

## **Forty years on: education for a culturally diverse Australia?**

**Marnie O'Neill**

The University of Western Australia, Crawley

Marnie.ONeill@uwa.edu.au

### **Abstract**

Commencement of a period of social reform in Australia was marked by the abolition of the “White Australia” policy in 1966, the transfer of powers and responsibility for Indigenous Welfare to the Commonwealth Government (1967), and election of the reformist Whitlam Government in 1972. The broad issues of race, ethnicity and gender are discussed in the context of historical policy on Indigenous Affairs, immigration and equal opportunity, and more recent events which have affected the ways in which policies for school education have been framed and implemented. Specific examples are used for illustrative purposes, rather than attempting a comprehensive coverage of all state and territory education jurisdictions. This paper reviews the extent to which the potential for social reform have been sustained in the field of education, particularly in terms of equity access and social justice.

### **Introduction**

The brief for this paper was to address the handling of cultural diversity in education in Australia in the context of inter-ethnic relations and the realisation of human rights. In considering the ways in which that brief might be constructed in the Australian context, the definition of multicultural education offered by Nieto (1996: 307) is useful:

Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and societies and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic and gender, among other things) that students, their communities, and teachers represent. Multicultural education permeates the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, as well as the interactions among teachers, students and parents, and the very way that schools conceptualise the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes the democratic principles of social justice.

In practice, many of the elements of pluralism identified above interact with each other, so that attempts to consider an element like gender without doing so in relation to social class and ethnicity, particularly in the quest for social justice, would oversimplify both the dimensions and the impact of the phenomenon. In addition, the ways in which some concepts were defined have changed over time, or have been modified or manipulated by different governments that have affect in the same jurisdiction. In this paper, discussions will focus on education and indigenous Australians, cultural diversity and ethnicity, gender and class, and the ways in which these interact with each other in the Australian context.

A major consideration in making sense of the management of education at the school level in Australia is the complexity of intergovernmental relations in the country. The Australian Constitution negotiated at the federation of the States in 1901 defined education as a residual

power; that is, the power and responsibility for school-level education remained with the individual state governments. The Commonwealth Government has power to make grants for the benefit of students (amendment to Section 51, 1946 referendum), and to make tied grants for specific purposes (building of science laboratories and school libraries, for example), but does not have direct control over funding, management, curriculum or staffing of schools within the states. In 1973, the Karmel Report (Karmel, 1973) paved the way for the establishment of the Schools Commission, which marked a turning point in the history of the political, policy and financial framework for Australian schools, with the Act establishing the Schools Commission in January 1974 (Connors, 2000). The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) is the intergovernmental body through which States and Commonwealth Ministers of Education negotiate agreement on policies, but the ways in which Commonwealth initiatives are deployed in each State may vary considerably. Thus, examples discussed in this paper may be local to the school community or local to the State education system, and cannot necessarily be regarded as national examples of policy implementation. The focus of government policy shifts across time and within and between governments, so that the three cycles of reform identified by Angus (1995) are a more complex interplay of emergence, dominance and residualisation of issues in the agendas of state and federal governments. The period from 1970 (approximately) and the mid 1980s might be regarded as one of social reform in the three broad strands that this paper addresses. In the mid 1980s, the attention of governments shifted to the relationship between schooling and the national economy in which part of the agenda for the federal government was to influence school level curriculum development in the national interest. Angus focused on quality of teaching in schools as his third cycle of reform, but issues of indigenous education, multiculturalism, gender and class re-emerged as major factors in educational policy during that period.

### **Indigenous Education: Post-European Invasion**

In a sense, Australia has always been a culturally diverse country, even before European invasion. The *National Indigenous Language Survey Report 2005 (NILS)* (AIATSIS/FATSIL, 2005), shows that there were originally over 250 Australian indigenous languages. Language can be regarded as the main marker of a distinct ethnic group (AIATSIS/FATSIL, 2005: 20-21). Australian Indigenous people identify strongly with a traditional language group (usually also the tribal name), which articulates their law governing all matters of behaviour, social issues and belief and is in turn associated with an area of land which has deep spiritual meaning for them. Thus each language group has its own cultural identity, which can be severely dislocated by loss of language or loss of land. Subsequent immigrant groups may therefore be regarded as additions to an already culturally diverse environment.

