

# Rethinking Multiculturalism Reassessing Multicultural Education

## Project Report Number 3 Knowledge Translation and Action Research

Megan Watkins  
Greg Noble



Australian Government  
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#### Disclaimer

The NSW Department of Education and Communities strongly values educational research that informs the development and delivery of its policies and teaching and learning provisions. Findings contained within this report may not reflect current Departmental policy or practice across all NSW public schools.

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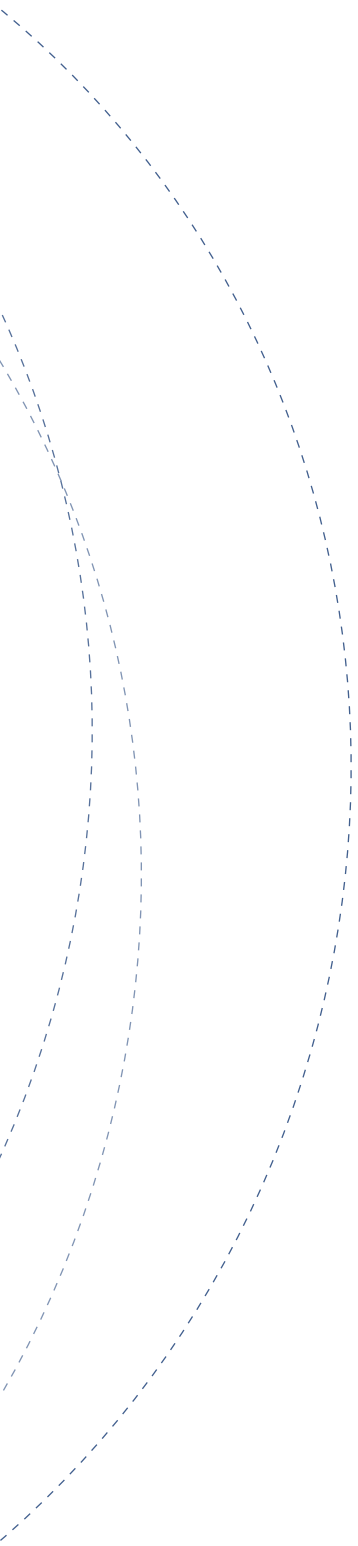
The research informing this report was only possible due to the willingness of the principals and teachers in each of the 14 project schools to participate in the professional learning and accompanying action research conducted as part of the Rethinking Multiculturalism/ Reassessing Multicultural Education (RMRME) Project. This involved a considerable commitment, on top of teachers' already very busy work schedules, and is testament to these teachers' professionalism and desire to effect change around multicultural education in their schools.

Together with these principals and teachers we also want to acknowledge our partner investigators on RMRME: Nell Lynes, Eveline Mougialis, Amanda Bourke and Lynley Qureshi, from the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and Robyn Mamouny from the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) with whom we worked closely on the design and implementation of the project and who provided invaluable input and advice on the writing of this report. Professor Kevin Dunn, School of Social Sciences and Psychology at UWS, also provided assistance on this stage of the project as did Neroli Colvin, a PhD student at the Institute for Culture and Society at UWS, who is the APAI candidate attached to RMRME. We would also like to acknowledge the work of Helen Barcham, Garth Lean, Lucy Hopkins, Cameron McAuliffe and Virginia Piccone who provided research assistance during different stages of the project. Thanks also to Yolande Cailly whose patience and professionalism is always appreciated.

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Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the financial support of the ARC, UWS, the NSW DEC and the BOSTES. NSW schools are now faced with increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, as is the broader Australian community. The public funding of research is essential to ensure that we have the richest data for understanding the make-up of this diversity, the theoretical tools for making sense of how this diversity shapes Australians' lives, and the educational tools for addressing the needs that emerge amidst this diversity. It is hoped the insights gleaned from this detailed study will better prepare all teachers for the challenges this diversity poses, ensuring schools cater for the diverse needs of their communities and equipping students with the knowledges and skills they require to effectively navigate the complexities of the transnational and globalised world in which they live.



## Executive Summary

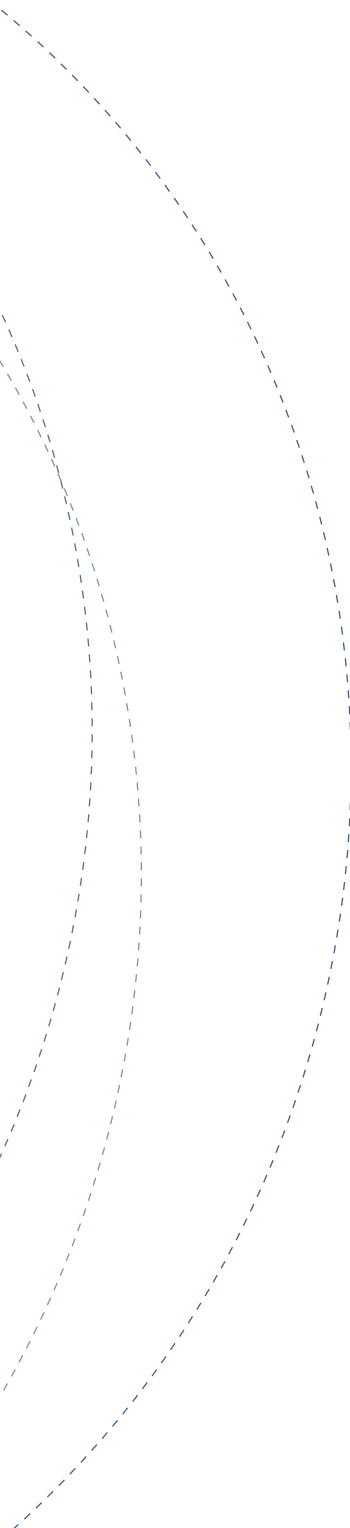
*Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education Project Report Number 3: Knowledge Translation and Action Research* is the outcome of the final stage of Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education (RMRME), an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project between the University of Western Sydney (UWS), the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) incorporating the former NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) and the Board of Studies. It follows two earlier reports, *Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education Project Report Number 1: Surveying NSW Public School Teachers* and *Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education Project Report Number 2: Perspectives on Multicultural Education*.

This final report provides a macro analysis of site-specific action research projects that were conducted during 2012 into issues of multicultural education in each of the 14 project schools. These schools were a diverse mix of: primary/secondary, high LBOTE/low LBOTE, high SES/low SES and urban/rural. Multicultural education includes a range of programs: ESL, parent engagement, intercultural understanding and anti-racism, designed not only to meet the needs of LBOTE students and their families but to equip all students with the necessary capacities to navigate the culturally complex world in which they live. The rationale for the inclusion of these very different types of schools in RMRME was to ascertain not only how multicultural education was understood and practised across a full range of NSW schools but also how they would then undertake rethinking these processes through their involvement in the project.

Prior to schools implementing their own action research, research teams comprising up to five teachers (including an executive member of staff) undertook a training program. This involved an examination of:

- issues around globalisation, culture and identity and their impact on schooling;
- the RMRME state-wide survey of teachers and individual reports that compared this data with that collected from each school;
- the approach to action research adopted by the RMRME project;
- aspects of research design and data collection techniques;
- project implementation and reporting.

These research teams were then supported in their schools in designing and implementing their projects by the NSW DEC Multicultural/ESL Education consultants, who had undertaken similar training. A project website was established with a teacher portal providing resources and a discussion board to encourage cross-school interaction, and where school research plans and reports could be uploaded and accessed. The task of the RMRME investigators was to map this process of knowledge translation and to gauge the extent to which teams were able to apply the understandings around rethinking multicultural education from the



training in their action research projects. To determine this, interviews were held with each school principal, and focus groups with the research teams, before implementation and again after completion of their projects. Other data sources included the observation of activities and/or the collection of project materials in each school together with their research plans and final reports.

Schools devised a range of projects to varying effect. Some teams, despite the training, had difficulty moving beyond more traditional forms of multicultural education focusing on the development of empathetic understanding and limited forms of cultural recognition; approaches RMRME was keen to challenge. These teams tended to be in low LBOTE schools with little previous emphasis on multicultural education. They were also the teams that had lower levels of engagement with the process of action research and with wider reading to inform their projects. Another group of schools found action research a useful mechanism for evaluating the projects they had devised and made greater headway in rethinking multicultural education. A third and final group of schools had teams that engaged more effectively with the understandings around cultural complexity from the training and used these and their own wider reading to inform their projects. This led to demonstrative change in their schools' practices around multicultural education and the enhancement of the professional capacities of the teachers involved.

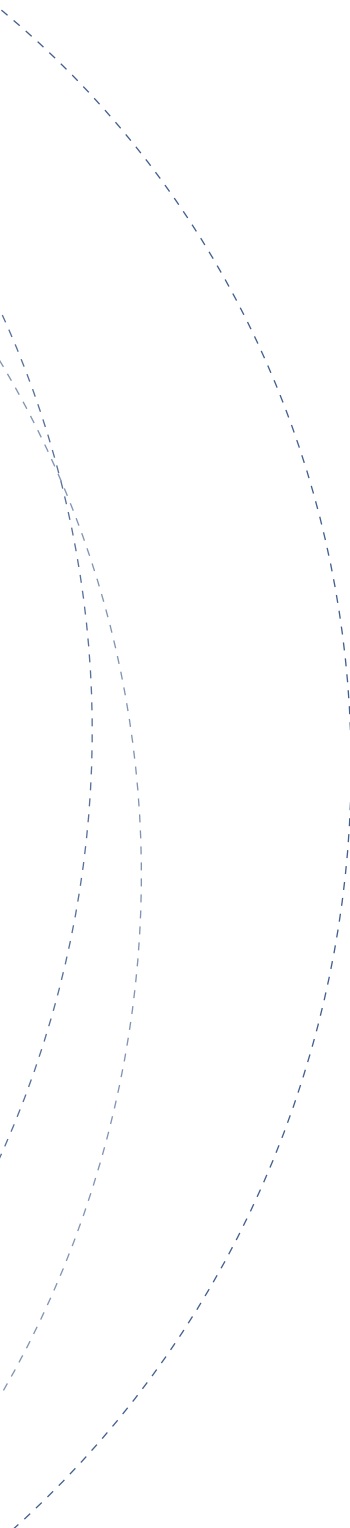
These differing responses to the training and action research seem to result from two very different professional cultures of teaching: one that had a generally narrow pragmatic focus and was somewhat resistant to a broader intellectual engagement with understandings that challenged more traditional forms of multicultural education, and one that was more academically oriented and open to the possibilities of effecting change in their schools. Rethinking multicultural education seems largely reliant upon the professional capacities of teachers to implement programs to enable this process. Rethinking multicultural education, therefore, may similarly involve rethinking professional learning for teachers.



## Introduction

This is the third and final report based on the findings from the Rethinking Multiculturalism/ Reassessing Multicultural Education (RMRME) Project, an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project between the University of Western Sydney (UWS), the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) incorporating the former NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) and the Board of Studies. While also directed towards broader questions of multiculturalism, the project has aimed to shed light on issues related to the increasing cultural complexity in NSW public schools and their communities in both urban and rural areas and the role education can play in social inclusion. Importantly, as indicated in the Project's title, its intent has been to rethink multiculturalism and the way it is understood and practised in schools through the various programs of which multicultural education is comprised. By multiculturalism we are not so much referring to its use as a synonym for cultural diversity but to the policies and programs designed to manage that diversity. Policies of multiculturalism date back to the early 1970s in Australia (see Koleth, 2010 for a detailed account of this history). In contrast to earlier policies of assimilation and integration which sought to either erase or suppress cultural and linguistic diversity — on the rise following Australia's increasing levels of immigration post World War Two — multiculturalism gives recognition to this diversity with policy initiatives also designed to combat discrimination and to ensure equal access and opportunity within society (see for example, Department of Social Services, 2011). Australia, however, and indeed the world, is a very different place to what it was in the 1970s. With factors such as intergenerational change, cultural adaptation, intermarriage coupled with the impact of globalisation and even greater levels of immigration from an even wider spread of countries, the nature of Australia's cultural diversity has changed dramatically, as has that of other migrant-based nations, leading to what is referred to as the 'diversification of diversity' or 'superdiversity' (Vertovec, 2006).

Such cultural complexity challenges the assumptions of cohesive ethnic communities upon which early multiculturalism was founded (Ang et al., 2001) and suggests a reconsideration of what current policies of multiculturalism now actually give recognition to. Indeed, the inclusivity of multiculturalism is itself questionable if an ongoing recognition of cultural difference is its focus. Doing this tends to set those who may be perceived as different apart, inhibiting a sense of national belonging, and running counter to multiculturalism's intended goal of social inclusion. Ang (2001, p.14), for example, is of the view that rather than meeting its rhetoric of 'unity-in-diversity', multiculturalism has instead promoted a 'living-apart-together'. In the UK, Malik (quoted in Modood, 2007, pp. 10-11) has even commented that 'multiculturalism has helped to segregate communities far more effectively than racism'. The intent of such critiques, and certainly their use here, is not to question the viability of multiculturalism as public policy but to prompt a rethink of how it might be reinvigorated to meet the challenges increasing cultural complexity poses. Of course, there are those who are quite vociferous



in their critique of multiculturalism and seek to capitalise on public anxiety, especially post 9/11 and with the heightened threat of global terrorism (Akerman, 2001; Sheehan 2006). By and large, however, there is considerable support in Australia for cultural diversity and policies of multiculturalism (Ang et al, 2006; Dunn et al, 2004).

Such support was also evident in the RMRME project survey of NSW public school teachers indicating even higher levels of support than the general population (Watkins et al., 2013, p. 42). Having such traction within the broader Australian community in one sense attests to the success of multiculturalism but, in another, presents difficulties if certain basic tenets, and the commonsense understandings they engender, require modification. With increasing cultural complexity, conceptions of culture as discrete and bounded are no longer tenable and yet policies of multiculturalism have tended to proffer such views, particularly in their recognition of distinct ethnic communities, masking their inherent heterogeneity. At the level of the individual, such forms of recognition are equally problematic, essentialising ethnicity as if it is the sole determinant of identity rather than one of a myriad of contributing factors together with class, gender, religion, sexuality, age, education not to mention individual experience. Such a process is often attributed to the identity politics formulated in response to assimilatory policies that thwarted any expression of ethno-cultural identification beyond the Anglo mainstream. In asserting a particular ethnic identity, important especially in lobbying for services and resources for marginalised communities, Ang (2001, p.11), feels 'that very identity is also the name of a potential prison house'. In saying this she is not trying to devalue the powerful sense of belonging individuals and groups attach to such forms of identification but to question the ways in which ethnicity is then cast as the defining feature of identity, reified as stable and unchanging that becomes a marker of difference creating artificial boundaries between people.

### Rethinking Categories

It is not simply the impact of globalisation, mass migration and intergenerational change that necessitates a more complex engagement with notions of culture, ethnicity and identity and their deployment within policies and programs of multiculturalism. Hybridised notions of culture, and identity as a more shifting and contingent phenomenon, are simply a more accurate reflection of reality. As James Donald (2007, p. 292) remarks, 'Communities and cultures (and we would add individuals) are never hermetic'. To see them as such is simply a function of the persistence of what are largely outmoded understandings fed, in particular, by late nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropology that sought the identification of different cultures and the so-called systematic relations that characterised them. Such understandings have long since been critiqued within anthropology and sociology. In the late 1960s, for example, the anthropologist Fredrik Barth critiqued the idea of ethnicity as a primordial category highlighting its social constructedness and the ways in which ethnic boundaries are maintained

through processes of inclusion and exclusion by both those within and outside a group. These ideas around the social constructedness of ethnicity have been developed by others such as the sociologist Rogers Brubaker who, in his account of ethnicity without groups, reminds us that 'ethnicity, race and nationhood exist only in and through our perceptions, interpretations, categorisations and identifications. They are not things *in* the world but perspectives *on* the world' (Brubaker, 2002, p.174). Culture and ethnicity may be representative of a certain coherence in terms of meanings, values and practices but caution is required if the assumption is then made that such categories — particularly if narrowly defined — determine individual behaviour. Yet while these ideas may be commonplace within academe, they seem to have had limited impact elsewhere with policies of multiculturalism generally reinforcing the groupism that Brubaker critiques and multicultural education often reproducing these ideas in schools. As Norma Gonzales (1999, p. 431) writes,

While many anthropologists may bemoan the essentialism and reification of bounded and shared cultural traits ... the reality is that academic critical discourses have been slow to penetrate curricular practices in schools.

This comment was written 15 years ago but research from the Cultural Practices and Learning Project (CPLP) conducted in NSW public schools during 2005-2008 indicates very little has changed (Watkins and Noble, 2008). It is this which provided the impetus for RMRME, namely to conduct professional learning around these ideas with teachers and, utilising techniques of action research, for them to reassess their approach to multicultural education in schools.

### **The Rethinking Multiculturalism/ Reassessing Multicultural Education Project**

Action research conducted during 2012 was only one component of RMRME constituting the final stage of the project. Prior to this, during Term 2, 2011, the Project team — composed of researchers from UWS and partner investigators from the NSW DEC and the former NSWIT — conducted a survey of all NSW DEC teachers to determine the state of play regarding multicultural education in NSW schools. With a response rate of almost 10 per cent of the NSW DEC teaching population, the survey reported on: the cultural and linguistic make-up of NSW DEC teachers, their training in multicultural and ESL education, their professional development needs in these areas, current practice around multicultural education including the effectiveness of policy implementation and teachers' attitudes to, and understandings of, issues related to multicultural education and multiculturalism more broadly. This data was the focus of *Project Report Number 1: Surveying NSW Public School Teachers* (Watkins et al., 2013) but importantly it was also utilised in reports for each of the 14 project schools (see Table 1). Responses from teachers in each of these schools were matched to the state-wide

results allowing the project schools to draw on this as baseline data to inform the design of their site specific action research projects. Additional data, expanding on that collected from the state-wide survey, but in particular, examining attitudes and understandings regarding cultural diversity, policies of multiculturalism and their impact in schools, was collected from focus groups with parents, teachers and students in each of the 14 project schools. These findings are discussed in *Project Report Number 2: Perspectives on Multicultural Education* (Noble and Watkins, 2014).

**Table 1** Profile of RMRME Schools, 2012.

School	School Type	Setting	Total Student Population	LBOTE* Student Population %	SES (ICSEA)**
Addington	secondary	urban	852	22	930
Barnett	secondary	rural	766	3	974
Beechton	primary	semi - rural	118	19	970
Binto Valley	primary	urban	268	25	1199
Eaton Park	secondary	urban	1109	59	1138
Getty Rd	primary	urban	807	79	1040
Graham's Point	secondary	urban	1341	46	1060
Harringvale	secondary	urban	967	83	1066
Hingston Valley	secondary	urban	1276	83	1097
Pentonville	secondary	semi - rural	1264	4	957
Smithton	primary	urban	527	70	1067
Thurston	primary	urban	178	47	895
Wellington Heights	primary	urban	907	95	1167
Wollami Lakes	primary	rural	380	27	924

\* LBOTE is an acronym for Language Background Other than English.

\*\* ICSEA is a value based on parents' occupation and level of education. See ACARA (2013). 1000 is the median score. < 1000 signifies a lower SES and > 1000 a higher SES.

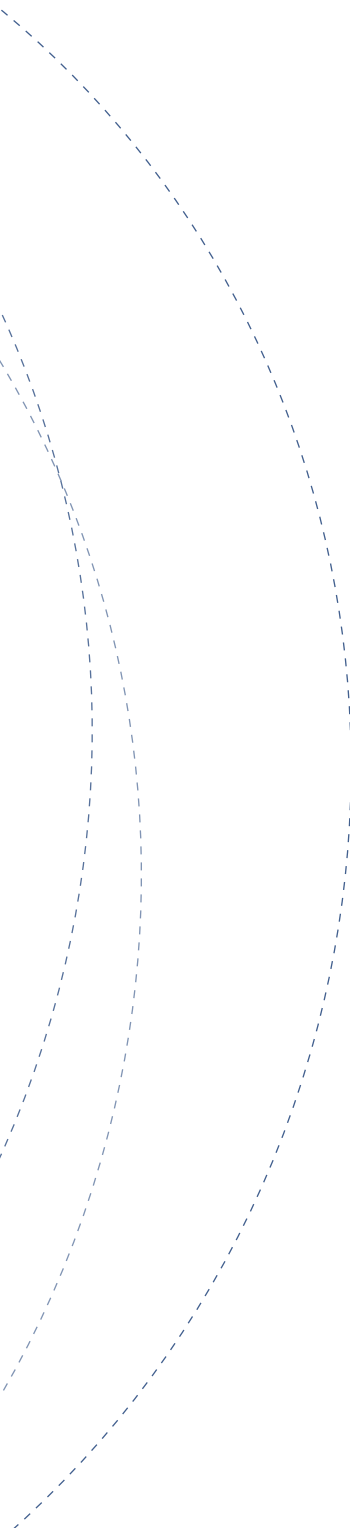
## Knowledge Translation and Action Research

As indicated, this third report focuses on the action research that was conducted in the 14 project schools. Much of the current literature on multicultural education tends to be based on schools with high percentages of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. RMRME, however, was keen to explore how multicultural education was practised in a wide range of schools: primary/secondary, high LBOTE/ low LBOTE, high SES/low SES, urban/rural. A profile of each school

is provided in Table 1. Please note that pseudonyms are used for each school and, later in the report, for all the principals and teachers to ensure anonymity for those participating in the project. Geographic descriptors are intentionally general as an additional measure to ensure anonymity. Schools, however, have the right to be named if willing to disseminate the findings of their own projects.

