

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY, COSMOPOLITAN
CITIZENSHIP & EDUCATION:
ISSUES, OPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS
FOR AUSTRALIA**

A discussion paper for the Australian Education Union

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Why is cultural diversity an educational policy issue?

Education forms the most important investment a society can make in its future – in terms of its economy, its culture and its social order. Education to a large extent determines personal well-being, health, and income, and social mobility, flexibility and innovation. Education is thus both a personal and a social good; indeed it demonstrates more than any other area of our lives how dependent we are on each other to fulfil our needs and contribute to the wider community benefit.

Australia is a modern democratic society, built on the energy and contributions of people from over one hundred different countries. They have arrived, those who are not Indigenous, seeking fortune, hoping for survival, fleeing from threats of torture and death, or looking for adventure, for a new start. Each carries the histories of her or his communities of origin, and are actors in the transformation of those communities into the integral components of contemporary Australia. Whether their forebears came as convicts or free settlers, seekers after the elusive fortune of gold, or refugees from wars and revolutions, they have fed their aspirations and skills into the melting pot of Australia. Australia has become and continues to evolve as a society of diverse cultures oriented to a common core of political, social, economic and cultural institutions.

Over the past generation, Australians have come to see the value of this diversity and its resilience and vitality. Cultural diversity, especially in its policy frame of “multiculturalism”, carries three key implications – heritage culture preservation and survival, inter-cultural engagement and synergies, and capacity to operate as global citizens. Cultural diversity, now the focus of an international agreement through UNESCO (as of July 2009 Australia was still one of the sole outsiders: the USA and Israel had voted against the convention, while Australia, Honduras, Liberia and Nicaragua abstained), has forced these issues onto the policy table of governments across the world.

Perhaps because of its difficulty as a concept in public policy, multiculturalism remains a point of division. This division is based on two totally different interpretations of the nature of the social world and the role of culture in sustaining social cohesion. One approach to “multiculturalism” recognises that a plurality of cultural groupings can co-exist and interact in complex modern societies – indeed recognition of difference and the resolution of differential power between groups becomes the essence of public policy. The other approach portrays a society as unitary, as though it requires a single shared culture, with diversity an aberration that passes in time through processes of assimilation, to which end public policy should be directed. At the heart of these debates over cultural diversity lies the role of education.

The development of public education in Australia in part grew out of the fear among liberals that sectarianism would undermine the emerging democratic and egalitarian social fabric of late 19th century. There was also the stronger desire that public education under a secular banner would provide an over-arching citizenship, in which once and for all State and Church would be separate. Both the Protestant and Catholic churches lost state support for their schools from the 1870s, deepening a rift that

persisted through the next three generations or more. Three concerns focussed the attention of public officials and the wider population of the day: the desperate need for skills required by a modernising society, the belief that secularism (though not atheism) should be embedded into the emerging civic culture; and the hope that education would provide the avenue for integration across the major European ethno-cultural divides of the day. Among the more outspoken of the ruling elites and their acolytes, there was also a deep hostility to the poor Catholic Irish, who were seen as a drain on the purse of the state, and whose education in a foreign ideology should be marginalised. While the middle class Christian schools of the Protestant communities survived, often with munificent land grants to sustain them, the poorer Irish found the period after the end of State Aid far more difficult.

These were deeply experienced social divisions, the most significant being that ethno-religious trench which separated Irish Catholics on the one hand from British (English, Scots) Protestants (and within this segment, a distinction between the Anglicans and the non-conforming remainder). The Indigenous population had already been corralled away from the new White society and pushed out of or never admitted to mainstream education, while the Chinese were suffering the increasing pressures that would lead ultimately to their suppression under White Australia, including their marginalisation in the telling of Australian history. In northern Australia Pacific Islanders laboured in a state of quasi-slavery with minimal access to schooling for themselves or their locally born children, while along the northern littoral the multicultural society of the Torres Strait was reaching its zenith outside any educational institutions except those offered by scattered missionary centres.

So we can see that Australia's cultural diversity has played an integral role in the formulation and implementation of Australia's education system, both in terms of those it sought to include and how it would do this, and those it effectively did not include. Despite the intention of the early public education proponents, the public system did not lead to a unitary framework for education. The withdrawal of state aid did not indeed ensure universal free and secular education. Rather it created a three-sector system, made up of wealthy primarily Protestant private schools (joined by some elite Catholic colleges), an under-funded but doggedly non-secular diocesan Catholic sector, and an always less than fully funded state sector. In fact it ensured that a religious orientation would necessarily underpin the non-state sector, embedding the division in the imagination of Australian public political culture, of a religious and value-saturated non-state sector in contrast to a secular and therefore supposedly value-free or relativist state sector. This distinction created the basis for a long-term and embittered divide that thwarted secularism as the hallmark of modern rational education. I am not arguing here for access by religious groups to state funding, but rather illustrating what happens where secularism is the mantra of public discourse but not the reality of public practice.

One consequence of the development of Australian education arrangements was that most working class children in the post war waves of European (and later Asian) immigration were funneled either (by a large majority) into a state system that was assimilationist, rationalist and nationalist, or a Catholic diocesan system that preached religious singularity while being slightly less concerned about the catholicity of cultures that the children's parents brought. Neither version of 1960s modernity

survived the end of White Australia, while both were transformed by the emerging debates about multicultural education.

