what the norm is sort of thing. So yeah, I don't know. [Wellington Heights PS]

Several issues emerge from this snapshot of the identity claims students, parents and teachers made in the course of the focus groups. As indicated, identities don't rely just on simple categories of nationality or ancestry, but increasingly complex forms of mixing which often have to be located in narratives of changing forms of identification over time. They also exist in families and their histories which point backwards and forwards, and entail uneven attachments to language, faith, sub-national and supra-national regions. Such combinations are often talked about as layers or mixing, but they also sometimes entail uncertainties about identity. These combinations reflect a world of increasing hyperdiversity, where differences are not simply additions of two or three elements, but the dynamic interplay of elements which produce new ways of thinking about identities, relations, communities and belonging (Noble, 2011).

A truism of contemporary educational discourse is the importance of knowing the student, which also entails knowing their parents and the wider communities in which they live and the circumstances from which they come. This is important for the development of the different types of knowledge crucial to the professional capacities of teachers (Ferfolja, 2008); knowledge which also constitutes key resources for schools. These forms of knowledge should extend to the backgrounds of teachers themselves. Poyatos Matas and Bridges (2008, 2009) have talked about such resources as part of what they call the 'multicultural capital' of a school: the material, human, symbolic and cultural 'assets' that derive from the cultural diversity of a school and its communities, and the capacity of a school to recognise differences and to draw on these resources to develop socially progressive curriculum and pedagogy. This terminology is not useful here, however, because there are some unresolved problems in the framework. A culturally diverse school is seen to have more multicultural capital than schools that aren't diverse, an opposition which draws too heavily on the reductive contrasting of 'interculturally proactive' and 'culturally problematic' schools (Hickling-Hudson, 2003). Such typologies tend to assume that diversity in itself is good and also that diversity is predicated on relatively coherent notions of ethnic community. It doesn't seem well-equipped to grapple with the kind of hyperdiversity in evidence here. Moreover, it doesn't really offer insights into how to address the needs of schools that don't have large populations of LBOTE students but still exist in a global world, or schools

that have, for example, different kinds of issues around cultural inclusion because they have significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

There is, however, a need to consider the potential of these 'resources' — not as an inherent good, but in terms of the usefulness for teaching practices and community liaison of understanding the richness of the identities, cultural backgrounds and experiences of students, their families and school staff in a world of hyperdiversity. This understanding therefore has to be matched by the experience and expertise of the school. Such complex forms of identification pose challenges (and not just positives) for multicultural education because many schools have tended to operate in terms of categorising students through reduced notions of ancestry defined by country of birth or language background. As elsewhere argued, the ways 'cultures' are typically construed in school discourse are largely reductive and simplistic, premised on perceptions of discrete and coherent communities with consistent customs and values (Watkins and Noble, 2013). This is problematic, and the report will return to the ways these understandings of 'cultural difference' operate within schools in Chapter Three, but the point to make here is that the evidence documented so far already points to the complex, hybrid lives of students, parents and teachers, beyond the superficial recognition of discrete ethnic communities, and that schools need to engage with greater nuance in terms of the diversities of their communities.

A key point to stress is that people's identities are not their cultures. Identification is a layered and dynamic process through which people draw on ancestries (often framed as national 'homelands' or cultural 'backgrounds', including languages and faiths, among other things) and reassembled diasporic networks which includes appropriated aspects of the country of settlement (often framed as 'ethnicity'). As one Addington HS student said in terms of 'being an Aboriginal': 'I don't do any of the traditions, like I just know my background'. The problem is that 'backgrounds' are sometimes treated as though they are 'foregrounds', as the ways in which people live their lives in the current moment, rather than, as they may often be, residual forms of identification that point to heritage, not 'ways of life'. The report will return to this argument in the following chapter, but the point here is this: if students', parents' and teachers' forms of identification are the result of complex distillations of diverse elements and not a simply defined 'cultural background', how well equipped are teachers and schools as educational institutions to operate in environments that are not just culturally diverse, but increasingly culturally complex?

Teachers' Experiences in Multicultural Education

Knowing your community is one key element of the resources schools accumulate to fulfil their missions, but it has to be matched by the attributes of teachers as professionals, their capacity to work with their

communities and to understand the various issues in teaching LBOTE students. This is especially important given the increasingly diverse and globalised nature of the world, and the kinds of complex identities already documented. Both the knowledge of student and community profiles and the skills needed to work effectively in school contexts constitutes what Ferfolja (2008) refers to as 'teaching capital'. So teacher groups were asked about their expertise in the various components of 'multicultural education'. 'Multicultural education', as indicated in the Introduction, entails a wide range of programs: English as a Second Language (ESL) training, anti-racism initiatives (including formal training as Anti-Racism Contact Officers or ARCOs), multicultural perspectives across the curriculum, bilingual education, community relations and parent engagement, and so on. In pre-service training, these are sometimes collapsed into single units in a university degree (if addressed at all) or may become, like ESL teaching, a discipline in its own right. The research on teacher education indicates that teacher education programs have tended to address diversity in piecemeal fashion, with limited success (Mills, 2008). Australian professional teaching standards adopted in 2012 by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership — the national body overseeing teacher education — may go some way to rectifying this, given the requirement for professional knowledge in teaching students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, but there is as yet little detail as to what this requirement translates to practically (AITSL, 2011, p.5).

In terms of in-service training, professional development in multicultural education may vary in nature from lengthy professional learning courses provided by the NSW DEC or external providers to short, one-off in-school discussions amongst teachers — or they could be somewhere in between, or nothing at all. The creation of the NSW Institute of Teachers (now incorporated in BOSTES) in 2004 was a recognition that more concerted attention needed to be given to professional development, and their system of registering different courses has gone a long way towards bringing greater coherence and depth to teachers' post-commencement development, especially for new-scheme teachers for whom accreditation is mandatory (BOSTES, 2014).

For the purposes of this project, then, the focus is on seeing how well teachers were equipped for working in the schools and the world they inhabited, and how crucial their experiences of pre-service and in-service training had been in preparing them for these challenges. The results were telling. As found in the state-wide survey, the development of professional skills in multicultural education broadly conceived, and in very specific areas such as ESL training, was uneven and often limited. In the survey, less than half of the respondents had received pre-service-training in multicultural education, and longer serving teachers had much less training in this area than new teachers. Just over a quarter surveyed had some expertise in ESL education, and this was more likely among primary school teachers (Watkins et al., 2013, pp.17-18). In terms of in-service training, a wide array of professional learning experiences were

found, with anti-racism strategies and culturally inclusive curriculum being the most reported (both at almost 60 per cent of teachers), but over 20 per cent of classroom teachers had not undertaken any professional learning in multicultural education at all.

Echoing these findings, while some teachers in the focus groups had a degree of ESL training or were ARCOs, there was a similar unevenness of experiences of multicultural education both within their university training and in their professional development since graduating. At one end of the spectrum, one Graham's Point HS teacher described how,

> At university we have a specific subject which is mandatory for the university … which was studying Aboriginal education, but multiculturalism was within every facet of the educational subjects that we did. For example, our lesson planning would have to include a variety of students of different backgrounds. So instead of it being one set subject it was right through and ESL was an option but I am already a teacher's aide specialist so I chose not to go down that pathway.

Her experience was unusual, however. More typical was the response that they had 'very little' multicultural training in their degree. As one teacher at the very diverse Getty Rd PS admitted, 'in terms of formal training … there was nothing really much when I was at university. I graduated in '84 I think'. The quality and ongoing impact of such units was also unclear:

> when I started in training in education … I had something, ... like a subject or unit about ... to do with the people coming from other countries to school, so that's all I did. … Like you had to ... know what their needs, what their habits, or culture,... lots of things like that. [Addington HS]

One Beechton PS teacher told us that she independently undertook additional study after her initial degree:

> going back about ten years ago I did a TESOL [Teach English as a Second Language] course with Charles Sturt University, I have a graduate certificate in that. … I was teaching so I was actually child rearing at home for five years and I was thinking of becoming an ESL teacher, so I did the course, it took me a couple of years … I did come back as a permanent part-time teacher but not as an ESL teacher.

There was also evidence of unevenness of professional development in this area. As an early career teacher at Graham's Point HS with over 50 per cent LBOTE students admitted, 'Um, since university I probably haven't had any extra training'. In contrast, a more experienced Barnett HS teacher had accumulated training over many years:

I lived in Victoria for a year and I participated in a lot of ESL professional development and was ESL resource teacher for one year at a school and I've been in Northern Territory and Western Australia for many years and there was ongoing multicultural ESL, professional development in those states.

She thought that there was 'nothing' at her present school, which has a low LBOTE population, and this may say something about the school's uptake of available professional learning opportunities. At the same school, one teacher commented that, 'Years ago there was, but not so much in the last ten years. I've been here for 21 years', while another said she 'had some training while I've been here, I did an ESL training workshop … last year, that only went for a day, I think.' At Smithton PS teachers attended an 'orientation' event each term where,

they talk about the composition of schools, the numbers of children who are arriving at schools from other backgrounds, the places where they are coming from … and things like that, so that's where I have had my most major amount of introduction to a multicultural type perspective. [but] it's more been about giving you background rather than giving you any strategies and things to do.

For some, experience in professional development was due largely to the fact they had worked in schools with large LBOTE populations, where multicultural education was seen to be needed,

I taught for a while at [a school in south-western Sydney] and so very high ESL population there and we had regular ... development programs running ... general multicultural education, that sort of thing, so probably a couple of times a year I would have gone to some sort of in-servicing on that. [Barnett HS]

A second teacher at this school had a similar experience: 'I worked at [a school in south-western Sydney] for three years, I did ESL and a lot of nationalities represented within that, so we had a lot of in-service training'. This was a common theme. A teacher at Eaton Park HS explained that he had 'ESL professional learning, school-based stuff, I've done, having worked in south-west Sydney was a lot of what we did, so yeah, a little bit of that'.

For some teachers, as at Pentonville HS, it didn't seem to be relevant:

To be honest, we don't have a massive multicultural aspect in this school apart from the Aboriginals.

Not that I can think of, no, especially since a lot of our in-services and our professional development are chosen by ourselves … I possibly don't see it relevant to me which might be a fault of mine, but no, I don't introduce those sort of courses … We did a lot of multicultural activities and days and support stuff like that for the children as

opposed to I think not much in servicing of ourselves, but we have run a lot of activities, multicultural activities with the children throughout the year, but not anything for ourselves. [Thurston PS]

For this teacher, multicultural training was more about practical activities with students rather than professional development amongst teachers. Established teachers, such as this person from Getty Rd PS, commonly described how they relied on accumulated practical experience:

My first school that I was appointed to was [a school in south-western Sydney] and then there were a lot of ESL, we had ESL teachers on every grade there but in terms of multicultural activities, the school provided lots of those activities … we always had the Vietnamese community and the Chinese community coming and doing things with the students, cooking, dancing, all sorts of things. We had community language teachers there as well, so they were involved in the programs as well. So I guess at that school I was a little bit more involved.

Several teachers had undertaken ARCO training provided by the NSW DEC as a requirement of the Anti-Racism Policy. At Wollami Lakes PS there were at least three teachers with formal ARCO training. For others, however, anti-racism training was delivered quite differently, as at Thurston PS:

Teacher 1:   We did when we were at the staff meetings. [The principal] got up and talked about it.

Teacher 2:   Yeah as part of our discipline policy, yes it is part of our discipline policy. So whenever we are going through and revising our policies, yes that comes up absolutely.

It is not the place of this report to comment on whether anti-racism is best dealt with in school-based staff meetings or department-provided professional learning, but the choices here seem significant. More importantly, perhaps, is the view that anti-racism strategies were best addressed in the context of discipline policy rather than a broader orientation to multicultural education with a curriculum focus. The former 'corrects' a problem as it emerges, as a behavioural problem, the latter sees racism as a topic to be addressed as an educational issue across the student body.

Few teachers underwent the sustained English language and literacy training that these two Harringvale HS colleagues describe:

we went one afternoon a week for many weeks and it was awesome. And that was probably the most useful in-service I've done of the whole lot … I did more grammar in that course than I had ever done in my life and gave me a really good understanding of how our questions need to be worded.

I'm participating in the TELL [Teaching English Language Learners] course after school with five other members of staff, and that has been quite enlightening, ... Making you aware of what it is like to be a second language learner … much of what we are doing there is looking at papers and questions … I did it online which was a very interesting way of doing something like that ... less about the language acquisition, but looking at things from an alternative perspective, and that's when I became much more interested in those cultural differences that we actually see within the classroom and the way that they are not acknowledged through our text-based … English. So I've certainly been interested in shifting our text towards accommodating more about students, given the needs that they have.

Teachers at Wellington Heights PS, which had five ESL staff, facilitated a TELL workshop in their area:

It was not a big program, it was about over 20 teachers, about 15 from our school and about 5 or 6 from other schools who came in, it was six lots of 2-hour sessions, just doing ESL, how do we teach children, what are we doing differently as ESL teachers and it was a really practical course. There was also a lot of theory as well. [teachers] were very responsive, 95 per cent of them were really interested, did their homework, participated in the class, it was interactive, we got them doing work at the table in small groups, it wasn't just us sitting up the front talking, but it was really very, extremely valuable I think. It gave them lots of ideas of things to do in the classroom.

Others valued 'on the job' training when and where it is needed, as with this Harringvale HS teacher:

My training in ESL was definitely on the job and the first six years of my teaching career I taught in [school in south-western Sydney], 97 per cent NESB, 60-odd different nationalities. They had … a faculty of ESL teachers … part of what we did every day was delivering lessons to classes where the class was just ESL … a lot of professional learning days were focused on helping students from non-English speaking backgrounds in faculties … that was a big priority ... the whole school was you know focussed on … non-English speaking background students, … [I learnt] more than I ever would have learnt by going to some in-service courses here and there, much more, … it was part of what I did every day, eight periods every day. So that's where I did my training for ESL and NESB, no doubt about it.

Yet for others, such as this teacher from Wollami Lakes PS, with over 30 per cent LBOTE population, this amounted to a haphazard approach:

I don't think we can say any of us have had a great deal of training while we've been teaching in the area of multiculturalism. … I suppose we've had bits and pieces because of the different population that we have here. You know, we have quite a diverse population of kids

multiculturally … but we haven't, except for TELL last year that we all undertook as a staff we really haven't had anything significant. Julie and I have both trained as Anti-Racism Officers, and there are aspects of multiculturalism come into that.

Some recognised the limitations of the various forms and levels of training they had received, as indicated by this Hingston Valley HS teacher:

I did a video conference on ESL multicultural education and it was quite interesting, some of the stuff they brought up, but it was a very sort of surface level discussion about multiculturalism, ESL, LBOTE students and that was pretty much it. You just came out feeling that you needed to know more because there was stuff that I didn't understand and wanted to know more about.

Many teachers felt they had a need for further training, but in different areas such as ESL, culturally inclusive curriculum, etc, echoing the findings of the state-wide survey (Watkins et al., 2013, pp.25-26). For some it was largely about cultural awareness, and often for pragmatic reasons:

we all work with these children but I know very little of their background. I don't know very much about their culture or their language, I think some training in those areas would be good, because then we've got an understanding. I mean we do learn a little from them but I think it would be great, I don't know whether people could come in and we could learn more about the Arabic community, more about the Muslim religion, and those sorts of cultures. [Getty Rd PS]

I think heads up about do's and don'ts, on cultural do's and don'ts, particularly, … ceremonial things that I don't fully understand what celebrations ... but what are more sacred ceremonies that we shouldn't go near, or there are certain people you should use if we want to get that lesson across. [Addington HS]

One Binto Valley PS teacher felt what was needed was a 'starter pack', 'when we have a kid from another culture arrive, just something that we can use just to start teaching these kids rather than thinking, what will I do?'. For others, such as this Beechton PS teacher, it amounted to cultural appreciation:

I think that would be great for teachers to have an appreciation of all different cultures and how they are different and the way they look at life, because different cultures have different perspectives and I think that you have got to educate your teachers to educate the students. … [and] we need the sort of resources that can be used within the classroom, physical resources.