Multicultural education is a matter for all schools, but differing demographics and community expectations result in very different practices and so RMRME sought to not only capture this but, through the site-specific action research projects, examine how schools addressed their differing needs and priorities in this area. Prior to each of the 14 schools devising and implementing their projects over the course of 2012, an information session was conducted with the school principals during Term 4, 2011 to outline the research process. Each of the principals had nominated their school to be involved in the project after first being approached by either the NSW DEC members of the Project team or by one of the regional NSW DEC Multicultural/ESL Education consultants, who, on the basis of the diverse demographics required for the overall sample of schools, selected those they considered most appropriate in consultation with the Project team as a whole. This information session was used to explain the research process and timeline to principals. In particular it outlined how each school was required to appoint a research team of up to five members including at least one executive member. In some schools, teams also included ESL as well as class/Key Learning Area (KLA) teachers and in one school two parents were also involved. The research teams were responsible for devising and implementing an action research project in their school. Before this, each of the research teams attended professional learning sessions conducted at the beginning of 2012 at UWS which considered issues of cultural diversity, globalisation and schooling. The training also outlined the action research process and techniques of data collection and analysis. Chapter Two provides a more detailed account of the training and the research teams' responses to it.

Schools received funding from the NSW DEC to allow teachers to attend this training, together with follow-up sessions midway through the process and a presentation day at the end of the year at the completion of their projects. Additional funding was given to schools to assist them to conduct the action research that could be expended on further teacher relief for planning, implementation and resources. Ultimately, however, the allocation of this money was left to project teams and their school principals to determine. New-scheme teachers attending the professional learning sessions could use the training for accreditation purposes through what was the then NSWIT with other teachers given the option to register the training as part of their individual professional development. Following this training, research teams received further support in their schools from the NSW DEC Multicultural/ESL Education consultants who had undertaken similar training towards the end of 2011 in preparation for this support role. The consultants' training also acted as a useful pilot for the training program which was revised in light of feedback from these sessions prior to delivery to the school research teams in 2012.



A project website was established at the beginning of 2012 which not only housed relevant resources and policy documents but included a teacher portal which provided all project members with access to each school's research plans and final reports, together with a discussion board to promote dialogue and the sharing of ideas between schools and participants.

The role of the UWS investigators within the RMRME team was to conduct a macro-analysis of not only each of the action research projects but the whole process of knowledge translation from the initial training through to the completion of each school's project. In some cases these projects are ongoing and, in line with the principles of action research, have been re-evaluated and revised. The data collection for RMRME, however, had a specified time period concluding in December 2012 and involved: interviews with principals and focus groups with each research team following the training and prior to commencing their project; follow-up principal interviews and focus groups with the research teams on completion of their project; observation and/or the collection of relevant documentary material including each school's research plan and final reports. While some research teams sought additional assistance from the academic members of the RMRME team, primarily in terms of research methodology and data collection techniques, by and large support was supplied by the NSW DEC consultants with the academic team members focused on the data collection for the macro-analysis rather than acting as mentors for school research teams. In a pilot project prior to the RMRME, the academics had performed both of these roles which at times had led to a conflict of interest. During RMRME the academic investigators took on the role of researchers rather than mentors and generally did not intervene to assist school research teams in the carriage of their projects. The aim of this approach was to give a sharper focus to the process of knowledge translation and, in particular, how research teams grappled with the ideas presented during training that critiqued cultural essentialism, considered the impact of globalisation and prompted a rethink of approaches to multicultural education in schools.

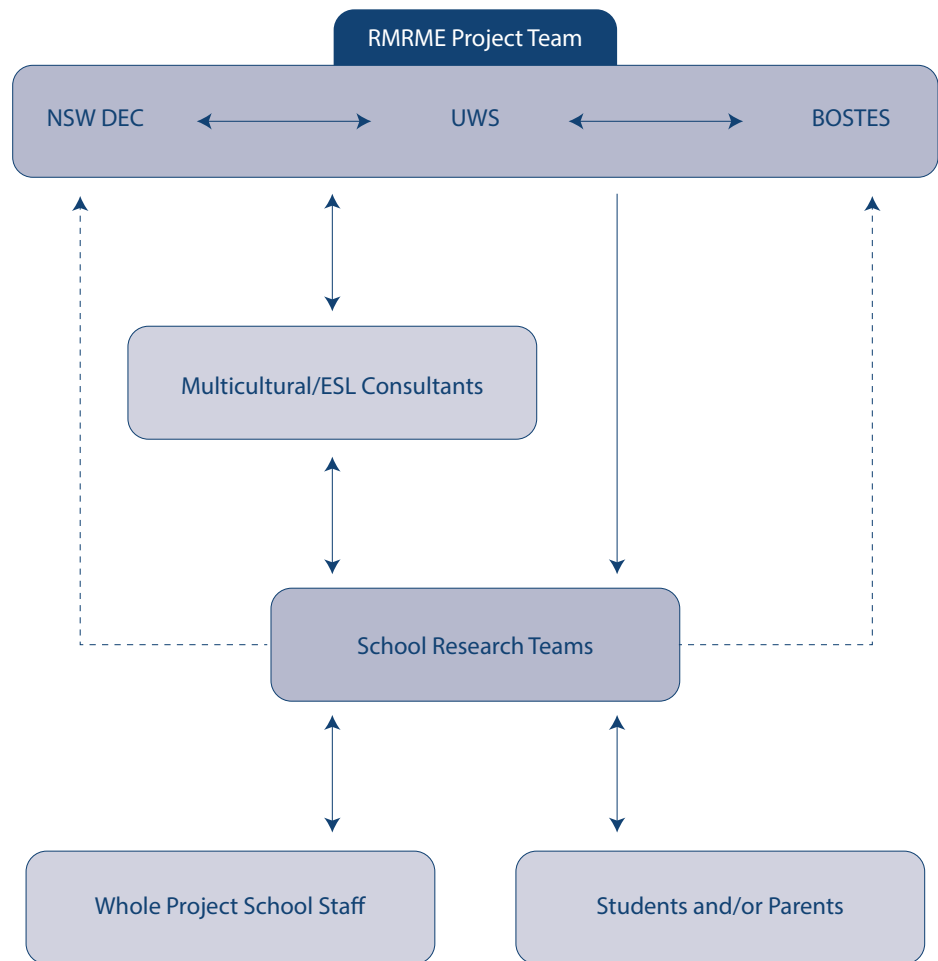
### **Differing Perspectives on Research: Reflections on the Process**

As a whole the Project utilised various approaches to research and employed various methods both quantitative and qualitative. With the focus here on the final stage of RMRME involving the school-based action research, it is probably best described as engaged research with embedded action research components, though both these terms 'engaged research' and 'action research', require further explanation, and some degree of qualification. Drawing on the OECD's Frascati Manual on Research, Amanda Third (2014) makes a distinction between applied and engaged research. While both intend practical application, what Third identifies as a shortcoming of much applied research is that, despite producing viable solutions to real world problems, this



knowledge often has little impact on policy and practice as the process of 'knowledge exchange' is not factored into the overall research design. This is what Third sees as characteristic of engaged research, namely that researchers, government, industry and/or not-for-profit organisations work collaboratively to identify issues that require attention and devise research to appropriately intervene and effect change. Agonistic relations may result but, as a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 2000), these points of tension are viewed as productive and worked through, ultimately proving essential to the dialogic process of knowledge production. This was very much how RMRME came to be. The then Multicultural Programs Unit (MPU) within the NSW DEC sought to examine multicultural education practices across schools in light of contemporary research and a rapidly changing policy environment. At the same time findings from the Cultural Practices and Learning Project, which was also undertaken between UWS and the MPU, revealed some teachers held stereotypical views of their students' cultural backgrounds that affected their practice, impacting upon student learning (Watkins and Noble, 2008, p. 115). The project report recommended professional learning for teachers to enhance their understandings of cultural diversity and to move beyond notions of cultural inclusion as simply cultural sensitivity — often misconceived — towards a critical engagement with the cultural complexity within schools and the broader Australian community.

Working together with the NSWIT, an important research partner given its role in professional learning and teacher accreditation, investigators from UWS and the NSW DEC used these findings to inform the research design for RMRME which was initially piloted with 11 schools and then modified for what then became RMRME. The collaborative nature of this process, particularly the research design and implementation, is what characterises RMRME as engaged research but this engagement operated at various levels and in different modes (see Diagram 1 on p.12). It not only occurred between the investigators from the three research partners, UWS, NSW DEC and the BOSTES, but with other personnel within the NSW DEC, namely the Multicultural/ESL Education consultants whose feedback from their own training led to the modification of the approach used with the school research teams. They in turn worked with schools to varying effect on devising and implementing the site specific action research projects. There is also the engaged nature of the research the school research teams were undertaking, though at this level there was no feedback loop to the broader project to affect its overarching research design and implementation. At this point engagement became embedded within an action research frame and in some schools, as detailed in Chapter Three, actions were modified through dialogue between schools and their communities.



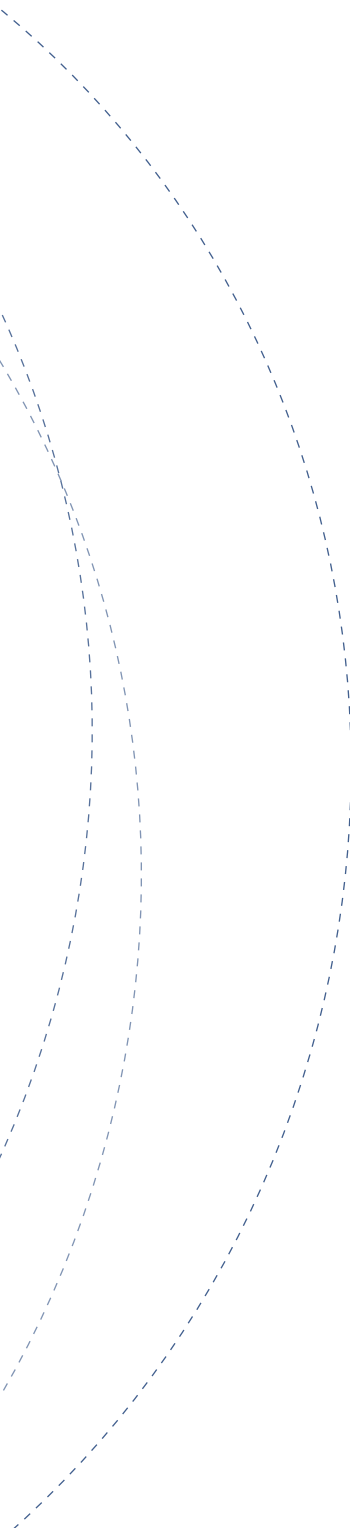
**Diagram 1** RMRME Action Research: Levels and Modes of Engagement\*

\* The dotted lines in the diagram refer to the data from the macro-analysis that was then drawn upon by the RMRME Team.



The macro-analysis of the action research necessitated certain limits to engagement. As indicated, the training of the research teams was not simply a technique to effect change in the way each school approached multicultural education. The macro-analysis also provided the means to ascertain the success or otherwise of the projects, yielding important insights with broader systemic implications for in-service professional learning. The action research component of RMRME was also quite specifically framed, or at least the training component encouraged a particular process. Approaches to action research vary enormously depending, it seems, on whether emphasis is given to *action* or *research* and on the way in which research itself is understood. The origins of action research can be found in the work of Kurt Lewin who, in the late 1930s, introduced participatory research methods into workplaces in the US to improve the conditions of marginalised workers (Adelman, 1993). Together with it being participatory, he drew on the research methods of the social sciences to encourage a systematic approach to data collection in gauging the effectiveness of workplace practices. His ideas were later adopted in education in the US and UK during the 1950s and 1960s where action research was refashioned as a tool for teachers to improve their classroom practice (Silver and Silver, 1991) and now has quite broad application as a form of research-based practitioner enquiry (Macintyre, 2000; McNiff and Whitehead, 2006; Mills, 2007). Stemming from Lewin's early approach, however, action research tends to place little emphasis on the theoretical but typically involves the identification of a problem or issue, devising an action to address it, collecting data to assess its effectiveness and then reflecting upon the findings, followed in many cases by the repetition of this cycle to monitor practice in an ongoing way. Indeed Brown University's manual on action research in education points out that 'Rather than dealing with the theoretical, action research allows practitioners to address those concerns that are closest to them, ones over which they can exhibit some influence and make change' (Ferrance, 2000, Introduction).

Rather than excising the theoretical, the approach to action research that RMRME adopted placed it squarely at the forefront stressing the necessity for teachers to engage with particular theoretical perspectives drawn from critical and cultural theory around cultural identification, globalisation, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism to prompt them to engage critically with how multicultural education is practised in schools and how it may be reimagined through this process. Surveying relevant literature was incorporated into the RMRME model of action research. Importantly, the NSW DEC's *Handbook on Action Research in Education* (NSW DEC Professional Learning and Leadership Directorate, 2010) takes a similar view. It also acknowledges, however, that 'In the action research cycle the literature review is not generally a formal process' (p.9). By countering this, and foregrounding its value, greater credence is given to formalising this step in the conduct of school-based action research. We would argue, that the parameters of the literature to be surveyed could in fact be broadened to include far more than what is usually considered under the rubric of 'professional reading'. Such



material often has a narrow pragmatic focus which would benefit from supplementation by more theoretically informed scholarship to promote new knowledge rather than simply application of the same. RMRME encouraged research teams to engage with the theoretical in rethinking multicultural education, alerting them to how Raewyn Connell envisages a teacher's role:

Interpreting the world for others, and doing it well, requires not just a skill set but also a knowledge of how interpretation is done, of the cultural field in which it is done, and of the possibilities of interpretation that surround one's own. This requirement helps to define teaching as intellectual labour and teachers as a group of intellectual workers (Connell, 2009, p.224).

The degree to which teachers involved in the research took up this challenge was variable but the insights gained from the various processes of knowledge translation, both in the initial training and subsequently in the action research in each of the 14 schools, have presented a range of possibilities for how multicultural education can more effectively approach the cultural complexities now characteristic of schools and the broader Australian community. This is the focus of Chapters Two to Four but prior to considering these various acts of translation and their implications we firstly examine the teachers' initial conceptions of multicultural education before they engaged in any attempt to effect change.

## CHAPTER ONE

# School Research Teams and Their Perspectives on Multicultural Education

Multicultural education involves a range of programs. From its inception in 1969 in NSW as the Child Migrant Education Program, providing English as a Second Language support to students of a language background other than English in just nine schools (Inglis, 2009), it has grown to include a wide range of programs: ESL<sup>i</sup>, community engagement and refugee student support for particular groups of LBOTE students and families; and anti-racism and intercultural understanding for all students in all schools regardless of LBOTE student enrolments. This is reinforced by both the NSW DEC Multicultural Education and Anti-Racism policies which require all schools to report on achievement in multicultural education and strategies to combat racism in their annual school reports. Inclusive curriculum and the promotion of social cohesion are now also goals of the Intercultural Understanding general capability within the Australian National Curriculum (ACARA, 2012) and so there is considerable complementarity between aspects of the state and national programs around cultural diversity and schooling.

As indicated by the RMRME state-wide survey, teachers are overwhelmingly in support of Australia's cultural diversity and 83.2 per cent were of the view that multicultural education should be a focus for all schools including those with few LBOTE students. Despite these findings, the survey also demonstrated that, while there was a high level of readership and knowledge of the NSW DEC's Anti-Racism Policy, there was less awareness of the Multicultural Education Policy as almost 40 per cent of non-teaching executive respondents had not implemented or did not know if it had been implemented in their school. Where the policy is implemented there is also little evidence as to how this is done and the kinds of understandings and approaches teachers employ. The focus groups with parents, teachers and students in the 14 project schools yielded important insights in this regard which are outlined in Project Report Number 2. Additional detail was gleaned from the initial principal interviews and focus groups with the school research teams undertaken after their training but prior to them devising strategies for rethinking multicultural education in their schools. Their perspectives on multicultural education at this point are insightful as the teams had had time to reflect on what multicultural education means in the context of their school following the training. They had also had time to discuss their school-specific survey reports which included comparisons with the state-wide data. Their views at this point are also suggestive of how they might then approach the process of rethinking multicultural education in each of their projects.

### The Goals of Multicultural Education

As a way into discussing approaches to multicultural education we first asked both principals and the research teams to explain what they saw as its goals and its role in schooling. In line with the results from a

<sup>i</sup> In line with National Curriculum developments, the term English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EALD) has now replaced English as a Second Language (ESL) in NSW public schools. Given ESL was the term used at the time of data collection it has been retained for this report..

similar question in the Project survey (Watkins et al., 2013, p. 34) and focus groups with other teachers, students and parents, teachers offered varying responses that in summary related to promoting a particular ethics towards cultural diversity together with a focus on equity and social justice. Patrick from the research team at Hingston Valley High School (HS), for example, commented that

‘There are two prongs to multicultural education which is ensuring outcomes and achievements across all cultures you’ve got at the school and developing cultural harmony. I think even if you have an Anglo monocultural school, I think you still want to do things to try and develop that whole, you know you are going to be moving to a more diverse society’.

Teachers, however, had varying interpretations as to how these goals should be met and many merged a focus on ethics and equity seeing them as one and the same rather than linking, for example, equity to equal opportunity through the requisite provision of ESL support and delivery of curriculum; what one teacher at Wollami Lakes Public School (PS) saw as ‘making what is the NSW curriculum available to all students’. More often than not, however, emphasis was given to multicultural education as the promotion of a particular ethic towards cultural diversity. Some teachers framed this in terms of citizenship. As Ivan from Eaton Park HS explained, ‘it’s just to produce better citizens’. To others it was conceived more in terms of community harmony: as the Principal of Thurston PS pointed out, ‘it’s about enabling the students to live and work productively in the multicultural society that we live in, work in and relating to other people of different ethnic backgrounds in the same way that they relate to people from their own’. Selena, the Principal at Beechton PS, saw multicultural education as making ‘Australia a place that is responsible and safe for everyone living in this country’ but prefaced these remarks by explaining how this was linked to developing certain capacities in students especially in relation to those in her semi-rural school:

they go from the small school to large cities so they need to be, to have some resilience, a personal resilience and coping with change and coping with differences and not to narrow it down to their own little prejudices. They need to have an open mind rather than a narrow mind, so it is bringing it down to that intellectual reaction to something different.

For teachers in some schools, the ways in which multicultural education might engender such an ethical and open-minded disposition, however, often relied on limited forms of cultural recognition associated with early policies of multiculturalism. This was the case even following the training that was intended to unsettle such understandings. Binto Valley’s principal, for example, explained that,

We’ve got a lot of kids who are maybe second generation Australian too so helping them appreciate their own cultural heritage [is important]. I want multicultural education not to be tokenistic, I actually

want it to be authentic... so I am wanting to help teachers and create an inclusive culture but I see culture as far more important than the educational outcomes at the moment.

The inclusionary logic governing this principal's statement tends to foreground the ethical dimension of multicultural education embracing a liberal multiculturalism that places emphasis on the appreciation of what she sees as the cultural heritage of her students. Yet, such a position may run counter to its intended inclusionary goal through its ongoing recognition of difference — however far removed — maintaining what may be an unwanted distinction from the Anglo mainstream. In a sense it may operate as a misguided ethic, but it seems it is one that is so immanently related to practices of multiculturalism, that for some it was quite difficult to engender any reflexivity about what may be its implications.

The Principal of Beechton PS had a similar view, explaining how 'we have spoken about acknowledging particular backgrounds of the children for some time. For children's self-esteem I think they need to actually have some pride in their own background and to be able to share that background recognising their identity as part of their self-confidence'. This is not to suggest that students should not be encouraged to have pride in their cultural heritage but such comments raise important issues with which schools need to contend. How, for example, is culture understood here and just what aspects of a child's background are to be given recognition? How significant is this background to a child's sense of identity and why is ethnicity singled out as a key determinant? Also, is such a focus undertaken at the expense of other priorities and do parents see it as the role of the school to promote such forms of recognition? Lastly, how far removed are such practices from then ethnicising the process of learning itself and assigning students certain traits on the basis of an assumed cultural background? (Watkins and Noble, 2013) — numerous examples of which were evident in the CPLP which in part prompted this examination of multicultural education. These issues are examined in more detail in the RMRME Project Report Number 2. The Principal of Eaton Park HS was grappling with some of these issues when he commented that,

there is a genuine commitment to understanding the different backgrounds ... I think that we can benefit as much from knowing their culture and integrating their culture but they also have to learn how to be in the Australian culture so that's a balance isn't it? But we don't want them to feel separate, we don't want them to feel they are second class so there are a lot of stereotypical traps, I guess, that you can fall into.

