UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

Representations of cultural diversity in school and community settings

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1   Introduction

Multicultural Australia today is a country of paradoxes… most younger Australians of diverse cultural backgrounds feel positive about their lives, although they feel somewhat insecure about what the future holds in today's uncertain world… while the value of multiculturalism is almost universally endorsed, it is clearly still unfinished business in practice [there are] ambivalences that point to limits of tolerance and unease about excessive difference. (Ang, et al 2006 p. 25)

I see that Australia is more and more moving towards a closed and insular society as a result of directions at the federal level. (Muslim spokesperson Sept 2006)

The quotes and comments noted above underscore the complexities of the issues to be discussed in this paper on the challenges of dealing with ethno-cultural diversity in our education system in the current context.

As a multicultural, multi-faith community, the Australian nation in the 21st Century is a microcosm of the world. As one of the world's wealthiest nations on a per capita basis, globalisation, international trade and technology may have brought the world to Australia's doorstep and afforded it material comforts unimagined by people even a generation ago – but this, it appears, has not alleviated a sense of anxiety about the future. While environmental concerns about climate change have brought fears for the sustainability of our western lifestyle and the planet in general, fears of international terrorism, increasing migration levels due to world catastrophes and wars – often magnified by governments and the media - have created a crisis of identity in our communities.

In creating the global village, technology and the market should have made us more accepting of cultural difference – yet, a perusal of current news items suggests that the opposite is the case.

The evolution of Australia from a homogenous predominantly Anglo-Celtic nation that imposed restrictive immigration policies for non –white migrants, to the modern cosmopolitan representation of a global community is predominantly the result of the policy of Multiculturalism. Introduced in the early 1970s by the Whitlam Labor government, the policy was strengthened by the Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser through the Galbally Report of 1978 and retained by partisan support during the Hawke an Keating years. Until recently, Australia's forays into multiculturalism have been much celebrated by governments of both persuasions. However, the meaning, purpose and impact of Multiculturalism have come under increasing scrutiny during the last decade.

The debates over the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, the increased racism towards Muslims in our community; the hothouse events of the Cronulla beach riots in December 2005; the community reaction to the plan to build a Muslim school south west of Sydney, as well as the debate and implementation of the citizenship and values test for migrants in 2007 have been used by activists and academics alike as

indicators of a higher level of intolerance in post September 11 Australia – a new myopia which doesn't want to see beyond the white picket fence.

This view is contested by leading politicians who are adamant that Australians aren't overtly racist. According to these politicians the Cronulla beach riots were not about race and ethnicity, rather about rival youth gangs. Despite condemning the violence that took place at Cronulla, the then Prime Minister, John Howard insisted `I do not accept there is underlying racism in this country, I have always taken a more optimistic view of the character of the Australian people." (Murphy & Davies 2005). They maintain that Australia still has one of the most tolerant racially diverse societies on the planet. Indeed, some reports find that migrants see Australia as a very tolerant country compared to their country of origin (Ang et al, 2002, p. 23). On the other hand, critics suggest that in defining Multiculturalism simply in terms of social cohesion and building a unified nation we fail to address the very real issues of discrimination and racism that exist in Australia. (Babacan 2006 p. 54).

Within this contexts how do civic leaders and policy makers work with communities to build civil societies based on principles of social justice, equity and social inclusion?
What should be the role of education, and schools in particular, in converting the challenges of cultural diversity into opportunities for children and young people?
This short report explores some of these important questions.

Executive Summary

This research project uses a qualitative case study approach to investigate how a small group of schools and their related communities are addressing cultural diversity issues within the current context of major community debates about national identity, immigration and ethnicity. The schools are situated in different geographic areas of Sydney and have different cultural compositions. Two are culturally diverse while two are situated in culturally homogenous communities.

The project examines what models of practice these schools are implementing in their school programs and policies in addressing issues of cultural diversity and community cohesion and place them within the various discourses on multiculturalism.

Investigations centre on the connection between schools and their local communities in exercising leadership to achieve a socially cohesive educational environment for students and to how best extend this in the local community. It analyses student and teacher understandings of cultural diversity issues and their manifestations in the classroom as well as community attitudes to the cultural diversification of their neighbourhoods.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Some of the research questions being addressed include:

- What are some observable representations of ethno-cultural diversity that exist in these schools?

- How are these schools dealing with the added challenges that our multicultural communities present in the current context?

- How can schools and communities work together to exercise leadership in promoting cultural cohesion in diverse cultural environments and culturally diverse settings?

- What models of dialogue/discourse are most successful between schools and communities with high levels of cultural diversity?

Individual and focus group interviews were employed as data gathering methods. Interviewees included school principals or deputy principals, a selection of teachers, some with ESL experience or teachers responsible for any multicultural programs. Interviews were carried out with a number of key informants including a Muslim school principal, community leaders, youth workers, and young people –students and young adults, who were interviewed to gain a broader view of the schools and their neighbourhoods. Additional data was gathered from school and community programs and policy documents.

The challenges
Schools address diversity on two levels. On a pedagogical level, teachers must meet the learning needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They should be professionally skilled to understand the issues related to links between cultural maintenance and educational outcomes – including first language teaching.

Schools are also empowered with being agents for social cohesion within the community. They are faced with the challenge of promoting greater understanding of cultural diversity among students. Despite our diverse population, teaching remains a primarily middle class, Anglo-Australian profession (Allard, 2007). So the question has to be asked, if teachers generally reflect the values and beliefs of the dominant class, how well are we training our teachers to meet the challenges of ethno-cultural diversity in our classrooms?   Should ESL be mandatory for all teachers (as one teacher noted in the research), to enable them to create learning experiences that are meaningful to all students?

Other questions that arise in this discussion about diversity in schools relate to the nature of the curriculum –what is emphasized and how responsive and reflective of difference it is –both in terms of content and how it is taught. Another relates to the question of effective teaching and what works in classroom settings.

Educational institutions – including schools and the academy- must engage with the debates about representations of ethno-cultural diversity, nationhood and identity. Indeed their contributions must help to shape these discourses. Professional educators, in schools in particular, need to focus their attention on the roles they play in converting the challenges of ethno-cultural diversity into opportunities for all children and young people

In setting the context for the research this report provides a brief overview of the how diversity is defined and the extent of its representation in our classrooms. In NSW government schools 26% of students were LBOTE with most located in three Sydney regions – South Western, Sydney and Western Sydney (NSW DET 2005:5). The main languages other than English spoken at home among NSW students were Chinese languages (18%); Arabic (12.5%); Vietnamese (5.9%); Pacific Islander languages (5.6.0%); Tagalog (3.7%); and Hindi (3.5%).

Findings

This study found that the representations of cultural diversity in schools were often shaped by the nature of a school and its community and the response of the school's leadership team. As cultural diversity varied across Sydney, so did the ways schools responded to that diversity. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was more likely that a school in a culturally diverse community would have a significant focus on cultural diversity and makes it a central feature of its activities. Though some activities were 'folkloric' and centred on food festivals, others were innovative in their approach.
Schools in less culturally diverse communities did not see the need for a great emphasis on activities promoting cultural diversity. We contest this view in our recommendations.

Our findings suggest that primary schools, especially smaller culturally diverse primary schools, with a committed school leadership and supportive teachers, were more able to embrace and represent the cultural and linguistic diversity in their school community A feature of their efforts involved in one case reaching out to bring parents into the school and create a whole school awareness of diversity, while in the other school they supported students in the school and reached out into the community to assist refugee parents to settle into the community and to support the needs of both the children and the families;

The two larger secondary schools were in more culturally homogeneous communities. One did not see any need to address cultural differences as it was not a major issue in the community, while the other responded after a major local incident by focusing on its student body with a range of activities including cultural exchanges, some cultural celebrations, and a program designed to train students to deal with conflict. Time constraints and overcrowded curriculum are often cited as reasons for a lack of focus on non-core curriculum. This research maintains that teachers and students require training programs in cultural competency. That is working towards culturally responsive classrooms should be part of the core curriculum.

In terms of activities undertaken we found that among the schools in the study there were:

- a small number of cultural diversity programs, projects and cultural events being used – and that these were in response to a high level of cultural diversity in the student population or a response to an particular event that had motivated the school into action. These programs were bringing positive results in terms of a greater understanding of diversity within that school setting;

- a reasonably broad based language and community language provision (including ESL programs in schools) that needed strengthening at a senior level;
- limited opportunities for LOBOTE students to take part in student forums and leadership projects; and
- evidence of some efforts, especially at a regional level and among a number of notable schools where critical incidents had happened, to develop better community relations, including with parents though to a much lesser degree with local community associations.

Activities

Celebrating cultural diversity in schools through an annual event has been a feature over many years of school responses to multiculturalism. The annual *Carnivale* day celebration was a major focus and more recently *Harmony Day* has provided at least one day in the school year to focus on and celebrate cultural differences. Our study suggests that this kind of event has been supported most strongly by the two primary schools in culturally diverse communities, where the days were seen as an important whole of school community event.

These events were very positive expressions of diversity at least at a symbolic level. Often this was one opportunity where parents got involved in either preparing their national food or national costume for children to take to school. Parents were encouraged to visit the school and take part in the parade.

Therefore it is safe to say that while there are examples of effective programs being implemented in some schools, Such as *Cooling Conflicts* and *Identity, Culture and Conflict* generally speaking the representations of cultural diversity are limited to more symbolic, awareness raising, but sometimes tokenistic recognition of traditional costumes, food and folklore.

Supporting culturally responsive teaching practices

One aspect that emerged from our interviews was the recognition that more was needed to support culturally responsive teaching practices in schools. Both key informants and school staff pointed to the need for more up to date and innovative cultural diversity resources, including ones that addressed religious diversity, in particular a better understanding of Islam.

Also mentioned was the need for greater cultural competency amongst teachers through professional development. This included increasing teacher's understanding and awareness of new policies and approaches to cultural diversity in schools. It is important to offer more staff development support – both at pre-service teacher level and in schools for ESL training. This training should include all teachers and not be limited to Language /ESL teachers.

Internal versus external focus

Drawing on Uzzell's model (1999) we found most schools focused on their internal school community, addressing cultural diversity issues within the school, with most efforts aimed at the student body. It remained a major challenge for schools, both at the primary and secondary level, to recognise the value of seeing learning in a broader

culturally more inclusive way and devoting time and staff resources to involve their wider community and indeed the world.

To this end we recommend that governments resource schools to expand their horizons in creative ways and connect to global communities through the use of the interactive technology that is now increasingly available in the modern school.

One initiative that requires further exploration is the use of ICT to connect schools throughout the world. Interactive whiteboards are now a feature of most schools – and if they are not – this is one area that should be resourced immediately and supported with teacher professional development. The potential for Australian schools to make cross-cultural connections and engage in projects with schools in regional or remote communities with Australia as well as in Asia or Europe and even in Africa given the appropriate resources are endless. This potential should be explored.

Countering racism
We found where a school was directly affected by an external event, such as the Cronulla riots, the school's leadership was willing to carry out a number of activities to address divisions in their student body and racist views among students. This included running a conflict management program, as well as school exchanges, and taking part in events to celebrate cultural diversity. At the same time other schools were not impacted by these events and did not see any need to address any issues related to racism.

It was evident that developing links with key local community organisations continued to be a challenge for schools. Despite policy encouragement, schools, especially in culturally homogeneous areas, found little need to reach out to community organisations or cultural associations to help address issues of cultural, linguistic or religious diversity. To this end what is needed is more collaborations on programs organised by the community for young people from different ethnic groupings that will bring them together to enjoy shared experiences.

