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Multicultural education: the state of play from an Australian perspective

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This article reports on the first comprehensive survey of public school teachers in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) around issues of multicultural and English as Second Language (ESL) education. While there is substantial literature on multicultural education – what it should and shouldn't be – there is much that is left unexplored in research in the area, not least of which is the characteristics of the teaching labour force. In this article, we 'take stock' of multicultural education, not by engaging with philosophical debates about multiculturalism as an ethical or policy practice, but as an auditing of what exists in the name of multicultural education. Drawing on a sample of over 5000 respondents, the article documents the changing cultural profile of the profession and highlights gaps in pre-service training and professional learning of teachers in terms of meeting the needs of Australia's increasingly culturally and linguistically complex school populations.

Keywords: multicultural education; multiculturalism; teacher education; English as a Second Language (ESL)

Introduction

Despite considerable public support within Australia for cultural diversity (Dunn et al. 2004; Ang et al. 2006), national and international contexts, especially since 2001, have seen heightened anxieties around immigration and social cohesion. These have exacerbated ongoing concerns regarding the lack of clarity about what multiculturalism means, the ways in which multicultural policy is currently managed and its usefulness within twenty-first century nation states. Following a decade or more of challenges to multiculturalism (Koleth 2010; Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010), in recent years pronouncements by leaders in the UK and Europe question its success (Henderson 2011). Despite a similar wariness by the conservative Abbott

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Government in Australia, it maintains the previous Labor Government's 2011 policy statement, *The People of Australia*, (Australian Government 2011) which provides a reaffirmation of Australia's commitment to multiculturalism. Since the multiculturalism of the 1970s, however, the nature of diversity in Australia, as elsewhere, has changed dramatically. Intergenerational change, cultural adaptation, intermarriage, and the widening cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of Australia's immigrants and their children (Ang et al. 2002, 2006) has led to what some theorists refer to as the diversification of diversity (Vertovec 2006).

Within this context, multicultural education in Australia faces questions concerning its relevance, framework and modes of delivery. Multicultural education, as practised in Australian schools, covers a wide range of programs which aim to prepare all students for successful participation in Australia's culturally diverse society and to meet the particular needs of students with a language background other than English (LBOTE). This includes: ESL¹, multicultural perspectives in the curriculum, anti-racism initiatives, community languages, community relations, and so on – and draws on diverse rationales – cultural maintenance, social equity, community harmony, cultural awareness. Yet many of these rationales, as with the notion of multiculturalism more generally, may need to be rethought if they are to retain their relevance in the culturally complex context of twenty-first century Australia (Noble 2011; Watkins 2011; Noble and Watkins 2013), and within a broader notion of global citizenship as envisaged by Australian education policy documents such as the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA 2008).² There are, of course, varying perspectives on multicultural education. For some people, schools are 'too multicultural', hostage to politically correct ideologies (Donnelly 2007); for others, education is not 'multicultural enough' (Hickling-Hudson 2003). Hickling-Hudson, for example, has criticised the tendency of many schools to remain ethnocentric and monocultural, and endorses a culturally proactive schooling and pre-service and in-service teacher education which engages with postcolonial theory. Yet, while there is substantial literature on multicultural education – what it should and shouldn't be – there is much that is left unexplored in research in the area, not least of which is the characteristics of the teaching labour force (Lowenstein 2009). In this article, we wish to 'take stock' of multicultural education, not by engaging with philosophical debates about multiculturalism as an ethical or policy practice, but as an auditing of what exists in the name of multicultural education. Unlike a focus on the 'multicultural capital' that individual schools deploy in shaping educational approaches (Poyatos Matas and Bridges 2008), this article, drawing on a state-wide survey of NSW public school teachers, explores the resources – the labour force, their training and their professional knowledge – that constitute the systemic manifestation of multicultural education after three decades of establishment and development.

Background to the study

The survey informing this article was conducted as part of *Rethinking Multiculturalism/Reassessing Multicultural Education* (RMRME), a three-year Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project conducted jointly by the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC), and the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT).³ While also directed towards broader questions regarding multiculturalism, the RMRME project aimed to shed light on the challenges posed by the increasing cultural complexity in public schools and their communities in urban and rural areas in the Australian state of NSW, and the role education can play in social inclusion. NSW provides an interesting case-study for investigating multicultural education as it possesses the second largest state education system in the world and one of the most diverse.⁴ The NSW DEC records that 30% of students in NSW are from a LBOTE, over 5% are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 12,000 students are from refugee backgrounds with increasing numbers from various African countries, Iran, Afghanistan and Myanmar. About 18% of the total student population require ESL support with an average of 6500 newly-arrived ESL students from overseas countries enrolling annually over the last five years (NSW DEC 2013).

