Chapter VI

Cultural diversity and migrant youth in secondary schools

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Introduction

Australia has a diverse population, which has been enriched and extended by a series of migration programs targeting distinct cultural groups. The cultural diversity of the Australian community, which has resulted from this migration program, is commonly described as multicultural, yet this has not always been the situation. During its early development, Australia was considered a white settler colony, similar to Canada and the United states. An influx of British migrants in the first half of the twentieth century continued the development of this remarkably homogenous society. However, at the end of the Second World War, Australia embarked on a contrasting program of migration. People came from Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe, the Middle East and Asia. These people contributed to the diversification of a society, which is now rich with people for whom English is a second language. Today, '20 per cent of the population speak a language other than English at home' (Inglis 2004, p.187).

In response to its culturally diverse population, Australia has committed itself to the development of an inclusive multicultural society. A considerable effort has been made to cater for minority groups and to embrace the interesting and sometimes challenging cultural contrasts with which Australia has been presented. Other countries such as France and the

United States have attempted this multicultural approach, but both countries have different challenges from those faced in Australia. Australia is in a unique position, because the population 'has no sizeable ethnic minorities comparable to the French in Canada or the Spanish in the United States' (Inglis 2004, p.187). This lack of large minority groups has also created a unique situation for educational institutions in particular, as there are specific logistical issues in teaching a small number of students from one or more minority groups within a traditionally larger Anglo-Saxon context. Whilst the significant Irish minority in Australia successfully developed the Catholic education system as a means to educate Catholic children, the development of many new education systems to cater for all the other migrant groups in Australia has not been as successful.

This peculiarity in Australia requires a unique approach within the educational system and a broad and extensive understanding of issues surrounding ethnicity, multiculturalism and schooling. The educational needs of specific cultural groups within this wide-ranging cultural community vary, creating an even more complex and challenging environment within which teachers must work. An understanding of how we should best manage cultural diversity within Australian schools can only be achieved through extensive and detailed studies that investigate how particular cultural groups understand their own social and educational experiences in relation to wider social discourses.

This chapter reports on a longitudinal study[8] , commenced in 2003, which sought to extend these understandings and focused on the experience of Arab Australian families and the students within these families who attend Victorian schools. While it was acknowledged that Victorian schools cater for many students from cultural backgrounds other than Arab Australians, this focus allowed for a more detailed study of one cultural group, while enabling input from students from other cultural backgrounds, such as Italian and Chinese. The relevant literature suggested that many issues relating to the management of cultural diversity in education were applicable in a general sense to all cultural groups. As will be discussed further in the chapter, issues in the management of cultural diversity in education were found to be centred upon (a) teacher impact, (b) student and teacher identity and (c) motivations, goals and aims for students from various cultural backgrounds. Variations occurred in the types of issues that arose within these themes according to cultural background, but the core themes remained the same for all cultural groups. Hence, the products of this research (a model of best practice, online teacher support materials and two modules of teaching and learning materials) are appropriate for schools with students from a plethora of cultural backgrounds.

The current study

Following extensive consultations and literature reviews, this longitudinal study identified two intersecting socio-educational trends necessitating further examination. One apparent trend in Australia is at the policy and funding level, with some schools falling short of meeting the educational needs of increasingly diverse student populations, inhibited by diminishing resources and monocultural curricula. The other trend is at the social level and relates to the increasing social marginality that Arab and Muslim communities in Australia face in the current political environment. This social marginality is partly reflected in the more pronounced racialised discourses towards Muslim and Arab Australians.

Cultural diversity in education provides an educational framework that is relevant and responsive to all students, keeping in mind their varied experiences, knowledge and backgrounds. In endeavoring to cater for the needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds, 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 a member of society in local, national, regional and global contexts.

Within multicultural education research (e.g. Anderson 1983; Banks 2001, 1997; Bell 1997; Bennett 2003), the concept of 'cultural responsiveness' implies that schools become more flexible in their pedagogical, curricular and structural approaches to education, in order to effectively respond to the needs of increasingly diverse student populations. 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).

Multicultural education policies in Australia

In Australia, official support for multicultural education has centered on the aims of encouraging civic duty, cultural respect, equity and productive diversity for all students. However, official support for multiculturalism does not always translate into practical and financial support for schools directly involved in the implementation of multicultural policies. Indeed, official support for multicultural education often 'mask[s] an uneasy ambivalence' towards multiculturalism and multicultural education by elites within the Anglo-Celtic 'core' of Australia (Hickling-Hudson 2002, p.3).