In conclusion, schools do not operate in a vacuum. They are influenced by the happenings in their community and in-turn they have an impact on the neighbourhoods they inhabit. Schools have an important role to play in nurturing communities that are socially inclusive. They are in a position to build bridges between different cultural perspectives. This can be done in an atmosphere of shared learning, within the safety of the school grounds in the first instance, but also through reaching out to the wider community, through parent groups, community associations and the local council. In this way the key stakeholders in a local area can work to create neighbourhoods that are truly inclusive.

Recommendations

Schools and their communities should embrace the opportunities and challenges presented by Sydney's increasing cultural mix. Drawing on the cultural life, language diversity, and religious traditions of Australia's many cultures will enhance the social fabric of the community.

To this end we make the following recommendations

Cultural diversity and culturally responsive practices
- A renewed focus on culturally responsive practices and policies is required by departments of education, teachers and researchers that links the most recent 2005 departmental policy on ethno-cultural diversity to models of pedagogy that are culturally inclusive and cater for vibrant cultural mix evident in schools.

- This renewed focus requires an increased allocation of resources to schools to re-state the benefits and challenges of working within a diversity framework.

- Increased resources to conduct a 'cultural audit' would allow schools to explore how they really see their local community, to map the school community's cultural diversity, and to demonstrate ways that schools can effectively engage with their parent body, community cultural associations, and key local bodies like the local council to support student learning.

- It is recommended that all pre-service teachers undertake one subject in ESL training and that the professional development of teachers in schools is extended. In the first instance this should begin in schools with high concentration of ethnic diversity but it must be extended to teachers in culturally homogenous areas.

- Departments of education and schools need to participate in community discussions and debates about the meanings of key concepts such as cultural diversity, harmony, and community relations.

- Communities need to explore and discuss how the representations of cultural diversity relate to and support a more socially just and inclusive view of Australian identity and citizenship. This requires local governments to organize activities in conjunction schools with a diversity focus that diffuse cultural tensions.

- The relationships between schools and their local community should have more depth and be more than just about having guest speakers or celebrations on special days. They should be built on real connections that involve parents, local cultural groups, the local council as well as the local business community. In this sense the school becomes a central point of connection with the community and that helps to cement the social fabric of the community.

- Schools need to address issues of Australian identity, racist attitudes and behaviours by drawing on our history and experience of waves of migration and the resulting impact on local communities. this implies that there are lessons in our history that relate to our practices in dealing with difference.

- In areas where there is evidence that cultural tensions exist education authorities should implement within the curriculum, conflict resolution

activities utilising such programs as *Cooling Conflicts* or other awareness raising educational resource.

- Schools should provide more opportunities for students from Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LOBOTE) to draw on their cultural backgrounds and learn about active citizenship as part of their school curriculum and school learning activities.

- There is a need for educational bodies to be proactive rather than reactive and to implement these culturally inclusive programs in schools that are seen as clusters of mono-culturalism.

- Governments for the local to the federal levels should extend their community grants programs to assist local associations to set up programs that bring young people together from different cultural backgrounds. While the *On the Same Wave* program is one example, this type of activity should be extended and sustained in our communities.

- One innovation that is highly encouraged is the use of ICT to extend to global education. The development of projects that connect global communities through interactive technology using interactive whiteboards is strongly supported.

- It is recommended that schools be encouraged to set up sister school relationships with overseas schools via the internet. An example of this is the *Connected Classroom*s programs projects that will provide all public schools with at least one interactive whiteboard

2.   Background

Background

The report outlines findings from a small qualitative research project conducted with teachers and students and related community members from four government schools in the greater metropolitan area of Sydney. The schools were located in different geographic areas with different cultural compositions. In one geographic area two schools have been grouped into one case study resulting in three case studies being presented in this report.

The project was designed to investigate how schools and the communities are dealing with cultural difference in the increasingly complex socio-political context following events like the New York Twin Towers attacks of 9/11/2001 and the Cronulla Beach riots of 2005.

The project examined ways that schools were representing cultural diversity, addressing the challenges they were facing, and what models of practice these schools were implementing in their school programs and policies in addressing issues of cultural diversity, racism and community cohesion.   Investigations also centred on the connection between schools and their local communities in exercising leadership to achieve a more socially cohesive educational environment for students and the community.

Methodology

The research sought to gain insights into the social processes, strategies and actions undertaken in the schools and how these were connected with their local communities. Key questions of this study include:

* What are some observable representations of ethno-cultural diversity that exist in these schools?

* How are these schools dealing with the added challenges that our multicultural communities present in the current context?

* How can schools and communities work together to exercise leadership in promoting cultural cohesion in diverse cultural environments and culturally diverse settings?

* What models of dialogue/discourse are most successful between schools and communities with high levels of cultural diversity?

The project employed a number of qualitative research methods, consisting of individual interviews and focus groups discussions with a number of key informants and a number of different stakeholders in schools, and an analysis of various policy documents. The schools were visited a number of times with interviews being conducted with either the school principal, an ESL teacher or the teacher responsible

for any multicultural programs. And a number of focus groups were held with teachers, parents and students.

Interviews were carried out with a number of key informants such as a Muslim school principal, community leaders, youth workers, and one group of young people who were interviewed to gain a broader view of the schools and their neighbourhoods. Additional data was gathered from school and community programs and policy documents.

In this report we saw it was important to allow the voices of the participants to be heard in addressing the key questions. While the findings from this report cannot be used to generalise about how schools in NSW are dealing with cultural diversity, they do provide valuable insights into the experiences of individual schools and their community of teachers, students and parents in managing a complex educational and community issue.

Educating for cultural diversity

Educational institutions were at the forefront in sustaining the policy of multiculturalism. A key plank of the Galbally Report in 1978 centred on providing more resources for education. Its fifty-seven specific recommendations for improvements in services to migrants, including assistance in settlement and education with a strong focus on English language teaching and the role of ethnic communities in the success of immigration, shaped government policies over the next ten years. This included the appointment of the Ethnic Affairs Council in 1977, as well as various programmes and services for migrants such as English teaching and translation services, the establishment of the Special Broadcasting Service for both radio and television, the establishment of Migrant Resource Centres and improved communication and information for new arrivals. (Langfield, 1996). An Act of Parliament established the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs in 1979 with the aim of raising awareness of cultural diversity and 'promoting social cohesion, understanding and tolerance.' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007)

This comprehensive report on the multicultural needs of our nation ensured that education programs promoted and supported minority cultures and as a consequence all State and territory public education authorities included statements supporting cultural diversity in policy documents. Schools introduced Anti-racism Statements and implemented Anti-racism Grievance Procedures. (NSW Dept of School Education 1992; Eckerman, 1994; NSW Government, 2001).

Programs and policies have continued to be developed and promoted by subsequent federal governments. However their emphasis has shifted in the last few years in response to factors in the community. NSW Premier Bob Carr noted in 1999 when his government restructured the Ethnic Affairs Commission to Community Relations Commission
 "'Ethnic affairs' no longer bears relevance to contemporary life in NSW' (Carr, 1999)

The shift in discourse on diversity in Australia is reflected in the undercurrents of change in the nature of multicultural education within our schools and communities from the former national policy which gave voice to minorities and celebrated difference, to one which has sought to dilute the cultural messages by returning to what are perceived, by some, to be more assimilationist approaches to cultural integration. This has been reflected in moves towards the development of a national Australian history curriculum with a focus on citizenship education and 'Australian values'. In 2005, then Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson warned Islamic Schools that they would be expected to 'teach Australian values to their students', through a focus on topics such as Simpson and his donkey (Hawley, 2005). More recently the decision by Camden City Council, a locality approximately 50kms outside of Sydney, to prohibit the construction of a Muslim school in its locality highlights the challenges education systems and policy makers face in dealing with cultural diversity both in schools and in the wider community. (Emmerson, 2008)

Schools address diversity on two levels. On a pedagogical level, teachers must meet the learning needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They should be professionally skilled to understand the issues related to links between cultural maintenance and educational outcomes – including first language teaching. For example one debate surrounds the balance between first language instruction and national language acquisition. Application of first language teaching reaffirms identity and therefore student well being. However, national language instruction is better for academic performance and therefore must get priority (Vedder, et al 2006).

Schools are also faced with the challenge of promoting greater understanding of cultural diversity among students. Despite our diverse population, teaching remains a primarily middle class, Anglo-Australian profession (Allard, 2007). Educational policies have reinforced the need for teachers to understand and respond to the ways in which a range of factors, including culture and ethnicity, shape the experience of their students. However, students from Non English Speaking Backgrounds continue to be identified as being 'educationally at risk' and do not achieve similar educational outcomes to their peers (Allard, 2007). The need to address this problem and to ensure that, as Ball states, all students are prepared for 'the needs of the global society in which we live ' (Allard, 2007 p. 322) demands of teachers the ability to work productively within an increasingly diverse context. A 2005 report by a Victorian Parliamentary Education and Training Committee included the recommendation that all teachers must be equipped to meet the needs of '… a diverse student population, of which migrant and refugee young people are an essential part.' (Allard, 2007). The Business Council of Australia noted in 2003 that cultural cohesiveness is a necessity for Australia's economic future. However, sufficient resources and adequate training and professional development must be provided in order to facilitate this (Osler and Vincent, 2003 p. 47).
So the question has to be asked, if teachers generally reflect the values and beliefs of the dominant class, how well are we training our teachers to meet the challenges of ethno-cultural diversity in our classrooms? Should ESL be mandatory for all teachers as one teacher noted in the research, as it helps teachers to modify the curriculum to allow for the diversity now obvious in our classrooms?
Other questions that arise in this discussion about diversity in schools relate to the nature of the curriculum –what is emphasized and how responsive and reflective of

difference it is –both in terms of content and how it is taught. Another relates to the question of effective teaching and what works in classroom settings.

As an example, citing 'a fundamental lack of respect for authority' as a cause of the Cronulla riots, New South Wales Premier Morris Iemma introduced a number of initiatives promoting values education under the Respect and Responsibility program in 2006. Defining 'Respect' as: 'having regards for yourself and others, lawful and just authority and diversity within Australian society and accepting the right of others to hold different or opposing views' (New South Wales Board of Studies, 2006), it includes cultural awareness and celebrating diversity among a wide range of dimensions. At the same time, 'Australian values' units were introduced in Primary Schools and each school was provided with a CD recording and palm cards containing the lyrics of the national anthem.   These programs appear worthy, but often they are introduced into a crowed curriculum in response to a crisis in the community and without adequate planning.

Given the context of post 9/11 Australia, current perspectives on multiculturalism and cultural diversity are necessarily increasingly complex and multi-layered as has been noted.