One Wellington Heights PS teacher put the emphasis on the quality of staff, arguing that 'I think human resources are people, it's that high expertise who have that specific training in working with our English as a second language students'. For many, like this Binto Valley PS teacher, literacy was the central issue:

> to me the hardest thing is writing because I teach in writing knowing how I can better do that because I have several ESL students in my class, and that has been the hardest thing. Their speaking is not a problem; it is their writing that I would like to know how to do better to cater to them more to their individual needs of that. How I don't know but that's probably the area I've struggled with the most, getting their writing on track.
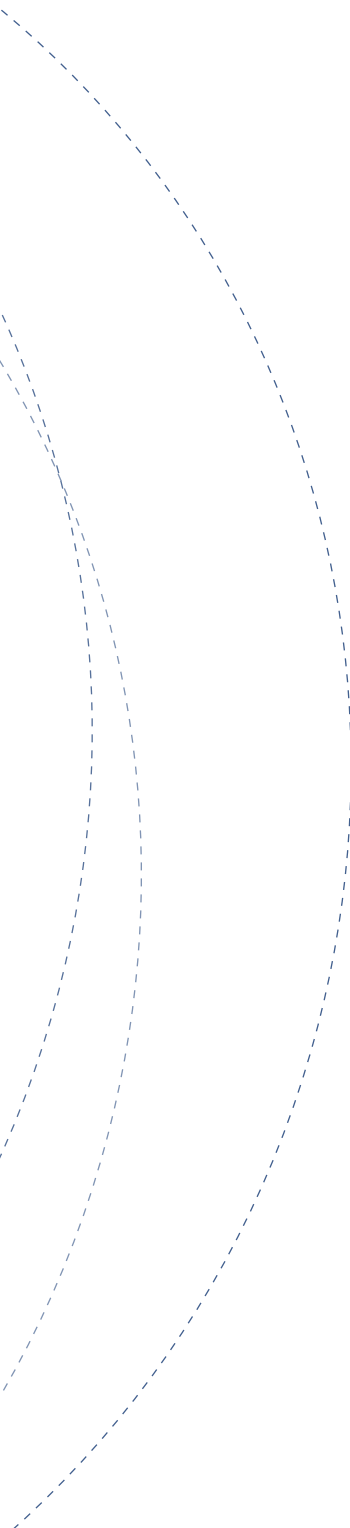
Yet for some, like this Beechton PS teacher, it just wasn't a pressing need:

> Well I am fairly happy with how things are. ... At this stage of my career I just sort of go with the general consensus and currently at our school, because we don't have ... ... we don't have a great population of multiculturalism.

As demonstrated, the experience and expertise of teachers in multicultural education were variable, and they had contrasting views of what they needed and what was best. This is no surprise, especially as many teachers see such needs in terms of whether they are in a 'multicultural school' or not. Few teachers grappled with the broader issues of teaching students to understand cultural complexity, and most saw it as a pragmatic response to the 'problems' that arise when you have students from 'different cultures'.

Conclusion

This overview raises key questions around how schools match the 'cultural resources' of their communities, teachers' abilities to address specific needs around multicultural education, and the wider resources schools need to meet these issues. It also points to the question of whether the ways students and parents, but also teachers, identify themselves correspond to the ways they are viewed within the school community, and the ways multicultural programs aimed at addressing the purposes of multicultural education frame the groups they are addressing. This, of course, begs the question of how teachers, students and parents understand the idea of multiculturalism — indeed, the very idea of culture — and the goals of multicultural education, and how they perceive the effects of cultural difference on student learning. It is to these issues this report shall turn in the following chapters.

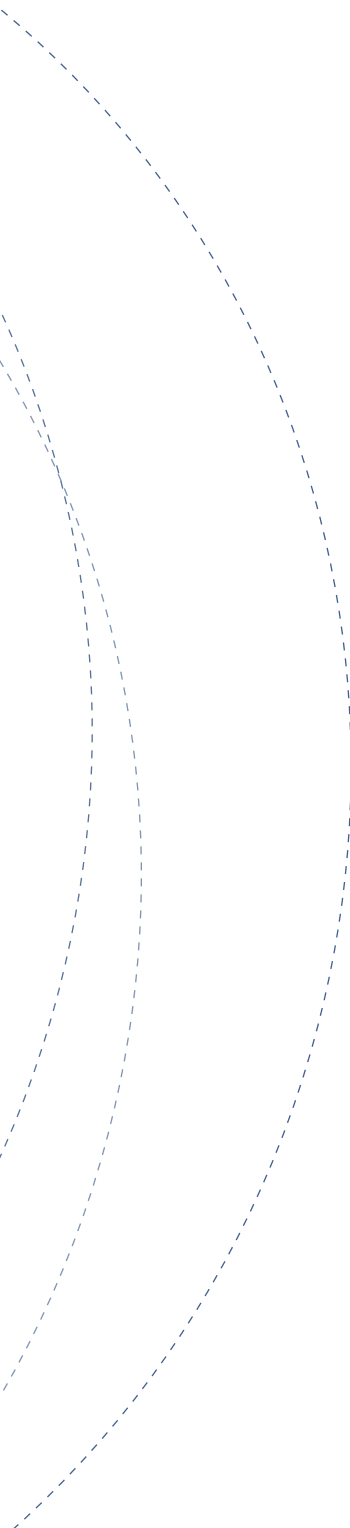# Understandings of Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education

Many studies have shown that there is confusion over what multiculturalism means, despite the term being part of political and popular discourse for four decades and despite general, ongoing support for multiculturalism in Australia (Dunn et al., 2004; Goot and Watson, 2005). The RMRME state-wide teacher survey conducted in 2011 demonstrated that while there was overwhelming teacher endorsement of multiculturalism, there were also competing understandings of its meaning, significant for those who are engaged in the delivery of multicultural programs in schools (Watkins et al., 2013). The focus of this chapter, then, is to explore how teachers, students and parents in the 14 project schools comprehend the notion of multiculturalism and related terms such as culture and intercultural understanding, and to examine what participants perceive to be the goals of multicultural education.

The Meanings of Multiculturalism

Considerable effort has been given over many years to unpack the meaning(s) of multiculturalism. Scholars have shown that there is often discrepancy between the take-up of the idea in different national contexts, shifts in meaning over time and contestation between groups about what multiculturalism should be (Jupp, 2011, pp.41-43; Schwarz, 2007; Ebanda de B'beri and Mansouri, 2014). Research also shows that while there is general support for multiculturalism, it varies depending on the question and context, and that there is also some ambivalence about multicultural policies and their effects on social cohesion (Ang et al., 2002; Markus, 2011).

There are several sources of this confusion and ambivalence. The first is the extent to which multiculturalism is a descriptive term, which simply points to the 'fact' of cultural diversity in Australia, borne of an immigration program that has drawn migrants from many countries, or a prescriptive term, which refers to the set of policies which manage that diversity and foster a particular attitude to cultural difference (Kalantzis, 1988, pp.91-92). Some scholars try to resolve this by distinguishing between 'multicultural' as a demographic description of diversity and 'multiculturalism' as a political strategy (Kenny and Lobo, 2014, p.105), but such divisions don't get at the underlying questions. A migration program constituted only by British migrants would not be seen to make Australia 'multicultural', which indicates that LBOTE migrants are the definers of 'multicultural-ness'. In other words, particular differences seem to matter more than others.

Secondly, and in terms of policy, not only are there are a range of programs, activities and events implemented in the name of multiculturalism, but these can embody diverse logics: multicultural days which ask us to value others' cultures go beyond interpreting and translating facilities which assist non-English speakers to access government services. This is important because there is a crucial distinction here: a nation can have a culturally diverse population without introducing policies which facilitate migrants' settlement or asking citizens

to celebrate their cultures. It was suggested earlier in the report that the range of programs found in multicultural education addresses competing rationales: social justice, equity, cultural maintenance, community harmony, cultural awareness and the celebration of difference. These rationales shift over time: initially multiculturalism focused on questions of servicing migrants' needs and protecting their rights. In other words, an emphasis on social justice was conjoined with a view that the target was migrants themselves. Later phases focused more on providing multiculturalism 'for all Australians', combating discrimination, recognising 'productive diversity' and enhancing social cohesion. There was also a concomitant shift from a group rights orientation to one which emphasised individuals, identity and lifestyle (Ho, 2013; Schwarz, 2007; Hage, 2003).

Thirdly, policies and programs often entail discursive, moral and political orientations: they aren't value-free. Multiculturalism comes with a language of respect, tolerance, celebration and so on — these implicitly or explicitly call for ethical practice, a normative relation to others and an imperative for a specific disposition. While at one level it seems valuable to foster such an ethos, it has not been without criticism, not just from those who label it 'politically correct', but from others who claim that a language of tolerance and inclusion can mask relations of power and practices of exclusion (Hage, 1998; Ahmed, 2012) and displace a critical engagement with social issues (May, 2009).

This isn't the place to engage in these debates — they have been well analysed by others (Levey, 2012; Ebanda de B'beri and Mansouri, 2014) — and the focus here is not what is the right or wrong definition, but rather to suggest that how teachers, students and their parents (as members of school and national communities) grapple with their understandings tells us something of the state of multiculturalism in Australia, and the relations between demographic complexity, policy and educational programs. Some differences might be expected between how teachers, whose professional task is to implement multicultural education, articulate their 'mission' and how students and parents, 'receivers' of multicultural education, understand the rationales of these programs and the policies from which they emanate. Divergences between official and popular views towards multiculturalism have often been explored (Baumann, 1996), but rarely has this been attempted in a setting such as schooling where a professional practice is the focus. La Belle and Ward (1994) two decades ago explored the ways multiculturalism found its way into not just teacher practices, but school committees, policy, parental expectations and student perceptions. It seems timely to consider what this might mean now.

Students

It is instructive to start with students because they are in the midst of an institutional process where they are 'learning' multiculturalism. Not only are they subject to activities in the name of multicultural education,

they are in the process of acquiring a competency in ways of talking about multiculturalism — what Voyer (2011) characterises as 'disciplined to diversity'. This process is uneven and different at different ages and schools. Our student discussion groups were held in a range of primary and secondary schools, with high and low LBOTE populations, high and low SES profiles, and in urban and rural areas. Unsurprisingly, when we asked students to explain multiculturalism, we got an array of responses. Two Year 11 boys at rural Barnett HS, for example, were fazed:

> Student 1:   Um, I wouldn't know.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, is it something that is ever discussed at school in any subject?
>
> Student 2:   Yeah, Year 10.
>
> Interviewer: What do you do around that — what do they talk about?
>
> Student 2:   Um, I forget. Um, we do it in history or geography.

At semi-rural Pentonville HS, students offered the basic definition that multiculturalism meant 'different people living together'. This was found at most schools but, at some, students were more comfortable with the language of multiculturalism and its different emphases:

> Different cultures, everyone's got a different backgrounds and we, so we, need to appreciate that as well as your own. [Addington HS]
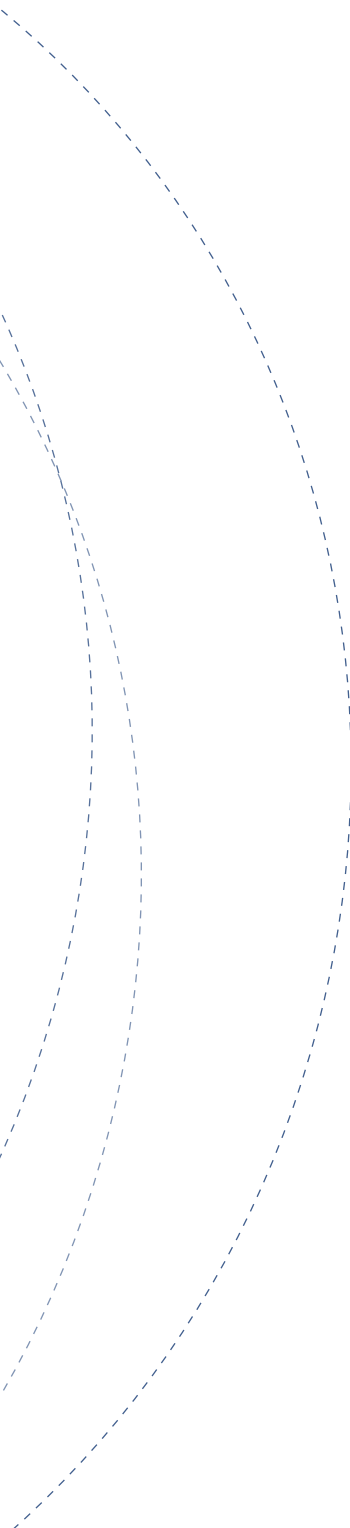>
> I think it means, not just lots of different cultures together but it means acceptance of them. [Getty Rd PS]
>
> I think multicultural is the mixing and the integrating of different cultures in something like say a community or a group, so yeah, like in this community there are various people who make up that group who come from different various cultural backgrounds and races and they mix and integrate with each other. And they share these cultural things that they have. [Eaton Park HS]
>
> Multiculturalism means like lots of different cultures blending together, harmonising .... It is like putting different ingredients into a blender, if sometimes you get it to be like really smooth and ... and sometimes there are chunks here and chunks there to sort out. [Getty Rd PS]
>
> I think like all groups of people just all coming to one. [Hingston Valley HS]
>
> Also a bit of embracing their culture as well. So if you look at our society you have like Indian restaurants, Chinese restaurants, Italian restaurants, so embracing that culture as well is an important aspect. [Harringvale HS]

These responses convey an array of meanings, some of which are in tension. From the initial description of the 'fact' of diversity, students emphasise several elements: mixing, ethical or dispositional skills (accepting, appreciating), coming together in unity, sharing cultural traditions, and so on. Sometimes this is framed in terms of a local community and sometimes it is seen across a nation. Sometimes culture is understood as personal differences and sometimes it refers to groups of people; sometimes it is a muted sense of 'background', while other times it is linked to race, language or faith. These divergent elements are not 'mistakes'; the students are processing the messages they receive in schools and elsewhere about multiculturalism. Several students built in references to the activities they do in school where these messages are reproduced. Several talked about multicultural days and 'multicultural speaking' competitions. Another from Smithton PS commented, 'We always do writing on it, like "is it good for Australia to be a diverse multicultural country?".