The RMRME project collected data from a number of sources: a large scale survey of NSW public school teachers, focus groups with parents, teachers and students in 14 targeted schools and site-specific action research projects in each of these schools. The project included primary/secondary, urban/rural, high/low socio-economic status (SES) and high/low cultural diversity schools from across NSW. This article documents the findings of the state-wide survey that was conducted during Term 2 of 2011.⁵ Distributed to the over 55,000 permanent teachers and executive staff in NSW public schools via their departmental email address, the survey yielded 5128 responses, just short of 10% of the overall NSW DEC teaching population. The survey included questions on a range of topics: (1) teacher background (related to language, cultural identification and teaching experience); (2) pre-service training and professional learning in multicultural and ESL education; (3) practices around multicultural education in schools; (4) attitudes toward diversity, schooling and multiculturalism; and (5) understandings of keywords: 'culture', 'intercultural understanding', 'social cohesion' and 'multiculturalism'. This article reports on the first three of these areas. Teachers from 70% (n.1554) of NSW public schools completed the survey with representation from primary, secondary and central/community schools in every region and school education group across the state. Respondents not only held a range of positions within schools, they also had varying levels of experience with the average number of years of

teaching for respondents being 20.4 compared to 15.4 for all NSW DEC teachers in the year the survey was undertaken.

The cultural and linguistic profile of NSW public school teachers

Much of the literature discussing the cultural make-up of the teaching population in Australia refers to it as being predominantly white or Anglo in comparison to the Australian population as a whole (Allard and Santoro 2006; Santoro 2007; Thomas and Kearney 2008; Mills 2009). Broadly speaking this is true. While 27% of the Australian population were born overseas, this is only the case for 12% of teachers in NSW (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2011). Yet, such a raw figure tends to mask the cultural diversity of the teaching population that is apparent; a workforce that is marked by increasing cultural and linguistic complexity (Reid, Collins, and Singh 2014).

The respondents to the survey provide a case in point with 20.8% born overseas and half of those (10.9%) in non-English speaking countries. A total of 109 countries of birth were nominated by respondents with the main source countries being: the UK (3%), India (1.6%), New Zealand (NZ) (1.3%) and Fiji (1.3%). In addition, there was considerable linguistic diversity within the sample. While 86.5% nominated English as their first language, higher than Australian census data which records 76.8% of Australians who speak English at home (a slightly different though comparable category), the 12.7% of respondents with a LBOTE spoke a range of European, Asian and Middle Eastern languages. In all, a total of 97 first languages were reported with the top five after English being: Hindi (1.6%), Greek (1.2%), Chinese languages (Mandarin and Cantonese 1.2%)⁶, Arabic (0.8%) and Italian (0.8%). Data on any additional Languages Other Than English (LOTE) spoken revealed not only a greater degree of diversity but a very different mix. More than a quarter of the survey sample (28%) indicated that they could speak one or more LOTES. In all, respondents nominated 130 different languages which included a far greater number of European origin: French (7.1%), German (3.5%), Italian (3.4%), Greek (2.9%) and Spanish (2%) being the top five including Hindi (2%) as the top non-European LOTE. This greater representation of European languages may suggest that some of these LOTES were learnt as a matter of academic study and may be a teaching subject for many respondents. Whatever the case, they give a fuller account of the linguistic diversity of the NSW teaching population.

In addition to country of birth and language, other data that added to the cultural profile of survey respondents included looking at where teachers completed their initial teacher training. Sixty-five different countries were nominated, indicative of the cultural diversity already discussed above. The vast majority (92.2%), however, were trained in Australia. Of the remaining

7.9%, the top four countries nominated were: UK (1.2%), India (1%), NZ (0.9%) and Fiji (0.9%), mirroring the country of birth of teachers born outside Australia.

While most teachers were born in Australia and only spoke English, the forms of cultural identification they described were considerably diverse, revealing a complexity that is masked by other indicators of diversity. Somewhat broader than the Australian census, which gathers data on a person's ancestry allowing for no more than two descriptors to be nominated, respondents to this survey had no such restrictions. While they were provided with a number of examples, such as Aboriginal, Chinese, Chinese-Australian, Anglo-Australian, Australian-Lebanese, etc. respondents could record any number of forms of identification. Taking full advantage of this, of the 5128 responses received, respondents nominated 1155 different cultural descriptors (see Watkins et al. 2013 for a fuller exploration of these terms). What this broad range of descriptors attests to is not only a far greater degree of cultural diversity within the teaching population than can be determined from country of birth and language background, but more detail about the nature of this diversity. The various hyphenated identifications, ordering of multiple descriptors and use of various non-nation-based forms of identification that respondents provided reveal a cultural complexity that is little acknowledged in the literature discussing the cultural make-up of Australian teachers. It is also suggestive of teachers' own awareness of the quite fluid and hybridised nature of cultural identity. The extent to which teachers apply this awareness more broadly in understanding the cultural backgrounds of their students, however, is another matter explored elsewhere.⁷