Despite the demarcation of culture as 'theirs' as opposed to 'ours', there is some consideration here of the tension within multicultural education between what constitutes inclusion and exclusion and the complex task of conceiving of an ethics towards cultural difference that avoids essentialising that difference in the process. To rethink multicultural

education, such concerns need to be foregrounded and debated in schools, clearly delineating between notions of heritage, culture and identity rather than assuming that they are one and the same.

To other teachers multicultural education performed another role as a kind of management tool to minimise any potential unrest and promote civility between groups of students. One teacher from Addington HS pointed out that it was 'to increase the tolerance of different cultures of our students represented in the school', a comment which followed her colleague's that,

I believe in the T word, tolerance. I think in life we have to have a certain degree of tolerance so that we can't cause problems through multiculturalism and through racism and things like that. You know, we might have different views but you need to accept other people's views and not necessarily cause a problem.

Ghassan Hage (1998, p.87) has critiqued such forms of multiculturalism as 'a form of symbolic violence in which a mode of domination is presented as a form of egalitarianism'. He likens this to Pierre Bourdieu's 'strategies of condescension', a putting-up-with to maintain the peace but maintaining a position of power in the process. Though slightly different, but with a similar focus on this kind of managed civility, other teachers saw multicultural education as a mechanism for ensuring cordial relations between all those within a school community. Deirdre, from Graham's Point HS, for example, felt multicultural education should,

provide practical strategies where teachers know how to approach a student from another cultural background other than themselves and they know how to approach them fairly, they are not scared to approach them because they are another nationality, they are saying, "oh no I am going to be called racist if I tell them to move on".

Marilyn from Binto Valley PS expressed a similar view of having,

an understanding of all cultures in my class, on the ethnic backgrounds in my class to make sure that I'm not doing something, or asking of them something, that is inappropriate in their culture that might be OK in Australian culture. I think that's really important and also dealing with parents too, you know treading gently.

Such views are suggestive of a multiculturalism that is concerned with particular rules of engagement, of doing and saying what is culturally appropriate as if one could arrive at a checklist of 'dos and don'ts' for each group. But, of course, multiculturalism has operated in this way and it is an approach that has influenced multicultural education. The CPLP, for example, reports on material that discusses the purported learning styles of Pacific Islander students as if they constituted a cohesive group. Likewise, in the US, Kip Tellez (2007, p. 547) refers to how competencies-based teacher education requires pre-service teachers



to memorise what he refers to as ‘a laundry list of cultural features as a demonstration of competency for multicultural education’. Informed by conceptions of culture as bounded, inherited and unchanging, such approaches seem to make sense but, with a wealth of evidence to the contrary, it is worrying that they still have such traction. Even more worrying is how these teachers still viewed multicultural education in this way despite the training that critiqued such perspectives and suggested alternatives. Yet this simply attests to the ‘stickiness’ of such views and the pervasiveness of cultural essentialism not only in how multicultural education is practised in schools but within multiculturalism more broadly.

What is also pertinent in these teachers’ comments, is the uneasiness such approaches can promote, as Marilyn says ‘treading gently’, not wanting to put a foot wrong. But, in doing so, she delimits the possibilities of engagement with those she perceives as Other, constrained by a set of rules of cultural appropriateness. Shifting such perceptions and equipping teachers with a more nuanced and productive set of conceptual resources to navigate cultural complexity is dependent upon the kind of intellectual labour that Connell argues should characterise the profession. Yet such engagement with cultural complexity and its impact on schooling is often elided in favour of a less challenging celebration of cultural diversity. As one teacher from Smithton PS remarked, ‘we are all one and we need to celebrate each other’s differences’. Such celebration, typified by what is now the ubiquitous multicultural day, may have certain benefits in terms of community participation but the degree to which this is sustained and also channelled into more meaningful engagement in a school and a child’s education is arguable. This is particularly the case for many LBOTE parents where a lack of English proficiency and familiarity with Australian systems of schooling may inhibit more active participation in their child’s education; the former of which was identified by respondents to the RMRME survey as a key issue (Watkins et al, 2013, p. 36). Also such events do little to address the complex issues raised above, conforming instead to what Ahmed (2012, p.58) terms the ‘lip-service model of diversity’.

Many teachers, however, did express concern with such approaches to multicultural education, viewing them as token and having minimal impact. The Principal of Wollami Lakes PS had such a view:

I would like to move away from cultural understanding being an event, you know so we go off to the temple and that’s great and we tick that box or we have NAIDOC day and we have people come up and we tick that box, to actually move past that to it just being normalised ... we do this because we need to put that in our annual school report ... I think we are moving past that but in many schools that, in my experience has been unfortunately what we do, you have an event.

Similar criticisms were voiced by the Principal of Addington HS: 'I think it has had the potential of slip into a bit of ad hoc — let's have a multicultural day, a few food stalls and we continue to tick that box. I think we were slipping in that direction'. The Principal of Getty Road PS also had reservations:

When there is an emphasis on spaghetti and polka I begin to feel it's a pointless exercise ... to me it is trivialising it ... we've had multicultural lunches and we've had multicultural dances and we've had the kids come in dressed in multicultural costumes and we've had the multicultural concert which is fine and all that's great as long as it's coupled with more in-depth understanding.

The research team at Getty Rd PS echoed their principal's remarks with one member commenting,

We all just get all happy on multicultural day. Personally I don't think that works. I don't think that kids of a young age understand, they just think it's a day of lots of food and it's lovely, it was fun, they really enjoyed it and a great sense of community but in terms of an actual lesson being taught from it ... nah.

Patrick from Hingston Valley HS felt that 'I wonder if, with culture, we probably need to start moving towards a more complex way of thinking about it'.

There were also concerns that a school's desire to celebrate its cultural diversity may not be shared by all members of its community. One teacher at Binto Valley, for example, recounted an experience when working at another school:

We had some children a couple of years ago, came from Afghanistan when the Russians were there, and they didn't want to celebrate their culture at all. They wanted to be Australian, they didn't want to have anything to do with their culture at all because of the trauma they had been through. So I think we have to be sensitive to that as well and you know this celebrating cultures, you've got to be sensitive to the ones who are refugees who come from terrible trauma and not push them to celebrate their culture if they don't want to.

While well meaning, such views tend towards the kind of moralising characteristic of early policies of multiculturalism, obscuring the tensions already discussed between inclusion and exclusion. Rather than simply being sensitive, perhaps it would have been more pertinent to have considered the cultural essentialism that frames this type of targeted celebration and the assumptions being made about what actually constitutes these students' culture; an issue not only for these Afghani refugees but all those encouraged to celebrate 'their' culture.



It is through such processes, that racism becomes institutionalised and reproduced. While a number of teachers made reference to instances of racism at their school — generally exhibited by students — such essentialising was not perceived in this way. It was generally more overt forms of racism that were foregrounded. Yet, as Ahmed (2010, p.44) explains, 'racism is not just about individuals with bad attitudes, not because such individuals do not exist (they do) but because such a way of thinking underestimates the scope and scale of racism thus leaving us without an account of how racism gets reproduced'. Anti-racism is a goal of multicultural education and responses to the RMRME survey indicate the NSW DEC Anti-Racism Policy has been very effectively implemented, but it is these less obvious forms of racism resulting from cultural essentialism, however well intentioned, of which teachers also need to be aware.

Many teachers were alert to these issues yet, up to this point, had not considered how they might inform the way in which they approached multicultural education in their schools. Amy from Graham's Point HS, for example, was reflecting on what she saw as problems with previous professional learning in multicultural education:

Well I think in terms of professional development in the past perhaps, as far as addressing multiculturalism in the classroom, it does tend to identify people in groups and ... if a kid is not working or not doing homework it may be because of their cultural background. You are told to sort of identify what is behind it, which theoretically is based on their cultural background and I was thinking well maybe then professional development around that needs to be more focused on looking at individual students rather than looking at culture, it's about the whole student and possibly the background of the student.

A colleague, also from Graham's Point, added, 'It's maybe a shorthand way of saying things rather than saying, you know this boy did this and this boy did that, they find it easier or more appropriate just to put people in groups in schools: the Islander boys, the Middle Eastern kids'. In thinking through these ideas at Wellington Heights PS, Julie commented, 'I think I was really hung up on ethnicity as being the be all and end all of multiculturalism but it's not'. Isaac, who led the Wellington Heights research team, added that,

I think in essentialising things, you know, you were conscious of it ... we were trying to be inclusive and supportive but we're more likely to say that it's a cultural thing so therefore we can't fix it or we can't do anything about it as opposed to well it's that family or it's that child's circumstances.

## Prioritising Multicultural Education

These teachers were among many who were beginning to conceive of culture, ethnicity and identity in more complex ways as they began the process of reconfiguring how multicultural education was practised in their schools. Elsewhere, together with reassessing multicultural education, it required greater priority. This was particularly the case in schools with low LBOTE student populations but not exclusively so. Reflecting on this, one principal commented that,

No one will walk into my office as a superintendent or higher and quiz me about it. OK, so in this school it's vital because of the nature of the school. If I went back to my previous school which was Anglo Saxon or white European in a Shire<sup>ii</sup> type school it became very much influenced by the Cronulla Riots. As a result of that aspect of negativity in the media suddenly the emphasis is deafening and the pressure's put on as a result. Therefore ebbs and flows, as what I said, where are you in the context? What's affecting you in the location you are in? What is the priority at that point in time?

In some schools, it seems multicultural education is not undertaken in a consistent or ongoing manner and only prioritised in reaction to external events which then impact on schools and their communities. So while, as indicated, the RMRME survey found that teachers felt multicultural education should be a focus in all schools, the point this Principal raises about its variable implementation, and limited encouragement regarding compliance, indicates such attitudes may not necessarily be indicative of actual practice. In fact, as also referred to earlier, this is borne out by other survey findings that indicated a sizable percentage of non-teaching executive were unaware if the Multicultural Education Policy had been implemented in their school. Gary, from semi-rural Pentonville HS, pointed out in relation to multicultural education that, 'I would have to say being honest about our school, teachers have a general apathy ...' with Vera his colleague on the research team adding, 'they wouldn't see our school as being multicultural, it's majority Anglo and that's the way it's always been seen so it would be all "why are we doing anything to do with multiculturalism?" because it doesn't affect us'. These teachers' principal, Melissa, provided further explanation of this point:

I guess, historically, I see multicultural education and funding and programs in schools that have got a high NESB population and that's where I've only ever seen those sorts of programs operating. I've never seen them in a school that is so inherently known as an Anglo school as ours is.

ii 'The Shire' here refers to Sutherland Shire in southern Sydney which tends to have lower LBOTE populations than some other areas of Sydney. Cronulla, where the racially motivated Cronulla Riots occurred in 2005, is located in the Shire.

Melissa, however, felt otherwise, pointing out that, 'Well, its' got the same relevance for any other school. I mean we need to learn tolerance, respect, understanding of other cultures and of the issues that people from other cultures living in our society face'. The Principal of Barnett, another rural school, explained:

You can't force a concept of multicultural understanding on people, it's got to come over a period of time and you would think in the twenty-first century in Australia that would be the case, but it's not, it's not in the country.

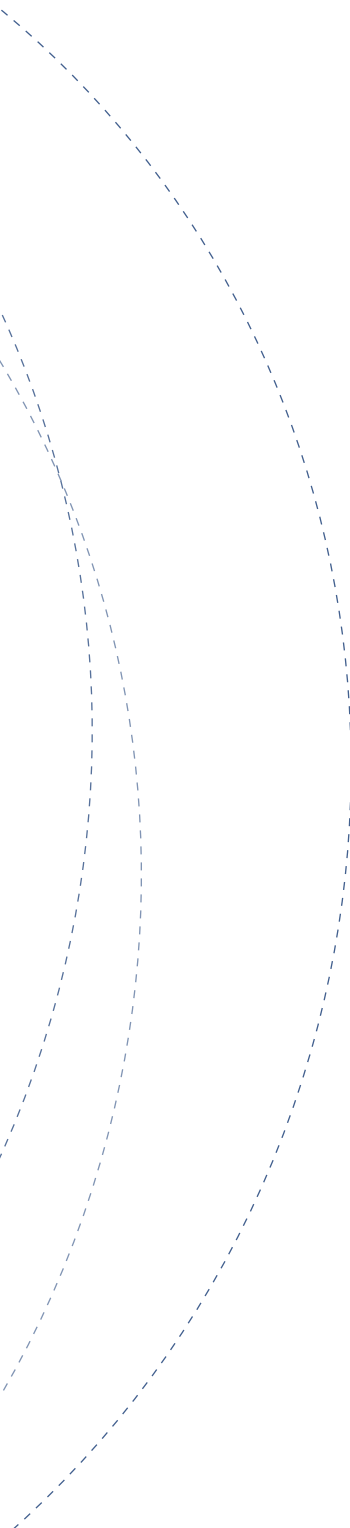
Toby, the Deputy at the same school, remarked:

Well until we wind up getting more and more people from an ethnic diverse background. I would always say that the Koori issue for education far outweighs that of multicultural at a school like ours because we deal with it on a daily basis you know with the number of Koori students we have.

Yet Toby had earlier explained that,

We had people from Ethiopia last year but they've since left and gone back to Sydney because I believe they were very isolated down here pretty much and even though we have a strong group of people who want to support refugees, and they were sponsoring families every year, we don't seem to get many here.

The relevance that some teachers and principals attributed to multicultural education seemed premised on the degree and nature of the cultural diversity of their student population. Of course certain programs within multicultural education such as ESL, refugee support and community engagement have more applicability to schools with higher concentrations of LBOTE students but multicultural education encompasses far more than this. Of particular relevance to all schools, no matter what their population, is the incorporation of intercultural understanding and anti-racism education. All schools in NSW are required to implement the NSW DEC Multicultural Education Policy which is aligned with other state and federal policies in relation to multiculturalism but it seems many schools are unsure about what this should involve, especially those with low LBOTE student populations beyond perhaps the celebration of diversity at multicultural and Harmony Day events. Yet multicultural education provides the opportunity for all schools to engage their students in a more critical examination of issues around cultural diversity and globalisation in line with the Melbourne Declaration's Educational Goals for Young Australians on global citizenship ensuring all students develop the requisite capacities for understanding the culturally complex world in which they live (MCEETYA, 2008).



Toby's comments, however, raise another issue for multicultural education and multicultural policies more broadly, namely their relation to Indigenous issues. Clearly it is important to maintain a distinction between the two not only to ensure that the different issues pertaining to Aboriginal and migrant Australians are addressed accordingly but that full recognition is given to the former as the First Peoples of Australia. While Australia's National Curriculum is currently under review, its general capability of Intercultural Understanding intends a broader engagement with culture inclusive of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The relation between this capability and multicultural education as it relates to NSW schools requires further elaboration. As complementary in terms of their impact, what this means in practice needs clarification to ensure they are of mutual benefit to schools and their communities.

It is clear from discussion with principals and the school-based research teams, that there are differing perspectives on the goals of multicultural education and also of the ways in which it is currently practised in schools. These teachers made these observations following the training they participated in as part of the RMRME Project. In the next chapter we examine what that training involved and teachers' responses to it as they begin to rethink multicultural education providing further insight into their understandings of cultural diversity and the degree to which the professional learning prepared them for the action research they would then undertake in their schools.

## CHAPTER TWO

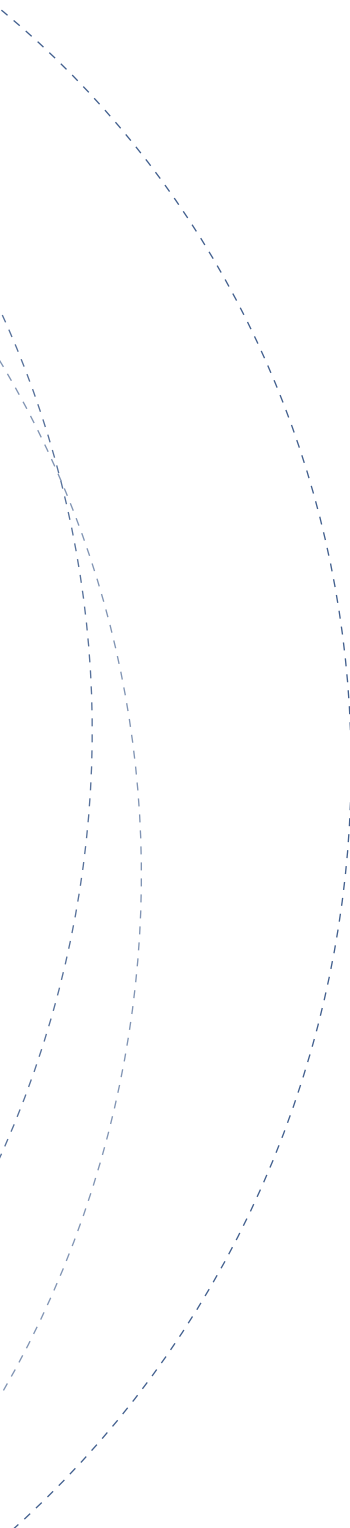
# Knowledge Translation Step 1 — Professional Learning

The focus of this chapter is the professional learning that each of the school research teams undertook prior to designing and then implementing their action research projects over the course of the year. In particular we examine the teachers' reactions to the training, their engagement with course readings and the challenges of devising a research project which for many was a new experience. Central to both this chapter and the next is the notion of knowledge translation, the ways in which particular understandings drawn from research are then utilised by practitioners to effect change. Within the RMRME Project this was quite a complex process involving various acts of translation as teachers were not simply taking a bank of knowledge and then applying it but utilising knowledge drawn from various sources: the findings from the CPLP, the RMRME Pilot, the RMRME state-wide survey and each school's comparative report drawing on this data, the Symposium Report<sup>iii</sup>, theoretical understandings gleaned from critical and cultural theory relating to globalisation, transnationalism, and cultural identification together with aspects of research methodology and using these to frame their own action research project addressing an issue around multicultural education. Schools were also encouraged to draw on any school or NSW DEC derived data to assist in the initial design of their projects together with surveying relevant literature. Further acts of translation were evident as some schools then drew on data resulting from their own research to then modify the actions they were implementing. These are given consideration in Chapters Three and Four. Here the focus is the training the teachers received and the ways in which they made sense of, and then utilised, what was presented.

### Understandings of Knowledge Translation

Knowledge translation is one way of describing this process yet various terminology is employed in discussion of how knowledge derived from research is then applied in terms of policy and/or practice such as 'knowledge transfer', 'research utilisation', 'knowledge exchange', with the differing terminology signalling a variation in the actual process of knowledge creation and/or application (Graham, et al, 2006, p. 15). Knowledge exchange, for example, denotes a more collaborative process of knowledge creation which, in a sense, was indicative of the relations between the UWS, the NSW DEC and the BOSTES in the design of RMRME. This was also characteristic of relations between the NSW DEC Multicultural/ESL Education consultants and school research teams as well as those between some school research teams and their participants. Yet another term gaining currency in the field of education is knowledge mobilisation, reflective of 'the multiple ways in which stronger connections can be made between research policy and practice' (Levin, 2011, p.15). Different terms seem more applicable depending on the particular stage of the RMRME Project and the participants

iii In late 2011 an International Symposium was held at UWS to survey current theorisation and practices around multicultural education. A report documenting the proceedings can be found at [www.multiculturaleducation.edu.au](http://www.multiculturaleducation.edu.au)



involved, but with the training the school research teams undertook we were specifically interested in their engagement with the knowledge in rethinking multicultural education and the research tools to assist them to do this.

Prior to the training taking place there were two initial steps, one being an information session conducted by the full research team — UWS, DEC and BOSTES — with the school principals, and two being the training of the NSW DEC Multicultural/ESL Education consultants who would go on to support research teams in their schools. The principal information sessions, held at the end of the year prior to the training, were designed to give an overview of the research process, the funding provided and the required composition of the school research teams. Principals were asked to discuss this information with their staff and to form research teams who would attend the training and conduct the research in the following year. The suggested composition of the research teams was either the principal or another senior school executive and three or four classroom teachers including an ESL teacher, where relevant to the school population. One small, semi-rural school included six parents on its team, given the difficulty in covering classes if more teachers were involved, though only two parents attended the training. Principals used various methods to recruit team members, targeting staff and/or calling for interested volunteers.

An important aspect of the overarching project was the in-school support for research teams. This was provided by the 13 NSW DEC Multicultural/ESL Education consultants whose initial training served as a pilot for the training that was conducted with the research teams. The consultants' feedback provided a valuable basis on which to modify the professional learning for the school-based research teams. There was, however, an additional component to the consultants' training which involved each of them devising a research proposal around the theme of rethinking multicultural education based on a school with which they were familiar. The consultants were allotted three weeks for this task after which they presented their proposals to the RMRME team and other consultants when they were discussed and critiqued to acquaint them with the analytic tools to undertake a similar process with the school research team for whom they were responsible.

