PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES WITHIN COMPLEX AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE SCHOOL COMMUNITIES: LEARNING FROM PARENT, TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES

Submitted by

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Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

Aspects of the research presented in this thesis are works of joint research. The initial ethics applications, initial contact with schools and organisation of focus groups, relating to the first study presented in this thesis, were completed by the Enhancing Relationships in School Communities (ERIS): Talking Culture team. Ethics modifications were completed by the author to adapt the ERIS: Talking Culture project for the research presented in this thesis. The focus groups were conducted by pairs of ERIS researchers, as described in the acknowledgements and method. The remainder of the work is that of the author, with feedback from Professor Eleanor Wertheim (principal supervisor), Elizabeth Freeman (a member of the ERIS: Talking Culture team) and Dr Emiko Kashima (co-supervisor).

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the relevant Ethics Committees of La Trobe University, The University of Melbourne, the Department of Education and Training, and the Catholic Education Office Melbourne.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables .............................................................................................................................. v
List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... vii
List of Appendices .................................................................................................................. viii

Abstract ....................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: A Rationale for the Study of Cultural Diversity in Complex and Culturally Diverse School Communities.......................................................................................................................... 3
  Background to the Study............................................................................................................. 4
  Statement of the Issue ................................................................................................................. 5
  Purpose and Significance of the Research .................................................................................. 9
  Overview of the Research Methodology .................................................................................. 10
  Theoretical Context for the Study............................................................................................. 11
  Definition of Key Terms........................................................................................................... 13
  Summary................................................................................................................................... 16

Chapter 2: A Review of the Research on the Challenges and Practices Associated With Supporting People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds in Schools.............................................. 18
  An Introduction to Federal and Victorian Education Policy and School Guidance in Australia.................................................................................................................................... 21
  Supporting the Wellbeing of People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds.............................. 22
  Educating Students From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds ........................................................ 33
  Education About Culture and Cultural Diversity in School Curriculums ................................. 42
  A Whole School Model for Cultural Diversity......................................................................... 48
Chapter 3: Aims of the Current Research ................................................................. 52

Chapter 4: Method for Study One ............................................................................ 56
The Australian Context of the Study ......................................................................... 57
The Participating Schools .............................................................................................. 59
The Participants ........................................................................................................... 59
Procedure ..................................................................................................................... 61
Data Analysis ............................................................................................................... 63

Chapter 5: Parent Perspectives on Challenges and Practices in Culturally Diverse Schools... 65
Theme 1: Culture: It’s Hard to Explain if You Don’t Know What It Is ....................... 66
Theme 2: How Do Other Cultures Fit In? ................................................................ 70
Theme 3: Safety, Fun, Knowledge and Maybe Identity and Culture ....................... 76
Theme 4: Teaching for Culture and Supporting Difference Can Be Difficult ............ 82
Theme 5: Children Themselves Aren’t Racist. It’s What They’re Taught .................. 88
Theme 6: Our Schools are Very Supportive but How Parents Want to Engage With Their School Can Vary ................................................................. 93
Summary .................................................................................................................... 99

Chapter 6: School Staff Perspectives on Challenges and Practices in Culturally Diverse Schools .......................................................................................................... 101
Theme 1: A Pragmatic Perspective on Culture ............................................................. 102
Theme 2: Schools Support the Wellbeing of People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds but Don’t Do as Much To Educate for Culture ......................................................... 110
Chapter 10: General Discussion ............................................................... 225
Implications and Future Directions ......................................................... 228
Strengths and Limitations ...................................................................... 232
Conclusion ............................................................................................ 233

References ............................................................................................ 235
List of Tables

Table 4.1: Study One Participants: Parents………………………………………………60
Table 4.2: Study One Participants: School Staff…………………………………………61
Table 8.1: Parent, Teacher and Principal Perspectives on Challenges Schools Encounter as They Work to Support People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds Analysed Within the Whole School Approach to Cultural Diversity Model………………………………………………………………………………162
Table 8.2: Parent, Teacher and Principal Perspectives on Effective School Practices to Support People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds Within the Whole School Approach to Cultural Diversity Model………………………………………………………………………………174
Table 9.1: Participant Gender Distribution…………………………………………………198
Table 9.2: Participant Age Distribution……………………………………………………198
Table 9.3: Scale Reliability…………………………………………………………………….199
Table 9.4: Variable Descriptive Statistics…………………………………………………200
Table 9.5: Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scale Descriptive Statistics………………………………………………………………………………201
Table 9.6: Proportion of Responses in Each Rating Category for the Four Parent Engagement Scenarios and Mean Score of the Averaged Items for Those Scales……………………………………………………………………………………………..202
Table 9.7: Parent Engagement Scenario Comparisons on the Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scale………………………………………………………….....204
Table 9.8: Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scale Means by Scenario…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..204
Table 9.9: Correlations Between the Cultural Beliefs Scale, Language Attitudes Scale and Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scenario Scores……………206
Table 9.10: Hierarchical Regression Results of the Cultural Beliefs Scale and Language Attitudes Scale Predicting Scenario Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scores………………………………………………… 207

Table 9.11: Correlations Between Age, Years of Study, Years of Teaching, Perceived Cultural Diversity Experience, Hours of Cultural Diversity Training, Hours of Professional Development and Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scenario Scores………………………………………………………… 210

Table 9.12: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Cultural Beliefs Scale Scores From Years of Teaching and Perceived Cultural Diversity Experience…….. 211

Table 9.13: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scenario Scores in the Interpreter, Limited English and Other Culture Scenarios From Years of Study, Years Teaching, Perceived Cultural Diversity Experience, Training in Cultural Diversity and Hours of Professional Development in Cultural Diversity…………………… 213

Table 9.14: Participant Ratings of the Amount of Training They Have Received Relating to Working With Interpreters……………………………………………………….. 215

Table 9.15: Correlations Between School Climate, School Support, and Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scenario Scores…………………… 216

Table 9.16: Hierarchical Regression Results of Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Score, School Climate and Teacher Support Predicting Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scenario Scores……… 217

Table E.1: Changes From the Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale to the Adapted Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale……………………………………………………………………..286

Table E.2: The Language Attitudes of Teachers Scale……………………………………… 287

Table E.3: The Teacher Language Attitudes Scale……………………………………………… 287
List of Figures

Figure 2.1. A Whole School Approach to Cultural Diversity Adapted From Freeman et al. (2012) ........................................................................................................................................................................................................50
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Study One: Principals Plain Language Statement........................................260
Appendix B: Study One: Staff Plain Language Statement..............................................264
Appendix C: Study One: Parent Plain Language Statement...........................................267
Appendix D: Study Two: Survey.....................................................................................270
Appendix E: Changes to the Cultural Beliefs Scale and Language Attitudes of Teachers Scale
.........................................................................................................................................285
Appendix F: Study Two: Plain Language Statement for Principals.................................288
Appendix G: Study Two: Plain Language Statement for School Teachers.........................291
Appendix H: Study Two: Plain Language Statement for Student Teachers.......................294
Appendix I: Median and Interquartile Range Scores for Non-Normal Variables..............297
Abstract

This thesis, composed of two studies, sought to enhance our understanding of the challenges encountered and the practices employed within complex culturally diverse school communities, with the aim of helping schools to support their communities more effectively.

The first study investigated adult perspectives on the challenges that schools encountered and the practices perceived to be effective as they attempted to support people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Six schools from a highly culturally diverse and low socioeconomic status region of Melbourne, Australia participated. Focus groups were conducted with school staff \((n = 40)\) and parents \((n = 72)\), and interviews were conducted with school principals \((n = 6)\). Thematic analysis was conducted based on transcriptions of the focus groups and interviews. Findings indicated that the complex context in which the schools were situated created substantial challenges. However, participants thought that their schools were supportive and identified practices which they considered effective. Further analysis indicated that some participants held beliefs which may potentially limit the capacity of schools to support people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

A smaller pilot study investigated parent engagement challenges identified in the first study, examining the effects of teacher, parent and school characteristics on teacher perceptions about working with parents. An online survey was used to gather data on these variables, with teachers from three of the schools which participated in the first study \((n = 44)\) and additional teachers undertaking postgraduate training in teaching \((n = 18)\) completing the survey. Results indicated that cultural and linguistic differences were perceived as creating barriers to engagement and that cultural beliefs, training and experience predicted responses about engaging with parents.
The findings of this research suggested that school staff may benefit from further training focused on teaching in culturally diverse contexts and that schools may benefit from more resources.
Chapter One

A Rationale for the Study of Cultural Diversity in Complex and Culturally Diverse School Communities
Background to the Study

Since World War II Australia has become an increasingly diverse nation. The 2011 census revealed that 24.6 percent of the population residing in Australia were born overseas (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014), a significant change from the early to mid-20th century when only 10 to 15 percent of people residing in Australia were born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The nationalities represented by these figures have also changed dramatically. The 1947 census showed that most residents born overseas were from Britain, Europe, Canada or the United States, with less than 1% of the population from other countries and regions. In contrast, the 2011 census indicated that the proportion of non-European and Anglo immigrants has changed considerably, with approximately 11.5% of the residents in Australia being born in non-European and Anglo countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

This experience of change is not unique to Australia and it has been observed that many other countries around the world are also becoming increasingly culturally diverse (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2013; Freeman & Jupp, 1992; Jamrozik, Boland, & Urquhart, 1995) and that in many other western countries the nature of migration is also changing (Meissner & Vertovec, 2014). For example, in many western countries new arrivals are increasingly from countries in which the populations have low incomes and have less access to education (Pedersen, Pytlikova, & Smith, 2008). As a result of these changes, both in Australia and internationally, there has been an increasing need to understand how cultural diversity influences nations and communities.

It is apparent that the changes in population and culture have led to a substantial and continuing transformation of Australia (Champion, 1994; Zolberg, 1989) but, perhaps because changes in population and culture are so far reaching, it has been difficult to identify all of the ways in which countries that are undergoing this diversification have been affected.
While observable aspects of culture such as food, music, and clothing have been affected, there is evidence that there have also been shifts in deeper aspects of culture, relating to beliefs, values and identities (Jamrozik et al., 1995). One area in which the impact of cultural diversity has been observed in many countries is in schools and the following section sets out why understanding cultural diversity in school settings is critical.

**Statement of the Issue**

It has been widely recognised internationally that, as a group, people from diverse cultural backgrounds have poorer outcomes across a range of health, wellbeing and related indicators than people in mainstream groups within Western societies. International research has established that these indicators include educational outcomes (Programme for International Student Assessment, 2007), mental and physical health outcomes, rates of access to health services (Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Stolk, Minas, & Klimidis, 2008), and help seeking behaviour (Cauce et al., 2002).

As will be discussed in more detail later, research and government policy both recognise that many of these poor outcomes occur in schools and that schools are places where these outcomes can be improved. At a national level within Australia cultural diversity is addressed through government policies such as “The people of Australia: Australia’s multicultural policy” which sets out the importance of valuing and welcoming all members of Australian society while fighting discrimination and racism (Australian Government, 2013). In addition, every state and territory in Australia has policies and programs for multiculturalism (Koleth, 2010).

Two of the most critical issues which can be addressed in schools are poor student outcomes (Programme for International Student Assessment, 2007) and matters relating to student mental health and wellbeing, such as racism (Greco, Priest, & Paradies, 2010;
VicHealth, 2014). The Australian Government (Australian Government, 2013) and the Victorian Government (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014b) have identified these as areas which must be addressed and they have been the targets of numerous programs and interventions (Demie & Lewis, 2010; Demie, Tong, Taplin, & Hutter, 2006; Demie, 2005; Pedersen, Walker, Paradies, & Guerin, 2011).

The following sections briefly review some of the issues identified here, with a focus on the broad influence of increased cultural diversity on the community and in schools. A more detailed review of school-based issues and related research and government policy is presented in the literature review in Chapter Two.

The Impact of Immigration and Culture-Based Change on Wellbeing

Immigration has potential economic and social benefits (West, 2011); however, it can also be associated with challenges and costs, particularly in the short-term, for both host groups and new arrivals (Bloemraad, Korteweg, & Yurdakul, 2008). Four important groups affected by these challenges are immigrants, refugees, members of the dominant mainstream group and indigenous peoples, who in Australia comprise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and who are also a host group.

**Immigrants.** Being from an immigrant background has been linked with poorer outcomes in a number of areas. It has been found immigrants often have poorer mental and physical health outcomes, rates of access to health services, educational outcomes, and help seeking behaviour (Bollini & Siem, 1995; Cauce et al., 2002; Programme for International Student Assessment, 2007; Stolk et al., 2008). In addition, those from immigrant backgrounds are often socially and economically disadvantaged (Raat et al., 2011).

Research in Australia indicates that immigrants often experience significant challenges. Immigrants may have experienced violence and trauma, which are closely associated with negative long term mental health outcomes (Davidson, Murray, &
As a result, immigrants often require assistance on arrival to ensure that they are adequately supported (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012), creating a responsibility of care for their host country. Immigrants can also experience difficulties adjusting to their new society and can encounter stereotyping, prejudice and racism (Stolk et al., 2008).

Immigrants can also be affected indirectly. For example, it has been found that immigrants with family members still in their country of origin experience higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Nickerson, Bryant, Steel, Silove, & Brooks, 2010) and research in Australia has found that parents can find it difficult to adapt their parenting practices to match new cultural norms (Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011) and can also have difficulty accessing childhood services (Warr, Mann, Forbes, & Turner, 2013).

**Refugees.** Many immigrants are refugees or have experienced hardship in their country of origin and often these people experience challenges similar to, but more severe than, those experienced by other immigrants. For example many refugees have experienced violence and trauma or may have family members still in their country of origin who are in danger (Katz & Redmond, 2010; Nickerson et al., 2010). A review (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011) of the mental health research on refugee children found that approximately 11% experience post-traumatic stress disorder while the prevalence of depressive symptoms ranges from 4% to 47% and the prevalence of anxiety symptoms ranges from 3% to 96%. Together this research shows that refugees may require significant support on arrival.

**Dominant mainstream society.** Changes in the population also affect the host country. New arrivals signal and lead to a cultural adaption process for the host country (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997) and the provision of services to new arrivals can be difficult and costly (Collinson & Copolov, 2004). In addition, as evidenced by the
amount of public debate and government policy around immigration in Australia (for example, Amnesty International, 2013 and Dorling, 2014) while immigration can be both deeply rewarding and enriching it can also be divisive.

**Indigenous peoples.** Within many nations, an additional consideration is that indigenous inhabitants have experienced significant hardship following occupation by settlers. In the Australian context, it is believed that since 1788 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population declined from an estimated level of between three hundred thousand to a million down to sixty thousand in the 1920s from the impact of diseases borne by Europeans and through dispossession of lands (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994). Challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples still persist with poor socioeconomic status, living conditions, and educational attainment as well as increased emotional and wellbeing problems (Garvey, 2008).

**Outcomes of People from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds in School Contexts**

In the past few decades there has been an increasing interest in cultural diversity in schools with the recognition that schools in many countries are becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). Many of the social benefits and challenges of diversity have been observed in schools, and for many newly arrived families one of their earliest points of contact with the community may be through their child’s school. Schools can help ease the transition of new arrivals into a community; for example, within the Australian government school system new arrivals can enter an English as an additional language (EAL) new arrivals program to help them develop English language skills (Department of Education and Training, 2014c). Schools serve as an important conduit through which children, parents and other members of the community can engage and learn about new arrivals and it also provides a place where a country’s existing and new cultures can be recognised, celebrated
and engaged with. Schools have also been recognised as an important place where cultural challenges, such as racism, can be addressed (Greco et al., 2010).

**Summary of the Issue**

As the preceding sections demonstrate, there is a strong rationale for further research investigating culture and cultural diversity in school contexts. The research on outcomes of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, the influence of cultural diversity on schools and the emphasis on supporting people from diverse cultural backgrounds in national and educational policy indicate that supporting people from diverse cultural backgrounds is a priority. They also suggest that knowledge about the challenges that schools encounter and the practices that they employ to effectively support culture and cultural diversity is important for governments and school communities. However, despite the evidence demonstrating the important role of schools in promoting the academic and wellbeing outcomes of students there has been limited research exploring how the collective school community, including teachers, parents and principals, experience their schools’ efforts to support people from diverse cultural backgrounds or what their perspectives on the practices schools employ or the challenges schools encounter are.

**Purpose and Significance of the Research**

The current research sought to explore the experiences and perspectives of school staff and teachers, principals and parents within schools in relation to the practices their schools employ and the challenges they have observed in their school with the aim of enriching our understanding of how to effectively support cultural diversity. This will inform school practice in similar and less complex schools, assist with policy development at a state and national level and increase local and the broader community’s understanding of the issues so they can respond more effectively.
Having now presented the broad aims of this thesis the remainder of this chapter introduces the methodological approach, introduces some theoretical frameworks to help position the findings and results of the research, and defines key terms used throughout this thesis.

**Overview of the Research Methodology**

An important consideration in this research was how to investigate the perspectives and experiences of teachers, principals and parents, and the approach was guided by observations of the existing research related to this area. First, there is currently a lack of research that has sought to investigate the experiences of adult members of school communities as a whole, or how principals, staff and parents within the same school experience different challenges, policies or practices. Second, much of the research, in Australia and internationally, has focused on specific aspects of experience in culturally diverse schools (for example, the academic achievement of a specific group of students) and there is a dearth of research that has allowed members of school communities to identify what they see as the salient issues and important practices. Given these two points, it was identified that there was a need to approach the current research in a manner that allowed participants to freely identify issues of importance to them to accommodate the variation in the breadth and depth of participant perspectives. To achieve this aim it was decided that a primarily qualitative approach would be adopted.

Qualitative research is well suited to the exploration of perspectives and experiences as it provides a paradigm from which varying perspectives and experiences can be considered together. There are a number of forms of qualitative research and the assumptions and theoretical frameworks of these approaches can differ. For example, positivist, critical and constructivist approaches have been developed (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The methodologies applied by different approaches can also vary, with some adhering to strict
guidelines (e.g., conversation analysis), some allowing flexibility within a predetermined framework (e.g., grounded theory), while others may be independent of theory (e.g., thematic analysis; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given the limited research on parents, staff and school principals, Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013) thematic analysis approach was selected because it allows flexibility in analysis while providing a methodological approach that can be clearly defined.

An important consideration in qualitative research is the establishment of validity (Tracy, 2013). Validity can be established in a number of ways and triangulation (using multiple sources of data relating to the research question) is considered a sound method of achieving this (Decrop, 1999; Guion, Diehl, & Mcdonald, 2002). Within the current project this was achieved through the collection of data from principals, staff and parents allowing data triangulation both between groups (comparison between principals, staff and parents) and within groups (multiple focus groups or interviews). Ideally this would have also involved the collection of data from students within these schools. However, the current research was part of a broader project in which the perspectives of students were examined within a separate thesis.

Finally, a small pilot quantitative study was conducted to further extend the findings from the qualitative component of the thesis. This second study was designed to add greater depth to the exploration of parent-teacher engagement in culturally diverse communities and therefore to complement the qualitative data. In addition, the follow-up study allowed exploration of areas not covered in the qualitative component of this thesis, including the influence of cultural and language attitudes on teacher perceptions of engagement with parents.
Theoretical Context for the Study

To provide groundwork for the rest of the thesis this section presents a major psychological model that helps explain intergroup relations. This is Berry’s (2004) group relations model which also incorporates his theory of acculturation. This theory is a useful tool for making sense of the literature on cultural diversity in school contexts and also provides a perspective from which the findings of the research in this thesis can be analysed.

Group Relations and Acculturation

Berry’s (Berry, 1997, 2004; Bourhis et al., 1997) model of group relations draws together research from anthropology and sociology to seek to explain how individual members of groups relate to each other when they come into contact and the outcomes (from harmonious relationships to conflict and stress) they will experience. It incorporates contextual factors, research on acculturation, and research on ethnic relations to understand which outcomes will occur. Berry proposes, based on a review of the literature, that more harmonious and effective outcomes occur when acceptance of both dominant and non-dominant cultures is emphasised, when individuals respect diversity and have low levels of prejudice, and when both dominant and non-dominant groups are able to achieve security and equality. Berry’s (2004) review of research suggests that poor outcomes occur when these principles are ignored.

An important component of the group relations framework is Berry’s (1997) acculturation model. This model helps explain some of the processes that can occur when different cultural groups come into contact. The acculturation model describes strategies that individuals and groups can adopt when they come into contact with other cultures. Strategies are described for individuals and groups from the dominant culture (also known as the host group or the larger society), and strategies for individuals and groups who are part of a minority culture (also known as minority groups or ethnocultural groups). Within Berry’s
model both the dominant culture and the minority culture have a stance towards the other culture. In the case of the minority culture it relates to how much of their own culture they wish to retain and the degree of contact they wish to have with the dominant culture, while the dominant culture can attempt to force the minority groups into one of the four strategies, reflecting the dominant culture’s stance towards the minority group’s culture.

This results in four strategies for each of the minority and the dominant cultures. For the minority culture the four possible strategies are: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation. In integration the minority culture seeks contact with the dominant culture but also seeks to retain its own culture. In assimilation the minority culture seeks contact with the dominant culture and does not seek to retain its own culture. In separation the minority culture does not seek contact with the dominant culture and seeks to retain its own culture. Finally in marginalisation, the minority culture seeks neither contact with the dominant culture nor maintenance of its own culture.

For the dominant culture the four possible strategies are: multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation and exclusion. Multiculturalism describes the situation in which the dominant culture accepts other cultures and encourages integration. Melting pot describes the situation in which the dominant culture rejects other cultures and seeks to force assimilation. Segregation describes the situation in which the dominant culture seeks to force separation while exclusion describes the situation in which the dominant culture seeks to force marginalisation. Outcomes associated with different approaches are discussed later in the thesis.

**Definition of Key Terms**

Many of the terms and constructs used within this thesis have changed over time and their meanings and usages can vary considerably with context. As a result the following
section defines the key terms used within this thesis with the aim of avoiding any confusion in their use.

**Defining Culture**

A concept that is central to this thesis is *culture*. Culture permeates all aspects of human life and it is deeply embedded in the social and political contexts in which societies function (Parekh, 2006). Culture appears to affect how people think, how they respond to events, how they interact and how they live their life (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). It is linked to how people understand concepts like social status, gender, education and health (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2007).

Despite the importance of culture it can be a difficult concept to define as culture is a word that has a variety of meanings. It is rooted in descriptive, historical, normative, psychological, structural and genetic definitions, and relates to symbols, signs and discourses (Smith, 2001). For an individual or a group the term culture is often equated with the values and practices of a group (Parekh, 2006); these values and practices are considered to be in a constant state of change through the continual interaction of individuals and groups (Burke, 2009; Modood, 2007). One broad definition of culture, and the one that will be adopted in this project, is culture as “The way of life of a people, including their attitudes, values, beliefs, arts, sciences, modes of perception, and habits of thought and activity” (Blackburn, 2008, Culture, para. 1).

**Defining Diverse Cultural Backgrounds and Students, Parents and Families From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds**

A significant issue when discussing cultural diversity within a community is how to refer to groups from different cultural backgrounds. All members and groups within a society have a culture but different cultural groups can have different levels of power or privilege. This research is concerned with cultural groups that are at higher risk of negative
outcomes and different researchers have used a variety of terms to refer to these groups such as, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), minority and ethnocultural groups. This issue can be complicated further by the range of terms used to describe recent arrivals to a country and the different nomenclature used in education and psychology research. For example, in educational research the term “inclusive” is used to focus on students with learning disabilities or additional needs while the term is used more broadly in psychology. To help resolve this issue it was decided that the phrase *diverse cultural backgrounds* would be used to when discussing cultural groups with a higher risk of negative outcomes. Following from this, the terms *students, parents and families from diverse cultural backgrounds* are used to refer to specific subgroups.