The advent of multicultural education in both systems during the 1970s was part of the more widespread acceptance of cultural diversity as a continuing and welcome element in the increasingly complex and cosmopolitan social fabric of the nation. That transformation paralleled the rapid expansion of Commonwealth involvement in and funding of both state and Catholic systems, and the initially slow expansion of ethno-cultural private education.

In 1960 Justice Dovey, chair of a Commonwealth inquiry into the education of immigrant children, condemned those immigrant parents who sought to keep their cultures and pass them on to their children, viewing them as recalcitrant subversives undermining Australia's social homogeneity (Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Council, 1960). A decade later government policy had already been re-labelled as "integration", and a decade further on it had become "multicultural" (Galbally, 1978). These changes came from the recognition that Australia needed to retain its immigrants, which it would only do successfully it was argued, if they felt their own histories and cultures were respected, and their languages retained in the community. Some immigrants welcomed this recognition and its license to selectively nurture their own pasts; others sought only to escape their pasts and be accepted as undifferentiated Australians.

Context

The 1978 Galbally report into migrant and refugee settlement services codified multiculturalism and laid out its key institutions. A generation after the paradigm shift that it marked, there is considerable dissent about the policy and its implications. At the national level the anxiety about policies that accept cultural diversity, infamously labelled by conservative historian Geoffrey Blainey as generating "a nation of tribes", has resulted in significant withdrawal from proactive multiculturalism (Gobbo, 1995). National and state policies have moved in different directions, not necessarily related to the political bent of the government, but rather to the underlying sense of what might best hold Australian society together.

While government policies broadly accept that there will be a constant inflow of people with differing histories, values and experiences, who will be physically differentiated by regions of origin, there is less agreement about what to do with this diversity. Will it naturally dissipate over generations, leaving only a surface multi-coloured aesthetic beneath which everyone loves cricket? Do immigrants want to remember their pasts within a frame of nostalgia, but get on with their lives so that they can enter a mainstream Australian future? How important is cultural transmission through the generations – should it be a private matter for families, a communal matter for those interested in cultural preservation, a national policy supported by governments at all levels, or alternately an outcome that governments should seek to prevent? What priority should be placed on learning languages, including English, Indigenous, and immigrant community languages, as well as the major world trading cultural and business languages? Are the dominant society's values partial or

universal? If universal, is any deviation from them (such as accepting there is cultural pluralism and value diversity) a surrender to prejudice and archaic self-interest? Which of the dominant society's various values are truly shared among the native-born and reared, and which are partial, avoided or regularly breached? If the dominant society's values are partial in that they express the ethno-cultural priorities of the charter peoples, what implications are carried for minority groups? How reciprocal and truly multi-directional are the relations between communities in a multicultural society? These questions do not imply simple answers – however they do serve to nuance a debate that has too often been brutish and simplistic.

The other broad agreement that governments carried into 21st century dealt with a reform agenda based on neo-liberal economic models. Society was represented as a market, and buying and selling as the central relationship. Wherever possible governments tried to introduce such markets, thereby ostensibly facilitating choice. Only where markets failed, it was argued, should governments intervene, and then only to re-set the switches. Nowhere was this shift more apparent than in education, where parental choice was foregrounded. Parents who had the resources accelerated the shift of their focus from public to private education, driven in part by financial incentives offered by conservative governments, and in part by the desire for stricter discipline and conservative values likely to be available in the primarily religion-based Catholic and Independent sectors. There was another story as well, though one which was given cultural “spin” to avoid the opprobrium associated with the racism that drove it. There was growing concern that other children, particularly the children of the “Other”, might pollute the education pool in which the children of the charter communities were swimming. This ethno-religious racism infects all sorts of religious communities – Christian, Muslim, Jewish – and communities with no religious beliefs. It takes many forms, but at its heart it represents a withdrawal from intercultural interaction, into monocultural isolation with only carefully controlled interactions with “Others”.

By the middle of the first decade of this century, some of the great tradition of public education as the beachhead for intercultural engagement had begun to come unstuck. In the wake of 9/11 and the war within Australia against violence-extolling extremism, public conversations about education were becoming heavily inflected by new intercultural tensions. As the population became more diverse with the arrival of African refugees and the growth in families from the Pacific Islands, joining those from Middle East sources, the public culture began to seize up. Its nadir arrived with the statement by then Immigration minister Kevin Andrews in September 2007, that he was halting the movement of refugees from Africa, as they have shown themselves unable to integrate into Australian society. Within weeks Andrews had been swept into history with his master, PM John Howard, at the November election. But the quagmire to which he had so rashly contributed remained behind. In that election the incoming ALP government pledged it would continue to fund non-government schools on the same formula as its predecessor, and it would do so without a policy on cultural diversity in education or any other sphere of social life. Popular support for immigration among Victorian voters, Andrews' homeground, fell significantly at the 2007 Federal election (Betts, 2008).

