Leslie Terry

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Abstract

This paper argues that a number of competing interpretations of multiculturalism and education have emerged during the 1980s and 1990s in response to issues of ethnic and cultural difference in Australia. Drawing on the work of other researchers such as Kalantzis *et al.* (1990), the article traces the changing nature of governmental discourses and their effects in the education field, from cultural pluralist models through to perspectives which stressed broad institutional change and the social inclusion of marginalised 'ethnic minority' groups. The paper extends previous work by examining the ways in which the language of neo-liberalism has displaced the categories of race, ethnicity and culture as key concerns in the development of educational policy and programs by the end of the 1990s. It suggests, that these new trends have transformed multiculturalism in education into a 'choice' of establishing separate schools and systems along ethno-specific lines, but with no guarantee of improving educational outcomes. Concluding, the piece argues that an alternative agenda would build on the insights gained in the earlier processes of reform, which focused on broad institutional change. However, it is also proposed that there is a need to link these insights to a critical analysis of the ways in which the emerging types of knowledge, institutional arrangements and teaching strategies are producing new forms of exclusion within the ethnic and cultural spheres of our 'life-worlds'.

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*Since our position is that there will always be difference, we need to form practices which deal with difference, while trying to remedy the gross inequalities experienced by different groups.* (Hall in Terry 1995: 65)

Focusing the gaze

At the time of writing this paper a group of asylum seekers was picked up by the Norwegian ship the *Tampa* on the northern coast of Australia. The Australian Government concerned with sending a clear signal about the integrity of its borders refused permission for the craft to land. Instead the vessel was boarded by the Australian military, and after a few days, the passengers were transferred to another ship on which they were taken for immigration processing to a neighbouring Pacific island. Only a few weeks later, a large group of asylum seekers heading for Australia tragically drowned in the Timor Strait.

What was ironic about these events was that even though the Australian Government desired open borders for trade and finance, it was prepared to contravene its international obligations regarding asylum seekers. What is important to consider, is that all of these incidents took place in a context, where the dominant governmental discourses in Australia during the 1990s had moved away from a fundamental commitment to issues of difference and social justice. Instead neo-liberal approaches to governance had transformed social policy in Australia into what Zizek (1997) refers to as ‘an ideal form of ideology for global capitalism’. For Zizek, this kind of multiculturalism which operates from a kind of empty global position, treats each local culture the way the coloniser treats colonised people --- “as natives” whose mores are to be carefully studied and “respected” *but always with a view to ensuring the existence of a market for goods*’ (my italics) (Zizek 1997: 44).
According to the British cultural theorist Stuart Hall (Hall 1993) the ‘hybridity of the modern nation–state is now, in the present phase of globalization (sic), being compounded by one of the largest forced and unforced mass migrations of recent times. Furthermore, Hall argues that ‘one after another, Western nation-states, already “diaspora-ized” beyond repair, are becoming inextricably “multicultural” – mixed ethnically, religiously, culturally, linguistically, etc’. (356)

One response to such a state of affairs is to incorporate matters of cultural difference into the market discourses, thereby representing multiculturalism as simply a choice of lifestyles that can be bought or sold. In the recent decade such discourses have occupied a privileged position in the debates about governance in countries such as Australia, rendering invisible many of the issues that were pursued in an earlier period of social reform. It could be argued, that it is now an appropriate moment to take stock of the state of Australian multiculturalism and to posit an alternative set of strategies for addressing issues of ethnic and cultural difference in areas such as education.

In revisioning such an agenda, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate about globalisation, immigration, multiculturalism and education that has recently been advanced by a number of theorists internationally (Marcelo Suarez-Orozco and Carola Suarez-Orozco 2001; Castles and Davidson 2000; Kalantzis 1998). With this in mind, this paper is concerned with outlining developments in Australian education around issues of ethnic and cultural difference. At the centre of the discussion are questions about the specific genealogy of Australian multiculturalism, as well and the nature of the relationship between the Australian state and its citizens; particularly, those groups that are defined, and sometimes define themselves, as being of ‘Non-English speaking background’ or ‘ethnic minority’.