The term *diverse cultural backgrounds* was selected because other terms, such as CALD and ethnocultural, are often used to describe groups that are also recent arrivals. However, within Australia it is important to be conscious that the first Australians were and are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Unlike other countries in which the dominant group may also be the indigenous group, this is not the case in Australia and terms such as CALD are neither respectful of the history and experience of these peoples nor accurate. It is also important to note that in choosing the phrase *diverse cultural backgrounds* the intention is not to gloss over the significant diversity amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples refers to a “group” that was composed of approximately 600 different tribes, representing numerous cultures and languages, before colonial occupation (Holmes, Hughes, & Julian, 2007).

**Defining Social Justice**

A concept frequently referred to throughout this thesis is social justice. Social justice is a concept with a rich history and a variety of meanings relating to our treatment of others as equals and the distribution of power and resources (Miller, 1999). This thesis draws on the
work of Australian scholars (Woods, Dooley, Luke & Exley, 2013) to define social justice in a school context as relating to both redistributive and recognitive social justice in which it is recognised that resources must be distributed in a just manner and that a variety of ways of understanding and experiencing knowledge must be recognised and enacted in the curriculum and classroom.

**Defining Teachers and School Staff**

Throughout this thesis *school staff* is used to refer to all school staff below the level of school principal. Teachers, the focus of the pilot study in *Chapter Nine*, are considered a subset of school staff. This distinction is drawn as many schools participating within this research project employ staff, such as multicultural teacher aides, who have a key role in supporting diversity within their school.

**Summary**

The preceding sections demonstrate that internationally, and in Australia, some people from diverse cultural backgrounds are at a much higher risk of poor wellbeing outcomes and some students from diverse cultural backgrounds are at a higher risk of poorer academic outcomes. This is an important conclusion given the emphasis placed on supporting people from diverse cultural backgrounds in Australia. For students this heightened risk means that schools need to support students and it is evident that efforts to do so will largely be delivered by the staff, school principals and parents within these school communities. As a result, if people from diverse cultural backgrounds are to be supported within schools, then the role and experiences of staff, school principals and parents are also important. Therefore, it is important that research investigates the perspectives of these groups in order to help identify how they can effectively support students and how they themselves can be supported, in culturally diverse schools.
The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter Two reviews research on challenges and effective school practices in culturally diverse school contexts. Chapter Three presents the specific aims of the research and reviews the structure of the following chapters. The remaining chapters of the thesis focus on two studies. The first is a large qualitative study exploring the perspectives of principals, school staff and parents on the ways in which their schools support cultural diversity. The second study is a small quantitative pilot study exploring issues relating to parent-teacher engagement identified in the first study. Chapter Four contains the method for the qualitative study presented within this thesis (this study includes focus groups with staff and parents as well as interviews with school principals from six schools). Chapter Five presents the findings and discussion from the focus groups with parents. Chapter Six presents the findings and discussion from the focus groups with school staff. Chapter Seven presents the findings and discussion from interviews with principals. Chapter Eight presents a summary and synthesis of the findings from the first study. Chapter Nine presents the results and discussion of a quantitative pilot study with school teachers and Chapter Ten contains a final general discussion of the findings and results of this project.
Chapter Two

A Review of the Research on the Challenges and Practices Associated With Supporting

People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds in Schools
This chapter reviews the literature on the challenges schools encounter and practices they employ when supporting people from diverse cultural backgrounds. For the purposes of this thesis supporting cultural diversity within schools was divided into three domains that were then used as an organising framework for this review. These domains are: 1) supporting the wellbeing of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, 2) educating people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and 3) education about culture and cultural diversity in school curriculums.

There are several points which should be noted when approaching this literature review. First, while the three domains set out above roughly represent the tasks of supporting cultural diversity, they are not independent and much of the research literature addressing cultural diversity in schools argues that whole school approaches, that target all three of these areas together, should be employed. As a result, while the literature is reviewed on the basis of the domain to which it is most relevant, the literature is often relevant to the other domains as well.

Second, this review also includes literature relating to the wellbeing and support of parents and school staff from diverse cultural backgrounds. While the primary purpose of schools is the education of students, schools are also often involved with the support of these groups and have an obligation to provide a school environment that is not discriminatory for staff. In addition, the practices aimed at supporting parents and school staff are often linked to practices aimed at supporting students from diverse cultural backgrounds, underscoring the importance of considering the efforts of schools in this area.

Third, for the purposes of this review challenges are broken into two categories. These are primary challenges comprising the poorer educational and wellbeing outcomes of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, as discussed in Chapter One, and secondary challenges, which limit the capacity of school communities to improve the outcomes of
students from diverse cultural backgrounds and support the families of these students. The secondary challenges are the focus of this review. Examples of secondary challenges include limited school resources, high school staff workloads, and difficulties with parent engagement.

Fourth, there is a considerable amount of international research on the topics covered in this chapter and within most nations there are overarching education systems that oversee school policies and provide guidance on school practices. For example, in the UK the Department of Education sets school policy, in Canada school policy is primarily set by provincial and territorial departments and ministries, while in the United States school policy and practice is mainly determined by school boards located within school districts. In this chapter, while international research is addressed that is relevant to school policy internationally, because of the location of the study, the review focuses on current Australian practice guidelines and research. The focus will be on Australian Government guidelines and guidelines provided to schools by the Department of Education and Training (DET) in the state of Victoria, the location of the research presented in this thesis. In addition, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) also provides guidance to Catholic schools in Victoria (http://www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au/) which relates to the support of people from diverse cultural backgrounds but this guidance is less extensive than the guidance provided by DET and will only be discussed in selected areas of this review.

In order to provide some context for the rest of the review the next section introduces Australian federal education policy, Victorian (state) education policy and school guidance. The three sections that follow review the literature relevant to the three domains of cultural diversity in schools. The final section introduces a framework that will be used in the rest of the thesis to make sense of the challenges and practices associated with supporting cultural diversity in schools.
An Introduction to Federal and Victorian Education Policy and School Guidance in Australia

In Australia there are a number of federal policies and bodies that influence the education system. Federal policies, such as “The People of Australia: Australia’s multicultural policy” (Australian Government, 2013), set out the importance of valuing and welcoming all members of Australian society while fighting discrimination and racism, and, as mentioned in the introduction, all state and territory governments in Australia have policies that address culture and cultural diversity. In Victoria the “Multicultural Victoria Act 2011” (State Government Victoria, 2011) provides government guidance at a state level regarding the support of cultural diversity.

In addition to the federal and state policies, guidance is also provided by other education bodies. One of the most significant is the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA; http://www.acara.edu.au/) which develops the Australian Curriculum, which sets out the expected domains of knowledge within school curriculums in Australia.

In the state of Victoria the primary education body is the Department of Education and Training (DET; formerly the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)) which provides policy and guidance to government schools in relation to matters such as the way in which they should support cultural diversity and deliver the Australian Curriculum. The Department of Education and Training provides a number of policies such as “Unity through Diversity: The Victorian Government’s vision for civics, citizenship and multicultural education” (2014b) that set out the state’s overall vision for culture and cultural diversity. This is also supplemented by policies addressing specific areas such as the “Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship Strategy” (2009) and the “Wannik Education Strategy” for Koorie Students (2008) (Koorie is an Aboriginal word for
“Aboriginal people” originating from Aboriginal languages in south east Australia). These strategic documents are supplemented by further guidance provided by specific authorities within DET, such as the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), which produces documents like the “Australian Curriculum in Victoria” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2014b), which sets out how the Australian Curriculum can be implemented in Victoria.

However, it is important to note that within the Victorian school system when implementing the Australian Curriculum, schools individually determine the practices that they employ. Thus, the practices set out in guidance provided by DET are recommendations. In contrast to the DET guidance, the research literature on supporting cultural diversity in schools is typically more focused on specific practices believed to be most effective, and are often presented as practices that schools should employ.

Therefore, with the aim of providing an overview of the context within which schools select their practices, and the literature on practices and challenges, the following sections first review the guidance provided by DET before reviewing the research literature on the practices believed to be most effective and the challenges schools encounter as schools strive to support cultural diversity within their schools.

**Supporting the Wellbeing of People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds**

This section reviews the government guidance and research literature relating to the efforts of schools to support the wellbeing of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The section commences with a review of government guidance before addressing six areas of research within the literature: supporting students from diverse cultural backgrounds transition to school; efforts to address racism in schools (particularly in relation to the beliefs and attitudes of principals); the effect of teacher attitudes and beliefs on student wellbeing; the support of staff from diverse cultural backgrounds; the perspectives of parents from
diverse cultural backgrounds on effective student support; and, research on developing schools as community hubs to support families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Government Policy and Guidance Relating to Student Wellbeing**

Supporting student wellbeing is a key element of government policy and guidance, and there is considerable overlap between the coverage of support for students in general and those from diverse cultural backgrounds. The general guidance on the support of students covers issues such as bullying, mental health, and homelessness as well as guidance on working with parents around physical health, nutrition and other factors relating to the wellbeing of students (Department of Education and Training, 2014d). Guidance relating to supporting the wellbeing of students from diverse cultural backgrounds focuses on anti-racism and refugee students. Racism is addressed within the framework of multicultural education (Department of Education and Training, 2014b) while the support of refugees is covered under student support, with information provided on good practice principles relating to the support of students from refugee backgrounds (Department of Education and Training, 2015c), such as the development of partnerships with external services. The external services recommended include other Victorian government departments and specialist services. For example, Foundation House is a specialist service focused on “supporting people in Victoria who had been subjected to torture or other traumatic events in their country of origin, or while fleeing those countries” (http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/), which provides publications that aim to help schools support students that were refugees as well as providing direct counselling and support to students and families.

It is important to note that the guidance also discusses supporting the families of refugee students and that DET provides guidance to schools on supporting staff from diverse cultural backgrounds through its human resources pages (Department of Education and Training, 2013a). Guidance is also provided to help schools support the wellbeing of
students from Aboriginal backgrounds, with external services such as the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (http://www.vaeai.org.au) providing expert advice. Collectively the guidance on relating to students, parents and teachers is considerable, providing schools with information on a wide range of practices that they can draw on.

**Research on Supporting the Transition of Refugee, Immigrant, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students to School**

Within international research on the mental health and wellbeing of students from diverse cultural backgrounds there has been a growing awareness that many newly arrived families can have a history of trauma (Henley & Robinson, 2011) or can be isolated in the community (Warr et al., 2013) which can have a significant impact on students. Research has indicated that, while offering support following trauma or crisis can at times be challenging for schools, schools can have an important role in ensuring that students are properly supported (Dean et al., 2008). However, as researchers have warned, it is important that students from diverse cultural backgrounds, specifically refugees, are not pigeon-holed as having mental health problems (Matthews, 2008; Taylor, 2008).

It has also been established that students from minority groups are frequently the victims of racism (Agirdag, Demanet, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2011; Pachter, Bernstein, Szalacha, & García Coll, 2010) which has been shown to lead to negative health outcomes (Paradies, 2006) and schools are often seen as places in which racism can be addressed (Bryan, 2009). It is also thought that the embedded and systemic disadvantage and racism that many students face has links to poorer educational outcomes, although the extent to which this is true for all cultural groups is unclear (Hooks & Miskovic, 2011; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Interestingly, research has found that one of the best ways to improve academic outcomes has been to improve non-academic outcomes for students, which includes wellbeing (Mulford & Silins, 2011).
In Australia it has been found that, on school entry, students from diverse cultural backgrounds are more likely to be exposed to risk factors and to have poorer mental health outcomes than Australian-born English speaking students (Priest, Baxter, & Hayes, 2012). Within the literature relevant to the transition of these new students from diverse cultural backgrounds, much of the research has focused on refugee students, although immigrant and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have also been addressed. Researchers have noted that the challenges (i.e., primary challenges) associated with these three groups relating to transition are often considerable.

For Aboriginal students these challenges include isolation, family mobility, racial harassment and bullying (Howard, 2002), and some of these issues, such as racism, have been associated with negative health and wellbeing outcomes (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan, & Taouk, 2009). Recent arrivals may also experience these difficulties and may also be uninterested in learning a new language, not want to emigrate, feel displaced, feel insecure or feel intimidated (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Cardenas, Taylor, & Adelman, 1993; Sanagavarapu, 2010; Taylor, 2008). Refugees can experience these challenges as well but are also more likely to be suffering from trauma, anxiety associated with the asylum process, poverty, and interrupted education (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Brown, Miller, & Mitchell, 2006; Taylor, 2008). Finally, many students encounter these difficulties within the context of an Australian school system that has yet to adjust to them (Matthews, 2008).

In light of these challenges, and the recognition that the wellbeing of these students is closely tied to their subsequent academic success, researchers have recommended that whole school approaches are adopted that are grounded in social justice and which stress creating a safe and supportive environment in which students feel welcomed, valued and respected (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). It has been argued that this approach facilitates the development of social connectedness and feelings of belonging which, along
with positive relationships between students and staff, have been identified as important factors for improved outcomes (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Dockett, Mason, & Perry, 2006; Howard, 2002). Specific practices that have been investigated and argued to be effective include after school programs (such as homework groups, English programs or recreational programs) (Tsey et al., 2005), and engagement with community services (such as linking students to community workers) (Naidoo, 2009; Taylor, 2008).

Secondary challenges that arise as schools attempt to implement practices such as these have also been identified. Research has found that efforts to support student transition to school in Australia are often dispersed across different institutions (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007), which can lead to problems with coordination. In addition, schools often have insufficient resources to meet the needs of these students as they lack the teachers, support staff and funding for professional development to generate the necessary school capacity to implement effective practices (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007; Taylor, 2008; Woods, 2009). The result of these secondary challenges is that the task of supporting these students may fall on English language teachers who may feel underprepared and in need of greater training (Taylor, 2008). Thus, in order to be effective, schools need strong leadership and support from education authorities.

**Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs**

Research has shown that attitudes and beliefs of teachers influence the wellbeing of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, researchers (Van Petegem, Aelterman, Van Keer, & Rosseel, 2008) found that student wellbeing improved when teachers are tolerant and cooperative. In addition, students with developmental vulnerabilities and close teacher relationships have been found to have better outcomes than similar students without the close teacher relationship (Baker, 2006). Research has also shown that students with a high risk of poor academic and wellbeing outcomes had outcomes
similar to other students when offered strong instructional and emotional support (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). In addition, researchers (Hickling-Hudson, 2004) have stressed that when teaching about cultural diversity or in culturally diverse contexts teachers need to be able to apply an intercultural perspective to the way in which they teach, and recognise and counter racism and cultural ethnocentrism in order to ensure positive outcomes. These findings suggest that teacher attitudes towards students in culturally diverse contexts are likely to be critical, and so it is important that teachers develop good relationships with all students and feel comfortable doing so.

There has also been a considerable amount of research exploring the ways in which teacher attitudes and beliefs can act as secondary challenges. Research has established that teacher beliefs do not always correspond with those thought to be associated with the best outcomes. This finding has been identified in a number of different countries and settings. For example, research in Hong Kong (Yeung, 2006), United States (Milner, 2005) and Canada (Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005) has identified that teachers often have stereotypical or limited constructions of different cultural groups and are not skilled at engaging with notions of race or culture. These issues can contribute to issues relating to the prevalence of racism and also can limit the capacity of teachers to effectively teach about culture and cultural diversity.

A recent review of the international literature on pre-service teachers’ beliefs about cultural diversity by Castro (2010) supports these findings. Castro found that although beliefs had become more positive from 1986 to 2007 there were still a number of issues of concern. These included teachers having a limited understanding of multicultural education and the processes of institutionalised racism and oppression. In addition, it was found that teachers can hold unhelpful beliefs about cultural diversity which may be grounded in stereotypic thinking about cultural groups. Other researchers have also identified beliefs that
appear to be unhelpful. Jenks, Lee and Kanpol (2001) identified that some educators both acknowledge that dominant cultural groups have more power but also believe that it is the responsibility of minority groups to enact change. They also found that some teachers thought that the dominant (privileged) group(s) had less power to enact change than other groups. This research indicated that teachers’ beliefs can be counter to those thought to be associated with good outcomes for students (i.e., those in line with principles of social justice) and that these beliefs, while not always common, are pervasive throughout different contexts. Nonetheless, it has also been established that it is possible to change attitudes and beliefs. For example, Frye, Button, Kelly and Button (2010) found that a training program with 55 teacher candidates incorporating reflection and encouraging teachers to take ownership of their education was effective in increasing self-efficacy.

**Principals’ Attitudes and Beliefs Relating to Student Wellbeing**

The influence of the attitudes and beliefs of principals on the support of students from diverse cultural backgrounds has also been investigated, primarily in relation to racism. Research has established that the beliefs and attitudes of school principals can sometimes involve a lack of identification of racism and inaction. For example, Aveling (2007) investigated the impact that a state antiracism policy had on practice in thirty five schools in Western Australia between 1999 and 2003 in predominately mono-cultural schools and found that most principals reported that racism was not a problem in their schools. Furthermore, only four principals had specific knowledge of the policy and had discussed its contents and implications with staff. The researcher concluded that most principals were unaware of the nature of racism or its pervasiveness and were ill-prepared to deal with covert racism.

Australian research focusing on leadership in Indigenous education has also highlighted areas of concern relating to principals and racism. Two studies across three schools (Keddie, Gowlett, Mills, Monk, & Renshaw, 2013; Keddie & Niesche, 2012) found
that some school leaders in Australia had unhelpful or racist beliefs about Indigenous peoples, grounded in an Anglo-Australian world view. The researchers argued that leadership based on this perspective does not effectively support Indigenous students; rather school leaders have to be sensitive to the racialised contexts of schools and then actively pursue anti-racist policies.

Although there has been limited research on the attitudes and beliefs associated with positive student outcomes relating to racism in Australia there has been research on effective school practices that principals can implement to address racism in schools. There is growing evidence that a whole school approach that covers school policies, the curriculum and pedagogy, staff training, student support, parent and community involvement, and monitoring and reporting, are the most effective ways of addressing racism (Greco et al., 2010). This approach has been noted as not only having positive effects within schools but also subsequently for the general community.

Broader research regarding the attitudes and beliefs of principals, that are relevant to the support of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, has also been conducted. Research on inclusive education in Australia (Graham & Spandagou, 2011) found that principals in most states and territories may not have a deep understanding of policies relating to social justice. Although this research was focused on inclusive education (relating to students with disabilities) it found that principals in culturally diverse schools in disadvantaged areas extended “being inclusive” to students from different cultural, social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. However, while these principals had a broader understanding of inclusion, the researchers reported that some principals had negative attitudes towards diversity and expressed opinions with racist connotations. The research suggested that even though principals’ understandings of inclusive education differed with context, principals tended to adopt what might be considered a managerial approach to inclusion that focused on
resources, and that principals had a limited understanding of the history or underlying aims of inclusive education.

**Parent Perspectives and the Wellbeing of Students**

An area of research that has also received more attention recently is the exploration of the perspectives of parents on the support of student wellbeing in schools. This research is relevant to the literature on the support of cultural diversity in schools as it highlights that what constitutes effective support can vary depending on the perspective of the parents. For example, research (Friedman, Bobrowski, & Geraci, 2006) investigating the school factors important to parents from different ethnic backgrounds found that, although parents from different ethnic groups had similar concerns, in that they all valued a safe environment and effective teachers, they did vary in the priority they placed on these attributes. Unfortunately, this research has mainly been limited to the US (such as Johnson and Kafer, 2002, and Robinson-Zanartu and Majel-Dixon, 1996) and most of these studies focused on ethnicity (for example, Caucasian, African-American or Asian). However, a recent study (Badri, Mason, & El Mourad, 2010) has helped address the lack of research in this area, finding that nationality was a significant predictor of parent satisfaction with schools in Abu Dhabi.

**Supporting Staff From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds**

An area that has been the focus of relatively recent research has been the practices and challenges associated with the support of school staff from diverse cultural backgrounds. A general finding, affecting all staff, has been that teachers can be at greater risk of burnout in culturally diverse schools, illustrating the importance of having teacher support practices in place for all staff in these school (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003). However, it is interesting to note that the research establishing this finding also identified that burnout was higher when the personal beliefs of school staff about intercultural contact were assimilationist, suggesting that these staff may need greater support and potentially further education.
Australian research, specifically on the wellbeing of staff from diverse cultural backgrounds, suggests that there may be secondary challenges associated with the support of these staff members. In a four year study Santoro and Reid (2006) found that Aboriginal teachers were often given the sole responsibility for Aboriginal education and were treated as being culturally homogeneous, which was found to be detrimental at both professional and personal levels. These factors also appeared to contribute to burnout and work related stress for these teachers. Interestingly in a comparison of ethnic minority teachers in Britain and Australia (Basit & Santoro, 2011), it was found that being positioned as cultural experts was a positive experience for British teachers while for Australian teachers it was linked with increased work without compensation, which contributed to burn-out, workplace stress and reduced career opportunities.

These findings also need to be considered in the context of other Australian research that has found that teachers in general in Australia struggle with workload, time constraints, and institutional practices, as well as social and cultural practices which can be both isolating and disempowering (Miller, 2011). In addition, this research indicates that some school practices in Australia, which may be aimed at supporting the wellbeing of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and educating about culture and cultural diversity, can impinge on the wellbeing of staff from diverse cultural backgrounds. The research also provides further evidence that teacher support is critical in culturally diverse schools.

**Schools as Community Hubs**

The potential for schools to act as community hubs has also been investigated as a way of improving the wellbeing and educational outcomes of students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Research from the United States on successful school practices has identified that schools that position themselves as a “hub of community activities” have more successful student outcomes (Moos & Johansson, 2009, p. 11). In addition, research on
effective school principals has found that principals that adopted a role of community leader (being visible in the community and advocating for community causes), and developed their school as a community hub, were able to increase community engagement and improve student outcomes (Khalifa, 2012). Australian research has shown that playgroups based in schools can act very effectively as locations for parent support, increased engagement with the community, and support services that together can improve the outcomes of children and their parents (Jackson, 2011). In addition, experts on engagement with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australia have also stressed the importance of providing comprehensive support for parents (Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2006).

It has been recognised within psychological research that schools are sites in which families from diverse backgrounds can be supported. For example, community psychology has emphasised the importance of sites such as schools to community and, by extension, individual well-being (Berry & Welsh, 2010; Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006). Schools have been identified as places in which social capital, a construct which captures the quality of social relationships and cohesion in a community, can be developed (Crosnoe, 2004). This is an important finding, as social capital has been found to have positive relationships with physical (Folland, 2007) and mental (Phongsavan, Chey, Bauman, Brooks, & Silove, 2006) health. As a result, this research indicates that from both a psychological and educational perspective there is a need to better understand how schools can effectively support their school communities.

Summary

Overall the research highlights a range of practices and challenges that schools employ and encounter as they strive to support the wellbeing of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The research literature suggests that schools should take a whole school
approach, grounded in social justice, which emphasises a positive, warm and welcoming school ethos. This can be supplemented with strong leadership that is sensitive to issues affecting the wellbeing of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, such as racism. Teachers can play an important role in supporting the wellbeing of students through the development of positive relationships with them. Schools need to be conscious that they are not relying too heavily on staff from diverse cultural backgrounds for cultural expertise and schools may also improve their capacity to support students and families by developing their schools as community hubs.