Educational institutions – including schools and the academy- must engage with the debates about representations of ethno-cultural diversity, nationhood and identity. Indeed their contributions must help to shape these discourses in order to assist civic leaders and policy makers to work with communities to build civil societies based on principles of social justice, equity and social inclusion.
Professional educators, in schools in particular, need to focus their attention on the roles they play in converting the challenges of ethno-cultural diversity into opportunities for all children and young people.
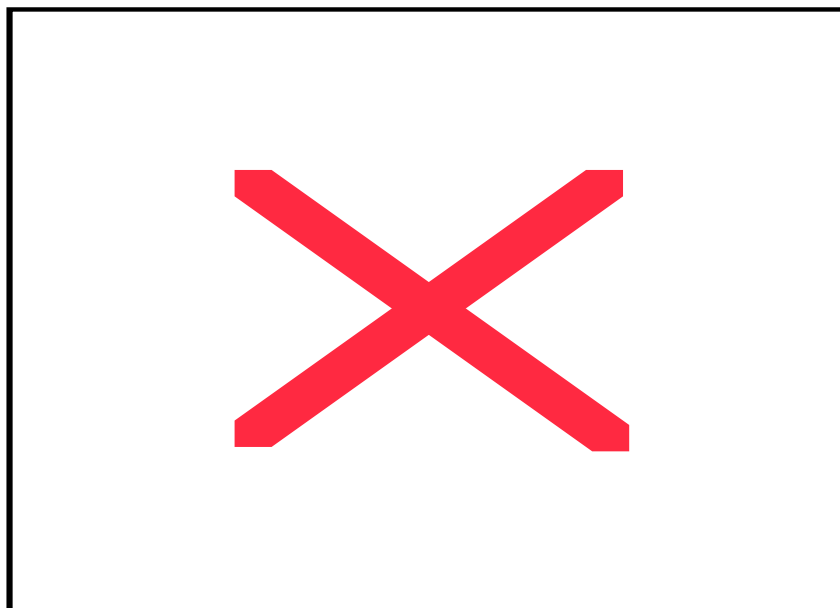
3.   Cultural diversity and education

Cultural diversity

What do we mean by cultural diversity and what do we know about it in the Sydney metropolitan area?

Cultural diversity is often defined in terms of the difference among cultures, focusing on three key aspects- cultural practices, values and language. For Ang et al (2002:19) cultural diversity relates to the different cultural and ethnic groups in our society and the coexistence of their cultural practices and values.

Cultural diversity, as defined in statistical terms by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), reports on three key aspects - country of origin or birth, language spoken, and religious affiliation.

In the context of this study these definitions are combined to encompass a broader perspective of cultural diversity that is more in keeping with school based interpretations of the term.

Diversity in Sydney and NSW schools

As mentioned above since the introduction of a large scale immigration program in the late 1940's Sydney has continued to receive a large number of new settlers from a wide range of non-English speaking and culturally diverse backgrounds. Immigration levels have risen over recent years and likely to remain high, as we look overseas to address chronic skill shortages. In terms of cultural diversity, data from the 2006 Census shows that the Sydney metropolitan area was more culturally diverse than the Australian population as a whole (ABS, 2007). Data on the three aspects of diversity - country of origin, language spoken and religion - helps to identify the nature of that diversity across Sydney:

- Country of origin: Almost four out of ten residents in Sydney (39.6%) were born outside Australia and among the largest non-English speaking countries of origin were now China, Italy, Vietnam, India, Philippines, Greece and Lebanon.

- Language spoken: The top five most common languages other than English spoken at home in Sydney were Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Greek and Vietnamese.

- Religion: Most people in Sydney were Christians, among the non- Christian religions the largest two were Eastern Orthodox (4.3%) and Islam (3.9%). The largest proportional increases in religious affiliations from 2001 to 2006 were Hinduism (India, Fiji, Sri Lanka), Islam (Lebanon, Turkey) and Buddhism (Vietnam, China).

A closer examination of the data shows that there were significant geographic differences in cultural diversity across the Sydney metropolitan area. Regions like the

southwest and western suburbs were amongst the most culturally diverse, while the northern and southern suburbs were among the least culturally diverse areas. However, within these less diverse geographic locations one can find pockets or concentration of ethnic groups.

NSW Government school students

An indication of the cultural diversity of government school students can be seen from 2004 enrolment data on Students from Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE), including those born in Australia and overseas. In NSW government schools 26% of students were LBOTE with most located in three Sydney regions – South Western, Sydney and Western Sydney (NSW DET 2005:5).

The main languages other than English spoken at home among NSW students were Chinese languages - 36,168 (18%); Arabic - 25, 092 (12.5%); Vietnamese - 11,819 (5.9%); Pacific communities - Samoan 5,994 (3.0%) + Tongan 3,735 (1.9%) + Fijian 1,353 (0.7%); Tagalog - 7,423 (3.7%); and Hindi - 6,980 (3.5%).

School community

In looking at representations of cultural diversity in school communities, we need to consider what is a school's community. It can be seen as just the community within the school. But increasingly it is taken to refer to more than just the internal school community and means looking out beyond the school fence and seeing the school in a wider context. In defining a school's community we can include the home (parents, siblings, extended family) and the local community (the local council, businesses and community associations).

A recent NSW DET working paper (2003) pointed to evidence that taking this wider view of community and having school's engage with parents and in partnerships with the local community did have a positive impact on student learning. Clearly for schools in culturally diverse areas this means reaching out to engage both with parents and community groups from culturally diverse backgrounds.

The model that policy makers espouse is that schools should be learning communities that don't necessarily close their gates when classes finish for the day. In this way they act as a community base for educational activities that bring together students, teachers, parents, elders, local community leaders affiliated with business interests and community organisations. One outcome of this model is the utilisation of the valuable skills and expertise each of these groups possess in achieving common goals and building greater social cohesion.

One way of categorising how schools are likely to work with their local school community is to consider how schools sees their role, especially their view about where and what students learn. Uzzell (1999) has developed a useful four part model that helps to locate schools in relation to their views of learning and of community. They range from on the one hand seeing the school as an island, separate from both parents and the local community, to one where the school is involved and engaged with parents and the local community, both inside and outside the school.

Cultural diversity and education policy

If as Eckermann (1994) suggested culture and education are interdependent, what policies are educators currently using to frame the efforts by schools to address cultural diversity? Since the early 1970s these policies have been defined in terms of multiculturalism and multiculturalism education. In NSW government schools multicultural education 'supports a vision…which values and benefits from its cultural and linguistic diversity to fully realise its social, cultural and economic potential' (NSW DET, 2007). It goes further in stating that the principles of multiculturalism that frame multicultural education include:

- recognising and valuing diversity;
- promoting equal rights and responsibilities within a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society;
- diversity is regarded as a strength and an asset;
- individuals share a commitment to Australia; and
- English is the common language.

Within the policy framework diversity is recognised and valued and viewed as a strength and asset. Multicultural education is also seen to include the promotion of equal rights and responsibilities. At the same time this is balanced against notions of responsibilities and social cohesion, including harmony, commitment to the nation and a common language.

The NSW DET policy released in 2005, the *Community Diversity and Community Relations* policy, aimed to ensure that schools were responding to and reflecting 'cultural, linguistic and religious diversity'. Also that they were giving students 'the opportunity to fully participate, achieve equitable outcomes, and develop skills and knowledge to be active citizens' (NSW DET, 2005a).

This implied that schools would be working to represent cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in their school community, while at the same time emphasizing student access to learning and active citizenship. The main policy objectives in the policy referred to:

- the promotion of community harmony;
- countering racism and intolerance;
- enabling students from all cultures to identify as Australians;
- ensuring inclusive teaching practices;
- supporting ESL students to learn English; and
- promoting positive community relations (including involving parents and community members).

The promotion of community harmony as a goal in part reflects the impact of events here and overseas that have resulted in disturbances, the re-emergence of intolerant views and racist behaviours towards particular groups, and concerns about Australian identity.

In addressing racism and intolerance several recent Australian studies (Dunn et al., 2004; Dreher, 2006; Browning & Jakubowicz, 2004) have highlighted the increase in

racist incidents. Also the way racist attitudes are concentrated in particular areas, including in some parts of Sydney (Forrest & Dunn, 2007). The study by Forrest & Dunn suggests there is a distinctive geography of racial intolerance in Sydney and that this has important implications for how community initiatives around cultural diversity are designed.

Cultural diversity activities

In looking at how NSW government schools reflect cultural diversity policies we have grouped school activities into four categories. They are:

- cultural diversity programs, projects, or cultural events;
- language provision;
- student forums / leadership projects; and
- community relations.

Programs projects and events
There are a wide range of programs, projects and events available to schools in NSW with a focus on cultural diversity. Among some of the main programs available to our case study schools were school cultural exchanges; the *Cooling Conflicts*; program; the *Identity, Culture and Conflict* kit, and web sites like *Prejudice No Way* and *Racism No Way*. They were also able to take part in projects linked to cultural events like *Harmony Day*.

School cultural exchanges
*School cultural exchange*s encourage schools to make contact with schools in different localities with different cultural compositions. These schools arrange visits where students meet each other and learn about other cultures. This has enabled students and teachers to learn and reflect on their perceptions of difference, through their own direct experience with other cultural groups of similar age from school communities that are different to their own.

Cooling Conflicts
Cooling Conflicts is a conflict management program assisting students to examine how conflict escalates and teaches them how to intervene to manage conflict more effectively. It uses educational drama techniques and peer teaching. The department's regional staff provide training in the *Cooling Conflicts* program to high schools and their feeder primary schools wanting to implement the program.

Identity, Culture and Conflict
The *Identity, Culture, Conflic*t kit contains eight video segments and an accompanying presenter's guide designed to stimulate productive discussion relating to issues of racism, including the nature of racism in educational settings, Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity, and Reconciliation.

Projects and events
As part of *Harmony Day* celebrations students from diverse backgrounds have been able to undertake projects and take part in events that are an expression of the diversity of their school population. Often these take the form of cultural festivals

where students come dressed in traditional costumes and perform dances from their native culture.

One example is the *Voices of Oceania* project conducted in one of the case study schools in this project that provided students from many different backgrounds with the opportunity to take part in a range of both school and public performances, where they have been able to represent or draw on their own cultural background.

Language provision

The main features of the language provision in NSW schools have been the range of languages other than English that can be studied, either in schools or as part of the Saturday School program, and ESL classes and support. Among the main languages studied were 12 priority languages including Arabic, Australian Indigenous languages, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish. There were also a further 26 languages taught.

In 2005 in government primary schools in NSW a total of 88, 135 or 19% of students were studying another language, while in high schools in 2006 in Years 7 to 9 there were 70,303 students or 16%. This number fell away to only 4,182 in Year 12 (NSW DET, 2006).

Community languages

The Saturday School of Community Languages program was supported by NSW DET to enable the teaching of community languages to school aged students. Across the Sydney metropolitan area there were 14 Saturday School of Community Languages centres located in high schools that organised the teaching of 26 different community languages. Most of these languages were only offered in one or two locations. Among the languages taught in the most locations were Chinese, Greek, Arabic and Spanish.

ESL classes and support

Students who settled in Australia from overseas and needed to learn English as their second language (ESL) were able to access a number of NSW DET initiatives. They included high school aged students attending any one of 15 special Intensive English Centres (IECs) in Sydney and Wollongong for short tem intensive support. This could be followed up with further English language support programs once the students moved on and enrolled at a government school. In primary schools ESL support was provided to students at school.

Student forums/leadership programs

Apart from specific educational programs, students from various cultural backgrounds have been able to participate in a number of student forums and projects, as part of their school activities. Most government schools across NSW have a Student Representative Council. Also the department organises a number of student leadership programs in both primary and secondary schools, providing opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills.

Community relations

Developing better community relations has been included as a feature of the cultural diversity activities of NSW schools. The most frequently mentioned kind of involvement has been encouraged has been for schools to reach out and communicate with parents from various cultural backgrounds, especially from non-English speaking groups. Among the NSW department's support policies for parent involvement have been:

- employing both regional and school based staff, such as community information and bi-lingual community liaison workers, to support communication with particular cultural and linguistic groups within school communities;
- encouraging the use of bi-lingual staff at parent meetings, especially where those language groups that represent a significant part of a school community
- using *School as Communities Centres* in schools to reach and include parents and families from diverse cultural backgrounds in pre-school and primary school programs; and
- providing an extensive list of translated policy statements and information documents in over 40 languages that are available online to schools.

Building links to local community groups and associations has also been encouraged. Over many years at a regional level, through the work of regional Multicultural Reference Groups, representatives from key local cultural organisations or associations have been involved in developing connections to schools in their area.