Key questions arising from this thumbnail sketch of the trends in Australian education are:
What are the implications of the recent shifts in educational governance for issues of ethnic and cultural difference? And, what might be the path forward in addressing matters of inclusion and exclusion in this important social arena?
Describing the context

In the post-1945 period the general tenor of education formed around a social-democratic model, though always with an exclusive non-government school component and large Catholic system operating independently. This was until the 1960s when the Federal government extended partial public funding to these latter schools. Recent changes in education policy have further encouraged the extension of independent models of schooling, so that in the present climate, nationally, around 31% of students attend a non-government school. The specific breakdown across the systems sees 3.1% in Anglican elite schools, 19.7% in Catholic schools and 7.5% of students attending the newly established and smaller schools. This leaves the state system with 69% of students; though at the post-primary level only 64.8% of students attend a government school (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 1997).

According to a recent study (Teese 2001), ‘[t]he population of academically successful students from culturally and economically advantaged families is largely monopolized by private schools, while the population of average or below-average students from modest or poor backgrounds is consigned to public schools and regional Catholic colleges’ (205). Further highlighting this situation, Teese argues that, ‘[p]rivate schools act to concentrate and enrich student attainment, attitudes and aptitudes formed in individual families and to turn these into a collective force with which to excel over other schools in the corporate enterprise’ (205). This, according to Teese, is demonstrated by a range of indicators, not the least, the differences across school types in achievement in the final years of secondary schools in the ‘areas that count most – mathematics, sciences, languages, traditional humanities’ (205). For example, according to this latter researcher, an analysis of student scores in Chemistry indicated that 30% of private-school students are placed in the top 5th band of achievement compared with only 15% of public high school candidates.

As Teese shows, these differences are replicated across a range of other subjects including Physics, some of the Mathematics subjects, as well as in Biology. But in his view, it is the
'more culturally selective nature' of the students taking History, Social Sciences and Literature in the 'elite privates' that highlight the continuing patterns of disadvantage in Australian education. For this Melbourne based researcher, 'private school students are three times as likely as high-school students to receive high grades, with every second candidate or more being placed in the top of the fifth band.' (206) Moving towards an explanation for these differences in outcomes across social groups, Teese states that, '[i]f elevated social intake is not a sufficient condition for academic success, the cultural homogeneity of private schools is at any rate necessary to achieve *globally high* success rates in key subjects' (207). Commenting further on this point, he suggests that the effect of this is 'to deplete the cultural reserves available to other schools' (207).

Unfortunately in highlighting the factors involved in creating these differences in educational outcomes, Teese's work is limited in that it does not properly explore issues of racial and ethnic status in the educational puzzle of academic achievement. While raising concerns about 'cultural homogeneity', he remains content to rely simply on the notion of social group or social class and not recognise the cross cutting nature of different identities of groups of students. This is despite highlighting the way in which schools with large numbers of 'ethnic minority' students in the western suburbs of Melbourne are poorly represented in the figures for academic success at the upper levels of the school systems.

Part of the reason for this may well be that the available figures on educational participation rely on broad categories for defining the situation of 'ethnic' groups vis-à-vis education, as if there is a consistent pattern across and within these groups. A number of Australian based researchers have over the past decade dismissed notions of 'ethnic disadvantage' because the generalised statistics usually indicate that social mobility is often better for second-generation 'ethnic minority' students than for students whose parents are Australian born. (Birrell and Khoo 1995) However, other figures based on the 1996 Census (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2000) highlight the existence of continuing patterns of exclusion in Australian society for particular ethnic minority groups. Figures on labour market participation, for example, indicate that unemployment among, Iraq-born Australians was 39% compared with the Australian-born rate of 7%. While this community is a relatively
small and recently arrived group, some of the more established communities such as the Turkish-born community were experiencing unemployment rates of 24%, while the figure in the Vietnamese-born community was recorded at 25%. The unemployment rate for the China-born groups was 13.4%.

Looking more specifically at the educational backgrounds of these communities as an example of continuing inequalities, of the Turkish-born population aged 15 years and over, 27.8% held some form of educational or occupational qualification compared with 42.3% for the Australian-born. In this former community 9.8% held a higher qualification compared with the Australian-born rate of 16.0%. According to the figures the percentage of the Vietnamese-born community with educational qualifications was 25.2%, while 12.3% held a higher qualification. Interestingly, 23.6% of this group, who did not have any qualifications were still attending an educational institution, while only 9.1% of the Turkish-born group were doing so. For the China-born community 48.3% held some form of educational or occupational qualification and 31.8% had higher qualifications.

