



**Australian Education Union**  
**Submission to the**  
**Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia**

**6 May 2011**

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# Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

## Background

The Australian Education Union (AEU) represents approximately 185,000 teachers and education workers in Australia's public early childhood education centres, schools and TAFE Institutes. We welcome this opportunity to provide our views to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's Parliamentary Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia.

The AEU believes that multiculturalism in Australia must be based on shared experiences and diversity, rights and responsibilities, and the recognition of the valuable economic, social and cultural contributions that all groups make to Australian society. Over 150 years ago, Sir Henry Parkes, the father of public education in Australia, saw it as a duty to offer an education to every child "making no distinction of faith, asking no question about where a child was born, what may be his condition of life or what the position of his parents, but inviting all to sit side by side".

Recognising the important socialising aspect of schooling, he believed that children should learn together and learn to live together. Everyday multiculturalism comes alive in the classrooms and playgrounds of public schools accepting of all children in every community right across Australia. Free, secular universally accessible public schools remain the key to a vibrant, socially cohesive multicultural Australia.

In this context, we welcome the Australian Government's renewed commitment to multiculturalism in Australia, through the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship's recent release of The People of Australia Policy<sup>1</sup> and in particular its four principles:

- celebrating and valuing diversity;
- maintaining social cohesion;
- communicating the benefits of Australia's diversity; and
- responding to intolerance and discrimination.

Rather than address each Term of Reference, the AEU's submission to this inquiry will provide an historical overview of the development of multicultural policy in Australia and then focus on issues relevant to multiculturalism in the context of public education.

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<sup>1</sup> Bowen, C (2011) *The Genius of Australian Multiculturalism*, Speech to the Australia Institute, Sydney, February, 2011, from <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/cb/2011/cb159251.htm> (accessed 5th April 2011)

## Introduction

Whilst the central concepts of multiculturalism have been an accepted part of Australian public policy for well over four decades, they have been and remain contested in political, policy and social terms.<sup>2</sup> Debates on multiculturalism in Australia are often heavily influenced by international events which have local resonance.<sup>3</sup>

Dr Andrew Jakubowicz, in his paper *Cultural Diversity, Cosmopolitan Citizenship and Education: Issues, Options and Implications for Australia*<sup>4</sup> argues that there are two different constructions of the 'social world and the role of culture in sustaining social cohesion' which drive public policy in Australia and that these concepts 'remain a point of division.' Jakubowicz explains these 'points of division' as the 'pluralist approach...recognis(ing) that a plurality of cultural groupings can co-exist and interact in complex modern societies' and the 'unitary approach... (of) a single shared culture, with diversity an aberration that passes in time through processes of assimilation.'<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, in a political sense, the concept of multiculturalism in Australia had maintained strong bi-partisan support even with the erosion of programs and institutions in the mid 1980's following budget cuts by the Hawke government.<sup>6</sup> In the late 1980s a new resurgence in the Government's support for multicultural affairs, driven by lobbying efforts from ethnic community organisations, was evidenced by the development and launch of the policy *The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*<sup>7</sup> in 1989. This policy defined the word 'multicultural' as 'simply a term which describes the cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia' and was based on three 'dimensions', namely 'Cultural Identity, Social Justice, and Economic Efficiency.'<sup>8</sup> Importantly, the policy embedded a number of significant national initiatives, including:

- *strategies to improve processes for recognising skills and overseas qualifications held by migrants;*
- *a community relations campaign to ensure that ethnic diversity goes hand in hand with social cohesion;*
- *strengthening the Access and Equity Strategy to overcome barriers of language, culture and prejudice experienced by migrants and Indigenous people;*
- *legislation to establish the Special Broadcasting Service as an independent corporation; and*
- *improved access to English language education for migrants'*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Koeth, E. (2010) *Multiculturalism: A review of Australian policy statements and recent debates in Australia and Overseas* Australian Parliamentary Library, Canberra from <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rp/2010-11/11rp06.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p. 27