While generally they had imbibed a celebratory message of diversity, few students thought about multiculturalism as policy unless prompted. Some, however, had a nascent understanding of the necessity of the management of difference:

> I think when those bad qualities come in, whether or not a multicultural community is successful is how they deal with those bad qualities and how they accept the person for who they are. [Eaton Park HS]

> I think having a policy sort of makes it a little more official, makes people think that you know this country is about multiculturalism, like in some places where the government is not supporting it the people feel that there is no need to support it either, so it sort of promotes a policy which sort of promotes the peace a little more. It sort of shows that they are out for multiculturalism and that it's a serious issue and it needs to be addressed. [Hingston Valley HS]

Within these elements there are complications. As students discussed these issues, they worked through particular problems:

> I see it as having sort of two sides, … in a multicultural society you have lots of different cultures that learn from each other but also like when individuals remain, like retain their own culture, they are allowed to retain their own culture … it's like different facets on a diamond kind of thing, like they are all unique and they are all different but they come together to form a whole. [Harringvale HS]

A more difficult issue arose when students pursued the theme that multiculturalism meant the mixing of differences, for several cited faith-based schools or suburbs which they claimed were not diverse. The Pentonville HS group hotly debated Muslim schools:

Student 1:   I don't know why they have to have just a … school, just for them, I don't understand why they couldn't go to their local school.

Student 2:   Let's just say the Anglo Australians trying to build a school specific for white people, imagine the comments and the newspaper articles that would get posted, you know, that's fine for the Lebanese or Muslim, like churches and religious groups trying to build schools specifically for them.

Interviewer: What about if it's a Christian school?

Student 2:   But can't anyone go to that anyway?

Student 1:   With private schools I don't think that's, if you have a Lebanese child that was you know, came from a Christian background they would still be more than welcome there, it's not — it's religious belief not — yeah. I think that's another topic.

Student 3:   I honestly don't see the problem. If they would like to have a school that their children can go to, to practise their religion, they should have the right to do it.

Student 1:   Yeah, but that's the thing, it's not a religious school, I thought it was a school based on race.

Student 2:   And if they build a school like that, as long as they just didn't like isolate themselves from the rest of the community, like if that happens people wouldn't be happy about it, oh they're just like not interacting with anyone else, they are just in that group.

The discussion moved to a suburb transformed by Asian migration which one student described as 'cool 'because of its restaurants. When asked if this place was multicultural, students disagreed:

Student 4:   We did an excursion there, yeah, in geography to just see the multicultural school, so yeah, I would say it was.

Student 2:   It's not; it wasn't particularly multicultural; it was primarily Vietnamese students.

Student 4:   When we went there, there are all different signs in different languages.

At the heart of these discussions is not simply disagreement about the benefits of multiculturalism, students are attempting to 'apply' some of the messages of multicultural discourse to the worlds they know. It may involve anxieties around the myth of 'ethnic ghettoes' (Megalogenis,

2002) that derive from what they think a local population may be like, but they are still thinking through the tensions of the messages they receive. Yet, as close as these discussions get to engaging with the challenges posed by cultural diversity, at no time do these groups engage with the idea that at the heart of their experience of multiculturalism is an intellectual task of making sense of the world around them.

Parents

Parents, of course, don't share a common institutional experience like students and have different participation in education in Australia or elsewhere, so their relations to discourses around multiculturalism are different, based on experience, media or their child's schooling. Nevertheless, their responses work through the same array of meanings, though often with less nuance. So typical statements include these:

> The bringing together of many different nationalities of people. [Barnett HS]

> I think it's lots of cultures living in one society… And being able to all get along. [Beechton PS]

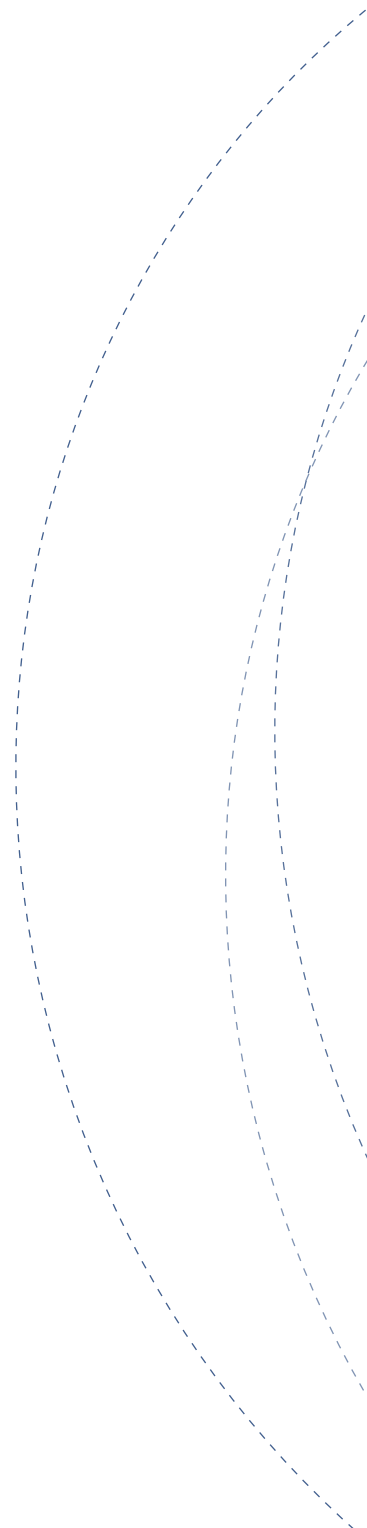> Different backgrounds congregating together. [Wellington Heights PS]

> Living in a society with people from different, or relatives from different races. [Harringvale HS]

For the most part the descriptive sense of multiculturalism dominates, though this 'multi'-ness can be seen in terms of individuals, cultures, nationalities, races and 'backgrounds'. Nevertheless, parents tended to focus on 'mixing' and 'acceptance'. A parent from culturally diverse Wellington Heights PS believed not only that there was mixing, but change: 'kids from different culture come together, they can adjust'.

One exchange between Addington HS parents demonstrates a number of ideas:

> Oh, basically just people from different backgrounds all coming together and I mean we all have to live in the same world, regardless of what background we are from, whether we are from you know, Europe or Britain or anywhere, … we just all have to understand each other and move forward as one sort of nation really so that we can all just get on with things. But it is good to understand each other's backgrounds so that, you know, … there might be a war overseas, that doesn't mean that everybody from that nationality here is a bad person.

I think the same, learning about it is important, to learn that people do come from different cultures and have different beliefs but at the end of the day we all live together and it's a case of respecting, although there are differences. Everybody deserves the right to be treated the same and to live equally.

The focus on social justice tended to be 'thinner' amongst parents than students. There was also a greater move from definitional issues to the 'problems' of multiculturalism. As a parent from semi-rural Pentonville HS commented, 'the term in the traditional sense means that different cultures living separately in their own culture'. He didn't see many cultures mixing, but thought 'they' 'stick together'. Multiculturalism becomes a problem of 'others'. As someone else in this group said, it 'depends on the culture doesn't it? Yeah, different cultures just don't mix do they?'.

A parent from Binto Valley PS, with a quarter of its students having a LBOTE, also saw problems: 'where does religion and culture sit? … For me that's interesting because that's when you get into extreme you know, where does extremism sit with integration, you know, and how do you integrate extremists? It is very, very difficult. I think that's a problem'.

One parent at Getty Rd PS grappled with the 'mixing' issue in this way:

> With multiculturalism is that the different cultures and the blending of them and also the differences of them — there are pockets of differences and there is great blends of — and it's just like chicken soup. But yeah it is being able to pick out all of those different things and recognise them for what they are and — it's not all good or bad or right or wrong, but it's recognising, respecting and learning to understand it.

One telling but rare exchange was among Eaton Park HS parents — a school with a large proportion of students from Asian backgrounds:

Parent 1:   Well, actually multiculturalism includes all Australians, it is not about other cultures, it's a we, not a them, you know, and to what extent our, not non-Asians, but our so-called Australian community is part of that program… I don't know what it means anymore... it is probably something as broad as that is just people within the community of different cultural backgrounds together. Now you can't define it I think across the board ... multiculturalism …, yeah, I'm confused by the word.

Parent 2:   The word has been bandied around so much now that I think people sort of have a bit of trouble. They sort of think they know what it means but because it has been bandied around so much in so many different contexts.

Parent 1:   It is fascinating, I mean I just find the concept fascinating that people live together, tolerance ... Sydney is very tolerant, lets things happen but it doesn't cross borders …, you know, there is not a lot of crossing of borders across cultures. You tolerate this, you tolerate that, you know, you don't interfere with it, but there is not a lot of communication across those cultural boundaries, I don't know.

Some parents, such as this man from Graham's Point HS, recognised that their children lived their lives with a very different relation to cultural diversity, and deferred to them: 'multiculturalism defines what our children are now talking about. All children, they are very multicultural. We should look up to our children to learn what multiculturalism is all about'.

Teachers

Teachers are professionals who work in institutions where multiculturalism has been adopted as policy that informs many programs and activities. To this extent, we might expect there to be differences in the ways they articulate the discourse of multiculturalism. In the RMRME state-wide teacher survey (Watkins et al., 2013, p.54), the most common definitions of multiculturalism teachers chose were 'celebration of all cultures within a society' (31%) and 'a society made up of many cultures' (25%). The option emphasising policy ran third (15%), just ahead of the mixing of backgrounds (14%) and freedom to follow beliefs (13%). This distribution was reflected in the variety of responses given without prompts in the focus groups across the schools. One teacher from culturally diverse Smithton PS responded that it was simply 'Many cultures'. The discussion at Thurston PS with a 50 per cent LBOTE population captures some of the descriptive and dispositional meanings of multiculturalism:

Teacher 1:   Lots of cultures all in one place.

Teacher 2:   Lots of different cultures exist harmoniously, you know, within the one area, working together and–almost you would say you don't differentiate, so multicultural that you don't notice them you don't differentiate any more.

Teacher 3:   Well to me I suppose multicultural is just, you know, a variety of different cultures existing harmoniously and having different things to offer, different traits and experiences to enrich the other cultures.

Teacher 1:   The more nationalities there are the greater we see the multicultural aspect of things I suppose. I mean my parents' parents wouldn't have grown up thinking that Australia was a multicultural society but my son definitely will and he'll know it too, you know, so, he is well aware of it. I think they just accept it.

The 'fact' of diversity, mixing and acceptance are again common themes. This Harringvale HS teacher grappled with the 'coming together' and community maintenance rationales:

> The multicultural idea is that cultures yes, they share, they blend, they coexist but in some way they maintain some kind of identifiable integrity, like you can still see aspects of different cultures in the multicultural society and that's tolerated so that it's okay for religious beliefs and all sorts of things, you know music, dress, the way you work whatever, they are all the things that make a culture, language. It's okay for all of those things to exist in a multicultural society.

Many, such as these two Getty Rd PS teachers, move from this to the 'problem' of others:

> I'm from [a south-western Sydney suburb] — they want to put a 10 km circle around … and nobody but Muslims can live inside that 10 km circle. So they are not even making it good for everybody living there, they are causing intolerance amongst the older people in the area, and they can't understand what's going on and why.

> Just adding to that, ... multiculturalism is…also that you can have your own culture, that you can identify totally with your own culture, that your understanding of others' intolerance but you can still live the life that you want within your culture. ... the Islamic community as a whole is ... in terms of their schooling and what they are prepared to have taught in their schools in the majority of cases is still limited. So they are not wanting that input of what we deem to be the Australian school culture or the Australian way of life.

As with many parents, a question about the meaning of multiculturalism shifts to a commentary on the changes some have experienced in Australia. It starts with the valuing of difference, but segues into the lack of acceptance amongst older 'Australians' (where difference is outside 'Australian-ness') and the dangers of cultural 'enclaves'. It sees multiculturalism as the right to maintain your culture, but shifts into the problem of intolerance amongst ethnic communities who are deemed to be unprepared to adopt the 'Australian' valuing of difference.

What is remarkable is the similarity of responses across the three groups: students, parents and teachers. Teachers' professional positions don't seem to lead to different views or a language that is different to students and parents. This links to the finding in the state-wide survey that while most teachers had knowledge of the implementation of the NSW Anti-Racism Policy in their school (80%), a smaller number had read the broader Multicultural Education Policy (46%), suggesting that teachers had a weaker orientation to a professional discourse around multiculturalism than we had anticipated (Watkins et al., 2013, pp.37-38).

Who is 'Multicultural'?

While there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, there are some odd uses of terminology. At Beechton PS, students responded in a very distinct way when asked why they were in the focus group:

> I'm in Year 6 and my teacher thought that I should participate because I am multicultural.

> I'm in Year 6 and the reason I'm participating in this is because I'm the school captain and I'm very multicultural.

> I'm in Year 5; my mum thought it would be good for me to do this because I am multicultural.

> My mum and dad thought that this would be a good thing to speak about my multiculturalism.

What does it mean for children — all of whom are Australian-born with diverse ancestries — to declare they are 'multicultural'? This is partly to do with the framing of a focus group on multiculturalism, but other things are going on here, as further comments indicate when students were asked about multiculturalism:

> Like lots of–um, a person from a different culture coming into another culture and having to learn about their culture and what they do.

> Well I define multicultural as like different backgrounds and your parents could be from two different nationalities and see in Australia we are very multicultural because a lot of people come here.

> I think multicultural is a variety of cultures that, so like my parents they've got — they are multicultural because they've got Australian and Maltese and Greek and everything.

> There is like a group of multicultural people coming together, getting to know each other and all that.

The students move between seeing 'multicultural' as a description of individuals' backgrounds and a description for diversity across a nation, to talk of 'multicultural people'. This is echoed in responses at other schools: one Eaton Park HS boy, for example, refers to himself as being 'from a half-multicultural background'. While this is common amongst the student groups, it also occurs amongst adult discussions. One teacher at Pentonville HS referred to a show on SBS that has 'a range of multicultural people in it'; another at Wellington Heights PS explained that when she was growing up, 'we didn't have any multicultural people at my school'; a parent who identifies as Indian at rural Wollami Lakes PS talked about how 'more other multicultural people are coming into the society'.

Do these variations matter? They do if we acknowledge that one of the central tensions has been whether multiculturalism is about people of LBOTE or is 'for all Australians'. Their usage refers to people with migrant and especially language backgrounds other than English, in the way we once used 'ethnic'. Our aim is not to belittle such comments, but to highlight one of the difficulties around words and the ways they categorise people and issues.

Understanding Culture

The issues enunciated here rest on the difficult place of 'culture' in multiculturalism. 'Culture' is one of the most complicated words in the English language (Williams, 1976), referring to things as divergent as the arts, individual taste, whole 'ways of life' and discrete groups defined by nation, ethnicity, language or faith. An account of that varied usage is not needed here, as it is documented by Raymond Williams and others, but it is important to see how it is reflected in participants' comments and to reflect on the consequences for multicultural education. The wider range of meanings of culture are generally not used in the focus groups; there is a narrower focus on 'ways of life', ethnicity, etc. This is significant because the emergence of multiculturalism has been one of the elements in the centrality of the idea of 'culture' in political and popular vocabularies, and our preoccupation with 'seeing culture everywhere' (Breidenbach and Nyíri, 2009), but often perceived in particular ways.