Room for improvement: teacher expertise in multicultural education

The survey was particularly useful for ascertaining the current levels of expertise that NSW teachers possess in multicultural and ESL education resulting from their initial training, in-service professional learning and post-graduate study. Multicultural and ESL education were dealt with as distinct areas of expertise in the survey and are discussed here separately though ESL is simply one aspect of multicultural education which, as already indicated, in NSW incorporates a range of programs including community liaison, inclusive curricula, community languages, anti-racism. In regard to multicultural education, less than half of respondents (47.5%) had received pre-service training in this area with there being a slightly higher percentage of primary school teachers (49.4%) than secondary teachers (45.4%) who had done so. There was, however, a clear trend towards increased pre-service training in multicultural education with teachers of less than six years' experience more than twice as likely at 69.2% to have had some training in this area compared to 33.3% for those with more than 25 years of experience.

This is an encouraging finding and may reflect the impact of the NSWIT's professional teaching standards which, since 2009, have required that initial teacher education (ITE) programs ensure graduates receive training in aspects of multicultural education. Professional teaching standards were also adopted in 2011 by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), the national body now overseeing the accreditation of ITE across Australia.⁸ Yet, while the AITSL standards require that teacher graduates possess the professional knowledge requisite for teaching students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (AITSL 2011, 5), there is little detail as to how this is to be undertaken. Though pre-dating AITSL, Premier and Miller (2010) are highly critical of pre-service education that does not address the needs of students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds across all subjects they undertake, or alternatively, in a core subject as a specialised focus. Many teacher education programs in Australia tend to favour an integrated approach that can result in token treatment of this subject matter (Santoro 2007; Thomas and Kearney 2008; Mills 2009; Premier and Miller 2010) and so, more specialised attention is considered preferable. This focus on addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) student populations within the AITSL standards, however, neglects the fact that multicultural education is far broader than this, incorporating the need to equip all students with the knowledges and skills required to navigate the cultural complexity of the transnational and globalised world in which we now live. It is these critical capacities, essential for living in culturally diverse societies, which ITE needs to address more effectively. These issues are of particular relevance given the recent Australian National Curriculum's emphasis on intercultural understanding, a capability to be fostered across the curriculum from kindergarten to Year 12 in Australian schools.⁹ As it stands, the majority of respondents to this survey had no pre-service training in multicultural education whatsoever and this is a matter of concern.

The situation is even worse, however, when it comes to teachers' pre-service training in ESL with only 27.4% indicating they possessed any expertise in this area. There was also a significant gap between primary and secondary teacher respondents in this area of training with 12.5% more primary school teachers holding qualifications in teaching ESL compared to secondary teachers. Despite curriculum documents in NSW dating back to the late 1980s declaring that all teachers from kindergarten to Year 12 need to address the literacy needs of their students (NSW Department of Education 1987), it seems that in NSW this may still largely be seen as the responsibility of primary school and secondary English teachers. While ESL is not the same as teaching literacy, and requires additional skills related to second language acquisition, the greater number of primary school teachers with ESL qualifications may be a reflection of where this responsibility is still seen to lie. Many primary school teachers, however, often do have a

greater responsibility for teaching ESL as they are more likely to be confronted with first phase ESL students in their classrooms.¹⁰ Many newly arrived migrants or refugees of secondary school age with ESL needs in metropolitan areas first attend an Intensive English Centre (IEC) for up to four terms prior to entering the mainstream. This is not the case for those of primary school age in NSW who are mainstreamed as soon as they enrol at a school. The majority of these students receive ESL support by a specialist ESL teacher, but there are many who do not, and so this responsibility then falls to the classroom teacher. Yet, while the number of respondents with pre-service training in ESL was relatively low, they were at least located in schools with higher percentages of LBOTE students. This is to be expected given the way in which ESL support to schools has been historically allocated in NSW, that is, a specific allocation of ESL teacher positions to a school determined by an annual survey which collects data on the number of ESL student enrolments, their level of English language proficiency and time in an Australian school. This targeted support, however, changed at the beginning of 2014 when a new neoliberal inspired resource allocation model was introduced in NSW schools. Under this new policy of *Local Schools, Local Decisions*, while the relative need for ESL support in each school will continue to be determined by an ESL Annual Survey, schools now receive funding rather than a teaching allocation and it is up to them to then determine how best to use their resources to meet the needs of their ESL students.

