IMMIGRATION AND EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA: SHORT-TERM FIXES OR LONG-TERM GAINS?

**CHRISTINE FOX AND ROBYN IREDALE
UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

INTRODUCTION

Recent changes in immigration policy in Australia have led to an emphasis on the selection of immigrants based on economic and social utility criteria. Since the early 1990s, over half of Australia's immigrant intake is now originating from Asian countries, and approximately 20 per cent of Australia's population speak a language other than English as their first language. In inner city schools of large metropolitan areas, the percentage of school-age population who identify as from a non-English speaking background varies from about 30 per cent to over 90 per cent.

The short-term impact of immigration policy for schools, post-secondary training and higher education is mostly felt in certain parts of the wider metropolitan regions. But the major effects of immigration on education and training are more global, and are long term and cumulative. For individuals who for the first time face schooling or adult education and training in Australia, the difficulties of participating may be compounded by their isolation from language services and by their inability to find employment. Families who have second generation participants in the education system are finding themselves edged out of training and employment opportunities by new policies and practices. Many are becoming increasingly marginalised socially and economically, in spite of the rhetoric of promoting an appreciation of cultural diversity.

What has changed since the height of the debate in the early 1980s? This paper will look at the findings from a recent report which examined changes in education and training over the last decade in New South Wales (Iredale, Fox & Sherlaimoff 1994). Within the paper there are comparisons of Australia's form of multiculturalism with perceptions of ethnicity and education in Canada, the United Kingdom and the USA. The very contrasts in these perceptions of what constitutes cultural diversity is a telling reflection on Homi Bhabha's observation that

the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image (Bhabha 1994, p. 45).

It will be seen in this paper that the question of student identity is often subverted in Australian education policy by arguments relating to the teaching of English as a Second Language, as if there are no intersections or differences in culture and class, or in gender and ethnicity.

THE CONTEXT OF “IMMIGRANT”

The debate over immigration policy in Australia appears in the historical literature from the day that European colonisers started to encroach on Aboriginal land. Recent debate tends to assume that the “new wave” of Asian migrants since the late 1970s, and particularly in the early 1990s is an entirely different phenomenon. The meaning of “Asian” is itself very seldom debated, although gradually third- or fourth-generation Anglo-Australians are beginning to differentiate between, say, a person from Lebanon, from the Philippines, from Pakistan or from Vietnam. Not all situations are culturally or socially interpreted, however. For example, in most classrooms, teachers sadly have very little experience in understanding the possibly very different needs of a child from a rural Cambodian family or a child from a Vietnamese business family, both refugees, yet each with very individual experiences and very personal differences.

The slowly emerging cultural understandings in Australia are comparable with those in the Canada or the USA (Hawkins 1991; Ghosh and Tarrow 1993), yet they are very different in interpretation. As Giroux (1992) points out, political and cultural boundaries are shifting, and the idea of “race” has radically changed as groups who used to be “Other” are moving from the margin to the centre.

The legacies of anticolonial and postcolonial struggles have ruptured the ability of Eurocentric discourses to marginalize and erase the many-faceted voices of those Others who have struggled under the yoke of colonial oppression (Giroux 1992, p. 111)

Immigrant, or outsider, in Australia is defined more by language background than by colour, although to be either black or “oriental” in

appearance may symbolise immigrant status in the eyes of many Anglo-Australians. As John Thompson (1992) stresses, the production and reception of symbolic forms are processes that take place within structured social contexts. In the structured context of an Australian classroom, the reception by children of texts about immigrants is produced in a situation where Anglo interpretations are dominant.

Much of the literature of the 1980s explores the idea of immigrant adaptation to a dominant culture, and the need for multiculturalism to include multicultural perspectives from the dominant culture's vision. The sense of dialogue, recognising and working with different voices to reach a mutual understanding has only emerged in the late 1980s and is still in its infancy. One of the most respected works in the 1980s, for example, was that by Young Yun Kim (1988). Kim's work in the United States on adaptation theory explores the assimilationist and pluralist ideologies as part of the adaptation process. Her concern is not whether individuals need to adapt but how they adapt, and how the 'internal transformation of an individual [is] challenged by a new cultural environment in the direction of increasing fitness and compatibility in that environment' (Kim 1988, p. 9).

The processes described by Kim are one-way, whereas the process of intercultural communication needs to be two-way. Families who have lived for generations in Australia have the same adaptation processes to encounter as they view a different face of Australia.

Cultural diversity and the identity of an "Australian" are debates as vigorous today as they were a hundred years ago.