At the beginning of the following year, the training of the school research teams was conducted over two days, a week apart, allowing participants time to digest material, engage in further discussion with their team back at their school and to complete additional reading for the second day. The program for the two days included: an overview of the research process, sessions on exploring multiculturalism, culture, identity and multicultural education, presentations on the RMRME state-wide survey and the distribution and discussion of the individual school specific comparative reports. Presentations were also given on the RMRME approach to action research; a range of relevant data collection techniques, including a successful program delivered by a member of

one of the school research teams involved in the RMRME pilot project; relevant resources including those available through the Project website and teacher portal; how to access the UWS University Library for wider reading (all participants were granted a year's borrowing rights); and project implementation, timeline and in-school support. Content was delivered in various formats including lectures by UWS and NSW DEC RMRME investigators, small group tutorials and group-based activities. An important aspect of the training was the readings which had been distributed in advance with questions used to frame discussion in the small group tutorials composed of members of different schools to promote cross-school interaction. There were three tutorials of this type led by either a RMRME Project team member and/or one of the Multicultural/ESL Education consultants, focused on a reading related to the themes of:

- i. Exploring Multiculturalism, Culture and Identity
- ii. What is Multicultural Education?
- iii. Conducting Research in Schools: Workload and the Professional Culture of Teachers.

The readings used were:

- UNESCO (2009) *UNESCO World Report Executive Summary — Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue* (pp.1-10). Paris: UNESCO;
- Inglis, C. (2009) Multicultural Education in Australia: Two generations of evolution, in J. Banks (ed) *The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education*. Routledge: New York and London, pp. 109-120;
- Timperley, H. and Robinson, V. (2000) Workload and the professional culture of teachers. *Educational Management and Administration*, 28 (1), 47-62.

These readings were specifically chosen to address one of the key themes and to promote discussion around each. The two days constituted quite an intense period of training. Following this, research teams were then to meet with their consultant back at school who would support them through the process of drafting their research plans. The plans were then submitted to the RMRME Project team for feedback prior to being revised and then made available through the teacher portal on the project website with teachers then undertaking the task of implementing the action research they had devised in their school.

## Reactions to the Training

Various perspectives were offered on the training during interviews with each of the school principals and focus groups with the research teams prior to commencing their projects. Many found it intellectually stimulating but challenging. As Daphne from Barnett HS explained, it 'took me back basically to my college days. I hadn't really been exposed to anything like that at that level for a long time'. This was a view echoed by Lena from



Thurston PS, 'I think that's probably why it has been overwhelming for us because we have — it's a long time since I've been at uni'. The team at Getty Rd PS were pleased with the level of theoretical engagement in the training with one member commenting,

Sorcha and I were talking about, as teachers, you are often in your classroom and you don't get to go back and do things and talk to adults about intellectual things. You know, use your brain.

Sayuri, another Getty Rd team member, added, 'It's given us avenues, it's made us all very buzzing with interest, we have access to the uni library to read up on readings and get all this background knowledge'. Harry at Smithton PS simply said 'my brain hasn't been clicked on for a long while because here you are doing the nitty gritty...'. Others, however, were less comfortable with the theoretical dimension of the training. The Principal of Eaton Park HS felt 'it was a little too theoretical. I think it could have been a little more hands-on and perhaps the theory base could have been reduced'. One member of the Wollami Lakes PS team was of a similar view:

I found the first one difficult to sit through because it was so academic. The second one was good because it gave us a sense of, all right now we know what we have to do; we are not just talking intellectual stuff ...

To the RMRME Project team, however, the 'intellectual stuff' was crucial for reconceiving the way multicultural education is approached in schools. One lecture, for example, examined different perspectives on culture as fixed or fluid and the implications of this for understanding cultural identity and the essentialising which certain practices of multiculturalism have tended to encourage. These issues were further explored in the extract from the UNESCO Report and through findings from the CPLP and the pilot RMRME project. Marta at Addington HS, however, saw little need for this: 'you could have condensed that day, introduction, here it is, off with your teams, here's your paperwork you've got to fill in, how are you going to do it, just let people work together'. In other words, Marta saw the two days of training as a time when her team, released from face-to-face teaching, could plan their project with little need for further input. This was an approach the Graham's Point Principal was critical of yet felt, 'a lot of teachers these days will say, "tell me what to do and I'll do it", rather than you know doing their own research and showing their own initiative and becoming interested in a particular area'. Many teachers did not hold this view. Gillian at Wellington Heights, for example, valued the intellectual input and time for reflecting on different conceptions of culture:

I think having a really in-depth look at that really made me start to think there was a little bit more to the way I was thinking and it kind of turned my thinking around to point in the direction of equity and I think that all the things that we did ... I think the first day in particular was really like, wow, I need to have another think about this.



Isaac, her colleague on the research team, added 'thinking about what is culture, I found that quite powerful'. The training had a similar impact on Sybilla at Thurston PS, who began to make use of some of these concepts in an everyday sense:

What's that word again? Essentialised. I've been using that on my husband quite a bit ... you don't realise how much you do it until I guess that first week made me think OK you do do it.

As Julie, from Harringvale HS, summed it up:

Yeah, I think if we didn't have the professional learning that our definition of multicultural education and any action to address it would be very limited.

This range of comments from the principals and teachers engaged in the training is suggestive of two quite distinct professional cultures, one with a narrow pragmatic focus in which professional learning serves a purely instrumental function, the other having a broader intellectual orientation more akin to how Connell sees a teacher's role in which professional learning melds theory and practice and, effecting change, is dependent on a capacity for critical thought. While teachers need to be mindful of the immediate concerns of the day-to-day teaching of students in classrooms, the extent to which this is divorced from any intellectual engagement is the point of differentiation being made here. Clearly the process of knowledge translation — a research team's capacity to engage with and apply the understandings from the training sessions — was reliant upon the professional capacities of the teachers involved and the degree to which their professional identities were formed by what appeared to be quite divergent cultures of teaching.

## Responses to the Readings

A similar range of perspectives was evident when the principals and research teams were questioned about the course readings. Richard from Wollami Lakes PS was initially a little concerned: 'when I went up and got my email ... and I saw the readings and the questions and all that sort of stuff I just went, oh no! But I'm hoping something positive is going to come out of it'. Toby from Barnett HS felt that 'the first one from the UNESCO was a chore, I felt like I was in Sociology 101 again, the second one had elements that I could follow but certainly the last paper was the best'. Such comments seem to indicate that professional reading, particularly of a more theoretical orientation, is not the norm. While the extract from the UNESCO Report dealt with some complex issues around globalisation, cultural maintenance and hybridity, it was specially chosen for its accessible style, consistent with a report genre. The Principal from Eaton Park HS, however, seemed to confirm the view that such literature was not widely read: 'Oh they are useful readings, yeah and probably you don't do a lot of academic reading when you are at school'. Alice, an experienced head teacher who led the

Harringvale HS research team, found the UNESCO report challenging but important, 'Well I think that it just makes the complexity of the whole idea of multiculturalism, I mean that's really what for me it underpinned, that there are no easy answers'. In reflecting on readings within the profession more broadly she explained that,

Some people would be really interested in it. I mean it depends, some people are more intellectually engaged in the theory behind educational practice and ideas so they will read ... other people just want to get in and do the practical. If it had no relevance to what I am actually doing in the classroom immediate and I can see that I can apply it straight away then they are a little resistant.

Clearly this characterised Marta from Addington's approach,

I reckon all that reading, I don't know what the point of that reading was actually ... this is all academic writing, like we are all at grass roots, we are at things that happen every single day that we have to micro-manage ... I know that the universities are driving the whole multicultural thing but ... teachers need to be in the classroom teaching.

In areas such as multicultural education — though of course this is the case more broadly — certain knowledge may not appear readily applicable, packaged for immediate implementation. Rather, it is more in the realm of professional understanding and expertise to be drawn on in devising curricula, pedagogic approach, school organisation and community engagement. It is knowledge constitutive of a professional, informing practice but, importantly, at a reflexive distance from it. Marta, however, appeared to present a more extreme view, inconsistent with those of many. It was a stance of which others, such as Julie at Harringvale HS, was critical:

at a school with a really experienced staff, if you give them an Academic reading that's the same thing with a new name, like I've seen it before, we did it ten years ago, blah, blah, blah and so I think you know that trying something new scares the bejesus out of teachers, because I just want to pull out my 1970s sheet that I've always used on Vikings and not have to do any more preparation.

Having said that, Julie felt there was a change in the profession:

When I first started teaching it would never have been, you know, someone would have said here's an academic reading, how about you consider this. I mean I've only been teaching 12 years so I don't see it as that long a time but I reckon for the first maybe 10 years of my career it was me who sought that out ... but in the last few years that accountability of being data driven, having the academic readings, I think that's something that is more of a buzz now than it has been in the past.

Julie's remark suggests a change in teaching. While some aspects of data-driven accountability teachers find excessive, a renewed focus on professionalism, in part attributed to the former NSWIT's professional standards which were adopted in October 2004 and the Australian standards from 2012 — appear to be having an impact. Those referred to as new scheme teachers (ie who have entered the profession after 2004) are now required to complete 100 hours of professional development every five years, a requirement, which from 2018, will apply to all NSW teachers. Yet many older, more experienced teachers also relished the opportunity for intellectual engagement that the training afforded. In contrast to some of her colleagues at Wollami Lakes PS, Jocelyn pointed out that

Even though I am at the end of my career I am still growing and I'm sorry guys but I do enjoy the academia and that, I came away from the first day feeling like I needed more.

Raoul, an experienced head teacher and team leader from Pentonville HS, had a similar view, 'To me, I feel, as professionals, we don't get enough of that. The way I get academic input would be like if I was doing, if I went and did another degree, not even logged in-services, not a lot of academic input to it'. Raoul particularly liked the UNESCO reading because,

The thing I liked about that was just the I guess the quandary it put in your mind about what culture is and so we all have our own view of it and it just sort of expanded my mind a bit.

When reflecting on the readings another teacher at Wellington Heights PS, remarked that 'I'm not 100 per cent locked in now with what I think multicultural education is, like I'm really confused about it. Before I pigeonholed it and felt OK I've got a handle on it but now I'm just like, oh my god it's all ...' and then laughed. When asked if she was 'good confused or bad confused' the response was, 'It's good confused because it makes us always reflective'.

Clearly teachers had differing views about the value of the course readings and professional reading more broadly. To the RMRME team this was of considerable importance as, in reassessing multicultural education, a broad spectrum of views and perspectives on professional learning was essential to then gauging how teachers would go about the process of trying to effect change in approaches to multicultural education in their schools. Did teachers' level of engagement with the course readings impact upon the design and carriage of their project and what factors impeded the process of knowledge translation that broader systemic change might mitigate? Such questions were pertinent in evaluating the site specific action research projects which is the focus of Chapters Three and Four.

## Using the RMRME Survey Data

In addition to lectures, mixed school group discussions of the readings and a range of other activities, the RMRME training also presented the findings of the state-wide survey of NSW DEC teachers and distributed reports of the school-specific surveys which compared each school's data with the state-wide data. The presentation and discussion of these data were designed to serve a number of purposes. Firstly, the findings of the state-wide survey had implications for how schools might approach their own projects. Data, for instance, on teachers' various forms of cultural identification such as their use of hyphenated identities and descriptors that varied in terms of nationality, ethnic grouping, religion, geographic region, race, etc (see Watkins et al., 2013, p.14) demonstrated how a similar complexity could be indicative of how their students may choose to identify rather than the singular categories that were often used as students' cultural descriptors by schools. It was also demonstrative of the potential complexity of school populations and Australian society as a whole. Also pertinent was the data already mentioned regarding the variable implementation of the NSW DEC Multicultural Education Policy which was intended to alert teams to levels of awareness in their own schools. The school-specific reports allowed teams to gauge how their school fared in relation to the state and were intended as valuable baseline data from which issues around multicultural education in their schools might emerge or be given sharper focus. In addition to this, the discussion of the survey provided a useful model of survey design, one of the possible data collection techniques that were discussed in further detail in other sessions during the training.

By and large research teams found the school specific survey data interesting but some recognised its potential for informing their own projects more than others. Toby from Barnett HS explained that,

After scrutinising it a couple of times it was quite interesting to see that on some things we were pretty much in line with state areas, others we weren't and I mean obviously from the data admittedly pointed to our weaknesses and what we need to do to develop.

Toby presented the findings from the comparative report to his whole staff, as was the case in many other schools, and, given Barnett is a rural school, he explained how many were surprised by the cultural diversity of the staff, something which had never been acknowledged. Together with this, he saw the survey as useful in identifying issues that could be addressed in the action research, explaining,

I tried to make sure that we were looking at more where there were inconsistencies with the state data and certainly when it came to awareness and reading (of policies) it stuck out. People aren't aware of cultural diversity across the board so it was obvious that was where the data shows us we have to go, even with our anti-racism policy.

The research team from Pentonville HS, a semi-rural school that, like Barnett, also considered its staff to be predominantly Anglo, was surprised this was not necessarily the case. Vera from the team remarked, 'I think we realised that there was more diversity among the teaching staff than what may have been initially perceived'. This, of course, is not just a matter of interest but demonstrates the increasing cultural diversity within schools — even among those that may consider their staff predominantly Anglo — not to then pinpoint a cultural difference but to operate as illustrative of the fact that culture is both more fluid and complex than might be acknowledged. Some research teams, such as that of Wellington Heights PS, examined the findings of their comparative report in some detail. Isaac, who headed their team, explained, 'We really pulled apart the survey ... and what we considered to be more important, what would have the biggest impact [in terms of our research project]'. Caitlin, also on the team, agreed and added,

We pinpointed the two greatest needs that were shown in the survey and we isolated them down to two, one of them being understanding of cultural background and engaging parents and the other one was the language side of multicultural education. So we chose one, we ran with the parent engagement one.

Yet, while this data was used effectively by some schools and, as with Wellington Heights, served the intended purpose of helping schools to target an area of concern for their project, there were others that made little use of this, or saw its potential. Marta, from Addington, for example, commented, 'I think basically it really sort of confirmed what we sort of knew', with Anita, another Addington team member, choosing to focus on the data regarding the cultural background of staff, 'It was interesting that one of our other team members and me included, oh where's mine, where's me? Did you list mine? Yeah we found it there. So it was really cool', though added 'but also you know quite a few people wanted to learn more about multiculturalism or do more'.

These comments regarding the survey data and school reports not only reveal a range of perspectives but also differing skills and abilities in terms of the interpretation and use of data. Clearly some teachers were more adept than others in not only synthesising the key points of comparison between their own school and the state-wide findings, but then conceiving how this may inform their own project. The collection and analysis of a wide range of data is now commonplace in schools but to then utilise it to improve practice is a more difficult task. The training sought to provide assistance to research teams in doing this with further support offered by the NSW DEC consultants in each of the project schools.

## Research Design

As a precursor to the school research teams drafting their research plans, the training also provided them with guidance on the design of research questions. As mentioned, RMRME encouraged a process not dissimilar from a standard social sciences approach but inflecting it with aspects of action research methodology, largely drawn from Macintyre (2000). This involved:

- identifying the issue,
- surveying the literature (an ongoing process),
- formulating a research question,
- planning a series of actions to investigate the question and decide upon data collection techniques,
- taking action,
- analysing findings and, in light of what has been discovered, evaluating each stage of the process,
- reporting findings to relevant parties,
- considering the next step.

Also in line with standard social sciences research method, the literature survey was not to operate as a discrete activity merely occurring prior to finalising a research question but to inform the research in an ongoing manner. This was considered especially important for action research given the cyclic nature of the process and so, becoming acquainted with relevant literature was encouraged to both inform and then extend or modify the research question depending on the stage of the action research cycle.

The degree to which teams surveyed relevant literature in devising their research question varied. Many also found it challenging to arrive at a specific research question as opposed to just deciding upon actions they would perform as part of their project. This was discussed in some detail with the Beechton PS team who, in eagerly deciding upon some of the possible actions they would undertake during their post-training interview, were reminded that 'it isn't just about developing a kind of activity'. Selena, the principal, pointed out how 'the wording is going to be really important because it is actually going to have an effect on basically the test or the goal that we are going to you know how we are going to collect it'. Other teams were also able to make this key observation of the relation between a research question and the data required to 'answer' it and then the extent to which this is reflective of the overall aim of a project. Anita at Addington explained that,

Yeah, we found that hard to come up with a question first up, so we had to work backwards or actually we started from the middle and worked out what we wanted to do and then from that we developed a question and then worked down the list again to work out how we are going to collect data because we had to ensure that it was measurable.

In terms of the importance of framing a research question, she added,

It gives you focus I think, yeah because when you look at what you are doing, all the different things that you are going to do, you need a central idea where all that stems from, so yeah you do need a question that is really important and making sure it's not too complex.

Sybilla, from Thurston PS, also commented on the importance of spending time on formulating the research question:

It's making us question what can we do? If we do this, will it help? I suppose until you research it and question it and see, we are not going to be able, we can't answer that.

In summing up the training's focus on research methodology and guidelines for formulating research questions, Gary from Pentonville HS explained 'I think all of us took that, from the two days the end message was try and come up with a nice, specific question that's not going to be so nebulous as to, you are going to find it really difficult to frame, like put the framework together for the action research and how are you going to pre and post-test and evaluate it and that sort of stuff and we found that difficult I think'. Melody at Smithton PS found the process equally challenging, 'It is a bit daunting though, like you are actually doing a project, you are actually creating it from scratch!'. Many teams rose to this challenge and embraced the approach to action research that RMRME encouraged.

### Attitudes to the Action Research

While research teams were given the opportunity to reflect on the research process after having implemented their project (which is discussed in Chapter Four) they were also asked to consider it following the training as they were finalising their research design. As with Melody at Smithton PS, Julie from Harringvale HS also found the process challenging. As she explained,

Very overwhelming, we kept choosing gi-normous areas to discover and we just kept thinking how, how will we get through this in the timeframe and then we stopped, let's be more specific ... then we took out that sample you gave us about the school and there were the questions, how are we going to get the data?, what data do we want to collect? So we started thinking of it step by step rather than what do we want.

To Julie this was an effective and rewarding process,

So now we have some things to do but we are really in the process of, well now we have our question, we have this common goal and we are starting to get excited about the practical application of it.



Adrian at Eaton Park HS not only reflected on the research process from the perspective of a member of a school research team but from that of one of the RMRME Project team conducting the macro-analysis, recognising a difference in research orientation and skill base:

Well I guess [you did it this way] to acquaint us with that research mindset that you know you have a problem, you refine it down, you investigate, you research and then you try and change practice so I guess to get us into that frame of thinking and I suppose for you guys [the RMRME investigators] then it's interesting to watch how if you throw a bunch of practitioners that challenge, how they handle it even though we have academic training, we are not in a tertiary academic environment so we are looking at things through a different lens from what the academics would be looking at.

Ivan, also on the Eaton Park HS team, seemed pleased the school was able to construct their own research project rather than merely being the subjects of research — though of course both were the case. He explained,

By allowing people the opportunity to make their own choices of where they want to research, areas that they've identified, that they want to know more about, I think therefore it does relate to the school and makes it more real in the situation.

While the intention of RMRME was to build teacher capacity to effect change around multicultural education in schools, in many respects this was dependent on the effectiveness of the research model and also teachers' willingness to implement it. This is considered in more detail in Chapters Three and Four but, as Adrian explains, teachers and academics have a very different skill base in terms of research and one aspect of the macro-analysis was to ascertain the degree to which the training prepared teachers to take control of the process and conduct action research, though specifically in terms of how the methodology was framed within RMRME. A number of teachers commented on the benefits of the approach but also on a broader need for the integration of action research within a teacher's professional practice. Mitchell from Graham's Point HS felt that,

It focuses us because I mean we probably all have the same experience in lots of different schools. You try one thing, it may not work, it may work, who knows? Who tested it? At least this is very, you know, systematic and we should get some data which shows whether what we've done works or not. I mean we should be doing this with a lot of other projects in schools because otherwise we are just stabbing in the dark, assuming what we are doing is correct but it may be having absolutely no impact on kids at all.

Deirdre, Mitchell's colleague on the team, was in full agreement,



We go to all these meetings and everyone is doing the same thing and no one ever stops and says ‘does that work?’ And if that was in corporate life, if I did something in my old life and my boss said ‘well what was the outcome?’ and I just went ‘oh yeah it kind of worked, I think so, oh we don’t really know, we never really got to it’ ... well?