Social cohesion, social inclusion and social justice

A decade ago when the Howard government was re-writing the national policy on multiculturalism, its advisors led by Arthur Sinodonis were trying to find a formula to ensure Howard got his nationalist spin but the broad mass of ethnic communities and their leaders were not alienated from the government. The multicultural lobby had been very effective under the Hawke government, stymieing the push by Labor's right wing (including ministers like Robert Ray) to throw out the multicultural model and its vocabulary. Howard at the time had also had been strongly critical of the concept of multiculturalism, deriding its illusory potential as "a national cement for all Australians".

A report by Stephen Fitzgerald in 1988 recommending the end of multiculturalism was "bushwacked" by Office of Multicultural Affairs head Peter Shergold (ironically later Howard's department head) who ensured Hawke would continue to support multiculturalism, which he did in the 1989 Agenda document. Essentially the 1989 Multicultural Agenda report and its modifications in 1992 mark the last pro-active articulation of cultural diversity as an underpinning of Australia's national development (Jakubowicz, 2009). The report on multicultural Australia that Howard later approved in 1999 would stress the nationalism of a unitary and hierarchical Australia, where British (Judaeo) Christian values crown the apex of a pyramid of power and privilege, though cloaked in the language of egalitarian populism. The one word that Howard would not accept in the revised document, even if he had to give in on "multiculturalism", was social "justice". Whatever the neo-liberal market economy would produce, however cohesive a neo-conservative society might seek to be, neither competition nor cohesion would be concerned with equity and justice.

In Australia therefore "cohesion" has a particular set of connotations. John Howard (later to be Prime Minister) as Opposition Leader in 1988 used "social cohesion" to articulate his and his party's increasing opposition to multiculturalism as public policy, and to demand a major reduction in Asian immigration. His concern, fed by Prof Blainey's worrying at the danger of multicultural policy creating "a nation of tribes", reflected a sense that one could not both promote multiculturalism with its implicit acceptance of cultural relativism, and argue for a set of unitary values based on Anglo-Australian institutions and traditions. Howard concluded that multicultural readings of Australian society represented the antithesis of social cohesion, so much so that in 1988 the Liberal and National Parties formally abandoned any commitment to multiculturalism (John Howard at <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Video/id/358>). While the use of the term "multiculturalism" was somewhat recovered for the 1996 Federal Election, it was never to find a firm base again. A socially cohesive society, Howard posited, needed agreed core values, a shared sense of its common history based on its charter members, and a unified orientation to the world. The role of government would be to shepherd such legal and policy processes into existence as might be necessary to put these practices firmly into place.

As economic, environmental and political crises of global scale impose their consequences on small states and economies such as Australia, they foreground the multi-directional flows of power and resources between the global and the local, and

the tenuous hold of the local political apparatus over international forces. The concept of social cohesion emerges from the social sciences, but has become part of the wider public discourse.

The resurgence of an interest in social cohesion in the late 2000s comes from a different direction. Alexander Vladychenko, Director General of Social Cohesion for the Council of Europe noted recently that “a question which is currently fuelling political debate in all our societies [is] “How can we achieve social cohesion in a multicultural Europe?”(Council of Europe, 2006). The Europeans are aware that there is an emergent paradox of social cohesion potentially present as a consequence of an “alleged ‘excessive level of diversity’ ”. Furthermore migrant diversity is itself a problem for social cohesion, the Council proposing that governments should be calling on strategic interventions geared towards human rights, participation, and active citizenship. The problem then might not lie in an incompatibility of cultures, but rather in the incapacity of the receiving societies to recognize and modify their own structures of exclusion.

The European Community faces three distinct though ultimately related problems. Firstly there is the question of European identity and how it should be articulated, in relation to the national identities of the member states, in ways which accord with the widespread desire to see the new expanding Europe as a secular federation based on common values. Secondly, social marginalisation and alienation characterise parts of Europe, typically accompanied by economic distress and occupational disadvantage. These issues particularly affect the Roma and Synti, whose history of survival against the extermination attempts of the Nazis adds poignancy to their current intimidation by governments such as those of Italy. Finally the consequences of generations of immigration from outside Europe – for example of Turkish guestworkers, ex-Commonwealth citizens from the sub-continent and Africa, and Africans, Americans and Asians with some former colonial relation with the European powers, overlaid by the movement west of citizens of former Soviet bloc nations – generated further concerns about the porosity of borders and the perceived social distance of immigrant cultures from the assumed European heartland.

The European model argues that economic integration and citizenship offers the most secure foundations on which to underpin social cohesion, and that employment and education serve as the drivers for inter-generational mobility and a longer term social order. In the Australian context the language of social cohesion has been further complicated, again by using European discourses around social inclusion. However, where social cohesion foregrounds cultural difference as a central problem in both thought and action to be dealt with through accommodation, social inclusion effectively ignores the issue. Whereas “cohesion” implies a set of negotiating relationships between disparate but interacting parties (albeit of unequal power), “inclusion” reinforces a hierarchy of power where dominant groups essentially set the parameters under which minorities will be expected to behave, in order that they gain access to the benefits associated with inclusion without disrupting unduly the benefits already taken-for-granted by the host majorities.