However it has often been left up to each school in a region to draw on these reference groups and to establish their own links to local cultural groups or associations. Generally at the school level engagement with the local community, including with community associations, has been taken up as part of the work of the school's Parents and Citizen's association. They will often work together with a school principal or a member of the school executive to develop these links for the wider benefit of the whole school community.

Cultural diversity activities in a Sydney DET region

In one large Sydney school region (Sydney Region, 2007) among the main Multiculturalism and ESL initiatives highlighted were:

- cultural projects – included anti-racism co-ordinators training; a *Developing Cultural Respect* initiative; a cultural exchange program; a cultural exchange through multimedia project and a mosaic project; and multicultural calendar which identifies a range of national and international days important to various sectors of our diverse community;

- cultural events – celebrating cultural events like *Connecting Diversity Day*; and *Harmony Day* (in partnership with a local neighbourhood centre);

- language support - ESL in the mainstream; supporting ESL in-school organization; Saturday Community language schools (community based);

- student forums and projects - students took part in the *Cooling Conflicts* program; the *Racism No Way* site; and a *Multicultural Speaking* competition which targets Years 3/4 and 5/6 students enrolled in government schools promoting the positive values of cultural diversity and social justice;

- community relations - parent participation projects; a Pacific communities project; Youth Partnership projects with both Arabic and Pacific communities; a Tongan picture book project; and the region's Multicultural Reference Group that included a member from the Arabic Council of Australia, the Australian Korean Welfare Association, Chinese Australian Services Society, Macedonian School Council of NSW and the SBS Corporation.

Models

A number of models or approaches have been developed to address cultural diversity in school settings. We have drawn on a number that have been developed from the experiences of Australian, US and European education systems.

Models of managing multiculturalism

Critical multiculturalism
Diversity is one of the fundamental issues of our time according to Kalantzis & Cope (1999:247) and increasingly relevant for those who are most comfortable in the dominant culture. They suggest that education in schools needs 'to move beyond the sort of multicultural education that has an exclusive interest in the welfare of minorities… [and] is more than a 'live and let live pluralism that satisfies itself with affirming diversity'.

Three distinct approaches to education for cultural and linguistic diversity have been outlined by Kalantzis & Cope (1999). They note that two main models that have dominated school models of managing multicultural education are the assimilation and pluralist multiculturalism approaches.

The assimilation approach focused on erasing diversity with the expectation that students would end up just like the dominant 'Anglo' community, mastering English and the necessary skills to fit into the Australian community. The pluralist multiculturalism approach focused on understanding and appreciating other cultures and the provision of ethno-specific services, including ethnic schools to support the teaching of languages other than English. For Kalantzis and Cope (1999: 250) this approach has produced in most schools the marginalization of diversity and tokenistic representations of cultural diversity that have largely focused on 'celebratory festivals and studying colourful lifestyles'.

The approach suggested by Kalantzis & Cope (1999: 248) is to adopt a critical multiculturalism that sets out to transform the mainstream and where cultural difference is employed as a resource for securing social access. Setting out the general principles of their approach they proposed transforming the school curriculum in response to cultural and linguistic diversity, with diversity as *a core* issue in the curriculum, education for equitable access, and cultural difference being seen as a resource for social access.

Approaches to cultural diversity in school curricula – USA
In a similar vein based on his work in the USA schools, James Banks (2003) outlines a framework for four different approaches to representing cultural or ethnic diversity in school curricula are Level 1 Contributions approach; Level 2 Additive approach Level 3 Transformative approach; and Level 4 Social action approach.

The Contributions approach focuses on ethnic heroes, special national days and particular cultural aspects of a community, without changing the mainstream curriculum. The Additive approach involves the addition of content, concepts and themes into the curriculum, also without basically changing the curriculum.

On the other hand both the Transformative and Social action approaches involve changes to the curriculum. The Transformative approach brings in the perspective of the 'outsider' or 'other' culture into the curriculum contrasting it with that of the dominant culture. The Social action approach builds on the Transformative by adding in a social action dimension for students, requiring them to consider, plan and take actions, often in the community, to work to achieve better access, or reduce discrimination.

Banks (2003) argues that most schools in the USA with diverse student populations generally start with and rarely get beyond using the first two approaches and that a challenge for the future is how to develop policies that support schools to adopt both transformative and social action approaches (Hudalla, 2005).

Intercultural education model – Europe
A major focus in school systems in Europe is on providing students with equal chances in their education, so they have opportunities for both social and economic mobility. According to Vedder, Horenczyk & Liebkind (2006) there is a growing intolerance and impatience in communities. Rather than providing real opportunities, schools are failing the needs of immigrant students. The intercultural approach, which

has been adopted by some European education systems, is one important response to these needs.

Taking an intercultural approach Aguado, Ballesteros and Malik (2003:50) means having a real 'respect for and recognition of cultural diversity' and it is not about introducing programs or services for different groups. An intercultural approach focuses much more broadly on the whole society on 'the idea of exchange, communication, and negotiation between different interacting cultural groups' (Aguado, Ballesteros and Malik, 2003:52). It respects and recognizes cultural diversity, is aimed at every member of the society. By taking this approach schools are expected to be able to provide 'real equality of opportunities in education' that are currently being denied children from diverse cultural backgrounds in many parts of Europe and to help 'overcome racism'.

From an Australian perspective Hickling Hudson (2003:3) suggests that taking an interculturally proactive approach means moving away from just promoting teacher and student awareness of different cultural groups. It means taking an approach that is 'incorporating a more equitable dialogic intercultural communication'. Among the strategies she found in her study that worked well in successful intercultural schools were:

- community liaison;
- critical socio-cultural study in the curriculum; and
- education in diverse home languages.

A multi/ intercultural education approach has also been outlined by Leeman and Reid (2006) in their comparative study of education policies in Australia and the Netherlands.

Critiques

In charting the rise and fall of multiculturalism as a policy from the 1970's Galligan & Roberts (2003:16) argue that multiculturalism was a failed policy and 'a conceptual muddle.' Although well intentioned and conceived to address the social and economic disadvantage of various migrant communities, the policy was never properly explained and its implementation raised concerns and uncertainties about Australian identity. They suggest that a view of cultural diversity as a fact and to be valued as a resource emerged in the framing of policies in the late 1990s.

The version of multiculturalism adopted in Australia according to Jakubowicz (2006:12) 'reinforces existing cultural hierarchy, reduces government support for cultural preservation, and pushes integration and inter-faith dialogue as the way forward.' He points to the dominance of a neo-conservative view over our national political discourse meaning that 'social cohesion will be further accentuated as a key policy goal, with inter-communal engagement a high priority and respect for difference playing a reduced role'.

Despite the promotion of cultural diversity and principles of multiculturalism in school education, its practice in school education continues in an often limited and symbolic way.

In the USA Gorski (2006) suggests that despite the laudable equity and social justice aims of multicultural education, the actual work carried out by many school educators reflects a *compassionate conservative* view not a progressive one.

The limited nature of many of the efforts being made across various school education systems suggests there has been a focus on a narrow almost assimilationist multiculturalism that prefers symbols over substance (Marginson, 2004).

In pointing to the failure of multicultural education Noble and Poynting (2000) have highlighted in particular that the conceptualisation of ethnicity and diversity has failed to take into account key historical and social features.

The critiques noted here see multicultural education as incorporating the '4fs' food, folklore, fun and fashion. These are those 'soft' and symbolic aspects of the multiculturalism that provide for narrow interpretations of cultural differences. The images they present can be stereotypical, lacking the true transformative nature of inclusive teaching and learning practices that value difference. (Morey and Kitano, 1997)

4. Representing cultural diversity

Key informant interviews

A number of key informant interviews were conducted with community based people who had been active in the education sector, in the community or within the commercial sector in the promotion of cultural diversity. Interviewees included:

- the principal of a Muslim school;
- a leading spokesperson for the Muslim community;
- a former federal government minister;
- a business leader working for one of Australia's leading corporate companies interested in promoting diversity amongst young people in the workplace; and
- several young people who undertook the life saving training program *On the Same Wave* in the aftermath of the Cronulla riots.

The main themes discussed were about:

- the struggle with Australian identity;
- the experience of racism in the community; and
- school programs.

Struggling with Australian identity

Among students and young people growing up with a different cultural background, especially Arabic or Muslim Australians, there was often an ongoing struggle over how to deal with conflicting identities and the pressures of not conforming to the traditional view of Anglo Saxon Australian identity.

A young Muslim woman, involved in *On the Same Wave* program at Cronulla beach during 2006 and 2007, described her struggle with her identity and the way her own identity as a Muslim had been strengthened over recent years:

> *I grew up with, you know, Asians and Greeks and everybody from all kinds of cultures and we never really saw them as different…*
>
> *I was questioning my Australian-ness and I would question my identity and I would question myself a lot of the time because, you know, it's hard to hear all this negativity and it's hard not to believe it even though I'm from this community…and I've never seen myself as anything but Australian. And I find it kind of funny when people always question me about that.*

She described her choice to wear the hijab from the age of 13, as an affirmation of her religion which she felt did not conflict with her sense of identity as an Australian.

> *it's hard because people just assume – they grab onto your ethnicity rather than who you actually are… so people automatically think that I'm Arab or I'm Lebanese, whereas I consider myself Australian.*

Another Muslim girl who was still at school and a fervent rugby league fan wondered where she fitted in and why she wasn't being accepted, even though she shared the same characteristics as other Australians:

> ...those of us from different backgrounds where do we fit in? I have always defined myself as an Australian. You know I was born here, raised here, gone to an Australian school, my language is English…If you look at the qualities that are attributed to an Australian. .the whole mateship thing and the love of sport - well then I'm just the same as the Australian old man who screams at the television every time the sports comes on.

Being born here and living here wasn't seen as enough anymore:

> you know, we've been here our whole lives and all of a sudden it's an issue and all of a sudden we're being questioned.

Racism in the community

Key informants were asked whether they felt there had been an increase in racism since the events of September 11. Those who came from Muslim backgrounds most particularly felt that this had been the case and there was the general opinion that there was more anxiety in the community about cultural difference.

According to a Muslim community leader he feels Australia is becoming more closed and insular:

> I see that Australia is more and more moving towards a closed and insular society as a result of directions at the federal level. It is not to say it will become so but it is moving in that direction.

He has seen how racism had been impacting on young children:

> Kids telling them that their parents said not to play with them … don't play with the ghost … don't play with the girl with a tea towel on her head.

According to a Muslim principal the increase in racism was based on fear, ignorance and the role of radio shock jocks:

> Now there is a lot more fear based on real events…there is a lot more knowledge of about Muslims – but still a lot of ignorance… I blame the shock jocks… they are deliberately humiliating and provoking people.

A Muslim project worker pointed to the ways that people made sweeping generalisations about people and their lack of interactions with Muslims:

> I mean, it's easy to kind of blame Muslims as a generalisation because we're quite easily identifiable, I guess. And also because not many people have interactions with Muslims because we are quite reserved because of what is happening.