The effective practices suggested in the literature also illustrate the challenges that schools need to be aware of. Different groups of students will have had different experiences which will require different approaches from schools. The needs of these students will also be influenced by the expectations of their parents, whose priorities may vary. Resources may be scarce and there may be pressures within schools to rely on English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers (specialists in teaching English as an additional language) or teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds. The beliefs and attitudes of principals and staff may also be problematic, and these may limit the capacity of schools to implement new programs or initiatives.

**Educating Students From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds**

This section reviews the guidance and research literature relating to the education of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The section starts with a review of the government guidance before addressing the research on the education of students from diverse cultural backgrounds in Australia. This is followed by a review of the research on parent engagement, an area that has been linked with student academic and wellbeing outcomes, and which has been identified as a significant secondary challenge for some schools.
Government Policy and Guidance Relating to the Education of Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

The DET guidance to schools relating to the education of students from diverse cultural backgrounds focuses on two areas. The first area is learning English as an additional language by students who are typically new arrivals (this includes refugees) and the second is the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Within the government school system the initial support to EAL students are language centres that also support school transition for students. The language centres are specialist schools with small class sizes and a focus on learning English that prepare students for primary and secondary schools. In addition to access to the language centres, schools receive funding on the basis of the number of EAL students that they have, which allows the employment of multicultural teacher aides (MEAs) who can assist with communication between their schools and the parents of students as well as with students in class. The Department of Education and Training also provides interpreting and translating services to schools free of charge as well as additional resources to schools (Department of Education and Training, 2013d). The publications and online resources available to teachers and schools cover training on teaching EAL students, as well as working with interpreters and MEAs.

Guidance on educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is provided separately from the guidance on EAL students. Within Victoria it is a requirement that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must have a Wannik Individual Education Plan (IEP). The IEPs were developed in an effort to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and information is provided on the DET website and in other DET publications about IEP (Department of Education and Training, 2013b, 2015a). A major part of the IEPs are Koorie Education Learning Plans (KELP) which
are a tool for parents, teachers and students to help specify the learning needs of students and how they will be met, as well as acting as a tool for monitoring progress. In addition, DET employs Koorie education coordinators (KECs) and Koorie engagement support officers (KESOs) to help deliver these services and to directly support and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families (Department of Education and Training, 2013c).

**Research on the Education of Students From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds in Australia**

A key finding within the international research on students from diverse cultural backgrounds is that historically many students from diverse cultural backgrounds have not achieved as well academically as host or dominant groups (Programme for International Student Assessment, 2007). This finding has motivated a significant amount of research that has sought to explore why some groups do not perform as well as others and how their outcomes can be improved. For example, studies in the UK have explored the outcomes of black Caribbean students (Demie, 2005), Portuguese students (Demie & Lewis, 2010) and Somali students (Demie, Lewis, & McLean, 2008). This research identified that when the needs of students are met through effective school practices then students can perform very well academically but when their needs are not understood or not met then they frequently experience difficulty.

However, unlike in many other western nations, research on educational outcomes within Australia has not clearly established that there is consistently a gap in academic outcomes between many students from diverse cultural backgrounds and other students. This is evidenced by OECD studies (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2012; Thomson & De Bortoli, 2006) that have looked at Australian students on the basis of birth (i.e., those born overseas, those that were first generation born in Australia, and other Australian students (those who are at least second generation)) and language status (i.e., English as a first
language and language background other than English (LBOTE)). The results of these studies have been similar, with a recent PISA study (Thomson et al., 2012) finding that for mathematical literacy, first-generation students outperformed other Australian students and foreign born students, while there was no difference between LBOTE students and English as-a-first-language students. This result differed for reading literacy with first generation students outperforming foreign and other Australian students while English as-a-first-language students outperformed LBOTE students. For scientific literacy both first generation and foreign born students outperformed other Australian students while English as-a-first-language students outperformed LBOTE students. The PISA studies also found that low socioeconomic status and attending a school in a remote location were both associated with poorer academic outcomes while the 2006 PISA study (Thomson & De Bortoli, 2006) found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students performed significantly more poorly than other students across scientific, reading and mathematical literacy.

Within Australia there has been limited research in this area and the results of this research have not been conclusive. For example, although Dandy and Nettelbeck (2002) found that students in Australia from Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds tended to outperform those from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds other researchers have urged caution. As stated in a recent book based on Australian research in this area “An analysis of the data, however, shows that there is no universal factor of ethnicity related to achievement but a complex relationship between ethnicity, language, socio-economic status (SES), gender, generation, family contexts and histories of migration” (Watkins & Noble, 2013, p. 2).

An exception to the limited research regarding the influence of language and culture has been research investigating the gap between the academic outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other students. This research has identified a number of issues affecting the performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students such as
cultural and societal factors, as well as language spoken at home (Bradley, Draca, Green, & Leeves, 2006). Interestingly while some of this research has found that “school characteristics play a relatively minor part in the development of educational disadvantage” (Bradley, Draca, Green, & Leeves, 2006, p. 21), other research has indicated that Aboriginal peoples’ needs are often not met and that the educational content they are exposed to can be Eurocentric (DiGregorio, Farrington, & Page, 2000; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

Despite the lack of clarity about the influence of cultural group, linguistic group, socioeconomic status, and location, researchers have identified some challenges that schools encounter and practices that schools can improve relating to the education of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Regarding primary challenges and the education of new arrivals and refugee students, researchers have noted that students have often missed schooling and that the older that students are the greater the amount of missed schooling (Brown et al., 2006).

Although the practices recommended in research broadly align with the guidance provided to schools by DET there is an important difference in the emphasis placed on social justice approaches. Social justice is addressed in the Australian Curriculum for students but there is limited discussion of whole school approaches based on social justice in DET guidance. In addition, the guidance relating to social justice is less visible within the DET resources and there is no reference to social justice in either the Australian professional standards for teachers or for principals (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011, 2014). A reason for the lack of discussion of social justice within DET guidance may be because, as mentioned previously, culture and cultural diversity are positioned within a framework of multicultural education rather than social justice (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007). In contrast to the lack of discussion of social justice in DET guidance, there is a strong emphasis on social justice approaches in the academic and published literature to
PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE SCHOOLS

(Keddie, 2012a, 2012b; Woods, 2009) and the Catholic Education Office Melbourne also puts greater emphasis on this.

Department of Education and Training guidance aligns more closely with other practices discussed in the research literature. For example, researcher have recommended that language support be provided to teachers in classrooms, that new students are engaged socially, that students might benefit from engagement in afterschool programs, and that schools engage with the parents of students (Szente, Hoot, & Taylor, 2006). These are also practices for which DET provides funding or guidance to schools. However, as the following section demonstrates, researchers have also identified secondary challenges associated with these types of practices.

Parent Engagement in Culturally Diverse School Contexts

An important part of the research aimed at improving the academic outcomes of students is the research addressing parent engagement with schools. Research has established that parent engagement is important for all students but also particularly for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, a supportive relationship between parents and students has been found to be a positive predictor of school-related interest in students (Wentzel, 1998) and parent engagement has been found to be an important component of efforts to improve the academic and wellbeing outcomes of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Demie & McLean, 2007). In addition, it is also likely that the capacity of schools to engage parents will impact on the transition of students from diverse cultural backgrounds to school and the effectiveness of schools as community hubs, as discussed in the previous sections.

Although there is evidence that parent engagement is important, schools appear to have had difficulty in this area. A key challenge, that may underlie some of the difficulty which schools have in engaging parents, is that there may be a tendency to position parents as
“hard-to-reach” and to imply that parents are the problem. However, a recent review of the literature on “hard-to-reach” families within communities in Anglophone countries (UK, USA, Canada and Australia) identified that challenges relating to parent engagement with services (and schools) often relate to the services themselves (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2010). The review discussed two relevant findings. First, “hard-to-reach” is a misnomer, as it labels families (or parents) as the problem. In practice, both familial characteristics and organisational factors can inhibit engagement. For example, the cultural sensitivity of the organisation will affect its ability to engage with families from diverse cultural backgrounds. This indicates that schools need to be conscious of their cultural sensitivity and the ways in which they may be inhibiting engagement. Second, while being from a culturally diverse background may mean that families are less likely to engage with community services, such as schools, there are other reasons why families may not engage that are outside their control. For example, poor literacy skills, being a young mother or lacking transport may all contribute to difficulty in engaging. As a result, schools need to be conscious of these factors when considering their own engagement strategies and they may need to tailor their approach to different populations within their school community.

Research into the differences between parents from different cultural backgrounds also illustrates the need for schools to be culturally sensitive. Crozier and Davies (2007) investigated the relationship between parents of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage and teachers in schools in England and found that there were considerable differences between Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents’ beliefs regarding the type and degree of involvement they should have in their children’s education. Few Bangladeshi parents felt that they could play a direct role in their children’s education, but they often believed that they had an important role in developing their children’s cultural and Muslim identity. In contrast, some Pakistani parents indicated that they believed they played an important role in the development of their
children’s identity but they varied in their direct involvement with the school, from very active involvement to almost no contact. This illustrates schools need to be highly sensitive to both cultural and individual differences in beliefs about engagement.

It also appears that schools may be unaware of the ways in which parent needs can vary. A study of the experiences of student teachers undertaking community placements with families from diverse cultural backgrounds (outside of schools) found that while student teachers were aware of issues that might affect engagement with these families, such as cultural differences and expectations about engagement, they were unaware of the complex differences between groups from different cultural backgrounds (Hedges & Lee, 2010). The researchers recommended that, in order for teachers to build effective relationships with families from diverse cultural backgrounds, it was important that the teachers receive more training and practical experience to help them develop the necessary knowledge and skills, a recommendation that indicates that it may also be important to consider the needs of staff in this context.

Research in Australia also suggests that cultural differences might impact on the engagement of schools with parents from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, a recent paper by Renzaho, McCabe and Sainsbury (2011) looked at the experience of 64 recently arrived Arabic speaking parents in Melbourne. They found that these parents had difficulties in three areas: parenting their children and adjusting to new styles of parenting and discipline, maintaining their own culture and passing it on to their children, and changes in gender roles and family dynamics. As all three of these issues may be encountered in a school environment this may discourage parents from engagement.

Other research has also found that parent beliefs may conflict with approaches taken by schools. For example, a study focusing on the experience of Turkish parents in Australia, investigated the link between acculturation attitudes, interaction with Australian society and
parenting (Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). Turkish parents were found to have values that differed substantially from the norms in Australia and they had difficulty with disciplining their children. Another study that focused on parents, but that is directly relevant to schools, looked at how the cultural values of 30 Sudanese families affected their selection of childcare services (Ebbeck & Dela Cerna, 2007). Sudanese parents had beliefs and values about parenting that differed substantially from Australian norms. This included beliefs and values relating to their children’s gender roles, discipline and toilet training. While many Sudanese parents used childcare services they reported that they felt forced to do so and also that their use of childcare services was resulting in a loss of their culture. The prevailing theme of these findings was that parents from diverse cultural backgrounds may encounter beliefs contrary to their own which points to the existence of cultural barriers which may inhibit parent engagement.

**Summary**

The research on academic outcomes suggests that cultural background, linguistic background, and socioeconomic status all affect student academic outcomes in Australia, but it is unclear how these factors exert their influence. Research has also identified challenges that many schools encounter as they attempt to provide education to students from diverse cultural backgrounds. A major finding in this area has been that schools may experience difficulties engaging with parents from diverse cultural backgrounds and that schools need to be aware of the ways in which they may be contributing to difficulties with engagement and the practices that they can employ to address these difficulties. In this regard the literature suggests that schools should be conscious that the needs of students and parents vary and that different parents will have different perspectives on education and their own involvement in their children’s education.
Education About Culture and Cultural Diversity in School Curriculums

This section reviews the guidance and research literature regarding education about culture and cultural diversity in school curriculums. The section commences with a discussion of the place of culture in the Victorian pedagogical approach and in the curriculum before moving on to the research literature. The literature on culture and cultural diversity education is extensive. Rather than attempting to review all of the literature in this area, Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) multicultural education standpoints are presented. These provide an internationally recognised framework for understanding education about culture and cultural diversity. It is intended that this will lay a foundation from which to interpret the approach(es) adopted by schools within the current research project.

Government Policy and Guidance Relating to Education About Culture and Cultural Diversity

At a pedagogical level the main guidance to schools in Victoria is the Victorian Government’s “Unity through diversity: The Victorian Government’s vision for civics, citizenship and multicultural education” (2014b). This document sets out principles of educational practice: participation and inclusion, quality learning environments, diversity of educational approaches, and collaboration with the broader community. Together these principles cover the importance of promoting equal rights, countering racism, developing intercultural understanding, engaging all students, and engaging with the community. Relating specifically to classroom practice the policy also stresses that education for “civics, citizenship and multicultural education… permeates all aspects of the curriculum, pedagogy, school practices and policies” (p. 5).

In regards to the curriculum, the major guidance for Victorian schools is the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) and AusVELS, the foundation to Year 10 curriculum in Victoria that covers 17 domains of learning. Although intercultural
understanding is considered a general capability within AusVELS (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2015a) there is not a domain specifically for intercultural understanding, culture or cultural diversity but these are instead covered under other domains, primarily Civics and Citizenship, and Language Education. The guidance within the domains is also fairly general. For example, in the education domain of civics and citizenship, the example of progression points and standards provided by the VCAA (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2014a) recommends that on the pathway to level four competency (corresponding to Year 4) students should be able to identify “similarities and differences among familiar groups; for example, in language, food and festivals” and have an “understanding of cultural aspects of the lives of people in familiar groups; for example, religion, language, customs, family”. While this guidance provided by the AusVELS curriculum is not extensive, to assist schools in developing practices and their curriculums DET hosts or provides links to hundreds of resources to help schools and teachers support and educate students about cultural diversity (Department of Education and Training, 2014a).

Research on Pedagogical and Curricula Approaches to Cultural Diversity

Research literature on pedagogical approaches to culture is extensive and a complete review of this literature is beyond the scope of this thesis. As a result, the focus here will be on research relating to the Australian Curriculum and effective classroom and curricula practices. The pedagogical approach set out in the guidance to schools in Victoria has some similarities with the best practice recommended in the research literature in this area but also differs in significant ways. Regarding similarities, the pedagogical approach set out in government guidance in Victoria broadly aligns with the recommendations in the international research. For example, Banks’ (Banks & Banks, 2010) conceptualisation of multicultural education, one of the most influential conceptualisations of multicultural
education from the US, sets out five domains that are critical to effective multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture, and these are largely covered by the approach set out in “Unity through diversity: The Victorian Government’s vision for civics, citizenship and multicultural education” (2014).

However, there are also significant differences between the Government’s vision and the research literature. First, research on multicultural education typically promotes a more active, reflective and assertive approach, with a stronger emphasis on social justice, than the Victorian approach. For example, research has found that teaching about awareness of diversity is not enough, students need to be taught within a critical approach (Maylor, 2010), that provides a framework for students to discuss issues relating to race, prejudice and difference (Walton, Priest, & Paradies, 2013). This contrasts with the more passive language in the guidance to schools (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2013) such as developing “awareness of the perspectives of others” (p. 6) and “knowledge of the factors that can determine power imbalances between peers; for example, gender” (p. 8). Second, research also promotes starting multicultural education at a younger age and in a more comprehensive manner than is set out in the curriculum guidelines. For example, given that children begin to notice difference around ages three to five (Hirschfeld, 2008) researchers in the US have investigated the use of programmes aimed at helping kindergarten age students engage in anti-bias activities and discuss race (Lee, Gamsey, & Sweeney, 2008). In contrast to this the two recommendations set out above, focused on increasing awareness and knowledge, were provided by AusVELs as goals for Year 5 and Year 6 students respectively.

An important adjunct to the research described above is the literature suggesting that teachers need support to deliver effective multicultural education. In a review of effective approaches to fostering intercultural understanding in students Walton, Priest and Paradies
(2013) found that teachers could be reluctant to discuss issues they thought might be complex or controversial and that teachers could take a “colour-blind” approach to race due to their own discomfort with discussions about race. They concluded that teachers need support in order to be confident delivering effective education about intercultural understanding and that this support needs to be reinforced in school policy, at a whole school level, and on an ongoing basis. These research studies suggest that effective pedagogical approaches are not easy to deliver. Schools may have access to good guidance and resources but there also needs to be a consistent ongoing effort at all levels within schools in order for them to be successful.

A Framework for Considering Cultural Diversity Education in School Communities: Multicultural Education Standpoints

To provide a framework from which to consider pedagogical practices and challenges within this thesis, Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) five approaches to multicultural education are presented here. Multicultural education refers to “educational practices directed toward race, culture, language, social class, gender, sexuality and disability” (p. 33). In their model, Sleeter and Grant argue that many traditional approaches to education can maintain a monocultural stance and can fail to engage with other cultures (for example, the cultural integration approach) which they believe results in poorer outcomes for minority cultural groups. They propose that the optimal approach is a transformative one that engages with other cultures and also with issues of social justice and power imbalances. This framework suggests that the content that teachers teach has a significant impact on the outcomes of students and the broader school community, and that it is important to consider the school curriculum, as well as broader school processes identified in their model, when exploring how schools work with and support cultural diversity.
The first of Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) approaches is termed “teaching the exceptional and culturally different” and focuses on helping to fit people into the existing social structure. Within this stance those outside the dominant group are often seen as “lacking the right skills, values and knowledge” (p. 44), and there is limited or no effort to change the dominant group or to address social inequalities. This approach has parallels with Berry’s (1997) melting pot strategy.

The second approach is termed the “human relations” approach and focuses on promoting “feelings of unity, tolerance, and acceptance within the existing social structure” (Sleeter & Grant, 2009, p. 86). This includes teaching students about individual differences and similarities, and encouraging students to accept themselves and others, but also does little to encourage change in the dominant group. According to Sleeter and Grant (2009), when done well this approach can lay the groundwork for deeper multicultural education later on but when done poorly it can result in a “tourist” curriculum, in which only superficial aspects of a group, such as food and clothing, are explored. This approach has parallels with Berry’s (1997) multiculturalism strategy, but with an emphasis on a more superficial endorsement of the minority culture.

Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) third approach is known as the “single-group studies” approach. It seeks to promote structural equality and recognition of a single group which typically involves in-depth instruction about the group and efforts to involve that group in the school. This can be carried out such that other groups receive little or no attention. This approach can represent a splitting of Berry’s (1997) strategies, in which the dominant group takes a multiculturalism stance towards one group (the focus of the single-group study approach) and takes a different stance towards the other groups, which might correspond with the segregation or exclusion strategies.
The fourth approach is known as “multicultural education” and it seeks to promote cultural pluralism and equality. Sleeter and Grant (2009) argue that this is a more self-reflective and critical approach than the preceding three and more focused on educating about and engaging with different cultures. They further argue that, while this approach is often positioned as being superior to the previous three, it can also been criticised for focusing on cultural issues to the exclusion of social inequalities.

Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) fifth and final approach is named “multicultural social justice education”. Like the multicultural education approach, Sleeter and Grant argue this approach seeks to promote cultural pluralism, but also that it focuses heavily on promoting social equality and providing students with the skills to address social inequalities. Students are also encouraged to proactively address inequality and this approach can be described as a much more active approach than the preceding four. However, Sleeter and Grant note that this approach can be resource intensive to implement and difficult for members of the dominant group to adapt to. Both this approach and the multicultural education approach align with Berry’s (1997) multiculturalism approach but with greater emphasis placed on promotion of the minority culture within the multicultural social justice education approach. Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) model demonstrates that there is a body of theory deeply concerned with the place of culture in schools. However, as the preceding summary indicates, its focus is on the impact of school curricula and school ethos on student development and wellbeing and it places less emphasis on general areas of school functioning (for example, improvement of academic outcomes for the student body as a whole). So there is a need to also employ a model that encompasses the whole school.

Summary

The research on pedagogical approaches to cultural diversity in schools highlights a number of important practices and challenges for schools regarding education about culture
and cultural diversity. Effective practices have been identified and these focus on explicit and in-depth approaches to culture in the classroom. As Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) model demonstrates, effective approaches require schools and teachers to be very proactive. This further highlights the need for the provision of sufficient support and professional development for teachers which has been identified in other research. While the advice provided by DET broadly aligns with the research on effective pedagogical approaches it is not clear that it captures the essence of these approaches and whether this will subsequently create challenges for schools.

**A Whole School Model for Cultural Diversity**

To draw together the research on supporting cultural diversity in schools, the whole school approach to cultural diversity model was adopted. This model is based on the Racism No Way planning framework (Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers, 2000) and was developed further by Freeman et al. (2012). The Freeman et al. model sets out nine components that provide a framework for understanding effective school practices in relation to the support of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Given the focus on challenges within this thesis, the model was extended to include school context (see Figure 2.1) which, as the preceding review demonstrates, is likely to influence the challenges that schools encounter. In addition, school context has been identified within effective school models as important to student outcomes (for example, Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006), lending further support for its inclusion. The components of the Freeman et al. (2012) model are described below.

First, a **whole school vision** developed by school leadership in conjunction with staff, students, parents and the school community is important for guiding the school’s approach to cultural diversity. **Policies and guidelines** set out and assist the implementation of the whole school vision and should be consistent with state and national policy. **School ethos and**
environment includes the ways in which the school acknowledges and includes groups within the school and community and the way in which the school communicates with families and the community. Student support and development covers the ways in which schools support their students and potentially, different groups of students. Staff training and development involves assessing staff training and development needs in the area of cultural diversity and providing staff to develop the necessary skills through self-reflection, knowledge and skill development. Curriculum and pedagogy addresses the way in which the school teaches about cultural diversity, which would ideally be based on an approach such as Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) multicultural social justice education standpoint. Parent and community involvement covers the way in which schools attempt to communicate with parents, bring them into the school and engage them in the education and support of the students. Partnerships and services describes the ways in which schools connect with and draw on external services to provide additional services to the school and to supplement the existing activities within the school. Finally, monitoring and reporting covers the way in which the school gathers information about cultural diversity present in their school, monitors discrimination and student performance and uses this information to guide practice and the overall strategic direction of the school.
Figure 2.1. A whole school approach to addressing cultural diversity in schools adapted from Freeman et al. (2012)
The preceding review demonstrates that there is a diverse literature on the challenges and practices relating to the support of people from diverse cultural backgrounds in schools. However, there has been a limited amount of research that has focused specifically on both challenges and practices at a whole-school level. In addition, very little research has sought to explore more than one group within a school community. This suggests that research that investigates both challenges and practices, at a whole school level and from multiple perspectives, will provide a new standpoint on the ways in which schools can effectively support people from diverse cultural backgrounds. These conclusions are operationalised in the following chapter as research aims for this thesis.
Chapter Three

Aims of the Current Research
Although the importance of effectively supporting cultural diversity is clearly laid out in outcome research and national and state educational policies there is still much to be learnt about effective school practices, challenges and directions for future school practice. Little is known about how principals, staff and parents within the same school community perceive different practices and challenges or what practices they believe schools should employ. In addition, much of the research that has been conducted on school practices and challenges has focused on restricted areas of practice or specific challenges and it is not known how representative the findings of that research have been of the wider experience of people in culturally diverse schools, the challenges that they face or the practices they think are most effective within their school to deal with these challenges.

Given the gaps in the research identified here, the first part of this project aimed, in a group of complex and highly culturally diverse school communities in Australia, to:

- Advance knowledge about the types of practices being used, with specific focus on those practices that principals, teachers, and parents view as most effective. This can help reveal any differences between practices reported to be most effective in these schools and practices that have been identified in research and school guidance as most effective, which should help schools improve their practice and further stimulate research on effective school practices.