As already stated, what is important about these figures is that they indicate that racial, ethnic and cultural status, continue to be factors relevant to issues of educational achievement and underachievement. But how have such concerns been constructed previously as part of the educational debates? And, what is the location of these issues in current policy formulations?

Revisiting past reforms in the area of education and 'diversity'

In recent years, a number of theorists have become well known for their views that state policies need to be analysed within the 'politics of discourse' (see, for example, Yeatman and Beilharz cited in Watts 1993/94, also see Yeatman 1994, 1998). In his article 'Governmentality and the State' (1993/94) Watts points out that, 'attention paid to the character of language and particularly the use of metaphor and its importance for explaining policy as a discursive activity will prove rewarding' (119). In pursuing this line of argument this theorist suggests that, '[o]ur social institutions which are best understood as inscriptions of discursive practices, exist in the relations between knowledge, social relations and social
action. Human beings move within discourses which are positional and which function rather like webs of meaning over which we clamber in various figurations of action, history and intention’ (122).

However, as Watts rightly points out: ‘...there is a sense of something missing in much of the Foucauldian style to do with the sense that discourses run themselves, are their own *deux ex machinas* and can therefore sustain the self-referencing set of explanations’ (125). Commenting further, on this style, Watts suggests that ‘[w]hat is missing, I want to suggest, is a specific sense of why particular styles and forms of discourse emerge when they do, or how they are shaped by other domains of social life’ (my italics) (125).

Bearing in mind Watt’s views, it could be suggested that Australian multiculturalism, and its translation into areas such as education have been determined by a range of struggles over ‘what “education” means, what people do in their educational work, and how people can and should relate to one another in the process of education’ (Kemmis cited in Singh unpublished: 47).

Until the early 1970s, the key discourses in Australian education were characterized by clear aspirations towards cultural assimilation on the part of the State. Working within this framework, post-Second World War education reformers in Australia did not question the notion of ‘Whiteness’ as the dominant signifier of national identity. Indigenous history continued not to be taught in schools, or, if it was, it represented indigenous cultures as backward and terminal, while all Australian children were regularly required to pledge an oath of allegiance to a British monarchy. Indigenous and non-British immigrants were forced to assimilate into a dominant culture that had been brutally transplanted into a colonial context and foreign landscape within a very short period of time.

The cultural exclusiveness of the education system was also evident in a number of other ways. Despite the influx of large numbers of non-English speaking background people that migrated to Australia as permanent residents from 1945 onwards, there was minimal support for the formal development of English language skills until the early 1970s. Moreover,
regardless of the rapid transformation of the Australian community into an ethnic and culturally heterogeneous society, languages other than English were not formally offered in primary schools, (except for Italian insertion programs) while only French and German were taught predominately in secondary schools as academic studies up until the mid-1980s. The adherence to notions of mono-lingualism over this period reflected a lack of desire on the part of Australian educational policy makers to relinquish what Hage (1998) refers to as ‘a fantasy position of cultural dominance born out of European expansion’ (20). Highlighting the same point slightly differently, Kalantzis et al. (1990) state that: ‘Through to the mid-1970s, then, the project of education systems was cultural and linguistic assimilation or integration’ (17).

From the early 1970s onwards, marginalized ethnic and cultural minorities, progressive policy makers and activists within communities began to contest this ‘fantasy position’ that had so far excluded them as groups from representation and participation in Australian social life. While the emerging discourses cannot be easily categorized and were often overlapping, they offered alternative versions of ‘belonging’ and made claims on the state for recognition of ‘rights’. What could be loosely defined as an emerging ‘ethnic rights’ movement began to agitate for changes in a range of social programs, including in the education field. (Martin 1978; 1981)

In their book, Cultures of Schooling, Kalantzis et al. (1990) provide a detailed analysis of the ways in which these developments and other policy changes impacted on six schools with significant ethnic minority student populations. In some regards, while the work does not set out to deal with the discursive strategies surrounding multiculturalism and education, it does provide a glimpse of the shifts in the language used by education policy makers and the way these discourses shaped school programs and practices.