The response from students at Barnett HS is a useful starting point:

What they believe in, kind of.
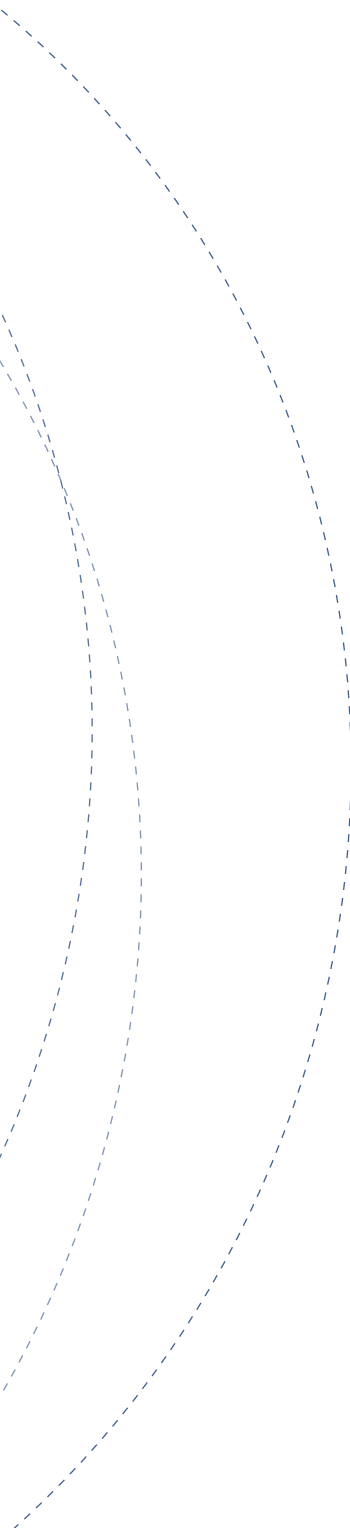
How we live.

Religion.

Well, yeah religion, how they grow up.

Would different views be expected amongst teachers? In the state-wide survey of teachers, almost half of the respondents chose 'shared beliefs, language or customs' while a third said 'shared beliefs and practices of any group'; only 16 per cent said 'a whole way of life' (Watkins et al., 2013, p.50). Amongst teachers in the focus groups, the common variations on these themes were:

I would say traditions, I don't know. [Eaton Park HS]

Like what you do in your country, like different kinds of stuff that you do. [Thurston PS]

At Pentonville HS, one student said culture was 'where you are from, like the things that they do', a second described it as 'a mix between race and religion', and a third said it was 'their background'. A fourth at Pentonville found it easier to contrast 'Western culture' and 'Asian or Chinese

culture': 'how they do stuff differently to different ... like in China they will use chopsticks instead of a knife and fork'. Like the Wellington Heights PS teacher who said culture 'encompasses things [like] dance, music, food, religion', many participants found it easier to typify what culture included, rather than define it. Many across all groups simply glossed culture as someone's 'background' (or even as a kind of possession): 'I've been born here, but I still have my background so I keep it with me', one Eaton Park HS student said. Importantly, however beliefs, 'how we live', religion, traditions, country, background, and how we are brought up are combined, they are not the same thing. The key issue here is that, in talking about a term that has become central to the ways we think about the world, few interviewees — teachers, parents and students — had a clear and consistent way of grappling with it as an idea. Some people, like these Pentonville HS students, admitted their uncertainty or pointed to an implicit meaning: 'it's all different but I don't know how to explain it'; 'Um, I don't really know, I know what it is but like I don't really think of a technical definition'.

A common move in discussions was to see culture in terms of difference (Watkins, 2014), and as something someone who is different from the mainstream has. This amounts to the 'ethnicisation' of the idea of culture (Noble and Watkins, 2014, p.166). It is seen in the use of 'they' above, but it was also voiced explicitly by this student from Beechton PS:

> Culture means from a different culture, like their background is a different culture than our background.

In this student group, the interviewer followed this comment by asking whether someone born in Australia had a culture. One Beechton PS girl gave a very thoughtful, but telling answer:

> Well depends, as you said, you were born in Australia and if you have a culture like, say your parents were born in a different country and then they had a culture and then their parents had a culture so then you would have a culture because their parents have culture and so do your grandparents. So you would have culture because they are from a different country or they were born in a different country…
> I also think that culture is like a different religion or something, not really a religion, like Catholic or anything but like a different country so you could be born in Australia, as I said before, you could be born in Australia but your parents could be from a different country and that's culture, so it's like you are born in Australia but you've got some part of a different country inside of you.

Here, this student captures a key dimension of culture as something transmitted over time, but her logic is premised on the idea that culture is something exotic to 'Australia', and on another idea that culture could be explained in terms of countries. Others talked about 'Australian culture' as though it was understood, but one Pentonville HS parent, a critic of multiculturalism, pointed out an important logical flaw in the multicultural idea of culture: if Australia also 'has' a culture', then 'you can't have many

cultures in one culture'. Occasionally, some responses, such as this from a boy at Hingston Valley HS, foregrounded the problem of the nation-based categorisations of culture:

> For me, this is where I was born, this is where I grew up, this is my home, so I'm Australian. My background is Lebanese, my parents come from Lebanon, that's my culture, this is how I grew up, but I'm Australian. My background is Lebanese and I associate with that and I'm proud to say it, … You know for me, I can't say that like Lebanese culture-Australian culture, to be honest, that is confusing… I am Australian or Australian culture or Lebanese culture. For me, because I have grown up with a different background, in Australia, it sort of just meshes. ...

This Graham's Point HS student criticised the categorisations often made in the name of 'culture':

> I don't even know why the word culture is used. I think the word exists to classify different styles really, because for example, the first time I invite people around to my house they immediately — wow, this is an Asian house!

One of the consequences of equating culture with country is that it encourages a view of culture as a kind of 'container' which sees cultures as fixed and ongoing groups (Breidenbach and Nyíri, 2009, p.25). This reified and essentialist take on culture (whether it be based on nationally or ethnically defined groups) has been widely critiqued (Modood, 2007; Noble and Watkins, 2014) in favour of a more processual view of culture as a dynamic, fluid, and contested process (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). The 'confusion' amongst teachers is not a mental flaw: the tension between an 'anthropological' focus on the groupness of culture and a recognition of the shifting and heterogenous nature of culture-as-process has been central to debates around cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue (UNESCO, 2009). The dilemmas that teachers face can be seen in this exchange at Smithton PS as they discuss whether there is a thing called 'Greek culture'.

> Teacher 1:   It encompasses everything about their lives.
>
> Teacher 2:   Because you know what, our Greek culture here is not even the same as the way the Greeks do it. My parents brought it out here, the put it in a bottle, they put the lid on it and it stayed the same. In Greece it changed, yet my parents still live in that culture… They preserved what they brought… [but] What is Greek culture? Is it the way in Greece, or is the one that my parents brought here?

The first (Anglo) teacher responds by declaring the parents 'more authentic' than the culture in Greece, while a third then responds that culture is, then, 'what you make it'.

While some interviewees captured something of this dynamic view by emphasising that culture was 'what you do', it was rarely articulated as well as this migrant parent at Graham's Point HS:

> Culture is what you make of what you see around you and how you react to it.

This 'in the moment' view contrasts sharply with the language of 'background' found across many people's responses. The idea of 'cultural background' has become standard terminology in multicultural discourse, but it is problematic. As discussed in Chapter One, the ways people often use culture to identify themselves, and are identified by others, refer more to ancestry than the 'ways of life' they currently follow. If someone is the grandchild of migrants, and 'looks' Chinese, what does it mean to say they have a 'Chinese background', especially if it is used to explain their success at school lumped together with students in Shanghai? Moreover, if students', parents' and teachers' forms of cultural identification are the result of complex distillations of diverse elements and not a simply defined or unitary 'cultural background', how able are teachers and their communities to address complex entanglements of culture, identity, migration, ancestry — and a host of other aspects — as educational issues within multicultural programs?

The Goals of Multicultural Education and Intercultural Understanding

Documenting the complex set of understandings entailed in multicultural discourse is crucial if there is to be some agreement about the goals — and practices — of multicultural education. The RMRME state-wide teacher survey showed that while teachers were more likely to prioritise equity, English language proficiency and combating racism as goals of multicultural education (Watkins et al., 2013, pp.33-4), they were more likely to focus on conventional multicultural days as strategies for fostering inclusion. In the focus groups, teachers were surprisingly unclear at times what these goals might be. Some simply listed a number of words like these Beechton PS teachers: 'inclusion mainly, harmony, togetherness'; 'living together peacefully, happily, tolerance, harmony'. Yet one teacher at Thurston PS doubted they could engineer multiculturalism in her school:

> Multiculturalism is something that happens, it is not like we are going to make this a multicultural place. I don't know, to me it's something that just is.

While, initially, this next teacher from Wollami Lakes PS expressed uncertainty, she managed to combine a focus on what was called above the 'ethical disposition' of multiculturalism with a subsidiary focus on knowledge of other cultures:

I don't really know. I think the most important part is sharing different cultures and making the children aware of maybe the beliefs of different children that we might have at the school and even ones that aren't here, they still need to know about different cultures, especially if they move to somewhere else. So probably yeah, just giving them more an idea and — so we have a big multicultural day here each year which is great.

Some felt the emphasis should be squarely on 'numeracy and literacy', 'the same' as any student, claimed one teacher from Barnett HS. Another, from Addington HS, thought that schools had 'to make sure that they are … teaching different backgrounds'. Yet overall, the emphasis amongst teachers was the dispositional focus. This was echoed amongst parents. When we asked one parent of Polish heritage from Beechton PS what she saw as the goals of multicultural education, she answered:

Basically educating children and parents as well to accept one another and to accept that some people could be a little bit different but also when they did get together to have that Australian way of living, … accepting each other and living together and educating people to basically love one another.

These aims are worthy, but they are couched in broad terms of personal attitudes and have limited translation into curriculum and pedagogy. It was useful therefore to press participants on what they understood by the emerging focus on 'intercultural understanding', which has become a key term within educational discourse because it promises the possibility of social harmony and reducing intercultural conflict, premised on 'three dispositions — expressing empathy, demonstrating respect and taking responsibility'(ACARA, 2013, p.111). While it is nominated as one of the seven 'general capabilities' advanced in the National Curriculum it has not entered into common parlance. In the state-wide survey (Watkins et al., 2013, p.51), teachers' definitions were roughly divided between knowing other cultures (33%), understanding cultural diversity (26%) and interacting effectively with people of different cultures (23%). In the focus groups, many participants indicated they had not heard of it at all. As one teacher said, 'that would be the first time I've heard that term'. Others gave general responses which aligned with what they had said about multiculturalism: 'awareness', 'empathy', 'understanding', 'appreciation', 'teaching tolerance'. At Barnett HS, one parent defined it as 'broadening your awareness that children have of the differences', but his fellow discussant saw a problem both in terms of the diversity in any given school but also in terms of the temporal nature of cultural change:

That would be tricky to do here though won't it, if there is not a lot, if it is true that there aren't a lot of other people from other cultures it would be quite difficult to say, oh here is this little boxed edition of what an Asian person looks like, you know, something, Asian people have been here for five generations just like me, you know they've come out with the gold rush and everything else but they are not necessarily Asian, they are Australian, but it would be difficult to do that.

While one teacher at Wollami Lakes PS thought 'it is definitely the school's responsibility' to foster intercultural understanding, she could only really list events such as Harmony Day and Refugee Week as examples of how this was addressed in schools. Nevertheless, she argued that,

> On a day-to-day basis it's just intrinsic if everything that everybody does here … it happens just through general talk, through discussions, through formal teaching lessons, about where people have come from and my family and that sort of thing, the playground and it just — it's hard to identify exactly what we do but it happens every day.

Some teachers saw intercultural understanding primarily in terms of a need for more 'special days' or an 'international day' typical of an older, traditional style of multicultural education. Another parent from Wellington Heights PS saw it more in terms of community liaison approaches:

> We do have many days where, like fathers' day or mothers' day or fun day where the parents do come over and interact with each other. So that is something that is very good that the school is doing. That's letting the parents interact so that we get to know each other and get to know our backgrounds.

Some parents were hesitant about how interventionist a school can be on the basis of 'culture':

> I think that's very difficult because there is a lot of nuance in how you deal with people, it is not only about their culture, it is about their personality, and I think it would be very difficult for a school or government to regulate or provide a curriculum that says this is the way that you should deal with non-English-speaking people at your school. [Binto Valley PS]

> I think that you deal with it at home as individuals, everybody is an individual and I don't know that the cultures need to be brought into it. [Harringvale HS]

Of course, multicultural policy does regulate in this area, but these parents are indicating that rules based on assumptions about 'cultures' might not be the best way to proceed. This response points to a deeper conceptual issue if intercultural understanding ends up repeating the dilemmas we have seen in discussions around culture above. One Eaton Park HS parent was conscious of this:

> By setting up programs to focus on different cultures — or do you have a classroom dynamic led by the teacher that somehow integrates the cultural in the classroom, how they teach, how they assess and how they promote discussion with the classroom?... is that more important than running multicultural days or particular
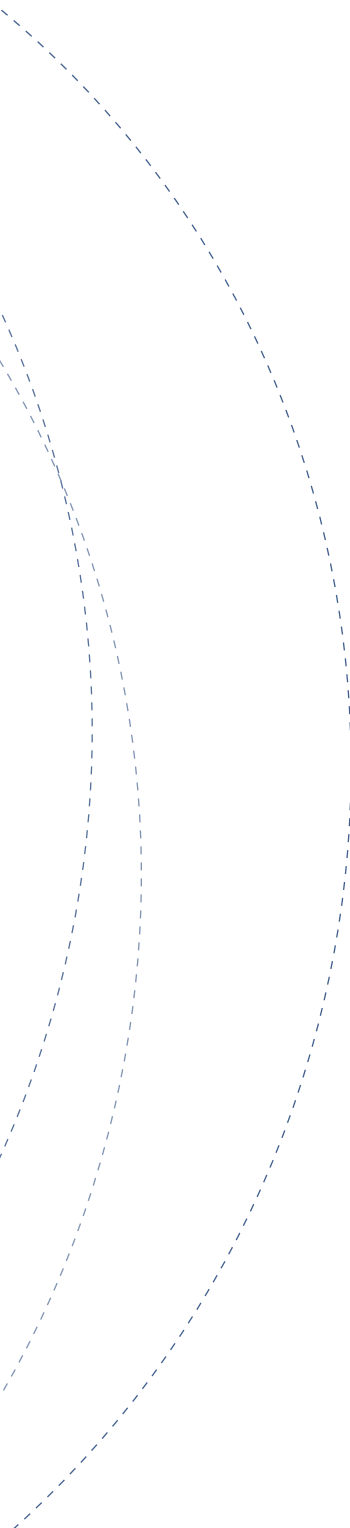
events that highlight differences? Well I think probably the process is probably more important than the big event, … seeing the teaching and learning process somehow integrates cultural attitudes towards learning or towards particular subjects. I don't know how you would do that to be honest.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined what teachers, students and parents understand by the notions of multiculturalism, culture and intercultural understanding. These are both difficult and complex, and not easily reduced to simple definitions. This chapter has also suggested that there is little agreement across school communities on what they mean. Nevertheless, they are useful tools for examining the complexities of life in 21st century Australia. But just how well-equipped are teachers, students and parents for engaging as a community in a shared discourse about the worlds they inhabit?

The sociologist Gerd Baumann (1996) makes a distinction between dominant and demotic approaches to culture in culturally diverse settings, claiming that the dominant (official) discourse tends to essentialise and reify 'cultures' as distinct communities, while demotic (everyday) discourse treats culture as a process. This distinction, however, doesn't play out here as teachers seem to share by and large the same contradictory ways of thinking about cultural diversity as students and their parents. In all three groups there was a tendency to think of cultures as discrete entities, as organised around difference, as the exotic baggage of 'others', and as 'issues'. This set of assumptions doesn't seem to provide a language for grappling with the complex identities articulated in Chapter One. Moreover, the overwhelming emphasis in most people's discussions of multiculturalism was on what we have called the dispositional focus, where greater stress is given to attributes of understanding, empathy and appreciation while the critical intellectual skills for making sense of cultural complexity — understandings that should be central to the focus of schools — are given little attention. There is a case to be made for elaborating what those skills could be and how schools might go about the task of equipping students to navigate the culturally complex society in which they live.