Education and social cohesion

There is of course a close relationship between economic disadvantage and social background, and social background and educational performance. In a series of wide-ranging studies over many years Prof Barry McGaw, head of the Melbourne University Education Research Institute, previously Director of Education at the OECD, and now chief adviser to the Federal Government on education reform, has highlighted the critical role that the educational community plays in building educational performance. McGaw presents these for a lay audience in a series of propositions about policy options. Firstly he demonstrates that Australia does quite well in international comparisons using the key test frameworks such as the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). However performance is closely correlated with social background, in which income, migrant status and linguistic capacity in English are included.

Despite broadly common curricula, different schools as McGaw notes “clearly divide, and do so increasingly”. He continues,

Schools frequently divide on the basis of gender, faith, social background, wealth, geography and so on. Schools are, therefore, well placed to build bonding social capital within their constituencies but the important question is whether they can build bridging social capital. From an Australian perspective, we can note that our schools clearly divide each cohort of students on all of the dimensions just mentioned. We need to ask whether their practices reinforce the divisions or whether they work in any way effectively to bridge them. Given the growth of the non-government sector, we need specifically to consider whether that development, in the name of choice and, with government funding, in the name of fiscal fairness, has positive or negative effects on education outcomes and on bridging social capital and, ultimately, social cohesion.(McGaw 2006:30)

McGaw’s research demonstrates that the level of social cohesion in society, reflecting the mix of bonding and bridging social capital, is significantly affected by the way the education system works. Using the work of Robert Putnam, himself an adviser on social capital and education to the OECD, McGaw argues that there are a number of different elements at work, and balance between them is crucial. Students who are corralled in privileged environments tend to do well – while students corralled in disadvantaged environments have their problems reinforced. Yet advantaged students who mix with more disadvantaged students do not appear to suffer; and the disadvantaged students gain a great deal. So socio-economic and cultural mixing in general improves the overall level of social and human capital in a society; on the other hand socio-economic and cultural segregation reduces the productivity of the society and intensifies social stratification. Yet this type of segregation characterises the operation of the education system nationally, and especially in the larger more multicultural cities.

The OECD has also addressed issues affecting migrant children and their educational needs, within wider studies of Australia’s educational performance. In its October 2008 Economic Survey of Australia, improvements for the education system are

summarised as: “While the school system compares well in terms of PISA scores, school heads should be given greater freedom to recruit the best teachers to work in difficult areas. There is considerable room to improve the pre-school and child-care sectors. They should be better integrated and quality services at affordable prices need to be expanded, especially for the disadvantaged”. (OECD, 2008)

More radical critiques of education in capitalist societies, which tend to be rather uncomfortable with ideas of social capital, focus their attention on economic capital. They see education as having a number of functions relevant to capitalism – the reproduction of the social relations (i.e. disciplines of work, hierarchies of authority, the acquisition of class-linked social technologies and skills), recruitment of “smart” children of the working-class for incorporation into the higher levels of production, and ideological reproduction of the social order (nationalism, religion, etc.). In a multicultural society where racial and ethnic hierarchies are so closely interwoven with economic power, empowering young people of non-Anglo backgrounds to engage with the society around them and change its well-established patterns of exclusion remains a major challenge for educators. Too often, children who live in both working class and culturally diverse communities can find they experience lower expectations of their performance and racist messages about their capacities and expectations within the education system. For some young people a generational cycle of failure and marginalisation can result, framed by racist discourses of exclusion and producing alienated, angry and potentially socially destructive behaviour.

Much has been made of Australia’s productivity crisis, and the comparatively low level of skills in the community. Even Rupert Murdoch in his 2008 Boyer lectures on the ABC bemoaned the structure of education and its effect on the overall capacity of Australian society to engage with the future. “We have a 21st century economy with a 19th century education system, and it is leaving too many children behind. That is an injustice to these citizens, and it puts a future burden on Australian society,” Murdoch claimed. In his second talk he continued, “We need to recognize that a first-class education is no longer a luxury. In our age, it is a fundamental civil right and necessity. The most important skill you will need in your careers is the ability to acquire new skills. At an absolute minimum, that means that every Australian ought to leave secondary school with a basic mastery of reading, writing, and arithmetic. They should also have a love of knowledge and a sense of their own potential. And for that cherished outcome, we need teachers who inspire—not those who conspire to thwart change.”

Murdoch sees education as being about “fortune favour[ing] the smart” (<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/boyerlectures/stories/2008/2397947.htm>). Yet of course there is no invisible hand, but there are economic and social drivers, and entrenched patterns of power and exclusion. The conspiracy to thwart change can be viewed from two perspectives – that of Murdoch’s free market model, with his view of a current one size fits all pattern of education, or that of a concern for social justice and greater societal welfare and benefit, which sees the current trend as limiting opportunity.

While it is not clear exactly what Murdoch had in mind, there is little doubt that the Howard government strategy (continued by the Rudd government) of directing Federal funds to private schools suits the idea of the market and the ideology of choice. However it may significantly undermine three key struts in the whole edifice

of social cohesion and modern citizenship – namely intercultural competence, secularism as a core social value, and interactive life-long learning.