In the transition from colonialism to individual state governance, to federation (1901), responsibility for indigenous people remained with individual state governments until the Commonwealth referendum of 1967 transferred powers and responsibility for indigenous welfare to the Commonwealth. Until 1967, each state managed its responsibilities independently, although there was considerable commonality in the practices employed. Under the auspices of various state governments, tribal groups could be excluded from their traditional lands and children could be removed from their parents to Native Settlements or

Homes; in other circumstances, missionaries of various religious affiliations provided physical, spiritual (Christian) and educational care and governance. Forcible removal of children and alienation from “country”, and sequestration of traditional lands and waterways resulted in deep social and emotional dislocation documented in *Bringing Them Home* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). Schooling for indigenous children in this period was erratic: in some states there was dispute about which government department was responsible for educational provision; Indigenous children could be excluded from school on the petition of parents of white children (Tomlinson, 2008); and the kinds of education provided fitted girls for domestic work and boys for labouring jobs or work as stockmen in the pastoral industry (Toose, 1993). Stanner’s 1968 Boyer lecture series (Stanner, 1969) provided a comprehensive critique of the policy of assimilation and, with H.C. Coombs, Chair of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs from 1967 to 1976, contributed to development of a policy of self-determination and autonomy in decentralised Aboriginal communities (Manne, 2007: 34-35).

Despite Coombs’ optimism about “two-way schooling” with both Aboriginal and Western dimensions (Coombs, 1994), successful completion of schooling and transition to employment or higher education and training for indigenous students continued to be low. Thies (1987) documented some of the issues related to poor school attendance for children in the East Kimberley as being traditional parents’ lack of familiarity with the requirements of Western schooling, incongruence of school regimes and traditional customs of child-raising and patterns of movement, ill-health (particularly hearing impairment, anaemia and trachoma), social problems (drunkenness, sick parents, guardianship, hunger, clothing) and resistance to schooling (parents may have had bad experiences themselves, do not know or trust the teachers).

### Current issues

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2006: 11) reported some success:

The educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians have improved over recent decades as evidenced by the enrolment, participation and achievement of Indigenous students in both the early childhood education and school sectors, by increased representation of Indigenous students in traineeships and apprenticeships and the strong growth of Indigenous enrolments in TAFE colleges, VET institutes and universities.

However, the document also acknowledged that relationship between Indigenous people and formal education systems has continued to be problematic, and of limited success for many students:

... progress has been slow and incremental. Many Indigenous students continue to “drop out” at or before Year 10 and far too few remain at school to complete Year 11 and Year 12, or its vocational equivalent. Of those who do complete Year 12, few obtain the scores needed to gain entry into university. Most Indigenous students, regardless of their completion year, leave school poorly prepared relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts. ... While some (specific intervention) programs have been highly successful, only a small proportion of the total

population of Indigenous students is able to access them and the impact on overall outcomes has been limited. (p.11.)

Thies documented the desire of participants in her study for “two-way” schooling which would accommodate traditional education, culture and language, and equip children to compete equally with children from mainstream Australian society, or “diversity within diversity” (1987: 85). The concept of two-way schooling, particularly with reference to language, was raised in the *NILS Report* (AIATSIS/FATSIL, 2005). The question of the relative places of Standard Australian English (SAE) and Kimberley Kriol in schools was raised by Thies (1987: 105); the argument was that continued recognition and maintenance or recovery of traditional language was not necessarily a hindrance to acquisition of SAE. This was also the finding of the *NILS Report* (AIATSIS/FATSIL, 2005: 12), which cited the success of the bilingual education initiative in the Northern Territory, 1974-98 (p.35).

There have been positive initiatives, but many, as the *NILS Report* (AIATSIS/FATSIL, 2005) points out, have been fragile and dependent on particular persons, within both the communities and in the school system for their success. For example, the Fitzroy Valley Community developed a self-help plan in conjunction with indigenous leaders, the Aboriginal Trust (LEEDAL), the local community, local schools and several corporate sponsors (The Crossing Inn and the Swan Brewery) to extend the work of the Karrayili Adult Education Centre to young people with the intention to educate them in life skills, encourage them to complete schooling, continue to tertiary studies and to take advantage of work opportunities (The Fitzroy Valley Youth Trust, 2000). By 2008, the project had disappeared, and Fitzroy Crossing was one of the communities investigated in the coroner’s inquiry into the deaths of 22 Kimberley men and women in 2006 (Hope, 2008).