Whereas a prominent businessman, former politician now involved with a cross-cultural leadership group in Sydney involving young Muslims saw things differently:

> *We want the young Muslim Australians to feel like they're a first class citizen. Not to feel like the dice is always loaded against them… I think there's lots and lots of goodwill around the community, but the challenge is how to mobilise it and harness it.*

He felt there was a challenge to our democracy from 'militant Islam':

> *I would say the collision between militant Islam and western liberal democracy is a big problem…there is an element of Islam which is deeply, violently alienated from Western liberal democratic ideas.. I think what we need to do is give balance to the alternatives to militancy.*

While a former federal government minister wanted to emphasise the need for unity over diversity, otherwise there would be problems in society:

> *I do think that if we properly understood multiculturalism it is a good thing…if it means that we cherish our diversity much more than our unity then I think it is very problematic.*

As an early 'ferocious' critic of multiculturalism he now noted it as *'potentially a significant strength for Australia'* although his view of multiculturalism is in keeping with the notion of it as a *'cultural convergence'* with a very identifiable *'core culture'* that rather than a *'cultural smorgasbord'*.   This emerges as one dominant theme in Australian multiculturalism.

Another key informant, a journalist involved in online opinion blogs, from the Indian sub-continent, but not a Muslim felt that his name signalled him out for an increase in racist emails and phone calls:

> *People who know me now that I am a Catholic, but I started getting threatening phone calls, hate mail…. From people who only knew my name… saying that I am a terrorist.*

A young Muslim woman involved in the Cronulla beach initiative to train lifesavers felt that young Muslims were now even more aware of racism:

> *I think they're aware of racism now. From before, racism wasn't really an issue. I mean, it did exist, that's not to say, but as a child you didn't really take into consideration – Oh my God, if I talk to this person, are their parents terrorists, or something like that, you know what I mean. There was nothing like that at the back of your head whereas now you do...*

Two other key informants, young women from Cronulla both involved in the surf clubs there, noted that there were clear pockets of monoculturalism and insularity in some communities, including those where the riots happened on North Cronulla beach in 2005. One of them commented:

> *my partner's Japanese…. we walked into a restaurant and my partner was speaking Japanese with his friend…… the whole restaurant turned around and looked at us.*

To both young women the riots were a mixture of race and gang rage heightened by alcohol consumption and aided by organised racist groups manipulating the situation:

> *North Cronulla is actually the only beach that's got a direct train line, so a lot of the western gangs and that jump on the train and end up at Cronulla, so its not really a beach culture versus a gang culture its really both.*

> *…. the first thing that was publicised was actually more of a demonstration of the support for Cronulla so basically the Anglo Saxon sort of thing, a lot of people that were in that were not actually from Cronulla. A lot of people from Cronulla just stayed away*

One of the these young women noted that the impact of the riots was that fewer Middle Eastern Muslim families now visited Cronulla beach:

> *From my perspective, it was a mixture of a mob, but also there has been that tendency of we are a monoculture in Cronulla, like in the Shire. We want to keep it that way. The most interesting point that I want to say to you is, if you go to Cronulla on the weekend, you will not see any Muslim groups or families having picnics, enjoying how they used to. You will never see that anymore.*

> *…. I just think it's a shame that – because that's been voiced so strongly and because of the media, maybe they're thinking we shouldn't go down there because we don't want to cause trouble.*

School programs

Enhancing cultural education programs
For one Muslim community leader more funding and a change in priorities was needed:

> *In my view schools are under funded. [They need to] prioritise funding to shift the emphasis from national pride and this ill founded notion of patriotism that makes you think you are better than someone else... we have to enhance rather than dumb down education… priorities need to be more realistic.*

A Muslim principal pointed to the need for better informed initiatives that took account of our multicultural history:

> *As the principal I don't feel there is enough emphasis on our multicultural background history and what these people have brought into the country.*

Insufficient teaching materials
The lack of up to date cultural diversity teaching resources was identified as a major issue. This lack of resources with a focus on the new cultural groups now present in

Australia, affected the ability of teachers to teach and change the attitudes of students, according to a Muslim principal:

> *As a teacher I am concerned that there is not enough teaching material – not enough representation of our multicultural identity. I don't think it is getting through to the kids sufficiently.*

School exchanges needed

Organising more school cultural exchanges, especially into less culturally diverse areas of Sydney was needed, according to a young woman of Anglo-Asian background living in the Shire:

> *I think it's unfortunate that there are pockets of Sydney, Australia, that are still mono-cultural… because there's a very low number of children from other cultural areas in the Shire and it's probably the same in the Northern Beaches… I'd probably like to promote… do some type of exchange.*

Summary

Key informants were each strong in their views that cultural diversity in our communities enriches Australia's social fabric – even despite some early misgivings as noted by one of them. Most felt that while cultural gaps and enclaves of mono-culturalism do exist, resources and programs are necessary to bring young people together to break down the perceived barriers between ethnic communities. This is even more important as it clear that some young Muslim men and women are experiencing a sense of alienation from the mainstream and are beginning to question their identity even though they were born here.

Case studies

The three case studies we have carried out have been analysed in terms of:

- the school and community setting;
- the policy framework; and
- examples of representations of cultural diversity.

The examples of representations include:

- school programs and strategies;
- school organised events to promote and celebrate cultural diversity; and
- the ways that parents from various cultural backgrounds are included.

Case study 1 – Southern Sydney

Setting

The first case study focused on a large comprehensive government secondary school in the southern part of Sydney, with more than 1,000 students. The school was located in a local government area that was not very culturally diverse and socio-economically a middle class area. Although relatively small in number, there were residents from more than 30 different non-English speaking countries living in the area. Census data showed that:

- Country of Origin: Almost 17% of residents in the area (33,980 out of 205,450) came from overseas, but most of these were from England, Ireland or Scotland. Among the main non-English countries were residents who were Italy, Greece, China, Egypt and Germany.

- Languages spoken: Just over 10% of residents spoke a language other than English at home. The two largest language groups were Greek and Chinese, followed by Arabic, Italian and Tagalog.

- Religion: Most residents (76%) were Christians followed by Islam (less than 1%), Hinduism and Judaism (ABS, 2008).

As a key organisation in the local community, the local Shire Council had recently developed a *Diversity as Strength* statement as part of its *2006-2010 Community Plan*. While stating a number of benefits of diversity, the council felt that diversity and difference could be seen as being '…*a significant threat to communities'* and, it suggested that valuing difference was *'...the biggest single challenge facing modern society.'* At the same time it recognised that the needs of migrants in the Shire were 'relatively unrecognised by the broader community'.

In its action plan, the council proposed to develop a range of programs which identified and engaged 'target communities' in community representation and leadership. Under it's Community Communication Strategy, the council planned to train customer staff in the use of the Telephone Interpreter Service and to address

cultural diversity. It planned to provide signage in community languages and promote council events and initiatives in ethnic radio and newspapers.

Policy framework

The school in this case study indicated that it drew on the department's cultural diversity policies and on its own assessment of issues that were impacting on its school and the community.

A number of events over recent years had impacted on both the school and the local community. As a result there was a stronger feeling of Australian identity in the area, and greater separation among particular cultural groups. There were mixed views about the extent of overt racism towards some cultural groups, both at school and in the local community.

Impact of events – September 11 and Iraq wars

School staff and students specifically mentioned the impact of events such as the New York twin towers attacks, the Iraq war and the Bali bombings. Both school staff and students felt that these events had resulted in an increase in racist incidents, community division, and the increased isolation of Middle Eastern students and their community members.

A teacher at the school highlighted the separation among students that had occurred:

> *What happened in our playground was that the children with Middle Eastern heritage all broke away from their groups. They were in integrated groups and congregated all together in one place in the playground, across all years. They became a separate group, almost as if they were there trying to defend themselves in a sense. Not that anything happened in our playground, but that was how they felt.*

While a former student, with siblings still at the school, pointed to an increase in racism after these events, comparing her lack of awareness of racism when she was at school to the experiences of her younger brothers and sisters:

> *I think they're aware of racism now. From before, racism wasn't really an issue. I mean, it did exist, that's not to say, but as a child you didn't really take into consideration – Oh my God, if I talk to this person, are their parents terrorists, or something like that, you know what I mean. There was nothing like that at the back of your head, whereas now you do.*

Also one senior executive member of the school noted that the attitudes of some teachers towards students of Middle Eastern background had changed as well:

> *Some of the teachers had more difficulty in dealing with some of the kids, and some of those kids really felt that.*

Impact of events – Cronulla riots December 2005

Another more recent event that had direct impact on school staff, students and the local community was the riots at Cronulla in December 2005 that occurred only a few suburbs away from the school. In the immediate period after the Cronulla riots the

school was locked down for two days. According to a senior staff member this created a very significant impact on both students and staff:

> *We were given intelligence by the local police command to say that there was a planned school invasion. A large number of people from the Bankstown area were planning to invade the school and they had a couple of names of kids that they'd allegedly wanted to get.*

> *So we had two days here where we locked the entire school population into the school grounds. We have a perimeter fence. On two afternoons there were up to 40 police and the riot squad and dog squad and all sorts of things at the front gate of the school ensuring the safety of the children. Our school attendance dropped off I think by about 25 per cent. So 25 per cent non-attendance. That was a direct impact on it. It also increased kids' anxiety levels and fostered fear.*

On the other hand young adults interviewed who were involved in the beach culture generally downplayed the racial nature of the riots, suggesting that the riots were more about 'tribalism', gang issues, outside groups, young guys getting drunk, and the power of SMS messages and the tabloid media.

> *My perspective, it was a mixture of a mob …there were two different groups. There were definitely the neo-Nazi types…and a lot of the guys who live in Cronulla, you could tell because the next day they were all sunburnt, they all had their eyes looking down the ground, they felt so ashamed..*

The students felt that the community at Cronulla was 'monocultural', largely 'informally segregated' and since the riots this had intensified:

> *I definitely feel the difference… yeah, I think ever since that happened you see a lot more flags being [put up] in houses..*

Also as a result of the riots few Muslim groups or families would visit the area. One young Indonesian Muslim student said that her family had visited Cronulla for years on the weekend. But they would go to a particular bay, which was away from the main surf beach, where they would be with other Arab and Muslim families.

Examples – Programs

In the year following the Cronulla riots the school executive responded to what it saw were a 'whole new set of needs' among its student body. It accepted that cultural difference and racism needed to be addressed with students at the school. Among the actions the school took were:

- cultural exchanges where students visited other schools that were culturally different from their own;
- implementing the *Cooling Conflicts* program, as a way of helping students deal with conflict in a productive way;
- changing its existing Anti-racism Committee (originally a small roll call group) to a Multicultural Awareness Committee (made up of 80 students) to promote the value of multiculturalism within the school community; and
- setting up an ongoing partnership with a nearby Intensive English Centre (IEC) enabling students and teachers to make contact with recently arrived students from a range of different backgrounds.