While there was a clear trend among respondents with less than six years' experience to have had training in other aspects of multicultural education compared to each of the other experience brackets (6–<15 years, 15–<25 years and 25 or more years), this was not the case with pre-service training in ESL. Here, there was little variation between those with less than 25 years of teaching experience, with the highest age bracket for pre-service training in this area being 6–<15 years (34.5%). The major variation in this area was for those with 25 or more years' experience, with only 18.6% of these teachers having pre-service qualifications in ESL. It seems to be far too early for either the NSWIT or AITSL professional standards relevant to ESL to have had any major impact on the teacher workforce, yet it is uncertain whether these would greatly increase the number of graduates with ESL qualifications anyway. AITSL simply requires graduates to 'demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds' (AITSL 2011, 5) and the NSWIT 'to demonstrate knowledge of a range of literacy strategies to meet the needs of all students' with one group being Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students (NSWIT 2005, 5).¹¹ In elaborated requirements for the mandatory areas for ITE in NSW, the NSWIT does provide a little more detail. It requires that programs ensure graduates have examined and

developed strategies in relation to linguistic minority students such as through ESL education but there is no stipulation from either body that teaching graduates require specific training in teaching ESL. If anything, the NSWIT standards may create confusion among trainee teachers as to just what the literacy needs of NESB/LBOTE students might be in listing them along with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, those with special education needs and students with challenging behaviours. Also, as mentioned, while literacy and ESL teaching are related they are not one and the same and problems emerge if specific needs around second language acquisition are not met (McKay 2001; Lo Bianco 2002; Miller and Windle 2010). The growing number of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds who have completed the greater part of their schooling in Australia and now experience major problems with academic literacy – the so-called Generation 1.5 – is testament to this (Thonus 2003; Benesch 2008; Williamson 2012).

Of those already in the profession, it was ESL teachers who were most likely to have had pre-service training in teaching ESL. At 49.1% of those surveyed, this was much higher than general classroom teachers at 27.6% and other specialist teachers at 24.4%. While it is to be expected that ESL teachers would have higher rates of pre-service training in this area, there are a considerable number – over a half of responding ESL teachers – who, on entering the profession, did not. Given that ESL teachers in NSW often fill fractional positions based on the number of ESL students in a school, this responsibility may be performed by teachers of other subjects without the requisite training. Yet, what is even more a concern is that only 27.6% of classroom teachers who responded had pre-service ESL training. In NSW in 2012, while 137,487 students were eligible for ESL (remembering support is allocated on student numbers in individual schools), only 86,661 actually received it. Over 46,000 ESL students, therefore, needed to have their ESL needs met within the mainstream by their classroom teacher, the vast majority of whom, in terms of respondents to this survey, had no pre-service training in ESL.

Respondents were also asked if they had any postgraduate training in either multicultural or ESL education. The latter fared much better here with 11.5% of respondents having ESL postgraduate qualifications compared to 7.1% in other aspects of multicultural education. There was no significant difference here between primary and secondary teachers and, as might be expected, it was the more experienced teachers who had undertaken postgraduate training in multicultural education, in particular those with 15 or more years' experience (15–<25 years at 8.2% and 25 or more years' experience at 7.7%). This is compared to 5.9% for 6–<15 years and just 4.4% for those with less than six years' experience.

Postgraduate training in other aspects of multicultural education also varied across position with ESL teachers (16.7%), more likely to have

undertaken this compared to non-teaching executive (7%) and classroom teachers (5.9%). In terms of postgraduate training in teaching ESL, once again it was the more experienced teachers who held these qualifications with 13.1% for those with over 25 years' experience, 12.6% for 15–25 years, 9.4% for 6–<15 years and 6.4% for those with less than six years' experience. Importantly, it was the ESL teachers among these respondents who were most likely to have these qualifications (61.2%) compared to classroom teachers (7.3%), teaching executive (6.6%) and non-teaching executive (9.3%). This finding is significant if read in conjunction with the number of ESL teachers with pre-service qualifications (49.1%). It would suggest that many who take up ESL positions without the required pre-service training, once in the profession, complete postgraduate study to acquire this expertise. It may also be indicative of a commitment to ongoing professional development among trained ESL teachers.

Data were also gathered on teachers' in-service professional learning on multicultural and ESL education. Respondents were asked to indicate if they had undertaken professional learning in any of the six areas of multicultural education shown in Table 1. A wide range of professional learning experiences were reported with 'incorporating anti-racism strategies' (59.2%) and 'teaching a culturally inclusive curriculum' (58.7%) being the most common. The high rate of professional learning in these related areas no doubt stems from the extensive training offered to teachers following the release of the NSW DEC's Anti-Racism Policy in 1992 and the revised policy in 2005. Those areas where professional learning was least common were 'teaching ESL' (38.5%) and 'teaching refugee students' (29.8%). Most worrying, however, is the 14.8% of respondents who indicated they had not engaged in any professional learning in any aspect of multicultural education.