Other initiatives have had a longer-term influence. Linking education to opportunities to participate in high level sports training and competition has been productive. The Clontarf Foundation (2008), a non-profit organisation incorporated in Western Australia, aims to improve the health, employment, education and life skills of Australia’s teenage male indigenous population. The initial vehicle for providing an opportunity to succeed and thus raise their self esteem, is Australian Rules football. The Clontarf Football Academy was established on-site at the Clontarf Aboriginal College in January 2000 with 25 boys, and has since expanded to multiple sites throughout Western Australia and the Northern Territory, enrolling 1380 students. The Foundation works with the support of sponsors, the federal and state governments, local communities and schools, and is currently placing graduates in employment in Perth and in regional centres. The Clontarf Girls’ Academy welcomed its first intake of participants in 2008. Other school-based sports academies supported by the Australian Government’s *Sporting Chance* programme opened in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and South Australia in 2007 and 2008 (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2008).

*Follow the Dream*, a Western Australian programme, commenced in 2004 to help indigenous students stay at high school and work towards a university entrance (Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate, 2008). The programme is a partnership between the Department of Education and Training (state government), Department of Education Science and Training

(federal government), the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation<sup>1</sup> and Industry Organisations who provide funding and employment opportunities. The programme provides students with tutors and mentors, individual education plans, a safe supportive study environment after school, regular updates on academic performance and regular contact with parents and teachers. Although the programmes are run locally by experienced teachers, participating families are invited to take part in decision making for future directions.

Links between schools and their indigenous communities are essential to maintain positive participation of children. There are 2500 Indigenous Education Workers (IEWs) across Australia, although they work under different titles in different states (Aboriginal Education Workers [NSW], Koori Educators [Victoria], Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers [WA], Aboriginal Education Workers [SA]). Roles have changed since the first Aboriginal teaching assistant was appointed in the Northern Territory in 1953, and vary from providing specific support to individual students and families, to organising study skills centres and literacy support, orientation camps and career advice to ensuring that an Aboriginal perspective is prevalent across the school curriculum (<http://samekidssamegoals.dsf.org.au/what/>). In Western Australia, a new conversion course for AIEOs, initiated by the Department of Education and Training (DET) and run by Curtin University, allowed 24 students to complete a Bachelor of Education (DET, 2008: 10). An increasing body of research on culturally appropriate teacher education and curriculum is emerging (for example, Arbon, 2006; Etherington, 2006); the challenge will be to use it to inform policy and practice.

Multiple reports (Pearson, 2000, 2007; Gordon *et al.*, 2002; McKnight, 2002; Wild & Anderson, 2007; Hope, 2008) have shown that for some remote communities, destructive dysfunction has been acute. Pearson identified three major contributing factors: alcohol, passive welfare and disconnection from the real economy. His agenda for change includes the selection of talented young people to attend boarding schools outside their communities, support for those seeking work and training outside their communities, and support for community residents to buy their own homes. All of his proposals have attracted criticism, but perhaps the boarding school initiative has been most controversial because sending young people away from the communities and country, to institutions run by white people in the mainstream community, resonates with the bitter experiences of *The Stolen Generations* (Human Rights and equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), Furthermore, some young people have not been sufficiently resilient to complete their schooling in those environments. A current project (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2008) initiated between the previous Howard federal government, the Northern Territory government and the Nguiu Tiwi community, is the establishment of a boarding school on Melville Island, away from the main community, where students attend five days per week, returning to their homes at the weekend. The community chose this means of providing a safe and focused educational environment, while retaining regular frequent contact between the students, their families and the community, as several of the prospective students were unable to continue when sent to boarding school away from the community. The community also chose an English-only environment; instruction in local primary schools is in Tiwi for the first four years, with only two years of English language before students enter high school. Student achievement in the

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Farmer was a successful, high profile Australian Rules football player.

national English literacy tests is very low, and they are judged to have inadequate levels of English for secondary school studies.

The transition from education and training to work is critical to Pearson's<sup>2</sup> vision for an indigenous future. Andrew Forrest (Fortescue Metals Group chief executive) recently urged fellow corporate citizens to set an agenda for 50 000 jobs for indigenous people within two years. Pearson's concern is that there will not be 50 000 indigenous people ready to accept such jobs, and proposed a five-step staircase of opportunity (Pearson, 2008: 27), that could be extended to parents and their children in high school as a guarantee of access to opportunity on completion of schooling. Scepticism about the viability of the scheme was expressed by Malezer, Chair of the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research (Gilling, 2008). Sanderson<sup>3</sup> (2008) expressed reservations about the kinds of jobs, their locations, and the readiness of Western Australian indigenous people to undertake them as a consequence of the sustained experience of neglect and trauma. He pointed out that although only three percent of the total population, indigenous people comprise 45% of the prison population of Western Australia. In recognising the visionary significance of Prime Minister Rudd's Apology (42<sup>nd</sup> term of Parliament, Parliament House, 2008, Sanderson also identified a flaw: "the challenges are not just those faced by Indigenous Australians – they are challenges for us all, and the redemption we are seeking is for the whole nation" (2008: 9). The Apology was widely celebrated in Australian schools, as is NAIDOC week, which celebrates National Aboriginal and Islanders' Day Observance. National recognition and celebration of these kinds are significant, but not sufficient on their own. The Aboriginal Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC) Working Party on Indigenous Education articulated the scope of the educational challenge:

The Indigenous population is young: almost half of the population is approaching school age or in the compulsory and post-compulsory school age cohort. The Indigenous population is also growing at twice the annual rate projected for the rest of the population. ... Indigenous students represent an increasing proportion of all students, particularly in government schools. There is thus an urgent need to challenge the prevailing view that disparity in the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is "normal" and that incremental gains are acceptable. The rapidly widening polarisation in society due to globalisation and unequal opportunities to join the "knowledge economies" further underlines the critical importance of addressing the disparity in educational outcomes. (The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. [MCEETYA], 2006: 11.)

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<sup>2</sup> Noel Pearson is Director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant General John Sanderson AC, former Governor of Western Australia, Special Adviser to the Carpenter Government of Western Australia on Indigenous Affairs.

## **Immigration for a Diverse Australia**

### **History of immigration policies**

The Immigration (Restriction) Act of 1901 brought together the existing state laws of Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia, all of which were based on the immigration law of the Colony of Natal, and all of which had a form of dictation test written into their general immigration acts for the purposes of excluding non-European immigrants. Failure of the dictation test meant the prohibited person could be gaoled for six months (although this could be reduced) before deportation. The period in which a person could be subjected to the dictation test was extended from one year to three (1920) and to five (1932) before being dropped from the Migration Act of 1952. Commonly known as the “White Australia’ policy, exclusion by race was officially abandoned in 1966 when Immigration Minister Opperman announced that application for immigration would be accepted from well-qualified people on the basis of their suitability as settlers, their ability to integrate readily and their possession of qualifications positively useful to Australia. In 1973, government took three further steps to remove race as a factor in Australia’s immigration policies: legislation that all migrants of whatever origin, were eligible to obtain citizenship after three years of permanent residence; policy instructions to all overseas posts to disregard race as a factor in selection of migrants; and ratification of all international agreements relating to immigration and race. From 1978, planned immigration took place in three year rolling programmes.

Management of unplanned immigration was a different matter. Until 1992, unauthorised entrants to Australia (usually refugees referred to as “boat people”) were held in detention under the Migration Act 1958, on a discretionary basis. In 1992, the Labor government introduced mandatory detention under the Migration Amendments Act (1992) on the rationale that detention would facilitate processing of refugee claims, prevent de facto immigration and be more economic than locating people in the community. In 1994, the Migration Reform Act (1992) introduced mandatory detention for everyone without a valid visa, effectively regulating the determination of refugee status and the “removal of people who could not establish an entitlement to be in Australia” (Parliament of Australia, 2005). Between 2000 and 2005 amendments to the Act expanded powers to administer detention centres and prevented court orders for release. Some softening of the policy occurred in 2001, with a residential housing project for women and children and introduction of community detention arrangements. The Migration Amendment (Detention Arrangements) Act (2005) signified that the government remained committed to mandatory detention, excision of territory for migration purposes, offshore processing (the so-called “Pacific solution”), and turning boats back at sea. In July 2008, Senator Chris Evans announced a policy of the newly-elected Rudd government that retained mandatory detention for three groups (unauthorised arrivals, unlawful non-citizens who posed unacceptable risks, and unlawful non-citizens who repeatedly refused to comply with their visa conditions) as a last resort, excluded children, and promised that periods of detention would be short; subject to regular review; fair and reasonable within the law; and that it would maintain the inherent dignity of the human person (Evans, 2008).

According to the 2006 Census, Australia’s population was around 20 million people. Of those reporting a country of birth, 24% were born overseas and 45% were either born

overseas or had at least one parent born overseas. In addition to indigenous languages, a further 200 languages were spoken in Australia; after English, the most common languages spoken were Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic and Mandarin. Australians identify with some 250 ancestries, and practise a range of religions ([www.immi.gov.au/mediia/factsheets/08abolition.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/mediia/factsheets/08abolition.htm) downloaded 23/05/08). This diversity poses particular challenges for maintenance of cultural heritage and identity, particularly in relation to language, and full participation in the dominant culture.