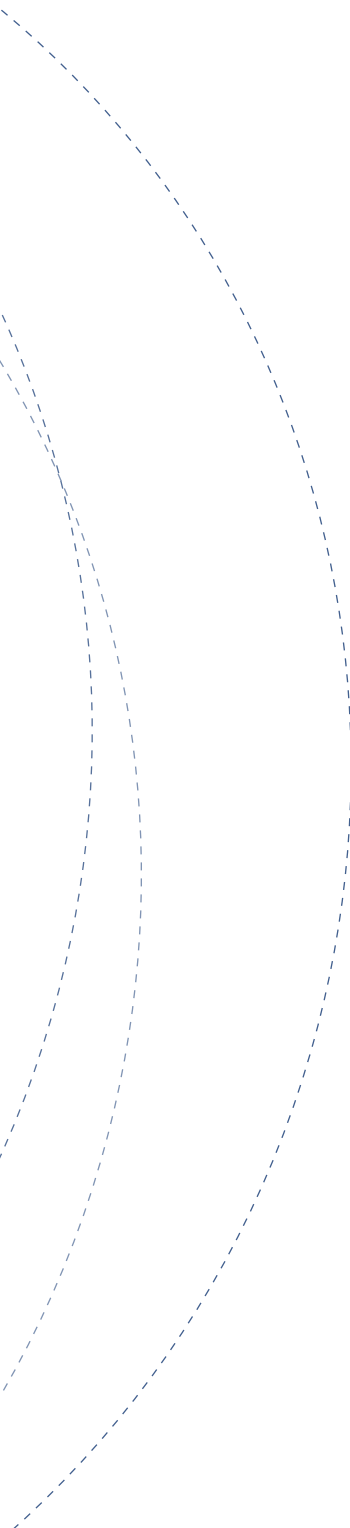
To Melissa, the Principal at Pentonville HS, collecting data through action research was also beneficial as it provided the evidence to sure up staff support if change was required,

You’ve got to be able to show them the need for it. So, if they can see a need and can see that through data, whether that’s numbers or whether that’s through you know talking to people and focus groups and getting their main stakeholders that are giving you that information, so you can then show that there is good reason that we should be looking at this as a focus area and then you’ve got people on board.

Together with the utility of evidence, Harriet from Getty Rd PS saw the systematicity of action research and, in particular, the model developed within the RMRME, as significant in effecting change,

We get to find out more about our school and especially if we do it in a systematic way and you can measure it and as an action research project bring about change, so it forces us to critically look at our school, find something that we maybe think needs improvement and go through a systematic process and make a positive change in our school which is a really great thing.

While many teachers found the training and the prospect of conducting action research challenging, on the whole it prompted them to reconceive the way they approached multicultural education in their schools. These schools were very different. As indicated, they had very different demographics and so the issues their research teams chose to address were also quite different. This chapter has considered the first step in the process of knowledge translation, namely the effectiveness of the training in terms of promoting new ideas around culture, ethnicity and identity pertinent to practices of multicultural education, together with understandings around action research and various data collection techniques that will enable research teams to systematically examine how these ideas can be harnessed in rethinking multicultural education. The next chapter takes this process of knowledge translation a step further as research teams implement the projects they have devised, giving consideration to not only the degree to which they met their own goals but those of the broader RMRME project as well.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Knowledge Translation Step 2 — Action Research in Schools

As already discussed, the 14 target schools involved in the project were quite diverse. There were both primary and secondary schools; some had very high populations of LBOTE students, others very low. Some schools had communities that were from high socio-economic backgrounds and others were socio-economically disadvantaged. The RMRME schools were also located across the Sydney metropolitan area and beyond, a number in either semi-rural or rural settings. These differing demographics and locations had resulted in differing emphases on multicultural education in each of the schools prior to their involvement in RMRME and the teachers who comprised each research team also had varying levels of expertise in this area. These factors then contributed to the design of 14 quite distinct projects as teams sought to address issues of particular concern around multicultural education in their own schools. Some with very low numbers of LBOTE students took various measures to lift the profile of multicultural education in their schools; some designed and implemented programs of inclusive curricula. Others with high LBOTE populations developed programs addressing issues of academic literacy, parent engagement or anti-racism and still others devised projects directed towards improving the educational outcomes of particular groups of students at their schools.

The macro-analysis of these projects was designed to gauge the extent to which the knowledge and skills acquired in the training would then inform the multicultural education approaches adopted in each of these very different schools. As such, it functioned as another step in the process of knowledge translation but, importantly, one in which this knowledge was then applied in practice. The RMRME team was keen to see the ways in which particular conceptual understandings around culture, ethnicity and identity as more fluid constructs — in contrast to their framing within early policies of multiculturalism — would translate once teachers returned to their schools and were largely reliant upon their own professional capacities, and their functioning as a team, to guide their practice. While each school was supported by a trained NSW DEC Multicultural/ESL Education consultant, and could utilise the resources of the project website, there was generally minimal intervention from the RMRME investigators as the teams designed and implemented their projects. Once they had received feedback on their initial research plan, the degree to which teams surveyed relevant literatures, their utilisation of particular data collection techniques and their adherence to the action research model that was detailed in the training, became matters for each team.

Below is a summary account of each of the 14 projects undertaken by the schools. These accounts describe the composition of each research team and provide information about the project undertaken including its rationale, research question, aim and actions, the data collection techniques used and outcomes achieved. Together with this, there is an assessment by the RMRME team of the extent to which teams met the broader project aim of, not only effecting change in their school, but rethinking multicultural education in the process. These accounts are based on each school's submitted research plan, their final reports presented at a day showcasing each of the projects at the end of the school year and additional material gleaned from the pre and post principal interviews and research team focus groups conducted by the RMRME team.

## Addington HS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Low SES Low LBOTE Urban
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 deputy principal 3 classroom teachers
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	While Addington is a low LBOTE school, from time to time it has enrolments of refugee students. It is essential to raise awareness and understanding of wider issues occurring in Australia, namely the refugee debate to combat negative media representations.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	How does the explicit teaching of a social justice unit of work enhance students' understanding, empathy and respect for cultural diversity, in particular, the plight of refugees coming to live in Australia?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To develop and teach a social justice unit of work that incorporates 'authentic' stories from refugee students.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre and post student surveys</li> <li>• Student work samples</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	The unit was developed and taught to all Year 10 English classes culminating in a Focus Day on Refugees where students attended a range of workshops that included speakers on refugee issues and 'multicultural' tile making. The student surveys revealed improved comprehension of refugee issues and work samples documented increased empathetic understanding. The school developed useful links with a local government diversity organisation that will provide ongoing support and an additional unit on related themes will be developed in the Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) Key Learning Area (KLA).
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	While the school put a greater focus on examining refugee issues, the degree to which this moved students from empathic to critical understanding was difficult to determine from the data the team collected which was largely attitudinal. The work samples were primarily of creative writing so it was difficult, once again, to gauge the development of students' understanding of cultural complexity from these. While an enjoyable activity, the mosaic tiles that students and staff made tended to reinforce limited conceptions of culture and identity that RMRME was keen to challenge.

## Barnett HS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Low SES Low LBOTE Rural
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 deputy principal 1 head teacher 2 classroom teachers *(Team membership changed midway through the project. None of the new team members attended the initial training.)
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	A number of issues have been identified regarding the staff awareness of multicultural education. These include but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the high level of teaching staff with no multicultural education training;</li> <li>• the large number of teaching staff who have not read the multicultural policy;</li> <li>• the large number of teaching staff who limit multicultural education to 'anti-racism';</li> <li>• the reliance on one faculty (HSIE) to carry 'multiculturalism' within the school.</li> </ul>
<b>Research Question/s</b>	How does whole school and targeted KLA professional learning around multicultural education impact upon teaching and learning at BHS?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To devise and conduct whole school and targeted KLA professional learning around multicultural education.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff evaluations of professional learning</li> <li>• Interviews with staff</li> <li>• Sample of programs / lessons</li> <li>• Review of school documentation</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	Given disagreement within the initial research team as to the direction of the project there was a change in personnel that led to a change in the overall project. While some whole school professional development occurred, the project was primarily enacted within the English faculty and around a newly developed Year 9 unit with a multicultural perspective designed to teach empathetic understanding. The unit was taught to one class. While the new team recognised the limitations of this approach, it was seen as a good first step given BHS is perceived as being predominantly monocultural. There was acknowledgement that further units and resources need to be developed.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	It was disappointing that the initial whole school focus of the project was not sustained and, given the lack of staff awareness of multicultural education identified through the RMRME survey, whole school professional development is obviously a pressing need. The new team was pleased with the unit of work that was devised and implemented but, as students were primarily self-directed and the unit's focus was on developing empathetic understanding, it seems unlikely that they developed the kind of critical understanding that RMRME was encouraging. Also the new team gave little emphasis to the collection of data beyond student work samples. Given the reported limited focus on multicultural education at the school in the past, this project may be an important first step towards it being given greater priority.

## Beechton PS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Low SES Low LBOTE Semi-Rural
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 principal 1 assistant principal 2 parents (an additional 4 parents were involved in the project though they didn't attend the training)
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	A cultural exchange program operating at the school, involving a visit by Beechton PS students to a school with high numbers of LBOTE students in the Sydney metropolitan area, indicated there was limited cultural awareness among BPS students. This has been characterised as the 'Beechton Bubble' whereby families tend to not associate with the wider community as they are on semi-rural properties with limited transport links. Families also display a hesitation to recognise and acknowledge their own cultural backgrounds which impacts on the accuracy and detail of enrolment information.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	Does a teaching program on cultural identity and heritage culminating in a multicultural day contribute to understandings of the collective cultural diversity of the broader BPS community?
<b>Project Aim</b>	In partnership with parents, to promote and value the cultural diversity within and outside the Beechton community through the teaching of a program on cultural identity and heritage culminating in a multicultural day.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-based survey to supplement the DEC ESL annual survey</li> <li>• Census data on the Beechton area</li> <li>• Pre and post tests to assess students' cultural perceptions</li> <li>• Videos and anecdotal evidence of student perceptions</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	An initial parent survey demonstrated a higher degree of cultural diversity present within the school community than was reflected in student enrolment data. Class-based activities examining cultural diversity which culminated in a community multicultural day led to positive interaction between members of the school community. Post tests were not completed with all classes but students showed increased recognition of their own complex cultural backgrounds observed through class discussion and playground conversations and parent reports. The project raised the community profile of the school. Future planning will involve continuing the strategies teachers found effective as well as maintaining teacher professional learning.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	The actions undertaken at BPS had a positive impact on the school community. They lifted the profile of multicultural education at the school and led students to develop a greater understanding of cultural diversity within their school and the area in which they lived. The involvement of parents in the research team proved particularly beneficial. Teachers are seeking better resourcing in this area and also ongoing professional development. It is hoped that through this project, BPS will move beyond what is primarily a focus on cultural recognition at this point, albeit giving some consideration to cultural complexity, to develop units of work that foster a greater degree of critical understanding of the cultural diversity of the school and its community.

## Binto Valley PS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	High SES Low LBOTE Urban
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 principal 1 assistant principal 3 classroom teachers
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	School council parent surveys revealed a lack of LBOTE parent participation within the classroom and at school events.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	To what extent do families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds feel engaged and participate in their children's learning at home and at school?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To conduct a 'Multicultural Roadshow' with Years 3-6 students undertaking units of work focused on the study of specific countries culminating in a day of multicultural cafes involving the whole school community including parents.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent survey</li> <li>• Pre and post parent and student qualitative interviews</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	Following the analysis of the parent survey regarding community involvement in the school, it was evident BVPS needs to make this a priority. The school needs to improve community engagement in professional learning opportunities. The Multicultural Roadshow and the project as a whole has led the team to further explore cultural diversity and to building relationships with other schools. The BVPS team plans to visit schools in other areas of Sydney to learn how to encourage greater community involvement, specifically developing links with another RMRME school, Wellington Heights PS.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	BVPS made some important observations from their initial survey about the need to engage LBOTE parents far more within the school. Their response to this in terms of encouraging parents to participate in the multicultural cafes was quite limited and lacked any meaningful engagement. To some extent this was acknowledged by the BVPS research team and it is pleasing to see that they intend to examine alternative ways of engaging LBOTE parents through investigating the program at WHPS.



## Eaton Park HS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High SES</li> <li>• High LBOTE</li> <li>• Urban</li> </ul>
<b>Composition of Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 deputy principal</li> <li>• 1 head teacher</li> </ul>
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	There are currently higher levels of truancy and absenteeism among students of Korean background together with differing levels of engagement in academic pursuits and participation in peer learning at Eaton Park.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	Is there a discernible difference in engagement in learning between students of Korean and non-Korean backgrounds at EPHS? Do students of Korean background have a preference for particular instructional strategies?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To identify to what degree the engagement of students of Korean background is affected by differing pedagogical strategies with a focus on cooperative versus individual strategies.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre and post student and staff surveys</li> <li>• Student focus groups</li> <li>• Classroom observations</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	The findings of the research indicate that the students of Korean background seemed to respond to both independent and group-based strategies in their learning, dependent on the subject studied. This data implies, for future reference and lesson planning, students of Korean background see group work as a positive form of learning with many benefits. From the action research plan, the teachers involved have felt a need to review some of the topic areas that they and other faculty members teach so that they may incorporate more group tasks in future. This will hopefully not only engage the Korean boys more in class and at home but also other students.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	The findings of the EPHS study don't seem to justify increasing group-based learning to address the problems of attendance with many boys of Korean background. Given there were teachers of Korean background at the school it seemed unusual that they were not involved in the project particularly given EPHS only allocated two staff members to their research team. The RMRME team felt that engaging parents of these boys in some dialogue regarding attendance may have proved more beneficial. While this was clearly an issue for the school, it was hoped EPHS may be able to engage more productively with issues around multicultural education across the broader school community.

## Getty Road PS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Mid SES High LBOTE Urban
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 deputy principal 1 assistant principal 4 classroom teachers
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	There have been misunderstandings about the cultural practices of some students in the school such as some students being told by parents not to mix with students from different religious or cultural groups. While these problems are not widespread, the team believe it is important to be proactive in developing a culture of inclusion and respect for cultural diversity at GRPS.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	Can a focus on critical literacy in a literature-based unit enhance intercultural understanding?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To use a critical literacy approach to develop the higher order skills needed in interacting with texts as a means of developing intercultural understanding.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre and post focus groups of parents, 4 Vietnamese and 4 Arabic speaking background</li> <li>• Pre and post student focus groups from each project class</li> <li>• Student work samples</li> <li>• Post action teacher survey</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	The literature survey around critical literacy and data from parent focus groups was useful in devising the approach. The student focus group data and work samples of 4 classes (Years K, 1/2, 3 and 5/6) involved in the project enabled teachers to gauge whether a focus on critical literacy could enhance intercultural understanding. While students within the older grades responded to multicultural themes and issues, younger students showed only the beginnings of an understanding to do so. It was determined that this still provided a basis from which to develop intercultural understanding with older students who could explore more complex issues.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	The school team drew effectively on both their literature survey and data from various sources in the design and assessment of their project. While more meaningful results were evident from older students, the team felt the critical literacy approach was also beneficial for those in earlier grades. The school team demonstrated an engagement with the RMRME-promoted focus on the critical interrogation of cultural diversity but further strategies for how this might be deployed with younger students could be considered.

## Graham's Point HS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Mid SES High LBOTE Urban
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 deputy principal 1 head teacher 1 ESL teacher 2 classroom teachers
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	The RMRME School Survey Report revealed that 56.9 per cent of GPHS teachers agreed or strongly agreed that racism was a problem in schools and 63.9 per cent believed that combating racism was one of the main goals of multicultural education. There is evidence of GPHS students using cultural stereotypes, inappropriate language around race and displaying a lack of intercultural understanding.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	Can focus lessons on cultural understanding improve intercultural understanding among GPHS Year 8 and 9 students?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To explore students' current understandings of, and capacity for, intercultural understanding through the teaching of an 8 week mini unit to Years 8 and 9 students.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations of classes implementing the project</li> <li>• Pre and post student focus groups</li> <li>• Pre and post student surveys</li> <li>• Pre and post teacher surveys</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	Pre teacher and student survey results indicated both teachers and students saw racism as an issue at GPHS. This data and insights from a literature survey then informed an 8 week mini unit conducted during extended roll call targeting Years 8 and 9. With mixed reviews from students and a positive response from staff evident from post surveys, a revised program is planned for next year with Years 7 and 8 students to be assessed using similar means. The revised program will need to be sustained by ongoing professional learning, maintaining a multicultural education focus in the staff handbook and in new teacher induction programs.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	GPHS made effective use of data and a literature survey in the design and assessment of the action they undertook. Their program, specifically targeting anti-racism, has given this greater priority in the school and there is a demonstrated ongoing commitment to improving professional learning in this area. The GPHS team has embraced the use of action research to determine the effectiveness of programs implemented at the school and this should lead to an improvement in practice. It is hoped through this means the school continues to rethink its approach to multicultural education.

## Harringvale HS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Mid SES High LBOTE Urban
<b>Composition of Team</b>	2 head teachers 3 classroom teachers
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	Findings from the RMRME survey showed that staff at HHS identified English language and literacy as the most important area of need for LBOTE students.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	Does the explicit teaching of the genre of explanation benefit the engagement and educational attainment of Year 8 LBOTE students across KLAS?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To develop materials and implement a more explicit approach to teaching explanation with Year 8 students across the four KLAS of History, English, Maths and Japanese.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre and post survey of Year 8 students</li> <li>• Pre and post student work samples</li> <li>• Staff group Interviews .</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	Results from the surveys and work samples indicate an improvement in the majority of students' ability to write explanatory texts and their use of metalinguistic terminology. Overall, the two classes which were part of the project performed better in an explanation response than another which was not. The action research led to staff appreciating the effect that a skills-based pedagogy can have on achievement, modifying their assumptions about the capacity of high performing LBOTE students. The project also importantly increased professional dialogue and mentoring of new scheme teachers.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	With a focus on English language and literacy, this project was related to the ESL component of multicultural education. The HHS research team surveyed literature around the stereotypical representation of Chinese and other Asian learners, critical multiculturalism and genre-based approaches to teaching writing with a focus on explanation. This informed the action they took that looked beyond the stereotypical representation of 'Asian' students to improve their written explanation and understanding of English text and grammar. The team also acknowledged payoffs in terms of their own professional learning.

## Hingston Valley HS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Mid SES High LBOTE Urban
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 head teacher 4 classroom teachers
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	Findings from the RMRME survey indicated there is a view among HVHS staff that multicultural education should: develop harmonious cross-cultural relations; combat racism and discrimination; develop shared social values; incorporate explicit teaching of key issues and concepts around cultural diversity.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	How can the explicit teaching of key issues and concepts around cultural diversity across English and HSIE develop Year 10 students' critical capacities and understandings in this area?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To devise and teach units of work for Year 10 English and HSIE to develop students' critical capacities around cultural diversity.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre and post survey of students (2 classes will participate in the program, 1 class will be a 'control').</li> <li>• Pre and post focus groups with selected students from the three classes.</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	The pre survey and focus groups revealed HVHS students were actually starting from a very strong base of cultural understanding. The question remained as to whether or not a one-term unit of work addressing issues of culture and multiculturalism would measurably improve upon this. Students targeted in the program did, however, display a general movement towards more sophisticated understandings showing evidence of higher-order thinking and the development of a metalanguage in discussion of cultural complexity.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	The HVHS research team engaged in an extensive literature review and effectively drew on this and the findings of their initial student survey and focus groups to devise units of work to enhance their students' understandings of cultural diversity. While students at the school already displayed considerable intercultural understanding given the demographics and general ethos of the school, the post survey and focus group data demonstrated that completing these units of work led to a critical engagement with these issues and a greater understanding of cultural complexity.

## Pentonville HS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Low SES Low LBOTE Semi-Rural
<b>Composition of Team</b>	5 head teachers
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	PHS is predominantly an 'Anglo Australian' school with students having little exposure to cultural diversity. Many have ill-informed attitudes to 'non-Anglo' cultures. Many students will travel to the more ethnically diverse Sydney for work in the near future and so they require assistance to successfully meet the challenges this may pose.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	What effect does the teaching of a Year 9 Geography unit of work on 'Communities' — that includes a visit to a high LBOTE school — have on students' knowledge and perceptions of cultural diversity ?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To use the 'Communities' unit of work to increase the cultural awareness of students from a semi-rural community.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus group of students who have previously completed the unit</li> <li>• Focus group of teachers who have previously taught the unit</li> <li>• Pre and post student surveys</li> <li>• Teacher survey</li> <li>• Assessment task</li> <li>• Selected student interviews</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	The action research and subsequent evaluation of the annual 'Cultural Exchange' excursion to a high LBOTE Sydney school has revealed a number of issues that need to be addressed. The data gained from the pre and post student surveys, unit evaluation, teacher survey and focus groups indicates the program needs to deepen the intercultural experience that students attain from this excursion. To do this, PHS has committed to strengthening the partnership between the two schools providing an opportunity for students to participate in an overnight joint school camp. Another initiative is for the two HSIE faculties from the high schools to conduct joint programming around multicultural education.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	By engaging in the action research process to evaluate an established activity of 'Cultural Exchange', PHS has realised that the program could be broadened to allow students to engage in more meaningful dialogue around cultural diversity. This will be further enhanced by the cross-school programming of HSIE. Given PHS has very few LBOTE students and little emphasis on multicultural education; these are positive developments indicating the school is moving towards rethinking their approach to multicultural education.

