TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGIES FOR CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING

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Introduction[27]

Official support for multicultural education has centered on the aims of encouraging civic duty, cultural respect, equity and productive diversity across all Australian students. However, such official support for multicultural education "mask(s) an uneasy ambivalence" towards multiculturalism and multicultural education by elites within the Anglo-Celtic 'core' of Australia (Hickling-Hudson, 2002, p3). In an effort to maintain an ideal of social order and cohesion, certain fundamental oppressions and systemic disadvantages may go unchallenged by a superficial form of multiculturalism, and a form of multicultural education that results from this ideology (Rifzi, 1993). While, like there are varying concepts and practices of multiculturalism, so too are there varying ideas about multicultural education. Broadly speaking, there are certain common objectives of multicultural education that are discussed in the following section.

The first objective of multicultural education is to allow students to explore the meaning of culture and how culture operates, share their cultures with each other, and explore that which they share across cultures (Banks, 2001; Bell, 1997). Thus multicultural education promotes an "awareness and appreciation" of the student's own culture and the cultures of others. Related to this objective is the need for multicultural education to help to promote an understanding and a sense of belonging within the various types and levels of communities in which students are located, and an ability to engage with a variety of other communities through meaningful cross-cultural communication. Thus students may more

successfully interact and engage on local, national, regional and global levels, and extend their awareness across and through these levels.

Multicultural education is also seen as a mechanism through which one can value the experiences and backgrounds of all students, staff and families, and draws upon these in a positive manner as a learning resource. It affirms the right of all students to access important learning strategies and resources, as well as broader societal resources. Multicultural education promotes the ability of all students to contribute both to the school community and to society and provides an educational framework that is relevant and responsive to all students keeping in mind their varied experiences, knowledge and backgrounds. In endeavoring to achieve such objectives, multicultural education uses cultural diversity as a positive, rather than negative, learning resource. This is to develop in all students the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes to participate actively and with a critical informed framework as members of society: local, national, regional and global.[28]

Multicultural education has been defined as "an approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs and that affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interdependent world" (Bennett, 2003, p. 14). While initially multicultural education focused upon ethnic groups, it is increasingly seen as fundamental education for all students to be able to successfully live and interact in an increasingly globalized, interdependent world. Bennett breaks down multicultural education theory and practice into four dimensions. The first is *Equity pedagogy which* is an approach to education in schools that attempts to remove the many hidden barriers (for example the idea of the 'hidden curriculum', such as when teachers have lower expectations for particular groups of students) that prevent ethnic minorities and low socio-economic status students from achieving "fair and equal educational opportunities" (Bennett, 2003, p. 14). In this sense equity pedagogy is a transformative approach to be applied critically to the whole school environment.

The second dimension is *curriculum reform* that many people mistake to be the entirety of multicultural conceptual frameworks, though it is only one dimension. In Bennett's framework, curriculum reform recognizes that traditional educational courses taught in school usually reflect monocultural values and content, and so curriculum is reformed to reflect more diverse perspectives that are explicitly acknowledged. The third

[28] These ideas may be found, articulated differently, in the ACT 'Multicultural Education Curriculum Support Materials', *op. cit.,* pp. 7-9.

dimension is *multicultural competence:* "the process of becoming multicultural is one whereby a person develops competencies in multiple ways of perceiving, evaluating, believing, and doing" (Bennett, 2003, p. 15). Developing multicultural competency is believed to help people negotiate social relations in various cultural arenas, including on a global scale as well as with diversity within a nation. Multiculturalism is normalised and respected, and the multiculturally competent person recognises his/her own ethnicity and particularist views.

The fourth dimension relates *to teaching toward social justice,* which aims "to develop antiracist, anti-sexist, anti-classist behaviour in basic everyday life" (Bennett, 2003, p. 16). This dimension is seen as necessary to augment, for example, curriculum content, because learning about other cultures alone may not motivate an individual to act to promote social justice in his/her life. In teaching for social justice, students are helped to identify and address myths, stereotypes and prejudice; find unities between people as well as differences; and understand and identify individual, structural and cultural racism, sexism and classism. Similar conceptual frameworks or multicultural education have been established and maintain "that all students should have equal opportunities to learn regardless of the racial, ethnic, social-class, or gender group to which they belong" (Banks, 1997, p. 68). In this view, multicultural education also "describes ways in which some students are denied equal opportunities because of their racial, ethnic, social-class, or gender characteristics" (Banks, 1997, p. 68). It is an ongoing "process" towards more just, democratic schools.

Even if the taught curriculum is reformed to reflect multicultural education dimensions, unless the deep structure and hidden curriculum of the school is also transformed, traditional unjust social structures will be perpetuated and ensure continuance of barriers to equitable learning for all students. Equity pedagogy therefore necessitates an empowering school culture and social structure that may demand considerable transformation of the deep structure of the school. For example, Banks (1997) suggests that the usual period allocation for different school subjects may not allow students enough time to develop deep reflection on the concepts they are learning, as well as sufficient "content integration and synthesis".

Within multicultural education research, the concept of "cultural responsiveness" implies that schools become far more flexible in their pedagogical, curricular and structural approaches to education, in order to effectively respond to the needs of increasingly diverse student population. It is a concept that attempts to bridge the gap between multicultural educational policies and theories on the one hand, and pluralistic educational practice on the other, with particular reference to the specific needs of the school community in question. 'Cultural responsiveness' is underpinned by the principle "that diverse ways of understanding and interpreting the world are an asset and a resource, not a liability, and that it is in the best interest of all learners to build on the strengths and experiences that children collectively bring to the classroom" (Johnson, 2003, p. 24).