### Multicultural and Ethnic Education

Multiculturalism in Australia appears to have begun with a paper from the Whitlam government Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby (1973), but to have developed as a product of the Fraser government (1975-83). As might be expected from the preceding background discussion, a substantial policy shift occurred between Snedden's position as Liberal Minister for Immigration, espousing an Australian monoculture in 1968, and MacPhee's term as Minister for Immigration in 1982:

Acquiring Australian citizenship should not require suppression of one's cultural heritage or identity. Rather, the act of becoming a citizen is – symbolically and actually – a process of bringing one's own gift of language, culture and traditions to enrich the already diverse fabric of Australian society. Our vision of multicultural society shares with our concept of citizenship, strong emphasis on building cohesive and harmonious society which is all the more tolerant and outward looking because of the diversity of its origins.

(Ministerial Statement, 6 May 1982, cited in Kalantzis and Cope, 1984: 83.)

“Choice”, “diversity” and “community involvement” were key terms in the Schools Commission's reform programme and fitted the project of cultural pluralism perfectly (Kalantzis and Cope, 1984, p.87). The Australian Department of Education (1975) highlighted the needs of migrant children with respect to successful teaching of English, introduction of multicultural elements to the curriculum, maintenance of community languages, bilingual education programmes and retraining of teachers to sensitise them to migrant issues. The ways in which schools (even in the same state education system) responded to the press for multicultural education varied considerably, as demonstrated by Kalantzis and Cope's (1984) thumbnail sketches of five Sydney schools. In four of the five cases, Kalantzis and Cope suggest that the multicultural agenda failed to advance the educational achievement of the students, either because of a lack of resources to support the necessary intensive and specialised teaching, or because the ways in which multiculturalism was interpreted reproduced existing structures of class, gender and inequality (p.91). Only in one school was the curriculum adjusted to integrate language and social science offerings, to extend the time allocation to these subjects and to incorporate values, socialisation, culture and gender in ways strongly oriented to concept and language development. The focus on language was extended to offer Italian and Arabic as mainstream academic subjects rather than “preserving” them as community languages.

Kalantzis and Cope argue that multiculturalism as applied to education had two drivers – attempting to right social disadvantage for migrants, and valuing cultural pluralism, without acknowledging the wider patterns of socioeconomic status, social class and gender. Thus,

schools might include specialist teaching of English as a second language, the valuing and accrediting of “community” languages, bilingual teaching, employment of teachers with overseas qualifications, and socio-cultural programmes trying to foster positive self-images in children of a non-English-speaking background (Kalantzis & Cope, 1984: 84). Cultural pluralism as a concept and as a practice did not set out to reform society, but to celebrate existing diversity; frequently it was described as a folkloric combination of “spaghetti and polka” (p.85) which should recognise difference but offend no-one. Such a philosophy might be held to inform educational supplements like *Faces of Australia* ([www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/faces-of-australia/index.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/faces-of-australia/index.htm)) intended to provide resources for upper primary and secondary schools, and practices associated with *Living in Harmony* (<http://www.harmony.gov.au/>).

Nevertheless, language became an arena which encapsulated the conflicts between recognition of cultural diversity and equity of opportunity for successful participation in an Anglo-Australian mainstream culture. Reference has already been made to the issues of language loss, bilingual education and English language literacy for indigenous Australians. The development of “community language” in the Australian context confronted a number of issues: which language(s) should be accorded “Community language” status, given that there are multiple languages, rather than a single major minority language; what form (standard or particular to the immigrant context) should be supported; and what are the appropriate pedagogies (communicative competence or traditional linguistics)? By 1987, the concept of the maintenance of community languages appeared to be assigned to the “too-hard basket” and was replaced by Language Other Than English (LOTE). *The National Policy on Languages* (Lo Bianco, 1987) set out broad social goals of “enrichment, economic opportunities, external relations and equality” to be achieved through three guiding principles: English for all; support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages; and a LOTE for all. By 1990 (Department of Education Employment and Training, 1990, 1991; Dawkins 1990) the focus of attention appeared to have given priority to English for all, with an increasing emphasis on functional literacy. Various commentators (De Castell & Luke, 1987; Ferdman, 1990; Stuckey, 1991) argue that literacy as a social technology is not neutral, but impacts on the values and social and cultural identities of individuals and groups in ways that require adjustment of cultural identity to participate fully in the dominant culture. Battles have been waged in the academic literature as well as the national press over the claims of cultural literacies, critical literacies and multiliteracies. Irrespective of changes of government, focus on functional English language literacies has gained greater prominence through national and state tests of English language literacies as the definition of “schooling literacy” in Australia.