- Identify, define and delineate the major issues, concerns and challenges related to supporting or engaging with cultural diversity identified by these community groups in these schools. This will lead to increased awareness of issues that limit the ability of schools to implement best practice, information which will be beneficial to other schools that are attempting to improve their practice. It should also inform research and theory that advocate for improved practice but that may not have accounted for all of the challenges that schools may encounter.
• Investigate what principals, teachers and parents believe their schools should do to more effectively support people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This will assist with the development of further hypotheses about ways to improve current practice which will be relevant for schools and researchers seeking to improve school effectiveness.

• Analyse the conceptualisations of culture and cultural diversity employed by members of the school community through an examination of their discussions of challenges, practices and future directions for school practice, with a focus on the way these conceptualisations may be affecting school communities as well as practices and challenges. This will illuminate the context in which school practices are implemented and challenges are encountered, which should help schools to further tailor their approaches to supporting people from diverse cultural backgrounds, assess whether underlying beliefs and attitudes are congruent with social justice approaches, and identify areas for future research, particularly in Australian contexts.

The second part of this project explored school-parent engagement which was identified in the first part of this project as a major challenge for schools. The aims of the second study were to:

• Examine how the language and cultural background of parents influence teacher attitudes towards engagement with parents in order to establish with whom teachers feel most or least comfortable engaging.

• Assess how teacher characteristics, attitudes, education, training and school environment may influence teacher attitudes towards engagement with parents from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

It is intended that these research aims will result in recommendations and provide guidance for teacher training and professional development regarding work with people from diverse
cultural backgrounds, parent engagement and school level practices that support engagement.

In addition, this research may also extend the research on school-parent engagement, which has not investigated parent and teacher characteristics together.
Chapter Four

Method for Study One
This chapter sets out the methods employed in the first study presented in this thesis. The first study was conducted with six schools from a low socioeconomic status and highly culturally diverse region in Melbourne, Australia. The first section discusses the distinct Australian context in which the participating schools exist. The local context is an important consideration, one that is frequency not specified in research and is important for the analysis of data and the generalizability of the findings of this project. The discussion of the Australian context is followed by a description of the participants and the procedures employed.

**The Australian Context of the Study**

It is important to recognise that the experience of increasing cultural diversity is not homogeneous. Different countries, regions and towns may have very different stories of change and these stories may differ over time. As a result, it is important to understand the context in which the current project was conducted.

One of the key drivers of increased cultural diversity is migration and research has revealed that there are a number of factors that influence the settlement patterns of immigrants when they arrive in a new country. International research (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004) has found that the choice of residence by immigrants when they arrive in a country is affected by proximity to their entry point, the presence of family or community, and the economic opportunities present in the location. Immigrants are also likely to imitate the settlement pattern of past immigrants from the same country of origin.

Historically in Australia new immigrants have settled in large metropolitan areas, particularly in Victoria and New South Wales (Australian Survey Research, 2011). Settlement patterns of different groups within Australia have been found to be affected by factors including: the distribution of housing opportunities on arrival; the political, social and
economic climate in Australia at the time of arrival; the scale of immigration (larger groups tend to cluster in outer suburbs); language ability (groups with limited English language ability are more likely to cluster); their financial resources; and, whether there is an existing community from the same origin (Hugo, 1995; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004). In addition, immigrants in Australia are also highly transient during the period after their arrival, as they develop social networks and find employment (Australian Survey Research, 2011; Richardson, Miller-Lewis, Ngo, & Ilsley, 2002). These factors go some way in explaining why non-western European groups have tended to settle in clusters while western Europeans have been more dispersed (The Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, 2011).

These effects also differ by city. Within Melbourne the more established western European immigrants (for example, Greek, German, and Italian) initially settled in the inner and central local government areas and over time dispersed across the city. Non-European groups have been more clustered, for example, with people of Indian origin in the south-east, Filipinos in the west and Turkish in the north-west (The Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, 2011).

The outcome for schools in Melbourne has been that schools towards the centre of the city tend to have fewer students speaking a language other than English at home than schools in the outer suburbs (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014). In addition, given that cheaper housing tends to be in the outer suburbs and the tendency for groups with limited English skills to cluster there, there are significant clusters of populations of lower income and from non-English speaking countries, such as people with a Turkish background (The Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, 2011), in specific regions in Melbourne’s outer suburbs. This has created an unusual setting for schools in Melbourne’s outer suburbs, in which some schools have high levels of enrolment of students from a small
The number of countries with smaller populations of students who were born in Australia or other countries. Schools in the present study were located in this setting.

The Participating Schools

The six primary schools participating in the current study were located in Melbourne’s outer northern suburbs. The population in this region is highly culturally diverse with approximately a third of the population born overseas and a little over a quarter of the population from a non-English speaking background. In this region there are over 140 nationalities and 125 languages other than English represented and many of the residents are refugees or immigrants from countries in the Middle East such as Iraq and Turkey.

Four of the schools were government schools and two were Catholic schools. One of the government schools was also what is referred to as a special school, catering for students with disabilities. Enrolment within five of the schools was between 200 and 300 students with the sixth school having an enrolment over 600. Language other than English background ranged from 44 percent to 92 percent while Indigenous enrolment ranged from no recorded Indigenous students to 5 percent. The schools had high numbers of students with a language background other than English and the region had seen an influx of many students from Iraq, Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries in the last ten years, prior to which there had been a significant immigration of people from Asian backgrounds. All of the schools were linked with the Enhancing Relationships in School Communities (ERIS) – Talking Culture project of which the interviews and focus groups within this thesis were a part. ERIS: Talking Culture was a collaborative project between The University of Melbourne and La Trobe University to explore the experiences of cultural diversity in Australian schools.
The Participants

All six principals (four female; two male) across the schools agreed to participate in an interview. Eleven parent focus groups were conducted and 67 parents participated (62 female; 5 male) with groups ranging in size from 2 to 10 participants. There was also an additional focus group conducted with five members (5 female) of the local Aboriginal community. Six staff focus groups, one in each school, were conducted with a total of 40 staff members (38 female; 2 male) with groups ranging in size from five to eight participants.

Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 provide details of the participants.

Table 4.1

<table>
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<th>Parent focus groups</th>
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<td>(multiple schools represented)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>School groups</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English – School B</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English – School C</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>English – School D</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>English – School E</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Table 4.2  

*Study One Participants: School Staff*

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School F</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
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**Procedure**

Ethical approvals for the project were received from La Trobe University, The University of Melbourne, the Catholic Education Office - Melbourne, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (now DET). Once ethical approvals were obtained, schools were approached and invited to participate. Principals were provided with a plain language statement (Appendix A) which set out the aims of the project and the intended procedure for interviews with principals and focus groups with staff, parents and students. The aspects of the ERIS: Talking Culture project that dealt with the student focus groups are reported elsewhere (Freeman et al., 2012).

Each principal agreed to participate in the project and organised the recruitment of staff, parents and students or nominated another staff member to do so. Schools were asked to approach a diverse and representative sample for both the parent and staff focus groups. Principals or nominated staff distributed plain language statements explaining the project to staff (Appendix B) and parents (Appendix C) as well as consent forms and organised the time and location of focus groups. Interviews with principals were organised directly by the research team. Interviews and focus groups were conducted within participating schools during school hours in a private room in order for discussions to be confidential, except the Aboriginal focus group which took place at an Aboriginal social club.
Focus Groups With Parents

One English language focus group was conducted in each school and to ensure that parents from different backgrounds could participate in the project, five focus groups were conducted in community languages drawing on participants from across the six schools. Parent focus groups in English were facilitated by the ERIS: Talking Culture research team, including the author of this thesis, with two researchers present at each focus group. The focus groups conducted in community languages were each conducted by one external facilitator with the appropriate language and cultural skills and were observed by a member of the ERIS: Talking Culture research team. Focus groups ran for approximately one hour.

During the focus groups participants were again provided with the plain language statement explaining the project and completed a consent form if they had not already done so. Each focus group then commenced with an introduction by the research team or external facilitator. The introduction reiterated the goals of the project and the focus groups. Participants were then asked to introduce themselves and were asked to mention if they had children in the school and if so, which year level they were in. Participants were then asked to discuss the following topics:

- What are your schools are doing well to support cultural diversity
- What are the challenges relating to cultural diversity that your school faces
- What practices would you like to see implemented to improve support of cultural diversity

At the completion of the focus group parents were offered a $20 voucher for their participation. Audio recordings of the parent focus groups were taken and were transcribed. The audio recordings from the English speaking groups were professionally transcribed while the audio recordings from the community language focus groups were transcribed by the facilitators of those groups.
Focus Groups With Staff

Staff focus groups were facilitated by either one or two members of the ERIS: Talking Culture research team, including the author of this thesis. The focus groups varied from 30 minutes to 1 hour in length depending on staff availability. As with parents, during staff focus groups participants were again provided with the plain language statement explaining the project and they completed a consent form if they had not already done so. Each focus group then commenced with an introduction by the research team. The introduction reiterated the goals of the project and the focus groups. Participants in the staff focus groups were then asked to introduce themselves and to specify their role in their school. Staff were then asked to discuss the same topics presented to parents. The focus groups were recorded, field notes were taken by the researchers present and audio recordings of the session were subsequently transcribed.

Interviews With Principals

Interviews were held at the office of each principal, were up to 50 minutes in length and were conducted by two researchers from the ERIS: Talking Culture research team, one of whom was the author of this thesis. Each interview began with a brief introduction and then principals were invited to discuss the same topics as parents and school staff with one additional topic:

- What is your philosophy and vision for cultural diversity in your school

Participants were allowed to discuss these topics freely with minimal prompts from the interviewers. All interviews were recorded and field notes were taken by both researchers in attendance. The audio recordings were then transcribed.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis using the method of Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013) was conducted to analyse the data. An inductive approach was adopted, that is, the identification
of themes was driven by the data. The thematic analysis followed the six steps described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. The analysis was conducted by the author of this thesis but the initial generation of codes, the identification of themes and the defining and naming of themes were also discussed with other members of the research team.

As this was the first major qualitative research project conducted by the writer of this thesis, additional care was taken in the generation of initial codes and identification of themes. Coding was conducted twice before final themes were identified, with 124 codes generated across the three qualitative data sets. Following the identification of themes, data was again recoded using these themes as a guiding framework. During the course of writing the findings and discussion sections for each of the qualitative chapters, the themes were refined further. Themes were then reviewed again by other members of the research team, resulting in 14 themes across the three qualitative data sets.
Chapter Five

Parent Perspectives on Challenges and Practices in Culturally Diverse Schools
This chapter sets out the findings from the focus groups conducted with parents. Six themes are discussed, with the first two themes exploring how parents understood cultural diversity. The first theme focuses on how parents understood culture, while the second focuses on how parents thought their culture and the cultures of others should be treated. The following three themes capture the ways in which participants talked about schools and their children in schools. Within this section, theme three explores areas in which there was general consensus on the role and purpose of schools while theme four explores areas of disagreement and conflict. Theme five focuses on how parents believe children understand and experience cultural difference in their school. The final theme includes three subthemes which explore parent attitudes about their own engagement and the engagement of other parents with their schools. These themes touched on all of the areas within the whole school approach to diversity model (see Figure 2.1), with a focus on student support and development, curriculum and pedagogy, and parent and community involvement. Additional discussion of each of these areas and those not discussed in detail within this chapter is presented in Chapter Eight.

**Theme 1: Culture - It’s Hard to Explain if You Don’t Know What It Is**

A central theme in the parent focus groups was the way in which participants constructed culture and racism and the first theme *culture - it’s hard to explain if you don’t know what it is* captures the reliance participants had on simple conceptualisations of culture and the difficulties they encountered trying to understand and explain more complex cultural differences.

**Culture as Observable Practices and Behaviours**

Conceptualisations of culture varied amongst participants within the parent focus groups, but participants primarily employed a simple construction of culture as relating to *practices* and *behaviours*, rather than values and belief systems. Building on this point,
participants appeared to view cultural diversity as relating to similarities and differences in practices and behaviours between groups. Common practices that participants drew on to explain differences between groups included what people ate or wore, the languages they spoke, and their dances and art. For example, while discussing the cultural diversity within her daughter’s school and the pleasure she derived from this, one participant said:

Well what's good is the kids having so many cultures [at school]. I love it. Even at home the kids will come and they speak about each other's ways and how they are at home or what they do…. My daughter had a friend that came from Japan. She found that really fascinating with their lettering and how they write. It just opens a lot of doors because then she would want to research it.

Interestingly participants also appeared to apply the construction of culture as practices and behaviours to their own culture. As one participant said, “I think kids already know the Australian culture. They celebrate Australia Day, they participate in footy days, they have meat pies, they dress in those hats and scarves and whatever and you know, they know the Australian culture”. The exception to these types of conceptualisations of culture was the statements of participants from the Aboriginal social club, which included comments about values, beliefs and identity; this is discussed within the fourth subtheme in theme three.

The focus on culture and cultural diversity as relating to observable practices and behaviour highlighted how few participants linked culture to values or beliefs. Some participants did link culture with religious practices but not with the values or beliefs of the religion they were discussing. For example, a participant in a non-English language focus group said “Yes of course; they show respect to our culture and let us pray if we want to; this is cultural diversity; they respect our culture” and did not discuss whether the school supported their beliefs or practices in other ways. When participants did discuss beliefs or values these were discussed in terms of challenges occurring within the school and were not
linked back to the concept of culture. For example, in one focus group two participants were discussing an incident in which some parents had asked that alternative arrangements be made so that their daughters would not need to be driven by a male bus driver and they said:

Participant 1: So they want a female driver for their daughters. Because that's not available, the daughters will not go on the bus.

Participant 2: Why should the school now find funding for your daughter for these few girls because you don't want them going on the bus?

These participants appeared upset about the apparent request for special treatment being made by this family, but did not indicate whether they were aware that the request for a female bus driver was grounded in cultural beliefs. Overall the discussion amongst participants suggested that parents’ constructions of culture were driven by the more easily observable features of individuals and groups, while values and beliefs, which are often harder to quantify, were less salient to the participants.

**Distinguishing Between Culture, Civics and Religion**

When participants did discuss values and beliefs it appeared that they associated them with either civics or religion and not with a broader conceptualisation of culture. It appeared that there were at least two groups of participants, those that saw religion and culture as overlapping but distinct constructs while the other group, frequently those that made statements suggesting that they were more religious, closely equated religion and culture. For example, when discussing the teaching of religion in their school, one participant drew distinctions between religion, culture and history:

I don't mind if other religions are taught too and the children have the option to be able to go in and listen in their teachings as well. I think it even gives you a more spiritual outlook and not just the spiritual, but on culture, on history and you can have a wider look at your own beliefs because you see the differences, but you also see the
similarities within each religion. You can have a lot more openness to your own belief in a sense.

This participant also identified that knowledge about religion would help enrich understandings of other cultures. Interestingly, across the focus groups the possible benefits of educating about culture and cultural diversity were rarely discussed and this will be discussed further in theme three.

**Parents’ Knowledge of Cultures and Their Capacity to Engage With Their Children on Culture**

While most participants’ statements indicated that they believed their understanding of culture and diversity was adequate, some participants identified that their understanding of difference, specifically relating to culture and religion, meant that they had difficulty engaging with their children on these topics. As one participant explained:

> My daughter will say to me, “Mum, why do they pray on the carpets?” Well, I can't give her an answer. I don't know. I sometimes would make one up just to help... To give the kids the right answers, you need to know and … Besides Google, it's not available.

Another participant said:

> See, my son wanted to know why they fasted and I couldn't fully explain that to him and we've got Turkish friends and everything. They had the burka festival and we went past. My son went “why are [they] celebrating - the people wearing the headpieces?” I said, “I don't know”. This is something I would like to be able to have him know.

These participants demonstrated that there were a number of cultural and religious practices for which they did not have the knowledge necessary to educate their children. The direct consequences of this type of issue were not clear but it is possible that it contributes to
children having difficulty understanding and accepting different beliefs. For example, one participant described her child being excluded by other children after taking a ham sandwich to school:

See, that wasn't just from the Muslim children or the people that don't eat ham children. This was from other children that would have no reason to not eat ham. It was like, “you're eating ham, so we're not playing with you”, that's it. That was from one of her other good friends who has nothing to do with that culture.

This participant described a situation in which her child was excluded by students, some of whom were not Muslim, because her child ate a ham sandwich. It is possible that this type of exclusion may partly stem from students having a limited understanding of the reasons why people may choose to eat or not to eat ham. This may result in less tolerance for those who do eat ham, which is an issue that might be improved through greater education about different cultures and variation within cultural groups for both students and parents.

The consequences of the types of conceptualisations of culture set out in this theme are potentially significant. Apart from the potential implications for the capacity of parents to help their children develop their own cultural identity and to teach their children about other cultures, which are discussed later in this chapter, parents who limit their conceptualisation of culture to observable practices may subsequently have a limited understanding of the other parents within their community and feel less connected to them. This is significant because literature on sense of community suggests that a higher sense of community provides important protection against physical and psychological stressors (see Pretty et al., 2006, for a review of some of the benefits of sense of community).

**Theme 2: How Do Other Cultures Fit In?**

One interesting area of participant discussion in the parent focus groups regarded the ways in which participants spoke about how different cultural groups engaged with each
other and the variation in perspectives about this issue. This theme how do other cultures fit in? explores this topic and some of the implications of the different stances that participants took.

**There’s Nothing Wrong With Having Your Own Culture but You Still Need to Assimilate**

Although many participants in the English language focus groups appeared to endorse new arrivals retaining their own culture, there was a strong theme throughout discussion in these focus groups that it was important to protect the existing culture within Australia. The title of this subtheme was taken from a statement made by one participant who stated “You should be proud of your own culture. There’s nothing wrong with having your own culture but I still think that you need to assimilate into Australian society” and who demonstrated the conflict (and potential confusion) between endorsement of integration and assimilation. Other participants expressed similar views; for example, one participant stated, “they have to accept us and make the effort to go to school things and make the effort to blend in. But eventually I think they'll settle”. Participants making statements such as these appeared to have strong views about the importance of maintaining the existing Australian culture and discussion indicated that participants felt that, while variation in cultures and beliefs was acceptable, this was only permissible to the extent that it did not impinge on mainstream Australian culture.

The statements presented in the preceding paragraph also suggested that some participants, while outwardly stating that other cultures should be respected, were also uncomfortable with them. For example, one participant made a statement supporting inclusiveness, “I think the most important thing is that they [the children] have to know that we are all people. It doesn’t matter what culture we are, what nationality we are, what
religion we are” and then while providing an example of their efforts to be inclusive, they indicated that they still found the cultural difference to be a barrier that they struggled with:

For example if I come across a Muslim lady in the - what are they called - the burka, well sometimes I automatically look at her as a lady. I don't see her burka, you know, I just see her as a person in front of me. I don't see her as - I don't see her culture - I don't see her as Muslim, I just talk to her as a person. That sort of helps me in a way, to communicate better with her because if you see her as a person rather than a Muslim…or person who is wearing that costume - in a burka - then there’s sort of like that obstacle. If you have that in the back of your mind, okay, fair enough, she’s a Muslim, she’s wearing a burka, but that’s not really important.

This participant framed “Muslim” and “burka” as “obstacles” that needed to be overcome in order for communication to occur. These types of statements provide further evidence that some parents may hold beliefs about other cultures that might conflict with their more explicit statements about respect and acceptance. This passage also links to theme one, suggesting that the participants’ relatively simple conceptualisations of culture are potentially linked with a lack of knowledge of other cultures.

Contact Between Cultures Can Be Enriching

Not all participants within the English language focus groups endorsed the view that members of so-called “non-Australian” cultural groups should attempt to adapt to or to “assimilate” into Australian culture. Some participants indicated that they thought that cultures could be enriched by exposure to others. For example, one participant said:

Yeah, so I think it’s good too that [my daughter] is exposed to other cultures and religions. I believe that it’s really important to have an understanding and a respect for other cultures and religions, and I think that her being exposed to that here is helping to develop that. I think it’s good that she’s developing an understanding that
there is not just one belief system, that people are allowed to believe what they want to believe, and it’s okay to do that, as long as you respect other people’s beliefs. I think the exposure to, obviously, the Muslim culture and all that here is really good for her to develop that.

This participant linked cultural and religious contact with the development of her child’s understanding of others and their belief systems. This participant also endorsed a view that “people are allowed to believe what they want to believe” and stated that this needs to be tempered by respect for other people’s beliefs. This view was also supported by other participants for whom mutual respect between cultures was seen as important, as one participant said, “We need to teach our kids their side of things, but, at the same time, they need to be able to interact and learn our side of things. It's got to be a two way...”. However, this view diverged from the views of some participants presented earlier in this section who discussed assimilation of other cultures and did not discuss potential benefits of contact between different cultures or how contact between cultures could occur.

Overall it appeared that there were participants who saw culture as something that could be enriching and who sought to engage with other cultures, while others were more focused on retaining their culture. Given that the schools strongly endorsed values of mutual respect and acceptance, as discussed in the following three chapters, it was not clear from the discussions how parents who endorsed retaining their culture engaged with the schools on this issue. One distinction that was identified is that participants often spoke about mutual respect and the enriching aspects of culture when discussing their children’s experiences of other cultures but more frequently discussed wanting to retain their own culture when the discussion drew upon their personal experiences. This suggested that for some parents adapting to different cultures might be something that they believe is beneficial but found difficult to engage with personally.
Parents Who Speak Languages Other Than English Also Want Their Own Culture Retained

Participants in the language-other-than-English focus groups also made strong statements about the importance of retaining their own culture. A parent in a Turkish-speaking group said, “And also I try to raise them as Australian Turkish. I want [my children] to acknowledge this.” Similarly, a parent in a Vietnamese-speaking group said, “Well, as parents we’re trying our best to hold on to our culture and to pass it to our children. The more the better. And we have to accept the fact if they don’t listen to us, they will be failures.” This parallels Australian research (Renzaho et al., 2011) that found that retention of culture was a strong value amongst Sudanese, Iraqi and Lebanese immigrants in Melbourne.

As participants in both the English language focus groups and the language other than English focus groups expressed the attitude that they would like to see their culture retained, it is possible that there would be tension between different groups of parents within the schools. However, participants who did discuss this topic in the focus groups indicated that this had not led to significant problems. One participant from a language-other-than-English focus group indicated that she had found Australia to be very supportive of her traditions and culture:

I come from an Arabic background and there is no society without mistakes. Australia is a country that respects traditions and culture. I find it strange and difficult, and I feel hurt if someone says to me “I don’t want to eat your food”. While here they say “if your son does not want to do this, it’s up to him”. It’s very difficult for me to say no; my religion does not allow me to say no. Here they don’t push, they leave it up to you… they respect your view and do not put pressure.
This finding suggested that, even if parents from different language backgrounds are uncomfortable with the beliefs or cultures of parents from different backgrounds, they may still try to engage in supportive behaviour.

**Participant Perspectives on Other Cultural Groups Within Berry’s Acculturation Model**

The positions of the different groups of participants which have been identified appear to have parallels with previous theory and research on acculturation (for example, Berry (2005); Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder (2006); and Berry (1980)) discussed in the introduction. Many of the participants in the language-other-than-English focus groups appeared to align with the ethnocultural group strategy of integration while discussion also indicated that some appeared to endorse the ethnocultural group strategy of separation. In Berry’s model, integration describes an approach in which ethnocultural groups seek to maintain their own culture but also engage with the larger society, while separation describes an approach in which ethnocultural groups seek to maintain their own culture and do not engage with the larger society.