A culturally responsive ethos can be pursued successfully through a "system-wide initiative ... to be pursued wherein measures that impact all facets of the school operation are carried out in an ongoing and integrated fashion" (Johnson, 2003, p. 19). Johnson writes that:

> Effectively to promote understanding and acceptance of differences across the entire community, school initiatives need to be integrative (infused through all elements of the educational enterprise), egalitarian (assuring equitable status for all parties), substantive (ongoing, significant and purposeful), inclusive (involving all stakeholders) and culturally responsive (sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of all member groups) in their orientation (Johnson, 2003, p. 19).
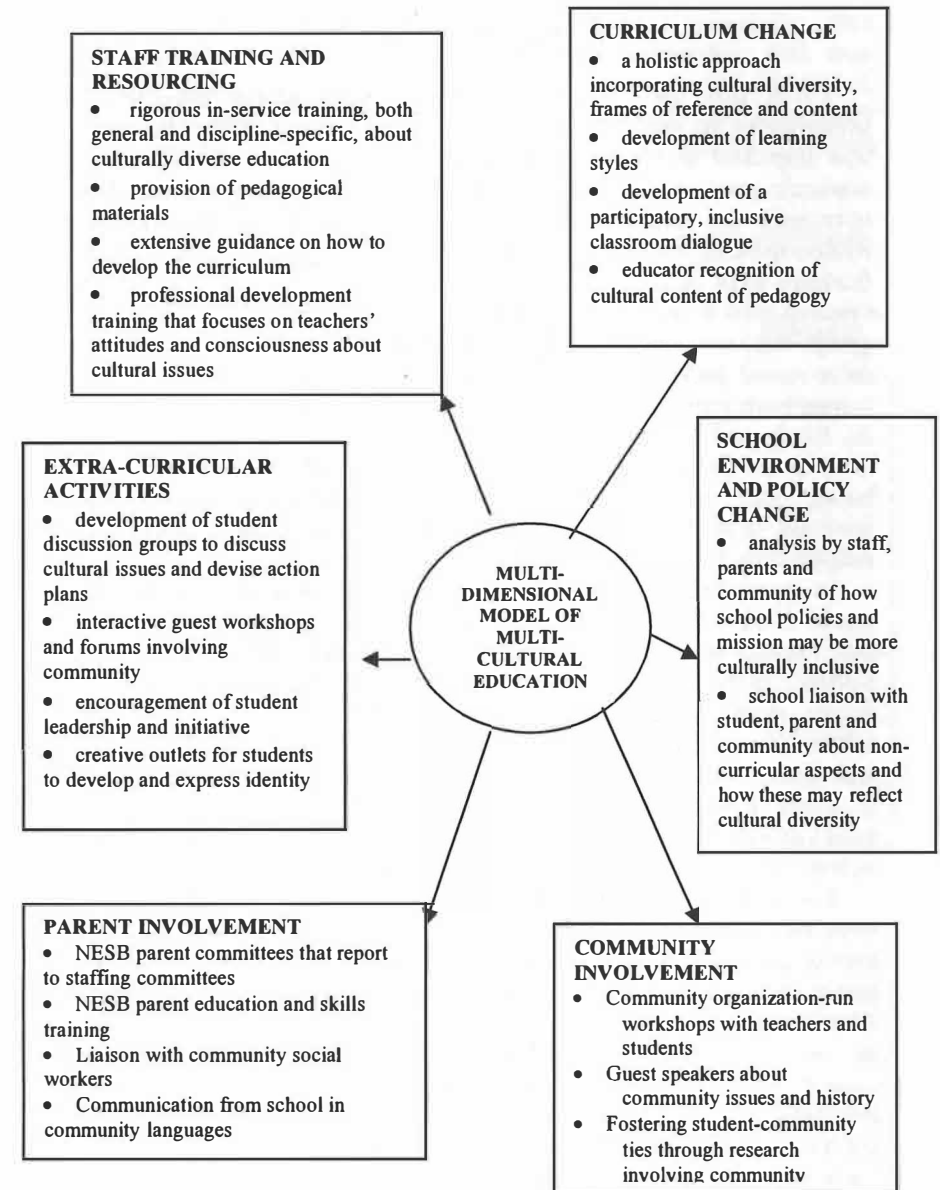
Whilst this study incorporates much of these theoretical features in the current literature on multicultural education, it nevertheless formulates a distinct approach that integrates school-specific and societal dimensions into one multi-tiered model. This is described below.

Approach

Current literature on cultural diversity in education suggests that there are numerous factors that contribute to successful multicultural education practices. These factors extend from individual staff practices, school-based curriculum, practices, pedagogy and policies, school-community relations, and broader structural factors such as educational policies and curriculum. That is, current theorizing around multicultural education tends to take a holistic approach that highlights the importance of all these factors and the way they interlink with each other. In light of the recent developments in theories of multicultural education, this study has developed and adopted a multidimensional model of multicultural education. This model draws on the critical educationalist's view that education is transformative as well as on various contemporary streams of current multicultural education theory that emphasize education involves many factors, sites and dimensions.

The multidimensional aspect of the model in this study assumes that school education is experienced and influenced by a combination of factors. These relate to pedagogic choices, opportunities for social engagement, the involvement of families in their children's education; school resources, and by individual students' experiences and understanding of culture, identity and social background. The transformative dimension of the model recognizes that students are disadvantaged by socially-constructed barriers to learning. In this sense, successful multicultural education requires change not only in Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students, but also more importantly in the various dimensions of the educational system and the schools in order to break down these barriers.