<sup>4</sup> Jakubowicz, A. (2009) *Cultural Diversity, Cosmopolitan Citizenship and Education: Issues, Options and Implications for Australia* from <http://www.aefederal.org.au/Publications/2009/AJakubowiczpaper.pdf> (P.1) (accessed 27th April 2011)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Tavan, G. (2006) *John Howard's Multicultural Paradox*, paper presented at John Howard's Decade Conference, Australian National University, 3-4 March, 2006 from

<http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/displayPrint.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressrel%2FIMYI6%22> (accessed 28.04.11)

<sup>7</sup> National Multicultural Advisory Council (1997) *Multicultural Australia: the way forward*. Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, from <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/issues97/macpape3.htm> (accessed 5th April 2011)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, page 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid page 5.

The *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* drove the Federal Government's priorities for multiculturalism for the better part of the 1990s, which under the Hawke Keating governments was situated 'within a nationalist narrative where cultural diversity and tolerance were part(s) of Australian national identity'.<sup>10</sup> This represented a shift from the past 'migrant rights' agenda, to an agenda which had nationalism as a central characteristic, along with the promotion of multiculturalism as a nationalistic endeavour in its own right.<sup>11</sup>

During this period, a rigorous conservative debate about Australian nationalism grew, along with opposition to multicultural policies and programs. A range of conservative critics, including historian Geoffrey Blainey and the then leader of the opposition John Howard commented on (primarily) Asian immigration and introduced terms such as 'ethnic ghettoism' and 'ethnic tribalism' in to the debate. With the political rise of Pauline Hanson and the eventual establishment of her One Nation Party, the national debate increasingly swayed towards anti-immigration and anti-multicultural sentiments, focussing on certain racial groups.<sup>12</sup>

Following its election in 1996, the Howard Government absorbed many of these sentiments in to its policy approach and abolished programs, reduced spending and marginalised consultation with ethnic peak body organisations such as FECCA.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the decade of Howard's government, racialisation primarily (but not only) targeting the Muslim community grew along with anti-Muslim sentiments inflamed by Prime Ministerial statements about 'keep(ing) a close eye on mosques' and statements from a senior Government Minister, recommending that Muslim girls in public schools be banned from wearing their hijabs.<sup>14</sup>

Some argue that the decade of Howard's government was filled with paradoxes. On one hand, John Howard enabled nationalistic anti-multiculturalist sentiment to thrive; and on the other he presided over large increases to immigration and maintained many elements of the multicultural policies of the previous Labor Governments.<sup>15</sup> Jakubowicz however, neatly summarises these paradoxes on both sides of the political spectrum by stating:

*"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."*<sup>16</sup>

Howard's decade undoubtedly gave rise to hostility to so-called 'political correctness' and facilitated the growth of intolerance and fear which was promulgated widely by populist radio stations and some elements of the national print media.<sup>17</sup> In 2004 and 2005 in Sydney, the nation witnessed the outcomes of almost a decade of racialised Government vernacular, in the Redfern and Cronulla Riots. In both instances, physical violence and cross-cultural provocation led to groups of (primarily) young men exploding with anger. In the case of Redfern, it was young Aboriginal men against the police following the death of a young

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<sup>10</sup> Tavan, G. (2009) op.cit. p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Koleth, E (2010) op.cit. p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Tavan, G. (2006) op.cit. p. 7. h

<sup>14</sup> ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 8 & 9

<sup>16</sup> Jacobowicz (2009) op.cit. p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Kabir, Dr. N (2007) The Cronulla Riot: How One Newspaper Represented the Event, Paper presented at the TASA 2007 Conference, 4-7 December 2007 Auckland, New Zealand from <http://www.tasa.org.au/conferences/conferencepapers07/papers/268.pdf> (accessed 5th April)