In discussing these concerns from a systems' perspective, Kalantzis et al. trace the changes in the definitions of 'culture' and education reform in Australia in the 1970s and through the 1980s, 'away from specialist programmes to mainstreaming' (28). However, in doing so, they are right to point out that 'mainstreaming' proved to be a 'two-edged sword', which sometimes was 'no more than a euphemism for cutting ethnic specific services without
passing on the funding to support concrete initiatives in the mainstream’ (25). According to these researchers, the orientation of the initial reforms made by the Australian Labor Government in the early 1970s did not speak of cultural difference, ‘but of a unified “family of the nation” rid of all forms of social injustice’ (18). Under this rhetoric more English language programs in schools were established while other important issues that revolved around ethnic and cultural difference were not addressed.

For the authors of *Cultures of Schooling* the next policy shift under the newly elected conservative government in 1975 began to acknowledge the existence of cultures other than the dominant Anglo-based culture. In this scenario, they suggest, that education policy makers began to use the language of ‘cultural relativism’. According to Kalantzis *et al.* while this was a positive development, in that it questioned the existence of a uniform Australian identity, it was often interpreted in schools as an expression of the ‘folkloric’. Furthermore, these researchers point out, that language and social education were superficially attended to through ‘self-esteem programmes in which one would end up feeling good about one’s own culture while issues of educational access were often ignored’ [my italics] (22). Kalantzis *et al.* also highlight the way in which some responsibility for the new brand of multiculturalism was passed through limited subsidies to the ‘ethnic schools’ sector that operated language and cultural programs out of day school hours. Within this model leading educationists such as J.J. Smolizcz (cited in Terry 1984), argued for an ‘institutional’ and ‘dynamic pluralism’ and a continued growth of ‘ethnic cultures’ (23).

However, running along side these interpretations of multiculturalism, and its representation in education, was another view that was concerned with the linking of cultural concerns with notions of social inclusion. Jakubowicz and Wolf (1980), for example, writing at the time, argued that, ‘[c]oncerns about the education of ethnic minorities have too often been allowed to become engulfed by a concentration on issues of culture and language to the exclusion of structures and processes which prevent fair access and equitable outcomes’ (4). Others also suggested that, ‘[t]he agenda for a truly multicultural society where there is tolerance and understanding with social justice is still to be written’ (Jayasuriya: 1984; 7). Such advocates argued for an agenda framed in terms of ‘life-chances’ and not ‘life styles’.
Consequently, it was about the mid-1980s that the ‘culturalist’ discourses, that had so far dominated the educational terrain, began to be displaced by a set of discourses that went under the rubric of ‘Access and Equity’ or ‘Mainstreaming’. According to a National Population Council document at the time, such an approach ‘has come to signify both the recognition of the diversity in the cultural and ethnic composition of Australia’s multicultural society by authorities and organizations responsible for providing services to the whole community, and to their access and equity in service delivery’ (1985: 4). While still concerned with issues of linguistic and cultural background, these discourses focused on removing institutional barriers to educational success for marginalized racial, ethnic and cultural groups. In their work, Kalantzis et al. argue that the idea of ‘mainstreaming’ was a ‘critical revision’ of the former models that regarded multiculturalism simply as cultural pluralism. For these researchers, ‘[t]he general mainstreaming argument reasoned that relegating crucial social issues to specialist funding can, in effect, marginalize those issues and make them institutionally vulnerable’ (24).

Through this interpretation of multiculturalism, however, as the authors of Cultures of Schooling point out, a number of initiatives were implemented to promote broad educational change, including the extension of English language programs for a range of first as well as second generation students. In addition, school community participation programs were instituted, along with reforms in social education curricula that stressed the idea of ‘preparing all students for life in a multicultural society’ (See Kalantzis et al. 1990: 24-25; see also Minister for Education 1985). Furthermore, some states (regions) enhanced the ‘out of hours’ teaching of languages by formalizing the arrangements between these programs and the day school programs. This meant that students could continue their language studies with formal recognition in after-hour school locations.

During this time, in line with the notions of ‘participation’ and ‘equity’, some regional authorities made efforts to translate key education documents into a range of languages as well develop ways by which non-English speaking background groups could more actively participate in the education of their children on a system-wide and local school basis (see
Terry 1989; Hartley 1995). More specifically, this involved establishing mechanisms for better ‘participation’ of and ‘informed decision making’ by non-English speaking background communities on key education boards and local school councils. It also involved the effective use of interpreters and translations for communication between parents and the schools. With this end in mind, one state (regional) education authority, for example, produced a compendium of multilingual notices that could be used by schools on a regular basis in order to provide general but essential information to their diverse parent groups.