The discussion in the English speaking language groups suggested that participants in these groups tended to endorse one of two further strategies that Berry (1997) indicates are common within dominant cultural groups. These strategies were multiculturalism (in which the larger society endorses the maintenance of one’s own culture while also allowing ethnocultural groups to retain their own culture) and melting pot (ethnocultural groups are welcomed but must adopt the culture of the larger society). Based on participants’ discussions of school ethos, the participating schools were portrayed by the parents as endorsing the stance of multiculturalism, to the point that schools appeared to be willing to alter some of the existing culture to better support groups from diverse cultural backgrounds.
These differences in acculturative strategy are important because acculturation research has also established that undergoing cultural change can lead to acculturative stress (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987), for both new arrivals and the existing group(s), particularly when the strategies adopted are incompatible, such as the enthocultural strategies of either integration and separation with the larger society’s melting pot strategy. From the standpoint of wellbeing this is important because acculturative stress, depending on the nature of the acculturative stress experienced, is associated with indicators of negative mental health (Berry, 2005). As a result, although the schools and many parents may endorse a strategy of multiculturalism or integration, parents who do not wish to have their culture changed and parents identifying with groups from diverse cultural backgrounds who have adopted the strategy of separation may be undergoing acculturative stress.

Theme 3: Schools Should Focus on Safety, Fun, Knowledge and Maybe Identity and Culture

The theme schools should focus on safety, fun, knowledge and maybe identity and culture explores participant’s perspectives regarding the purpose of schools in relation to both their general function and how they engage with cultural diversity. Participant discussion relating to the purpose of schools covered four areas which are addressed across four subthemes. First, were factors relating to child wellbeing and children’s enjoyment of school. Second, were perspectives about the most important areas of education. Third, was the development of identity and values in children. Fourth, was an education hierarchy that participants appeared to endorse.

Parents Prioritised Safety, Fun and Wellbeing

Parents in the focus groups consistently prioritised student safety, fun and general wellbeing as a requirement for their child’s school. As one participant said, “I suppose three things you always tend to look at is first safety, second fun, and I suppose then thirdly,
knowledge”. Other participants made statements such as, “She [their child] can’t wait to come to school, and that’s what it’s about” which demonstrated that they wanted their children to enjoy school and that enjoyment was an important priority in its own right. When discussing their schools’ capacities to achieve this, participants were also consistently positive. For example, few participants reported incidents of bullying or racism, with one participant stating, “Because as far as the kids [go] they all get on. It doesn't matter what background they're from. They all get on and I think that's fantastic”. Participants who did identify instances of bullying typically indicated that they were dealt with quickly, for example:

Just once, I was upset because my daughter came home and told that an Australian girl hit her. So I went to the school and talked to the principal and told him about what happened and that my daughter was very sad. He said “Ok I’m going to talk to the other child and it won’t happen again”. So, I asked my daughter if things are ok and she said “yes, she’s playing with me now and the teacher talked to her”.

However, as noted in theme one, instances of less overt racism and bullying, for example the ostracism of students eating ham sandwiches, were not always dealt with and participants typically framed this as an issue relating to education about similarities and differences rather than racism or bullying. Overall, participants indicated that they felt that their children’s general wellbeing, as well as their own, were being looked after. This view was reported by participants in both the English language and language other than English focus groups. The following statement by a participant from one of the language other than English focus groups captured this idea:

My daughter wore the Hijab this year and she was afraid that the teachers or the school would tell her off. On the contrary, the teachers and administration said “wow”. They encouraged her; she felt that the teachers loved her; and she felt good.
My children do not like to be absent from school. They become bored during the school holiday and can’t wait till term starts to go back to school. They love their teachers and they love their friends. Here you feel that you live with a family, you don’t see a difference - this is a teacher or an admin worker or a principal - you feel they are part of your family. I don’t feel that I am coming to a school, I feel like I am coming to my home. The school has good programs and do their best to get closer to the parents.

Some participants in the language other than English focus groups reported that they or their children had previously had negative experiences in Australian schools but they reported that the schools participating in this study were very welcoming and participants identified some of the benefits of the approaches employed by their schools. They identified that their children were much more engaged with the school and eager to attend and they also noted the sense of community that this created. In addition, participants felt that parents and students became close with school staff and felt comfortable going to the school for support if they needed it. Building on the results identified in theme two, this provided further evidence that the school communities in the current study typically were accepting of different cultures.

**Traditional Subjects Should be the Focus of Education**

When discussing education there was consistent agreement among participants that the focus of schools should be on core and traditional subjects like mathematics, history, reading, and writing. Some participants also expressed a belief that schools should not do much beyond this, a sentiment echoed by many of the participants in the specialist school. As one participant stated:

At the end of the day the children are here to learn Maths and English and History and reading and writing. Of course they know about backgrounds but I don't think school
is totally responsible for doing that. I believe we, as parents, are. I think what they've got in place with the art things and the cooking and the garden and accepting all different cultures into the school is...enough.

In this example the participant not only limited the responsibility of the school but identified parents as having an important role in the education of their children.

**Educating About Cultural Diversity is Part of Educating About Values and Identity**

Some participants identified the importance of schools for the development of identity and values in students. However, as briefly touched on in theme one, participants often discussed identity and values in terms of civics and religion. When discussing the school’s role in the development of identity and values, discussion was primarily framed in terms of civics. The beliefs and values that were most salient within parent focus groups were respect, tolerance and acceptance of the self and others. Analysis of participant discussion of these values in relation to contact with different cultures indicated that participants were interpreting these values as the stance that their children would adopt towards people from other cultures, rather than learning about the values or beliefs of cultural groups. For example, one participant said:

> Oh look I think just with the kids seeing what other people eat, the way they dress, and just enjoying it, rather than picking on it. Being able to see it’s normal for that person, like what I wear is normal for me or what I eat.

Here the participant discussed accepting different foods and styles of dress but did not discuss any form of deeper engagement, such as understanding the other person’s perspective, understanding why other people may have different practices or behaviours, or any of the broader values, beliefs or aspects of culture that observable practices and behaviours derive from. The theme of being familiar with difference rather than engaging with difference was consistent across focus groups. As another participant said:
They have looked at other religions, which I think is an important part of growing up. And knowing that there are other religions like there are other nationalities, is a good thing. It's always best to know about it than to be scared of it.

This participant identified the importance of knowing about difference but again did not appear to see a deeper engagement or understanding as important. Some parents did make statements that suggested that a deeper level of engagement may be occurring, but the statements lacked the specificity necessary to determine whether this actually was happening, and if so how. For example:

My kids seem to come home with a well-rounded concept of other countries, other people's needs both traditionally and religiously and things like that. So to me it seems like they're getting their adequate fill of all the information that they need.

Overall, participants were consistent in their construction of schools as a place of fun, safety and knowledge but were less consistent in their constructions of schools as a location for the development of identity and values.

**Culture Within a Hierarchy of Needs**

Despite the focus of much of the discussion on teaching about traditional subjects, some participants did state that they would like their children to receive more education around culture. However, discussions also suggested that participants differed in regard to the priority they placed on culture and cultural diversity in the school and its curriculum. Participants with children in the specialist school most strongly supported the notion that their children’s understanding of culture and cultural diversity was adequate and that they did not need a more extensive or complex understanding of culture. They saw the needs of their children as superseding cultural difference and “diversity” was defined in terms of the children’s special needs, thereby making engagement with other forms of diversity, such as cultural, largely irrelevant. For example, one parent said, “If you're autistic it doesn't matter
where you come from … disability sort of cuts through any culture, any economic, anything. It affects everyone.” They went on to say, “maybe because it's a special school you're more concerned with the disability aspects of the kids and what background they come from really doesn't enter into it”. Another parent said:

The schools need to look at the education and what the skills can do for the child, not worrying about “oh where does this kid come from” and “we need to be aware of this and aware of that”. That's good that the school is aware of the different cultures and that but it is not as important.

A significant contrast to the statements made by parents with children at the specialist school, and with the statements discussed in the first subtheme regarding culture, were views expressed by participants from the Aboriginal social club, who appeared to conceptualise culture beyond practices and behaviours, and strongly supported education around cultural diversity. One participant in the Aboriginal social club group said “[The specialist school] is another one that's got quite a few Koorie kids going there and I’m thinking well, just because children have a disability, that doesn’t mean they don’t have cultural needs” while another participant said:

I think anything your children do, you want it to be conducive to strengthening their identity and strengthening their sense of belonging and their sense of self. You know children spend so much time at school so [the school] should be playing a role in that. So I think it's important for individuals and for children, and then there's the other aspect that's around you know, educating the wider community about Aboriginal people and our history. It's a joint history. What happened to Aboriginal people isn't just our history. It's Australia's history and that needs to be taught, I think.

Together these statements illustrate differing views about the perceived need for education about cultural diversity and its importance relative to other areas of education. Members of
the Aboriginal social club saw education about cultural diversity as important, both in its own right and in relation to other subjects, while participants with children in the specialist school gave it a much lower priority. Many participants in the other focus groups also made statements that indicated further difference in beliefs about the importance of culture and cultural diversity in the school and curriculum, but their perspectives were more difficult to define. The implications of a significant number of parents seeing teaching about culture as a low priority is not clear, but it does suggest that there may be less incentive for schools to prioritise teaching in this area.

A noteworthy finding from focus groups was that parents consistently prioritised safety, wellbeing and education about traditional subjects, while there was considerable variation regarding the importance placed on education about culture. This finding differs somewhat from previous research (Friedman, Bobrowski, & Geraci, 2006) which found that parents differed in their prioritisation of safety, wellbeing and education. It also represents a novel finding, revealing that some parents value education about culture and identity highly while others do not. Unfortunately as the cultural group that each participant identified with was not known in many cases it is not possible to determine how influential cultural group was to the priority that participants placed on education about culture.

**Theme 4: Teaching for Culture and Supporting Difference Can Be Difficult**

The theme *teaching for culture and supporting difference can be difficult* explores the challenges within the school that participants in the parent focus groups identified which relate to culture and cultural diversity. This theme consists of four subthemes that explore: religion in schools, second language classes, retaining traditions and how the needs of different groups are met. This theme builds on theme two by focusing on parent perspectives on how religion and language should be taught or if they should be taught at all. It also
builds on theme three by linking the discussion of values and identity development to classroom practices.

Parents Have Differing Opinions About Religious Education in Schools

The issue on which participants expressed the widest range of views in government schools was religious education. Some participants thought that religious education was very important and that schools had an important role providing religious education for their children. For example, one participant said:

They need to have religious instruction come back… if one group of children want to do it and the parents want them to do it, they should be allowed to have that choice there… They need to have a choice and we don't have a choice.

While the parent in this example identified that different people might have different religious needs, most parents who were in favour of increased religious education wanted the Christian or Muslim faiths taught. In contrast to the participants in favour of religious education, other participants thought that religious education should not be occurring in schools. For example one participant said, “Religious wise - well I don't know about you but I don't expect him to come here and have any religion anyway”.

Despite the differences in opinions about whether different religions should be taught, a large number of participants in the focus groups commented on how well their schools supported different religious groups. Many participants talked about how their schools set aside rooms during Ramadan for students who were fasting or wished to pray, or how their schools had adjusted the food they offered. For example, one participant said:

We don't have any pork products, so that's always a priority and we always take into consideration religious days so we don't celebrate things if they can't eat at that time. It's all taken into consideration.
So although there were significant differences in opinions about religious education classes, it appeared that participants thought that in general different religious groups were supported effectively.

**Concerns About Losing Religion, Culture, and Identity**

It was identified that, in addition to disagreements about the provision of religious education classes, some participants saw the shift towards greater support for non-Christian religious groups as leading to the loss of their traditions and culture. For example one Christian parent discussed her thoughts about schools in Australia doing less to celebrate Christmas:

> When we were younger, we used to have our end-of-year school Christmas. We don't have that anymore … I liked the old traditions, back when we sang Jingle Bells and all the other stuff. We had a concert and now I don't think there was one single Christmas song sung. I think that's a shame that we've got that pushed out of our schools because - as I say, I'm not racist, but a lot of nationality backgrounds of Turkish and all that - they've complained about it and we've lost our traditions.

> We're losing our traditions to accommodate for them.

This participant identified a number of concerns. She believed that a cultural and religious practice that she valued was no longer being maintained, that parents from other cultural and religious groups were pushing for this, and that the traditions were no longer being supported as there was greater emphasis on supporting these other groups. These types of concerns were also echoed by other participants. For example, one participant said, “We have a sausage sizzle kind of thing. I know of one family that was complaining of the fact that they had to give up normal sausages for halal”. These comments suggest that the recognition of different religious events and practices can be difficult for schools. Schools aim to support
the different needs of their community but in the examples presented above these needs appear to clash at times and create tension.

**Differing Views on Language Education in Schools**

Language education was another area in which participants’ opinions varied. Participants were in favour of their children learning English fluently but there were significant differences in the second language(s) participants thought should be offered. Some parents were happy for their children to learn any additional language. For example:

Learning a language - another language. I certainly didn't so I’m just really enjoying that [my daughter is] learning Italian and they've got a language at the school. So - which you don't see a lot in primary schools, I don't know if nowadays they do but back in my day you didn’t learn a language at primary school.

Other participants indicated they thought that offering a second language could conflict with their language goals for their children. For example, some participants did not want their children to learn a second language which was not the parent’s first (non-English) language because they felt it was making it more difficult for their children to learn the parent’s language. As one participant stated:

I'm not going to lie, I was a bit ticked off when I found out my kids were learning Turkish. I've got no problem with them learning another language, it's just that for me - yeah and it is kind of my fault - I haven't taught them my language because I don't really speak it myself. I thought well there's not many Samoans at the school and there's a Samoan teacher here. I would like it if there was some kind of a class where she could teach Samoan to the kids as well as them learning another language, because I would much rather they learn my language before they learn anyone else's language.

And another participant, in a different focus group stated:
I would prefer they just taught them English. I send my son to Arabic School on Saturday and he's been doing it since prep. He'll come home and he can say the alphabet in Turkish and the numbers and he doesn't even know to say that in Lebanese. I'm like what are you doing? It just makes me mad that I've paid all this money to learn on Saturday and he's not learning it like he is here. I prefer him to learn English. I don't want him to get confused between three languages, you know what I mean?

It was not clear from participant discussion whether the schools allowed parents to opt out of these classes although the implication was that they could not. Second language classes were therefore another area in which the needs of parents differed and it appeared that schools would require more resources to meet the needs of parents.

**Schools Focus on the Majority Groups’ Needs**

There was little discussion in any of the parent focus groups about the smaller cultural groups in the schools. For example, in nearly all parent focus groups, the discussion relating to religion focused on Christianity and Islam. In addition, some participants stated that the cultural groups with less representation within the school community received less support than the more visible cultural groups. Specifically, some participants noted that little was being done for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Pacific Islanders, and people from Asia or Eastern Europe.

The few comments made about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people groups highlighted the difficulties that they might encounter in the community. One participant in an English language focus group said that she was not aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the community, saying, “There were Aboriginal kids when I used to go to school, but there are no other ones around here now. So there are different types of people now”. In addition, it was determined
that this was one of only three comments made about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in any of the parent focus groups apart from those made by participants in the Aboriginal social club focus group (the other two comments were made by a parent who mentioned an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art project their child had completed at school and a parent in an Arabic speaking focus group who suggested that an Aboriginal language should be taught as the second language in their school). One participant in the Aboriginal social club group pointed out why this lack of visibility and the current lack of attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and history in schools was a problem:

And that itself, saying well we don't have that many kids here, is insulting in itself. You know, it's not recognising Aboriginal people as the first people, it's not recognising our sovereignty over this country. I mean, I think it's not just about being respectful but there's also a social justice component of it which I think people tend to forget. Well, it's recognising that Aboriginal people, our ownership and being the first people of this country … I think sometimes people forget about what acknowledging traditional ownership is about. Social justice is important because that's sort of acknowledging our history and the dispossession and the loss and what all the impact of that is… I think people sometimes don't think about the whole purpose or meaning behind doing that. Because I think people need to understand that to get, it puts things into context around perhaps why we face some of the issues that we do these days … what has happened historically has directly impacted on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people today.

This participant identified that there was limited recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their history, their experience and the issues they often have to confront.
Theme 5: Children Themselves Aren’t Racist - It’s What They’re Taught.

The theme *children themselves aren’t racist - it’s what they’re taught* captures how participants talked about and understood how children act in racist or discriminatory ways. Collectively participants minimised the tendency for students to independently notice difference or engage in social categorisation and also expressed a variety of opinions on the extent to which social and societal factors influenced the attitudes of students towards different groups. This theme links with the preceding four themes in that it demonstrates how participants’ understandings of culture, their engagement with culture and their priorities about their children’s education can lead to misconceptions about racism.

Racism is Often Not Visible

Many participants expressed a belief that racism and discrimination were not problems in their school, or if they did occur it was something that was dealt with quickly. Discussion focused on two reasons why racism and discrimination were not problems. The first reason was implicit. Participant responses suggested that as they were not directly observing instances of racism they felt that their schools were doing a good job to counter it. Parents made statements like:

> The school embraces multiculturalism, so they’re always doing different activities, whether it be something Turkish, something Arabic, something Australian. So they embrace that here, they don’t try to sweep it under the carpet. So it feels like we’re a community.

Acceptance, tolerance and understanding, framed as the opposite of racism and discrimination, were things that many parents stated their school communities did well. However, it should also be noted that in the study of children’s attitudes across the six schools that was conducted as part of the larger research project of which the parent focus
groups are a part, it was found that racist behaviours and discriminatory attitudes had been experienced or observed by a significant number of students (Freeman et al., 2012).

The second reason was linked to the way in which participants understood racism. Participants constructed **racism as something that was intrinsically foreign to children**. As three participants from one focus group said:

Participant 1: Kids just got out there because kids don't care. Kids are kids, they couldn't care less what you are, you could be black, red and green for all they care.

Participant 2: That’s right.

Participant 3: It’s true, yeah.

Participants also described racism as something that children have to be taught. For example, three participants in another focus group said:

Participant 1: Children themselves aren’t racist. It’s what they’re taught.

Participant 2: That’s exactly right.

Participant 3: Yeah, they’re given to us with nothing, a pure slate.

Discussion diverged when participants addressed how children learnt racism. For example, one participant indicated that they thought that media representations taught children about racism:

I think TV plays a role as well because once children see, for example, a black person playing the role of a judge or playing the role of a policeman, back 10 years or 20 years ago that wasn't allowed. I mean black people weren’t allowed to be playing those roles. They’ll play those roles as peasants or servants…

Other participants suggested that talking about similarities and differences was a mechanism by which children started to see difference and, subsequently, become racist, and that children need to learn about racism either experientially or be taught about it when they are in high school:
I don't think that the teachers actually talk about the different cultures within the classroom. That would be a prejudiced thing. I think the kids just learn from different things that they do like each other, as you said, or maybe through drama. Also I think through… like the school production.

Or, as another participant put it:

So I reckon the kids at school should be taught - or actually we shouldn't put that emphasis too much because they don't see it as that, but as they get older they see the differences. They do see differences and they do - what's the word? They do segregate themselves.

Here the participant appeared to think that younger children should not be taught about difference because they “don’t see it” and it would be better to teach about it at an older age when they were aware of difference. Another parent identified that, in addition to learning from media, children could learn racist attitudes from their parents:

As they're growing up things around them form those prejudices, whether it’s the media, whether it’s your parents, because of course, they're your stepping stones, that’s who you look to. So you often have your own prejudices and without you realising, you are very opinionated to your children, so you form their prejudices. Do you understand what I mean? So I think from ground root level to actually let children embrace and see everybody as one and equal, because kids don't care. All kids care about is “that kid over there played with me” or “that kid over there thumped me, I don't like him”.

Another explanation that was offered was that children perceived difference but were either uninterested in it or did not have the necessary cognitive skills to make (racist) generalisations from it. As two participants in one focus group said:
Participant 1: I think kids don't - it doesn’t bother them too much. They know that they're different from others…

Participant 2: …and they want to know why they're different.

Participant 1: …but it doesn’t bother them, I think, as much.

Facilitator: As much as what?

Participant 1: As what we probably - I mean some people are prejudiced against others but kids, I don't think it bothers them as much. When they associate with each other they know they're different but it doesn’t get to them as much as adults do.

Some adults say “oh well, they're Chinese”, well, sometimes they even generalise - all Chinese are this or all Indians are that. You know what I mean? They generalise but kids see each other as different but they don't generalise as much, if you know what I mean.

In this quote participants also indicated that they may construct racism as a problem that adults can create, rather than children, a sentiment that was supported by a number of other participants. Participants did not explore this idea extensively but, in addition to describing racism as a problem for adults, they implied that as people grow older they form opinions and start to generalise about other cultures or groups:

The [children] don't care what the differences are. Kids are kids, but as I said, as you grow older and you see the complexities of things and you see things thrown up on television about Afghanistan blowing everybody up, that’s when you start to form your opinions.

Discussion also indicated that participants may not be self-reflective when thinking about other cultures or groups. For example, one participant said:
You know, and sometimes you look at other people and you think “well, I’m not too keen on”, you know, sort of - what do you say? “No, not too keen on your culture because you tend to tar everybody with the same brush”

Discussion also indicated that participants may construct bullying and racism in different ways despite grouping together the efforts to limit bullying with efforts to limit racism. As the above discussion indicated, participants constructed racism as something that was learned. However, discussion of bullying suggested that some participants viewed bullying as something that was a natural phenomenon in children, and in the examples below two different parents, in two different focus groups, identified it as “a girl thing”. In the first focus group:

Participant 1: Amongst their own group they still seem to have this real nasty streak.

Maybe it's just a girl thing.

Participant 2: Oh look we have issues here and I mean let's be honest every school does. There are no schools…

Participant 3: Kids are kids aren’t they? Yeah.

And in a second focus group:

Participant 1: Yeah but like my daughter has problems with kids at school and they're all different nationalities and they're all bitches at one time or another you know including my daughter.

Participant 2: Part of growing up.

Participant 1: Yeah I think it's a girl thing more than a cultural thing.

Overall, it appeared that while participants had different ways of understanding how racism occurred, they constructed it as something that was largely a problem for adults and something that children would not pick up on. In contrast, bullying was a behavioural problem for children and, as demonstrated in the second quote, one which they would
eventually stop exhibiting. These perspectives differ substantially from the current research evidence that children as young as 3 to 5 notice difference (Hirschfeld, 2008) and that it is possible to constructively engage these children in discussions about race and bias (Lee et al., 2008).

**Theme 6: Our Schools are Very Supportive but How Parents Want to Engage With Their School Can Vary**

The theme *our schools are very supportive but how parents want to engage with their school can vary* explores how participants spoke about parent engagement with their schools. The discussion of this subject was broken up into three subthemes. The first explores the attitude expressed by a number of participants that their own needs determined how much they wanted to engage with their school. The second explores some of the difficulties that participants encountered when trying to engage with their schools, and the third explores some of the attitudes participants expressed about the engagement of other parents with their school.

**We Like Engagement but There can be Other Priorities**

The subtheme *we like engagement but there can be other priorities* explores how participants described their engagement with their schools. As suggested by the title of this subtheme participants appeared to value engagement with their school. Much of the discussion relating to this theme also implied that the participants in the focus groups felt that their personal engagement with their school was successfully meeting their own needs in addition to those of their children. The majority of participants within the focus groups who had chosen to get involved with their school were happy with the experience. For example, a participant whose family’s application for residency in Australia had been rejected spoke about the support she had sought and received from their school:
Two months ago, [the Australian government] rejected us to stay here. [The school staff] are all supporting us and we cry and everything, and it’s really sad, but thanks God, people around you still are there to help you. I’m happy for that. I always pray to God, bless all these people supporting us.

However, participants also indicated that engagement with their school was not always a priority. As one parent explained, there was a period in her life in which she did not have the time to engage with the school:

I suppose with my first two I wasn't involved in the school because I was working full-time so it's pick up the kids and quickly read the newsletter, and that was the extent of my involvement in the school.