Below is a diagrammatic representation designed by the author of how the various dimensions of education may be changed to reflect multicultural perspectives:

STAFF TRAINING AND RESOURCING
- rigorous in-service training, both general and discipline-specific, about culturally diverse education
- provision of pedagogical materials
- extensive guidance on how to develop the curriculum
- professional development training that focuses on teachers' attitudes and consciousness about cultural issues

CURRICULUM CHANGE
- a holistic approach incorporating cultural diversity, frames of reference and content
- development of learning styles
- development of a participatory, inclusive classroom dialogue
- educator recognition of cultural content of pedagogy

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
- development of student discussion groups to discuss cultural issues and devise action plans
- interactive guest workshops and forums involving community
- encouragement of student leadership and initiative
- creative outlets for students to develop and express identity

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF MULTI-CULTURAL EDUCATION

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND POLICY CHANGE
- analysis by staff, parents and community of how school policies and mission may be more culturally inclusive
- school liaison with student, parent and community about non-curricular aspects and how these may reflect cultural diversity

PARENT INVOLVEMENT
- NESB parent committees that report to staffing committees
- NESB parent education and skills training
- Liaison with community social workers
- Communication from school in community languages

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
- Community organization-run workshops with teachers and students
- Guest speakers about community issues and history
- Fostering student-community ties through research involving community

Design of the study

Given that the study adopted a multidimensional approach to investigating the needs of Arabic-speaking background (ASB) students, it was important to elicit data from a range of sources. In addition to academic research and textual analysis, the primary data was based on interviews and questionnaires conducted with teachers, students and Arabic-speaking parents at the participating schools in research sessions. Students were randomly selected and approached to participate in the research, with the necessary condition of consent from their parents. Focus groups were run with students divided into ASB groups and students from other mixed backgrounds. This method of division was chosen so that comparisons could be made between ASB students and non-ASB students. At Blackwood College, three focus groups were run, two with ASB students divided into gendered groups, and one with students from other backgrounds. At Clayfield Girls Secondary College, two focus groups were run. In all the focus group discussions, students were of mixed ages ranging from 12 to 18.

In approaching the data elicited from students the study measured the results of the questionnaires quantitatively to ascertain whether there were any statistical differences in answers between ASB students and non-ASB students. In the questionnaires, students were asked a range of structured answer questions relating to the themes of happiness, belonging and relationships at school, perceptions of the school's educational standards and students' educational ambitions, perceptions of intercultural relations at school, family support for education, and identity and their place in local and national communities. Focus groups discussions, interviews and written answers have been analyzed qualitatively.

The majority of staff members at the participating schools also completed a survey, comprising a demographic section, a short structured answer question and a written answer section (Appendix I). The structured answer questions related to themes of race, ethnicity and conflict at school, and cultural diversity in the wider Australian society. The written answer section was designed to elicit responses from staff about their understanding of multicultural education, their school's and their own individual approaches to cultural diversity in education, and their experiences of cultural diversity within the schooling environment. One leadership staff member at each school has also been involved in an interview. Participating parents had the option of completing their survey in Arabic or English, and the focus group sessions were run in both Arabic and English. Parents were asked to answer structured questions and discuss themes of their involvement in the school community, their communication with the school, and their communication with their children; whether they think their children are happy or satisfied at school, culture and identity, and their desires for their children's education. Table 1 outlines the number of participants involved in this preliminary research phase:

Table 1. Outline of number of participants involved in the preliminary research phase.

| Participants	Blackwood College	Clayfield Girls Secondary College	Subtotal
Students	25 Arabic-speaking background students (surveys and focus group) 11 non-Arabic speaking background students (surveys and focus group)	12 Arabic-speaking background students (surveys and focus group) 10 non-Arabic-speaking background students (surveys and focus group)	58 students
Staff	28 surveys 1 interview	27 surveys 1 interview	67 staff
Parents	3 surveys and group discussion	4 surveys and group discussion	7 parents
SUBTOTAL	68 participants	54 participants	
TOTAL	122 participants		

Findings

The following is a summary of statistical findings followed by a qualitative discussion based on interviews with principals and focus group discussions with students and parents. Given the limited scope of this paper, only those findings most relevant to this paper will be detailed.

Schools

The schools are affected by low staff opinion of their professional environment. The Victorian Department of Education and Training measures staff opinion according to five indicators: staff perspectives on morale, supportive leadership, goal congruence and professional interaction. Both schools fall well behind the state benchmarks on all indicators, though staff opinion at the schools appears to be trending

upwards. Table 2 shows the levels of staff opinion in the schools compared with the state benchmarks in 2002. The maximum rating possible is five. Interestingly the staff from Blackwood College rated supportive leadership, personal interaction and professional growth slightly below the state benchmark and higher than the staff from Clayfield Girls Secondary College while they rated morale and goal congruence significantly below the state benchmark and also below the ratings in the same category from staff at CGSC.