## Smithton PS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Mid SES High LBOTE Urban
<b>Composition of Team</b>	3 classroom teachers 1 ESL Teacher
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	There are gaps in teacher knowledge regarding the impact of cultural diversity on schooling and understandings of multiculturalism.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	How effective are the current approaches to teaching a culturally inclusive curriculum at SPS and in what ways can professional learning around cultural complexity improve this?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To professionally develop teachers in terms of a broader understanding of the complexities of cultural diversity in schooling.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher evaluation of ESL at SPS</li> <li>• Audit of current inclusive practices</li> <li>• Interviews with community members</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	The action research has enabled the school to really look at what was happening in many areas of multicultural education at SPS: ESL, anti-racism, culturally inclusive curriculum and multicultural events. To some extent this has improved the way these are now promoted and administered.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	The SPS team engaged in a range of actions to improve the profile and delivery of multicultural programs at the school. In some respects there probably needed to be a narrower focus such as limiting the action to improving the professional development of all staff around multicultural education where there was a mixed response to the team's initiative. Hopefully the program has provided the basis for further development in these areas.



## Thurston PS

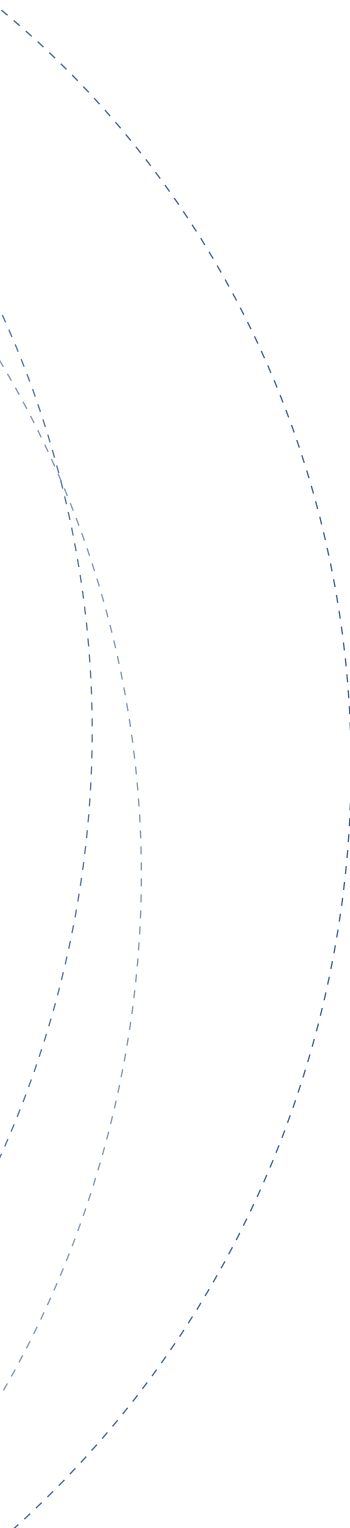
<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Low SES Mid LBOTE Urban
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 assistant principal 2 classroom teachers
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	There has been a poor response to homework by students from some cultural backgrounds at TPS and this may be due to a perceived inability of many LBOTE parents to support their children in completing their homework.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	Will the provision of targeted homework support strategies for families/parents from culturally diverse backgrounds improve student engagement and participation in homework tasks?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To revise the TPS Homework Policy and to provide targeted homework support strategies for families/parents from culturally diverse backgrounds.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre and post teacher questionnaire</li> <li>• Pre and post teacher class record of homework</li> <li>• Whole school parent survey</li> <li>• Pre and post focus groups of students and parents</li> <li>• Pre and post student homework samples</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	The action research project has provided an opportunity for teachers to assess how they view homework and develop a new way of thinking that takes account of the differing cultural practices of the students at TPS, in particular those of Bengali and Pacific Islander backgrounds who were the two target groups for the project. The revised approach to homework now recognises more out-of-school activities as learning moments and provides the opportunity for extension work for those students who wish to complete it.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	Through both broad and targeted community consultation using surveys and focus groups, the TPS team were able to identify issues that LBOTE parents were experiencing in relation to their child's homework. In light of this the school has revised its homework policy and practices allowing for greater flexibility and the acknowledgement of differing cultural practices. This increased community dialogue should provide the basis from which to consider other issues that may affect students' education at the school.

## Wellington Heights PS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	High SES High LBOTE Urban
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 assistant principal 1 highly accomplished teacher 1 ESL teacher 1 classroom teacher 1 teacher librarian
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	WHPS were unsure as to the effectiveness of current parent workshops around topics of relevance to their children. The RMRME school survey report indicated that most WHPS teachers (87.5%) believe that there are differences in the involvement of LBOTE parents and the main reason for this (60.7%) is due to 'different understandings of Australian schooling'.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	Does the 'Community Learning Approach' (CLA) increase parental understanding of problem solving in mathematics and does this improve teacher understanding of students' cultural backgrounds?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To address the concerns evident in the survey by researching, developing and trialling a new approach to parent workshops with the aim of building intercultural understanding between all members of the school community.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre and post survey of all parents</li> <li>• Additional interviews with a random cross-section of 5 parents</li> <li>• Staff interviews</li> <li>• Students interviews</li> <li>• Workshop attendance data</li> <li>• Return rate of EOIs to participate linked to identified cultural background</li> <li>• Analysis of key words used on networking site</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	Many aspects of the CLA were designed to create an equitable environment for building relationships between teachers, parents and students. In this environment, parents demonstrated a deeper understanding of the aspects of the curriculum. The surveys showed an increase in trust evident in the depth and candidness of responses over the duration of the workshops. For teachers, forming purposeful relationships with parents allowed assumptions on both sides to be challenged in a supportive and inclusive way leading to a shared vision of quality education at WHPS.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	Through wide reading and close examination of existing data, and that collected in the course of implementing their project, the WHPS team developed an important initiative that has enhanced relations between teachers and the culturally diverse communities represented at the school, countering the essentialised understandings that often framed their previous information sessions and attempts at community dialogue.

## Wollami Lakes PS

<b>Demographic and Location Profile</b>	Low SES Low LBOTE Rural
<b>Composition of Team</b>	1 assistant principal 1 ESL teacher 3 classroom teachers 1 teacher librarian 1 community language teacher
<b>Rationale for Project</b>	With the growing number of refugee students attending the school and many enrolments of students from longer established migrant and Indigenous backgrounds, the research team has identified a lack of knowledge of this diversity and feels there is a need to increase the awareness of students and community members.
<b>Research Question/s</b>	Will the development and implementation of the HSIE publication 'Our Stories' improve student understandings of the cultural diversity within the WLPS community?
<b>Project Aim</b>	To explore the cultural diversity within WLPS and to build community harmony through developing students' sense of identity as Australians and their understanding and acceptance of all students through the development of a school and community-based HSIE publication 'Our Stories'.
<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre and post student surveys</li> <li>• Informal discussions and Interviews with selected students</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome and Evaluation</b>	A comparison of the pre and post student surveys indicates the collection and publication of the stories of selected LBOTE children at WLPS has proved a powerful teaching tool enhancing students' intercultural understanding. The stories in book form are now lodged in the school library and will serve as a valuable resource for years to come. The team's ongoing plan is to add to these stories over time so that they remain real and relevant for future student cohorts and to develop units of work based around the stories to enhance students' understanding of issues around cultural diversity.
<b>RMRME Assessment</b>	The WLPS team used existing data and professional reading to develop an initiative that had the support of the whole school staff. Not only did they raise awareness of the varying cultural heritage of students at WLPS and produced a useful teaching resource but the process of collecting the stories led to the involvement of the broader school community. It is hoped as the resource develops that the team incorporates activities within their teaching programs that give consideration to issues of increasing cultural complexity allowing, particularly older students, to consider the school's location within a globalised world.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# Rethinking Multicultural Education, Reflections on the Process

In the previous chapter accounts of each school's project were provided together with a brief assessment by the RMRME team. Here this examination of the projects continues with further reflections on the process that school teams undertook in conducting action research to rethink their approach to multicultural education. Rather than a detailed analysis of each project, a number that exemplify particular forms of engagement with the research process are given prominence. In doing so, additional insight is gleaned as to the varying effectiveness of the projects with consideration given to various teams' engagement with academic literature, the ease with which they drew on the conceptual resources the training provided and their utilisation of the action research model. In the interviews with the principals and focus groups with each of the research teams that were conducted at the completion of the projects — or at least the endpoint of the broader project — a number of issues were also raised about constraints upon the implementation process. These interestingly prompted a broader discussion of the teaching profession itself and the role and nature of professional learning, the latter of which is the focus of the concluding chapter. Firstly, however, we survey the observations of various teams and their principals at the end of the year in which they implemented their project to shed further light on the various outcomes of their interventions and what may have led to their differing levels of engagement with the overall project aims.

### The Limitations of Empathy and Recognition

With increasing numbers of LBOTE students, some of whom were from refugee backgrounds, the research team at Addington HS was keen to lift the profile of multicultural education at their school and, in particular, address negative media representation of refugees. In discussing the degree to which their project — involving a unit of work, Refugee Focus Day and the making of a multicultural mosaic — had led to any sustained change, Addington's Principal commented that, 'I don't think we know until we look again. We have to look again. We have to continue to embed the program, we have to keep raised awareness and then we have to look again and measure again in a year, in two years'. These remarks suggest a certain commitment to both the continuation of the project at Addington and the use of action research in evaluating it but whether or not action research provides the most effective means for doing this, or at least how it was applied at Addington, is another matter. The findings from the attitudinal surveys the team administered, and work samples of creative writing they collected, may suggest a shift in students' empathetic understanding but this may not necessarily entail any intellectual shift in terms of their understandings of culture and ethnicity. While these ideas may have been broached in the teaching of the unit of work, the Principal felt the rationale of the multicultural mosaic was unclear,

Everybody did a tile, but their capacity to link that tile to why and what we were doing, even though I thought the delivery was very good, the delivery did a lot of prep work. The term before we did the tile, staff

were spoken to as a whole staff about why they were doing the tile, how it was going to fit into the project, how it was an opportunity for them to go home over the holidays and think about what were some symbols which were significant to their culture, or to their perspectives on multicultural society and to bring that back in to create their tile.

Despite resulting in what appeared to be an enjoyable school community art project, the mosaic is emblematic of early forms of multiculturalism with Australia viewed as a patchwork of discrete cultures. Of course, it may be that the tiles provided a springboard for the examination of an alternative perspective on cultural diversity, with both staff and students reflecting on the process and what the mosaic as a whole may represent about the changing nature of the school population and Australia's cultural diversity, but this did not appear to be the case. If the rationale for the mosaic was to raise awareness, as the Principal indicated, what this actually entailed and what those making the tiles were being made aware of was unclear. When these matters were raised with the research team, Marta, who headed the project, replied, 'Oh we did a pre survey and a post survey and yeah, we've got the results there but the pre survey, we looked at how harmonious the students think [the school is] ... we got 90 per cent saying it was a friendly school'. When questioned further, however, this survey was used to evaluate the unit. In terms of evaluating the mosaic, the following discussion ensued:

Marta: I don't know how you do that.

Anita: They were done. I mean it's physical evidence and every student has had some ...

Marta: And all of them, if you look, have taken pride in them and you know ...

Anita: And not [one] child has said 'nah, I'm not doing it'. Every single kid engaged in this activity.

The measure of effectiveness here is the activity itself, the completion of a tile and the assumed satisfaction in doing so. Yet, even with the unit of work, the evaluation relied primarily on an attitudinal response to enable a dubious quantification of school harmony. While the post unit survey on refugees included some factual questions, it was also largely couched in attitudinal terms, for example,

Question 6: Do you think refugees value their Australian citizenship after they get it?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Some do/Some don't   ☐ Don't know

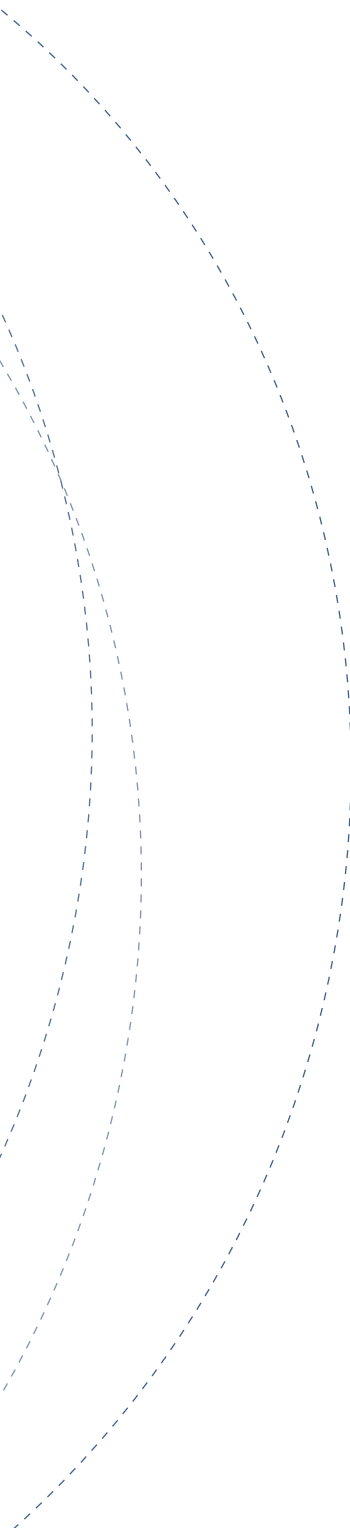
Question 7: My opinion about refugees coming to Australia has changed.

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure   ☐ Stayed the same

Leaving the issue of the survey construction aside, the Addington HS research team clearly focused on promoting an attitudinal shift in students, reliant on the development of empathetic understanding that the unit of work, tile-making and other activities during the Refugee Focus Day were designed to elicit. Yet the ability of empathy alone to foster intercultural understanding is a matter of dispute. Various scholars critique the very possibility as inherently ethnocentric (Boler, 1999; DeTurk, 2009; Lather, 2009) and much work examining its role in the teaching of students of various ethnic minorities indicates empathy provides little more than a superficial understanding of these students' experience. Rosenberg (1998) considers such approaches promote a 'false sense of involvement', problematic if teachers then feel this equips them to understand their students, often obscuring a more meaningful focus on factors such as racism and forms of structural inequality. With these various activities lacking a clear purpose, it is not certain what understandings students may have acquired and, the data the team collected, was ineffectual in determining this. With an emphasis on empathy over any kind of critical enquiry, it may be the case that students were inadequately equipped to examine the complex issues associated with the plight of refugees and the way in which this is represented in the media.

The intention here is not necessarily to find flaws in the research design of Addington HS's project, or the limitations of the activities they conducted, but to reflect on how this might shed light on the process of action research and rethinking how multicultural education is understood and practised in schools. Clearly it demonstrates that action research, as with any research, is a complex process. Being a form of practitioner enquiry does not make it any less so. Yet, this is a mistake of some forms of action research, underestimating the rigour involved (Anderson and Herr, 1999; Newton and Burgess, 2008). Addington's experience demonstrates the potential pitfalls when insufficient thought is given to survey design and the overall suitability of data collection techniques to produce the evidence required to judge the effectiveness of the actions performed, if in fact this is done at all. The problems with Addington's project, however, do not simply relate to research design, they largely stem from how the team approached the project in the first place. Marta, who headed the team, saw little need for wider reading. Her comments, reported in Chapter Two regarding the course materials, that, 'I don't know what the point of that reading was actually' — a view her team members appeared to share — suggest she was content relying on the knowledge base she already possessed to frame and conduct the research for the Addington project. While one of the team members had ESL training, none of the others had any expertise in either multicultural or ESL education and, with very little engagement with the course materials or any further reading, this provided very little scope for conceiving how multicultural education might be rethought within the context of their school. As a result, the Addington project seemed to reproduce the kind of understandings that had informed early policies of multiculturalism — empathy for 'Others' and the recognition of cultural difference.





Addington, though, was not alone in taking such an approach. Barnett, Beechton and Binto Valley, all schools with low LBOTE populations, devised similar projects informed by the same types of understandings. It may be the case, with a limited focus on multicultural education prior to RMRME, that projects highlighting cultural recognition may have been perceived as the most likely first step towards lifting the profile of multicultural education in these schools. While this may be the case, critiques of such perspectives and their potential to promote forms of cultural essentialism — issues given consideration in the training — seem to have made little impression upon these teams in informing their projects despite being raised in feedback on their research plans. Also similar to Addington is the way in which these teams conducted either little or no wider reading to inform the approach they took. In the one school that did, Binto Valley, it was the Principal heading the team who encouraged members to do so but, as she explained, she was met with ‘massive resistance ... for me to get a culture of proactive initiative around reading is difficult’. Consequently, whatever reading was undertaken did not lead to any alternative to their Multicultural Roadshow as a way of engaging LBOTE parents in their school. Following the implementation of their project, however, the team seemed more aware of its limitations and were keen to explore other approaches such as that involving community learning at Wellington Heights PS. Whether this assessment was prompted by framing the project as action research, however, is uncertain given data collection was undertaken in a haphazard manner, leading another Binto Valley team member to comment at the end of the project that, ‘I don’t really know what an action research project is. A lot of that kind of high brow stuff was lost on me because it’s years since I’ve been at uni’.

What seemed the case at each of these schools — together with Smithton PS whose project had a different focus — is that emphasis was placed on the *actions* rather than the *research*. At Barnett, for example — where the team who finally implemented the project had not attended the initial training — their team leader was of the view that, ‘I think action research is part of good teaching. Every good teacher I’ve worked with has done it on a day-to-day basis, minute-by-minute’. Another team member made a similar comment, ‘I think every unit of work we teach is action research’. Clearly, what action research actually involves, its purpose and required systematicity and rigour was not understood by these teachers. They equated action research with informal evaluation lacking any sound and impartial evidence base from which to assess the effectiveness of the actions they conducted. These, however, are important observations in terms of the overarching RMRME project. While, as indicated, these two teachers did not attend the initial training and it seems were not adequately briefed following this, their perspective on action research, as with a number of others who did attend the training, seems suggestive of the more pragmatic culture of teaching that was discussed in Chapter Two whereby professional reading is conceived in terms of that which has an immediate classroom application and with little recognition of how action research may inform

practice. This kind of pragmatic focus — with the emphasis on action over research — was more prevalent in low LBOTE schools and was similarly coupled with projects that tended to reproduce more traditional approaches to multicultural education that favoured an emphasis on celebratory forms of cultural recognition over any engagement with issues of cultural complexity. Such a combination was also evident at Wollami Lakes PS which has higher numbers of LBOTE students including increasing numbers from refugee backgrounds. Here, as with Barnett, Beechton, Binto Valley and Addington, the recognition of cultural diversity, within their school and the broader Australian community, was given prominence and the actions undertaken to do this overshadowed the research process that would determine the effectiveness of this approach.

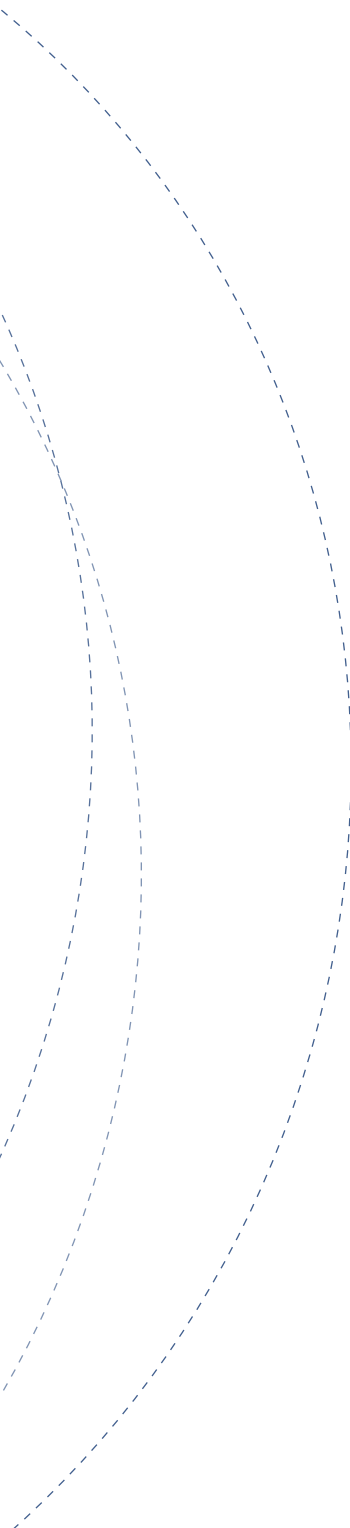
As RMRME was keen to see the degree to which schools might be able to reimagine multicultural education, moving beyond such approaches and using action research to enable them to do so, it was clear such tasks proved challenging for these schools. Yet, this did not mean that there was little gain from participating in the project. At Beechton and Wollami Lakes, in particular, their programs led to a heightening of parent and community engagement in their schools and a greater whole school awareness of multicultural education. To some extent this was also the case at Smithton. At Addington as well, closer ties were formed with an external agency to lend further support to lifting the profile of multicultural education at the school and the Principal also recounted a conversation she overheard among a group of students after school following the Refugee Focus Day,

... the argument was around what we do with boat people, that's what they were arguing about and what was the most humane solution and you know who should be taking responsibility. It was sophisticated intellectual discussion and it was really powerful and I thought if nothing comes of the project but that, the project was worthwhile.