With the last two I've ceased working so I'm now home full-time, so I've got more time to invest in the school and in the school community. So it depends on your life outside out of school as to how much you get involved within the school.

This participant indicated that there were often external factors that influenced her engagement in the school in addition to her own needs.

Overall, engagement with the school appeared to be driven by a need for support from the school or by a desire to contribute to the school community, although these reasons were not discussed extensively. It was interesting to note that participants did not link engagement with the school to educational outcomes for their students. This perspective contrasted with views elicited from the participants in the staff focus groups, the findings for which are presented in the next chapter in full. Staff who indicated that one of the primary reasons to increase parent engagement was to improve student outcomes. However, it does align with research (for example, Harris and Goodhall, 2008) in which it was found that parents saw engagement as being an important way of supporting students but did not necessarily link this to their education. The lack of discussion on this topic amongst participants, despite
extensive discussion about engagement, suggested that the participants may not be aware that many schools sought to increase parent participation for student academic outcome purposes.

**Engaging With the School can be Difficult for Some Parents**

Participant discussion also covered some of the challenges that could limit parent engagement and the practices that could meet these challenges. Participants identified that there were frequently barriers that they thought limited both their own engagement, and the engagement of other parents, to participate with their school in the manner they desired. The most discussed of these was *language barriers*. Interestingly language barriers were seen to affect both English speaking and non-English speaking parents. For example, some English speaking parents in these very culturally diverse schools found that they were no longer as comfortable helping in classrooms as they had previously been:

In the classrooms... when I was working with them they'd talk in their own language and I didn't know what they were talking about ... I used to spend anywhere from five to seven hours a week working in the classrooms with the kids, so once that started to happen I backed away from working in the classrooms because I didn't feel comfortable.

Non-English speaking participants, particularly new arrivals, also commented that language barriers could create practical problems that limited engagement. One participant, newly arrived to Australia, commented on the difficulty experienced in trying to communicate with some other parents:

Participant: My English is not very well. I’m thinking oh maybe she can't understand to me. Okay, I not speaking to Australian mother. Yeah, I want to say it in English. Yeah I want to talk to all people, usual Australian people, but I can't.

Facilitator: From what you're saying, you would like to interact more.

Participant: Interaction, interaction is good, yeah.
The language barriers that participants identified also appeared to link to beliefs about culture and cultural diversity, as discussed in themes one and two. Some participants indicated that encountering and getting to know parents who spoke languages other than their own was an adjustment:

When my daughter first started here, I have to admit, I did feel a bit excluded. People - and I don’t want to offend anyone, but - wouldn’t even really look at you, and being in their little groups and talking Turkish and things like that. But now, because I’ve been around the school for two and a half years I feel like I can look at someone with a scarf on and smile. I feel better about that now.

In addition to language, other barriers included work commitments, lack of awareness of services offered by schools and additional checks required to help in classrooms. For example:

I asked to help out in the classrooms. My son’s prep, so it’s all new to me, and I don’t know the key factors. Back in my days, you just approached the teacher, I’m here to help, and you’d go for it. Now, you have to file and get a Working With Children Check, everything. I’m like, “oh my God, since when?” I approached that to do it, and apparently I can’t do it in my son’s classroom. I can do it with other year levels and what, so there’s that.

Participants also indicated that their schools were making efforts to encourage participation of parents with limited English language ability. One parent, who was not a native English speaker, explained that the capacity of the school to provide a staff member who spoke their first language meant that she felt more welcomed and comfortable in the school and subsequently more comfortable becoming involved:
I can speak English, but still, when [the staff member is] Turkish, I feel more at home and I can express myself more and just be like them, you know what I mean? I feel like this is my school.

I think another thing is, what parents probably look for is to be happy themselves when they walk into a school, and one of those things is being welcome, seeing someone or hearing someone with their own language. So if there’s someone working at that school, a staff member or a teacher that can speak their own language, I think parents are a bit more relaxed. They can express themselves better, and, if their English isn’t good, find out how their kids are going, so they can be more involved. I think that’s an important thing.

Although the findings presented here reflect the views of parents engaged with their school they do add to the existing research on barriers to parent engagement. The existing research (e.g., Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2010) suggests that language barriers are often a significant barrier preventing engagement between parents and schools, specifically teachers. The findings from the current research also suggest that in highly culturally and linguistically diverse schools language barriers can impact on engagement between parents and between parents and students (in the form of parent involvement in the classroom).

Parents Have to Push Themselves Too

The subtheme *parents have to push to themselves too* explores how the participants in the focus groups discussed the engagement of other parents with their schools. Some participants spoke about the need for parents to make a greater effort to engage with their school more. For example, some participants thought that parents had a responsibility to try to engage with their school:

It is not enough that only the school does things. The parents have to do something as well. Most of the parents come to the school to pick up his/her children but they don’t
go to the office to ask what they can do. It is even important to tidy up the things around the school. The parents should suggest to help. It is important to ask class teacher whether he/she needs help or not. For example, there is a day of fruit cutting, and the help of the mothers is requested, it is being requested verbally and written, but some parents are very unresponsive.

One interesting aspect of participant discussion was that parents varied in how they spoke about whose responsibility it was to initiate engagement between parents and schools and between parents. A number of participants commented on their experiences with other parents, with some participants indicating that they thought that the initiation of contact was a mutual responsibility:

I don't know the answers, but to try break that barrier, for the person who doesn’t speak English it is to not be afraid to ask. And then on the other side of it is the person that does speak English, maybe even looking at someone going “I don't think maybe that they understand” or saying “do you understand what this is about?”

Some participants indicated that they were making efforts to connect with other parents, with varying degrees of success, for example:

But sometimes you see them that they're confused. But you do approach them anyway and then that breaks the barrier. So like approach them and say “oh, do you need any help” to “whatever?”

Some participants saw other parents as being “afraid” or “scared” to engage, and indicated that these parents needed to make a greater effort to initiate engagement. For example one participant said:

I'm thinking like “why are they so scared to mix”, “why are they so scared to open up?” We're not going to bite them. We're trying to be friendly. Whether they're scared or they don't want to, I don't know.
And another participant said, “I think a lot of people are scared from other cultures because English is not their first language”.

The perspectives of the participants discussed above also highlighted some important processes involved in parent engagement. First, the participants identified that parent engagement was often influenced by how much parents thought they needed to engage, which could be offset by the challenges they experienced in the process of engagement or by external factors, such as work commitments. Second, some of the participants in the focus groups, and these might be assumed to be some of the most engaged parents, wanted other parents to engage more because they thought it would benefit the school.

**Summary**

The findings presented suggest that parents in culturally diverse schools may have relatively simple constructions of culture and cultural diversity. They tend to focus more on observable practices and behaviours than on values and beliefs, which appear to be linked to their perspectives on the ways in which other cultures should be treated, to their opinions about cultural education, and to their experiences in their school. Participant responses indicated that many were happy for the cultures of the larger Australian society and smaller ethnocultural groups to coexist, while some suggested that there may be parents who feel that making space for new cultures may be crowding out some aspects of the pre-existing culture. Most participants seemed to view schools as a place of fun, safety and learning but not necessarily as a place to engage with culture. This perspective was perhaps strengthened by the belief expressed or implied by some participants that specifically teaching about culture in school might actually increase racism and stereotyping. Overall participants indicated that their experiences with their schools were very positive and they felt supported when they did engage with them. However, participant perspectives varied when the
responsibility for initiating engagement was discussed and parents identified challenges they encountered.

A final point of note, caution was taken with the interpretation of the data within this chapter as it was apparent that the parents who were participating in the focus group might be more engaged with the school than other parents and that, particularly on the topic of parent engagement, their perspectives might not be representative of the broader parent body. As such discussion was interpreted as the opinions of engaged parents.
Chapter Six

School Staff Perspectives on Challenges and Practices in Culturally Diverse Schools
This chapter presents the findings from the focus groups conducted with school staff and covers three major themes, which incorporate a number of subthemes. The first theme explores how teachers understood and approached culture within their school. The second explores how participants positioned cultural diversity in relation to the classroom while the third theme focuses on how participants framed engagement with parents. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the overall findings. All three themes presented within this chapter touch on elements of the whole school approach to cultural diversity (See Figure 2.1) with an emphasis on school ethos and environment, parents and community involvement, student support and development, and staff training and development. Further analysis of these areas is presented, within the whole school approach to diversity model, in Chapter Eight.

**Theme 1: A Pragmatic Perspective on Culture**

The theme *a pragmatic perspective on culture* explores how teachers conceptualised culture, their stance on supporting cultures different to their own, and their stance on learning about other cultures.

**Culture is About Observable Practices and Behaviours, and Maybe Something More**

Discussion relating to the ways in which participants taught students about culture suggested that the participants often constructed culture as relating to observable practices and behaviours. For example, one participant said:

Harmony Day, that we have once a year, is a really big thing here and we have things happening from every culture, like food and dancing and music and just everything. We had painting and all the teachers were there getting involved so [the students] can see that we're interested in their culture as well and we're not just the teacher. This participant described culture in terms of food, dancing, music and painting, and this was representative of the discussion amongst many of the participants. There was limited
discussion of other aspects of culture, such as values, beliefs and traditions, which suggested that participants may have had a narrow understanding of the cultures present in their schools. A finding that would be congruent with previous Australian research (Santoro, 2009).

A small number of participants did discuss culture from other perspectives. For example, one participant described an activity in which the students had been asked to talk about a day in their life from five years ago, an activity which allowed students to start thinking about how students from other cultural backgrounds may have had different experiences to their own:

A day in the life of say, five years ago, we did that as an activity with the kids. If you were at school in Iraq, as some kids were, what does your classroom look like? That’s so then the other kids know and giving me a bit of awareness. Even the physical environment is completely different. We just presume that because they have been to school that they sit at a table. Not necessarily. So those type of past experiences and you build on from that, where you plan.

This participant recognised the importance of not making assumptions about the past experiences of students and the need to take past experiences into account in their teaching. This finding is in line with existing Australian research (Allard & Santoro, 2008; Santoro & Allard, 2005), which found that teachers use their knowledge of student experiences prior to arrival in Australia to distinguish between cultural groups.

Discussion also suggested that some participants might have a restricted construction of culture, defining it as something relating to non-mainstream groups. For example, while one focus group was discussing the foods provided during a school cultural day; a participant said “We had mostly cultural food” suggesting that she saw “culture” as being something relating to others. In light of the research finding that an intercultural perspective is important in order to counter racism and ethnocentrism (Hickling-hudson, 2004), the findings
presented in this subtheme suggest that some school staff may not be well equipped conceptually to address ethnocentrism and racism.

**It is Important to Support Students and Parents but School Staff May Not Accept all of Their Values and Beliefs**

Another topic was staff attitudes to other cultures. As discussed in the previous theme, the comments made by staff indicated that they may not have clearly defined beliefs relating to culture and cultural diversity. However, despite the lack of a defined position on culture or other cultural groups, many staff said that they taught their students about accepting differences between people and that they and their schools placed a high value on supporting students and parents from different backgrounds. For example, a participant who was very highly regarded by other participants in both the staff and parent focus groups, remarked that her primary role was student and parent support, “I am the community liaison worker, it is really hard to describe [the role] but it really is just about supporting parents and supporting children”.

Participants’ comments suggested that they were more reflective about their attitudes to cultural groups than they were in relation to the constructions of culture discussed in the previous section. However, not all staff were equally self-aware and differing attitudes were identified, as shown in two exchanges about physical punishment and violence which took place in different focus groups. In the first exchange, participants rejected the use of physical punishment or violence and, while noting that it might be typical in the parent’s country of origin, did not overtly question this perspective:

Participant 1: That's true. Have you had them come up to you, say look if [the children] misbehave, just smack them?

Participant 2: One occasion actually, yeah.
Participant 1: Yeah. Because that's … the type of schooling they experience back in Iraq. You give them the cane, and very hard to explain to them no, we don't hit children in class [laughs].

Participant 2: Yep.

In the second exchange, which commenced with a comment about how one student from a Middle Eastern background slapped another student who had stolen his pencil, the discussion indicated that some participants did reflect on their own attitudes:

Participant 1: And I think when [student’s name] came in [to the classroom] his automatic response was to slap. But if we're finding it hard to understand [the students], put yourself in their shoes, when they've got no [English] language [skills], how hard must it be for them to understand us and what's going on? They might think if they took someone's pencil, and they didn't get a whack for it, “what's going on?” If that's their thinking, then it's just as important to familiarise them, and their parents, with our culture, and the way things work here, as it is for us to familiarise ourselves with theirs. I think too often we make presumptions. We just presume “oh yeah, well no-one hits”. [Laughs] do you know what I mean? Hitting's wrong. But actually in some cultures, that is what they do. That is their natural response.

Participant 2: The teachers do hit in the schools they've come from.

Participant 1: So I think it's about education isn't it? Educating ourselves and educating them as much as we can about our traditions and - it's - it is really hard though, coming from a ridiculously Anglo-Saxon family, you know [laughs], to - it's very hard to put yourselves in their shoes.
You can imagine, but like as [the other participant] was saying, she can really truly empathise because she's been there, she's done that herself and worked through it.

Whereas for me, I can go oh it must be really hard, but that's about all I've got…

Participant 2: Me too.

The participant in this focus group indicated that greater understanding between cultures was important but she also recognised the difficulties involved.

**There Hasn’t Been a Need for a Deeper Understanding of Culture**

As the discussions suggested that some participants did not have a clear conceptualisation of culture or frequently engage in self-reflection about culture, the focus group discussions were analysed for possible reasons that could explain why this was the case and four were identified. First, participants focused on practical tasks associated with culture and cultural diversity, such as resolving disputes between students of different cultural backgrounds or increasing the school attendance of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This is captured in the following quote, “[parent engagement] is also teaching parents to report to the office when they are going overseas so we are not surprised when they are gone”. Second, discussion indicated that staff felt that they did not usually require a deep understanding of culture or cultural diversity in order to manage most situations in the classroom. For example, culturally based disputes that arose between students often related to food, clothing and behavioural differences. Staff reported that these disputes could be dealt with by discussing the need to accept others rather than by encouraging students to develop an understanding of the cultural reasons for the differences. Participants did indicate that some of the issues they encountered with parents could be more complex (for example, disagreements over the provision of religious education at the schools) but participants indicated that these situations were often covered by school policy or were resolved by school leaders.
The third and fourth possible reasons for a lack of engagement with concepts of culture and cultural diversity related to training and staff background, and the interaction between them. Participants within the staff focus groups commented on the lack of formal training they received regarding working in culturally diverse contexts or teaching about culture. As one participant, who was a recent graduate commented, “At university I had to do an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander class but that was it, there was no other cultures or anything like that”. There was also an implication in focus group discussions that the training that participants had received in relation to specific cultural groups had not focused on underlying concepts relating to culture or diversity. In regard to ongoing professional development, participants said that little formal training on cultural diversity was provided in their schools. A small number of participants implied that they would welcome more training in this area and one teacher stated that she wanted to develop greater “cultural awareness and religious awareness”. Schools appeared to rely on informal practices, such as meetings in which staff could raise questions about different cultural groups, or the use of a mentoring/buddy system, as ways for staff to learn about different cultural groups within the school.

The fourth possible reason is that many of the staff within the focus groups identified as being second or third generation immigrants and they felt that their cultural heritage and experiences growing up meant that they had already developed intercultural competency. For example, during introductions at the beginning of a focus group one participant said:

I'm a prep teacher and my cultural background is Serbian. I came to Australia when I was 10 and I guess I really enjoy working with other cultures. I think having that personal experience really brings me that understanding of how children are settling in when they come from a different culture and country.
These participants cited their cultural background as a source of knowledge that guided them in their work with cultural diversity. However, although discussion within the focus groups implied that these participants might be more knowledgeable about some cultural groups than other participants, and generally more comfortable with cultural diversity, the qualitative analysis of the transcripts indicated that they did not discuss culture in greater depth than other participants and did not appear to be more self-reflective or more engaged with culture or cultural diversity. The staff’s level of self-reflectiveness and engagement appeared to be linked to attitudes towards staff training on the topics of culture and cultural diversity. Participants who were more confident in their own cultural competency appeared to see less value in additional formal training for cultural diversity while participants who were less confident valued training more highly. An exchange between two different participants illustrates some of the elements of this point:

Facilitator: What do teachers need [in order] to be able to teach and work well in multicultural schools?

Participant 1: I really need an understanding of their customs. I need to know their religious beliefs, you know just like a general outline, whether it’s different types of Islamic…

Participant 2: You don’t think you’ve got that already after all these years?

Participant 1: No, I have but that’s experience, that’s me coming in every day for the last year. If someone was a graduate straight out of university, I think it would be very difficult to come in and teach if they were hit with Ramadan straight away.

The above exchange also indicates the type of training that many of the participants said they wanted. This was information sheets that provided a general outline of the typical practices and beliefs that they might encounter during contact with each group within their school. This also indicates that some participants who did feel confident were doubtful that
additional training was beneficial for staff members. For example, during a discussion about
the lack of formal professional development in their school, some participants indicated that
they would like more training and currently felt under prepared. In response to this, another
participant in the focus group said:

And I just want to butt in there, and if it was a big enough issue I’m sure that the
school leaders, they’re sensitive enough to this in these sort of matters to actually
bring somebody over even, to do like a professional development if there was the
need. Up until now we really haven’t had anything that has been so overwhelming
that we couldn’t sort it out amongst ourselves by sharing information through parents,
children, ourselves and so on, but I believe that if there was a need, a new community
came out and we knew nothing about them we would get that support.

Another interpretation of the above quote is that the participant interpreted other participants’
lack of confidence and desire for greater training as a criticism of the school which they
wished to defend.

The observation that teachers who did not identify as Anglo-Australian did not appear
more self-reflective or engage more with constructions of culture and cultural diversity
differs from existing Australian research by Santoro (2007) which suggests that teachers in
this group may have a greater ability to empathise with students from different backgrounds
and have a greater understanding of their students’ lives. However, Santoro (2007) focused
on teachers from Aboriginal and Greek backgrounds and differed in a number of ways. First,
Santoro focused on the experiences of eight teachers with five from Aboriginal backgrounds
and three from Greek backgrounds while the present study was considerably larger. Second,
Santoro directly asked participants about their identities and how this influenced their
teaching while the present study was more indirect. It is also not clear whether the
participants in the two studies identified with the “mainstream” in their schools in the same way.

Overall the discussions about conceptualisations of culture, participant stances towards other cultures and their attitudes to learning about other cultures presented a mixed picture. As a group, participants endorsed supporting people from other cultural groups but it was not clear whether this extended to all aspects of the cultures of other cultural groups or how much support participants believed should be offered. Participants also appeared to differ in the extent to which they reflected on their own attitudes and beliefs. Analysing staff comments using Berry’s (2004) acculturation model, suggests that some participants endorsed the melting pot approach while many endorsed the multiculturalism approach.

**Theme 2: Schools Support the Wellbeing of People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds but Don’t Do as Much To Educate for Culture**

The theme schools support the wellbeing of people from diverse cultural backgrounds but don’t do as much to educate for culture captures how participants in the staff focus groups saw cultural diversity in relation to classroom teaching and their schools’ support for different cultural groups. The overarching theme identified was that staff believed that their schools had very important roles in supporting students and families from all backgrounds but they appeared to put less emphasis on direct education about culture, different cultural groups or the development of cultural identity within the classroom. It was interesting to note that discussion tended to focus more on secondary challenges relating to cultural diversity than effective school practices. This theme also builds on the findings presented in the first theme that focused on the ways in which participants conceptualised culture and cultural diversity. How participants saw their own role and the role of the school is explored more deeply in the following three subthemes.
The School is a Place in Which Cultural Diversity is Supported and Accepted

Staff consistently stated that their schools were places in which cultural diversity was supported. They indicated that events such as cultural days and activities aimed at supporting parents from diverse cultural backgrounds, such as parenting or life skills classes were common. For example, one participant noted, “I've just recently finished a six week parenting course called 'Tuning into kids' with some Turkish parents”. This quote also illustrated a sentiment expressed by many participants that it was important that students and families from different backgrounds were supported and that this was a high priority. In addition, it was apparent that many members of staff were aware that some students, particularly new arrivals and those who had experienced trauma, might require additional support and that they believed that this was within the school’s role. For example, one participant described the process the school went through to ensure that a new student transitioned into their school successfully:

I think it was Foundation House, and they came out and they did a lot of liaising, talking to us and helped us settle [the student] in very well and the parents were quite appreciative of that fact. They were able to talk about [the student’s] health and the refugee camps and just unload a little bit.

Another important component of the discussion about support for people from diverse cultural backgrounds was the importance that many participants placed on the acceptance and support of different religions within their schools. Staff in all the focus groups, including the focus groups comprising staff from the Catholic schools, noted that their schools were making concerted efforts to support different religions.

Participants discussed a number of ways in which their schools did this. One common example was the way in which schools ensured that students observing Ramadan were supported. A participant in one focus group made the following statement that captures some
of the discussion on this topic “We recognise the different expectations. For instance, fasting, we accommodate that with our kids”. Other practices included allowing students to opt out of certain classes, such as music, if they conflicted with their family’s religious beliefs, recognising different celebrations in school newsletters and assemblies, and in one school, offering a range of religious education classes.

Participants also indicated that they thought it was important that students felt welcomed within their schools. This was a common theme across focus groups and one that was often linked to schools creating an environment in which people felt accepted and safe. One staff member articulated this quite directly:

That’s actually something that we have on order, welcome and different signs around the school in – well I have requested in Arabic, Turkish, so just welcoming things as people walk in to the school. So that on arrival people might see a few familiar words and things.

**Schools Don’t Really Teach About the Values and Beliefs of Other Cultures**

Interestingly, despite the emphasis placed on the support and acceptance of other cultures teachers said that they rarely explicitly taught about the values and beliefs of different cultures. Participants often considered that teaching about “cultural diversity” involved teaching students about tolerating and accepting differences, where were typically the differences in visible characteristics of groups. Specific education about culture and cultures therefore usually meant teaching about food, clothing and music. Very little discussion touched on education about the values and beliefs of different cultures. For example, one participant talked about the ways in which their schools educated about culture:

I think we promote culture at the school. We have days such as bring food from your own culture days. We have our, bring something in from your culture days, talk about
your culture, what do you celebrate? What do you do? We really promote that cultural awareness of others and for individuals.

In general, discussion suggested that participants saw their schools as primarily employing Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) human relations approach with some elements of the multicultural education approach.

Participants in some focus groups also noted that cultural education was often sporadic and was part of festivals or other special celebrations. It appeared from participants’ discussion of cultural education that there was no formal curriculum in their schools covering the area. For example, when discussing ways to increase engagement with culture one participant said “Maybe we could be encouraging little groups to sing songs in other languages and even the music that we have before the bell, we could get some national anthems or something from other cultures”.

The approach that participants indicated they did use within the classroom appeared to be based on education about cultural practices, with the apparent motivation being that this grounded learning in tangible experiences for the students. For example, one participant described how she taught about culture in the classroom, “Bring in some food, bring in some toys, some photos of your family, so it starts with them”. When participants did discuss teaching about values and beliefs this was identified as an area that was difficult to teach. Participants in one focus group described the difficulty of talking about values and beliefs in religious education classes as they found that this had led to conflict between students and families. Participants thought that many parents were uncomfortable with their children being exposed to different beliefs and values, particularly when it related to religion, for example:

When we first started here we would have religious groups … and there was just one [class] for all kids, just to teach them appreciation about people’s cultures and
religion. But we found it caused a few issues because some of the parents used this as an opportunity to preach. So we had to put a stop to the classes because parents were telling children that if they didn't follow this or that then their hair would fall out and they would go to hell.