Students interviewed in Year 10 responded positively to the various cultural awareness programs at the school. They mentioned developing greater empathy for new arrivals, developing new friendships, and a greater acceptance of new students from diverse backgrounds as the main benefits. Commenting on the activities students said:

> *It shows how much they've had to go through from coming here like from there to here and so much they've lost.*

> *You just feel that you've got to do your best to make them feel comfortable.*

> *I still think like me and Caleb get along really well and but then I feel that I know that there were things different about him to me … diversity to me is me still noticing that about him, but still accepting him for who he is.*

According to one teacher at the IEC, cultural exchanges worked well for all students, often showing up similarities as well as differences:

> *…we do a lot of cultural exchanges. In May, [we] took kids up [country], and worked with the Gamilaroi elders up there, which was fantastic …the similarities between Aboriginal initiation and our Sierra Leone boys just went 'That's the same in our community, we do exactly the same'.*

Examples – Events

The school described taking an activity based interactive approach to cultural diversity that included organising events at the school, visiting other centres, and attending events in the community:

> *If kids can interact with each other through an activity and have fun with it. It breaks down more barriers than textbook work which tells them what they should and shouldn't think.*

Discussing the school's *Multicultural Awareness Day (MAD)* a teacher described how students learnt about a few of the cultures:

> *Last term … we had what was called a MAD day, which is a Multicultural Awareness Day. We had organised a number of different workshops … so we had an African drumming workshop… we had one of our ex-students, now a student, who is a Samoan girl, taught Samoan dance and taught us a little bit about Samoan culture.*

The partnerships with the IEC led to a range of activities where the school:

- hosted students from the IEC to attend an *Aussie Bush Experience* (bushwalking, visits to a local wildlife park and zoo);
- had its students buddy up with IEC students to help them to complete language activities; and
- organised a *Unity and Diversity Day* in Term IV at the school where the entire IEC student body visited the school for performances by students and teachers from both schools, with a food fair and sporting events and a *Multicultural Awareness Day (MAD).*

Organising events in this way was a highly successful approach. According to a teacher from the IEC the events worked well:

> *I took across some African girls and boys; I took across some hijab-wearing Muslim students, and some non-hijab-wearing Muslim students, and some Christian Lebanese. And we talked about 'These are Lebanese students; they are all Lebanese students: the hijab, the non-hijab, the Muslims. And the students there went, 'Wow, really? I thought they all just wore that.*

Working on activities meant students at the school connected with other cultures and started developing ongoing relationships:

> *Halfway through, a lot of the kids stopped paying attention to the work sheet, which is fine. And they started talking about, to each other and about each other. We now have kids[here] who have developed, and are continuing to develop, relationships independently of our exchanges, which is great, which is what we'd like to see.*

Students from the school also took part in a few local community events, like a spring fair that was organised by the local council in a nearby suburb as a special multicultural celebration day.

Examples – parent inclusion
Apart from the normal parent school communications, the school did not highlight any specific measures to include parents from non-English speaking backgrounds in their community. The main focus of the school's efforts was directed at the students at the school.

Summary
The school executive felt that the range of programs, activities and events organised and the interactive approach being taken had made a significant impact at the school. They especially pointed to programs like *Cooling Conflicts*, the partnership and activities with students from the IEC, as contributing to the positive changes.

While teachers identified there were ongoing divisions and groupings based on racial lines (like the 'Skips' and the 'Lads'), both at school and in the wider community, they felt that programs like *Cooling Conflicts* had made a positive impact on the students involved. But to be more effective these efforts needed to be supported by involving students in their primary school years, and by addressing the negative or racist attitudes at home and in the wider community.

They also commented that more resourcing of teachers in multicultural awareness and ESL was needed and that older teachers, who came from an age that was *'less culturally tolerant'* tended to have, in the words of one teacher, *'cultural problems'* and needed to learn how to accept and look beyond cultural difference.

Anecdotally, racism in senior years had decreased, but students still reported racist incidents and racist attitudes in the junior years. In response, the school was planning to expand the *Cooling Conflicts* program and to hold a Multicultural Awareness Day for the Year 7's.

They also identified the need for having a more open discussion of racism within the school because they felt by bringing it out into the open it stopped the issues from building up to become much bigger ones. The students also felt that by making contact with students from other cultures from the IEC this had helped them to break down some barriers and become more accepting to students that were culturally different to them.

Case study 2 – Northern Sydney

Setting
The setting for this study was a small government primary school with just over 200 students and a multi campus secondary school with 1200 students in the beachside part of northern Sydney. Traditionally the suburbs in the area have been predominantly upper middle class Anglo-Australian communities, with only a small proportion of residents born overseas from non-English speaking countries. At the same time in one suburb a number of new refugee groups have arrived, noticeably increasing the cultural diversity of that area. Census data for the local government area showed:

- Country of origin: Only 14% of residents in the area were from non- English speaking countries. The main countries of origin were for groups that were well established- from Italy, and Germany. While smaller numbers had settled more recently from China, Philippines, and Hong Kong. In one suburb people from Pacific communities and refugees from Tibet and Africa had settled.

- Languages spoken: The main languages spoken were Italian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Armenian and German.

- Religion: In terms of religious affiliations more than 70% of residents had a Christian religious affiliation. Less that 2% were Buddhists, while 17% had no religious affiliation (WC, 2008).

The local council had not felt the need to provide specific services for non-English communities in the area. There was no multicultural worker employed by the council and if communities needed assistance, they were encouraged to access assistance through two local neighbourhood centres and charitable organisations in the area.

According to a council youth worker the area was known as being reasonably sheltered and insular, with a distinct, more tribal youth culture that was connected to the beach. They felt people were generally quite tolerant:

> *But on the main I think it's a reasonably tolerant area. And again it has to do with the quite well educated, quite affluent and the diversity isn't so diverse as many other areas where – it's quite a small number relative to the overall population that is there and they seem to be able to absorb that situation.*

On the other hand, there were examples of open hostility towards some backgrounds. According to one school teacher the hostility was there below the surface:

> *I've even encountered it myself. My brother's married a Japanese woman. We went down to a local surf club for a BBQ and all the men down there were saying oh are you a Philippi no, she said no I'm Chinese and she's got a doctorate and they're treating her like a mail order bride. I was embarrassed. That's the sort of overt racism that's out there.*

Policy framework
The NSW DET regional office for the area did not highlight any particular cultural diversity programs or events that schools in its region were involved in, and there were no Saturday School of Community Languages centres in the area.

Examples – Programs
The primary school, although only a small school in a relatively culturally homogeneous local government area, had a reasonably diverse school community, with children attending from over 30 different cultural groups. As a result the school felt it had developed an awareness of different cultures over the last decade or so, and created 'a more harmonious, tolerant and caring school environment'.

While not organising any specific cultural diversity programs for students at the school, apart from ESL support for children, one of the school's main efforts had been to support newly arrived refugee families and their children at the school. Led by school's two ESL teachers they worked closely with the children providing ESL support. And the school had also employed a Tibetan community aide at the school to come in once a week to help with the younger Tibetan children at the school:

...because the smaller ones were very unsettled when they first arrived as new refugees, they're humanitarian refugees.

The school also employed a trauma counsellor to help those children who had arrived here from war torn countries or refugee camps. It ran a breakfast club two days a week with Red Cross volunteers, for those children who missed out on breakfast at home. To help refugee families get settled when they first arrived school staff connected with local charitable organisations like St Vincent de Paul and a local church to help organise donations of furniture, beds, blankets, clothing, food and Christmas present. During the evenings the school was the site for a series of living skills classes for Tibetan parents to help with their settlement into the community.

The secondary school had a different approach to diversity, because the school felt it was more culturally homogeneous and only a few groups stood out. The main ones now were Pacific Islander and Serbian families, with a growing Chinese community. Given the small proportion of students and families from diverse backgrounds, the principal felt there were no real cultural issues to address, apart from the teaching of ESL within the school to new arrivals.

While the largest and most rapidly growing group were Pacific Islanders, in school there weren't any issues emerging that had to be dealt with. But there were some negative views in the local community that could need addressing:

Its one of issues the school faces...the community's perceptions of some of the Pacific Islanders, is by their sheer physical size, [they] can sometimes feel they are intimidated by them.

Generally the high school principal could not see a need to artificially create an issue about cultural diversity when there wasn't one in their area:

I can understand from a perspective that promoting cultural tolerance and understand is overall good. And I think schools do that quite well, in fact they do it very well, and I think they've contributed to a relatively stable society and the values that do respect multiculturalism. I think schools do that very well, but its not a major community issue here.

On the other hand some of the students interviewed felt that there are pockets of insularity along the peninsula– particularly as you travelled northwards to the more isolated beach communities on the upper northern beaches:

I think that further up the northern beaches something like that can happen.... Yeh like past Avalon, not our way.
Well right at the moment now there's a little riot going on between Avalon and Narrabeen because right now Avalon are seen as the rich kids and Narrabeen is seen as 'well we work hard blah, blah, blah. You guys don't do anything'. I think there are a lot of prejudiced people that live like, not trying to be generalising, but the further you go up the northern beaches, there's definitely a lot more prejudice and stuff.

Indeed a recent visit to one of the beaches found this slogan emblazoned on a rock face just above a popular surfing beach. Discussions with a local surfer indicated that

the slogan was intended for surfers - however the implications of such a slogan are obvious for any group.

Examples – Events

For the primary school cultural diversity was celebrated through a number of events like the previous annual *Carnivale* celebration, which celebrated the cultural diversity at the school by bringing in various national costumes, dances, food and decorations. This had been replaced by *Harmony Day* which was now another big cultural celebration:

> *We have Harmony Day, we've got a Peace garden out the front…and I've got [children] from all the different cultures of the school. I've got their word for PEACE which we painted on tiles and we've stuck on a wall out there and we had a big grand opening …we had them all in a circle and they all took turns to say a prayer for our garden.*

At the high school apart from a small scale celebration of *Harmony Day*, where one group of students worked on making a film during their drama class, there were no other events that involved students celebrating cultural diversity during the year.

Examples – Parent inclusion

Overall the primary school said that it had a low level of parent involvement and there was no active school P & C. Instead the school had set up a multicultural network for parents to meet staff, but it had not worked well and did not manage to bring in many parents to the school.

The main occasion when parents became involved at the primary school was when the school had celebrated *Carnivale* or *Harmony Day*:

> *…the parents love it, it's the time when we get the most parents up to the school, everybody loves it. Other times they hardly come because they all work or they're either going to English class, which they can't get a day off.*

The school made dance a feature of a recent celebration and by bringing in a professional dance group (Dance Nova) they were able to involve both Tibetan and

Thai parents, who brought along food, helped make costumes for the students and decorated the school:

> *We hang all the different nationality flags all around the school and decorate the school. Then the kids have a passport that they've got to go in, its like a comprehension, they've got to go in and answer all the questions, its a [very]different thing. So they're getting to study different countries all of the time. And the parents come in and look at the display.*

The high school did not mention any efforts it made to reach out specifically to parents or local community associations.

Summary

In an area that is largely culturally homogenous and then receives a number of new refugee groups or students from a number of different backgrounds, it was evident that the two schools here were responding in different ways. The smaller primary school, while not taking on new programs or celebrating events, it had made a concerted effort to reach, engage and support refugee children and their families. On the other hand the large high school faced with a number new groups in its school population did not see cultural diversity as an important issue that the school needed to address. Apart from focussing on the language needs of students through its ESL program the school had not taken on any other cultural diversity programs nor did it see the need to particularly celebrate cultural diversity. It appeared that the school was adopting a 'wait and see' strategy, and it would only need to react if any serious issues arose within the school student body.

Case Study 3 – Inner Western Sydney

Setting

This case study was of a small government primary school with just over 300 students located in the inner west of Sydney. Students were drawn from a very culturally diverse area. According to the local council's Social Plan (SLC, 2004) the area was 'one of the most ethically diverse communities in Australia with people born in at least 50 different countries'. Census data from the local council area showed:

- Country of origin: In the area 46% of residents were born overseas, as compared with 24% of all Australians (based on ABS 2001 census figures). The largest groups were from Korea, China, Sri Lanka and India. Note: Only 16% of the population gave their ancestry as Australian.

- Languages spoken: A very high proportion of residents (56%) spoke a language other than English at home. The most commonly spoken languages were Cantonese, Korean, Tamil, Arabic, and Mandarin.

- Religion: Asked about religious affiliations 63% of residents nominated Christianity, while the largest non-Christian religion was Hinduism (9%) followed by Buddhism and Islam (SLC, 2004).

The school in this study mentioned that it had experienced different waves of new arrivals. When it was classified as a disadvantaged school, Turkish families were the first to make a mark at the school, followed by Lebanese and Pacific communities. Since the late 1980's they were replaced by Chinese families, and in the early 1990's when the school lost its disadvantaged status (because of the improved socio-economic status of the area), they were followed by Korean, then more wealthy Chinese, Indian and Tamil families.