ECONOMIC POLICY AND IMMIGRATION

The increased emphasis being attached by the Australian government to the economic benefits of immigration implies that the economic potential of all migrants must be properly nurtured and tapped. This is in keeping with an emphasis on international competitiveness, demonstrated in part through education policy. The introduction of alternative pathways through education and training, of commercial and competitive elements into aspects of education and training, of competency based training and skills assessment and enterprise bargaining have all occurred in the last decade, if not the last few years.

Given the number of families who are first or second generation immigrants, and given the economic rationale for "tapping" skills and talents of immigrants, the provision for immigrants has come under

closer scrutiny than was achieved through the fairly *laissez faire* attitude of multicultural advice. Even so, an analysis of current policy indicates that it still devotes most of its efforts to language training, particularly English language training, although there is a new push for teaching languages other than English which have perceived advantages for trade and work.

The economic impact of immigration is a long-term change, since actual numbers of people arriving in any one year is relatively small. If those permanently leaving the country are considered, the net permanent gain in Australia was 48 425 in 1992-93, a significant drop from 78 269 in 1991-92, compared with 44 510 in 1983-84, where the proportion of departures over arrivals was a high 35 per cent (27 per cent in 1991-92).

The most outstanding change that has occurred in the 1980s in the immigration intake has been in the source regions of immigrants. While the UK remained the top source country for Australian immigration, the percentage of total settler arrivals fell from 31 per cent in 1981-82 to 14 per cent in 1991-92. By comparison, the percentage of immigrants from Northeast Asia rose from 5 to 20 per cent of the overall intake, and southern Asia's contributions increased from 7 to 10 per cent. In 1991-92, Hong Kong topped the list in terms of permanent net gain with 12 per cent of arrivals. Vietnam occupied third place among the source countries with 9 per cent of arrivals. Overall, net permanent gain from countries of Southeast, Northeast and Southern Asia was 67 per cent of the total in 1991-92.

Another aspect of immigration of economic significance is the growth in temporary migration to and from Australia. While in 1990-91 more than 100 000 people entered as permanent arrivals, fifteen times that number of visas, that is, more than 1.5 million, were issued to overseas residents entering Australia on a temporary basis (Sloan & Kennedy 1992, p. 4).

There has been a steady increase in the emphasis of maintaining a sharper economic focus for immigration policy. The FitzGerald report (CAALP 1988) recommended that most immigrants should be accepted under a category that emphasised skills, languages, educational levels and youth. The report came under sharp criticisms from the ethnic lobby because of its assimilationist rhetoric (Jupp 1991, p.118). Nevertheless, the federal government took on board many of the report's recommendations. In 1989 the government's Office of Multicultural Affairs issued the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia *Sharing our Future* (OMA 1989), which identified three main

dimensions of multicultural policy, of which one was economic efficiency. The other two were related to cultural identity and social justice.

In the 1990s, almost half of Australia's immigrants are admitted under the two family migration categories, and family reunion has been a priority of successive governments. In 1991-92, family migration accounted for 45.3 per cent of settler arrivals (BIR 1993, p. 33). The second category is Skill Migration, where applicants are assessed and awarded points for employability, skills, education and age. This group made up 37.6 per cent of the total intake. The third component is the refugees, Humanitarian and Special Assistance category. This accounted for 6.7 per cent of settler arrivals in 1991-92.

The nature of the impact of changes in immigration policy on numbers and the composition of the intake, and the consequences that flow from this for education and training, were the subject of the research conducted in 1993-1994 (Iredale & Fox with Sherlaimoff 1994). The discussion was centred around the most populous state, New South Wales, but since about 40 per cent of all immigrants come to New South Wales, the findings will have relevance for other States, in general terms, if not in specific patterns of change. The major findings that emerged were analyzed under six headings:

1. changing demographic patterns in NSW;
2. language policy and programs;
3. curriculum development and implementation;
4. access, participation and equity;
5. teacher requirements; and
6. data collection, monitoring and liaison.

1. Changing demographic patterns in New South Wales

Between 1980 and 1993, the population of NSW underwent considerable and continuing demographic shifts in terms of countries of birth of its new arrivals. Shifts in birthplace composition and balance of immigration categories have placed new demands on education and training systems in all sectors and require flexible long term planning. Even though absolute numbers of new settlers have fallen, there is an increase in demand for educational support and training opportunities. There is a serious unmet demand for higher levels of literacy and language training (including the number of Australian-born NESB students), and for a change in curriculum and in teacher education.

In schools, children from immigrant families where the country of origin has a national language other than English are counted as 'Non-English Speaking Background' (NESB), and as requiring language instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL). Immigrants from English speaking backgrounds are counted when they first arrive, but are not given consideration for any special settling in program. Funding for schools is calculated on ESL requirements, either per capita for new arrivals, or general support for ESL in a school.