When professional learning was observed across position (as shown in Table 1), more than one fifth of classroom teachers reported they had not undertaken any professional learning in these aspects of multicultural education compared to only 4.5% for non-teaching executive and 2.3% for ESL teachers. While it is the latter two groups who tend to take the lead on issues around multicultural education in schools, the relatively high percentage of classroom teachers without any professional learning in these areas is a matter of concern, particularly given the requirement in the Australian National Curriculum for all teachers to promote intercultural understanding across the curriculum which professional learning in these areas would support.

Data were also sought on teachers' professional learning needs in multicultural education and whether there was any variation between the perceived needs of early career teachers (ECTs) – that is, those with less than 6 years' experience – and those who are more experienced. Respondents felt ECTs had a range of professional learning needs in multicultural education

Table 1. Respondents' professional learning in multicultural education, NSW, 2011.

Aspects	Classroom Teachers	ESL Teachers	Other Specialist Teachers	Executive (Teaching)	Executive (Non-teaching)	Overall
Teaching ESL	30.3%	95.1%	34.5%	39.5%	42.5%	38.5%
Promoting positive community relations	45.0%	52.0%	53.2%	64.5%	75.4%	53.7%
Developing intercultural understanding	44.1%	58.3%	53.8%	53.6%	57.9%	49.8%
Teaching a culturally inclusive curriculum	52.0%	67.5%	57.4%	66.8%	69.9%	58.7%
Incorporating anti-racism strategies	49.7%	64.4%	55.5%	70.6%	81.2%	59.2%
Teaching refugee students	23.5%	63.8%	31.8%	30.7%	32.6%	29.8%
None	21.6%	2.3%	14.7%	8.3%	4.5%	14.8%

but it was ‘teaching ESL’ (34%) that was considered the most pressing in terms of first preferences. When respondents’ first three preferences were taken into account, it was ‘teaching a culturally inclusive curriculum’ (67.9%), ‘developing intercultural understanding’ (66.4%) and ‘teaching ESL’ (52.9%) that were identified as the top three areas of need. Teaching ESL was seen as a significantly higher professional learning need for ECTs in primary schools (41.6%) compared to those in secondary schools (27.9%). Once again, this may be a function of primary school teachers being seen, rightly or wrongly, as shouldering the major responsibility for the language and literacy education of all students in Kindergarten to Year 6 including ESL students, compared to teachers in secondary schools who may have different subject specialities and where IECs may be available to cater for the needs of new arrivals in metropolitan areas. When the top three preferences were taken into account, the professional learning needs for primary and secondary teachers were similar to those of the general population of respondents though ‘incorporating anti-racism strategies’ assumed greater significance, especially among secondary teachers.

Significant differences in professional development needs also emerged between schools located in the Sydney metropolitan area and those in regional NSW. All Sydney metropolitan schools indicated a strong preference for professional development in ‘teaching ESL’ while the first preferences for regional NSW schools differed, with much less variation between selections. When the top three preferences of respondents were taken into account, those in Sydney schools included ‘teaching a culturally inclusive curriculum’, ‘developing intercultural understanding’ and ‘teaching ESL’. The top three preferences for regional schools included ‘incorporating anti-racism strategies’ rather than ‘teaching ESL’ (with the exception of one region which included ‘promoting positive community relations’). These findings are largely a reflection of differences in student enrolments between schools in the Sydney metropolitan area and those in regional NSW. Given 90% of LBOTE students are located in the Sydney metropolitan area; it is understandable that teaching ESL is a pressing professional development need in these schools.

The timing of professional learning in multicultural education is also an important consideration. Respondents were asked when they felt the most effective time to receive this professional learning was such as: during their initial teacher training, the first years of teaching, once established in the profession through in-servicing or by undertaking postgraduate study. By far the highest first preference that respondents nominated was during their pre-service teacher qualification (34.3%). This is a significant finding as it demonstrates that those already in the profession feel far more training is required in multicultural education prior to entry to the profession. This result is also important in terms of what it reveals about ‘how’ this expertise should be acquired. Respondents were three times more likely to nominate

units of study rather than practicum teaching experience, suggesting these teachers felt there were theoretical understandings that beginning teachers needed around multicultural education that cannot be gleaned from the ‘hands-on’ experience of practicum. In fact, teachers nominated mentoring and teaching experience in the first years as more effective times to learn about multicultural education than their pre-service practicum. Also, the combined total of first preferences for ‘through mentors in the first years of teaching’ (18.2%), ‘through teaching experience in the first years’ (17.2%) and through ‘in-service professional development’ (16.8%) at 52.2% suggest respondents felt professional learning in multicultural education needed to be ongoing and not simply a bank of knowledge and skills acquired during their initial teacher training. Similar results were recorded for primary and secondary school teacher respondents with consistency in findings across metropolitan and regional areas.