Aboriginal man.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Cronulla, young ‘Aussie’ men fought to ‘reclaim’ Cronulla beach from young Lebanese Australian men, who were referred to at the time as ‘Lebs’ or ‘Muslims’.<sup>19</sup>

Although numerous conservative commentators raged in the populist media at the time, there was little analysis of the primary cause of these the issues – the intersection of race and social class and their impacts on social exclusion. As explained by Jakubowicz:

*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.*<sup>20</sup>

The political response from Howard on both occasions was entirely consistent with his philosophies on race and race relations. Following the Redfern riot, Howard suggested the cause to be ‘different treatment of Aboriginal people’,<sup>21</sup> and in the case of the Cronulla riot he denied that racism was the cause.<sup>22</sup> In his Australia Day address to the National Press Club in 2006, Howard married his conservative views on race with his conservative views on education, promising a ‘root and branch renewal’ of the ‘teaching of Australian history in schools’, arguing that ‘history, along with other subjects in the humanities, has succumbed to a postmodern culture of relativism where any objective record of achievement is questioned or repudiated.’<sup>23</sup>

## **Multiculturalism and Public Education**

In contrast to Howard’s description of Australia’s ‘postmodern culture of relativism’,<sup>24</sup> in 1981, Malcolm Fraser, then the Liberal Prime Minister of Australia and one of the architects of multicultural policy in Australia, described multiculturalism as being:

*concerned with far more than the passive toleration of diversity. It sees diversity as a quality to be actively embraced, a source of social wealth and dynamism. It encourages groups to be open and to interact, so that all Australians may learn and benefit from each other's heritages. Multiculturalism is about diversity, not division — it is about interaction not isolation. It is about cultural and ethnic differences set within a framework of shared fundamental values which enables them to co-exist on a complementary rather than competitive basis. It involves respect for the law and for our democratic institutions and processes. Insisting upon a core area of common*

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<sup>18</sup> Ridgeway, A (2004) The underlying causes of the Redfern riots run throughout Australia, paper posted to OnLine Opinion, Monday, 23 February 2004 from <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=1989&page=0> (accessed 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011)

<sup>19</sup> Kabir, Dr. N (2007) op.cit.

<sup>20</sup> Jacobowicz (2009) op.cit. p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Shaw, M. (2004) Different treatment may have led to riot, says PM, The Age Newspaper, Canberra Correspondent, February 27, 2004 from <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/02/26/1077676898292.html>(accessed 5th April, 2011)

<sup>22</sup> Davies, A. and Peatling, S. (2005) Australians racist? No way, says Howard, Sydney Morning Herald Newspaper, December 13, 2005, from <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/australians-racist-no-way-says-howard/2005/12/12/1134236005950.html> (accessed 5th April, 2011)

<sup>23</sup> Howard, J (2006) A Sense Of Balance: The Australian Achievement In 2006, Transcript Of The Prime Minister The Hon John Howard MP Address To The National Press Club, Great Hall, Parliament House, 25 January 2006, from <http://australianpolitics.com/2006/01/25/john-howard-australia-day-address.html> (accessed 5th April 2011)

<sup>24</sup> Howard, J (2006) *ibid*.

*values is no threat to multiculturalism but its guarantee, for it provides the minimal conditions on which the well-being of all is secured.*<sup>25</sup>

One of the central roles of public education in Australia has been to encompass the principles of multiculturalism, as outlined in Fraser's address. It is only the public education system which embodies the principles of 'diversity, not division' and 'interaction not isolation'. However, there are a range of historical and political imperatives which have driven government policies on multiculturalism in Australia's public education system. These have had an impact on the development and implementation of the educational policies concepts, practices and frameworks required to ensure that multiculturalism is not only appropriately enacted in public schools, but also appropriately sustained.

