

The Policy of Values and the Value of Policy: Managing Cultural Diversity in Australian Schools

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Abstract

Current literature on cultural diversity in education suggests that there are numerous and complex factors that contribute to successful multi-cultural education practices. Such factors range from individual pedagogical practice to broader structural factors such as educational policies and curriculum resources. Focusing on the policies and initiatives pertaining to the management of cultural diversity in schools, this article analyses the social and educational context for policy making and the extent to which such policies are penetrating the school fence. Within an integrated theoretical framework that is based on critical race theory and critical education theory, the article examines Australian federal and state policies within a case study of secondary schools in the northern suburbs of Melbourne in the state of Victoria.

Keywords: cultural diversity, Australia, schools, values, educational policies, racism

Introduction

Western education systems, and certainly Australia's, are steeped in a colonial heritage (Kalantzis et al., 1990; Rizvi, 1993; Smolicz, 1999, 2006; Hickling-Hudson, 2002; Matthews, 2004; Joseph, Winzer, & Pollard, 2006). Not only are institutions shaped along colonial lines, but dominant epistemologies carry implicit Western assumptions with little or no opportunity for students to explore other epistemological forms. In this sense, schools actively reflect the power dynamics that mark a post-colonial Australia.

This is by no means an Australian-specific situation as research on race and education in the United Kingdom (Fyfe, 1993) as well as in the United States of America (cf, Bennet, 2001, 2003; Banks, 1997)

has revealed similar connections between dominant white majority groups and non-white minorities. What these studies reveal is a pattern of structural disadvantage at the level of resources and pedagogical approaches that seems to perpetuate prejudicial attitudes and undemocratic practices (Giroux, & McLaren, 1989; Gougis, 1986).

As this article argues, school education involves many factors, sites and dimensions. The multicultural dimensions-approach underpinning the study reported here recognises a combination of influences and sites of learning: curricular learning, assessment, and feedback; social engagement during extracurricular activities; informal and formal dialogue among teachers, students, families and communities; within classrooms, playgrounds, sports training sessions, music and artistic groups, student representative bodies, canteens, locker rooms; and in what happens outside of classrooms before, during and after school.

The core objective of the project described here is to engage students, parents and teachers and enable them to reflect critically about optimal avenues for dealing with cultural diversity and inter-cultural relationships. The collaborative initiatives introduced into the participating schools are intended to be interactive and reflexive rather than rigid and prescriptive. They are designed to permeate the school's culture at the level of administrative structures; the school's connectedness to its immediate milieu of parents and community organizations; and curriculum resources and pedagogical practice that is linked to current policy initiatives. To illustrate how the project has approached these objectives, the Australian (both federal and state) policy context is first set out to provide an overview of the key aims and philosophies that drive education in Australia. The article then provides a more detailed description of the project's research approach and findings within its partnership schools and explores how, and whether, policy satisfies its objectives in schools located in culturally diverse settings.

The Social Background to the Socio-political Context for Education Policy Formation

Though Australia's federal government has no constitutional authority over education, it does maintain a significant interest in steering policy initiatives that it deems to be of national concern. For example, foreign language study is considered 'an important cultural and economic asset for Australia'¹, and the federal government asserts certain priorities in its funding for language studies. Similarly, joint policy initiatives are negotiated between federal and individual state governments in relation to children with special needs, including migrant students.

While Australia has moved on from the imperatives of cultural uniformity implicit in the educational policies of the 1950s and 1960s, a general national standardisation is still evident in schools' learning priorities, curricular structures and pedagogy. Of specific interest to this article, is the reinvigoration of debates over multiculturalism, which in turn is placing renewed emphasis on concepts of citizenship and democracy, and more specifically, shared national 'values' in education. Post September 11 (2001) and the Bali bombings (2002), these concepts have taken on more intense meaning in the West. In the federal government's *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity (Updating the 1999 New Agenda for Multicultural Australia: Strategic directions for 2003-2006)* policy statement, 9/11 and the Bali incident are acknowledged by the Prime Minister for their 'significant impact on community relations in Australia.' (Howard, 2003: 1) 'National security begins with domestic harmony' (Howard, 2003: 7) the report states, and in achieving this, it repeatedly invokes 'Australian values'. For Australia, the bombing of its Embassy in Jakarta in 2004 and the London bombings in July, 2005, in which eight of the thousands of Australians living in London were injured, resonated even more personally for Australians by striking at a national symbol and our Anglo-Celtic 'centre'. These incidents were followed by violent riots in Sydney's Cronulla in December, 2005, and this left a more immediate and threatening imprint on the Australian psyche. In particular, the Cronulla riots made more potent the importance of 'Australian-ness' (however that might be defined) as the global tensions of 'terrorism' entered the domestic domain. Although the Cronulla riots were widely cited as 'race riots', Prime Minister Howard disavowed the notion that Australia is 'racist':