Table 2. Staff opinion
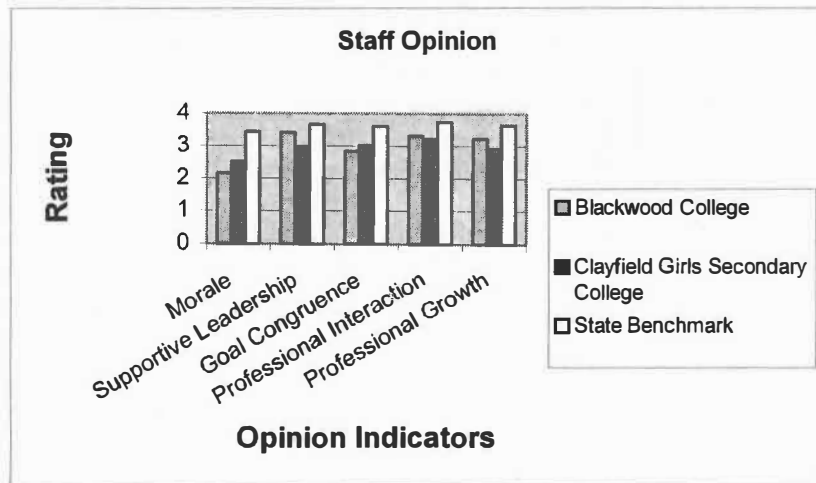
Students

The statistical comparison of questionnaire results between ASB and non-ASB yielded some interesting significant differences between the two groups. For example, ASB students indicated less comfort than non-ASB students in talking to staff members about problems they were facing. Students were asked 'Do you feel comfortable talking with teachers, counselors or other staff members about any problems that you may be having?'

Students could rank their answers from 1 (yes always), 2 (mostly), 3 (sometimes), to 4 (not at all). On average ASB students answered 3.06 while non-ASB students answered 2.36, indicating a greater degree of

comfort with talking to staff. Significantly nearly one quarter (24.14%) of ASB students compared with 8.7% of non-ASB selected 4 (not at all) for their degree of comfort talking to staff. 86.95% of non-ASB students compared to only 47.54% of ASB students replied that they either always, mostly or sometimes felt comfortable talking with staff about their problems. Table 3 summarizes those results.

Table 3. Talking about problems
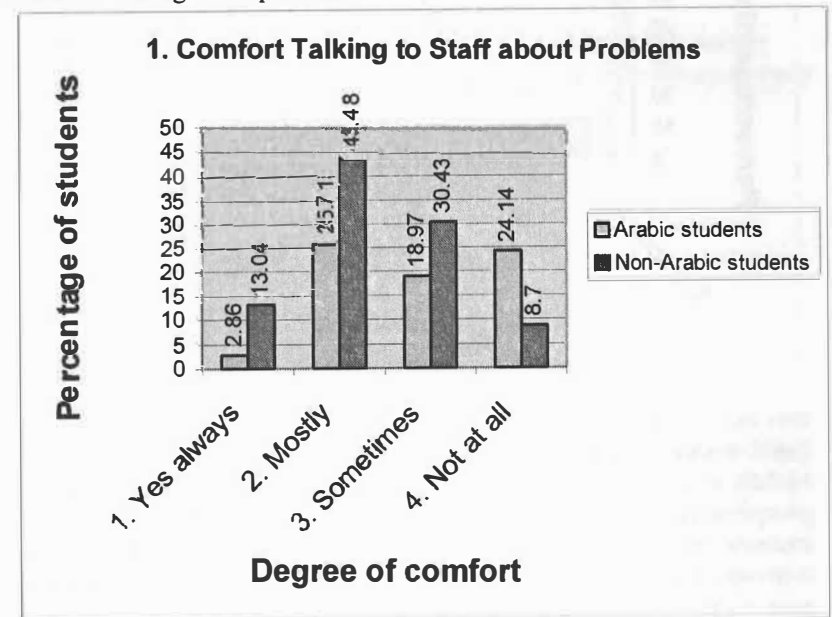
Similarly, ASB students indicated less confidence in student harmony in their culturally diverse school. When asked to rate relations between different ethnic groups at their school, with 1 being 'excellent' and 4 being 'poor', ASB students answered 2.56 (close to 'average'), while non-ASB students answered 2.18 (close to 'good'). Table 4 summarizes the results.

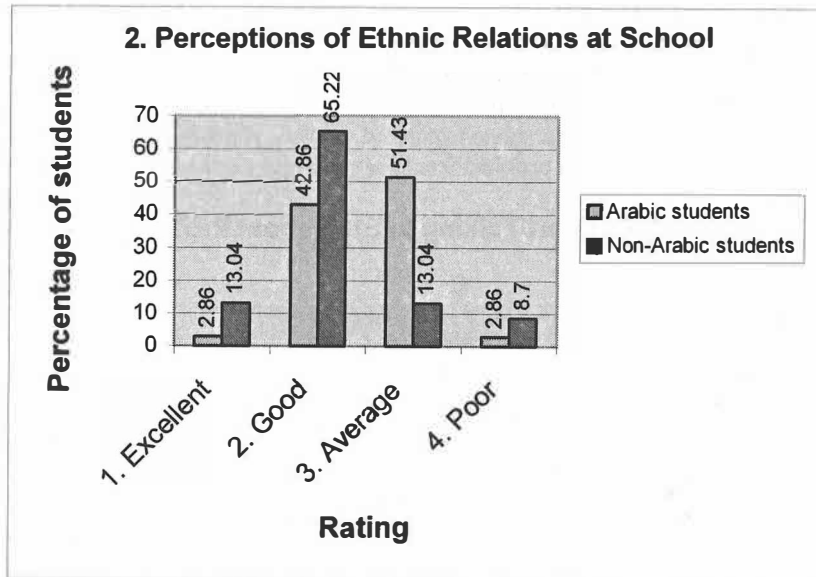Table 4. Perceptions of ethnic relations

Table 4 shows that 78.26% on on-ASB students compared with only 45.72% of ASB students replied that relations between different ethnic groups were excellent or good. The greatest proportion of non-ASB students replied that relations between ethnic groups were good. The majority of ASB students (94.29%) answered that relations between ethnic groups were either good or average.