However, according to Kalantzis et al., writing at the end of the 1980s, the ‘most significant recent development which impacts directly on multicultural education is the 1987 National Policy On Languages. At this time Australia was one of only two nations to have such a formal policy. For the above researchers, the Policy built on the early versions of cultural pluralism but also consolidated ‘the move towards social equity in the 1980s’ (25). As the authors of Cultures of Schooling point out, this policy worked to position language issues as a concern for all Australians. The high levels of mono-lingualism, the threats to indigenous languages and the fragmented approach to language education were some of the key issues for the Report. The metaphor here was of a nation in which English was necessary for all, but Australia was also represented as a place where all ‘Australian languages’ were to be supported within the ‘mainstream’ in a way that could be linked to educational and vocational attainment, as well as inter-group relations. The issue of geo-political relevance was also canvassed as an important rationale for language education in the Australian context.

Within the framework offered by the National Policy On Languages, and in order to address the lack of interest in language studies, one state government (regional authority) implemented a local policy that required all primary schools to offer a Language Other Than English (LOTE) for a minimum of three hours a week to all students. As well as this, students completing a language in their final year of secondary education were given extra points towards their tertiary entrance score. There were also a number of arrangements made to train teachers in the languages and to upgrade the qualifications of existing teachers. Programs in Vietnamese, Indonesian, Chinese, Italian, Greek and Arabic and a host of other languages were established or extended. These programs meant that the secondary schools also had to
rethink the rationale for the teaching of German and French, with a view to meeting the diverse needs and interests of students that were now coming through the education system.

As Kalantzis et al. highlight, the educational initiatives that emerged during the 1980s under the rubric of Australian multiculturalism were central to the efforts at promoting serious reform in the ‘mainstream’ of the state education systems. Other researchers, with the same intentions, also began to address connected issues such as ethnicity and tertiary education. For example, Meekosha et al. (1991) writing about the need for change in higher education after the Federal Government released its National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, stated that the ‘government’s Multiculturalism for all policy with its National Agenda implies that all access concerns be addressed in conjunction with curriculum and related questions of education in and for a multicultural society’ (8). To this end, these researchers explored the ‘conditions under which effective equity strategies affecting Non-English Speaking Background students are developed, implemented and sustained within the university sector’ [my italics] (9). Highlighting further problems, Meekosha et al. commented that ‘[u]niversities have had the least success in attempting to influence their own curricula – the most widespread model of education regards NESB (Non-English Speaking Background) students as being in need of compensatory education. There is rarely recognition of the need to address structural racism, and fully integrate non-racist practice …’ (56).

Clearly the late 1980s and the early 1990s saw a great deal of change in Australian education around the notion of education in and for a multicultural society. During this decade or so there was a clear shift from cultural pluralist discourses to those concerned with the idea of social inclusion. In this process, visions of ‘institutional pluralism’ were dislodged by versions of the social that recognized that schooling was ‘a critical path (for all groups) to social mobility and adult earning power’ (Kalantzis et al. 1990: 40).

It is difficult to estimate the impact of the discourses that revolved around notions of ‘access and equity’ or ‘mainstreaming’ on school programs in Australia during this time. It could be argued that this was because the initiatives were broad in scope and there was minimal evaluation of the various aspects of the ‘targeted’ programs. It is also clear that while some
subgroups within particular ‘ethnic minority’ communities, were well placed vis-a-vis the education system, at the beginning of the 1990s significant numbers of students were still encountering major obstacles in their education as result of institutional barriers which formed around race, ethnic and cultural status. For example, research (Terry et al. 1993) on the education of Maltese background students in Melbourne in the early 1990s showed that there had been few gains in education made by this community over two and three generations.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations of ‘corporate multiculturalism’ in the education sphere, it could be argued that these emerging discourses disrupted the status quo. In their comprehensive case study of change processes in six schools Kalantzis et al. found that, ‘[w]hile the case for academic performance remains unproven, in socio-cultural terms, all six case-study schools seem to be succeeding’ (225). Concluding further, these researchers stated: ‘It was frequently reported that racism is a serious problem in the community but that, comparatively, school is a haven from that. In schools which are located in relatively poor neighbourhoods, and with so much cultural diversity, this must be regarded as a testimony to the long-term social success of Australian multicultural education’ (225).