This chapter has not been about ascertaining whether people have the 'right' definitions of these ideas or whether people are confused, because these are difficult questions often unresolved by researchers. Rather, its focus has been on considering whether their understandings provide the basis on which we can examine how the goals of multicultural education are realised in schools. The report will now extend this by looking at the perceptions of cultural difference people hold and how these influence participants' views of schools and the everyday life of the school.
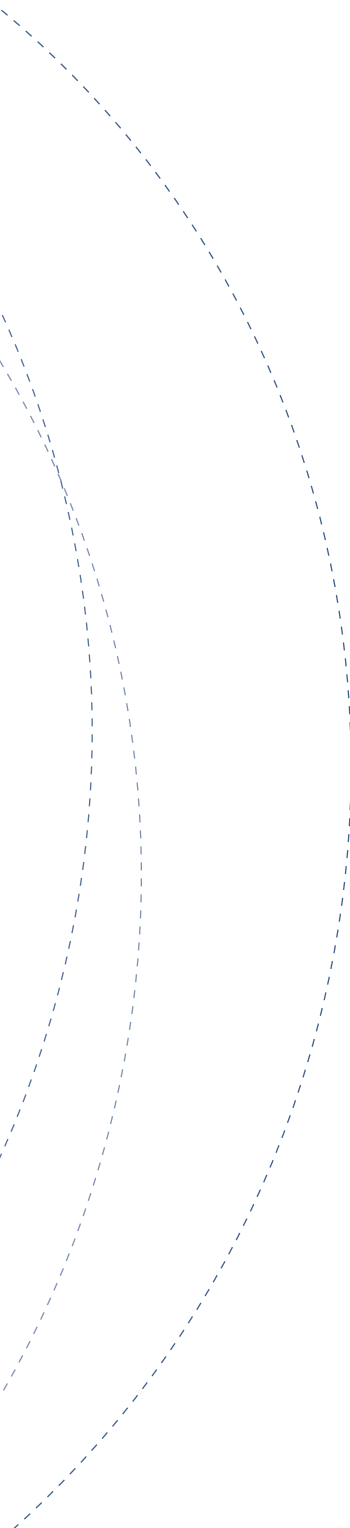
Perceptions of Difference

The previous chapter suggested that examining people's understandings of keywords in multicultural discourse is not just an interesting end in itself, but a means to consider the stock of knowledge in place in schools and the ways these understandings shape practice. This chapter takes this a step further by considering how teachers, students and parents viewed the relationships between questions of 'culture' and key educational and social dimensions in regards to their school and wider communities. Here, in a sense, is where multiculturalism is 'enacted' in school communities, both inside and outside the classroom. If a central aim of multiculturalism generally, and multicultural education in particular, was to direct people's attention to the need to address a range of issues in the pursuance of educational access and equity, to what extent has multicultural discourse provided a language to think about these issues and provide rationales for educational action in meeting them? Also, to what extent has that framework helped or hindered our understandings of the challenges facing students and parents? As indicated in Chapter Two, the focus on cultural difference is a central consequence of the multicultural paradigm but, as argued elsewhere, this has often produced schemas of perception amongst teachers which shape their 'professional vision', including their understandings of students, the challenges they face and their role as teachers (Noble and Watkins, 2014). The previous chapter showed little difference between the understandings that teachers as professional educators held and those of the students and their parents.

In the focus groups, students, parents and teachers were asked about the relation between culture and student learning and behaviour, parental involvement, and so on — issues where some differences might be expected between the groups. Given that these questions also entailed understandings about the nature of ethnically-defined communities, they were also asked questions about belonging and racism. Finally, in these discussions questions around Indigeneity, and the relationship between Indigenous education and multicultural education also surfaced.

Students' Learning

Teachers

'Culture' has become a central category in political, popular and professional discourses (Breidenbach and Nyiri, 2009). At one level this allows people to move away from a problematic language of race, but at another it only serves to obfuscate complicated issues around ethnicity, community and identity. This is not simply a problem of semantics, because part of the process of 'seeing culture everywhere' is that it operates as a form of explanation of a range of social and educational phenomena. Most importantly, teachers, parents and students were all asked whether they thought students from particular cultural backgrounds perform differently academically. Here is a typical comment from a teacher at Binto Valley PS:

Definitely, I think the Asian students have that work ethic, right from the start, no matter which Asian country they come from, they all seem to have it. It is rare if they don't. And that's not the case with a lot of the other races, although [student] came from Iran and maybe she is just naturally smart anyway, but she was also, was extremely focused and extremely driven too, you could almost see it in her face, I want to get this language, I want to succeed, ... — I'm not sure if that's an Irani thing or if it's just [the student]. But definitely.

A small minority of teachers also talked about these differences in now outdated racial terms. At Wellington Heights PS, one teacher ruminated on the lack of success of Arabic-speaking students: 'I think that's also because the culture is different again, where the cousins marry cousins, so therefore the children's intelligence levels will be different. That's just their genetics, a scientific fact, so um, that's where I find that's coming from'. But her colleague resisted such explanations: 'I don't think you can generalise about, look, I know what you mean because I agree with everything everyone has said, [but we]... have to be really careful not to generalise about various groups'.

Most teachers had no qualms, however, talking about academic performance in terms of ethnic or cultural categories. A Graham's Point HS teacher explained:

I teach maths and I am completely biased. Maths, there are certain cultures that absolutely thrive on having maths as their primary like goal … maths and science is very similar because they want to be doctors or engineers ... The first cultures would be, well it's across many cultures but particularly Indian, Sri Lankan, so sub continental, Middle Eastern can be but maybe not as much… But definitely not Anglo Australian'. Sometimes it could be said very baldy, as with this teacher from Smithton PS: '[student] is smart because he's Chinese, you know, the Chinese are smart'.

At Graham's Point HS, another teacher was aware they were dealing in 'stereotypes', but used them nonetheless:

I think that students have their own stereotypes as well. Let's say for instance you have an Islander — the Islanders are meant to be the sporty types and they are you know, not meant to thrive in things like English and all that sort of stuff, so they come here and you know, they are the cool kids and then they are meant to be the sports, so they don't really focus their attention on the studies, and yeah, I reckon that that plays a part of it as well. Yeah, so you've got some of the Year 7 kids today are listening to their gangster music ... more the Arab sort of culture here. ... oh they are gangsters, 'no we haven't got time for the English exam, we've got to be cool at lunch' and all that sort of stuff.

However couched, there was a constancy of linking particular cultural groups with strong academic performance, as one Wellington Heights PS teacher remarked:

> Indian population I've noticed is ... a massive academic push in those areas and therefore when I go into their classroom they are the achieving students. The Anglo students ..., they are more the strugglers, like the lower end. ... And then the Chinese students as well, that are here, the same sort of thing. The Lebanese are interesting, yeah, they were sort of in between'.

Other teachers were a little more circumspect, but agreed about the performance of Asian students in maths. One teacher from Eaton Park HS cautioned against explaining success by culture: 'I think sometimes it can, but it depends on the situation, it depends on the length of time that they've been in the country, how well their English skills are going and those particular things, so it just varies'. Nevertheless, at this school another teacher talked about the idea of the 'Asian fail', 'if an Aussie beat an Asian at maths', or if they got 'below 90'. At Harringvale, '80 per cent is fail' for the Asian students. The public conception of the successful Asian student echoed throughout the discussions (Watkins and Noble, 2013).

At Getty Rd PS, one teacher demonstrated how they navigate their sense that there are patterns based on culture but are anxious not to be seen to make 'racist' comments:

> I think it often comes back to, … the way parents value education and it reflects on how the child values education. It sounds awfully racist but not necessarily, the Asians and the Indians value education, the Middle Easterns couldn't care less. The Aussies they care more about sport ... ... in a joking way but I think there are certain demographics where you know that those parents, education is number one and then it filters through to the child, whereas there are some cultures where their mum and dad really — especially with their daughters sometimes, they really don't care how they are performing at school. As long as they are well behaved and they are turning up and doing what they need to be doing, they don't really care. But that could be a generalisation.

In several groups teachers talked more about 'the incredible work ethic' as the factor in the success of many students of Asian background. One teacher from Harringvale HS commented, 'Not all of them do, most of them do, yeah, I think work ethic is an element, but then of course, in this school we can't dismiss the contribution of our cultural background and parental pressure'. Some teachers saw this drive as intrinsic to the cultural backgrounds of some students and their families:

> With the Asians … that is inbuilt into their culture. …That is their culture and I mean people accept that, you know, within the Asian culture that... everyone knows it that Asian students that they do well but they are expected to do well. [Beechton PS]

> When it comes to our Indian students the push from home is fairly strong for their students to succeed. So you know, they want the homework, they are wanting the kids to bring home books to read... there is a strong support from home you know and if kids aren't bringing work home to do and succeeding well, you know, usually they are pretty well on to it. [Wollami Lakes PS]

In other schools, such as Pentonville HS, the problem was the lack of a 'work ethic' amongst 'Aboriginal students'; there had been some improvement in their NAPLAN results but for the most part numeracy and literacy levels were still well below the average. Most teachers didn't see a strong work ethic as a problem, of course, but in other circumstances it was. The language of 'pushing' could often become negative, as parents of particular backgrounds were seen at Wellington Heights PS to bring 'too much pressure' on their children. These discussions often turned to debates about coaching colleges, homework, tests for selective schools and gifted and talented streams, etc. Some teachers were not that dismissive of the coaching phenomenon. In fact, one teacher at Smithton PS admitted to working as a tutor in a coaching college on Saturdays:

> Just about every child that is there are from an Asian background because it's the norm in China to go to school on Saturday. That is what they do and they put that emphasis and value on — don't play on the weekend, learning — any additional chance to learn — this is the way their mentality that I see at the coaching school… their emphasis on Saturday schooling is a lot higher than the emphasis of Anglo Saxon families that would suggest that going and playing soccer on the weekend is what they need, and having that balance of school is five days a week, weekends is for sport and socialising with other people, whereas the mentality of other backgrounds may be different.

One teacher at Harringvale HS recounted how, when the maths head teacher gets up at the Year 7 orientation and 'makes his little speech … "don't send your kids to the tutor"… they are not buying it, because they know it works'. In fact, this school encouraged ex-students to come into the school to help tutor. Yet this same teacher admitted that 'there is an element of mistrust there' if the parents don't think the school can provide what their children need.

Some teachers resisted 'cultural' explanations: at Smithton PS a teacher took the view that it was 'the individual': 'I don't think it comes down to a whole cross cultural thing, I think it comes down to an individual'. At Barnett HS, the teachers debated the causes of success:

Teacher 1:   I think there are obvious differences around kids from different socio economic backgrounds, certainly. And also backgrounds where the students come from backgrounds where the parents have split up and the parents themselves don't have a great deal of education and so sometimes that isn't encouraged at home, you know, to study isn't encouraged. So, I think that has an impact on the ability, the student's ability to succeed academically.

Teacher 2:   Oh well the recent NAPLAN results indicate that fairly clearly that there is a very big difference between the Indigenous students' achievement and the non-Indigenous ones.

Teacher 3:   But they don't identify socio-economics in that.

Teacher 2:   No, but I am talking about the ethnicity, as far as that goes.

Teacher 1:   But there are other variations from ethnicity.

Teacher 3:   Yeah, it's not just — because most of those Indigenous kids would come from pretty low socio-economic ....[it's] The money.

Similarly, at Wollami Lakes PS: 'I don't like the word "class", but I would add that its more class than culture of what happens at home relates to their success here… the respect of schooling and it's the push of schooling, you can see it across the board in all of our different cultures'.

Nevertheless, most teachers adopted some form of cultural explanation of success. Some, indeed, expressed views consistent with the notion of culturally-specific learning styles, an idea that became popular in Australia in the 1990s and has remained part of educational discourse despite controversy and criticism (Noble and Poynting, 1998). The state-wide survey indicated that 70 per cent of teachers viewed 'accommodating diverse cultural learning styles' as an effective strategy for fostering cultural inclusion—putting it right in the middle of the 10 options teachers were given; on the other hand, it was one of the two least nominated items given as a reason for differences in academic achievement (Watkins et al., 2013, pp.33-35). While many teachers in the focus groups agreed that 'learning style' was a factor, few elaborated their views. A Binto Valley PS teacher raised the issue explicitly:

One area we haven't covered, is learning styles, which ... is working in the schools with higher levels of multiculturalism, was a big focus that you had to understand … the learning styles of the Islander kids, and the learning style of Asian kids, they are entirely different and you have to have an understanding of that. It gives you a preparedness

I guess when you get it that a child comes from a different culture, that at least you have some insight into the way that they should be learning.

Other participants who agreed there were different learning styles operating in schools framed them, however, in terms of individual styles or the result of family values. These findings suggest that, while there may be a commonality of language, teachers, as professional educators, are far from sharing a consensus view around the relationship between culture and educational outcomes.

Parents

Parents also voiced perceptions of students' academic performance being linked to cultural background. At Addington HS, one parent argued that,

I think Asians perform at a top level all the time but I think that comes back to their background at home, they are encouraged, that's the number one thing when they are at school is their academic achievements. I'm not too sure about any other backgrounds but I mean obviously all backgrounds would have different learning levels and different achievement but the Asian background would be the one that stands out to me that they're definitely encouraged to achieve at high levels.

At the same school, another parent said that she thought that 'children may be from a Pacific Islander background are very into their music and they excel at that and sport'. One Hingston Valley HS parent felt that,

there is more pressure from particular backgrounds just because of their cultural background, like, you know, it is so much more competitive, I think in countries like China,… India … even countries like Fiji … there is so much competition and we don't realise how privileged we are in Australia to have such a great education system ... we can see this rise in coaching colleges because of the intensity from countries like Korea and you know, so we've kind of been rocked out of our complacency ... I just say to my boys, look there are kids out there, they are working hard and you know they will achieve and if you don't fire up then that's the deal.

At Barnett HS they were again more concerned about Aboriginal students: 'there is a problem with Indigenous kids particularly with their performance at school. They seem to need a lot of help and they go astray a little bit. I'm just hearing from my primary boy, still in primary, a lot of family problems are associated with that and that goes generally too…. Just different expectations, historical, …'. Other parents agreed and one added that a key problem was that those Aboriginal students who do achieve are 'pointed out' and they prefer,

> To shy away from that … that's a western thing idea to make someone stand up and be an individual …in a western culture children have been encouraged all their lives, pat, pat, pat on the head, you've done well, oh yay, yay, yay. It doesn't work like that with Aboriginal kids, they are trying to fit into this group and we are trying to single them out.

However, she also qualified that by admitting that Aboriginal people in her community and traditional central Australia 'could be vastly different'.

Like a few teachers, some parents also resisted cultural explanations, preferring to see it again as 'individual', as one parent from Beechton PS explained, 'I think everybody has their own learning capacity and I think — not capacity, probably their own learning style, and it would be a style, I think it's more of a learnt thing as they've grown up, spending five years under your mum's apron so you hit school and you have that way of learning'. Others emphasised class-related factors:

> the [Indigenous] students that live in the housing commission area you know, they fall behind … because they are dealing with parents that aren't there or ... drugs and they are dealing with that, so they're learning — their behaviour is a lot different to an Australian child, so yeah, you can't sort of say Aboriginal students are going to learn faster or slower because normal Australian students that live in housing commission do have problems too.