Moreover, ASB students were generally less confident that working hard at school would earn them a TAFE or university place. Students were asked 'Do you think that working hard at school will get you a university or TAFE place? The average result for ASB students was 1.89 (close to 'somewhat'), while the non-ASB students indicated more confidence with a result of 1.27 (close to 'yes, very much').

Table 5. Confidence in pursuing further education
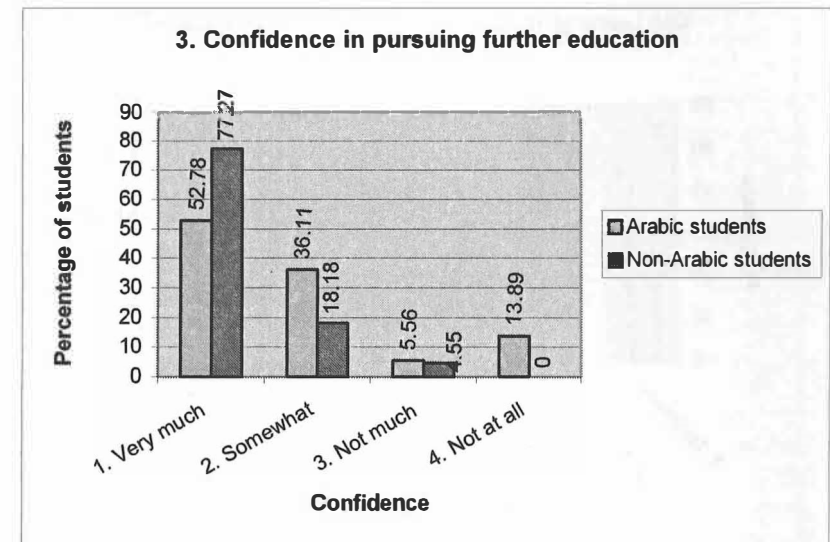
More than three quarters of non-ASB students compared with just over half of ASB students believed that working hard at school would help 'very much' in obtaining a place at university or Technical and Further Education (TAFE). At the other end of the confidence scale, just under one fifth of all ASB students (19.45%) compared to less than one twentieth non-ASB students (4.55%) believed that working hard at school would either not help much or not at all assist them in getting a university or TAFE place. Table 5 summarizes the results relating to confidence in pursuing further education.

Interestingly, however, the majority of non-ASB students (95.36%) compared to 63.89% of ASB students think that learning and behavior at school can sometimes or often be affected by racism. Students were asked 'Do you think that student learning and behavior can be affected by racism?' 1 indicated 'yes, definitely', 2 indicated 'sometimes', 3 was 'not much', and 4 meant 'no'. Non-ASB students answered on average at 1.64, while ASB students answered at 2.28.
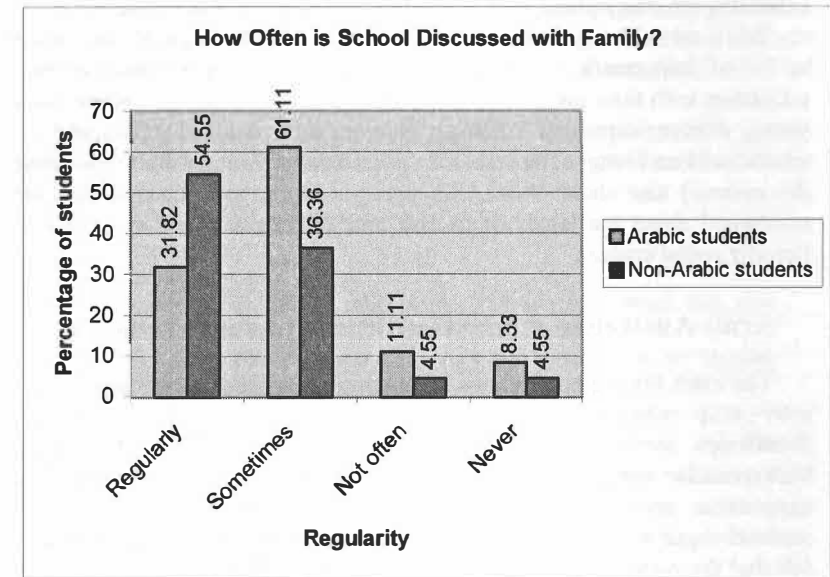
Table 6 summarizes the results relating to learning and racism. A significant proportion of ASB students (36.11%) compared to only 4.55% of non-ASB students answered that racism could not affect learning behaviors at school.

Table 6. Learning and racism

Can Learning and Behaviour be Affected by Racism?