Practices around multicultural education in NSW schools

The survey also sought to gather data on the ways in which multicultural education is practised in schools, asking respondents for their perceptions of the needs of LBOTE students, the goals of multicultural education and their knowledge of policy implementation. Over 70% of survey respondents indicated that LBOTE students had particular learning or support needs with a further 26.2% feeling this was sometimes the case. Of these respondents, 64.8% believed the most important area of need for these students was ‘English language and literacy’, far ahead of the other needs listed in Table 2. The figure for English language and literacy, however, rose to 90% when respondents’ top three preferences were taken into account, with very

Table 2. The most important areas of need for LBOTE students, NSW, 2011.

Areas of Need	Primary		Secondary		Overall	
	% 1 st pref.	% 1–3 pref.	% 1 st pref.	% 1–3 pref.	% 1 st pref.	% 1–3 pref.
English language & literacy	63.2%	89.5%	65.9%	88.5%	64.8%	90.0%
Content knowledge in particular subject areas	3.5%	38.4%	4.7%	42.7%	4.1%	40.4%
Understanding of Australian society	6.5%	39.4%	7.7%	48.0%	7.4%	44.8%
First language instruction/maintenance	6.5%	28.4%	3.7%	18.4%	5.3%	24.2%
Developing a sense of inclusion & belonging	15.2%	65.9%	12.7%	66.1%	14.7%	67.6%
Recognition of cultural identity	3.1%	31.8%	3.2%	27.1%	3.3%	30.2%
No response		2.1%		2.1%		0.4%

little variation in response between primary school teachers and secondary teachers. This is significant especially when considered in conjunction with the professional learning needs of teachers already discussed. The majority of respondents not only felt that LBOTE students have English language and literacy needs but many of these teachers indicated that they lack the necessary expertise in teaching ESL to assist these students. Also significant is that, while both primary and secondary teachers see English language and literacy as an area of need for LBOTE students, it was primary teachers who were more likely to nominate ESL as a professional development need, suggesting many secondary teachers may feel this is not their responsibility.

While English language and literacy was by far the most commonly identified area of need for LBOTE students, when respondents' first three preferences were taken into account 'developing a sense of inclusion and belonging' rose to 67.6% with very little variation once again between the responses of primary teachers and secondary teachers. Respondents, therefore, not only felt that key skills such as literacy were important for LBOTE students but that they needed to develop strong affective ties to their school and the broader community. 'Developing all students' intercultural understanding' and 'teaching a culturally inclusive curriculum' would no doubt assist LBOTE students' sense of inclusion. It is interesting, therefore, that, as with literacy and teaching ESL, students' needs in terms of belonging closely mirror teachers' professional learning needs around ways this could be achieved. Yet, cultural inclusion should not be perceived as something quite distinct from improving LBOTE students' English language and literacy and their overall academic achievement, both arguably more concrete indicators of belonging that challenge forms of structural inequality. In fact, when respondents were asked what they felt was the most effective means of fostering cultural inclusiveness, it was 'improving all students' academic outcomes' (78.9%) that was the most highly rated. Other strategies such as 'implementing anti-racism' (74.7%) and 'improving intercultural relations among students' (77.9%), more obviously associated with promoting inclusiveness, were also rated highly. Overall, respondents indicated there were various ways that cultural inclusiveness was fostered but together they seemed allied around the promotion of ethics and equity.

This focus on ethics and equity is similarly evident in the survey responses about the goals of multicultural education shown in Table 3. While respondents rated a number of goals quite highly with 'developing proficiency in English language and literacy' (90.2%), 'giving all students equal chances to share in Australia's social, political and economic life' (89.5%) and 'achieving equity in student learning outcomes' (89%) the highest rated, these goals have both an ethical dimension and a clear intent around equity. In relation to this, respondents were also asked if they felt there were differences in the academic achievement of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. More than three quarters of the

Table 3. Opinion on the goals of multicultural education, NSW, 2011.

Goals	% Important
Developing shared social values	77.2%
Achieving equity in student learning outcomes	89.0%
Giving students the right to maintain and develop their cultural heritage	73.0%
Giving all students equal chances to share in Australia's social, political and economic life	89.5%
Combating racism and discrimination	89.6%
Developing students proficiency in English language and literacy	90.2%
Developing harmonious cross-cultural relations and intercultural understanding	88.2%
Developing a commitment to Australian identity	67.8%
Fostering of skills in languages other than English	44.9%
Averages	78.8%