Policy framework

As a school with a very culturally diverse community this aspect was featured as a positive strength in the school profile. The school also said that it worked within the framework of both the department's and the school region's multiculturalism policies. It was also able to take advantage of various departmental programs, regional staff, and community positions at the school to assist in its work with diverse communities. Significantly the impact of events like September 11, the Iraq war and the Cronulla riots were not mentioned as important to the school and its community.

Examples – Programs

The principal felt that as a smaller primary school in a culturally diverse community, it could accomplish a great deal by teaching children to be aware of that diversity first hand:

> *You can teach children to be aware of cultural diversity because we do that all of the time and children are totally aware of cultural diversity, in their sentences they'll say things like: "his family are different to mine but we're friends", so you know, they can express it*

In that sense cultural diversity was represented across the whole school.

Examples – Events

At the same time the school did focus on a number of events throughout the year as a way of highlighting the school and community's cultural diversity. Among the events celebrating cultural diversity at the school were:

- *Harmony Day*;
- celebrating national days like Chinese New Year; and
- a parent oral history project.

During an discussion with a group of parents at the school, one parent mentioned that for the school's Chinese New Year celebrations the Chinese parents were asked to contribute:

> *we asked the Chinese community to bring desert so we could experience different food.*

Parents said they felt that it was hard to get parents to move out of their own cultural groups at school events. But celebrations like Chinese New Year did help to break down those barriers:

although some still like to remain in their cultural group there is more of an attempt to mix. But for festivals like the Chinese festival – they enjoy mixing more. And if we have other activities all parents will bring food and enjoy together.

Examples – Parent inclusion

Another important dimension for the school was its work to involve its parent body. This meant the school worked hard to reach out and include parents from different cultural and language groups by:

* being a more welcoming place to parents and carers;
* employing bilingual workers;
* organising regular morning teas each term for parents;
* translating school newsletters into the main and largest community languages;
* having a number of community language teachers and cultural liaison officers doing outreach to parents.

The school also carried out a project leading up to *Harmony Day* where an oral history of a number of parents from different cultural backgrounds at the school was put together and featured on the day.

As a small school the principal felt it was easier to address cultural diversity and include parents by creating a welcoming atmosphere. This started with the front office:

> *… its much easier to do this in a small school, its much easier to give a warm welcoming atmosphere when there's less people involved.*

> *In terms of even approaching the school and being made to feel welcome, the office is the starting point, it would be so nice to have various languages spoken even at the first point of call at the school, we can only provide Chinese and English at the moment, but I must start to try to provide a couple of other languages as well.*

According to the principal regular morning teas and newsletters in community languages worked well to inform and involve parents:

> *Its so easy in a small school, we have morning teas for parents and we try to do that at least once or twice a term, we have translations in newsletters and initially it used to be really frowned upon by the Anglo-Saxon background parents but we've been doing it for years and years and years and the last 3 years I haven't heard a complaint about that, we can't get to all cultures in all languages in the newsletter but we do make an effort and I think that's valued.*

Parents did feel that the school was open to their involvement:

> *The school tries to let parents be involved with what the school is doing.*

The principal also highlighted the role played by a few key staff who would make contact with parents and invite and encourage them to come to the school and to attend school activities:

> *Another aspect is having community language teachers or cultural liaison officers in your school and for them to be doing the outreach to parents that is such an important part of making schools work and it depends, of course, on their personalities, if they've got the welcoming personalities they'll get the parents in, if they've got the persistence they'll get the parents in, so you've got that aspect of your enthusiasm and your personality and if people are welcome or not.*

Having a more highly educated parent body meant the parents were interested in learning and generally had high expectations of their children. Among some cultural groups, some of the parents felt the standards of the teaching at the school were not high enough. For example, the principal mentioned this was true for some Chinese parents:

> *Chinese parents do not agree with the levels – the curriculum and the homework. You know Asian parents want the children to be more academic rather than [doing} too much activities.*

Summary

As a small primary school, with a very culturally diverse school community, the school leadership saw that culturally diversity was an important issue for the whole school to address. It was seen as an important part of the school's profile and was promoted as a feature to the wider community.

The principal emphasised the importance of developing student and staff awareness of the cultural diversity in their school and of making positive efforts throughout the year to acknowledge, celebrate and include aspects of cultural diversity.

The school did make a point of celebrating cultural diversity throughout the year and of making consistent efforts to include parents. Celebrating harmony Day and various national days meant that there was a focus on cultural diversity more than just on one day a year. A range of actions to make parents feel welcome, to inform, reach and involve parents from non-English speaking backgrounds showed a commitment to an important element of school-community engagement.

On the other hand the school did not highlight any specific programs or indicate the ways the curriculum changed to be more culturally inclusive. Also no mention was made of the school reaching out to work together with either its local council or key local cultural associations on any cultural diversity issues, programs or events.

5.   Findings

Findings

The findings bring together the insights we have drawn from our analysis of policy documents, key informant interviews and our three case studies. Although these findings are based on a small qualitative study they present important indicators of attitudes and representations of diversity that are occurring in the suburbs of our main cities. What these attitudes and representations indicate is a need for a renewed focus on supporting the implementation of cultural diversity policies in schools in the Sydney metropolitan area.

The three case studies reflect a range of different settings from a culturally homogoenous or largely monocultural community, to one with an emerging number of new refugee communities, and a third with a very culturally diverse community. It is evident that some excellent programs exist in schools that have experienced critical incidents or the settlement of new arrivals as motivators for action. One school in a very culturally diverse community has adopted a whole school inclusive approach that extends to parents –though to a much lesser extent to the community.

Generally speaking the representations of cultural diversity are limited to recognition, raising awareness and some support for parent information and access. This points to a need for more focused support for programs and activities across both primary schools and high schools, in both culturally diverse and culturally homogeneous areas. Clearly different approaches are needed in primary schools as opposed to high schools and in areas of greater cultural diversity, as well as the less culturally diverse regions.

Our study points to the need to move from what has been described as a conservative approach (Gorski, 2006) assimilationist or pluralist approach (Kalantzis & Cope, 1999) that focuses on just promoting contact and cultural awareness (Hickling Hudson, 2003) to a more progressive view of cultural diversity. One that is a more critical, post-progressivist approach, that is opposed to views that have dominated our public discourse over recent years which see diversity as being a threat to community harmony and national unity.

This suggests a need for a greater emphasis on:

- reflecting and representing the existing cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in schools;
- providing more opportunities for students from LOBOTE backgrounds to draw on their cultural backgrounds and learn about active citizenship as part of their school curriculum and school learning activities;
- schools building relationships with their local communities including parents, cultural community associations and other key local organisations;
- the relationship between schools and local government should be strengthened and the council encouraged to support specific programs in schools;
- the relationships between schools and their local community should have more depth and be more than just about having guest speakers or celebrations on special days – such as *Harmony Day*. They should be built on real connections

that involve parents, local cultural groups, the local council as well as the local business community. In this sense the school becomes a central point of connection with the community and that helps to cement the social fabric of the community.

As Marginson notes:

> *Regardless of the homogenising intentions of governments and the techniques of official programs, it is a safe bet that migrants will increasingly pluralise multiculturalism and multicultural education in the future (Marginson, 2004).*

Given the increasing diversity in our classrooms, governments should endeavour to build policies that celebrate difference and look to develop unity in diversity.

Representations of cultural diversity

Although government school policies in NSW were revised in 2005 and a new cultural diversity and community relations policy released, it appears that at the regional and school level there has been little evidence of a sustained effort to follow through the broader implications of this relatively new policy.

Our study indicates that the activities carried out to reflect and represent cultural diversity (programs, language provision, student forums, community relations including parent inclusion) continue to be seen as part of ongoing multiculturalism or ESL initiatives. We found that among the schools in the study there were:

- a small number of cultural diversity programs, projects and cultural events being used – and that these were in response to a high level of cultural diversity in the student population or a response to an particular event that had motivated the school into action. These programs were bringing positive results in terms of a greater understanding of diversity within that school setting;
- a reasonably broad based language and community language provision (including ESL programs in schools) that needed strengthening at a senior level;
- limited opportunities for LOBOTE students to take part in student forums and leadership projects; and
- some efforts, especially at a regional level and among a number of notable schools where critical incidents had happened, to develop better community relations, including with parents and to a much lesser degree with local community associations.

Diversity in school communities

This study found that the representations of cultural diversity in schools were often shaped by the nature of a school and its community and the response of the school's leadership team. As cultural diversity varied across Sydney, so did the ways schools responded to that diversity. It was more likely that a school in a culturally diverse community would embrace cultural diversity and make it a central feature of its school. While schools in less culturally diverse communities were less likely to focus on cultural diversity. This was evident in the schools in our study where:

- two small primary schools - one located in a culturally diverse community, the other experiencing the arrival of a refugee group - both acknowledged the diversity and worked in their own way to increase awareness, provide support and promote community harmony. A feature of their efforts involved in one case reaching out to bring parents *into the school* and create a whole school awareness of diversity, while in the other school they *supported students in the school* and *reached out into the community* to assist refugee parents to settle into the community and to support the needs of both the children and the families;
- two larger secondary schools were in more culturally homogeneous communities - one did not see any need to address cultural differences and did little apart from supporting ESL learning, while the other responded after a major local incident by focusing on its student body with a range of activities including cultural exchanges, some cultural celebrations, and an anti-racism program.

Primary schools

Our findings suggest that primary schools, especially smaller culturally diverse primary schools, with a committed school leadership and supportive teachers, were more able to embrace and represent the cultural and linguistic diversity in their school community. These schools were addressing the policy aims of promoting community harmony, of enabling students from a range of different cultural backgrounds to gain a stronger sense of their identify as Australians, and of supporting ESL students to learn English and students to learn other languages.

High schools

It appears to be harder for high schools to more fully embrace cultural diversity as a core part of their school programs, especially if their school community was relatively culturally homogeneous, and the cultural or linguistic groups in their area were largely invisible. However where event impacted on a school, such as a riot or there was an increase in racist behaviour or bullying, school leadership were more likely to react and bring in a number of activities focused on its student body. This meant efforts were generally located *within* the school or with neighbouring schools that were more culturally diverse.

Programs and events

It is important to note that school staff face many competing pressures. Issues of culturally diversity often compete for attention with other social and learning issues. As we have seen they can be viewed as of marginal interest to the operation of a school, and will be reflected in the offering programs and organisation of events.

The number and range of programs offered appeared limited with only a few anti-racism or conflict resolution programs or school cultural exchanges being offered across schools.

Celebrating cultural diversity in schools through an annual event has been a feature over many years of school responses to multiculturalism. The annual *Carnivale* day celebration was a major focus and more recently *Harmony Day* has provided at least one day in the school year to focus on and celebrate cultural differences. Our study suggests that this kind of event has been supported most strongly by the two primary

schools in culturally diverse communities, where the days were seen as an important whole of school community event.

These events were very positive expressions of diversity at least at a symbolic level. Often this was one opportunity where parents got involved in either preparing their national food or national costume for children to take to school. Parents were encouraged to visit the school and take part in the parade. Indeed for one school parents were encouraged to tell their stories and have them recorded as a resource for the school to use.

Schools and communities working together

Community relations – parent inclusion

A feature of efforts to develop better community relations has included a focus on parent inclusion in the school community. We found the two primary schools in our study were actively reaching out to involve and support parents from different cultural backgrounds within their school community. Given limited staffing for particular community workers this meant contact by bi-lingual workers was with parents from the largest cultural groups. Also translated documents helped schools to reach other cultural groups. Parents from other groups were still encouraged to be involved and would also attend school functions and events. Noticeable were the lack of similar initiatives in either of the two high schools in our study.