Table 7. School and family

How Often is School Discussed with Family?
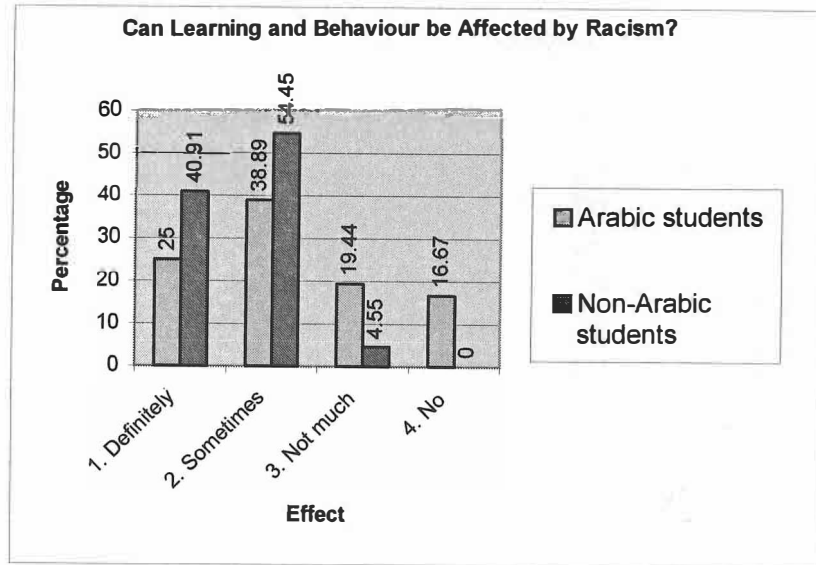
While all students reported that their families consider schooling to be important, on average non-ASB students talked more regularly with their families about school and study than ASB students. Students were asked 'Do you talk to you family about school and study?' and could respond 1 (yes regularly), 2 (sometimes), 3 (not very often) and 4 (never). ASB students answered 2.08 (sometimes), while on average non-ASB students discussed school with their family more regularly, at 1.59. Double the number of ASB students (19.44%) to non-ASB students (9.1%) either never or not often discusses school with their parents. Table 7 indicates the breakdown of answers for each of the above questions:

These statistical findings were confirmed in focus group discussions during which ASB boys stated that they found the school environment inert and unengaging, arguing that this dragged them back academically. ASB girls also argued that they should be pushed more in their studies and that teachers should make more effort to engage them. The non-ASB students were generally more positive about teachers, though still reported negative feelings about the learning environment more generally. They felt that while there were 'some good' teachers, the general learning environment was non-academic and unengaging, subject selection too limited, school reputation poor, and studies unchallenging. ASB students were very concerned about the 'perceived' increase in racism against Arabic and Muslim communities in Australia, associated with global and local events. The boys felt that the media vilified and misrepresented their culture, and that they were targeted by the police on account of their cultural background. The girls discussed particular instances of racism, especially relating to wearing the *hijab*. This preliminary research suggests that ASB students and students from other backgrounds differ in key areas, particularly those relating to (a) teacher-student relations (ASB students were more likely to express distrust towards teachers, particularly

based around a perceived lack of cultural understanding), (b) ideas of social cohesion and interethnic relations at school, (c) confidence in achieving a tertiary place, and (d) family emphasis upon education.

While all students tended to think that their parents regarded education to be of importance, ASB students were less likely to discuss their education with their parents. In addition, some ASB students, particularly young women, expressed a tension between their cultural roles and their educational ambitions. The research (in particular through the focus group discussions) also shows that ASB young people, particularly boys, are concerned about the levels of racism and discrimination they face in a broader social context.

Arab-Australian students attitudes towards schooling

The main finding here relates to perceptions of inter-racial tension and inter-group relations. Many of the students interviewed, argued that friendships (with other students not necessarily from their own background) seemed to be one of the few elements of their schooling experiences about which they felt positive. Generally, racism between students was not considered to be a significant problem. Most participants felt that the issues they had with racism or inter-cultural tension at school were linked more to student-teacher relations. Boys, in particular, expressed unhappiness at school, often in terms of anger and frustration. The following exchange between male students incorporates a wide range of concerns about relations with teachers:

I was suspended 17 times because of her (a teacher), and for the stupidest reasons too. And I didn't get to say anything that I wanted to say, they wouldn't let me speak.
They don't give you a fair go, man.
They're racist, they always pick on Lebbos.
Like especially in this month, Ramadan, they should understand what we're going through, they shouldn't force us to do things that make us scream and all.
I got chucked out of class in the first period, I don't think they understand you. If it keeps going like this, I don't know what I'll do.
See, the teachers at this time of year have got to help you to understand and be good. Say if I'm doing something bad, they should go, 'oh you're fasting', like this, like help us out a little.

As illustrated in the above passage, students reported a lack of meaningful communication between themselves and teachers, often feeling that teachers make little attempt to understand them culturally.

More critically, students across the two schools conveyed doubts about teachers' commitment to quality teaching and to meeting the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds. The school environments were also represented as being inert and disengaging, with many students arguing that this held them back academically and negatively affected their levels of ambition and motivation.

Yet, some students also reported positive relationships with certain individual teachers. When asked what makes a good teacher, these students gave various replies, including the following:

They listen to you.
They understand you.
They come from a different religion too, and they understand, like, you know what I mean?
'Cause you know like the Australians, they don't know what we've been through, and what we are going through.

None of the students believed that there was any significant multicultural content within the existing curriculum. Some male students expressed a desire for more multicultural educational content, particularly relating to their own culture, to combat what they saw as an Anglo bias:

Have a subject for it, like in history, all we learn about is the Anzac war and all that stuff. Why don't we learn about our culture as well?

Despite the frequency of negative feelings about the schools' learning environments, the vast majority of students who participated in the research expressed a desire to complete secondary school. The students at BC who wanted to pursue further study or training mainly aspired to join TAFE colleges. Discussions of educational ambition among the girls at CGSS were more mixed, with some students wishing to attend TAFE colleges, and some university. Students generally felt very positive about their social interactions with other students, however, the research findings suggest a significant level of disengagement with the schools as learning institutions. They frequently attributed their own disengagement from school and the processes of learning to: (a) perceptions of teacher disinterest in them as individuals, and as young Arab- and Muslim-Australians; (b) perceptions of teacher racism; and (c) low teacher expectations of their schooling achievements.