research population (77.4%) believed differences were evident while 10.5% did not and a further 10.4% did not know. The survey did not focus on differences between students from particular cultural or linguistic groups, nor on whether the differences signalled under or over achievement, but instead sought respondents' perspectives on what might be the reasons behind this differential achievement. While a number of factors were considered important by those who felt differences were evident, English language proficiency again featured prominently at 86.5%. Proficiency in English seemed a recurrent issue in the survey. Respondents not only identified it as an important area of need for LBOTE students, a chief goal of multicultural education and, teaching ESL an area in which many felt they required professional development, but it was also seen as a key rationale for the differential achievement of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, well in advance of factors such as socio-economic background and behavioural issues. The importance attributed to the relation of language proficiency and SES to academic achievement, however, varied across schools. It was evident that as the average SES of a school increased, the impact of the SES of specific groups declined and the importance of English language proficiency increased, with some levelling out in the more affluent schools. Other factors that respondents felt contributed to the differential academic achievement of LBOTE students were parents' attitude to education and the support they provided. Both of these factors were not only judged to be of similar significance to English language proficiency but remained consistently high across schools of varying SES.

Parents' involvement in their children's education has long been recognised as having a significant impact on students' academic performance (Toomey 1996; Perry-Indermaur 2004; Epstein et al. 2009). This involvement occurs in various forms: Parents and Citizens association activities, fundraising, canteen

duty, acting as a helper for children's reading, through to parents assisting their children with their homework. Parents' level of involvement, however, differs markedly and respondents to the survey were asked whether they felt this was the case with parents from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Over 80% of respondents were of the view that parents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds did display different levels of involvement in their children's school, while only 6.3% indicated there was no difference and 10.2% did not know. While respondents felt there were various reasons for this, 'English language proficiency' (86.8%) was considered the most significant followed by 'different understandings of Australian schooling' (73.9%) and 'cultural values' (71.8%). Although it is not possible to determine if respondents felt cultural values were having a positive or negative impact, clearly there is evidence that English language proficiency and understanding of Australian schooling may be inhibiting parents' participation in their children's education. In terms of who should shoulder the major responsibility for engaging LBOTE parents in school activities, most respondents felt it was firstly, the principal (82%) and secondly, the ESL teacher (76.4%). While there were relatively high percentages for all parties – classroom teachers (73.8%), parent associations (72.6%), Community Liaison Officer (71.6%) and LBOTE parents (65.8%) – suggesting a shared responsibility, overall, respondents felt the onus lay more with the school rather than parents.

Encouraging LBOTE parents' participation in their child's education and broader school activities is not only an issue of ethics and equity linked to broader goals around multicultural education; it is also mandated by policy. The NSW DEC's (2005a) Multicultural Education Policy requires schools to promote positive engagement with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds and outlines a number of responsibilities in relation to multicultural provisions such as providing a culturally inclusive curriculum and ESL programs for LBOTE students.¹² Responses to survey questions about whether or not this policy had been read and implemented however, suggests many teachers may not be aware of these policy requirements. Almost half of respondents (46%) indicated they had not read the policy with classroom teachers (45%) and other specialist teachers (44.7%), the two groups least likely to have done so. While non-teaching executive (71.7%) and ESL teachers (73.3%) were far more likely to have read the policy, overall there were still a considerable number of respondents who had not. The likelihood of respondents having read the document increased with years of teaching and there was little variation in readership across regions. What is perhaps more of a concern than policy readership, however, is that 43.4% of respondents did not know whether it had been implemented in their school. Knowledge of the policy's implementation did increase with years of teaching and there was also some variation across positions, yet, the most disconcerting finding was that almost 40% of non-teaching executive staff – those responsible for policy implementation in their school – had either not

implemented the Multicultural Education Policy or were uncertain if they had done so.

The other policy document of relevance to multicultural education in NSW is the NSW DEC's (2005b) Anti-Racism Policy. In comparison to the multicultural education policy, this policy had been read far more widely by respondents with 80.2% indicating they had done so. While increased rates of readership were evident across all positions, non-teaching executive (94.8%), teaching executive (91.3%) and ESL teachers (84.8%) were the three highest. The likelihood of respondents having read the policy also increased with years of teaching. Respondents also indicated greater awareness of the Anti-Racism Policy having been implemented at their school with 76% indicating this was the case. Knowledge of whether or not the policy had been implemented, however, varied considerably across positions. While only 4.7% of non-teaching executive were unsure about implementation, there were still quite large numbers of classroom teachers (24.6%) who did not know. Certainty of whether the Anti-Racism Policy had been implemented at their school increased with respondents' years of teaching.