I now want to turn to government policies as they affect these three elements, and discuss where we stand after a decade of Howardism and its associated attack on public education and undermining of multiculturalism. As the national government shares education policy with the states, the situation is complex and varies from state to state. However some overarching factors appear to be present everywhere.

Commonwealth perspectives

The Federal and state ministers for education issued the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians in December 2008, replacing a declaration dating from 1999. This earlier Adelaide Declaration made specific reference to social justice as one of three National Goals (others being about capacities and curriculum), promoting the idea that “all students understand and acknowledge the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in the Australian community and internationally” (MCEETYA, 1999).

A decade later the Melbourne meeting, already shrugging off the political correctness of the Howard era and for the moment made up of mainly Labor politicians, in contemporary minimalist style espoused only two goals, “equity and excellence” and students becoming “successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens”. In doing so schools, as part of the first goal, would “provide all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, [and] ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity”. As active and informed citizens children would “appreciate Australia’s social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and have an understanding of Australia’s system of government, history and culture, [and] are able to relate to and communicate across cultures, especially the cultures and countries of Asia”(MCEETYA, 2008). The expectation that every child should learn a language other than English, outlined in 1999 then already 10 years after the crest of the push for a National Languages policy (identified in the 1989 Hobart Declaration), is by 2008 significantly diminished. While Asian languages are still foregrounded, community languages do not appear – nor in preparation for a more diverse future, does Arabic as a global language of trade. The idea that Australia is a multicultural society has disappeared completely, leaving a bare recognition of cultural diversity as a demographic fact, rather than any sense of a multicultural policy framework.

The multicultural terrain is criss-crossed by many such agendas –values education, democracy and citizenship, languages other than English, globalisation, studies of Asia, personal development, studies of religion: the list continues. Each area has reports, strategies, plans, evaluations (sometimes) and contradictions. Each has its own group of promoters and “product champions”, anxious to demonstrate the critical role that their program will have to play in the future education of young Australians.

The Internet is littered with the cooling bodies of former enthusiasms, left where they froze as the funds petered out or the program priorities changed (*Discovering Democracy* report of 2008 notes that after seven years of funding that had now ended, success in achieving its goals “cannot be answered in the affirmative with any confidence”).

We are now at the commencement of a new enthusiasm, the National Curriculum, heralded as the framework for a common educational experience through a structured and planned learning pathway. Former OECD policy maker Barry McGaw heads the Board, which represents state, independent and Catholic education institutions. The myriad voices of the polyglot constituencies that exist in the field of education are channelled through these people and the extensive consultative structure that the Board has established.

I want here to address as an example of the multicultural challenge the History curriculum (one of five national curricula), as the stories the nation tells itself embody its most cherished myths and its preferred strategies to manage uncomfortable truths. One only has to look at the background document for the *Citizenship Test*, or the *Discovering Democracy* segment of the now stalled *Civics and Citizenship Education* program, and explore the language used to explain White Australia, to see what I mean. When those paragraphs were being written in the early and mid years of the decade, the government’s flavour of the moment in historical purity was Keith Windschuttle. Windschuttle’s history of White Australia took the view that a) racism was an unquestioned part of the late nineteenth century Australia *zeitgeist*, b) the new Australian nation was fiercely democratic and egalitarian and did not want any lesser beings in to be exploited, and c) the main opponents of non-White immigration were working class organisations such as trade unions and liberal democrats. This is the logic embedded in the Civics and Citizenship description of White Australia (which actually explains why this made Australians “better racists”), and underpins the Citizenship Test. There is no sense in these documents that the survivors of this barbarity are Australians too, and their forebears bitterly contested the imposition of ever more racist constraints upon them.

So let’s see what the History curriculum group put together as their story. They were moving on from the bizarre moment in 2007 when John Howard had over-ridden his own advisory committee’s recommendations (it included his favourite Geoffrey Blainey; even he was affronted by his political patron’s wayward excess) and awarded the first PM’s history prize to a glowing celebration of Australians at War on the western front in WW1 (where Howard’s grandfather and father had both been involved).

It was his history but not everyone else’s. Under Howard’s then Education Minister Julie Bishop, a history advisory group which included a raft of conservative thinkers produced a “Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9 and 10”. In the published document, there are only three non-Anglo names (and a blurry photo of an un-named “prosperous migrant farmer and his helpers [who] are gathering the strawberry crop for the nearby Brisbane market, between 1910 and 1962, Frank Hurley, courtesy of the Hurley Negative Collection, National Library of Australia” – putting anonymity, artistic vandalism and historical uncertainty together as an exemplar to young historians). The names in the Guide included a Polish Jewish

entrepreneur who was barely in Australia and went to the USA, a German Australian inventor whose real (and unremarked) story is not that he invented a radio for remote areas but that he was banned from serving in the Australian military in 1914 because his father had been German, and the Petrovs (two Russian spies who defected in the 1950s and indirectly triggered the split in the ALP). It's a curious way to talk about Australia's historical diversity.

The new collective under Melbourne historian Stuart Macintyre took on the task of Historical Advisory group in 2008, replacing the Right orthodoxy of the Howard period with the random heterodoxy of the Rudd period. The reports this group has developed, locate the formation and development of Australia within an overarching global perspective, and within a millennial timeframe. This foregrounds the longevity and sophistication of Indigenous societies in Australia, it reduces the Britishness of the narrative somewhat, and creates an Australian flavour that stresses egalitarianism. So far, it's an advance on the earlier versions (though the bugle-call of egalitarianism echoes earlier motifs).