The study also appears to confirm the critical importance of race, ethnicity and cultural identity in students' attempts to make sense of their social and educational experiences and the worlds in which they live (Mac an Ghaill, 1988, p. 155; Troyna, 1993, pp. 130-131). The discussions with

students indicated that schools and teachers need to explicitly address and repudiate racism in order to ensure students' educational engagement. Participating students, suffering from racism in the broader social environment, often appeared to be suspicious and distrusting of the school's role in perpetuating racialized patterns of privilege and disadvantage. Teachers' claims to being 'color-blind' and treating the students as individuals were not effective in satisfying students that teachers do not hold prejudiced attitudes. Students were well aware of how racism operates in complex ways in the social environment. They were looking to their schools and teachers to actively convince them that complex societal practices and patterns of racism were not simply also permeating their schools. Without schools giving greater acknowledgment to students' social experiences of racism and creating an environment where racism is explicitly resisted, students appear less willing to trust in the school as a social unit and, consequently, more willing to disengage from it as an educational institution. Without a trust in the school, students are unlikely to engage fully in schools' educational processes and achieve their optimal educational outcomes.

Parents' views on social and educational issues

Parents' involvement in their children's education and their interest and support (or lack of) is often reported to be an important factor in explaining students' own behavior and educational attainment. One major concern expressed by parents regarded their own abilities to support their children's education. Parents argued strongly against the stereotypes of Arab-Australian parents lacking interest in, or undervaluing, education. However, many parents acknowledged that they had limited resources in terms of language skills and educational background to actively assist their children in pursuit of successful educational outcomes. They indicated how teachers sometimes humiliated their children if they had not completed their homework, and yet teachers did not understand the family barriers to students undertaking successful study at home. It was argued that schools needed to recognize that in some cases second-generation or long-settled students may have special educational needs, even though—unlike newly-arrived students—they may not exhibit problems with the English language. For example, parents indicated a firm desire for well-resourced homework groups to enable their children to receive the assistance with their study that the parents themselves felt unable to offer.

Another concern raised by parents related to the effect of racism upon their children's educational outcomes. While all the parents were keen not

to overstate the prevalence of racism within their children's schools, they felt that it existed as a persistent undercurrent that *"kills the spirit"* of some Arab-Australian young people:

> There are problems, and one of them is the students feel ashamed and have low esteem and is unable to get his work done like the rest. Also when the teacher, which is very seldom, is biased or something … the student may feel shy and want to change schools. Why they want to change schools? Racism. Sorry to mention this, it's very important. A lot of people do not mention this, the teachers are being biased because you're wearing a hijab. Not all teachers are like this but there are some who kills the spirit of the student.

Parents also noted that some teachers made distinctions between girls wearing the Muslim *hijab* and those who did not. Two parents related an incident where a teacher reportedly called a girl wearing the *hijab* a *"napkin head"*. Parents were in no doubt that the current manifestation of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment has the effect of isolating their children from Australian society. They felt that their children often have to prove their 'Australianness', causing them suffering:

> The media is really racist, sometime coming to scary stage. Especially what's happened in America, then Bali. Up to now, we really hope nothing happen to any Australian because we don't want someone to say something to our children, or to destroy our house, or something like that. The children think they are being targeted, because they've become like a soft target, because of the media here.
> The media makes them feel they are not Australian. You know, like it's not their country.

A number of parents believed that issues of exclusion in the broader social environment may impact upon Arab-Australian students' educational experiences. It was argued that to combat the potentially destructive impacts of racism on their children's learning, methods of communication between students and teachers had to change markedly. In one woman's account, more constructive engagement between teachers and Arab-Australian students could hold the key to improving student-teacher relations, student behaviour and educational outcomes:

> The teachers, they should make at least one day a week, a few hours, and just sit down with the classroom, be honest, be frank, find out what's bothering the children. And the teachers can tell the children too, what bothers them about their behaviour, about their attitudes, and then vice versa. And then they can start working together … Like especially when

the school is like, what, 50 per cent Arabic? And with everything that's going on around the world, it has a very big effect … It affects the children because the children are gonna say, "this is Australia, we haven't done anything here. The Muslim community hasn't done anything. So they're calling us terrorists?" And so the children are gonna take this and go all over the place in their mind and say, "well, I'm not gonna listen to any teacher".

While some parents considered this inclusive, transformative method of student-teacher engagement to be crucial to addressing their children's social experiences of racism and exclusion, other parents favored more teaching focus on issues of racism and inter-cultural relations. All parents involved in the research reported high levels of educational ambition for their children. They appreciated that the schools made efforts to recognize the particular needs of their children, for example, being sensitive towards religious observances and developing literacy programs. The Arabic-speaking cultural diversity facilitator placed in each of the participating schools (as part of the larger study upon which this paper is based) was regarded by parents to be highly important, if not crucial, to their improved communication with and participation in the school community. However, parents also acknowledged that low educational outcomes was a significant issue for Arab-Australian students, and that there was an urgent need for a dialogue about why this may be and how it could be addressed by schools. The parents had clear concerns and suggestions, particularly focused on the recognition by schools of the specific needs of second-generation students, and the necessity of explicitly addressing issues of racism and exclusion. Parents tended to feel that while instances of overt teacher racism may have been rare; those that did occur had a major effect on their children.

Conclusion

The fundamental purpose of education is to ensure that all students, no matter what their linguistic, cultural or socio-economic background, benefit from learning in ways that facilitate their full participation in the economy and in the broader community. While schools may reproduce social inequalities, including racism and its effects upon particular minority groups, schools are also in a rare position of being able to directly challenge social injustices. Transformative practices may be undertaken to effect positive change in the school environment, both at social and educational levels.