I believe yesterday's behaviour was completely unacceptable but I'm not going to put a general tag (of) racism on the Australian community (Sydney Morning Herald, 2005).

The Prime Minister's linguistic reticence on matters of diversity, race and ethnicity has been effective in subtly controlling a discourse of denial and repudiation of cultural difference that edges Australia back to the monocultural imperatives of the 1950s and '60s. Whichever linguistic contrivance is employed, the inherent cultural complexity of Australian society remains the base reality. This was acknowledged in the 1999 *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*, which noted the inevitability of a continually evolving local cultural environment, enforced by the complexities of globalisation:

This world will be characterised by advances in information and communication technologies, population diversity arising from international

mobility and migration, and complex environmental and social challenges (*The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*: 1999).²

To manage these changes, the task of assisting young people to develop a fuller understanding of their rights and responsibilities as Australian citizens was identified as a core goal of the *Declaration*. A better understanding and acknowledgement of 'cultural and linguistic diversity' (*The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*: 1999, Goal 305) and the view that a student's school experience ought to be 'free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability' (*The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*: 1999, Goal 3.1) were outlined as core goals. More broadly, however, the *Declaration* places primary emphasis on fostering the individual's capacities to develop their 'Australian-ness', rather than on an accommodation of the diversity of values present in an increasingly multicultural – or culturally diverse – society. Indeed, the issue of a generic set of 'values' in Australia's plural setting continues to pose a challenge to policy-makers and educators, as it becomes more urgent in an environment increasingly charged with the politics of difference.

Federal Education and Multicultural Policy

The central themes underpinning national education priorities in secondary school curricula include citizenship and democracy studies, and the broad question of 'values'. In 2002 values were moved to the forefront of educational policy when the government commissioned a comprehensive report to evaluate values education in Australian schools. The *Values Education Study* (August, 2003) was reflective of a much broader move internationally to arrive at a framework of universal values that transcend culturally or religiously inscribed values. In designing and implementing values education processes for the study, a range of well established programs became the structure around which schools could develop a culture of respect and civic responsibility.³

Although *Nine Values for Australian Education* emerged – care and compassion; doing your best; fair go; freedom; honesty and trustworthiness; integrity; respect; responsibility; and understanding; tolerance and inclusion⁴ – collectively, schools engaged in the study found 'values' challenging to identify and difficult to abridge across their diverse communities. There was never really a definitive 'universal' finding on values and so, for the purposes of the values study's final report, Halstead and Taylor's definition was relied upon, that is, values are:

. . . the principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable' (*Values Education Study*, 2003: 2).

Doubts were expressed regarding whether this interpretation captured the most desirable definition of values, in particular, the claim that:

This [definition of values] carries a cognitive weighting which potentially obscures the motivational aspect . . . we're still grappling with the problem of moving the student from "knowing the good to be desirable" to "desiring to do the good" (Hill, 2004: 5).

Critics stressed the need to separately identify values as: democratic values; ultimate values; and educational values and the importance of increasing the degrees of choice in schools through building partnerships with parents and the community in order 'to counteract some of the negative impacts of the media, politicians, the profit motive and the like' (Hill, 2004: 5). Defining values, however, does not stop in the educational policy context. As far as 'Australian values' and their articulation in the *New Agenda for Multicultural Australia* policy is concerned, broader, rather de-personalised concepts of citizenship, democratic institutions and the rule of law are offered as central to the interests of community harmony and social cohesion.