But it is not a multicultural history even though it is a history that in its early versions still mentioned multiculturalism. It is actually a bi-cultural history – Dawn Casey an Indigenous woman and museum curator (driven out of the Museum of Australia by Howard's minions) has done much to ensure that race and gender feature. There's also an emergent Australian ethnicity, wrapped in the mix of (Scots) Presbyterianism, non-Conformism and Irish Catholicism that was so unsettling to the Anglican elites.

However there is no one else on the Group with a strong track record in relation to migrant or ethnic histories, unless one counts the somewhat quirky conservative La Trobe historian John Hirst, who has survived governments of all colours, and who was a regular contributor to *Quadrant* with forays into the history wars such as 'Australia's Absurd History: A Critique of Multiculturalism' (1990) but who has also written histories that discuss the experience of the Chinese. So to the text (in this case, the first report put out for consultation), as the cultural studies sleuths would have us go...

“History is the study of the past. It provides knowledge, understanding and appreciation of previous events, practices and ideas. It orders them and renders them intelligible, and discerns patterns of continuity and change. It provides the means whereby individual and collective identities are formed and sustained.”

So we must ask – whose past? Whose experience counts as worthy of being accorded the status of “known”, and what data will be sanctified as “knowledge”? Who does the ordering and to what purpose? What sorts of patterns are discerned (or imposed), and whose collective identities are formed and sustained (and necessarily, whose are forgotten or eroded)?

Cultural difference is featured in the later primary years of education, where students will be encouraged to learn about the daily lives of immigrant communities in different sites around Australia. Thus far we are not exposed to any controversial questions, except in relation to Aborigines. However the word used (“settle” or “people” as verbs) avoids issues associated with invasion, theft, rape, and murder. The students are engaged with a “glorious adventure”, looking at maps, building models,

comparing traditional lives in other societies that experienced British colonialism. Civics and citizenship manages to skitter across Federation with no mention of White Australia. The focus is on building chronologies, and populating them with iconic events; the problems in exploring and settling new lands (but for whom, the Indigenous recipients, the competing Chinese, the excluded Macassans?).

In the secondary school curriculum, we meet global history and Australia's place in it. Well not quite: we meet Australia as a 'better Britain', and the social unrest associated with class conflict. We don't see Australia as a prize for competing empires, with the British trying to deal with the diversity of Asian, Irish, European and Pacific populations, and impose their hegemony. We don't track the Chinese fleeing the turmoil of the Taiping rebellion to the goldfields of Victoria, or the minorities of Europeans succumbing to the travails of Northern Queensland as the Chinese prospered and grew in number, only to be banished at the point of the gun.

It then gets more and more messy – the Irish don't rate a mention, nor religious bigotry and conflict. With the Depression and the rise of Nazism in Europe we see the crisis of liberal democracy, but no reference is made to Australian governments canoodling with Mussolini, Hitler and Japan, or the domestic opposition to this drift to authoritarianism. The Holocaust and the post-war dispossession of Palestinians rate a mention but not Australia's reluctance to take refugees before and after the war if they were Jewish.

We do ultimately get a mention of multiculturalism, and cultural diversity as though it only happens in the 1960s (it took until the 1990s for Australia to become as diverse as it had been in the 1850s). Importantly the report notes that, "Students should apply relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and gender perspectives to past events;" but not it appears, perspectives from any other culture.

So if one were not of the mainstream culture whose narrative this is, or of Indigenous culture, for whom the narrative now makes space, where would your history sit, and how would your identity be sustained? One answer might be to avoid the questions that might be uncomfortable.

While the historians had their challenges working through the preparatory ideas, the final two reports released in May 2009 are even more problematic. The "Framing Paper Consultation Report: History" contains one reference to "multicultural" (and none to "cultural diversity") which demonstrate the context of this debate and the response of the communities of interest that engaged with the process of the report "10.6 There were some requests for gender, multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives to be included" to which the recommendation was: "Action 4: The advisory panels and the curriculum writers will discuss and resolve the best ways to strengthen gender, multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the curriculum where appropriate. (10.6)". So the final report actually weakens the concern with multicultural Australia that crept into the first report.

The main report "Shape of Australian Curriculum: History" which is the "vision" document, says this of the role of Australian history in relation to cultural diversity ("multiculturalism" having been totally expunged from the document). Australian

history has to be set in its broad global context because only then “ the dimensions of our migrant experience and cultural diversity will be intelligible”. The document contains no references at all to “race” or “racism”. Whose context exactly are Australian children going to hear about, and whose world views will they be asked to experience and understand? Surely the intelligibility of “the” migrant experience (as if it were a unitary phenomenon) and cultural diversity depends on more than referencing to international events – Australian history is deeply implicated in the travails of immigration and diversity, and should address these questions as central to the national narrative. At the time of writing of this paper there was no sign of the proposed advisory group on cultural diversity.