Numbers are identified by language other than English spoken at home, not by birthplace. The overall per cent of NESB students at school is around 17 per cent, but this varies considerably, reaching over 50 per cent in many metropolitan areas and over 90 per cent in some schools. Between 1986 and 1991, there was a 23.5 per cent increase in NSW in the number of NESB students. This compares with a drop in the number of ESB students by 3.4 per cent.

The diversity within many schools has and is continuing to increase. Non-government schools have experienced a decline in NESB students from European backgrounds and an increase in NESB students from other countries. This parallels the change in government schools where the four major language groups in 1992 were Arabic, Chinese, Greek and Vietnamese-speakers compared with Greek, Arabic, Italian and Chinese, in descending order, in 1986.

Beyond school, it was found that the participation rate of 15 to 19 year olds in education and training, although it varied widely by home language, was higher for all non-English-speaking background groups (with the exception of Oceanic language speaking 15-19 year olds) than for English-background speakers. This may be due to a range of factors such as job opportunities, recency of arrival, parental expectations, cultural background and access to pathways to education and training. The finding also takes no account of outcomes of participation in post-compulsory education and training. Participation in the work force by comparison, was very different. Among the long term unemployed, a far higher per cent of NESB adults are registered than the rest of the population.

In the technical and further education sector (TAFE) overall, the proportion of students who speak a language other than English at home has gradually increased to 14.7 per cent in 1992. This figure is likely to be an underestimation of the NESB proportion. NESB students in TAFE are concentrated in certain Training Divisions: 71 per cent were in Foundation Studies; Pre-vocational; Business Services and Engineering Services. This indicates a considerable problem in either

the accreditation system for special purpose courses, creating a barrier for further progress, or a problem in the way in which students can be traced across courses. In 1994, some adjustments within TAFE show preliminary signs of greater accessibility for NESB student study paths into other divisions.

The Australian Commonwealth Government provision to TAFE for ESL related courses is inadequate. Statistics from 1993 identify 22 per cent of NESB enrolments as requiring ESL tuition. Immediate special needs of new arrivals and longer-term special needs based on patterns of settlement have indicated gaps in equity, gaps in provision of appropriate curriculum, and gaps in ESL assistance.

In higher education, The NESB proportion was 22.8 per cent in 1992, comprising both overseas students and first and subsequent generation NESB immigrants. Indonesian Malay, Korean, Chinese languages, Greek and Vietnamese-speakers showed the highest participation rates in higher education, while Italian, Arabic, Turkish, German and Filipino language speakers had the lowest.

The participation pattern of NESB higher education students displayed strong preferences for specific fields of studies—students speaking Chinese languages favoured Business/Administration/Economics, Vietnamese-speakers gravitated to Science and Arabic-speakers to Engineering/Surveying and Science. Overseas students made up 5.3 per cent of university enrolments in NSW in 1992 and of these, 72 per cent were full fee paying. There is a preference for Business/Administration/Economics courses amongst fee paying students.

There is also a changing participation pattern for adults requiring English and other work related skills training which is provided by the Adult Migrant English Service. In 1992, 53 per cent of NSW AMES clients were born in Asia and a further 19 per cent in the Middle East. In 1992, the largest language groups were Vietnamese, Cantonese, Arabic, Mandarin and Spanish. For new settlers, participation rates in NSW AMES programs varied widely by gender, country of birth and migrant entry category. It appears that the backlog of unmet demand for literacy and ESL-related courses is disadvantaging a large percentage of NESB adults who have been in the country for some time and are unable to participate in AMES because of a new policy of enrolling in the first few months of arriving in Australia. Here is the crux of the problem—it appears to be a case of being quick off the mark or else.

2. Language policy and programs

The Commonwealth and States have responded to the impact of immigration with policies related to access and equity, but the programs emanating from such policies have not always met the needs and demands that exist. Emphasis is increasingly being placed on the diagnosis and assessment of levels of English language proficiency and literacy, both for adults and for school-age students. Changes in immigration patterns (for example increased flows from Eastern Europe in 1992) have led to a change in demand for specific ESL-related courses in TAFE. This has impacted on the availability of some courses for more traditional clients, that is longer term residents.