Within (or perhaps, against) the national trend, some language projects have succeeded. Despite Chipman’s scaring commentary on the introduction of Modern Greek in Victorian primary schools (Chipman 1980, p.6), the initiative appears to be alive and well as a result of co-operation between the Greek communities in Australia, Greek Consuls of education, local Australian Greek communities, and the University of Crete. A significant feature of the project is the Seconded Teachers from Greece Scheme, which provides for Greek teachers to be seconded to Australia for three to five years, but also provides opportunities for Australian-born Greek teachers to attend courses at the University of Crete. Opportunities are

also available for Greek and non-Greek youth and schools to participate in cultural and languages programmes, and teaching resources are supplied for schools. In Western Australia, the state government also provides funding for teaching of Greek language and culture through after-hours providers such as the weekday or Saturday morning Greek schools (Yiannakis, 2009). Similarly, the Chinese community has been able to sustain teaching of Mandarin through the Chung Wah Associations, and some schools have developed strong sister-school exchange programmes to support the teaching and learning of Japanese.

Insufficient attention has been given in this paper to teaching and learning of English as a second language (ESL), particularly for students from refugee backgrounds. Increasing numbers of students from diverse cultural backgrounds arrive in schools traumatised by the cumulative experiences of war and detention camps. Teachers engaging with these students face the task of helping them rebuild individual and community identities, learn English, and find ways to survive and participate in the dominant culture. Stevenson (2008) offered a moving account of the ways in which Human Rights Education can assist in achieving these aims in a senior secondary college in Perth.

### Shaping the citizens

Various curriculum interventions were negotiated between the federal and state governments in attempts to shape the social consciousness of the population in what might be described as the progressive period in Australian education. The Social Education Materials Project (Curriculum Development Centre, 1974) provided teachers of Humanities-type courses with an immense resource base developed through a collaborative project involving all state education departments in partnership with the Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra. The project was intended to provide teachers with an opportunity to select resources suitable for their students and for integration within their own curricula and teaching programmes in an era which promoted resource-based learning and school-based curriculum development. The resources offered opportunities to develop programmes of learning that interrogated social constructions in relation to cultural diversity, inclusion and exclusion, exploring social values, norms and beliefs. Most teachers operated within relatively prescriptive state syllabuses, and had not necessarily had access to appropriate professional development for school-based curriculum development. The sheer scale of the package may have mitigated against its successful dissemination, despite three models of diffusion being attempted (Marsh & Carter, 1980). Some educational jurisdictions found the materials confronting and subversive, and banned parts of the package; the potential of the innovation and its investment in social reform were substantially unrealised.

More recent curriculum developments have paid greater attention to shaping responsible citizens (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989; Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1991; Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, 1995), partly fuelled by concern about apathy and ignorance, and partly driven by urgent national issues of multiculturalism, reconciliation and the republic debate (Macintyre, 1996). The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) produced the *Discovering Democracy* package through the Curriculum Corporation (1998) and funded a three-year professional development package for teachers,

delivered through the Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment (AFSSSE). Criddle's analysis (2002) suggested that the intervention had limited success for a variety of reasons: changes of government and "ministerialisation" skewed the package toward historical content and knowledge-based activities; the narrow version of citizenship provided in the package conflicted with wider and more critical views enabled by some state curricula which cast students as change agents rather than passive consumers; and finally, the package was optional rather than compulsory.

If *Discovering Democracy* might be viewed as an unsuccessful movement towards shaping democracy and informed citizenship, the Australian History initiative called for "a nationwide revival in the teaching of Australian history and its global, environmental and social contexts" (Department of Education, Science and Training 2006). The Guide to Teaching Australian History in Years 9 and 10 (Department of Education, Science and Training 2007) emphasises the history of Australia as:

the single most important disciplinary perspective from which students can know, understand and evaluate the development of the nation in which they live. It helps them learn about Australia's democratic traditions, its institutions, its sense of national identity, the life and values of its citizens and its cultural diversity. These understandings should be informed by a sense of relevant local, regional, state, national and global contexts and influences, as awareness of the past and present experiences of distinct groups within Australian society, and the heritage and influence of Australia's Indigenous peoples. (p.6.)