From a narrower state perspective, Victoria's policy approach posits that the school system is a major social change agent with an important role to play in the development of attitudes, values and critical thinking and in confronting barriers to social participation (Department of Education & Training 1997). Yet while being confronted with increasingly culturally diverse populations (Mansouri 2005; Mansouri & Trembath 2005) this role is played out in a broader educational context that has been found to replicate rather than challenge patterns of social inequality (Teese & Polesel 2003). The Victorian Government has responded to these challenges through a range of policy initiatives, which build beyond the *Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools* (1997) and the *Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools* (2001) to include the *Blueprint for Government Schools* (2003), the *Victorian Curriculum Reform Project* (2004) and the introduction of *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* (VELS) in 2005. All of these policies suggest implications and opportunities for Victorian schools and their communities.

The *Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools* (1997) outlines a number of criteria and aims for schools, which need to develop an in-depth knowledge and awareness of the concept of culture, along with an understanding of the multicultural nature of Australia's past and present history, and of the interdependence of cultures in the development of the nation. Schools must also develop skills and understandings to interact comfortably and competently in intercultural settings. For example, schools are encouraged to promote an awareness of the reality of the global village and national interdependence in the areas of trade, finance, labour, politics and communications. For this to be achieved, the development of international understanding and cooperation is essential.

The *Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools* (2001) outlined the Victorian Government's commitment to assisting all students and staff to become informed, productive, adaptable, motivated and creative citizens, who take full advantage of their economic, social and individual opportunities. It also requires schools to build an accepting environment where all staff and students are treated with dignity and respect and where diversity is valued, thereby creating a learning environment where stereotypes are questioned. Furthermore, instances of bias, bigotry, ethnocentrism, prejudice or racism are wholeheartedly rejected.

The *Blueprint for Government Schools* (2003) made recommendations for the identification and development of Essential Learnings. The Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority's (VCAA) *Victorian Curriculum Reform Project* (2004) responded to this recommendation. The VCAA's new curriculum standards—the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), have augmented the framework for Victorian government schools' curriculum. In addition, on 1 January 2005, the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004* came into effect, enshrining principles of access, participation and contribution, for all Victorian citizens, to services made available by the Victorian Government.

The Multicultural Victoria Act has a number of important implications for school councils, principals, staff and students. It is recommended that school councils become committed to ensuring that the contents of any existing policy document – including the Accountability and Improvement Framework, and particularly the school profile, codes of practice and the student code of conduct – reflect the principles of multiculturalism. They must also promote and preserve diversity and cultural heritage among members of the school community, ensuring they are all equally entitled to access opportunities and are able to participate in and contribute to the social, cultural, economic and political life of Victoria. It is the role of the school council to encourage and facilitate the participation by all parents in school community activities and decision making, taking into account the principles of multiculturalism.

The Act also has implications for school staff who are committed to promoting and affirming diversity in all aspects of their work practices and interactions with students, parents and other staff. School staff are given the responsibility of ensuring curriculum programs and classroom materials incorporate multicultural perspectives and reflect a range of cultural experiences as well as using teaching and assessment strategies that cater for a range of learning styles. They also have a role in monitoring the school environment in terms of promoting and preserving diversity and assisting the school's efforts to incorporate the principles of multiculturalism.

Approaches to cultural diversity in education

There are several themes that permeate the recent literature in relation to cultural diversity in schooling. These are (a) teacher impact, (b) identity issues relating to teachers and students and (c) the motivations, goals and outcomes for ethnic minorities in school. These three themes will be discussed as a basis for understanding the issues in relation to the management of cultural diversity in schools. The discussion will draw on literature from both Australia and the international sphere, highlighting the manner in which many of the issues in multicultural education are similar from country to country. This discussion will provide a platform upon which to further understand the development of the longitudinal study model that follows.