Students

Many students broadly echoed parents' and teachers' views endorsing some link between cultural background and academic performance. But others did not. Some, like this student from Addington HS, believed 'it just depends on the individual'. Interestingly, however, those that did see a connection did so with much less emphasis or explained it through other factors, like upbringing or recency of arrival. At Binto Valley PS, one student felt that 'some kids … concentrate on being like with friends just for a start so they concentrate on other stuff like work and then that makes them, yeah, and so... once they learn English they understand it as well, and then they become better and like yeah'. At Barnett HS, one student felt that,

> It depends on their like their bringing up. I've got a sister in uni and she's on campus with a lot of international students and she has a lot of Chinese and Korean kids and just from their upbringing, they are like brought up to do their best, to try their best so they spend a lot more time in studying and stuff like that.

But this was specifically referring to international students, not local LBOTE students. Even the poor educational outcomes of some Indigenous students were explained differently here: 'many Indigenous people ... ... as white people think they don't get along well with a lot of people in class they might feel lonely, left out'. In other words, the

students seemed to rely less on cultural categories per se as explanatory tools. One Eaton Park HS student also developed a slightly different emphasis in his explanation which foregrounded experiences at school rather than just family:

> Indians and Asians … are … high academics. I reckon their mothers and fathers they pressure them and then give them choices, so like we see that because they are always getting the top marks, but um, it looks like they form groups around their study and their academic achievements. So you have to get really good marks to be in this group, if you know what I mean? So like they always associate around the same people, so if you are dumb, like they won't associate with each other. But ah, yeah, I think those two are the main ones I see.

In response, in the same group, another student cautioned about the role of stereotypes: 'I think it is only because we notice them as Asians and there is that whole stereotype of them being studious, I think there is a large portion of them that don't study at all and don't achieve good marks. I think it is just associated with the stereotype'. One boy of Asian background in the Eaton Park HS group described his experience of such 'pressure': ' I can say, because I am Asian, I don't get pressured as much but it's more of me wanting to do well sort of thing. I think it is just a general stereotype and maybe a trend that yeah, the Asians and the Indians seem to do better and that's just caused that general stereotype'.

Similar caution was voiced at Getty Rd PS about stereotypes of Asian students: 'I don't think they particularly learn differently, they might use what they learn differently but here we are all taught the same and we all tend to learn the same things and in the same way'. Like the boy from Eaton Park, this student at Graham's Point HS saw an advantage:

> Especially when you are Asian you are terribly stereotyped. I don't know something about race or being smart and stuff but that's just pretty much our culture. Like we are pushed to the limit to do our best and stuff and so we are terribly stereotyped by it, like not everyone, but a lot of people, …. It doesn't have a negative effect on me … I actually don't mind it because they think I'm smart so I don't really mind. … but like say if you don't get like the best result in a test or something they will be like, 'oh you are supposed to be Asian, you are supposed to have great marks and stuff'.

At Harringvale HS, one student was unsure if there was any truth to the myth: 'We are kind of all Asian so it's really hard to tell'. An Anglo peer disagreed:

> I don't think so, I think the difference is in … in learning culture, … it's not advantageous to be Asian ... personally, I don't go to tutoring and I'm you know Australian and Anglo and I'm doing reasonably well, so it is not — I think it's how hard you work, and all of that, like there are

that many other factors and I think that your culture wouldn't come into it in as much as your values, in fact, anything that you do, but I don't think that that's a defining factor.
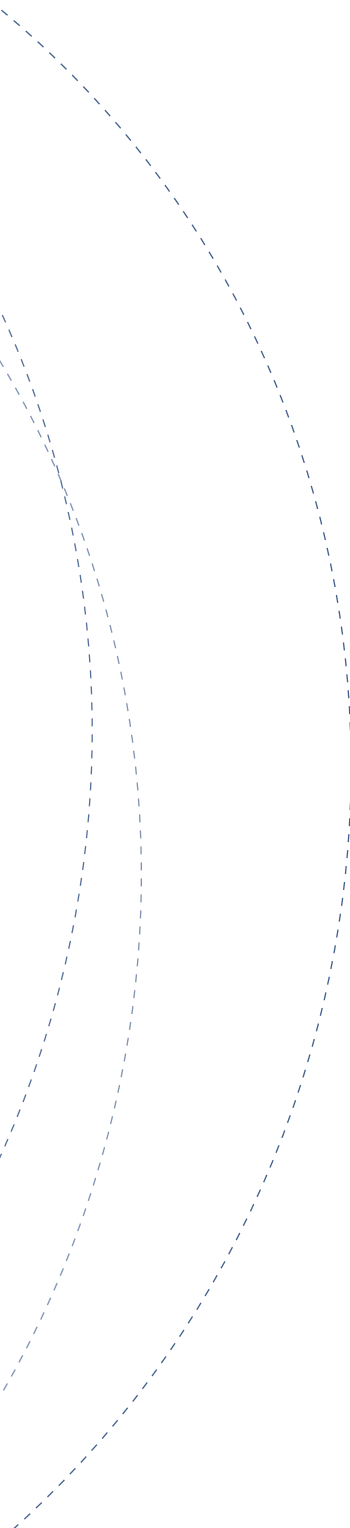
For another student in the Harringvale group it was a decided advantage: 'It makes me want to like stay up there like if, … for example, like Vietnamese people have to be good at maths, oh crap I've got to be good at maths…. It's a pressure but like I'm cool with it'.

What is an Asian? Culture and Explanation

The report has suggested not only that across the three groups that there is a tendency to deploy culture to explain differences in educational outcomes, but that these often rely on ethnic stereotypes. This needs to be examined in more detail, because these cultural categories often harden into assumed 'truths' that rarely get challenged and, as will be seen below, extend into wider debates about culturally-attributed behaviours and hot educational topics such as the proliferation of coaching colleges.

At Addington HS, while asserting that Asians performed better at their school, the teachers were not entirely sure how many Asian students they actually had, though one teacher added, 'there is all like all different Asians, not necessarily Chinese, but you've got all the — Indonesian, that sort of Asiany sort of feel'. It is clear that amongst teachers, students and parents, the idea of the successful Asian student has taken hold. There is of course good reason for this to be convincing: plenty of research shows that students from Asian backgrounds, by and large, perform better educationally, whether it is Asian students in Australia or overseas (Watkins and Noble, 2013). But the problem is that it is not a very meaningful category and, despite occurring in educational debate, not a very powerful one analytically. Asia is, of course, a very large area — often described as the world's largest and most populous continent — and is actually a geo-political entity which is often seen to extend to incorporate much of the Middle East and many of the nations once part of the former Soviet Union. It thus includes many nations which are very different to each other; it also includes nations that are internally very diverse, such as China. The idea of the Asian learner, moreover, is often conflated with the Chinese learner, and moving from national categories of culture to regional ones seems unproblematic for most. Such categories are especially problematic for teachers in that they don't acknowledge other factors that might limit educational achievement — English language proficiency, SES, refugee status, length of time in Australia, and so on.

So, something odd is going on with the way people use these categories: they are often viewed as singular and fixed and yet are anything but homogenous entities. Their use often erases complexities of experience and social causation. Moreover, 'culture' becomes increasingly essentialised and primordial, even sometimes being construed in racial

terms. One parent at Binto Valley PS jokingly commented that maybe Asians 'are all racially superior'. As we have seen, the language of race found its way into several participants' views of others. So 'culture' is understood through a variety of lenses: nation, race, ethnicity, heritage, faith, language and background are all found in the ways people think about the categories of cultural difference. The point here is not merely semantic, because people use these categories and these various lenses to explain particular kinds of outcomes. While learning was the focus of the discussions above, teachers, parents and students were also asked about the relationship between culture and other aspects, such as student behaviour and parental involvement in schooling. These aspects were subject to much less discussion, and a few declined to make a link, but some comments are worth documenting here.

'Asian' students, overwhelmingly, were not seen to have behavioural issues. One parent at Harringvale HS said that,

> If children have been in tutoring, … if they have led a very sheltered lifestyle their life experience is so limited that they are not particularly adventurous in their behaviour, … like they are not likely to be running around the playground going aahhhh! They are usually more quiet, but … I don't think that should be a generalisation to race.

On the other hand, several teachers referred to students of Muslim, Arabic-speaking or Lebanese backgrounds as being 'problems'. One young female teacher at Wellington Heights PS recounted, 'I had a Muslim boy last year who disrespected me because he was taught at home to disrespect women. So you've got that other culture, you've got that other behavioural problems where at home they are taught to respect a certain gender so then at school they are doing the same'. There is a problem of course with her view that Muslim men necessarily disrespect women that fits into a long tradition of Orientalism (Poynting et al., 2004), but the point here is more on how these categories operate in discussing student behaviours.

At Eaton Park HS, the teachers identified a problem with a particular group of 'Korean' boys who were 'constantly truanting', and yet this didn't emerge in the student group. Rather, one Malaysian-Australian boy said that, 'There is definitely a group in my class that sort of do that [misbehave] and they are very Australian, and they are the same ones that do the racist jokes against the Asians and they are commonly the ones that are playing games in class, they are not doing their work, that sort of stuff'.

At Thurston PS, one teacher believed that 'our biggest behaviour problems are Anglo Australians by far… a lot of them have problems at home, home life, not very stable, that's from the families that I know'. Her colleague elaborated:

They don't have family unity as much as the other nationalities seem to have a commitment to family, stronger than and to really generalising, but if you are asking why you think it is, you think about those children instantly you think about what mum and dad are doing and who they're you know, and the fights that are going on and da, da, da … They are the ones that have the lack of respect and discipline.

In both cases there are particular uses of 'Australian'. For the Eaton Park HS boy, it referred to Australian boys of English-speaking background in a middle-to-high socio-economic area; in the second, these 'Anglo Australians' were of low SES origins in an area that had a long history of Housing Commission estates. Like the other categories discussed above, internal complexities of class make nation-based attributions of culture somewhat problematic.

Turning to parental participation in schools, especially given the comments about parental pressure on students in the opening sections, a slightly different set of emphases were given. A common view was that there were noticeable differences in parental involvement in schools, with 'Australian' parents (though they don't identify who this includes) more likely to be the ones staffing the P&C committees, canteens and working bees. A general view, as this comment from an Addington HS parent indicates, is that,

> Some cultures are more willing to get involved. There are probably a lot of cultures that probably stick more to their own families and you don't tend to see a lot of different cultures. I think there are in all schools, yeah, some cultures that are more willing to participate and want to help out and learn about how they can help their children.

The first point to note is that it is 'cultures' getting involved here, not parents. In other words, 'cultures' become things which have agency. Secondly, the view that cultural background shaped parental involvement was common. While some, such as this teacher from Binto Valley PS, thought they had 'strong participation' across the board, others felt there was a noticeable unevenness. At Barnett HS, one parent remarked that 'it would be very rare there would be one or two Indigenous parents getting involved'. In terms of those with migrant backgrounds, at Beechton PS it was often explained in terms of poor English and 'lack of knowledge' or because parents did not feel 'comfortable' approaching the school. Ironically, though Asian students were seen to be high achievers because their parents had much invested in education as a strategy of social success, the parents were seen to steer clear of the school. At Eaton Park HS, one Singaporean Chinese mother observed that,

> For Asian parents we tend to be a bit laid back in terms of ... ... so I'm not sure if it's because of the communication process, but most of them, when you ask them to contribute, to come and help, we are

very willing to, but … some are not very fluent in English …, so they tend to shy away from meetings because sometimes we feel that, I've got nothing to contribute, yeah.

In contrast, at Hingston Valley HS it was felt that 'with a lot of the Sudanese there is fear with any type of authority'. At Smithton PS, one parent felt that 'the Greeks do tend to keep very much Greeks together'.

The point is not whether these views of culturally explained patterns of behaviour have some basis in reality — whether as local truths or wider social phenomenon — the point is more the ways these categories are drawn on to explain aspects of student behaviour and community relations. Not only are they drawn on, but they harden and become taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world, affecting teaching practices and educational programs. A discussion of the presence of these hardened perceptions of cultural difference that operate across these communities necessarily raises the issue of racism.

Racism

The perceptions of cultural difference that structure teachers' professional practice may shape classroom teaching and teacher expectations in sometimes problematic ways, framing not just how students and their families and communities are grouped, but also how educational and behavioural 'problems' are constructed and addressed (Noble and Watkins, 2014). This report suggests, however, that teachers' perceptions are not always dramatically different to students and parents, so this shaping comes at least as much from popular understandings as it does from a particular professional discourse. This foregrounding of identity categories reflects the ways that 'culture' has become a central social feature across state policies, commercial activity, popular culture and professional practice (Breidenbach and Nyiri, 2009), but it also requires us to think about how cultural categories can stand for racial ones that invoke a history and practice of racism.

It is generally the case that most teachers, students and parents felt, by and large, that while there were ongoing issues of racism both within Australian society and their specific communities, their school did a fair job of preventing and dealing with such incidents — which corresponds somewhat with the view in the state-wide survey of teachers that racism was more of a problem outside schools than within them (Watkins, et al., 2013, pp.44-45). Nevertheless there was a wide range of views and explanations. One Wellington Heights PS student declared simply, 'They get on pretty well because there is no racism in our school', while a teacher there declared: 'I've never seen racism at the school'. A Barnett HS student commented, 'I think there are definitely racist people, but I wouldn't call Australia as a whole racist'. A Smithton PS parent made this distinction: 'I think the kids know there is their school world and then there is their world when they see it on TV at home. There is more racism on TV than you see in anything'.

At Wollami Lakes PS, however, students listed clear examples of racist name-calling: 'people call Aboriginals, "niggers" and they call Indians, "Punjabs" … some people tease the Indians about their turbans'; 'sometimes they call them "curry munchers" and stuff'. One parent at Hingston Valley HS saw very particular targets:

> I think of the African kids because they are so different in their colour of skin that they stand out a lot, … so many of those kids have been through so much trauma that we just can't comprehend and I get really upset when I see blatant racism against them because like — you see these big teenage boys who just have these soft hearts and they have been through so much trauma and all some people see are these big muscular boys you know, and feel intimidated.
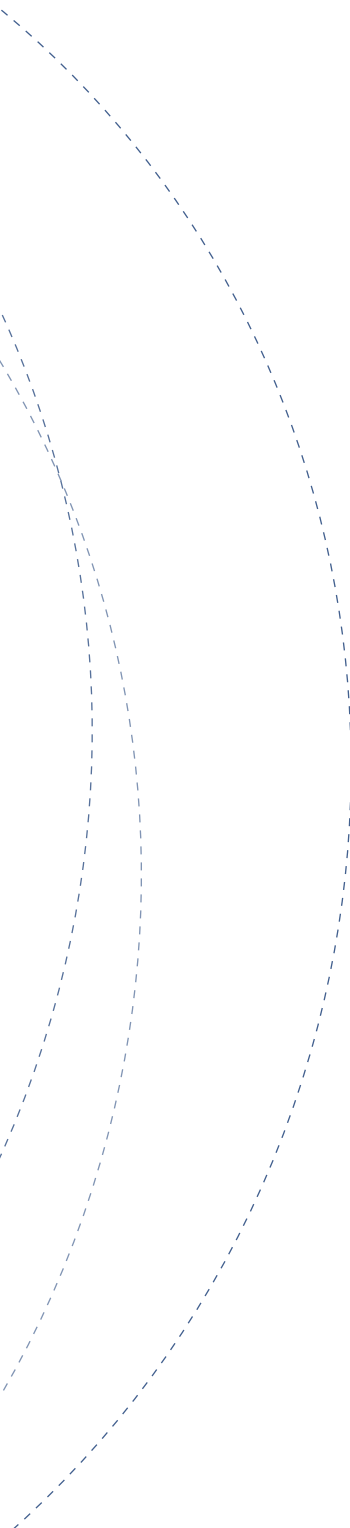
A Wellington Heights PS student emphasised another target, and the source of this targeting:

> A lot of people pick on Muslim people in our country. Because they are always, all the people who have like committed crimes and wars especially Muslims and I think Australians themselves think that people in this country who are Muslim also will act like that but I think if we explore their culture a bit more … will understand that not all people are alike, like aggressive or anything. So in that way I'm not saying that Australians are racist but it is just people's opinions, after seeing what's on TV and they believed it. So Australia, they say that Australia is a racist country but I don't think so, it is more of a multicultural country than a racist country.