The intention was to proceed with a set of outcomes, assessment techniques, a detailed curriculum and resources as the next priority in developing a national curriculum in Australian History. Had this project proceeded, it would have been possible to make a judgement on the extent to which it recognised and admitted cultural diversity to the grand narrative of a national history. However, the election of the Rudd Government in 2007 may have changed the priorities and the extent to which such an agenda might recognise and support culturally diverse approaches. The project of a national curriculum across all learning areas canvassed between 1990 and 1993, founded on differences between the state education departments; it has re-emerged on the agenda of the Rudd Government, but the scope and orientation of the project are not yet apparent.

The more recent curriculum initiatives briefly addressed above should be regarded in the context of a series of events which impacted on the Australian psyche (if such a collective notion is congruent with the concept of cultural diversity): the MV Tampa rescue of refugees, the subsequent Border Protection Bill and the "Pacific Solution" to illegal immigration; the bombing of the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001; the Bali bombings of October 2002 and 2005; the Cronulla beach riots of December 2005; and the arrest of Mohammed Haneef in July 2007. Directly or otherwise, these events may have contributed to the institution of the Australian Citizenship Test (October 2007) and the requirement for all visa applicants to sign the Australian Values Statement (2007). Whether these can be seen as a set of events that has moved cumulatively towards an Australia with less openness to diversity and a less inclusive culture is questionable. Singh (2000) argues that although the White Australia policy may have been abolished in 1966, the ways in which the contested uses of

“multiculturalism” are deployed support values and practices that he associates with latent systemic racism in Australia.

### **Gender Equity**

Nieto’s definition (1996: 307) includes gender as a category of diversity. In Australia, gendered curricula were an accepted feature of schooling until the 1970s. Policies central to the improvement of the status of women, particularly young women, in Australian society, namely:

- the Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women Act, 1986 (revised and amended in the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace, 1999)); and
- the National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools (Department of Employment Education and Training [DEET], 1987)

were informed by two major reports (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1975; Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1984) which guided funding through arms such as State Grants (Schools Assistance) and Commonwealth Projects of National Significance. Apart from general equity requirements, projects focused on obtaining approximately equal representation and attainment of girls in major subject areas (e.g. mathematics and science); developing and implementing educational strategies which improve the outcomes of schooling for girls (e.g. girls with special needs, such as girls with non-English speaking backgrounds, girls from isolated rural areas, Aboriginal girls, girls with severe disabilities); improving the self-esteem of girls (participation in physical education and sport); and programmes to assist in widening career options for girls.

Despite acknowledgement in *Girls, Schools and Society* that:

Sexism is a process through which females and males not only progressively learn that different things are expected and required of them because of their sex, but learn those things in an unexamined way.

(Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1975:17.)

“new” policies and practices reflected existing gender biases in society, constructing a deficit in girls’ attitudes and skills, with overwhelming emphasis on increasing girls’ participation in mathematics, science and technology in a more rigorous masculine curriculum. However, Connell *et al.* (1982) noted that as early as the late 1970s, a “renovation” of middle-class femininity had begun to appear in the independent girls’ schools, actively promoting the possibilities of a career and independent paid work for middle-class women. Commitment to curriculum change is rarely unanimous. Even if there is consensus about the nature of the problem, it is more difficult to agree about the best way to fix it, and to ensure that the new curriculum model is institutionalised effectively. Competing orientations to curriculum can be considered along a continuum:

Residual ← → Dominant ← → Emergent (O’Neill, 1995).

Attempts to institutionalise the emergent curriculum will meet challenges from the competing models, even as a previously dominant model slips into residual status, and the

emergent becomes the dominant model. Commonly, curriculum hybrids may appear (O'Neill, 1995), sometimes with the agenda of "having the best of both worlds". Marais' (2007) research in an independent girls' school indicated that the "accomplishments" curriculum and its related discourses and practices of femininity became a residual orientation, as the emergent "masculinities" curriculum with its emphasis on equal participation and achievement in the fields where boys traditionally achieved success provided a platform for change:

The preparation and publication of the *National Policy for the Education of Girls* in Australian Schools (1987) which was endorsed by all Australian education systems had a major ideological impact on private schools which needed to be seen at the forefront of gendered educational change. The overall result of feminist interventions in the educational debate around equity in education for girls in Australia was that private girls' schools, in particular, reinvented their curricula to interrogate and critique patriarchal exclusivity with their new emphasis on mathematics and sciences. (Marais 2007: 14.)