The discussion in staff focus groups suggested that basing cultural education on education about practices and teaching about acceptance, was seen by staff as providing an effective way of introducing students to different cultures. Interestingly, during a discussion of this, one participant said that their school did have a formal practice that involved students learning about the background, and potentially culture, of other students, although discussion suggested that this was grounded in teaching about acceptance. This is set out in the following quote:

Now we have a start-up program in the first four weeks of school and we get to know people’s backgrounds and it’s probably a repetition as well, but it’s just to remind children that we all follow a religion, we’ve all got parents and so on. So it’s just getting the kids to appreciate each other and their celebrations and the differences and yeah, just trying to make them adjust to their new classroom and to their new peers that they’ll be spending the next three terms with.

In addition to illustrating the approach to teaching about culture and difference discussed by the participants in the staff focus groups, the above quotes also hint at the philosophical approach that may have been adopted towards education about culture and diversity in the participating schools. Much of the discussion focused on reducing conflict between students (that is, teaching students about the differences they might encounter so they would not react negatively towards others) while discussion of helping or supporting students was not linked to education about culture (for example, schools appeared to focus on putting up welcome signs or linking to external support services). Overall, there appeared to
be a much stronger focus on supporting student wellbeing and transitions to school than about multicultural education.

**Are all Cultural Groups Really Welcomed Equally?**

It was unclear whether schools were successful in making students from all backgrounds feel welcomed despite their intentions to do so. While there was substantial discussion about supporting people from Middle Eastern backgrounds little was said about supporting people from other backgrounds. For example, there was very limited discussion of people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Pacific Islander or Asian backgrounds although there were significant populations of students from each of these backgrounds across the schools. For example, there was no discussion of how welcome signs in Turkish and Arabic might make students from other language and cultural groups, for whom there were not welcome signs, feel. In addition, during discussion about school practices relating to language schools, support staff and external services, participants focused almost exclusively on students from Middle Eastern backgrounds. Although these groups were not the subject of much discussion, it is possible that schools do provide them with equal support. However, if they do not, these groups may feel excluded.

Some discussion of cultural groups with fewer members within the schools did occur, which further indicated that these groups may not be receiving the same support as other groups. For example, participants in one focus group were discussing how their schools supported students from culturally diverse background when one participant, not originally from Australia, commented on the lack of acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, “That's one thing that really sort of bowled me over, coming and working in Australia, was the complete lack of embracing aboriginal culture at all”. Other participants within this focus group commented on this and noted how the salience of different groups, in
terms of both the allocation of school resources and staff awareness, was affected by the number of students from each cultural group present in their school:

Participant 1: This school had a fund for the Aboriginal, the Koori indigenous group and it was based on headcount numbers. So if you had five or more, you could get funded and when you do get the funding you had to do a five year plan and you had to show what the school is doing regarding indigenous education. But we've only got - well, we didn't have none until those three boys came and then we got another one now. So the numbers are low. But where the numbers are higher…

Participant 2: When the headcount is lower I don't think the emphasis is higher. When the numbers are higher, then the emphasis is higher.

As the discussion developed, participants highlighted the lack of awareness and support for Aboriginal people and expressed dissatisfaction about this. They also suggested that there may also be a lack of education about Aboriginal cultures within the participating schools.

Participant 1: That's a shame because really it shouldn't be on headcounts. It should be…

Participant 3: We got asked if there was a reason we actually have a Koori school open in [suburb] if there was enough students to actually go to and fill a Koori school. People go “we've never seen them. Is there a huge population of people, Aboriginal people out there that we can’t actually see?” So they don't even know what they look like.

Participant 4: Quite devastating I find. It's really quite appalling.

Participant 5: So it was different coming over here and having one of the boys ask [a student] why he is dark if he is not Indian or if he is not Samoan or - and he goes “oh, I'm Aboriginal” and the kids go “what?” So it was shocking for him too, like he didn't get it.
In the preceding section, the comments made by the first participant indicated that little had been done to engage with the background of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or to teach the students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The remainder of this discussion further highlighted how infrequently Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were recognised within the school.

Participant 3: What about the - sorry, my ignorance - but we did have one assembly. I remember we thanked the traditional owners of this land. Does anyone remember?

Participant 5: Yeah I do remember that.

Participant 6: They were opening the gym.

Participant 2: There was one.

Participant 3: Yes.

Participant 4: Whereas other schools I've been to, that is every assembly. It's every speech, it's every - every time we are going together we recognise…

Facilitator: So it sounds like that in terms of learning about other cultures, indigenous and other cultures in the - there is lots of good things happening, but they're a bit sort of random and some of the things you are saying are that maybe a bit more coordination and external support in providing that would be…

Participant 6: Yeah.

Participant 3: My student who is indigenous wants to know how to say Koori words, wants to know about his background. I got looking for things in the library. We used to have lots of resources. I can't find much now.

The collective discussion indicated that participants did want all of the students in their schools to feel supported and welcomed but it appeared that support of cultural groups that were less populous within the schools was often based on informal processes that were
inconsistently applied across different cultural groups and, despite the good intentions identified by participants, not all cultural groups received recognition.

**Teachers and Schools Need to Adapt to the Challenges Cultural Diversity Creates**

Participants also framed cultural diversity as linking to challenges in the classroom that schools and teachers had to adapt to. The following subthemes explore these challenges.

**Students with limited English are difficult to teach.** The first of these challenges mainly involved new arrivals to Australia who did not speak English. This issue was salient for a number of participants, particularly for those in Catholic schools who had new arrivals in their class or had many new arrivals in their school. Participants explained that this issue was particularly challenging because many new arrivals did not speak English at all and most staff did not speak the first language of these students. For example, one participant stated:

I think my biggest challenge as a grad student is teaching in a class where you'll have a child given to you at five past nine, saying ‘oh there's a new child for your class. Oh and by the way, they don't speak English, we'll see you later’.

Given that two schools within this study were Catholic and four were government, it is important to note that in the Catholic school system schools receive grants to employ additional staff to support students who are learning English as an additional language (Catholic Education Melbourne, 2010) while in the government system students learning English can attend a language school or centre for 6 to 12 months before entering a mainstream school (Department of Education and Training, 2015b). Discussion revealed that participants in government schools were aware that they had access to language centres and that their schools often had transition programs tied to these. Staff from a number of government schools stressed how important language schools were as a resource and how important transition programs were as a school practice. The following quote demonstrates
one participant’s belief in their schools effective use of language centres and transition programs:

...transition, especially because I haven’t seen the new kids come in before, that have only been in the country a short amount of time and with limited English. The school does a great job at bringing them in through the language centre.

Participants in schools who said that they did not have access to language support discussed how difficult it often was to support these students. They noted that without support they were often reliant on other students interpreting or translating. They indicated that this was inadequate for new arrivals and significantly impacted on the effectiveness of the classroom as a learning environment for the new student.

Participant 1: I have our interpreter. I have her every second Tuesday. We have a whole table of new arrivals, so on those days when she comes in and can sit and talk and communicate 100 per cent with all the children, it is absolutely fantastic. Unless you've got that - someone in there, because normally I would give a student a chance to go up and sit next to a student who speaks their language and English and you just don't know exactly how the message gets through. But when you've got someone with you, an adult, who has got that ability to do that, it is absolutely fantastic.

You can see the progress. I get her every second Tuesday all day. The progress they make in that one day is ten times more than the eight or nine days I have them for.

Participant 2: Yeah, that's right. We'd be lost without…

Participant 3: …just so chaotic that you just - I don't think you could do it justice, if you didn't have interpreters.

Overall, discussion suggested that the participants from government schools perceived that their students had adequate support, although some participants indicated that some issues did occur with students who were still developing their English language ability. However,
participants from Catholic schools indicated that they were experiencing some ongoing difficulties, as there were periods in which they were without language support in their classrooms.

**There needs to be awareness and support for students with a trauma history.** The second major concern for participants was students who had previously experienced trauma, as participants were aware that many new arrivals may have experienced significant trauma in their country of origin or in the process of coming to Australia. Participants in most focus groups discussed instances in which this had become an issue. A major concern was that they, as staff, were not always aware that a student had a trauma history and that the student in question might need more support. This concern was articulated by a new teacher:

Participant 1: I didn’t know about that situation with [that student]’s family that [another participant] has just talked about until it was mentioned at a staff meeting. I had no idea that the school was [supporting the student’s family] until it was mentioned at the staff meeting. You work with those families so much in the office and you know those stories and all that sort of stuff but quite often we don’t hear about that.

[Knowing] would have explained [the student’s] behaviour because she would cry all the time and I was just told from the prep teachers “oh she cries”, or the aide that was working in the room at the time said “she just cries a lot” and there was no explanation. So me trying to work with her, trying to get her to come up with these problems to solve when I didn’t know the full story, it’s really hard to do that.

Participant discussion indicated that knowing that students had experienced trauma and that there might not be adequate support for these students was upsetting. The following statement by a participant touches on the types of trauma discussed across groups, the
concern that participants had for these students and the need for additional support prior to the student becoming distressed.

One [parent]'s child was crying one morning and she often did cry as she’s a new arrival from Iraq. The grade 5-6s were going on camp and she saw this great big bus outside the school and she heard the word camp used a lot. She came into the office, she sat there, she cried and cried and cried and while she is that anxious it was just too hard to get any information out of her. So we let her have a cry, we hugged her and you know cuddled her and everything, and then when she did calm down she said “I don’t want to get on that bus, I don’t want to go on a camp”. She thought that the whole school was going on this camp because this child had this experience on her travels from Iraq to Australia, so the word “camp” was a really bad experience for her.

Another participant in a different focus group indicated that schools were not always aware of who had experiences of trauma, the nature of the trauma or the type of support they might need as the parents of the student had not shared this with them:

I think the thing is that these children are carrying a considerable amount of emotional baggage. It’s through that language centre enrolment that we sometimes touch on that, depending on how much the family are prepared to offer. Some of the families have been in refugee camps for three or four years.

This participant also indicated that the trauma that some students had experienced was severe and that they may have experiences within their school that remind them of this trauma:

Participant: I was talking to one student just the other day and she was talking about when dad comes home. Well, I know dad is not coming home. Dad will not be coming to Australia. So there is quite a large family of girls and one of them is still talking about when dad comes to Australia to meet us.
Facilitator: Really? So dad’s not with them?

Participant: No, dad is dead…. They saw some horrendous things, an uncle murdered and all sorts of… that’s why they get quite upset when another young boy says how wonderful Iraq is. They are saying, “It’s not, it’s an awful place”.

Unfortunately, it was not clear how many students who had traumatic experiences had been linked with external support services. Participants did say that some students were receiving help from external services but it was unclear whether schools had formal processes in place to identify these students and connect them with the appropriate service.

**Students have been exhibiting more behavioural problems in recent years.** The third major concern identified by participants was behavioural problems exhibited by some students. Some participants noted that as the origin of new arrivals in their schools was starting to shift from South-East Asia to the Middle East they were starting to observe more behavioural problems in the student body. Discussion suggested that this had entailed an adjustment for school staff but participants stated that they were generally comfortable dealing with any incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Participants identified two reasons for the increase of behavioural problems. One reason was the trauma that students may previously have experienced, as set out in the following exchange:

Participant 1: I do think behaviour for some of these children is quite a big hurdle when they first enter the country and that’s at both extremes.

Participant 2: Because of what they have seen.

Participant 1: You can get the very quiet, almost choosing not to speak, withdrawn and I was going to say selective mute which we have had at the school. Then the other extreme where they are hitting, punching, fighting for various reasons and a lot of those reasons do come out through counselling and family conferences and different things.
Within another focus group participants also identified culture as an influence on the
behavioural problems they had observed:

Participant 1: I don't know if I'm correct. This is going off the tangent that we've been
on, but what you said before about parents and smacking, I have found one of my
issues, especially being on the oval playground duty, I think the Iraqi culture is - tends
to - I don't know, they tend to solve their problems with fighting rather than talking.
So I tend to find I break up a lot of fist fights, and - because - and it's always well
“they F-ing insulted my”…

Participant 2: Grandma.

Participant 1: …family and they - and so….

Participant 3: Yeah, it's a big thing for them.

Participant 1: Yeah, so they said “my mother was this”, and so they've insulted my
generations. There's constant - and I know when [student] first came he would turn
around - a child would pick up his pencil, and he would just turn around and backhand
them. I'd be like, “no you can't do that”. So I think they're a lot more physical. To me
that was like “oh, God, they're always fighting”. I had to duck punches in the
playground.

Theme 3: Engaging With Parents is Important but Can Be Difficult and Requires
Ongoing Effort

Parent engagement was a major topic of conversation across all of the school staff
focus groups and the theme engaging with parents is important but can be difficult and
requires ongoing effort captures how participants spoke about engagement with parents.
Participants described parent engagement as an important part of their work but indicated that
it was an area in which they had difficulty achieving consistent success. Despite the
challenges that schools were experiencing, participants indicated that their schools had
developed practices that were leading to improved parent engagement.

It’s Important for Parents to Engage for the Children’s Sake but Parents Can Get a Lot
Out of It Too

This subtheme explored the reasons why participants believed that parent engagement
was important. Participants addressed student academic outcomes, the education of parents
about Australian education practices, improving student attendance at school and educating
parents about Australian norms.

Parent engagement improves student academic outcomes. Foremost of the
reasons for parent engagement was the desire to see student academic outcomes improved.
As one participant put it, “I think the challenge is engaging the parents and making them
more involved in their child’s learning”. Some participants indicated that they thought that
education of children was a team effort that involved both schools and parents and they also
stated that they often set homework designed to involve parents in the children’s learning.
Participants also identified parent engagement as a way to educate parents about their
responsibility to be involved in their child’s education. It was also seen as an opportunity to
provide parents with information about their children’s educational activities which they
could also participate in although the activities that staff wanted to see parents engaged in
were not clearly specified.

Parent engagement helps teachers educate parents about Australian education
practices. In addition to explicit discussions about the purpose of parent engagement,
participants also indirectly identified ways in which parent engagement was important.
Participants noted that some parents from different cultural backgrounds had misconceptions
about Australian school practices and therefore limited their children’s involvement in some
school activities. One school activity that exemplified this was school camps. Participants
discussed situations in which some parents from Middle Eastern backgrounds had previously prevented their children from going on school camps because they believed that there might be inappropriate contact between male and female students. Participants noted that it was only through pursuing engagement with these parents that this misunderstanding was rectified and students were able to attend the camp. A participant in one focus group stated that “When the seniors went on camp we had to really have a big discussion with some parents because ‘coming from camps’, [meant something] totally different to the camp we're talking about”. Another participant in a different focus group spoke extensively about this topic illustrating that misunderstandings about education practices could be quite significant:

For some of the girls they are not allowed to go on camps because their parents are under the misapprehension that the girls and boys will be together. We finally got, thanks to some great work by staff, talking to some of them and some of the girls and boys that would normally not be allowed to go were allowed to go. One of the boys said to me "I was so glad I went on camp, I went home and told my dad that the girls and the boys are separate, boys are down that way, the girls are there and the teachers are in the middle.”

Parent engagement helps reduce student absenteeism. Participants noted that another challenge that they had encountered was an increase in student absenteeism which was interrupting the education of students. Participants identified that it was common among some cultural groups within their schools to return to their country of origin for extended periods. They also remarked that within some groups it was more accepted that students would miss school if the family had other commitments. Participants highlighted their belief that it was important to engage with parents from these groups and encourage them to help improve their children’s attendance and to keep the school aware of periods in which they were planning to travel. The following quote displays some of the discussion on this topic:
Because absence is a serious issue at our school and I'm sure that with all the other schools that you will be visiting in the area of Hume. There is the overseas component, you know they go away for three months at a time. That's bad enough, and then they take regular days off, at least once a week or, it happens mainly with the same families. It is also teaching parents to report to the office when they are going overseas so we are not surprised when they are gone. They are learning to do that.

**Parent engagement helps teachers educate parents about Australia.** Another goal of parent engagement was to educate parents from different backgrounds about Australian values and practices. A notable example of this was parent beliefs about disability. Participants, particularly those in the specialist school, noted that some parents and families had beliefs about disability that differed significantly from mainstream Australian views, which could have a negative impact on the parent’s own children or other students. Participants saw it as important that these families were educated about the nature of disability so their children could be adequately supported.

In the example presented below, one participant identified two beliefs that she had encountered and that she had found to be problematic. These beliefs were that disability was a punishment from God and that specialist schools would “cure” the disability. The participant identified that she thought that these beliefs linked to both general stigma or misunderstanding of disability as well as beliefs specific to some cultural groups. In addition, this appeared to be an emotive topic for this participant:

Participant: I think the biggest problem that I feel is that parents, no matter what their background, are in denial about their child’s problems. They think that the kids are going to come here and we're going to cure them and then we are going to send them off to a mainstream school again and they are going to be totally fine and okay.

Facilitator: Do you think that's to do with the disability or culture as well?
Participant: Both, because some ethnic groups don't like that tag or that label put on that child. Anything to do with special needs, they just totally ignore it. Like here we are accepting other diversities and cultures, yet some of the families coming in don’t grasp what we already have here. They want us to do so much. But no, their child will still follow their way and not integrate into a system that has been this way forever.

Some parents think it's punishment from God. Do you know what I mean? They still have that belief. It's a punishment. I sometimes think if it wasn't the law that they have to send their kid to school, they'd have them locked in up their rooms.

Parent Engagement can be Hard Because of Cultural and Language Barriers

Analysis of staff focus groups identified two major challenges, which staff encountered when attempting to engage parents with their schools. These were cultural barriers and language barriers, both of which were frequently discussed. Some participants also indicated they believed that cultural and language barriers were worsened by unconstructive beliefs held by some parents about themselves and engagement with schools.

Cultural differences can lead to different expectations. When discussing cultural barriers participants noted that differences in beliefs about education between staff and parents were common. The primary difference identified by participants was that some parents had been raised in countries in which the education of children was seen as the sole responsibility of schools while in Australia staff expected parents to participate in the their children’s education. Participants identified this difference as a reason why initial engagement with parents was often difficult; parents did not initiate contact or take advantage of opportunities for engagement which the school offered because they did not believe that they should or that there was any opportunity to do so.
This challenge appeared to frustrate many participants. Participants indicated that they often felt that parents were not as engaged as they could be and that the difference in expectations about roles and responsibilities was the primary source of this. The following statement by a participant demonstrates this sentiment.

I think probably one of the major problems we have is that the parents have a different perspective of what education is for their children to what we perhaps have. So they feel that you give the children to the teachers and the teachers, it’s your job to teach them. Whereas we feel that it’s a team. We have our part to play and that the parents have their part to play in the education of their children.

There’s a little bit of that confusion at times when we send home things to be done or to be followed up and either culturally they don’t believe it’s what they should do, or they don’t understand enough about how to do it?

**Language barriers are often difficult to overcome without staff with language skills.** In addition to cultural barriers participants indicated that language barriers compounded the difficulties they experienced when attempting to resolve culturally based challenges and were, as an individual challenge, more difficult to overcome. Participant discussion suggested that while engagement could lead to changes in beliefs over time language barriers were more intractable, as staff were often dependent on the availability of staff with language skills, or on access to interpreters, in order to communicate with some parents. As one participant put it:

Well, as you’ve said, the language centre and the integration aides. There is no way we would be able to communicate effectively as teachers and with the kids if we didn’t have that support here. If that was external to the school I don’t know, it would be so difficult.
Some parents are afraid of engagement. Participants in the staff focus group also identified general parent attitudes about engagement as a challenge inhibiting successful engagement. Some participants expressed a belief that a significant proportion of parents did not engage with their school because they were afraid to do so or lacked confidence. Parents were at times described as “frightened”, “scared”, “secluded”, lacking confidence, “lazy” and “needing to be educated”. It was also noteworthy that on the occasions when difficulties with engagement were discussed, the difficulties in parent engagement were often attributed to parents, while possible deficits on the part of the school or staff were rarely discussed. This had parallels with the research on “hard-to-reach” parents within schools (Crozier & Davies, 2007, 2008) which found that schools can position parents as hard to engage without questioning their own role in the engagement process.

While there was a considerable amount of discussion from which the above quotes were drawn, it was not always clear whether these comments were an empathic effort to identify a cause of a challenge or if they had a derogatory or paternal element. Some comments did appear to be distinctly critical, for example one participant stated, “I think it’s a cop out on [the parents] behalf - you know; ‘Oh, we don't have English, we can't help our children’”. These types of comments contrasted strongly with some of the other statements that participants made. Foremost was the apparent inconsistency between statements such as these and those about schools as places of acceptance and tolerance for students. As the following quote demonstrates, some participants appeared confident that they were accepting and tolerant, and that they were modelling it for their students, for example:

We share our culture as well. When they share theirs we share ours. It’s just something that we take for granted like we said before and we are so tolerant and accepting and it just kind of happens, I don’t know why. We just model it so well I think.
Some comments were not critical but appeared to be potentially minimising the skills of the parents, for example:

Once they come and they find out what they can do, they’re very willing and that’s the good part of the cultural part of the school, is that we have brought them in and they’ve done their dances. They’ve done their cooking and their children are really happy.

Here the parents’ contributions were framed in terms of “their dances” and “their cooking”. No mention was made of how parents might enrich the school in a deeper way, for example by providing an avenue for students to learn about different cultures, learn about their own cultural identity or about how cultures interact.

In contrast to these statements, other comments were more neutral, and suggested that some participants were trying to identify and understand issues that they were frequently experiencing. The following quote demonstrates an instance of a neutral discussion of the challenges associated with the characteristics of some parents:

The day to day in-classroom activities - the parents are either embarrassed or they can’t help their children, so that frustration comes out in, “I won’t come to the school, because what can I do anyway”. “We won’t help at the school, because I don’t understand anyone and I can’t”. It only takes, “look come, we’ll show you what to do”, whether it’s a cooking activity or. There’s that fear I think, which both of my parents had, fear with confidence.

**Parent Engagement Takes a Lot of Work!**

Participants also discussed the processes by which they and their school sought to foster parent engagement. Participants noted that many traditional strategies were not effective within their schools and that they needed to find new approaches to engage with parents from within their highly culturally diverse communities. They also commented on
the considerable amount of work necessary to successfully engage parents and they were cognizant that engagement was a long term process which required ongoing effort. A statement by one participant summarised this sentiment, “actually trying to get our parents into the school more and perhaps using them as a resource to do things within the school, is always hard isn't it?”.

When discussing the inadequacies of traditional methods of communication with parents, participants noted that schools historically often relied on newsletters and other written documents as a primary form of communication. However, participants noted that this was now often an ineffective form of communication as parents’ English literacy was often low. For example, one participant stated “I think we just have to be aware that the parents often don’t read, most times don’t read English or speak English”. In addition, while many schools, including those within this study, had newsletters and other documents translated, participants said that many parents were unable to read in their mother tongue.

The practices that staff identified as effective were often more labour intensive than traditional forms of communication but participants endorsed three sets of practices that helped them effectively engage and communicate with parents.

**Specialist staff with language and cultural skills are a bridge between parents and schools.** The first effective practice was the employment of support staff with language and cultural skills. These staff members were often employed in roles that incorporated both teacher and front office support, and they were often recruited from the local community. This meant that they were able to support classrooms that had students with limited English ability and be a point of contact for parents with limited English language ability at the front office. However, participants also identified that a potential risk of relying on these support staff was that classroom teachers may not get to know parents and that information that support staff had gathered from parents that was important for the support of students was not
always communicated to the classroom teachers. The following quote illustrates some of the actions that participants described support staff taking to increase parent engagement and to support their community:

So I think that’s a challenge, to engage the community. I've done some stuff where I've invited the parents in. That worked well. It was hard work. You can't just send a note home because they won't come, so you have to take additional steps. You have to get interpreters happening, so it’s hard to engage our community in the school. You can get the kids engaged but the parents, because of their lack of English, they find it hard until we invite and we do special days. They're happy to come but you need to put in that extra effort.