Across all education systems, it was found that there is a serious gap between the identified need for ESL services in educational institutions and the provision of programs. State and Commonwealth governments both have funding for ESL. The Commonwealth has two funding elements, that for New Arrivals and a General Support element. In spite of such support, the gap between supply and demand is increasing. This is particularly noticeable for students requiring higher levels of English language proficiency. For example, in the NSW school system, nearly 42 per cent of government high school NESB students, and 69 per cent in the Catholic system, who require ESL instruction at some level of proficiency, particularly proficiency levels beyond basic literacy, do not receive any special assistance. In the primary school system, children who do not live in areas with a high NESB percentage must rely on itinerant teachers. In kindergarten, many children are not helped at all with ESL because they come from families who do not speak English at home, but who have been in the country for some time, and therefore the schools do not receive any Commonwealth funding from their New Arrivals Program, and may not have asked for Commonwealth General Support funding.

Although it would be expected that policies on the learning of languages other than English (LOTE) would be driven by immigration trends, this is not the case. Priority languages in 1994 are concentrating on Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian and Korean, clearly a link with trading possibilities more than on community languages. Moreover, LOTE policy of encouraging priority and community languages stretches current resources and levels of LOTE teacher supply beyond current capacity.

There is a tension between community demand for LOTE programs (which would reflect changing immigration patterns) and economic imperatives. Participation rates in the learning of languages other than English have dropped in the last decade in Australia, in spite of increased attention to language policy at all levels, the increased recognition of the political and economic importance of languages other than English and the question of rights in relation to language maintenance and learning. The situation is such that many languages other than English have not been reinforced in immigrant children or taught to second generation immigrant children. The role of some languages, such as Macedonian, Croatian and Serbian, as an economic resource and in cultural maintenance is being lost. In spite of Commonwealth and NSW State Government policies on access and equity the needs of ethnic communities and their demands for community language maintenance and teaching are not being met.

3. Curriculum development and implementation

While research exists in cross-cultural education and policies on curriculum have shifted to relate to a multicultural society, it takes time to update or change resources and practice at individual schools, TAFE colleges, AMES centres and higher education institutions. While some educational establishments and systems have responded creatively and skilfully to their changing enrolments, and others have perceived the need for change in schools where Anglo-Australians are still the majority, the process is unacceptably slow and dishearteningly racist.

The NSW Multicultural Education Strategic Plan released in 1992 for 1993-97 (NSW DSE 1992) places an increased emphasis on anti-racism and anti-harassment policies and strategies across all systems. Nevertheless, there are still gaps in staff development programs for implementing these. As Ghosh argues in relation to multicultural education in Canada, multicultural education addresses the problem of discrimination based on perceptions of difference of race/ethnicity, gender and class. Yet policy and practice tends to focus only on strategies to accommodate differences within the existing traditional structure, and not on strategies for a changed and culturally diverse society (Ghosh in press).

In *Cultures of Schooling* (Kalantzis et al. 1990) six case studies are described to show ways in which schools have responded to their multicultural school populations. Some of these schools have developed

courses for students who are not achieving in the mainstream courses, including many immigrant students. Kalantzis et al. argue that this strategy tends to remove NESB students from opportunities for further education and they attribute the low achievement rates of many NESB students to the schools' so-called progressive inquiry approach. They maintain that separating off the NESB students means that they do not have the same access to resources and inside knowledge as their Anglo counterparts. Many other studies have explored the school experiences of particular migrant groups and found problems were not only related to perception of ethnicity; they also concerned discrimination by gender and by class (e.g. Brookes 1985).

A case study undertaken in Wollongong in 1994 by Paulin Shankar indicates that the teachers she observed in two schools still do not "see" the need to approach their classes as multicultural sites (Shankar 1994). They still tend to use reading materials for children which are heavily Anglo oriented and often racist in focus or stereotyping the "Other". They still do not seem to be aware of special needs of NESB children. She records a number of critical incidents in the primary Year 5 classrooms where children with ESL backgrounds failed to receive feedback in their writing and story times because they were unable to finish their stories in the same time as their Anglo counterparts (Shankar 1994, p. 92). Similarly, when they were given tests, the children consistently spent more time in reading the questions than their Anglo counterparts, yet were not given any special consideration and were thus unable to complete their tests in the allotted times (ibid, p. 93).

While this evidence points to considerable disadvantages experienced by NESB children, and similar disadvantages are evident in higher education (Pe Pua 1994), families of NESB immigrants are participating in education at all levels at a greater rate than families (recent immigrants or those with several generations in Australia) whose first language is English. In addition, with the emphasis on encouraging settlers with, Business Skills and other qualifications, there is a perceived higher success rate for some more elite immigrants, especially those who are full fee paying or who have families from professional backgrounds. Even so, these students suffer from discrimination and racism because of perceived ethnic/racial differences, and they find teaching methods, curriculum materials and attitudes difficult to deal with (Pe Pua 1994). Curriculum practice, and access and equity are closely aligned.