Teacher impact

The impact of teachers in schools with culturally diverse student populations is significant. Adolescence is a period in which many students may develop a strong sense of identity and 'schools are an ideal place for students to grapple with and explore their racial identities' (Davis 2007, p.209). Schools are also places of great influence, both on individuals and on the community in general. As a partial reflection of society, schools contribute to our overall understanding of social structure, attitudes and

changes. Whether or not schools influence the community to the extent that the community influences schools is perhaps debatable; however, the influence of the learning environment, teachers and community attitudes upon students' sense of self and identity is significant. As Giroux stated

> schools establish the conditions under which some individuals and groups define the terms by which others live, resist, affirm, and participate in the construction of their own identities and subjectivities.

(Giroux 1988, p.88)

Schools provide an environment that can be conducive to the development of valuable discussion and exploration of ethnicity and identity. Schoolteachers, and their approach in the classroom, may greatly influence this exploration.

In order to facilitate a positive influence on identity development, Davis suggests that American high school social studies teachers need to adapt their teaching to 'develop students' racial identity and foster racial acceptance, tolerance, and interaction' (Davis 2007, p.209). Within schools, students tend to mix with students who are from a similar racial background to their own. They wish to 'fit in, and in high school it is easiest to fit in with similar students' (Davis, p.210, derived from Wade & Okesola 2002). Racial isolation such as this only exacerbates racial misunderstandings and prejudices. The social studies classroom is, according to Davis, the most effective place for the development of ideas regarding racial identity. Teachers can play a crucial role in the development of healthy racial identities, attitudes and interaction. He suggests that a starting point for this is for teachers to understand the racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of their students (p.211). Teachers play a part in the social development of their students (Ndura 2006, p.2), but without an understanding of the students' backgrounds this task is made more difficult. [9]

Teachers' interpersonal behaviour with students is also significant. The 'rise of international migration has led to an increase in multicultural classes and schools' (den Brok & Levy 2005, p.73). This has affected teachers in various ways, one being that teachers are now required to teach within a multicultural context, creating a need for a 'higher level of communicative competence than is usually found with teachers' (den Brok & Levy 2005, p.73).

The way in which teachers respond to students from culturally diverse backgrounds is akin to 'perform[ing] a social function that is never innocent' (Ndura 2006, p.2). Teachers are influenced by their own culture and race, and this has significance for their classroom teaching. Ndura states that both educators and students generalise about different cultural groups, and furthers this saying that boundaries that exist between school

and community need to be broken. This breaking of boundaries would aid the healthy flow of cultural exchange and information.

The effect and impact of the teacher on the multicultural classroom is reiterated throughout the literature. Teacher behaviour, and attitude, and an understanding and acceptance of student cultural diversity, are crucial in the creation of a safe environment within which students can explore and discuss racial identity. It is crucial for teachers to understand the level of their impact and influence, as an understanding of this can help them to shape and direct their behaviour to achieve a positive outcome for all students.

The literature suggests that changes in teacher behaviours may improve the effect of teacher impact. Teachers may need to be more proactive in the recognition of the cultural backgrounds of their students as a means to foster more tolerant visions of ethnic identity. They can do this *via* particular classroom activities and through curriculum changes and inclusions.

Identity, motivation and school attainment

While student identity has been a common focus of the research into the experience of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) school students, the issue of teacher identity has been relatively neglected, 'we don't know enough about how pre-service teacher education students construct their own socio-cultural positioning in relation to those who are different from themselves' (Allard et al. 2006, p.116). Twenty-five per cent of Australia's school student population has a language background other than English, so it seems a little incongruous that 'the teaching population is overwhelmingly Anglo-Australian' (Rizvi 1992). The diverse student population depends, to an extent, on the ability and willingness of teachers to recognise and value difference. Despite the importance of this, teacher education programs have previously failed to address the issue of teacher identity, rather, concentrating on how gender, ethnicity and race shape students' identities (Allard et al. 2006, p.115).

Identity development is a complex process, involving a plethora of different experiences, associations and genetic factors. For example, in Australia, children of migrants present an interesting picture of identity and in some cases, a 'hybrid' or 'dual identity'. Straddling the gap between their parents' culture and Australian culture, these children exemplify the difficulties and contradictions that can arise within identity establishment. Butcher describes this as 'young people … negotiating their identity between familial expectations ("tradition") and the expectations of a mainstream national identity ("being Australian")' (Butcher 2004, pp.215–16).