For this to happen effectively, schools and educators need to be equipped with the necessary resources and experience to challenge social inequalities in the educational environment. Students and parents in the participating study often expressed an explicit desire for learning environments where their social experiences of racism and exclusion, and their cultural backgrounds, were acknowledged and actively engaged with. For this to be achieved, an integrated approach needs to be adopted, where schools, parents and communities form a strategic partnership aimed at reducing the effects of social barriers and at meeting the challenge of cross-cultural negotiation.

This study's findings suggest that socio-political dynamics not only affect young Arab-Australians' sense of identity (c.f., Butcher & Thomas, 2001), but also their educational experiences. It is not suggested here that there is a direct causal correlation between the two or that the effect of racism and exclusion is the sole factor influencing Arab-Australian students' educational experiences and outcomes. However, racism was a factor of concern readily and repeatedly identified by students and parents. While parents indicated that overt teacher racism is a rare phenomenon, students' reactions to particular instances of unhappy interactions with teachers cannot be dismissed as over-sensitivity. Instead, by focusing on such incidents students may be voicing an acknowledgment that cultural prejudice colors multiple facets of their experiences and opportunities, including education, and that these instances are simply the most apparent. This is why current patterns of educational research may need to be extended to reflect socio-political dynamics beyond the confines of school and family factors. At very least, this study's findings suggest that the effects of racism on young Arab-Australians, particularly since the events of September 11 (e.g., HREOC 2004; Collins et al., 2000, Poynting &Ang, 2004) have been underestimated in educational research and practice. In addition, this study, coupled with the recent closure of Blackwood College highlights the urgent need for innovative approaches to teaching in culturally diverse schools, wherein quality education—with systematic multicultural perspectives—would be viewed as a basic right, and an essential means to social and economic development.

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Appendix 1

Sample of Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

This survey is part of a research project that is being conducted by Deakin University investigating the educational outcomes of non-English speaking background students, particularly Arabic background students. We hope you will fill out this short survey as your ideas and experiences are important to the successful completion of this project. Personal information such as name, address and date of birth is not required so as to protect your anonymity.

Please answer all of the questions by following the instructions for each section. If you find any of the questions unclear, confusing or inappropriate, place put a cross beside the question's number. Thank you, we welcome your participation.

Section One
Personal Profile

Below are some questions about you. Please answer the questions by ticking the relevant box and where relevant, writing a brief answer.

1. Gender: Male: ( )   Female: ( )
2. Year of birth is   19
4. How long have you worked at Preston Girls Secondary College?
5. What is your position in the school?

Leadership staff	( )
Teacher	( )
Administrative staff member	( )
Social welfare staff member	( )
Other	( )

6. Country of birth:
Australia ( )
Other   ( ) Please specify …………………………………………..

7. What is your religion?

8. How would you describe your ethnic background?

Section Two   School and Community Experiences

Below are some questions regarding your experiences working at your school and living in Australian society. For each question, please **circle one number** to indicate your answer to the question.

8. How often do students report instances involving issues of race or ethnicity?

Very often	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
1	2	3	4

9. How often do you think misunderstandings occur between students and staff because of cultural differences?

Very often	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
1	2	3	4

10. How often do you think misunderstandings occur between students because of cultural differences?

Very often	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
1	2	3	4

11. Do you think political issues involving ethnicity have an impact on the school environment?

Very much	Somewhat	Not much	None at all
1	2	3	4

12. Have you noticed any increase in inter-group tension following national or international crises?

Very much	Somewhat	Not much	None at all
1	2	3	4

13. Do you think that Arab-Australians and Muslim Australians are perceived positively by the wider Australian community?

Very much	Somewhat	Not much	None at all
1	2	3	4

14. Do you think that most Australians value cultural diversity?

Very much	Somewhat	Not much	None at all
1	2	3	4

15. Do you think that racism is a problem in Australia?

Very much	Somewhat	Not much	None at all
1	2	3	4

Section Three   Multicultural Education

Below are some questions about your views on education and cultural diversity. Please answer each question by writing a short answer in the space provided. If you require more space, feel free to continue your answer on the back of the page and indicate that you have done so.

16. What do you think the term 'multicultural education' means?

_____

_____

_____

17. What do you think is the school's approach to education in a culturally diverse environment? Can you give some examples of how this approach has been implemented in the school?

_____

_____

_____

18. In terms of how the school approaches multicultural education and cultural diversity, what do you think are the successes and what needs to be improved upon?

_____

_____

_____

19. Do you reflect upon cultural diversity in your teaching or other work? If so, how?

_____

_____

20. What are the most prevalent problems or challenges you face as a teacher/staff member in a culturally diverse setting?

_____

21. What sort of support or training have you received in intercultural communication and in teaching a curriculum that reflects upon cultural diversity? Do you find this to be sufficient?

22. Do you think that multicultural education can have positive impacts upon students' educational achievement and happiness? Why/why not?

23. Do you discuss issues of cultural diversity affecting the school with students, other staff, parents, or community members? If so, does this discussion take place only informally, or are there established processes that facilitate this discussion?

24. How do you view the relationship between the school and the community? How involved in the school do you think the community should be?

25. What avenues are available for students to influence decision-making in the school? Do you think the existing avenues are sufficient? Are different ethnic groups fairly represented in these decision-making processes?

26. How does the school handle incidents involving issues of race or ethnicity?

Please feel free to make any further comments about any of the issues raised in this survey:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. You can contact Dr Fethi Mansouri, Deakin University (03) 9244 3914 if you have any comments or queries.