4. Access, participation and equity

Successful participation and learning outcomes for immigrants require adequate access to education and training. New pathways for students are increasingly available between systems, and within systems, providing more options for participation. As noted earlier in this paper, it was found in our report (Iredale and Fox 1994) that this is only just beginning to apply in TAFE. At the same time, many students require more flexibility of access. For example, many groups within the immigrant intake, such as refugees and their children, and immigrant women, have special needs which impact on all systems.

It is clear that more resources for specialist teachers and more education of mainstream lecturers and teachers are needed. Resource limitations only provide some of the explanation. As Marginson pointed out (1993, p. 246), since the end of the 1970s educational institutions in Australia have been required to do more with the same level of financial resources. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has shown that Australian public school education is under-funded by international standards, ranking 18th out of 20 OECD countries surveyed.

But why have there been resource limitations? The lack of realisation of the importance of diversity, the undervaluation of the rights of difference, fear of the unknown and a level of racism which incorporates a view of what is superior, have "been responsible. On the other hand, students must be given equitable access to the core subjects of maths, language and sciences, 'disciplines which are socially and vocationally empowering' (Marginson 1993, p. 243)." But knowledge is culturally specific and therefore equitable access may not lead to equitable outcomes. For this reason, the need to provide a diversity of curriculums or to modify curriculums away from the traditional Anglo-Australian, middle class, male-dominated norm is essential. Failure to do this will relegate some social groups, including some groups of immigrants, to inferior socio-economic positions in Australian society.

5. Teacher requirements

One of the more distressing findings was the apparent failure of universities to expect their preservice teachers to be specifically trained to work in classrooms which are culturally diverse, or to understand how to develop lessons which cater for such classrooms. A survey of universities in NSW showed that few offer more than an

elective in ESL, and none of the universities which responded to the inquiry had separate subjects in their Education faculties specifically dealing with multicultural strategies, anti-racism, intercultural communication or ethnic studies.

The numbers of specialist ESL teachers in schools, TAFE and higher education is far from adequate. Moreover, there has been limited attempt, on the whole, to draw on the expertise of overseas teachers who speak languages other than English and come from different cultural backgrounds. Key administrative personnel are predominantly drawn from English-speaking backgrounds.

In comparison with some of the data emerging from other countries, it appears that Australia may have made a similar effort to increase the number of teachers enrolling in post-graduate ESL courses and to conduct whole school/college staff development programs in ESL. But it is not language which is fundamental to teaching needs in multicultural societies. As Ghosh and Tarrow found in the USA and Canada:

no amount of curriculum material can make a significant difference if teachers, who present and translate the material, do not have the knowledge, attitude and commitment to the ideological change implied in equity and justice (Ghosh and Tarrow 1993, p. 81).

6. Data collection and monitoring

An interesting finding from the research (Iredale & Fox with Sherlaimoff 1994) were the major discrepancies of data available about NESB students. The Australian Bureau of Statistics data do not tally with the Department of Employment, Education and Training data, which again are not always the same as that available to the NSW Department of School Education. It was found that there is a considerable undercounting of ESL learners in the education sectors. This is partly attributable to the reluctance of some families to "identify" themselves for fear of discrimination or differential treatment. The question of identity is crucial to an understanding of policy and practice and is the subject of a future paper (author, paper to be presented at the 1995 CES Conference, Boston).

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, the changes in immigration policy since 1947 have effected vast changes in Australian society and these are reflected in

schools and post-school enrolments. Recent changes in the composition of immigrant intake have impacted most directly in those metropolitan areas which have received a high percentage of new arrivals, allowing some schools to remain open, new schools to be established, and an increase in course demand.

Positive moves have recently been made in introducing anti-racism policies and establishing grievance resolution procedures in education sectors. This reflects current international moves to resolve the pressures of increased intercultural interaction. Policies are also needed to prioritise programs which inform society of cultural and global concerns and create positive attitudes towards diversity. Students and student teachers require far higher levels of global understanding and social literacy than they tend to receive in their core subjects, as do the teacher educators and other lecturers.

As Ghosh and Tarrow observe (1994, p. 85), "teacher education institutions have been slow to respond to change by assuming that student teachers either do not need to, or will automatically be able to deal with the wide range of cultural diversities in the classroom." Teachers are, of course, products of their own socialisation processes, and most teachers are still from families who have been in Australia for some time. The language of teacher education therefore still reflects the European academic discourses founded on nineteenth century classical knowledge structures. Until we develop a new, inclusive discourse, created from new metaphors of diversity, the tension will remain between the expectations and desires of the still dominant group and those of families who construct their Otherness from different stories.

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