Whilst several researchers have discussed ethnicity and race in relation to identity, the particular place that 'whiteness' plays in this identity development is not fully developed in the literature. Often, the examination is of a 'non-white' racial group. Hatchell, however, does explore the place of whiteness in identity development investigating the manner in which

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9. The term 'racial identity' is not commonly used in Australia; rather the term 'ethnic identity' is preferred. Ethnic identity has a sense of cultural identification as opposed to racial identity, which suggests notions of descent.

'adolescent male students construct their own male identities within a privileged white position' (Hatchell 2004, p.99). 'Being white, like being male, is associated with privilege' (Hatchell, 2004, p.100). White people often do not regard themselves as ethnic because they do not view themselves as so. They fail to acknowledge their privileged position and do not understand the 'transparency of whiteness as a racial identity' (Hatchell 2004, p.100). The dominant position of whiteness is occupied at the expense of non-white students within the school environment.

The literature demonstrates a clear connection between student identity and schooling and teaching practices. Teacher impact is crucial in the development of racial and ethnic identities, and migrant groups themselves appear to be integral in the process of identity creation for themselves and their children. Research suggests that 'Education can ... lead the way in how to overcome ... divisions of people' (Hatchell 2004) and it is possible that teachers can, through a positive use of their impact, pave the way for a less racist and more inclusive and cohesive school environment.

Another issue that is often equated with identity is the educational inequalities of some groups of students, in particular minority and migrant student cohorts. The academic underachievement reported among minority groups is a complex socio-educational issue worldwide that defies facile solutions and responses (Banks 2004). Australian research in this area has been a little varied and, in particular, research in the area of Indigenous Australians and education has been limited. For example, de Plevitz examined systemic racism, which has affected the incidence of poor educational outcomes for indigenous Australian students. She took an unusual perspective, arguing that 'apparently benign and race-neutral policies and practices may unwittingly be having an adverse impact on Indigenous students' education' (de Plevitz 2007, p.54). This is in contrast to other research projects that argue that previous explanations have taken a more negative approach, blaming conscious and intended legislation or omissions.

The complexities of educational outcomes within Australia are highlighted by Suliman and McInerney (2006), who explored the motivational goals and school achievement for Lebanese background students in southwestern Sydney. As this research shows, 'there is a general belief that Lebanese-background students in Australia do not usually perform well at school' (Suliman & McInerney 2006, p.242). In contrast, Windle (2004, p.271) refers to the widely accepted proposition that students of non-English-speaking background generally achieve well in Australian schools and are over-represented in higher education. These two statements appear to highlight the perceptions and opinions that exist within the community, often without any real empirical basis. This contradiction could be explained by a prevailing view that

most research combines immigrant-background students into very broad categories distinguishing between three blanket groups: Australian-born students; students born overseas in non-English speaking countries; and students born overseas in English speaking countries.

(Sturman 1997, p.43)

The implied message here is that there can be variations within a group that can be more significant than the differences between the groups.

The three themes that permeate the literature about the management of cultural diversity in education relate to: (a) teacher impact, (b) teacher and student identity and (c) motivations, goals and outcomes for students from culturally diverse backgrounds. The literature also identifies 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 theorising about multicultural education tends to take a holistic approach that highlights the importance of all these factors and the way they interlink with each another.

The current study's approach

In light of the recent developments in theories of multicultural education, this study has developed a multidimensional model of multicultural education that draws on both the critical educationalist view that education is transformative and on contemporary streams of current multicultural education theory that emphasise the multidimensional nature of education. The multidimensional aspect of the model in this study assumes that school education is experienced and influenced in a number of areas relating to pedagogic choices, opportunities for social engagement, the involvement of families in their children's education, school resources, and the individual students' experiences and understanding of culture, identity and social background. The transformative dimension of the model recognises that students are disadvantaged by socially constructed barriers to learning. In this sense, successful multicultural education requires change, not only for students from culturally different backgrounds, but also more importantly in the various dimensions of the educational system and the schools themselves in order to break down these barriers. A multidimensional model of multicultural education should incorporate and embrace the following aspects:
- staff training and resources
- curriculum change
- school environment and policy change
- parent and community involvement.

Staff training and resources

Professional in-service training should be provided for teachers that addresses culturally diverse education and allows for the provision of pedagogical materials. Within this training teachers should be given extensive guidance about how to change and develop the curriculum so that it is appropriate for the multicultural classroom. In addition, professional teacher training should focus on addressing teachers' attitudes and consciousness about cultural issues.