The notion of values is further defined through the federal government's *Living in Harmony* initiative, which was extended under the *New Agenda for Multicultural Australia* for a further four years with funding of A\$3.5 million a year. *Living in Harmony* includes Harmony Day, celebrated on 21 March (International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination), and is widely promoted in primary and secondary schools as the flagship for cultural diversity. Harmony Day invokes yet another set of ideals to which Australians should aspire and that 'represent commonly shared Australian values and concepts' – commitment; goodwill; understanding; diversity; community; harmony (*Living in Harmony*: Australian Government).⁵ While these various articulations of values are situated as central to social cohesion and 'Australian-ness', in terms of education policy and its recognition of cultural diversity at the structural or pedagogical level, and in terms of actively facilitating the building of parent and community partnerships, very little leadership has emerged out of national policy initiatives.

State Education and Multicultural Policy

The platform for Victoria's state school curriculum in the areas of multiculturalism and the teaching of languages other than English (LOTE) are centred on two policy documents: the *Multicultural Policy*

for Victorian Schools developed in 1997 and the *Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools* established in 2001. Since then, the *Blueprint for Government Schools* (2003) and the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority's (VCAA) *Victorian Curriculum Reform Project* (2004) have more generally provided the framework for Victorian Government school curriculum. In addition to these, on 1 January, 2005, the new *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 Policy for Victorian Schools 1997* was a collaborative effort between the Victorian Government's then-Department of Education, the Ministerial Advisory Councils on Languages Other Than English (MACLOTE) and English as a Second Language (ESL). The policy was developed in response to the *Multicultural Victoria Inquiry* of 1995, which identified 'the need to develop a specific multicultural education policy for schools, to provide intercultural education in primary and secondary schools, and to develop strategies to combat prejudice, racial tension or misunderstanding in schools.' (*Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools: 1997: 7*). It sets out a range of recommendations intended to move multicultural initiatives from the periphery of educational policy, into the mainstream of the state's school curriculum. The primary target of the policy was to ensure that:

By 2006 all students P-12 will have multicultural perspectives delivered across all eight key learning areas (The Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, LOTE, Mathematics, Science, Study of Society and Environment, and Technology) and incorporated into all aspects of school life (*The Adelaide Declaration: 1999: 9*).

The policy, nevertheless, only embodies a set of 'recommendations' and while an Implementation Strategy has been set out by DET, this is limited to links to written support materials rather than through strategies to develop ways to incorporate the policy into Key Learning Areas (KLAs).

In November, 2003, a *Blueprint for Government Schools* was released, identifying three rather broadly defined priority areas for government school reform: recognising and responding to diverse student needs; building the skills of the education workforce to enhance the teaching-learning relationship; and continuously improving schools. Under the *Blueprint's* Flagship Strategy 1, community partnerships – between schools, community agencies and industry – are

encouraged in defining schools as the learning centres of communities. As well as this acknowledgement of a greater need for cross-community engagement, in its conclusion the *Blueprint* acknowledged that education inequities exist.

The Government's case for further reform has been built on the understanding that current inequities across the system are unacceptable. Every government school student, irrespective of the school they attend, where they live or their social or economic status, is entitled to a high-quality school education and a genuine opportunity to succeed (*Blueprint for Government Schools*, 2003: 28).

To this end, completion of Year 12 or its equivalent by 90 percent of young Victorians is targeted by 2010 (*Blueprint for Government Schools*, 2003, Appendix 2).⁶ In achieving this objective of success and equity, the *Blueprint* encourages school self-management and endorses the strengthening of teacher-student-parent and community engagement. In other words, the need is recognized but very little is provided in terms of financial support in areas of high need and low access to resources; professional development, pedagogical or curricular resources for teachers managing classrooms of students who have little English and little or no educational experience; or strategies to cope with culturally diverse and possibly traumatized refugee students and/or parents.

Instead, the constraints of limited resources in government schools – particularly those in areas with high populations of refugee families with limited cultural, social and financial capital and often in need of supplementary support – are forced to independently seek assistance from local industry and non-government organizations to meet the complex demands of their school communities. Such partnerships are forged with varying degrees of success and longevity. They therefore often struggle to form an ongoing or steady source of support.

On a curricular level, the *Blueprint* made recommendations for the identification and development of 'essential learnings', to which the VCAA's *Victorian Curriculum Reform Project* (2004) responded with new curriculum standards, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). Released in March, 2005, the VELS 'Overview' outlined a new essential learning framework for Victorian government schools. In an effort to adapt the school curriculum to the changing social demands on young people, the VELS specifically addressed: 'The economic and social changes associated with the development of our global, knowledge-based world and their implications for school.' (*Victorian Essential Learning Standards*, 2005: 1).