The efficacy of innovations of this kind for all girls has frequently been called into question. Construction of the equity debate around girls as a single homogenous group – as if the only division were that between males and females – excludes issues of race, class, ethnic minority status, religion and the interactions between them from consideration. Tsolidis (1990: 57) argued that the analysis which dominated the girl's education debate operated within a schema which defined "Australian" in dominant cultural terms. According to studies of high-fee independent girls' schools (Kenway, 1990; Marais, 2007), high levels of academic success for middle class girls reinforce class divisions. The focus of attention on successes of middle-class girls may have deflected attention from Wyn's concern (1990) that working class girls select vocational pathways, and the tendency of girls to suppress ambition and undervalue their abilities (Foster, Kimmel & Skelton, 2001).

The shift of government attention to the relationship between schooling and the national economy in the mid 1980s, and the sense that "the girl problem" had been addressed, momentarily obscured gender as an issue in the equity and diversity debate. A "failing schools, failing boys" discourse emerged directly from the school effectiveness and school improvement movements (Foster, Kimmel & Skelton, 2001: 4). Arguments about "competing victims" and moral panic about boys' disadvantaged status relative to girls (Martino & Meyenn, 2001; Foster, Kimmel & Skelton, 2001), have pervaded the popular and academic discourses about education for the past decade. The universalising discourse category of "boys" again occludes the distinctions of class, ethnicity and religion as markers of (dis)advantage. Middle-class boys in high-fee independent schools might be considered to be advantaged, relative to other groups, including girls. As Langford-Smith's (2008) study of such an independent school indicates:

... School also had a political agenda. Although it was privileging the needs of an individual, it was clearly promoting the creation of a particular type of individual who was being prepared to take on a specific role in society. Hale School saw itself as preparing the state's future leaders. (p.132.)

An inquiry into the education of boys in Australian schools initiated by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2002) resulted in two major initiatives. The *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools* project (BELS, funded at \$7 million) was implemented in two stages over 2003-05 in more than 550 schools to help to improve boys' educational outcomes (Cuttance, Imms, Godhino, *et al.*, 2004). The *Success for Boys* programme built on BELS as a national \$19.4 million initiative that targeted at-risk and disadvantaged boys, to address key intervention areas of mentoring, literacy, information and communication technology and relevant Indigenous issues over 2006-07, and subsequently established further research projects. Reports have not yet been issued on these projects.

The construction of girls and of boys as two separate but homogenous groups may have masked a potentially more insidious and damaging effect of federal funding policies which directed funding to independent schools at the expense of government schools. The rise of low-fee independent schools, ostensibly to provide parental choice in schooling options for children, drained financial and cultural resources from government schools (Connors, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Di Bartolo, 2005; Campbell, 2005) and exacerbated socio-economic divisions. The argument is that socio-economic status partitions populations in Australian cities geographically, resulting in "an accumulation of disadvantage within schools" (Teese & Polesel, 2003: 10), which can serve to contain the aspirations of new populations completing school. The question is to what extent the current structures of funding and curriculum provision cater for the aspirations and abilities of the increasingly culturally diverse populations of students in terms of access and success.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has been able to give only a cursory and selective overview of the issues of cultural diversity in the context of schooling in Australia. Socio-economic factors, federal funding of schooling and the ways in which they intersect with access to opportunity across indigenouness, ethnicity and gender cannot easily be unpacked in a paper of this size and scope. Policies of the previous Howard Government appear to have been enthusiastically adopted by the current Rudd Government, with the announced agenda of improving schooling outcomes for all and particularly for disadvantaged sectors of the community. One such initiative is to withhold social security payments from families who do not ensure that their children are enrolled and attend school regularly. However, this may further damage at-risk families and the frequently fragile relations between them and their schools, as teachers are cast in the role of social security police. The intention is also to provide more informed choices with regard to the selection of schools, and therefore it is proposed to make public all schools' performances on agreed upon standards (comparing schools of similar socio-economic status). Initially, "failing schools" will receive extra funding to raise their performance, but repeated failure will result in dismissal of school principals and/or staff, and ultimately, closure of schools. How these policies might affect remote and regional communities where there are no alternative schools conveniently accessible, or schools with low socio-economic communities or high migrant communities, is a matter of speculation. The overview provided by this paper suggests that since the mid 1980s, as cultural diversity in Australia has increased, the national agenda in education has focused increasingly on the relationships between the national economic agenda and accountability and performativity

for schools and teachers. This process was driven through national curricula initiatives (yet to be successfully realised) and national testing programmes, with less support for culturally diverse programmes to meet the needs and interests of culturally diverse groups of citizens. Realisation of human rights and equity of access and success in education appears to have receded for some marginalised indigenous and immigrant groups. Furthermore, low socio-economic status, gender and class interact with both these factors in ways which have impacted adversely on the sustainability of the reform agenda envisaged forty years ago.

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