Victoria is illustrative of a positive approach to multiculturalism in education. The approach is underpinned by a strong human rights framework and a strategy document *Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship*, which aims to 'equip all students with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to prosper and thrive in a world characterised by global mobility and cultural, political and economic connectivity.' Specialist programs supported by the Victorian Government under this strategy include Multicultural Education, Language other than English (LOTE), English as a Second Language (ESL), studies of Asia, Values, Civic and Citizenship and Human Rights Education.<sup>26</sup>

Yet more needs to be done to embed appropriate policies and programs on multiculturalism for all students in the public education system in Australia. National enrolment data for the period 2002 – 2006<sup>27</sup> show that an average of 90.5% of all students who access the ESL New Arrivals Program are enrolled in public schools. However, principals responding to the AEU's 2010 *State of Our Schools Survey* indicate that the majority (57%) do not have sufficient resources to appropriately meet the needs of New Arrivals/ESL students in their schools. 84% indicate that assistance for teachers in classrooms is inadequate, 55% that there is a lack of appropriately trained teachers, 55% that there is a lack of dedicated programs, and 38% that there is inadequate equipment and learning spaces within their schools.

In addition, the ongoing trend of stripping government Adult Multicultural Education Program (AMEP) funding from public TAFE institutes to provide essential, core educational services in favour of profit-making companies demonstrates Government unwillingness to fulfil its own basic obligations to its citizens. This raises a number of equity, value and efficiency questions relating to the implementation of the competition model in the areas of education and the impact this has on multiculturalism. In NSW in particular, public education provision of English for new migrants to Australia has sustained a severe blow. The decimation of the NSW Adult Migrant English Service will result in inferior pay and working conditions for teachers and poor value for the taxpayers' dollars. With every tender, there is needless waste – centres are stripped and huge resources are diverted from the classroom and from the teaching of English. Additionally, the accumulation of professional knowledge and expertise is dissipated and there is significant upheaval for students, many of whom are among the most vulnerable members of the community.

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<sup>25</sup> Fraser, M. (1981) *Multiculturalism: Australian's Unique Achievement*, Inaugural Address on Multiculturalism to the Institute of Multicultural Affairs, Melbourne on 30 November 1981, from <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/malcolmfraser/speeches/nonparliamentary/multiculturalism.html> (accessed 5th April, 2011)

<sup>26</sup> From <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/>

<sup>27</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) (2011) *Report on Government Services*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, Table 4A., P 24.

Jakubowicz argues that in order for multiculturalism to be sustained in education policy and practise in Australia, governments need to adopt what he describes as ‘some rather difficult principles... many which directly conflict with strongly held views in some communities, governments and civil society organisations.’<sup>28</sup> These are: ‘secularism; mutuality of recognition, including ethnographic consciousness; and an emphasis on the creative synergies that are generated in interaction and dialogue, such that priority is given to multicultural rather than monocultural engagement.’ The AEU agrees with these principles, and would add that governments should adopt a long-term approach to the development, implementation and resourcing of multicultural policies and programs in public schools.

### **School Funding Policies and Cultural Polarisation between Public and Private Schools**

Recent research conducted by Christina Ho from the University of Technology in Sydney reveals that the vision of Australia’s public education forebears, such as Parkes of public education for all Australian students regardless of their backgrounds is under severe attack. In an analysis of MySchool 2.0 data, Ho compares the cultural make-up of private schools with public schools in wealthy metropolitan suburbs in Sydney. Her research finds that in these areas, ‘public schools routinely educate a much higher proportion of migrant-background students than do private schools’ and that there is now ‘a clear pattern of cultural polarisation in schools across the board, including in wealthy elite suburbs...suggest(ing) that Anglo-Australians may indeed have abandoned public schools in many areas.’<sup>29</sup>

The AEU has long raised the issue of the long-term consequences of the current Federal Government schools funding model on Australia’s social, economic and cultural cohesion. There is a range of evidence<sup>30</sup> to support the thesis that the mantra of ‘choice’ as the underlying basis for education policy in Australia is leading to greater ethnic and socio-economic polarities in Australian society. Ho’s research should be a matter of great concern for the majority of Australian’s who ‘support culturally diverse school communities.’<sup>31</sup>