Greater emphasis on developing students' critical capacities rather than a focus on empathy and cultural recognition would arguably have resulted in more such discussions.

### **The Benefits of Action Research in Rethinking Multicultural Education**

In other schools, such as Eaton Park HS and Thurston PS, their projects had a different orientation. While their teams similarly engaged in little further reading to inform their projects, they tended to put a stronger focus on action research in choosing to examine issues pertinent to particular groups of LBOTE students. The conclusions they drew from their findings, however, would have benefitted from more informed consideration. In terms of their engagement with the broader program aims they appeared to have made a little more headway than the group of schools already discussed but this transition towards rethinking



multicultural education was perhaps more pronounced at Hingston Valley, Graham's Point and Pentonville. In each of these schools they narrowed their enquiry to either assess current practice or a neatly delimited intervention. In doing so the action research they undertook yielded some valuable insights. At Hingston Valley, where there was already a strong focus on multicultural education, the team was keen to develop the critical capacities of their students. They designed and implemented units of work with a set number of Year 10 English and HSIE classes that dealt with issues around culture in more complex ways, giving consideration to cultural hybridity and its implications in terms of identity and belonging, producing what they found to be unexpected results. Patrick, who headed the team, explained,

It did surprise us, I think, how good our data looked, like we thought at first that our kids were making such insightful comments early on, we were just oh this is – they know it already, we are not going to get anything different, but it was still – when you look at it on a student by student basis there is an improved sophistication in their comments on what culture is, on what multiculturalism is, certainly the description of their own culture.

Ekaterina, also on the team, had a similar view finding the action research of benefit,

I was going to say I didn't think it was that useful to do as action research until we sat down and looked at the findings. Then I thought, oh, ... and that was good because even when the responses, in fact it was when the responses were unexpected that this sort of thought, well actually no this is really good because they are still developing an understanding and they haven't all of a sudden reached this fantastic point where you know they know it all but they are clarifying and they are thinking and they are questioning and they are doing a lot of these things...

At Graham's Point, while the team were less pleased with their results, they found conducting the project as action research was similarly useful. Deirdre, one of the team members, commented that,

I liked it because I don't like that so many things that are implemented in a school, and they are never tried and tested, and I like the fact that we implemented it, we had a question, we did surveys and feedback and observations, we tried and tested it and found out what happened. Whether what happened is what we wanted, which some of it isn't, but I like that idea.

Deirdre's principal, Ennike, shared her view,

I don't know whether it changed it but I think it makes the results more — you reflect upon the results a lot more, and that will then inform the next thing that you do. So being action research and being

accountable for what's going to happen and the you know, doing the before and after comparison is quite different from just doing an activity and I think you know, by looking at that, and looking at the after, we can work out what we are going to do for the next step.

With these views in mind, the team planned to revise the program targeting younger students in Years 7 and 8 and upgrading the skills of staff implementing the anti-racism program they had devised through further professional development and induction programs for new staff.

The team at Pentonville HS were also not entirely happy with the results of their project. Rather than implementing something new they chose an existing cultural exchange program within a geography unit to evaluate. As a predominantly Anglo school in a semi-rural setting, this unit and its accompanying excursion to a high LBOTE school in Sydney, had been considered worthwhile in raising students' awareness of cultural diversity but, following the action research, the team came to question the approach they were using. Raoul, who headed the team, explained that,

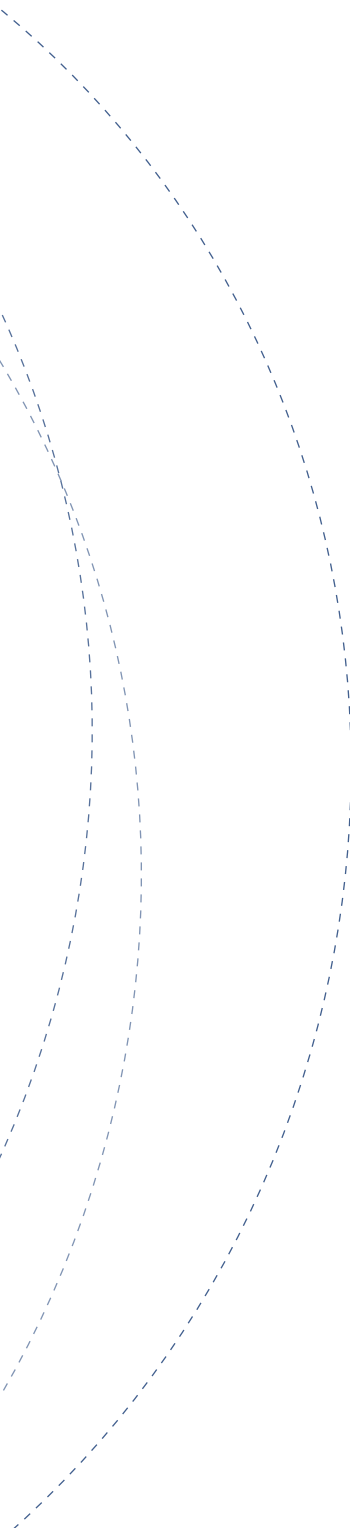
one of the things in schools that you have a hard time doing is evaluating programs and that's probably one of the best things that's come out of it for us, to actually evaluate that.

He added,

we did little focus groups, kids that had been on it in previous years and they were really good. Like the kids straightaway identified some things that they thought didn't have a lot of value... they were saying that they like, they think it would be even more effective to set up some shared experiences between the two schools, not necessarily at one of the schools, but they go out and do an activity together and they spend more time ... because for some of them it was, not confronting, but yeah, just a bit artificial.

The students, in a sense, helped the teachers to recognise the limitations of the excursion. As a trip to visit the 'exotic Other', it tended to objectify cultural difference reinforcing rather than breaking down the cultural stereotypes many students held. The results of the action research prompted the realisation that a more meaningful course of action would be to involve the schools undertaking activities together. Another member of the Pentonville team also reflected on other ways the project had affected him. Gary explained how he had begun to think more deeply about racism questioning how he had characterised it up to this point, in particular not feeling that racist jokes towards some students were 'intentionally racist',

I think that's probably the thing that it's opened my eyes and now I am more aware of the general comments that they are making because I think to be honest, I was coming from my own, probably as an Anglo Saxon perspective, and I think I remember — remember we were



talking about and I said, I don't think the kids are, like they generalise and they are generally racist but in terms of the respect they pay to students from other cultures within the school, I would say that it's generally, it's good. And then you, I can't remember exactly what you said, but whatever you said made me realise that they're not really, they are not really and it's all here about those kids fitting in and accepting the comments that are made.

Through this discussion Gary came to realise that, just because the students who were the object of these remarks did not respond, it did not make the jokes levelled at them any less racist and, as a teacher, it was his role to intervene, rather than being complicit in a form of bystander racism. While Gary's realisation did not stem directly from the research he was undertaking, by lifting the profile of multicultural education at the school, it gave him a greater understanding of racism in its various guises. What was significant about the research at Pentonville, which is related to Gary's revelation, is the way it led the team to question their practices. In each of the three schools discussed here, Pentonville, Hingston Valley and Graham's Point, it was the systematic nature of the research process that proved beneficial with their findings either justifying the actions they were taking or alerting them to how they might modify their practice as they began to rethink how multicultural education was approached at their schools.

### **Engaging with Complexity, Enhancing Professional Practice**

The action research process proved similarly effective in the last group of schools to be considered here: Getty Rd PS, Harringvale HS and Wellington Heights PS. While conducting three quite different projects, Getty Rd around critical literacy, Harringvale, academic literacy and Wellington Heights, parent engagement, what characterised them as a group was not only their embrace of action research and the significant change it produced, but their cohesiveness as teams and the degree to which they engaged with the conceptual resources around cultural complexity, enhancing their professional capacities and reinvigorating their schools' approach to multicultural education.

At Getty Rd, with their team teaching across four stages of the primary years and headed by the deputy principal, they were keen to take the school's approach to multicultural education to another level. As Fiona explained, 'We already have multicultural day with the dress-ups and food, so we wanted to do something deeper than just surface level'. Sayuri provided a further rationale,

The main drive for this project was to use something that was useful for our school. It had a purpose and it was going to be something that we could just take away and bring to the staff, sell it to them and something as a useful resource for the school.

Prior to completing their research plan and implementing their project on a K-6 approach to critical literacy, the Getty Rd team decided to survey relevant literature. Sayuri commented on how,

... we looked at fairly — material that was related to critical literacy, looking at ways that a reading program, however it was delivered, could impact on children, their thinking, so that was the material mostly that we looked at to support our project because we wanted to know if we were going on the right track.

Fiona offered more information on this process,

I found the readings I did were very useful because it also told you what not to do, and they told you — I remember one reading specifically told you not to do surface level things like dress ups and food days, and to do critical literacy. They said that was the best way in and that was research from primary school right up to university, so, I felt I was on the right track.

The team drew on these understandings from their readings, together with those from the training, in their design of the critical literacy units. Despite working with young students they wanted to challenge them by engaging with some complex ideas. Sorcha explained,

... the concept of culture is so ambiguous and difficult, so we found that the older grades grasped on to it quite quickly and you know, I mean even adults have trouble defining that, but they were giving it a go and they were really you know hitting some good concepts.

It was the students' conceptual understanding and their development of critical capacities in examining issues around multiculturalism and cultural diversity that the team sought to promote in their teaching with Sorcha adding,

Because I think if you take the superficial take on it, like at the beginning of the unit the kids are, especially if they are clever, they are pre-programmed to say what the teachers want to hear. Is multiculturalism good? Oh yeah multiculturalism is great, oh yes it's about accepting each other and blah, blah, blah ... but I felt the critical literacy meant people were speaking honestly and it wasn't superficial, yes let's all hold hands and be friendly.

What Sorcha and her colleagues were aiming for here was to move beyond the kind of unreflexive civility that she saw characterised some forms of multicultural education — 'let's all hold hands and be friendly' — blandly prizing cultural diversity without interrogating the challenges it poses. Developing skills around critical literacy enabled the students to approach such issues as an analytic exercise rather than one that was emotive and moralising. Students spent a lot of time examining texts,



‘analysing articles, we were looking for emotive language, what is the aim of this journalist, what are they doing?’. Sorcha detailed one particular lesson with her Year 5/6 class,

the kids were writing interviews, a media interview where they were interviewing a refugee and they had to make it very clear whether or not they were going to have a negative slant on the interview or a positive slant on the interview and they did it all in the language, like you know, oh in these traumatic circumstances, you know, really loaded words and we looked at different stories, and they started to realise when they were being persuaded and you know, just to take it on facts and it was great, well it wasn't great, but the riots in Hyde Park happened right then when we were teaching it and I remember I heard it on the weekend oh God, oh God, I'm teaching this!

Rather than avoid classroom discussion of this contentious event, Sorcha decided to make use of it in class, ‘we tried to get as much information as we could about it, we tried to get rid of all the crap and just find out what happened’. To Sorcha's surprise it resulted in some interesting discussions between students and their parents. She recounted how one girl questioned her father's take on the event with her mother then supporting her daughter's stance,

Mum came to tell me, [I was] talking to parents and Mum thought it was brilliant, especially that kid, because Dad was a refugee and she said I don't get it either, he's a refugee, but it's different because they are different, and Samantha launched into him about that.

What ensued was a lively family debate with Samantha being able to make a strong argument based on a detailed understanding of the event. While such anecdotes attest to the impact of the work the Getty Rd teachers were conducting, this was also borne out by the data they collected from focus groups and work samples. While the units of work had greatest impact in the senior class, the team could see that such work in the earlier years would be useful for providing the necessary foundation for examining these issues in later years. Sorcha summed up the team's efforts in the following way,

I think it is more than scratching the surface, and I know it is very difficult with multiculturalism to do something meaningful, and it's awkward and you don't want to offend anybody and it's hard, but I really do think that we've done something quite good.

At Harringvale HS they had an equally cohesive team that sought out relevant literature to inform their approach to improving the academic literacy of their students, particularly in writing explanatory texts. The Multicultural/ESL Education consultant offered much assistance in this area. As Alice explained,



she has helped us with some analysis recently, certainly given us relevant readings, things that she's found from sort of the National Curriculum in terms of looking at explain texts. Passed on other readings to us, suggested approaches. I've used the UWS library to download quite a few readings.

Louise, another team member, also set up a site as a repository for readings for the team and over the course of the year drew on them to refine the approach they were using. As Louise explained, 'reading through some of the literature definitely affected the way that I approached it the second time around. It is more critical thinking and how you engage with it that's important'. Julie agreed,

the academic readings helped you be reflective, and that's what I think, if you didn't do that reading you would be sitting here puzzled and maybe keep trying the same thing over and over again without going oh well look at the steps this book is telling us to take.

In a sense, a focus on academic literacy at Harringvale seemed like an odd choice given it is a high performing school. Many of the students, however, are from various Asian backgrounds: Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian and, while they are high achievers, the team felt the stereotypical image of the successful Asian learner masked the fact that many had issues with their written expression, especially with explanation. Julie pointed out that, given this stereotype, choosing to focus on academic literacy as a project in rethinking multicultural education was important to 'break the cultural assumption here that because we are a high performing school they can just do it, and I don't need to teach it'. Taking the lead from the perspective in the training, the team then rethought what multicultural education could mean in their school. Julie explained,

it was sort of this idea of, you know, shift away from looking at their ethnicity and thinking well we all have this common goal of attainment and engagement let's create a culture that supports that instead of it being about, what's your background, what's my background.

The shift in focus that Julie describes here is not about erasing difference — what Boler and Zembylas (2003) rightly critique as the Denial/ Sameness model, drawn from a liberal humanist philosophy of equality. Such a position, in denying difference, also obscures the inequalities that may result from it. Rather, what Julie and her team have encouraged is simply a different orientation to cultural difference and, distancing themselves from any tendency to essentialise, are firmly emphasising the importance of equity in educational outcomes. Julie summed this up in the following way,

But in the end it didn't feel like there was a focus on ethnicity, it was about there is a need that we all have and then we all engage ...  
The kids always knew it was a multicultural project and never ever

said well why aren't I learning about my cultural background? There was this understanding of, we are going to have a culture of being engaged and attain no matter what our background.

Eun jung, also on the team, agreed, 'it's moved from the ethnicity, where you were born, that kind of stuff and come to realise your culture is all around you and the different things that you do, yeah'.

A similar professional ethos was evident at Wellington Heights PS where the focus of the action research was a parent community learning program. The school felt there was a lack of understanding among parents, many of whom were from Indian backgrounds, about the primary curriculum and, in particular, maths. Many parents had high aspirations for their children and sent them after school and on weekends to academic coaching feeling there were inadequacies in the way maths was taught at school. Despite having held information sessions for parents, teachers felt there was still a lack of understanding about the maths curriculum. The research team engaged with the RMRME course readings and conducted their own literature review searching out programs that might have been successful elsewhere and information about the Indian educational system, which Isaac, the team leader said,

was vital because it made us reflect and the more that we read the more we reflected on ... this idea of putting people into boxes ... we talked about the essentialism and breaking things down, I think we realised these are parents first and foremost ... each one of those parents sitting there wanted the best for their child. As a school, we make assumptions about why parents were putting their kids in tutoring and why they were making them do extra study, but ultimately it was because they wanted to give their child the best chance they could to have at an education.

He went on to explain that,

So we sort of started exploring and that was the way that our project was really about, it was about us getting the parents to, to train the parents up. But through the process we began to realise that in a way that was almost similar to what we were doing ... we were again telling parents and we were expecting them to change to meet what we expected. We began to realise that perhaps it needed to be a halfway, we had to meet them halfway. And what really became apparent that it was more about changing values, well not changing values but understanding how values are really strong and you can't tell people to change something, if it is not necessarily part of their values, and that by building a relationship we began to understand where their values were. The parents began to understand our values as a school and it is a system, and it was much easier then to build that mutual understanding and I think that was, personally, the key.

The action the team devised involved six x two hour workshops with parents, discussing their experiences in learning maths, how the teachers had learnt maths and how things had changed with the current approaches to learning maths experienced by the students. Rather than simply offer 'information evenings', teachers and parents worked through the syllabus together and then participated in a series of different maths problem-solving activities with 'homework' that they undertook with their children. Parents came to understand the curriculum much better; they were able to assist their children with their homework and school relations with parents improved dramatically. After these workshops, the parent participants then became the 'teachers' and invited another set of parents to participate in the program, running the workshops themselves. Attendance rates at these events formed one data set to measure their effectiveness together with surveys and interviews with parents.

In this process of conducting these workshops teacher-parent relations became systematically dialogic, but it also meant that the teachers themselves were reflexive about their own experiences as learners, as socially situated activities, and their assumptions about the parents. When asked if her view of culture had now changed after being involved in the project Caitlin, another research team member, remarked:

I think in addressing culture, because it is the political and the right thing to do, I think it had a reverse effect because we were grouping them, so I think in trying to do the right thing and to be multicultural and to address culture we've actually – it's had more of a reverse effect because we did group them into particular groups and said, okay, they are Indian, [now] we just treat them as people.

Gillian also offered her view,

I think I just feel a lot more relaxed about the whole thing. I just don't feel that it is as big deal to tell you the truth. I don't know if that's the right thing but it just doesn't come into the foreground for me at all. When I look at parents now I think I just see parents, you know I don't really see Indian parents, and the baggage that might have come with them beforehand. I just see ... there is a parent that I am going to communicate with to the best of my ability about their child, and about that building of relationships.

Gillian's comment here about being 'a lot more relaxed' is in sharp contrast to the hesitancy and feelings of uneasiness evident in some of the teachers' comments from Binto Valley and Graham's Point reported in Chapter Two. Here, through conversation and the building of relationships with parents, the Wellington Heights team worked together to build an effective learning community in their school, moving away from limited forms of cultural recognition to practices of negotiation. Ethnicity was not foregrounded in this exchange, simply a willingness to work together which brought with it a self-reflexivity about each party's own situatedness which in the end led to common ground around

ensuring the best for the students at their school. Another powerful effect of the project at Wellington Heights was the enhanced professional capacities that the team felt they attained through their involvement in RMRME. As Caitlin explained,

Because we have changed, I definitely changed as a professional. I definitely had my pedagogy, like my pedagogy has changed, like I am going to do things differently next year with my parents. I just don't know why I haven't thought of it before. They are such a valuable resource and if we have that shared understanding like we are trying to get through this project, I mean half the battle is won.

### **Time: A Constraint on Implementation**

A recurrent theme throughout the post-implementation interviews with principals and focus groups with research teams was the time involved in undertaking their projects. To counter this, the NSW DEC provided cash grants to each school to finance release from teaching for team members if required and, also, through the involvement with BOSTES, the opportunity for team members to register their involvement as professional development, which for new scheme teachers could be used for accreditation purposes. Despite this, many teams made reference to its impact on their already busy work schedules, though the degree to which this impeded their involvement and commitment varied, depending on the school, the team and also individual teachers. Understandably the time commitment the project required seemed more of an issue in low SES schools where the pressures of teaching appeared to be more pronounced. As Lucy, the Principal at Thurston explained,

I think initially it was a big challenge to the team because they had to understand the scope of the project ... so they had to come to terms with that, and they already have high workloads. I know the time was provided, and the money, which was good but I think just the time involved out of their already busy schedules to complete the work on the project.

Anita, from Addington HS, considered time a factor in terms of her lack of engagement with professional reading, 'I would love to do more professional reading but you are just so tied up. You've got to get going, you have to have stuff ready for these guys before you hit the classroom'. Sorcha, at Getty Rd, had a different view, 'an imposition on our time, absolutely and it wasn't until I started writing the unit and teaching it that I got a bit passionate about it, yeah loved it, absolutely loved it!'. Gillian, at Wellington Heights, also acknowledged the heavy commitment the project involved but then considered the issue of time from a broader perspective, 'reflective practice is really, I suppose, something that is often given up because of time constraints and the, you know, like I am thinking, say staff development day, well we've got to get X, Y and Z done, do we have time for reflective practice?'