The federal government's values underpinned the VELs 'Three Pillar' approach centred on: disciplines of knowledge and key concepts, generic or cross-curriculum skills and personal and social development (*Victorian Curriculum Reform, 2004, Consultation Paper: 3*). Rather than being prescriptive, these three strands are seen as transferable and integrated. Where students are learners of English as a second language, for example, it is acknowledged that they will come from various backgrounds and levels of learning in their first language. Under these circumstances: 'Teachers need to devise appropriate teaching and assessment practices for these students.' (*Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004, Consultation Paper: 11*) The primary purpose of VELs is to identify what is *essential* and leave schools to devise appropriate curricular programs that reflect the needs and interests of their school community, drawing upon available resources and expertise. As this policy indicates, and as is indicated in federal education policy, flexibility, autonomy and the structural sustainability of developing strategies to support multicultural communities are rather vague in terms of their implementation.

Project Overview

Both the *Adelaide Declaration* and the *Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools* recognise that the purpose of education is to ensure that all students – irrespective of race, gender or religious background – benefit from learning in ways that facilitate their full participation in public, community and economic life. When this Project started in its current multidimensional form in 2003-2004, the preliminary research findings (that is pre-testing) suggested that students of Arabic-speaking background (ASB) exhibited negative tendencies in key areas relating to teacher-student relations, perceptions of interethnic relations at school, confidence in achieving a tertiary place, beliefs about whether racism affects learning and behaviour, and family emphasis upon, and attitudes towards, education. More worrying perhaps was the fact that ASB students were more likely to express distrust towards teachers, particularly based around a perceived lack of cultural understanding. They were less confident in their abilities to achieve education or training beyond secondary school, and were more likely to hold more limited educational ambitions than students from other backgrounds. 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 order to address these negative trends the project, with its various elements designed around a multi-tiered approach, aims to provide complementary educational and structural resources that are

sustainable. The need for complementary resources, such as engaging parents and communities in schools, is identified in both federal and state policy statements, but they remain under-resourced and, therefore, under-developed. While the recognition of cultural diversity in schools is celebrated annually through events such as Harmony Day, these do not bring structural, systemic or sustainable change. Nor do they encourage deeper cultural transformation; instead, 'teachers often find themselves encouraging students to sing "ethnic" songs, eat ethnic foods, and do ethnic dances' rather than 'engage students in provocative thinking . . . and lived realities' (Ladson-Billings, 1998: 22). The project specifically aims to fill these needs by first recognising the unique diversity of culture, language, religion and ethnic background within the school. That unique composition, a microcosm of the wider community, becomes a primary and complementary educational resource.

The project began by focusing on ASB students and families in the north-western suburbs of Melbourne where there is a high proportion of migrants from this cultural group. This is reflected in the student populations of the project's participating schools, each of which fall into Group 9 of DET's 'Like Schools' ranking. Like Schools divides schools into nine groups reflecting the proportion of LBOTE (Language Background Other Than English) students and the proportion of students who are in receipt of the federal government's Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or Youth Allowance (YA). In 2003 there were 36 state secondary schools falling into Group 9, 29 (or 81 percent) of which were located in the north-west region. (Schools of the Future, DET, 2006) The three schools from this area that have participated in the project – Maryland Secondary College, Brookvale Secondary College and Clayfield Secondary College⁷ – typify this demographic.

Research Approach and Longitudinal Change

At the end of 2005, the project had gathered a body of research sufficient to examine longitudinal change across a three-year period – 2003 to 2005 – among ASB students. The cohort isolated for this analysis was characterised by from the 'Like Schools' Group 9 and focuses on four specific areas where positive change was evident: students' relationships with teachers; relationships between ethnic groups at school; attitudes towards racism; and family attitudes towards school. Several significant shifts within the research cohorts of 2003 and 2005 were observed within the Arabic community, including: the increase of ASB students born overseas; their country of origin; language spoken at home; a decrease in Muslim families; and an increase in Christian families.