### **Multicultural Perspectives in the Australian Curriculum**

The AEU is concerned that the key foundational documents intended to shape the National Curriculum contain limited references to multicultural perspectives. We believe that it is vital that these perspectives are embedded across the curriculum at all levels. The Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia (FECCA) also recommends a stronger focus on cultural and ethnic diversity in the Australian Curriculum and believes that these should promote Cultural and Linguistic Diversity and address the specific barriers faced by people from CALD backgrounds, along with promoting positive partnerships and relationships with CALD communities.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Jakubowicz, A. (2009) *Cultural Diversity, Cosmopolitan Citizenship and Education: Issues, Options and Implications for Australia* from <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/2009/AJakubowiczpaper.pdf> (P.17) (accessed 27th April 2011)

<sup>29</sup> Ho, C (2011) ‘My School’ and others: *Segregation and white flight*, Australian Review of Public Affairs, May 2011, from <http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2011/05/ho.html> (accessed 6th May 2011)

<sup>30</sup> See Ho, C (2011) *ibid*; Jakubowicz, A. (2009) *op.cit*; Bonnor, C. & Caro, J. (2007), *The Stupid Country: How Australia is Dismantling Public Education*, UNSW Press, Sydney.

<sup>31</sup> Ho, C (2011) *op.cit*.

<sup>32</sup> See FECCA (2010) *Submission to the development of a National Curriculum* from [http://www.fecca.org.au/Submissions/2010/submissions\\_2010036.pdf](http://www.fecca.org.au/Submissions/2010/submissions_2010036.pdf) (accessed 27th April 2011)

The AEU believes that the current drafts of the four learning areas in the Australian curriculum have not substantially addressed these issues. Australia is a multicultural society. Accordingly, the Australian Curriculum must provide appropriate and accurate recognition of the diverse range of cultural backgrounds in Australian society. This must include the explicit inclusion of multicultural perspectives across all areas of the curriculum framework.

## Conclusion

Recent research<sup>33</sup> shows that on the whole, Australians are accepting of cultural diversity, with an overwhelming majority of people (85.5%) believing that '*It is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures*'.<sup>34</sup> However, it is of great concern that there remains a small minority of people in Australia, whose views focus on separatism, racial segregation and exclusion, notions which are given disproportionate attention in the populist media and by conservative politicians, and are out of step with the mainstream.<sup>35</sup>

The AEU rejects discrimination in all its forms and believes that the promotion of respect, tolerance and equality through education assists all groups to participate in society on an equal basis. The maintenance of a comprehensive, secular, free, universally accessible public education system is key to achieving this aim. A strong public education system is one which welcomes all students and supports them to develop their maximum potential whilst taking in to account their cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds.

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<sup>33</sup> See Dunn, K. White, A. and Ghandi, V. (2010) *Understanding Racism and Cultural Diversity: 2007 South Australia Racism Survey: A Report Prepared for the Equal Opportunity Commission South Australia, Final Report 2010*, University of Western Sydney from [http://www.uws.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/126204/Report\\_on\\_2007\\_South\\_Australia\\_Racism\\_Survey.pdf](http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/126204/Report_on_2007_South_Australia_Racism_Survey.pdf) (accessed 5th April 2011); And additional research from the Challenging Racism project (various authors), University of Western Sydney, Sydney from [http://www.uws.edu.au/social\\_sciences/soss/research/challenging\\_racism](http://www.uws.edu.au/social_sciences/soss/research/challenging_racism) (accessed 5th April 2011),

<sup>34</sup> Dunn, K. Forrest, J. Babacan, H. Paradies, Y and Pedersen, A (no date cited) – *Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racism Research Project National level findings* from [http://www.uws.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/173635/NationalLevelFindingsV1.pdf](http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/173635/NationalLevelFindingsV1.pdf) (accessed 5th April 2011)

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*