Anti-racism approaches

One project that links all the states, though it is driven out of New South Wales, remains the “Racism No Way!” website. Begun by the Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers in 2000, it carries a foreword by then Governor General Sir William Deane. Deane’s perspective is personal and tough - “Knowledge of the history and impact of racism is essential for understanding and change. It can be the spark that ignites action against racism by individuals and local communities. And education is the key to that process”. Racism (referring to skin colour and physiognomic distinctiveness, ethnicity and culture) is defined following the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission as “an ideology that gives expression to myths about other racial and ethnic groups, that devalues and renders inferior those groups, that reflects and is perpetuated by deeply rooted historical, social, cultural and power inequalities in society.” Power relations lie at its heart.

In its background to combating racism in society, Racism NoWay! identifies a range of issues including: Racist abuse and harassment, Racism and violence, Attitudes of students, Teacher attitudes and the classroom, Cultural diversity and the school climate, School community relations and The effects of racism in schools. These all require significant and continuing action, and many schools have taken on whole of school strategies for combating racism. But emotionally-charged words like “combat” or “racism” itself generate friction when applied to reality.

It is no wonder then that anti-racism as an educational issue has had a difficult history. While it was strenuously advanced by lobby groups and teachers during the 1990s (especially after the 1991 HREOC Racist Violence report), Keating government proposals to criminalise hate speech and activate the relevant sections of the 1966 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination were defeated in the Senate in the mid-1990s by a coalition of free-speech Greens and reactionary conservatives. When the Howard government addressed the issue, it was in a climate of quite widespread positively-sanctioned racist discourse prompted by the rise of the independent politician Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party. The new government was dedicated to an “educational” approach on racism, a view underpinned by market research carried out by Eureka Strategic Research in 1997, that created the “Living in Harmony” brand.

A recent Labor government review of Living in Harmony summarised the dominant perspective thus:

“The Eureka Strategic Research indicated that strong anti-racism messages tended to produce negative results by alienating a broad range of the audience. ‘Anti-racism’ was found to be too negative and too explicit for the title of a mass media or community education campaign as it was likely to exclude both extreme racists and those who hold racist views but do not see themselves as racist.” As with all governments since 1998, the current parliamentary secretary for multicultural affairs, has refused to make the Eureka research available for public examination, so we only have the government’s word to go on, and the public service that has kept the report secret for over a decade can hardly be counted on to give an unbiased summary of its findings. This is not to discount the research findings, but to indicate the tension between goals that are about reducing power inequalities, and goals that are about allowing them to persist but containing the consequences.

The review also noted that “All sets of research concluded that the most effective approach to an anti-racism campaign was to engage people through activities and messages that are subtle, non threatening, positive, apolitical, engaging, encouraging, warm, optimistic and non dictatorial.” And possibly change nothing.

The review is careful not to evaluate whether the level of racism or intolerance has abated under the impact of the softly-softly model. One of its quoted studies effectively concludes that the onus is on the newcomers to change, with the host community being welcoming, but not itself changing its values or beliefs in any way. So we are still essentially faced with the perspective once voiced by Geoffrey Blainey (1984), that many Australians are racist and the best way to avoid evidence of their racism is not to expose them to anything that might require them to change.

However the government has proposed to go beyond that perspective, with the idea that “the program objectives be revised to provide a stronger focus on addressing issues of cultural, racial and religious intolerance, while promoting respect, fairness, inclusion and a sense of belonging for everyone.”

So how does education fit in, if combating racism cannot be easily foregrounded?

Education and globalisation: a new multicultural turn

The “multiculturalism” brand name has definitely undergone serious erosion during the past decade. Its slow and stumbling resurrection after the end of Howardism has been attached to the dragon leap of globalisation, where the accelerated mobility of peoples and the critical role of inter-cultural engagement simply overwhelm ethnocentric world-views, and exclusionary social practices. Most state governments have revised their multicultural policies in recent years to accommodate this awareness of globalisation. Even since the early 1990s the Asia Australia Education Foundation has supported the development of school materials for learning about Asia, and the foundation has sponsored teacher visits to Asia and so on. The Council for Arab Australian Relations, a Commonwealth advisory body, is commissioning

teaching resources to explain Arabs to (non-Arab) Australian children.

The drivers behind these developments can be discerned in the complex trajectories that combine in globalisation – economic development (now stymied somewhat by the global economic crisis with its dangerous prompting of ethnocentric nationalisms), natural and unnatural disasters forcing people to leave their homes, the growth of non-state politico-military actors (global terror) and family reunions across diasporic communities. One example of the new look at cultural diversity can be found in the Victorian government’s approach to multicultural education, released in early 2009.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood argues that multicultural education is a perspective that frames education more widely by integrating the global with the local experience of students. “Multicultural Education helps students to develop:

- * proficiency in English
- * competency in a language or languages other than English
- * in depth knowledge and awareness of their own and other cultures
- * an understanding of the multicultural nature of Australia’s past and present history
- * an understanding of, and skills to interact in, intercultural settings
- * an appreciation of the importance of local, national and international interdependence in social, environmental, economical and political arenas and an understanding that mutual support in these areas is vital to local and global harmony.