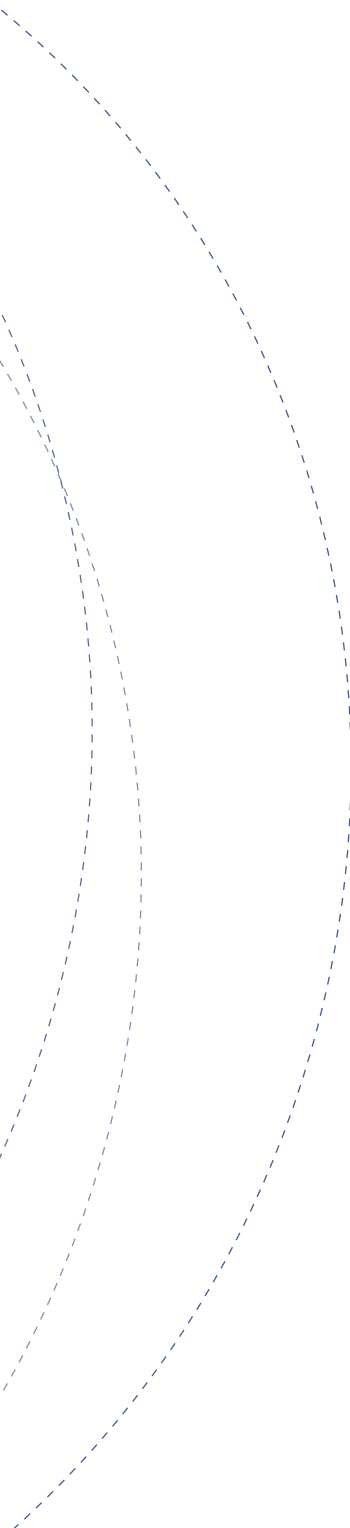
These reflections on the professional practice of teachers were also evident in the following comments by two of the principals, one directing her comments more towards the teachers themselves, the other the system as a whole:

I still think there is this mindset in schools largely that we are so, we are way too busy, we have no time to do that, unless you are going to let me sign up to a little project, get time out to go and learn about it, come back, time out to talk to my ... that's where we are at, and look I don't know what it will take for the whole sector or the education circles or practice in schools to adopt a different kind of attitude.

and

there isn't the time allocation to professional learning that allows people, the largess, are actually going outside the very narrow job description that we place them in ... For me the best change would be to go towards the Finnish model, cut the school face-to-face teaching day down. I think we can still get as much learning done for the kids and give teachers much more time to actually collegially and or professionally develop themselves.

Despite contrasting perspectives as to the reasons behind what they see as the limited focus on professional learning within teaching, both these principals' remarks — and those of team members — suggest it is an aspect of the profession where change is necessary. Moves stemming from the requirements of NSWIT, now BOSTES, for new scheme teachers — and soon all teachers — to engage in professional learning to remain accredited are important developments in relation to this but they don't address the differing issues that are raised here regarding both structural and cultural change within the profession nor the varying pressures on teachers that may limit willingness to pursue professional learning within different school contexts. In rethinking multicultural education these are a matter of concern as addressing what may be perceived as structural constraints — together with teachers' own desire for change — are necessary for ensuring the effectiveness of this process. These issues, pertinent to the nature of the profession itself, are considered in the concluding chapter together with a framework for reconceptualising multicultural education and the recommendations stemming from the macro-analysis of these various projects as to how this might be achieved.



## CONCLUSION

### Rethinking Multicultural Education, Rethinking Professional Practice

The acknowledgements that open this report thank all the principals and teachers who participated in the RMRME research project. In this concluding chapter it is important to acknowledge their contribution in a very particular way in terms of their willingness and candour in reflecting, not only on multicultural education and their participation in RMRME, but on professional practice more broadly and the degree to which change is required in rethinking multicultural education in schools. Here, a number of these views are aired before looking more specifically at what is required in undertaking this task.

In reflecting on the teaching profession and implementing change, Selena, the Principal of Beechton PS, identified ineffective evaluation as a bulwark to change in schools,

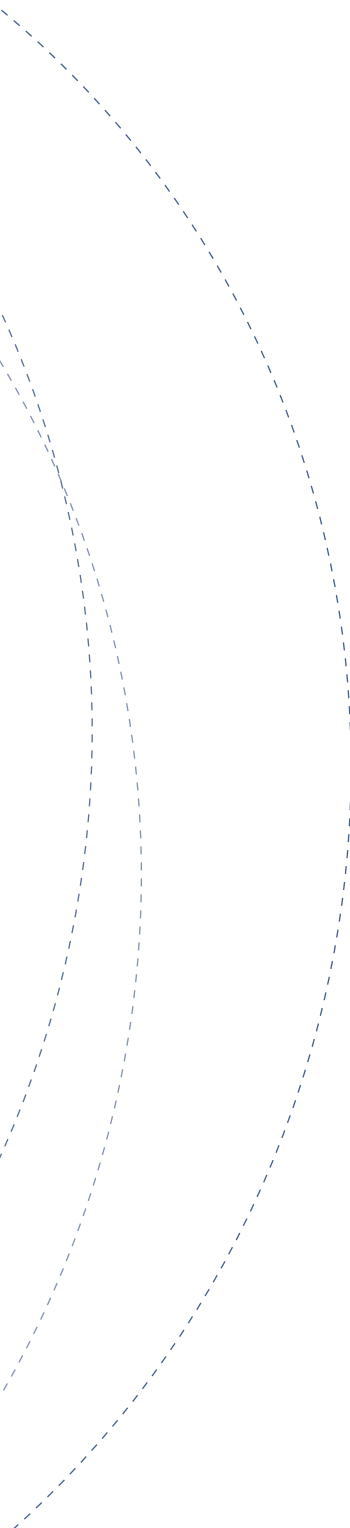
I don't think schools are places that absolutely follow through to the end, or go back and reflect at the evaluation process, and I think that's extremely important to make the next decision whether it's, if it's working and you are getting the results, fantastic. If it's not working, the evaluation process will tell you to pull the plug and for the kids you have to do something better. So I think that's a bottom line. It's not for an adult's ego for anything like that, it's actually, is it working for the kids? And, if it's not working for the kids then something has to change.

This was a view Isla, the Principal at Getty Rd PS, shared but she identified a particular resistance to change among some teachers,

When that comes down to the practice of teaching, it comes down to the type of teacher, it comes down to the philosophy and belief system of the teachers because there are teachers who have refused and resisted change in every single area. There are people who would still have us using ink wells if that was possible, and it's that resistance to change because people are afraid of change once again, all of this is to do with change. But I think there are people within the teaching population who don't feel that it's their responsibility, that their responsibility begins and ends with the three Rs, or their content subject in the secondary system, and that nothing else, the rest of it is irrelevant, that people will pick it up as they go along, that it doesn't have to be a structured and focused form of teaching, which it does because if it isn't structured and focused it will get left behind and in the end it won't be taught at all. So I think that teachers too, find it's just all too hard, they are being asked to do too much, too many things, and where does this fit in? I think there is an attitude that teaching still only refers to reading, writing and arithmetic.

Isla raises some important points in terms of the role of multicultural education within the curriculum and as an aspect of schooling more broadly. With claims of an overcrowded curriculum (Topsfield, 2014) and teachers stretched to perform a range of extracurricular activities, there are those who may place less importance on multicultural education





in schools, especially those with low LBOTE populations. As Daphne from Barnett HS explained in relation to some teachers, 'they are of the mindset that they are trained to teach a syllabus, you know and that's what they do very well, you know, that they have this content and if all these peripheral things weren't there then perhaps their job would be better and easier'. Yet, if we return to Connell's comment about the role of the teacher, is it really possible to think of aspects of schooling such as multicultural education as 'peripheral'? As Connell explains, 'Interpreting the world for others, and doing it well, requires not just a skill set but also a knowledge of how interpretation is done, of the cultural field in which it is done, and of the possibilities of interpretation that surround one's own'. Teachers, no matter what the stage of schooling or their disciplinary area, teach far more than subject content. Whether aware of it or not, as Connell explains, they are engaged in processes of interpretation and their perception of the world influences how, what, and especially who, they teach. Schools are important sites of socialisation and teachers have a crucially important role to play in producing a culturally inclusive and equitable society. Multicultural education is an aspect of schooling with which all teachers need to engage. While respondents to the RMRME survey acknowledged that it is a responsibility for all schools, even those with low LBOTE populations, in the latter there may be a need to give it greater prominence. This was the view of Jason, the Principal of Barnett, itself a low LBOTE, rural school,

Just to get people in some form or another engaged in multiculturalism and the discussion of multiculturalism is really good because you know, you've got to shake-up or otherwise it's just, you know, slips into the background, particularly if you don't see it. If it's not visible in the environment, it just doesn't exist.

'It', however, by which Jason means cultural diversity, does exist. It may not be as prominent within the local community of Barnett HS but teachers, students and parents need to see themselves as part of a broader community which spans, not only that of the nation, but of the global community as well. Multicultural education has a role in fostering such an orientation but it is reliant upon teachers possessing the necessary professional capacities to engage critically with issues around culture, ethnicity and globalisation which some may not necessarily see as a part of their job description.

Many of the teachers involved in RMRME raised these issues around the nature of the profession and aspects of professional learning in their focus groups. Bemoaning the lack of emphasis given to professional reading Sorcha, from Getty Rd PS, felt that 'Maybe it's because teachers aren't entering the profession thinking of themselves as professionals, it's viewed as a job'. Two teachers from Thurston PS readily admitted this was the case but after beginning teaching realised it required a greater commitment. Lena pointed out that, 'No, very few of us do professional development outside of school' with Sybilla adding

It's one of the reasons why I chose teaching because I thought it would fit in with my lifestyle, that's originally why I went into teaching. Now I enjoy it and I know I have to do stuff outside school because I am still learning and I always will be learning.

Others had similar views particularly in terms of how teachers viewed themselves. Raoul, from Pentonville HS, for example, remarked that, 'I think that most teachers don't see themselves as academics. We had to do a degree to get the job but you know that's all in the past and we've got the qualification'. Yet, having a qualification and maintaining professional standards — if teachers view themselves as a professional — are very different matters. Being a professional requires ongoing professional learning which Sybilla at Thurston PS had come to realise. Professional learning, however, should also involve a particular orientation to knowledge and the ability to engage in practices of knowledge translation both in working with students and the broader school community. There were teachers involved in RMRME who found this a very difficult process. Richard, from Wollami Lakes PS, in reflecting on the training at the end of the project commented that,

What's made this a little frustrating and what I found frustrating about the first day is that there were no answers ... There was lots of discussion and this hasn't provided us with any definitive answers as to the questions that were proposed on that first day. But as I said, it has reinforced the fact that we are all very different, you can't type cast people, stick them in a box or label them or whatever.

What is poignant here is Richard's uneasiness with the uncertainties of knowledge around the complexities of culture and identity which posed difficulties for him in translating these ideas in the classroom,

We are talking about basic things here, not things anywhere near the depth of belief and understanding and so on, so my frustration is how do we do that? I mean it is okay to say that we need to do it, yeah, okay, I know we need to do it, but how do we do it, and the frustration for me has been lots of talk about multiculturalism but it's not really going to help me reach the core of the kids to change and shape those beliefs and that's where my need is, I really need to know how to do that.

These are important points Richard raises but RMRME was not designed to do this. Its intention was to train teachers to undertake this task, specifically in relation to the needs around multicultural education in their own school. Many teachers were able to do this but for others it was a challenge. Richard would have preferred RMRME to have approached the project differently. As he explained,

From a personal view I would much have preferred you to produce a resource that we went and trialled ... our primary business here is teaching kids, not doing research, not producing resources, not doing any of that stuff.

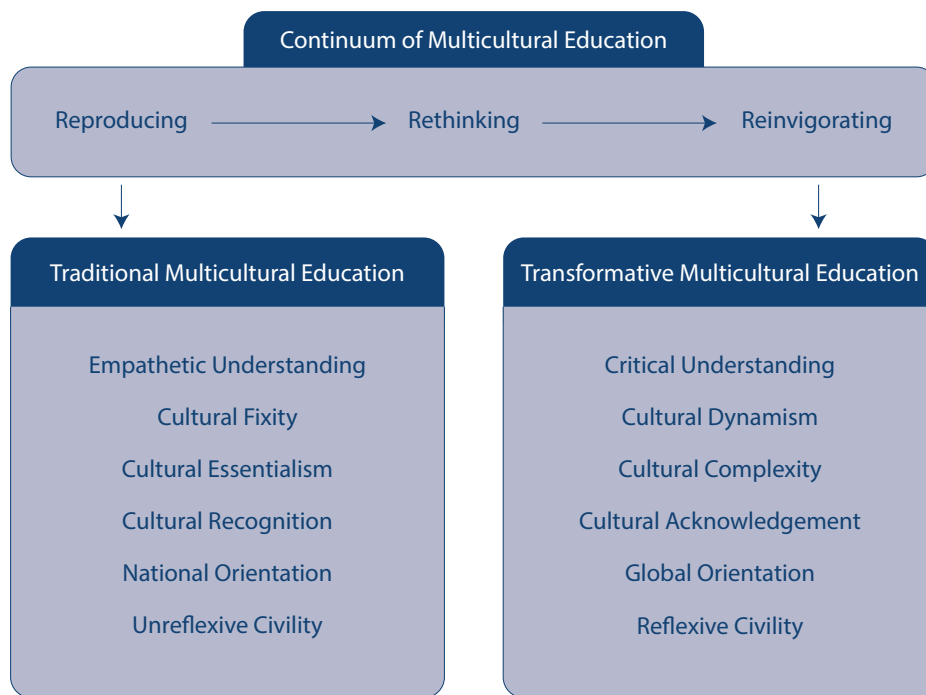
In some respects Richard is correct. Teachers' primary business is teaching kids but as professionals they are also required to do the other 'stuff', producing resources to meet the needs of their students with action research providing one means for judging their effectiveness.

Many other teachers embraced what RMRME had to offer. Isaac, from Wellington Heights PS, had a very different view to Richard's,

... I mean when you think of any professional learning that is offered, it is not, I know you sort of — Gillian used the word reflective — you go to professional learning, you are given something because somebody else has done the thinking and solved the problem for you and just gives you something which you then take back and implement. ... You don't own it, where we, because we've gone through the process we recognised the problem, we've gone, we've been stimulated to think deeply about the problem and then we've come up with our own way to solve it, which for us, I think, has helped us, not just own, but to really understand it. I mean we talk about that in terms of literacy teaching and numeracy teaching, and that you can show people new ways of doing — like with the parents — you can show them but will they really understand and value it because they haven't gone through that change and that deep understanding.

For teachers like Isaac and the team at Wellington Heights, RMRME provided them with the means to rethink how they approached multicultural education in their schools. No package would have been able to deliver the benefits that the project at Wellington Heights was able to achieve, not only in terms of the community learning program the team developed but in the professional capacities the teachers acquired in researching and designing what was needed to meet the very specific needs around multicultural education at their school. But the issue remains that others, like Richard, require more assistance.

While it may be the case, as the acting Principal at Getty Rd remarked, that 'Teaching is a hard gig!', it seems greater emphasis needs to be placed on developing the professional capacities of teachers to effect change in schools. In rethinking multicultural education this requires the development of a richer socio-cultural knowledge to guard against the simple reproduction of multicultural education as it is traditionally understood whereby emphasis is placed on the promotion of empathetic understanding and limited forms of cultural recognition that tend to essentialise the assumed ethnicity of students. Such approaches generally have a narrow national frame, often encouraging little more than a kind of unreflexive civility; a tolerance of difference but little meaningful dialogue that is robust enough to weather the challenges increasing cultural complexity now poses.



**Diagram 2** Continuum of Multicultural Education

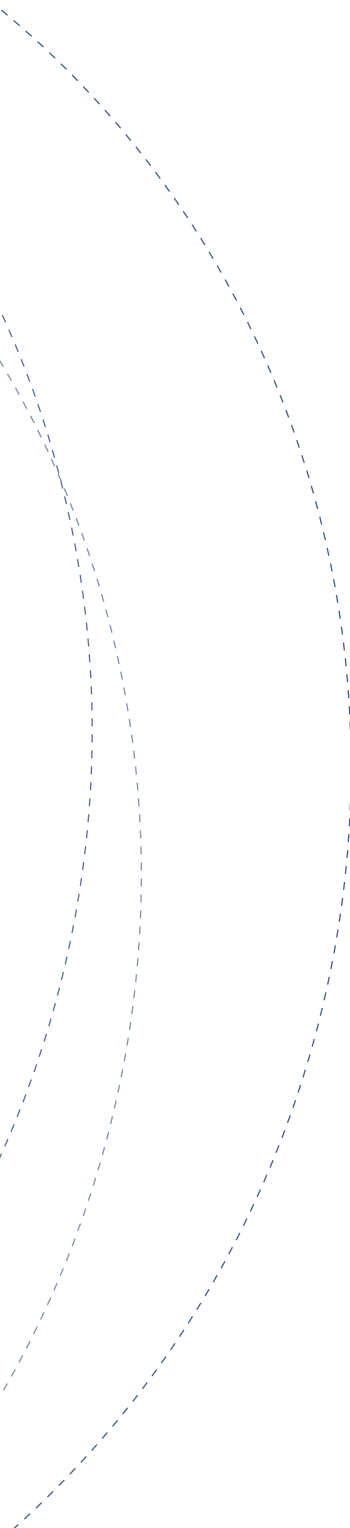
In the process of rethinking multicultural education an alternative perspective is required that enables the development of critical understanding informed by a view of knowledge that is comfortable with the uncertainties of cultural dynamism and its resultant complexities. Such a perspective is also alert to reductive forms of cultural recognition, tending more towards what could be termed ‘cultural acknowledgement’ that enables individuals to be recognised in the fullness of their humanity rather than simply foregrounding ethnicity as the single defining feature of identity (Noble, 2009). Such understandings engender a productive engagement with the global, and promote forms of reflexive civility (Kalantzis, 2011) that allow individuals to more effectively negotiate the culturally complex world in which we all now live. Such a move from traditional multicultural education to one that is potentially transformative — a process encapsulated in Diagram 2 — is reliant upon the professional capacities of teachers. RMRME provided the opportunity for some teachers to undertake this task and the following recommendations are made to further assist this process of rethinking how multicultural education is practised in schools.

## Recommendations

1. A review of the NSW DEC Multicultural Education Policy should be undertaken and in doing so, consideration should be given to ensuring that policy objectives clearly articulate the responsibilities of personnel and actions required at all levels of the NSW DEC to implement a transformative approach to multicultural education, the principles of which are outlined in Diagram 2, Continuum of Multicultural Education. Effective implementation of a revised policy would be strengthened by accompanying guidelines which assist schools to:
  - provide professional learning that encourages teachers to engage with issues of cultural complexity and their implications for schooling;
  - implement practices which support the development of the socio-cultural knowledge of teachers and students;
  - meet planning and reporting requirements for multicultural education, in consultation with their school communities, in particular reporting on how improvements to school culture and the learning experiences and outcomes of students are enhanced through the adoption of a transformative approach to multicultural education.
2. A multicultural education professional development resource for teachers, delivered by trained facilitators, could assist schools in rethinking their approaches to multicultural education and further strengthen the implementation of a revised Multicultural Education Policy. The resource should include academic readings on issues of cultural complexity and globalisation and their impact on school communities. It should also contain examples of effective practice drawn from a selection of the RMRME schools and others.
3. In addition to professional learning for teachers, attention should be given to developing sessions, focused on building principals' capacity to lead transformative multicultural education practices in schools, for inclusion in principal professional learning programs, including principal inductions.
4. BOSTES should develop further guidelines to improve professional learning practices in schools. Such guidelines should clarify and expand teachers' understanding of professional reading for professional learning. They should articulate the range of scholarship required to maintain professional standards, especially in areas outside a teacher's specific disciplinary field as in multicultural education. The guidelines should also clearly articulate the professional standards to which such scholarship may contribute.

## Glossary of Acronyms

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. Established in December 2008, ACARA is an independent authority responsible for the development of the Australian National Curriculum, national assessment programs and the collection of data for the MySchool website providing statistical and contextual information on Australian schools.
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. This is the statutory body that is responsible for the accreditation of Initial Teacher Education programs in Australia.
BOSTES	The Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) incorporating the former NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) and the Board of Studies.
DEC	The Department of Education and Communities. After a change of government in NSW in 2011, the Department of Education and Training (DET), was renamed the Department of Education and Communities. The acronym, DET, however, has been retained in all teacher email addresses.
ESL	English as a Second Language. ESL is the term used here rather than EAL or English as an additional language. While the latter is perhaps more accurate and is now being used more widely, ESL was the term used in the survey and is the term with greater currency in NSW schools at this point in time.
HSIE	Human Society and Its Environment. This is a Key Learning Area within the NSW Curriculum.
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage. This is a scale used by ACARA based on the occupation and level of education of all parents in each Australian school. The median ICSEA score is 1000 and values range from a low of 500 to a high of about 1300.
KLA	Key Learning Area.
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English. This is the favoured term to refer to students who have a language background other than English replacing the older term NESB or Non-English speaking background.
LOTE	Languages Other Than English.
NSWIT	New South Wales Institute of Teachers.





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