Country of birth – Figure 1: (for all figures see appendix) In 2003, the majority of ASB students surveyed (72 percent) were born in Australia. By 2005 this had changed significantly with only 31 percent of students born in Australia and 69 percent born overseas, a high proportion of whom are from Iraq. Many of these students were recently settled in Australia. In 2003 only 11 percent of students had arrived within the previous four years compared to 20 percent in the 2005 survey. This means that almost twice the number of students in 2005 had experienced minimal, if any, primary school education in Australia in preparation for secondary school, making this their first exposure to education in the English language. Not only was there a greater predominance of Iraqi-born students among those of Middle Eastern descent, but a greater mix of cultural groups more generally were represented among those defined as Arabs or Muslims in 2005.

Language and religion – Figures 2 and 3: The overwhelming majority of students surveyed in 2003 – 92 percent – were Arabic-speakers but with the influx of Iraqi students recorded in the 2005 survey, came a higher proportion of Assyrian speakers. With this shift came a change in religious affiliation as Assyrians are also Christians, as indicated in the next two graphs. Again, not only was there a change in Middle Eastern language groups represented, but an overall increase in language diversity appeared in 2005. Students were asked to list the languages they speak. The majority were multilingual, but it is their first language listed that has been used for this graph.

Students' relationships with teachers – Figure 4: Despite an increase in overall cultural, religious and linguistic complexity among the groups surveyed, improvements from 2003 to 2005 were evident in student relationships at school. This coincided with the introduction of the project's CDF into the schools to facilitate parental engagement and to interact with school staff on issues affecting ASB parents and families. Attitudinal changes were quite marked. Students indicated that they were more comfortable talking with teachers and staff members about any difficulties they might be experiencing at school. Only a small number of students surveyed (3 percent) were 'always' comfortable with teachers and staff in 2003. This shot up to 32 percent in 2005 and students who were 'not at all' comfortable with this proposition had fallen dramatically by 2005.

Relationships between ethnic groups at school – Figure 5: In 2003, a majority of students surveyed – 53 percent – thought that relationships were 'average' among ethnic groups and the remaining 48 percent believed they were either 'good' (42 percent) or 'excellent' (6 percent). Despite the increased cultural and linguistic diversity, the

greater mix of Muslims and Christians, and the increase of students born outside Australia two years later, perceptions had changed, becoming markedly more positive. The response 'excellent', in particular, reflected just over a three-fold increase and more than half the students believed ethnic relationships were 'good' in 2005, compared to 42 percent in 2003.

Attitudes towards racism – Figure 6: Overall, the ASB students surveyed were also more positive in 2005 about the wider community's attitude to racism and, more particularly, perceptions of them. A clear 'yes' when asked if they feel that they are positively perceived by Australian society registered more highly in 2005 (37 percent compared to 22 percent in 2003) and less students felt negatively about public perceptions of them (only 10 percent in 2005 compared to 23 percent in 2003). Four years had elapsed since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York when some Arab and/or Muslim students experienced the most overt negativity towards them at school. For instance, one Lebanese girl in Year 10 recalled a primary school experience:

' . . . after 9/11, you know what happened in America, they all used to say to me "she's got a bomb in her pencil case", she's going to bomb the school, just 'cause I was a Muslim'.

The Cronulla riots in Sydney in December 2005 came just days after the surveys were completed, so no changes due to this were registered in the research. The fact that media coverage of 'terrorism' and racial tensions had been quieter for some time may also contribute to the shift in students' responses to their perceptions of racism in Australia. Again, despite the students mixing in a more culturally diverse school community, the percentage of students who saw racism as a problem had fallen by 27 percent in the two years to 2005. This was tempered by more students believing that racism is 'somewhat' a problem and those who believe it is it 'not much' of a problem. Only a very small percentage of students, 6 percent in each year, denied that racism was a problem at all.

Family attitudes towards school – Figure 7: Significantly for the project and its introduction of a CDF into the schools to facilitate parents' involvement in the school, students reported more family interaction about school and study. Only one fifth of the students (19 percent) surveyed in 2003 said that they talk with their families 'regularly' about school and study, however, 61 percent (mostly girls) said that they speak with their families 'sometimes'. Even though more girls were surveyed both in 2003 and 2005, it appears that they outnumber boys in their readiness to talk with family about school and

study. This was particularly evident in 2005 when 47 percent of the 54 percent of students who said that they speak with their families 'regularly', were girls.