In their work Kalantzis et al. (1990) provide a valuable and important glimpse of the battles over issues of ethnic and cultural difference within the Australian schooling system. The work is significant because it highlights the limits and possibilities of the discourses that interrupted the established narratives and practices that characterized Australian education up until the 1980s. While this is the case, their analysis is restricted to a few key policies that specifically dealt with ethnic and cultural concerns in education. Consequently, the work is limited in that it did not scrutinize many of the other major policies that shaped the education processes during the time. To put it another way, it is often the silences, the elisions, erasures and contradictions that are central to a consideration of the practices and politics of difference (see Bottomley 1997), and Kalantzis et al. do not explore the not so obvious aspects of policy formulation.

Of course, it should be recognised that Kalantzis et al. were writing over a decade ago, however, despite the positive contribution of the work, there is still a need for other writings
on the genealogy of Australian multiculturalism during this period and its translation into
education and practice; Writings which perhaps represents the shifts and struggles in the field,
as ‘a knot, a tangled skein of yarn . . . without diminishing the simultaneous presence of the
most disparate elements that converge to determine every event’ (Calvino and Gudda cited in
Bottomley 1997: 1). What is missing so far is the ‘flesh and blood’ of the battles over
institutional life in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s. For example, as stated, the authors
of Cultures of Schooling highlight the formulation of the National Policy On Languages as
the ‘most significant recent development that impacts directly on multicultural education.’
(Kalantzis et al: 25) However, the analysis does not reflect the Policy’s formulation as a result
of many years of struggle by community groups and educationists around issues of ‘rights’.
Moreover, while it would have been another task altogether to document the pathways to such
a moment, there is no mention of the way in which the National Policy On Languages was
rushed through to completion, to appease community anger that arose in response to the
abolition of a range of ‘multicultural’ programs at the end of 1986. Furthermore, despite the
very positive nature of the Report, its effects were to sideline many of the non-language issues
that also came under the rubric of ‘multiculturalism’.

But it was during the 1990s, not long after the publication of Kalantzis et al.’s work that many
of the priorities of the earlier decades were displaced by a new set of discourses that arose
from outside the education domain but at the same time reshaped it. Central to these views
were notions such as ‘enterprise’, ‘individual performance’, and ‘choice’. In this scenario,
explanations which explored the relationship between social group (including racial and
ethnic status) and educational underachievement were set aside by policy formulations that
reasserted the idea of education as an arena of competition between people of different talents
in schools of varying quality. Whereas earlier educational policies (Minister for Education
1985) were underpinned by notions of social group, the emerging policies such as the Schools
of the Future Policy published by a state (regional) government in the early 1990s,
commented that schools ‘will be able to develop their own distinctive programs to take
account of the particular aspirations of their communities, the interests of their students and
the talents of their teachers’ (Directorate of School Education Victoria 1993:4). Moreover,
instead of funding specific programs to address issues of disadvantage as it formed around
ethnic and cultural issues, the drift of policy at the Federal and state levels was towards an educational market in which '[e]ach school is unique' and 'are best placed to make decisions about teaching and learning programs and what is needed to support them' (4). Within this model, notions like multiculturalism or cultural difference were attached to the desire for educational 'choice' that, according to such policies, can only be fulfilled through 'private' forms of schooling, in this case, the proliferation of 'ethno-specific' schooling.