Community relations – associations

Apart from a number of notable regional initiatives in one of the three Sydney school regions in this study, engagement of the schools with community organisations and associations and was limited. Among all the schools in this study there were few effective linkages out into the local community - especially to local community organisations or associations that would appear to have natural links to the school. One primary school showed how it had worked with local charities to support refugee families in the community. While one high school had taken part in a cultural event organised by their local council.

Schools dealing with challenges
Increasing cultural representations

Among the challenges facing schools, in both culturally diverse and culturally homogenous areas, was how to increase the representations of cultural diversity across their school. For schools in culturally diverse areas it was about deepening and extending their involvement with cultural diversity. While in less culturally diverse areas it could mean recognising and revealing some of the hidden diversity in their school community, reaching out to represent cultural, linguistic and religious differences, and linking it into what students were learning.

In both types of areas it would mean drawing on cultural diversity to explore underlying attitudes, to broaden student learning experiences and to better prepare students for life in a more culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society. This suggests a move away from just raising awareness and making contact to a

broader strategy of engagement with diversity, including across the school curriculum.

Countering racism

Despite a focus on notions of unity, community harmony, and a redefined sense of Australian identity, from time to time racist attitudes and racist behaviour to particular groups in the community continue to surface, impacting on schools and their communities. We found where a school was directly affected by an external event, such as the Cronulla riots, the school's leadership was willing to carry out a number of activities to address divisions in their student body and racist views among students. This included running a conflict management program, as well as school exchanges, and taking part in events to celebrate cultural diversity. At the same time other schools were not impacted by these events and did not see any need to address any issues related to racism.

Internal versus external focus

Drawing on Uzzell's model (1999) we found most schools focused on their internal school community, addressing cultural diversity issues within the school, with most efforts aimed at the student body. It remained a major challenge for schools, both at the primary and secondary level, to recognise the value of seeing learning in a broader culturally more inclusive way and devoting time and staff resources to involve their wider community.

The two small primary schools in our study demonstrated their willingness to reach out to their parent body - in one case to bring parents *into the school*, and in the other school to help families *out in the community*.

At the same time it was evident that developing links with key local community organisations continued to be a challenge for schools. Despite policy encouragement, schools, especially in culturally homogeneous areas, found little need to reach out to community organisations or cultural associations to help address issues of cultural, linguistic or religious diversity. This is on area that governments could extend their community grants programs. Providing grant funds for communities to organize activities to bring young people together from different cultural backgrounds would help to bridge the cultural divide. Philanthropy sector is another avenue for such community grants to be disseminated.

Supporting culturally responsive teaching practices

One of areas that emerged from our interviews was the recognition that more was needed to support culturally responsive teaching practices in schools. Both key informants and school staff pointed to the need for more and better cultural diversity resources, including ones that addressed religious diversity, in particular a better understanding of Islam.

Also mentioned was the need for more teacher training about the various aspects of cultural diversity. This included increasing teacher's understanding and awareness of new policies and approaches to cultural diversity in schools. It is important to offer more support for staff development – both at pre-service teacher level and in schools for ESL training. And for it to include all teachers, not just to limit the training to language /ESL teachers.

Recommendations

The level of representation of cultural diversity in schools often depends on the geographic locality of a community. Culturally responsive schools - mainly smaller primary schools reflect the diversity in the school population – these schools embrace cultural difference and seek to implement culturally responsive programs across the whole school community – though these are often at the symbolic level of folk and food festivals. There are also the schools that are reactive to critical events. We found one school where following an incident that impacted on the school community, the school leadership did set out to address issues of intolerance, racism and cultural diversity through what they called an activities approach.

Schools and their communities should embrace the opportunities and challenges presented by Sydney's increasing cultural mix. Drawing on the cultural life, language diversity, and religious traditions of Australia's many cultures will enhance the social fabric of the community.

To this end we make the following recommendations

Cultural diversity and culturally responsive practices
- A renewed focus on culturally responsive practices and policies is required by departments of education, teachers and researchers that links the most recent 2005 departmental policy on ethno-cultural diversity to models of pedagogy that are culturally inclusive and cater for vibrant cultural mix evident in schools.

- This renewed focus requires an increased allocation of resources to schools to re-state the benefits and challenges of working within a diversity framework.

- Increased resources to conduct a 'cultural audit' would allow schools to explore how they really see their local community, to map the school community's cultural diversity, and to demonstrate ways that schools can effectively engage with their parent body, community cultural associations, and key local bodies like the local council to support student learning.

- It is recommended that all pre-service teachers undertake one subject in ESL training and that the professional development of teachers in schools is extended. In the first instance this should begin in schools with high concentration of ethnic diversity but it must be extended to teachers in culturally homogenous areas.

- Departments of education and schools need to participate in community discussions and debates about the meanings of key concepts such as cultural diversity, harmony, and community relations.

- Communities need to explore and discuss how the representations of cultural diversity relate to and support a more socially just and inclusive view of

Australian identity and citizenship. This requires local governments to organize activities in conjunction schools with a diversity focus that diffuse cultural tensions.

- The relationships between schools and their local community should have more depth and be more than just about having guest speakers or celebrations on special days. They should be built on real connections that involve parents, local cultural groups, the local council as well as the local business community. In this sense the school becomes a central point of connection with the community and that helps to cement the social fabric of the community.

- Schools need to address issues of Australian identity, racist attitudes and behaviours by drawing on our history and experience of waves of migration and the resulting impact on local communities. this implies that there are lessons in our history that relate to our practices in dealing with difference.

- In areas where there is evidence that cultural tensions exist education authorities should implement within the curriculum, conflict resolution activities utilising such programs as *Cooling Conflicts* or other awareness raising educational resource.

- Schools should provide more opportunities for students from Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LOBOTE) to draw on their cultural backgrounds and learn about active citizenship as part of their school curriculum and school learning activities.

- There is a need for educational bodies to be proactive rather than reactive and to implement these culturally inclusive programs in schools that are seen as clusters of mono-culturalism.

- Governments for the local to the federal levels should extend their community grants programs to assist local associations to set up programs that bring young people together from different cultural backgrounds. While the *On the Same Wave* program is one example, this type of activity should be extended and sustained in our communities.

Conclusion

The evolution of Australia from a homogenous predominantly Anglo-Celtic nation that imposed restrictive immigration policies for non –white migrants, to the modern cosmopolitan representation of a global community is hailed by many as a great success.

As we have seen however, in the current socio-political context, these new images of Australia are causing anxiety. There are undercurrents of doubt and contestation about these new trends. While environmental concerns about climate change have brought fears for the sustainability of our western lifestyle and the planet in general, fears of international terrorism, increasing migration levels due to world catastrophes and wars – often magnified by governments and the media - have created a crisis of identity in our communities. Despite these anxieties, schools on the whole, are aware of the challenges that these changing times present.

Historically, Departments of Education throughout Australia embraced the policy of Multiculturalism as delineated in the Galbally Report of 1978. They responded with their own documents to embed the principles of a cultural and linguistic diversity into the curriculum. They have been at the forefront in promoting cultural inclusion through ESL and LOTE programs and community language programs since they were set up in the 1980s.

However, the shift from a clearly defined multicultural policy at the national level in the last few years has been reflected at the curriculum level. One example is the move towards the development of a national Australian history curriculum with a focus on citizenship education and 'Australian values'. As noted earlier by Marginson (2004), regardless of how policy makers try to homogenise curriculum, diversity is a reality and migrants will pluralise multicultural education, therefore part of the answer is skilling teachers to work within the diversity framework.

After over a decade of intense debate about cultural diversity and what it means to be Australian that was underscored by fear of difference and what some call 'dog whistle' politics - it is time to reshape community discussions about meeting the challenges of cultural diversity in school and community settings.

Evidence suggests that schools that operate in more culturally homogenous communities (what might be called enclaves of mono-culturalism) don't perceive the need to instigate programs that specifically address issues of cultural diversity - unless they have had to react to particular incidents or situations that have arisen within that wider community that has impacted on school life. What schools need are proactive, preventative policies that focus on culturally inclusive practices being embedded into the curriculum and in everyday school life.

As Hickling Hudson (2003) suggested, the challenge is for schools to embrace the growing cosmopolitan nature of our communities and move beyond neo-conservative mindsets that generally promote monoculturalism to a more equitable, transformative and engaged intercultural communication about and across cultures.

Comments from a number of young people interviewed indicate that cultural barriers exist in conscious and subconscious forms. That is to say, that in the conscious realm, the realities of geography, socio-economic status and language proficiency impact on the capacity for intercultural contact. This can lead to what could be called 'clusters of whiteness' on the one hand and 'ethnic enclaves' on the other – neither of these is desirable for building cohesive civil societies. The crisis point of the Cronulla riots exemplifies this in December 2005.

Pockets of the south/eastern suburbs and northern suburbs of Sydney, including the northern beaches, present themselves as 'clusters of whiteness'. There is little focus on multicultural programs both in schools and in the community settings of some of these areas - particularly at the secondary level. Young people commented on the insularity of some of the attitudes of members of those communities.

Unconscious cultural barriers manifest themselves in the mindsets created by perceptions and attitudes to different ethnic groups. For example, one young Muslim Australian women (Australian born), now fully involved in the *On the Same Wave*

program instituted by the Surf Clubs after the Cronulla riots, commented that she had no idea that Surf clubs were open to all people. She and her family had the perception that they were really for young people of Anglo-Saxon backgrounds.

There do exist some quality programs that address these mindsets and endeavour to build intercultural connections that will lead to a great understanding of difference. Two examples being used in public schools in NSW are *Cooling Conflicts* and *Identity, Culture and Conflict*. Other programs that have proved successful are cultural exchange programs that are organised by between schools from different geographic locations and with different school populations. Students involved in these programs reported that they found them an eye opening experience - particularly when they had the opportunity to discuss and ask questions of each other about their varying backgrounds and experiences.

Connected Classrooms

One initiative that requires further exploration is the use of ICT to connect schools throughout the world. Interactive whiteboards are now a feature of most schools in NSW as the State government committed $158 million over 4 years starting in 2007 (DET, 2007). There is great scope for the utilisation of these interactive whiteboards to link remote, regional and city communities within Australia but also to link schools in all parts of the globe. The potential for Australian schools to make cross-cultural connections and engage in projects with schools in Asia or Europe and even in Africa given the appropriate resources are endless. This potential should be explored.

The challenges include the need for teachers and teacher educators to steer a balanced course between competing policy agendas so that students from ethnically and socio-economically diverse backgrounds are not further disadvantaged in a 'one size fits all' education system. This is a particular challenge when the research suggests that teachers often inhabit a socio-cultural world which has more in common with mono-culturalism than the culturally diverse world of the students they teach. The challenges then become ones of providing the resources and professional training for all our teachers, including our teacher education students, to better understand the pedagogical issues surrounding the links between culture, cultural maintenance and improved educational outcomes for students from ethno-culturally diverse backgrounds.

In conclusion, schools do not operate in a vacuum. They are influenced by the happenings in their community and in-turn they have an impact on the neighbourhoods they inhabit. Schools have an important role to play in nurturing communities that are socially inclusive. They are in a position to build bridges between different cultural perspectives. This can be done in an atmosphere of shared learning, within the safety of the school grounds in the first instance, but also through reaching out to the wider community, through parent groups, community associations and the local council. In this way the key stakeholders in a local area can work to create neighbourhoods that are truly inclusive.

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