Girls were enthusiastic in sharing stories during student focus groups. Their honesty exposed some of the myths generated by the media about Arab and Muslim girls in particular. For example, in 2005 the Australian media reported that teenage Lebanese girls were being 'exported as brides' (*The Australian*, 2005; Rutledge, 2005) and while some ASB girls do continue to live within the constraints of traditional expectations, many others are encouraged to pursue alternative options that are not circumscribed by their culture or religion. This variety of experience is reflected in this selection of girls' comments:

'They [my parents] want me to be a lawyer, but I'm not, like, smart enough to be that.'

'My mum wants me to work first and then she wants me to get married and have a family.'

'My father wants me to be something good because he never got to be. He wants me to be better than him.'

'With my family, my mum thinks that school is actually corrupting me because when I go home I don't speak, like, Arabic and that. And she wants me to speak full Arabic. And she always says that school's corrupting me. And she always wants me to go to Arabic school to learn Arabic.'

Studies on the under-achievement of ethnic minorities in Britain have found that:

schools which are successful at overcoming prejudice, discrimination, marginalisation and underachievement are those which take time to talk with students and parents, and where they are prepared to consider and debate values as well as strategies to overcome inequity (Gilbert, 2004: 258-59).

This reflects the project's approach and, at this mid-point stage, research has elicited evidence supporting its premise, that this is the first critical step towards dismantling perceptions of difference and simulating a sense of inclusion. It also confirms that the rhetoric of education and multicultural policy, while it recognises the value and complexity of Australia's cultural diversity, it fails to follow through strategically or operationally, rendering it rather detached to the lived realities of what it propounds.

Evaluation

This small sample of the project research recognises one of critical

race theory's signature themes that for any meaningful positive change to happen, discursive counter-narratives are necessary. As insights 'from the ground' they, first, highlight the potential to expose, through inviting students to share stories, popular myths that stigmatise groups such as those generated in the media. Second, it sheds light on the increasing degree of complexity that lurks beneath the terms 'multiculturalism' and 'cultural diversity'. Identifying this reveals several challenges in meeting federal and state policy goals, not only in terms of identifying a platform of universal values, but in terms of achieving access and equity across schools without adequately responding to economic disadvantage or complexity of cultural composition. Stimulating counter-narratives is, therefore, still not sufficient. What is needed is to challenge the existing socio-economic structures in a way that provides equal opportunities for all irrespective of race, gender or religion. In other words school administrative structures and pedagogical approaches ought to be reformed constantly to become and remain indicative of and responsive to its various student groups. Only then can the experience of a collectively racialised identity be challenged and critically debunked.

As argued earlier in this article, central to the federal government's renewed commitments enshrined in the *New Agenda for Multicultural Australia* are community harmony, access and equity, and productive diversity. Inclusiveness, it states, is the 'key to the success of Australian multiculturalism' (*Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity*, 2003: 5) and in achieving this:

'The primary objective of the Access and Equity strategy is to ensure that government services and programs are attuned to the realities of diversity in Australian society. There is a strong case for better developing even greater levels of government investment in vulnerable individuals. Otherwise, the cost of remedying the problems that stem from social dislocation and lost opportunities for personal advancement will be greater in the years ahead. This is particularly relevant for refugees with a history of torture and trauma and who have had a chaotic educational background . . . (*Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity*, 2003: 8).

Vulnerability, in this context, is construed here as embodying those struggling against limited access to resources due to language barriers, economic instability, access to employment and possible psychological damage due to their refugee experience. Some, or all, of these might be attributed to the students engaged in the project research who, defined as Group 9 within DET's 'Like Schools', are in receipt of government financial support, live in highly diverse regions of low socio-economic advantage and often have little experience of education in English. Attuning services and programs must reach beyond

policy recognition of their needs to implementation strategies and funding if such students are to have more than a slim hope of being among the '90 percent of young people in Victoria [who] will successfully complete Year 12 or its equivalent' (*Blueprint for Government Schools*, 2003, Appendix 2) by 2010. For the expectation to be otherwise is what Gloria Ladson-Billings would call 'race-neutral' in its assumptions that policy can transmute into successful outcomes for *all* students without funding intervention to support 'multicultural perspectives delivered across all eight key learning areas' (*The Adelaide Declaration*, 1999: 9) particularly in schools such as those in Group 9. The responsibility for lack of achievement and, consequently, more deeply entrenched social marginalisation, thus shifts to the parents and students themselves in their failure to seize the educational opportunities that multicultural and educational policies have intended to open up for them. As Ladson-Billings explains:

This race-neutral perspective purports to see deficiency as an individual phenomenon. Thus, instruction is conceived as a generic set of teaching skills that should work for all students. When these strategies or skills fail to achieve desired results, the students, not the techniques, are found to be lacking (Ladson-Billings, 1998: 19).