Schools should ensure multicultural perspectives are incorporated into all aspects of school life by:

- * promoting diversity as a positive learning experience
- * incorporating multicultural perspectives across all learning domains
- * incorporating multicultural, anti-racism, and human rights perspectives in school policies and practices
- * enhancing teachers’ and students’ intercultural understanding and cross-cultural communication skills”.(Victoria, 2009).

Here we see the emergence of a set of civic virtues, which enable culturally diverse societies to operate in a creative, democratic and cohesive way. These virtues are not so idealistic as to be fantasies, nor so anodyne as to be irrelevant. They require hard work to be realised, and they are always being contested and disturbed by the complexities of daily life. Yet they don’t avoid the more difficult issues that confront multicultural societies, but rather they potentially empower young people and teachers to work through them.

One parameter of globalisation is closely linked to communication, in particular to the role of new media technologies to help bridge cultural divides. The Rudd education revolution has committed a major part of its resources to the provision of computer hardware and connections to the internet. However there are scant resources available to generate content, especially content that contests the master narratives of Australian history and society. The Curriculum Corporation materials for example have been suffused with the ideological sanitisation of the Howard years, and while there are useful elements already produced for schools, the depth and range of material has not

been created in relation to cultural diversity teaching and student-centred research. There is also little attention as yet to the potential of the internet to link schools and students from diverse communities in collaborative learning, though the NSW Board of Studies (<http://www.bos.nsw.edu.au>) has piloted collaborative software for inter-school dialogue.

Sites created some years ago age and falter, as the constant updating and revitalisation of on-line materials is a never-ending task that requires sustained support. One example of both the potential and the problems can be found in my own project in conjunction with the NSW Board of Studies and the state education departments of NSW, Queensland and Victoria, “Making Multicultural Australia in the 21st century”. The site has been in development for nearly twenty years (emerging as a CDROM set in 1999), and went online in 2005 (six years after the CDROM version) ; the Queensland sections went live in 2006, while the Victorian element went live in April 2009 (<http://multiculturalaustralia.edu.au>). The benefits to creative learning that flow from the site’s wealth of information for teaching and student-directed learning are evident, from direct first person access to the perspectives of leading academics, politicians, community leaders and artists, to the multitudes of research papers, video, images, audio, and government reports that otherwise disappear without trace. However the resources are less valuable than they could be were they to be “worked up” into lesson plans and teaching and learning strategies. Moreover the range of material is still limited, as the constant struggle to find funds to maintain and extend the site does leach out energy that should be more actively invested in research and development.

Cosmopolitan citizenship

Australia can be thought of as an empire project, a continuing political and cultural process through which a nation is being formed, reformed and transformed within a global setting. The imperial desire that created the Commonwealth as that “better Britain” in 1900 has been permeated since with many more nations and cultures than the defensive exclusionary rhetoric of the late Victorian age would allow. Yet the underlying dynamic remains – to suppress and halt any claims to autonomy from the original Indigenous peoples and their descendants, to defend the nation against claims and sallies from competing empires, and most importantly as Lenin once said of imperialism in general, to transform populations into a people.

Education is a primary resource for the empire project, both because its history and residues display so clearly the many highways of empire already trodden, and also because its strategies and programs can reveal the still unexamined assumptions and power hierarchies that will influence the future. To be cosmopolitan citizens of this empire means being able to reflect unemotionally on the past, explore the present without prejudice, and plan for the future based on clear recognition of the problems to be addressed. While governments are aware of the critical importance of a globally-oriented consciousness for the emerging generation of Australians, they seem less than willing to make the decisions necessary to implement their awareness.

There are some rather difficult principles to be adopted, many which directly conflict with strongly held views in some communities, governments and civil society organisations. The first principle must be that in Australia government and public institutions are secular, and that any organisation seeking public support must accept the underpinnings of secularism. By this I mean that religion can be accepted as a personal, familial and communal area of emotion and belief, but the state must assert the primary role of reason and science as the underpinning of society, and only then allow that all religions are of equal value, accepting the importance of peoples' spiritual identities. The second principle must be the mutuality of recognition, where acceptance of cultural difference does not necessitate the acceptance of the truth claims of different cultures. It requires an ethnographic consciousness, so that one is able to view one's own and other cultures as contingent and historical, rather than unique and universal. Thirdly, there should be an emphasis on the creative synergies that are generated in interaction and dialogue, such that priority is given to multicultural rather than monocultural engagement.

If we affirm an identity based on descent, it can only be one part of the communal identities we value; and indeed others may desire to rid themselves of the burden of their parental cultures. Perhaps at times an ethnic identity does prove to be too atavistic and "reactionary". The other parts of our identities are those that we create together in a society in which we are all transformed in our own way by the experiences we share, both across the whole society, and in the primary and secondary groups that we value, and that value us.

In the next decade some of our most important resources will be those that emerge from the interaction of our cultures, from what used to be described as productive diversity. We will need a sophisticated and careful plan to ensure this occurs, though as I have shown so many of our educational settings –from ethno-cultural separation to mono-lingual and mono-cultural historical narratives – have us pointed somewhere else altogether. We cannot afford to go to these places, where we will find over and again the most self-defeating of cul-de-sacs.

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