In the Australian context, the implementation of such policies, with funding attached accordingly, have had the effect in the past decade of creating a small but steady movement of students out of the state education systems into independent and catholic systemic schools. The current guidelines for non-government education make it possible to establish a new 'system' with a minimum of only three schools. Recent decisions on the part of the Federal Government to increase funding to non-government schools, including long established ones, has been based on the idea that it is possible to create wider access to 'private' education. However, there are major obstacles for many communities in gaining entry into the 'elite privates' because of the social location and cultural orientation of these institutions. In Australia the shift to private forms of education has historically been based partly on status distinctions that are often cast within a quasi-religious rationale. Because of their selective nature, the 'elite' schools have continued to function as a way of imparting cultural and social capital that ensures a steady pathway for particular groups of students into the established universities, which regard these students as part of their natural constituency. (Teese 2001)

Consequently, while there is presently a drift of students from 'mainstream' schools, it is largely to the more recently established independent institutions, including small Christian fundamentalist schools as well as 'ethno-specific' ones, such as those established by the Islamic and Greek communities. While the assumption is that parents move their children into these schools for cultural reasons, there is often a range of other factors involved in this 'choice'. These factors include a belief that private schooling offers a better education, perceptions (real or not) of 'poor' discipline and standards in government schools, and, a desire to more closely regulate the cultural and social life of children. It could be suggested that the establishment of these institutions is an attempt at mimicking the education received
in the large elite schools whose traditional constituencies have been traditionally the upper middle classes. However, as Jakubowicz and Wolf (1980) suggested some time ago, researchers and policy makers need to be cautious in this area as the expectations of ethnic minority parents are not open to easy interpretation or simple categorization. (see also Hannan and Spinoso 1982; Terry 1989; Hartley 1993).

Nevertheless, even though there has been little comprehensive study of student outcomes in the ‘ethno-specific’ schools in Australia, the available information does suggest that many of these organizations do not, on the surface, achieve any higher results for their students at the senior levels, than their counterparts in local state bodies (Good Schools’ Guide 2001). As Yuval–Davis (1992) suggests, commenting on the situation in the U.K, such developments can work against the interests of ‘minority’ groups by reproducing cultural forms that hinder access to broader social life. Moreover, a return to simple models of pluralism, reconfigured by entrepreneurial philosophy, continue to distract attention away from the development of forms of education necessary for all students in rapidly changing societies.

Concluding on the matter

It is apparent from this discussion that over the last two decades, competing discourses have come into play in response to issues of ethnic and cultural difference in Australian education. Moreover, it can be argued that such discursive formations have had ‘real effects’ in shaping education policy and programs. From the 1970s onwards there was a shift away from the idea of ethnic and cultural minorities as immigrant, as being outside the main frames of reference, to a view that the concerns of such groups could only be dealt with as part of the efforts at broad institutional change. While there was often a tension in these efforts at reform between the emphasis on cultural pluralism and the goal of social inclusion, by the end of the 1980s the dominant trend, at least at the level of policy and research, was on linking concerns of social and cultural rights to issues of social access and participation. It could be argued, that some points in time, unlike in some other countries, such as Sweden, where the emphasis appears to be more or less one-dimensional – the learning of Swedish as the centre plank of the policies of inclusion, as if that is all there is to addressing issues of difference – the
Australian initiatives operated at a range of levels and with a variety of strategies to improve the experience of education for marginalised 'ethnic minority' groups.

Unfortunately, as suggested, with the ascendancy of the *market* in the recent decade, even despite the high levels of underachievement among specific ‘minority’ groups and sub-groups, concerns with racial, ethnic and cultural differences, have come ‘under-erasure’ in Australian education. Given the shift to neo-liberal versions of schooling in such countries, it may well be worth asking: What would now constitute ‘strategic interventions’ in the educational domain? Or, as Hall *et al.* suggest: ‘What spheres of action and agencies of change lie beyond the antagonistic categories of the market and state *in the field of education in an ethnically and culturally diverse context?’ [my italics] (Hall *et al.* 1995:13).

While there are many possible responses to these questions, it can be argued that the insights gained from the earlier reforms associated with multiculturalism within its ‘access’ and ‘equity’ guise, provide a starting point for the construction of an alternative agenda. The concern with broad institutional change, the multifaceted strategies aimed at removing structural impediments to schooling and an emphasis on ‘rights’, among other things, all worked to shift the issues of race, ethnicity and culture towards the centre of the thinking about Australian education. However, while there is much to be learnt from previous experience of innovation, in light of the changing face of education that is being reconfigured by market and highly technological perspectives of schooling, it is obvious that educationists will need to rethink their ‘strategic interventions’. More, specifically, they will need to address their thinking to the ways in which the emerging types of knowledge, institutional arrangements and teaching strategies are producing new forms of exclusion within the ethnic and cultural spheres of our ‘life-worlds’.
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