The 'multidimensional transformative model' of multicultural education advocated by this project attempts to move away from such race- or culture-neutral constructions of education that posits teachers-students as passive transmitters-receivers of information. The transformative approach believes in both recognizing and understanding cultural difference and also in challenging the barriers that prevent minority groups from accessing particular social goods and society at large. Therefore it is both aimed at developing students' sense of their various cultural identities and in giving all students the skills and knowledge necessary to access the mainstream culture as well as other cultures. In doing so, the transformative model promotes the transformation of practices and ideas that contribute to the systemic disadvantages often found alongside cultural difference.

Project research has found that this systemic disadvantage is compounded when policy invokes adaptability and autonomy, as in the *Blueprint* and VELs for example, that places increasing pressures and responsibility on: local school management structures and teachers through 'school autonomy' and 'self management'; and on learners, such as the 'Three Pillar' curriculum framework, which is designed to embrace learning flexibility. Arguably, this shift towards loosely defined values and emphasis on flexibility reflects a broader political trend of governments, toward shifting responsibility for outcomes and manage-

ment of diversity onto local communities, and individual schools. This trend is tied to the broader decline of the welfare state and emergence of neo-liberal 'governance' models of educational reform. Parents, often with little or no English or education experience, are left to negotiate the Australian education system, and their children to assume the role of go-between in managing their own education.

In avoiding explicit debates over the impact and implications of cultural difference in education, policy discourse sidesteps the complex issues of negotiating cultural difference by rhetorically falling back on liberal notions of tolerance. The emphasis on common values evident in recent initiatives such as the *Discovering Democracy* initiative suggests that policy-makers favour a uni-dimensional approach to integration, which de-emphasises curricular incorporation of cultural difference as a mode of encouraging broader participation, in favour of encouraging acculturative adaptation among CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) students. The framing of values within the overarching concepts of citizenship, democratic institutions and the rule of law, as articulated in the *New Agenda*, places the onus of belonging, and for acquiring 'Australian-ness', on the individual *without* transforming the policy ideal of 'access and equity' into institutional practices that might facilitate the transition from 'refugee' to 'citizen'.

Conclusion

One of the key findings of the project that forms the basis for this discussion is that, to be effective in culturally complex school settings, interventions must be multi-dimensional. That is, pedagogical practice and curricular delivery; teacher professional development; student and parent engagement; and building community relationships with the school work most effectively when approached holistically. Engaging each of these constituents within the school and its immediate community, each become stakeholders in the broader social outcomes.

Critical equity pedagogy that reflects inclusive educational policies is a good starting point but cannot be sufficient to effect positive change. Instead, critical pedagogy needs to be equipped with the necessary resources to challenge social inequalities in the educational environment. Students and parents who took part in this project indicated a strong desire for learning environments where there are less pronounced social experiences of racism and exclusion, and where their cultural identities are acknowledged and actively engaged with. This study's philosophical approach and its empirical findings (Mansouri, 2005; Mansouri & Trembath, 2005) suggest that school-external factors including socio-political dynamics not only affect students' sense of identity, but also their educational experiences. This is

why holistic approaches to educational challenges are always more likely to generate positive outcomes than one-dimensional remedies.