One Pentonville HS parent asserted that 'there are no racism issues, and I think it's only because, or one main reason is we've only got a very small percentage of non-Anglo Saxon children here, therefore the problem just doesn't arise'. On the other hand, a teacher at the same school said that,

> There are barriers between the kids and teachers who have an accent for instance, not necessarily if they look physically different, it's the kids that don't have — like as I just said, there is no question, but we have a member of staff with a strong accent and there is appalling racism going straight at — on a regular basis towards that teacher, because the kids can't understand her.

There were views that some places were more prone to racism than others. One Hingston Valley HS parent argued that 'these areas that we live in I don't think there is that much racism. I think there is more racism in areas that aren't a melting pot and that's where the issues occur, and that's why they occur'. Similarly, a Harringvale HS student claimed: 'there are parts of Australia like in Sydney I don't think that racism is as common as it could be in other parts… because it's a matter of what you are exposed to and what you see'. A Barnett HS teacher also believed that there had been generational change: 'there is a lot more sources of communication with people and kids. There is not so much fear maybe now'.

But it is in the nature of the racism that interesting issues arose. A Smithton PS student described many incidents as 'accidental racism', rather than intention to hurt. Some students at Hingston Valley HS dismissed occasional racist remarks as 'just joking', an occasional refrain across the schools and groups. One elaborated that, 'I don't think there is a real problem in terms of getting on, except, until people actually have a disagreement and they bring it [race] into it, but it is never really the start of anything… Like racism sometimes'.

In contrast to the student who opposed racism with multiculturalism, one Harringvale HS student felt that multiculturalism encouraged racism:

> Multiculturalism leads to people congregating to what they are familiar with, so, for example, if you are Lebanese like from another country coming down to Australia you will be more inclined to live in areas such as Bankstown which the majority is Lebanese, but the thing is, I live in Bankstown,… and I've experienced the racism in there... It's because they are so proud, like any person can be proud, but when you group them together and … they are all the same race it's so easy to become proud of your culture and to criticise others and it's just because they need, not they, like anyone, everyone needs education to expose — open their mind.

Most interviewees disagreed with this, feeling that multiculturalism (either generally or in the specific programs that schools employed, like appointing ARCOs) had had a positive effect.

It was also interesting to see how LBOTE participants viewed this. A Graham's Point HS parent of Indian background thought that, compared to her experiences of India, Australians 'can be very proud to be an Australian because we do not have the kind of racism she had grown up with'. One Smithton PS student of Greek ancestry argued that,

> Nobody pays attention to racism and stuff because it's getting old… now we've gotten over it and I remember when I was 7, I wasn't sure what wog meant … We made up a club called the wogga club, … and when I told my dad, my dad started laughing and I said why are you laughing at me? But like people don't care about it, ... You make fun of what you are being made fun of.

One Graham's Point HS parent believed that some forms of rudeness are not racism: 'I don't think it is racism. It is lack of education or lack of awareness'. Others, however, were more critical of 'racism disguised as patriotism': 'annoying Southern Cross stickers on cars and the "love it or leave it" [stickers]'.

Not all participants characterised racism as a moral flaw, wanting instead to explain it or see it in context. One Smithton PS parent described racism as a kind of 'defensiveness', while a Smithton student described 'racism as a weapon'. Others echoed the idea of racism coming into situations not being the cause itself, such as at Addington HS:

Teacher 1:   We probably have half a dozen incidents a year, and most of those would be a spur of the moment sort of argument in the playground and more often than not the insult is basically just the colour of the skin, it doesn't go deeper, like there is no real religious or anything like that.

Teacher 2:   It is almost superficial, it's the same as almost calling someone fat, you know.

Teacher 1:   Yeah, that's right, that's the main thing. And then it's what comes after that is often more offensive like the 'c' words and things like that. But yeah, we don't have all that many and there is certainly not you know, the race gangs or race wars which some schools do have when they have their cliques.

A member of the Addington HS parent group made a similar comment: 'They... use racism as fist fight, it just happens to be maybe two kids from a different race fighting and other people around turn it into a race fight — just because they may call them names, they are in the heat of the moment'.

Students at Barnett HS recounted an experience when a student started saying offensive things about land rights, Aboriginal welfare and drugs in class because the topic they were studying involved Indigenous issues: 'I guess and it was only me and [another] were the only Indigenous people in the classroom, so we were just like yelling and screaming at them and I know that's probably not the best way but the teacher wasn't doing anything at all'. The inaction of the teacher is a concern but the other issue here is that curriculum designed to produce better understanding of Indigenous issues actually became a springboard for the airing of racist views because of the way it was implemented in the classroom. A similar situation was described by a Barnett HS teacher at a previous school:

Tensions were likely to arise was when in the classroom when Indigenous issues came up, as a matter of discussion, as part of the curriculum. … so normally they would be chatting about stuff and then these issues would arise, but when they started to talk about land rights or colonisation, that would be moments when some of the Anglo kids would get a bit strident in their views and most of the Indigenous kids would not want to confront them and actually go quiet.

Such examples raised the long-standing issue in Australian multicultural education of its relationship to Indigenous education.

Aboriginal Education and Multicultural Education

While Indigenous communities and languages have often been used to exemplify the cultural diversity of Australia, multiculturalism is often seen to be exclusively about migrant communities. As the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (1986) explained three decades ago, whilst endorsing a greater alignment of the two areas,

> The response from the Aboriginal communities has been mixed, with a strong feeling from some quarters that, at least at the philosophical level, multiculturalism denies their unique position as the original inhabitants of Australia. Indeed, it is felt that adoption of multiculturalism by Aborigines has the potential to trivialise their disenfranchisement from the land, and might limit their claims for social justice.

While in no way suggesting that the position of Aboriginal people and migrants in Australia are the same, it is significant that this question came up several times — especially in rural schools or outer-western Sydney schools with significant minorities of Indigenous students. At Pentonville HS, for example, this exchange took place between parents when the interviewer picked up on an earlier comment and asked what the parents thought about the separation of these areas:

> Parent 1: Yeah, just from like talking to different adults in regards to that, I find because the Aboriginal is separate from the multicultural sort of, that sometimes that can bring a bit of — what's the word? — resentment, sort of thing, that so much is focused on the Aboriginal culture. Just from people that might not necessarily know the true past, … I think having that separateness sort of sometimes may cause a bit more problems …

> Parent 2: I don't think it should be separate because ... teachers, the kids, they are separate people but you should be treating — telling the kids that we are all equals, and because we look different, believe something different doesn't mean they should be separate. Doesn't matter what your background is, we are all the same. To have it separate just means — why is it separate? Why are they different? That just creates something different — everyone should be in together.
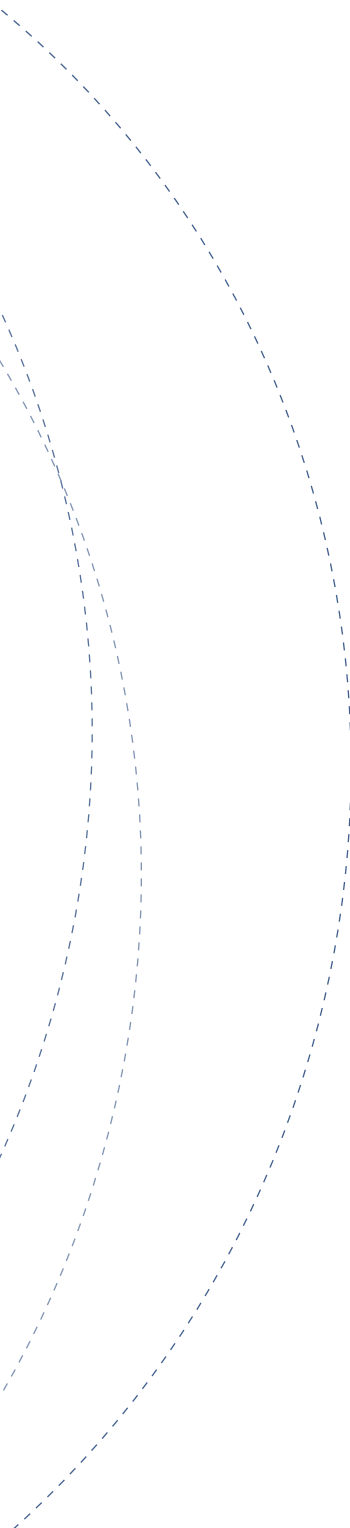
When asked whether he thought there were similarities between educational strategies for Indigenous students and those associated with multicultural education, one teacher at Pentonville HS answered cautiously that 'some places yes, and other places no'. A parent at Smithton PS felt it was strange that his son 'knows more about Greek culture and mythology and stuff like that than he does about Indigenous culture'. As a Getty Rd PS teacher pointed out in discussing curriculum for intercultural understanding, 'I keep looking at the Indigenous culture

as well, that we need to have that focus, although it is separate it is still intercultural ... we should be going along that path. Looking at the choices and lifestyle customs, religions, that type of thing'. Indeed, another parent here believed 'there is a multicultural class that they have here, the Year 9 class and that's a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and yeah, no problem'. A Barnett HS teacher saw no problem in maintaining overall coherence of approach and respecting individual specificities, 'I think if you are looking at different cultural backgrounds then you would include everybody in that ... you don't differentiate between any of them, I think they all have their own special needs and you need to look at them as individual cases'. As a parent at Pentonville HS concluded, 'Basically it is about inclusion, it's like the kids with special needs in the support unit because obviously my son is in the support unit, and all I want is him accepted as a part of the school, so everybody should be regardless of what their race is, everybody should be given the opportunity to learn and be accepted and the school does also need to make sure that other cultures are aware of each other'.

Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that many teachers, students and parents draw on cultural explanations of student learning, parent involvement in school communities and other phenomenon, which often harden into received truths. Yet there is a contradiction here: while each group had a similar array of understandings, indicating that there is not a specifically 'professional' expertise of teachers evident here, these uses are not necessarily consistent with each other, and shift from emphases on race to a less rigid set of assumptions around culture. So people 'see culture everywhere' but don't necessarily agree on how this explains behaviour. There is strong evidence for the prevalence of 'cultural expediency' (Yudice, 2003) here — that is, the drawing upon culture to categorise and manage populations — but often deploying quite diverse perceptions of cultural difference. These perceptions can border on racist stereotypes but, more importantly, they generally foster reduced ways of characterising people.

At one level this is not surprising, given that 'culture' is, as seen in Chapter One, not a singular collective identity but a heterogeneous mix of factors that constitute how people come to see themselves and others as 'groups'. Brubaker (2004) argues much the same thing about our notion of 'ethnicity', and the ways and times in which this gets mobilised to fashion coherent communities. What this suggests, then, is the need for a reinvigorated socio-cultural curriculum in which these factors are examined critically as well as ethically, where 'culture' is the basis of an educational project of intellectual comprehension, not just cause for empathetic 'understanding'. Such a curriculum would help produce a shared language for teachers, students and parents to interrogate the social, economic and political processes whereby 'culture' becomes significant, especially in the age of globalisation, and where questions of identity are framed less as the automatic consequence of a 'cultural background'.

CONCLUSION

Reinvigorating the Language of Multicultural Education

This report set itself the task of documenting the views around multiculturalism and multicultural education of students, parents and teachers in selected NSW public schools. It also examined the understandings of key terms in multicultural discourse and whether these understandings were adequate for members of school communities to grapple with the forms of cultural complexity increasingly typical in Australian society. It found, however, that there was often something of a mismatch between the complex forms of identification within school communities and the ways people think about culture. It also questioned whether teachers' experience and expertise in multicultural education equipped them well enough with knowledge of their school communities to work effectively with these forms of diversity. The ways people define themselves, the report suggests, challenges conventional wisdom about the nature of cultural diversity that derives from traditional models of multiculturalism and connects better with a view of the world as becoming increasingly 'hyperdiverse', where differences proliferate, adapt, mix and evolve into new identities and relations.

The report also argued what may seem like two contradictory positions. Firstly, that there was surprisingly little difference between the views expressed in teacher, parent and student groups regarding multiculturalism, culture and intercultural understanding. This was surprising because it would be assumed that teachers, as professional educators, might have a more developed professional language to talk about cultural difference, social relations and educational goals. Secondly, however, there was substantial variation within groups, which suggested that there wasn't a shared discourse or conceptual framework for discussing multiculturalism despite almost four decades of multicultural policies in Australia. This lack of a common language poses real challenges for developing a basis for a shared dialogue in school communities around these issues. While there was discussion and debate going on in schools, reflecting the investment and passion of teachers, students and parents, it lacked a critical dimension that both addressed key ideas with nuance and linked them to social contexts and processes. The tensions that the report documents, however, say more about the lack of a shared language across society as a whole than the limitations of multicultural education programs — these programs have, in fact, been crucial in shifting public discourse away from colonial notions of race and in foregrounding a strong and successful anti-racism focus in schools, as the data from this project attests. The key issue here is whether this existing discourse is still adequate, or whether we need to build on these successes by moving in a new direction.

It could also be argued that teacher education institutions have a more formative role in shaping that language as part of the professional training of teachers, and it is here where a very great need and opportunity lies. In this regard we could ask, echoing La Belle and Ward's 1994 study, how can education systems best prepare students

and teachers for participation in a culturally diverse society while also acknowledging distinct cultural identities, and how can we acknowledge those identities without relying on outmoded ways of thinking?

Despite the absence of a shared discourse, competing understandings of culture shaped participants' perceptions of cultural difference, and how these operated in explaining academic performance, student behaviour and parental participation, but in sometimes problematic ways. These explanations tended towards essentialised categorisations of ethnically-defined communities which, in some cases, could endorse racial stereotypes. These conclusions indicate that there is a pressing need for developing a shared language across communities which can facilitate the role of schools in addressing the challenges of a culturally diverse Australia. Central to this would be the development of a strong socio-cultural curriculum in both pre-service and in-service professional development of teachers.

The encouraging finding that there was valuable discussion going on in schools corresponds to another key finding that emerges from the data: teachers, students and parents overwhelmingly saw their school as having an important role in addressing issues around diversity in Australian society, and this speaks to the value they place on schooling.

Teachers, parents and students were asked, at several points in the discussions, what role the school has in relation to multiculturalism generally, but also specifically to issues of cultural maintenance and intercultural understanding. Again, a variety of interesting opinions were found across the schools. As one teacher from Getty Rd PS asked,

> How would, for example, someone maintain the cultural background that I came from? We are struggling to do it ourselves, you know, so to do that, and if you have a look at where my grandparents came from, my grandmother lived in the Ukraine, but she was half German, half Polish and spoke four, five languages, then they moved to Germany and then they moved to Italy and lived there, then they came to Australia and lived here.