The pedagogical dimension concerns professional development of school staff that is taking place at a number of levels: through reflective work in the research process; through the development, testing and use of the teacher support materials (TSM) and, finally, by a process of formal professional development, where schools are brought together to work collaboratively in enhancing their intercultural skills. This opportunity integrates learning about the policy context, provision of theory, exploration of the research findings, self-reflective work and the development of intercultural skills for the classroom using the TSM as one resource.

Curriculum change

Schools and education departments should embrace a holistic approach to curriculum change that incorporates cultural diversity across all subject areas. The inclusion of cultural diversity needs to be viewed as a positive learning resource. As part of this process various cultural perspectives, frames of references and content would be incorporated into the curriculum. This would encourage a recognition and development of different learning styles and the development of a participatory, inclusive classroom and dialogue about culture, perspectives and knowledge. To facilitate this change, teachers and educators need to be open minded in their approach and thinking, and give recognition to the cultural content of their pedagogical positions.

Extracurricular acrtivities offer opportunities for students to express and discuss their thoughts about topics such as individual and dual identity, Australian identity, family relations and multicultural schooling. This can be done through student discussion groups, within and across ethnic groups. Within these groups, students should be encouraged to discuss cultural issues and to devise action plans for the school that address cultural diversity issues and encourage positive change.

Other activities could include presentations and interactive sessions with guest lecturers, and workshops and forums involving community members. These types of activities would engender and support student leadership and provide creative outlets for students to develop and express a sense of identity.

School environment and policy change

The policy focus involves the development of a model of best practice that has a focus on the whole school environment and policy changes. In order for this to happen, schools need to appropriately exhibit the following attributes: philosophy and structures; leadership and attitudes; resources and facilities; partnerships and relationships. If the entire school is engaged in a process of collaborative transformation, students are likely to find such changes meaningful, rich and consistent. In this process, the model adopted in this study recognises the skills and capacities students bring to a transformative educational dialogue. Importantly, the model works from the basis that transformative multicultural education is of benefit to all involved in the educational process, not just Arabic-speaking background and other minority students. While the emphasis lies in promoting improved learning outcomes for students who experience educational disadvantage, research clearly indicates that the benefits of inclusive multicultural education extend beyond the student learning environment to the broader school community.

A positive multicultural education model requires an analysis by the staff leadership team of how school policies and mission statements may be made more culturally inclusive. Such a process would benefit from the assistance of parent and community representatives, giving it greater resonance with the school community. To complement this, schools may choose to have a school liaison who communicates with students, parents and community groups about non-curricular aspects of the school environment. Part of the charter for the liaison would be to investigate how the non-curricular aspects may be changed to reflect and encourage cultural diversity. For example, allowances could be incorporated that give consideration to religious practices and holidays. Other initiatives may be a more flexible approach to physical education and the offering of alternative menus at canteens.

Parent and community involvement

The study found that the involvement of parents in the school is crucial to the development of a healthy and positive multicultural school community. Parent committees should be formed that represent parents from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB). These committees could report to staffing committeees. Parents from NESB could attend parent education and skills training as provided by the school or an affiliated group, and facilitated by a bilingual cultural diversity worker where appropriate.

To facilitate improved and more productive communication, schools should provide newsletters and other forms of parental communication in languages appropriate to the languages spoken by parents. Finally, the school should liase with a community social worker who can provide

assistance with the multicultural programs and effectively communicate with parents from NESB.

Ideally there should be a positive involvement of the community in the school. As part of this involvement the community may organise forums and worshops with teachers and students. This could incorporate guest speakers who have expertise in community issues and the history of the local community.

Conclusion

One of the important aims of education is to ensure that all students, no matter what their linguistic, religious, cultural or socioeconomic background, benefit from learning in ways that facilitate their full participation in the economy and in the broader community. While schools may reproduce social inequities, including racism and its effects upon particular minority groups, schools are also in a rare position of being able to directly challenge social injustices. Schools may undertake transformative practices 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. The focus of these changes can be at the school policy and administration level, in pedagogical practices, in curriculum development, and particularly in school–parent relations. Students and parents in the participating study often expressed an explicit desire for learning environments in which their social experiences of racism and exclusion, and their cultural backgrounds, were acknowledged by schools and schools actively engaged with these issues. For this to be achieved, an integrated approach needs to be adopted, wherein 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 between diverse social groups.

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