Notes

1. Federal support is provided through programs giving priority to 10 languages, six of which are European, two Asian (Thai and Vietnamese), Aboriginal languages and Arabic. From 'The Australian Education System', Australian Education International website: <http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI> (as at January 2005)
2. *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* was developed at the 10th Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in Adelaide, 22-23 April 1999 by State, Territory and Federal Government Ministers. See <http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/adelaide/adelaide.htm>
3. Australian-based examples of such frameworks include Philosophy for Schools, which promotes the teaching of philosophy in primary and secondary schools. It is aimed at stimulating children to think about philosophical ideas, rather than values specifically (see <http://www.jcsav.vic.edu.au/vaps/info.htm>). You Can Do It! Education designed by Dr Michael Bernard, an educational psychologist, developed the You Can Do It! Education program to address mental health issues – emotional, behavioural and academic – affecting school age children (<http://www.youcandoit.com.au/about.html>) and Costa's Habits of Mind, comprising 16 habits of mind developed by Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick, based in California, are less about values and more about teaching skills, such as, effective thinking, intelligent behaviour in the face of difficulties, reasoning and creativity (<http://www.habits-of-mind.net>). International examples include William Glasser's 'Choice Theory', based on the premise that we choose all that we do, is used widely across industries for people who manage, teach, counsel or supervise others. It has been developed into the Quality Schools Programme (<http://www.wglasser.com>), the Tribes Teaching Learning Community program, an American-based organisation developing 'character education' values through a 'resiliency-building' model that is neither a program nor a curriculum, but a 'process'. It is used in response to the *Improving America's Schools Act* of 1994 (<http://www.tribes.com>) PeaceBuilders, an anti-violence campaign funded by the U.S. *Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act*. Its focus is on eradicating miscreant behaviour to create a safe school environment for primary and secondary school children (<http://www.peacebuilders.com>); UNESCO's Living Values Educational Programme, which has very much a global focus operating in 74 countries. Its focus is to nurture positive teacher-student and student-student relationships through twelve universal values (<http://www.livingvalues.net>); as well as spiritually-driven approaches like the Virtues Project, founded upon the values of the Baha'i Faith and was developed as a neutral values teaching programmes by Canadians Linda Kavelin Popov, Dan Popov and John Kavelin. Its focus is upon moral and spiritual development across cultures in schools, the community, corporations and for couples (<http://www.virtuesproject.com>) and the Sathya Sai schools program whose philosophy is framed by the Indian tradition. This organisation takes a more spiritual approach to its Human Values in Education programme, embracing five 'Ds' – devotion, dis-

cipline, duty, discrimination, determination. Sri Sathya Sai Baba's motto is 'the end of education is character'. (See <http://www.sathyasai.org/saieducation/content.htm> or <http://www.saieducare.org/html/index.html> [under construction]). There were also more secular approaches adopted, with human rights as the central determinant, such as the framework developed by UNESCO'S Asia Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education (APNIEVE).

4. These nine values and their broad definitions are:

Care and Compassion: Care for self and others

Doing Your Best: Seek to accomplish something worthy and admirable, try hard, pursue excellence

Fair Go: Pursue and protect the common good where all people are treated fairly for a just society

Freedom: Enjoy all the rights and privileges of Australian citizenship free from unnecessary interference or control, and stand up for the rights of others

Honesty and Trustworthiness: Be honest, sincere and seek the truth

Integrity: Act in accordance with principles of moral and ethical conduct, ensure consistency between words and deeds

Respect: Treat others with consideration and regard, respect another person's point of view

Responsibility: Be accountable for one's own actions, resolve differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways, contribute to society and to civic life, take care of the environment

Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion: Be aware of others and their cultures, accept diversity within a democratic society, being included and including others

5. *Living in Harmony*, An Australian Government Initiative. See Harmony Day Values at <http://www.harmony.gov.au/what-is-hd/values.htm> . These values and their broad definitions are:

Commitment: Uniting for Australia's future and gaining a greater understanding and awareness of our dynamic multicultural society, our democratic system, and our freedoms, language and laws

Goodwill: The bonds that holds us together; celebrating community harmony and our commitment to embracing traditional Australian values – justice, equality, fairness and mateship

Understanding: It starts with you; upholding your culture and traditional heritage while embracing respect for and appreciation of others.

Diversity: Australians have been born here or migrated here; we come from around 200 different backgrounds

Community: The spirit of cooperation; taking a stand against racism, prejudice and intolerance

Harmony: Bringing all together to celebrate the many faces of Australia and treating those around us with consideration and dignity

6. See *Blueprint for Government Schools* Appendix 2: the Goals and Targets for Education and Training.
7. Maryland Secondary College, Brookvale Secondary College and Clayfield Girls Secondary College are not the schools' real names.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Country of birth



Figure 2: Languages and religion



Figure 3: Language and religion



Figure 4: Students' relationships with teachers



Figure 5: Relationships between ethnic groups at school



Figure 6: Attitudes towards racism



Figure 7: Family attitudes towards school