At Wollami Lakes PS another teacher had no doubts about this question: 'the school has a duty to do that, yes, because I think it's just … part of the person, you know, they come with this background and I think it is our duty to continue to build on that, if it's their language or whatever, and share it with others'. Her colleague agreed that it was 'definitely the school's responsibility' but added that there was a question around 'the manner in which it's being [done]', and she said it was 'hard to identify exactly' what to do. A parent at Getty Rd PS insisted, however, that it was for 'the parents and the school' together to address: 'I don't think it is something you can really segregate I think it has to be part of the school, because we are all here together, they are all here together working together, so everyone needs to get on'. A Graham's Point HS parent of Indian background reinforced this view, saying emphatically,
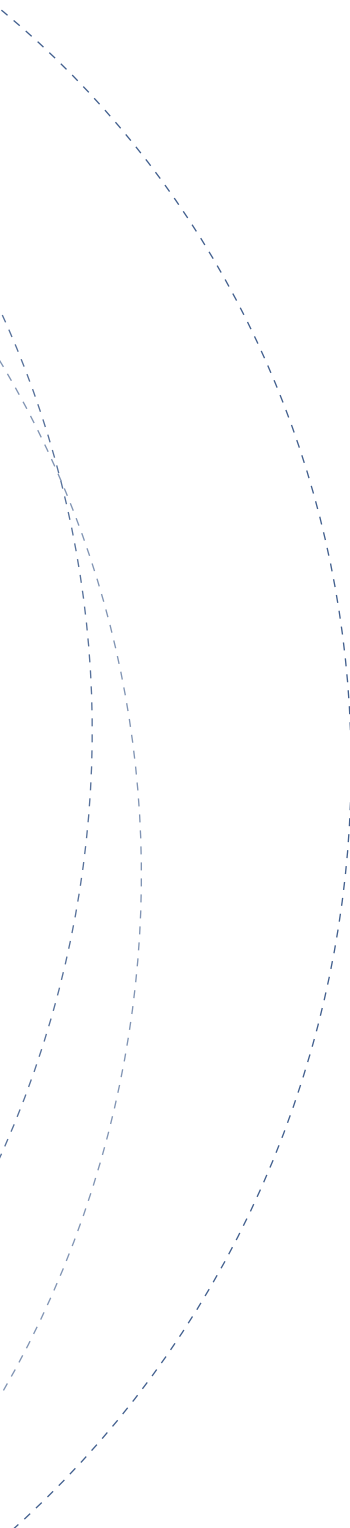
'to me that is an education', and another at Wollami Lakes PS, 'This is where they learn things'. For one teacher at Graham's Point HS, this had a specific focus: 'the school has to be more proactive with the anti-racism education'. Teachers at Harringvale HS, however, felt it was more to do with developing the language skills of students. For one teacher at Wollami Lakes PS it was about,

> equity for all no matter what the background or culture. Just we all respect and appreciate each other's culture basically no matter where you come from, no matter what circumstances of your arrival here or whatever and it's just — that's what comes to mind at first — just to educate each other about the world.

In many ways these comments repeat the diverse objectives of multicultural education that were canvassed in the introduction through the work of James Banks and echoed in the objectives of the NSW DEC's multicultural programs. Yet there are two pragmatic issues here, Firstly, schools are institutions with finite resources and these objectives make competing demands on those resources. To take the best options they need to have a critical and reflective approach to their choices and a school's capacities to realise their goals. Secondly, schools will make choices sometimes on the basis of what is expedient, easiest to justify and fund, and falls within the realm of what they can do quickly without collegial and critical evaluation (Timperley and Robinson, 2000). Moreover, there is a tension between people's emphasis on issues around equity and the choice of multicultural days, Harmony Day and multicultural speeches as key strategies in fostering social inclusion; a tension which echoed findings in the state-wide survey of teachers (Watkins et al., 2013). These events are valued in schools, and for understandable reasons, but they tend to emphasise what this report has referred to as the ethical or dispositional orientation in multicultural education, which foregrounds a feel good, celebratory dimension sometimes at the expense of the hard work of thinking through the redesign of curriculum and pedagogy. Yet it is the 'how' which remains unanswered. One Hingston Valley HS teacher was understandably hesitant: 'I wouldn't like to do it as a formal subject or a distinct study. I think it just develops in schools where people have been embracing [different cultures]'. Similarly, a Binto Valley PS parent commented that it was 'very difficult because there is a lot of nuance in how you deal with people'.

One parent at Getty Rd PS had a much clearer sense of what should be done:

> I actually do agree with the schools having to be accountable for what they are actually producing and ... but like for example we need to perhaps more than just appeasing everybody, perhaps … And also you know the way that the curriculum approaches it now, where we've got set sayings like, they've got the multicultural speeches and they've got certain sections that they just sit down and basically drill the kids

on. I don't actually think it is fostering the kids' understanding of each other's culture, it is just satisfying a compulsory part of the curriculum … it is ticking those boxes. These children don't actually get up and stand there and talk about their own home family environment or anything that actually matters, they are just trying to tick the boxes so that they can go on to the next stage of the speech.

This report does not intend to provide an extensive series of recommendations about what should be done, though the third report in this project — on knowledge translation and action research — will make more detailed suggestions about future directions. However, a key finding of this current report is that a crucial aspect of the 'rethinking' of multicultural education to make it more relevant to the culturally complex, globalised world of the 21st century is to push for a reinvigoration of a critical language for interrogating these complexities (May, 2009). Indeed, it should be central to any educational process, as several participants have indicated. Crucial to this, then, is the renewed emphasis on a socio-cultural focus in three areas: school curriculum, teacher education and the professional development of teachers.

This re-focus promises a framework for a critical cultural self-understanding, relations of 'reflexive civility' within school communities, and meaningful discussions between teachers, students and parents about the culturally complex worlds they inhabit (Noble and Watkins, 2014). Central to this is the interrogation of the idea of culture, to provide the knowledge base and 'intellectual compass' to help teachers and students navigate the 'poorly charted terrain of multicultural education' (Wren 2009, p.165).

It is worth quoting the Italian theorist, Antonio Gramsci (cited in Said, 1978, p.25), to outline this critical, cultural self-understanding:

> The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.

For Gramsci, this 'self-understanding' is not an inward-looking self-appraisal, but an enquiry into the worlds we inhabit, the histories that made us and the social relations that frame our everyday lives. So what kinds of knowledge and skills do we need to undertake this kind of 'critical elaboration'?
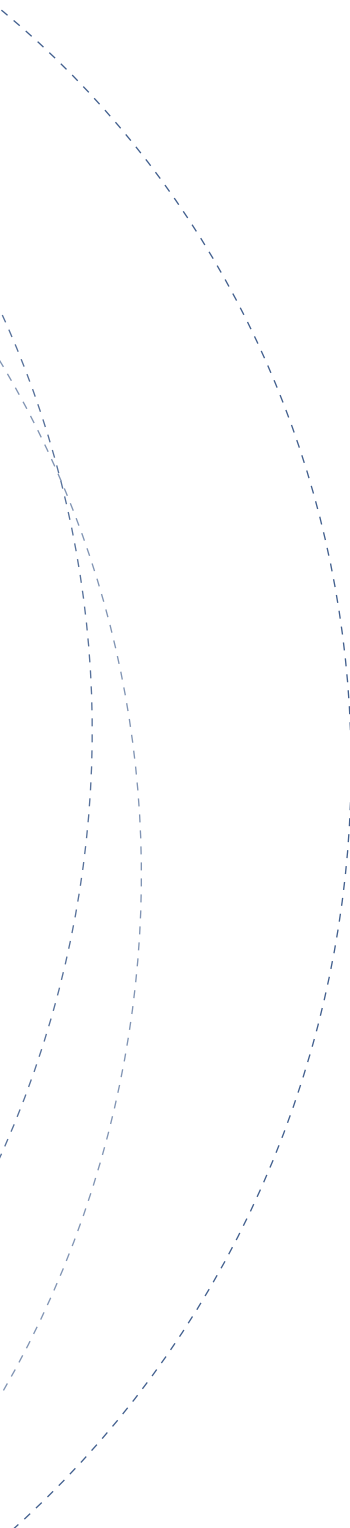
Centrally, we need to interrogate the vocabulary of multicultural education that has been developed over many years. 'Culture' has been a useful term to avoid the pitfalls of a problematic language of race, but it has lost its critical edge in favour of the celebration of difference. So we

need to develop the framework for a 'critical, cultural self-understanding' within a socio-cultural curriculum that can ask, and provide tools for answering, questions such as:

- What are culture, ethnicity and identity?
- How do these ideas relate to ideas of nation, race, ancestry, and belonging?
- How are they shaped by processes of colonisation, migration, experiences of locality, language, faith and citizenship?
- How do they relate to social relations, institutions and inequality?
- What happens to culture under conditions of globalisation and increasing transnational movement and communication?
- What happens to cultural identities and practices through generational change, especially amongst those of migrant, LBOTE backgrounds? How do individual, local and other social variations sit in relation to broader cultural commonalities?
- How do people understand, negotiate and inhabit the kind of 'hyperdiversity' the world is increasingly experiencing?
- How do claims about 'identity' and 'culture' — both as acts of self-identification and acts of racial stereotyping — work to injure or sustain people's sense of self, community and society, especially in times of change?

This is hard mental labour and reminds us that teaching is intellectual work, teaching students how to think, write, analyse and create — an expectation sometimes lost in the pragmatic business of running a school and managing a classroom (Noble and Watkins, 2014). Teachers need to have the critical capacities to challenge 'essentialisms' and easy explanations of complex phenomenon, and the capacities to help students develop these capacities. This is significant for addressing the complex relationship between multicultural and Aboriginal education, an issue that participants across the schools kept raising in discussions. Such an approach would allow, for example, educators to attempt the articulation of these two areas, not through collapsing both under a vague mantra of cultural inclusion or culturally responsive education (Perso, 2012), but through an awareness of the centrality of relations of culture and nation in very different and specific histories.

The work of many scholars and educators around the world, over many years, has helped forge frameworks for elaborating just such an intellectually challenging curriculum, for both students in schools and trainee teachers at University. Kalantzis and Cope (2008), for example, have argued, against a simple or 'superficial multiculturalism', for a critical and transformative approach which builds on the lessons of many years of educational change and works towards a civic pluralism which recognises the multiple identities and belongings of contemporary life. Such an approach foregrounds an emphasis on a 'social literacy' — both the analytical skills needed to understand and the social skills to negotiate the complex relations of difference in contemporary life

reshaped by diverse histories, processes of globalisation and practices of place-making. These skills aren't vague hoped-for outcomes of any classroom practice, but need to be the result of a considered process of educational design at all levels of educational experience (Kalantzis and Cope, 2005) involving a capacity for 'theoretical' consideration of social life, application of conceptual tools to real-life examples and self-reflexivity amongst teachers and students which allows them to interrogate their place in the world (May, 2009; Verma, 2007).

This intellectual orientation in teaching needs to be grounded in both pre-service training and in-service professional learning for teachers which prepares them with the capacities needed to undertake these tasks. Alongside the checklist of multicultural issues and aims that Verma (2007) argues should be central to teacher training programs, any activity promoted in the name of multicultural education needs to be framed by a series of questions which are both practical and philosophical in orientation:

- What is the issue being addressed in any given practice of multicultural education?
- What 'evidence' does it rest on?
- What goals of multicultural education does this practice aim to achieve?
- How does it aim to achieve these goals?
- Is the 'problem' identified an issue of 'culture', or something else? How?
- Who does the practice target? Who does it leave out?
- What understandings of equity and ethics does it rest on?
- What assumptions does it make about the groups involved? Does it 'essentialise' the groups involved? How can we address this?
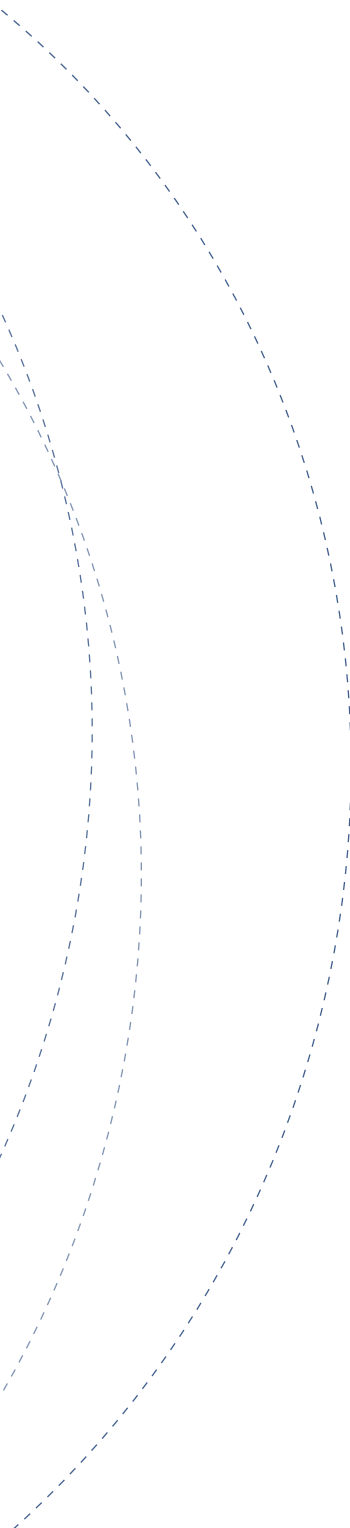
Recommendations

As indicated, this report does not intend to provide an extensive or detailed series of recommendations about what should be done, but the reorientation suggested above stresses the need to address three key interrelated areas for future development:

- renewing a socio-cultural focus across the school curriculum, Years K-12;
- foregrounding a comparable socio-cultural curriculum in teacher education, together with the tools to translate this into sustained curriculum and pedagogy;
- fostering, maintaining and extending a comparable socio-cultural focus in the professional development of teachers, together with the opportunities to sharpen the conceptual tools needed for a reinvigorated curriculum and pedagogy.

The renewed emphasis in these three areas, and the reinvigoration of a critical language of multiculturalism, will help achieve, we hope, a productive rethinking of multicultural education that suits the culturally complex world we live in.

Glossary of Acronyms

ACARA Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. Established in December 2008, ACARA is an independent authority responsible for the development of the Australian National Curriculum, national assessment programs and the collection of data for the MySchool website providing statistical and contextual information on Australian schools.

AITSL Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. This is the statutory body that is responsible for the accreditation of Initial Teacher Education programs in Australia.

ARCO Anti-Racism Contact Officer. The NSW DEC's Anti-Racism Policy requires each NSW government school to have a trained ARCO. The ARCO is a member of the teaching staff who assists students, staff or community members who wish to make a complaint of racism.

BOSTES The Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) incorporating the former NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) and the NSW Board of Studies.

DEC The NSW Department of Education and Communities. After a change of government in NSW in 2011, the Department of Education and Training (DET), was renamed the Department of Education and Communities. The acronym, DET, however, has been retained in all teacher email addresses.

ESL English as a Second Language. ESL is the term used here rather than EAL or English as an additional language. While the latter is perhaps more accurate and is now being used more widely, ESL was the term used in the survey and is the term with greater currency in NSW schools at this point in time.

ICSEA Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage. This is a scale used by ACARA based on the occupation and level of education of all parents in each Australian school. The median ICSEA score is 1000 and values range from a low of 500 to a high of about 1300.

LBOTE Language Background Other Than English. This is the favoured term to refer to students who have a language background other than English replacing the older term NESB or Non-English speaking background.

NSWIT New South Wales Institute of Teachers, now incorporated into The Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES).

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