Conclusion

This first large-scale survey of NSW public school teachers around issues of multicultural education, at a time in which Australian schools are faced with increasing cultural and linguistic complexity and multiculturalism as public policy is confronted with similar challenges, yielded some significant findings. While much of the literature focuses on teachers in Australia as a predominantly Anglo workforce – and respondents indicated this is still very much the case – the survey revealed the cultural profile of NSW public school teachers is far more complex than generally acknowledged with enormous variation in the ways in which teachers described their own cultural backgrounds and ancestries demonstrating a shift towards greater cultural diversity within the profession. There is similarly considerable linguistic diversity among teachers with respondents nominating 97 different LOTEs as their first language suggesting an untapped resource which educational authorities could make use of in expanding the limited teaching of LOTE in public schools in Australia (Sydney Morning Herald 2011). Together with these changes in the nature of the teacher workforce, the survey provided important insights into the preparedness and levels of expertise of teachers in meeting the needs of increasing CALD school populations and equipping all students with the capacities to navigate a similar complexity within the broader Australian community. Despite increasing numbers of beginning teachers having pre-service training in aspects of multicultural education, a good number of teachers did not and nor had they undertaken any professional learning in this area throughout their careers.

Such findings indicate a far greater emphasis needs to be placed on examining these issues in ITE in Australia and also once teachers have entered the profession through on-going professional development. Without doing so, there is no guarantee the teacher workforce possess the necessary expertise to adequately deal with the rapidly changing demographics within Australian schools and the educational and social challenges these pose.

Expertise in teaching ESL was also lacking among mainstream classroom teachers despite many students only receiving this support within the mainstream. While a gap in terms of many teachers' initial training, the majority of respondents to this survey also identified teaching ESL as their most pressing professional learning need in the area of multicultural education. In fact issues around English language proficiency featured prominently in teacher responses. It was also nominated as the greatest area of need for LBOTE students, an issue inhibiting LBOTE parents' involvement in their children's education and as one of the key goals of multicultural education, namely that English language proficiency provided the means for social access and effective academic performance. With the neoliberal trend towards decentralising government funding of multicultural and ESL programs in NSW resulting in schools shouldering much of the responsibility for how they are supported, it is possible that less rather than more emphasis will be placed on these issues and areas of increasing need in schools. Rather than governments limiting their influence in this area of civic responsibility, multicultural and ESL programs in schools require additional support, particularly in terms of developing the expertise – through pre-service training and ongoing professional learning of teachers – responsible for their implementation. Greater government support of multicultural education is also required in the area of policy implementation. Many respondents to the survey in executive, classroom and ESL teacher positions had limited knowledge of government policies designed to guide practice in this area. With schools as important sites in which values and understandings around cultural diversity are formed, it is imperative that teachers possess the necessary professional capacities to assist students in making sense of the multicultural society in which they live ensuring a sense of civic belonging and social inclusion that provide the basis for an equitable and fair polity. The results of this survey suggest more needs to be done in terms of multicultural education within an Australian context, particularly given it the teachers themselves who are indicating this is the case.

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Notes

1. The term ESL (English as a second language) is used in this article rather than EAL (English as an additional language). While the latter is perhaps more accurate, ESL was the term used in the survey and is the term with greater currency in NSW schools at this point in time.
2. The Melbourne Declaration set the direction for schooling in Australia for 10 years from its release in 2008. The goals were developed by Education Ministers from Federal, State and Territory levels of government in Australia.
3. During the course of the project, the New South Wales Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) was joined with the New South Wales Board of Studies (NSWBoS) to become the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES). In this article NSWIT is used instead of the more recent BOSTES.
4. In Australia, education is delivered at a state and territory level. NSW's education system is the second largest state system in the world, as most other education systems around the world are delivered at a district/regional level.
5. All data and findings from the survey can be found within the project's survey report located at: www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/542212/RMRME_Report_1.pdf. The survey form is an appendix item of the report.
6. Due to variations in how respondents reported their language background, Chinese languages, primarily Mandarin and Cantonese, were grouped together.
7. This discussion is taken up in two other RMRME project reports that draw upon focus group data and the evaluation of teacher-led action research in 14 project schools (see <http://www.multiculturaleducation.edu.au/>).
8. All state and territories have agreed to adopt the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. In NSW these standards have been progressively implemented since 2013.
9. The Australian National Curriculum was introduced to ensure a consistency in education across all states and territories in Australia. Further information can be found through ACARA (2013) at: <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au>.
10. The NSW DEC defines first phase ESL learners as 'students whose understanding and production of spoken or written English is obviously limited in all social and educational situations. First phase students range from complete beginners with minimal or no English to students who can communicate in English with limited fluency about events, themes and topics related to their personal experiences' (NSW DET 2004, 6).
11. The NSWIT has a second standard for graduate teachers related to LBOTE students, namely that they 'Demonstrate knowledge, respect and understanding of the social, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds of students and how these factors may affect learning' (NSWIT 2005, 4). This standard, however, has more relevance to multicultural education more broadly rather than teaching ESL.
12. Implementation of the NSW DEC Multicultural Education Policy, previously known as the Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Policy: Multicultural Education in Schools Policy, commenced in December, 2005.

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