So I had to make personal phone calls in Turkish myself. I had to get the Arabic [speaking support staff] to call the Arabic families and let them know we've got English classes here to help you out.

**Food-based practices draw the school community together.** A second practice that participants endorsed highly was the use of food-based cultural and school days as a means of increasing parent engagement with the schools. Participants identified that food-based activities offered a platform from which people from all backgrounds could come together. Participants in the staff focus groups spoke highly of these days as platforms for engagement and also identified them as effective ways to engage in education about culture with students. A conversation between two participants illustrated the success of food based practices:

Participant 1: It might sound silly but I think food at our school is a really big thing

Participant 2: All you have to say to a parent is "Aw how did you make this?" and the next day you'll get it in a great big tray or in a great big platter or something, you know, food is very abundant in this place
Participant 1: and they're and they're so confident with their food that it is a way for them to sort of get themselves into the school,

**Schools as community hubs.** A third practice was the development of schools as community hubs. At the time that the focus groups were conducted, the schools participating in this research project were in the process of implementing a “Community Hub” program. This program was aimed at developing the primary schools as a hub for community services and was seen by participants as formalising a set of practices that their schools already employed to support and engage with their school community. For example, one participant said:

Helping teachers and basically just making the school a very inclusive place for everybody to be. And you [the facilitator] know a little bit about our community hub philosophy, so we try and make the school live up to that standard and that is part of my role as a liaison officer.

Participants identified a number of programs and services that their schools offered, which they saw as being a part of their school’s role as a community hub. Many of the schools helped parents with limited English language skills to complete forms or liaise with outside agencies. Schools often offered programs, such as English language classes, aimed specifically at supporting parents. Participants in some focus groups stated that their schools were also proactive in linking parents to external agencies, such as those offering refugee support, if they thought it was beneficial.

**Summary**

The findings from the staff focus groups suggested that participants had strong views about culture, and how it should be addressed in schools and parent engagement in culturally diverse schools. The findings also suggested that participants may not be engaging in reflection about their constructions of culture and that they appeared to endorse a
construction of culture that was primarily focused on practices and behaviours. Other components of culture, such as values and beliefs relating to religion, appeared to be less salient until discussion specifically focused on these areas. Discussion also revealed that participants put a strong emphasis on supporting all members of their school community but there were some practices and beliefs that they were not comfortable with.

Employing the framework of Sleeter and Grant (2009), participants touched on and described instances of school procedures and practices in line with all of the standpoints other than the multicultural social justice education approach as, although participants stated their schools aimed to support all students, very little discussion could be linked to concepts of social justice. A consistent finding across the focus groups, that was also not in line with the multicultural social justice education approach, was that the practices that schools employed tended not to be formalised. This may help explain why much of the discussion of the role of cultural diversity in the classroom focused on secondary challenges (for example, the lack of language support) and effective practices received less discussion.

These findings also suggested that there may be additional issues that participants were unaware of. First, while participants described discussing values and beliefs with students, they implied that in many classrooms teachers may be inadvertently promoting the position that people should not directly discuss values and beliefs. This was evidenced by the apparent lack of discussion of values and beliefs in classrooms discussion referred to in the subtheme *schools don’t really teach about values and beliefs*. This may be occurring because school staff may believe that these issues are too difficult or too sensitive to teach about, although the DET recommendations on their “Respecting Diversity” page state “This section recognises that the coexistence of diverse values is an essential tenet of education. It also emphasises that controversial topics will often be appropriate and important subjects of study in schools and, at times, cannot be avoided in the context of teaching and learning”
Therefore, although students are taught about accepting different perspectives they may not be exploring these perspectives, which may limit their capacity to develop the educational goal of cultural competence (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014b). Second, school staff may be unaware of the potential benefits of teaching students about culture and diversity beyond avoiding conflict.

The final theme presented within this chapter focused on the difficulties that participants encountered when trying to engage with parents. An analysis of focus group discussions showed that participants thought that parent engagement in the school was important primarily for the benefit of the students but that it also provided a platform from which the school could support parents. However, participants identified that engagement with parents was often hard because of cultural and language barriers. Another important finding emerging from the discussion of the difficulties of parent engagement was that participants did at times attribute these difficulties to deficits in parents and rarely discussed ways in which schools might contribute to the problem. In addition, a major point of consensus amongst participants was that parent engagement was an area that required consistent effort if parents were to be successfully engaged.
Chapter Seven

Principals’ Perspectives on Challenges and Practices in Culturally Diverse Schools
This chapter reports and discusses the findings from the interviews conducted with school principals. Three themes are presented and discussed, with the first theme exploring how principals understood culture and cultural diversity within their school, the second theme investigating how principals conceptualised challenges their schools face and the third theme examining principals’ perspectives on effective school practices. The chapter concludes with a brief synthesizing discussion of the overall findings from the interviews with principals.

Theme 1: Engaging With Cultural Diversity Means Supporting the Whole School Community

A key finding from the discussion of culture with participating principals was that participants included supporting parents and families from diverse cultural backgrounds as a significant part of their role. A comment from one participant demonstrates this sentiment, “That is the school that we are, we're not just about education and about learning, but we are here to support families in whatever they actually need [the school] to be”. This is in line the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014) that state “They [principals] recognise and support the needs of students’ families and carers from communities facing complex challenges” (p. 14), but it was interesting to note the emphasis that participants placed on this.

Principals also emphasised the importance of supporting students and staff and the statements they made often aligned with the multicultural social justice approach. For example, one participant said:

I firmly believe, as an educational leader, I'm creating a future for everyone that comes through the door. The best way to move forward is to develop advocacy and confidence at every level. If you do that with the families, you do that with the kids, by seeking to understand and then be understood.
In addition, a number of participants indicated that considerations of culture and diversity were central to their decision making process. For example, another participant said:

Our community is culturally diverse and so really everything we do fits in…I would never just specify [addressing cultural diversity as an internal school practice], because it's just not necessary. That is our community.

Collectively these statements suggested that participants in these highly culturally diverse schools believed that supporting cultural diversity was an important part of their role as principal and an important function of their schools.

**Is There a Gap Between Vision and Practice?**

However, the discussion about supporting all people from diverse cultural backgrounds also suggested that there might not always be formal processes in place to ensure that all members of the school community were supported. For example, when asked about strategic processes, vision and practices no participant stated that their school had a formal plan relating to cultural diversity. In addition, following a discussion of effective practices they employed to support people from diverse cultural backgrounds, one participant explicitly stated that they lacked formal processes:

Facilitator: So do you have strategic things in place or ideas about how you're going to keep those things going?

Participant: [We] probably haven't formalised it as yet, to be honest with you. So we talk about it all the time, but I think I need to [establish] some clear directions, that it's really important that we're engaging the community. But as I said, we haven't formalised this although we talk about it each time.

A lack of formal processes is important as (as argued by Acker, 2006) the visibility of inequalities can vary, and by extension, so too can the visibility of different cultural groups. Therefore a reliance on informal processes might result in some groups being missed. In
addition, the statements made by principals suggesting that they endorsed a social justice stance contrasted with the lack of formal practices they had in place, which suggested that they may not be self-reflective but does not reveal why this might be the case.

**Theme 2: Supporting Students and Families From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds is Challenging**

A topic that was the focus of a substantial amount of discussion with principals was the way in which cultural diversity within the school community significantly increased the complexity and challenges associated with the principals’ leadership roles, particularly in relation to their efforts to support all students and families within their school. An analysis of the interviews showed that the challenges occurred both outside and inside the school gate, both of which related to *school context* in the whole schools model (see Figure 2.1). Challenges outside the school gate occurred during the principals’ work in strengthening ties with the school community and can be thought of as falling in the school context domain of the whole school approach to cultural diversity model. Principals indicated that these contextual challenges appeared to have a substantial influence on the challenges in the domains of parent and school community engagement and partnerships and services, particularly in regards to the tasks of engaging with parents, carers and families, and finding ways to bring them into the school community. The second set of challenges related to the internal operations of the school and the education of students. These challenges were also influenced by the school context but less directly than the previously mentioned domains and these challenges could be conceptualised as falling in the categories of student support and development and curriculum and pedagogy.
Outside the School Gate: Adapting the School to the Characteristics of the Community and Engaging With Families

All principals acknowledged the importance of creating a school that met the needs of their community but this was also identified as a goal that was difficult to accomplish. Principals described their school communities as culturally and linguistically diverse and constantly subject to demographic change. The need for their schools to continually adapt to change had increased the complexity of their leadership tasks. One principal referred to the challenges that had been created when her school community had shifted, in the space of five years, from a community which had a predominantly Turkish background to one that included many other Middle Eastern nationalities:

We're down to about 30 per cent of our families being Turkish. Most, in fact virtually all, of those children though, and often their parents, were actually born in Australia. However, they still don't speak English. Arabic and Assyrian [speaking] families are probably about 40 per cent now.

Participants described the goal of engagement with the community as two-fold. First, principals saw the involvement of families as important to the education of the students. Second, principals identified their schools as having an important role in the support of families in their communities. The principals discussed four features of their community that had a significant impact on their ability to engage with parents and also had consequences for practices and other challenges within the school gates. These are presented below from most strongly endorsed to least.

Transience. Transience was an issue that participants stated was both common and difficult to deal with. When discussing the frequency of the issue, one participant succinctly summed it up, “Our students are always coming and going”. Analysis of participant discussion suggested that there were three forms of transience that schools experienced: new
families arriving in the school, families newly arrived in Australia moving out of the school community as they found employment, and families returning to their country of origin for extended periods to visit relatives. This created three challenges for the schools: adjusting to students arriving in the school, adjusting to students leaving the school and uncertainty about the enrolment of students. Participants commented that arrivals and departures were most common at the start of school terms but that they could also occur at any time. They also noted that all three of these challenges created a significant administrative burden.

Participants indicated that transience was not only an administrative problem but was detrimental to the education of students as there could be extended periods in which they were out of school. Teachers were also affected by this as their classes were disrupted and they did not see the results of their work with the students. Aspects of these challenges were described by one participant:

So [when a family leaves the school] you're reading recovery and all the things that you've put into this family or to that child has gone and then a new family come in and we start again. That's hard for teachers, because … they put in a lot of hard work and they often don't get to see the results of it down the end because the families either move to other schools, sometimes locally but usually not.”

Other researchers have highlighted how disruptive transience can be to the functioning of schools and the education of students. Demie, Tong, Taplin, and Hutter (2006) reported that some principals in the UK identified transience as the most significant issue they faced and Lee et al., (2012) found that principals of international schools also considered transience a significant problem.

**Language barriers.** Language barriers between school staff and parents were identified by principals as a problem which schools had found difficult to overcome. Given the high population of parents and families within the participants’ school communities that
did not speak English, participants identified that when their schools had limited numbers of staff that spoke the languages of these parents and families a number of issues were created. First, language barriers between school staff and parents meant that parents who did not speak English often had difficulty engaging with the school outside of pre-planned events for which language support could be organised. This had a serious impact on the capacity of the schools to develop consistent parent engagement. Second, parents with limited English language ability often had difficulty becoming involved in the homework that teachers set for students. Third, participants recognised that parents who spoke languages other than English were more likely to be isolated, have limited support and have difficulty engaging with the broader Australian community. As one principal stated:

The parents probably feel more isolated than the children do. The children get the funding, the parents don’t unless they go to a language centre or something like that; especially maybe the mothers might be isolated. The father might be going to work or the father might be going to language school and might be studying, whereas mum may be basically isolated at home.

Participants also emphasised the importance they placed on increasing engagement with parents with limited English language. However, as the above quote indicates, schools do not receive funding for working with parents with limited English language skills. Participants stated that overcoming language barriers was an ongoing task for their schools and their efforts in this area are discussed further in the third theme in this chapter.

**Refugee experience.** The refugee experience of students and families was of considerable concern to participants. Participants recognised that families from a refugee background may have experienced trauma and they sought to provide links between these families and external services where possible. However, several participants highlighted difficulties in engaging with these families quickly and were concerned they did not have
sufficient time or resources to support these families adequately. Participants also identified that they did not always know when a student or a family were refugees. The following statement from one participant illustrates some of these points:

We’ve got 23 different nationalities or more in the school, [challenges include] the subtlety and just getting families to tell us about their experiences. Once you find out they’ve come through a refugee camp and they might have spent three years there and the experiences that they’ve had can be horrendous overseas; just getting that empathy with the families. Having time to be able to do that and being able to communicate, things like that can be an issue.

**Cultural barriers.** Principals saw cultural barriers between the school and parents as being important but of less concern than the other challenges and one which contributed to the difficulties that parents had connecting with their schools. While participants indicated that developing parent engagement was an ongoing effort with all parents, participants expressed a belief that this difficulty also reflected a difference between Australian norms and the beliefs that some parents held about their roles in both the school and their children’s education. For example, one participant spoke about the difference in expectations between their school and those of some parents in regard to homework:

Our expectations might be different to certain parents’ expectations, for example, the amount of homework. Aspirational parents may want their children to do more and more, whereas when it’s a lot of rote homework, it’s not actually quality homework, but they think that would benefit their child.

A final issue relating to cultural barriers was that many participants noted that school staff were still in the process of learning about the cultural backgrounds of parents and students, which may have been contributing to issues with parent engagement.
Inside the School Gate: Cultural Diversity Within the School Creates Challenges

Administratively and is Associated With Student Issues.

Principals described fewer challenges emerging within the school gates. The main area of difficulty they identified was management and administrative challenges, which appeared to stem from the school context described previously. A second, and less frequent issue, that participants reported were problems they conceptualised as relating to students, such as racism.

Management and administrative challenges. Participants identified significant administrative challenges associated with their schools’ culturally diverse contexts. Schools spent substantial amounts of resources on organising interpreters, translating documents, organising linguistic support for students, and linking families to external services. When asked what they would like to change in their school to better support cultural diversity, the response of a participant captured was, “It’s always more resources”. In reference to the impact of transience on administration, participants stated that they frequently needed to quickly reallocate school resources (for example, support staff) as the profile of year levels changed. As one participant stated:

For instance, on the first day of term [four] we had four children, four new enrolments and by Wednesday I think we had seven, but by Wednesday afternoon I'd found that seven children had left. They were in different grade levels and so our support staff, programs and any of those things that we do to support families, all have to get swapped around.

Participants were also cognizant of issues relating to helping all teachers engage with the community in the face of significant language barriers. To achieve this, strategies such as creating time for teachers to speak to parents was trialled by some principals.
**Student-related challenges.** Challenges directly relating to students were not frequently reported and only three participants mentioned racism or bullying, with only one identifying it as an issue. However, it was noted by participants that some students from refugee backgrounds did exhibit more *behavioural problems* than other students, although this was not seen as a challenge for the school. The lack of discussion of racism by participants contrasted with the results of a study exploring experiences of racism for students within these six schools (Freeman et al., 2012). That study found that students perceived that there were incidents of racism occurring in their school and that some students held beliefs that appeared to be unfavourable, such as perceiving “difference” negatively. Given the lack of discussion by principals on this topic, this research suggested that racism might have been more prevalent within their schools than they believed. This finding would parallel other Australian research (Aveling, 2007) which indicated that principals may underestimate racism in their schools. Interestingly, the principal that did discuss racism noted that its prevalence seemed to be increasing within their school:

> With the students, I would say there's been a change. We're starting to see racism come in, which is not something that we would have experienced here to the extent that we are seeing now. So we're addressing that both at the classroom level and at whole school level, but I think we need to really monitor it very closely. We want to embrace the people that come to our school, not turn them away because of the colour of their skin or the shape of their eyes or whatever.

In addition to issues relating to racism and behavioural problems, participants also stated that some students in their schools had *limited or no English language skills*. As one principal stated:

> Over half our students start Prep without speaking a word of English and the quality of their kindergarten, although it's improving now, in previous years it was pretty
ordinary [i.e., not very good]. They would learn some social skills, but not many English language skills, although the level is starting to improve.

It was not clear from discussion whether this population of students represented those who had recently arrived, and would therefore be eligible for additional funding, or students who had been born in Australia. However, principals indicated that they did not see students with limited English language skills as a significant challenge as their schools did receive some funding for English language learners.

**Some Additional Points Regarding Challenges**

Taken together, much of the principals’ discussion on the impact of cultural diversity on their schools focused on the impact on the school context and its influence on parent engagement. It was interesting to note that issues relating to cultural diversity and students were discussed less often than those relating to parent engagement. The difficulties that participants described regarding parent engagement were consistent with the literature in this area (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012; Crozier & Davies, 2007), in that contextual factors appeared to substantially influence the capacity of schools to develop parent engagement. It also aligned with research (Kim, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009) that has found that parents from diverse cultural backgrounds often encounter increased barriers and disadvantages compared to the rest of the population. Together these findings suggested that in the context of supporting cultural diversity, parent engagement is a significant concern for principals and that more research exploring how principals can effectively improve engagement with parents from diverse cultural backgrounds is warranted.

Some of the other challenges that participants identified were also in line with the findings in the broader research on culturally diverse schools, for example, language and cultural barriers (for example, Demie, Tong, Taplin, and Hutter, 2006). The findings of the current research, taken with the existing research in this area, suggest that the set of
challenges that schools in culturally diverse communities experience are significant and have a considerable influence on the operation of these schools. In this regard, perhaps the most important issue that participants raised was that school resources were not adequate to overcome all of the challenges they were experiencing. This was of concern to principals because it meant that they were not always able to support all of the students and parents within their school communities.

One area that participants did not discuss but appears relevant, given the extent of the challenges they reported, is the issue of workload for school leaders. Research has already established that principals frequently experience high workloads (Cranston, Ehrich, & Billot, 2003; MacBeath, O'Brien, & Gronn, 2012; Mulford, 2003) and the administrative challenges that participants identified suggested that the workload of principals in culturally diverse schools may be even higher than those of leaders in other schools. In addition, the administrative challenges and high workload may limit the ability of principals to proactively develop the capacity of their schools. This issue may also be compounded in international contexts in which there is lower expenditure on students in schools (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011) and as a result, less capacity for schools to adapt.

**Theme 3: We Strive for Practices That Support Our Whole Community**

This theme explores the way in which participants spoke about the practices their schools employed to support people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Under the whole school model (see Figure 2.1), the practices discussed were primarily in the areas of: school ethos and environment; parent and community involvement; curriculum and pedagogy; staff training and development; and, partnership and services.
School Ethos and Environment is Central to Our Work

All of the participants identified elements of their school’s ethos and environment, which they thought were effective, and these broadly covered four areas. First, schools were welcoming to students, parents and staff from all backgrounds. The following demonstrates the vision of one participant in this regard:

I do believe that we’re a welcoming community. I think people are different in their ways of welcoming. I certainly know for myself that my vision is that it is a welcoming community, that people from all cultures are welcomed to come in and to bring with them the richness of their cultural diversity.

Participants extended the importance of creating a welcoming environment to seeking to understand and engage with all families within their school community, ensuring that all parents felt comfortable at the school, and creating a supportive environment for staff.

Second, participants indicated that their leadership teams endeavoured to create a school that recognised the needs of all students, including those from different cultures, by seeking to understand the backgrounds of their students. Third, the schools celebrated and respected all cultures. This included frequently discussing celebrating cultural religious events such as Ramadan and Christmas. Fourth, the participants stated that they approached cultural diversity as a fundamental part of the functioning of their school. They considered it in the development of every policy and practice their school implemented, and, participant discussion implied that this was a part of their vision for their schools.

As the preceding points indicate, participants rated practices and approaches that related to creating a school ethos and environment that was warm and welcoming as an aspirational goal. The value that these principals placed on the school ethos and environment is well supported in research. For example, researchers (Van Houtte, 2005) have found that promoting a school climate that is supportive of multiculturalism helps increase empathy
towards minority groups within schools and may contribute to better academic outcomes for
these groups (Chang & Le, 2010).

Parent Engagement is an Area of Ongoing Work

Practices relating to parent engagement were discussed by all participants as an
important area of work but also as one that was still continuing to be developed. Participants
indicated this was an ongoing learning process for their schools and that their perceived
success was due to engaging with parents on the parents’ terms and in a personal and
welcoming manner. Participants identified that having designated specialist staff for
community and parent liaison was particularly effective in this regard. Describing the
function of their specialist staff, one participant said:

I've got an Arabic and a Turkish aide. They get allocated into classrooms to support
kids, but we tend to pull them out whenever parents come in or there are new
enrolments queries, and they have the first discussion with the parents. So they do that
really well. If we have problems with kids at school they'll be the ones who phone
home, just so that the parent has a real understanding of what we're on about.

Other practices and strategies that were seen as particularly effective included: creating
spaces for engagement, such as playgroups or parent groups; seeking engagement with
parents and families before students started school; making parent engagement a priority;
finding new ways to facilitate communication with parents, including employing staff with
language and cultural skills, translating newsletters in both written and oral form, and hiring
interpreters; providing support by assisting parents to communicate and engage with external
services; seeking to hear and understand parent perspectives through parent surveys, meetings
and informal conversations; and, encouraging participation in curricular and extra-curricular
activities. The wide range of practices that participants discussed highlighted how important
parent engagement was to their schools and it was interesting to observe the parallels between
the practices they used and those identified in international research as being effective. For example, research from the UK (Demie et al., 2008) found that successful engagement with Somali parents was improved by strong proactive leadership and the presence of designated staff.

For Students, We Focus on Practices That Support Their Wellbeing

When discussing students, participants focused on strategies that ensured that newly arrived students were able to engage with the school and unexpectedly there was little discussion of curriculum and pedagogy. Effective practices that participants identified included having a program for new arrivals to help them transition into the school, linking students to an in-school or local language school and providing language classes to assist students to become fluent in their native language. These practices matched those identified in the research literature and government guidance as being important for supporting the transition and education of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Tsey et al., 2005). The aim of these practices was captured in a statement from one participant:

We have a saying here about doing what's right for children and being able to explain why. That means to be respectful and engaging about who they are and what they are, so our school reflects our community in the most positive way.

However, Given the focus of interview questions it was surprising that there was relatively little discussion of school curricula. Victorian Government policy places a high importance on the incorporation of cultural diversity in the curriculum (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2014b) and it also stresses the importance of supporting students from diverse cultural backgrounds and helping all students develop intercultural competency.
Extra-Curricular Activities are a Great Way to Develop Deeper Engagement With Culture and the Community.

Several participants indicated that extra-curricular activities and events were successful practices, which helped them develop engagement between their schools and their school communities. Specific cultural events that were seen as highly effective included Harmony Days and cultural days. For example, one principal said:

We celebrate the Harmony Day and Harmony Week and they are both really big at our school. All the families bring the food now. We used to have a sausage sizzle in the old days and give everyone sausage in bread, but the families actually provide the food now and it's a wonderful, wonderful night. It really is just a celebration of who we are in terms of the diversity in our school and the Harmony Day, Harmony Week has sort of just made us really focus on that rather than do scattered things throughout the year.

Participants also said that they used these activities to engage families with the school and the community by either hosting an event on the school grounds or by conducting an excursion with parents and students, which also functioned as a learning experience for parents who were new to the community. In both cases the school provided substantial support by, for example, sometimes covering the cost of the excursion for families, while endeavouring to engage both students and parents in the organisation of the activity. For example, one principal talked about opening up their school to their school’s community:

I don't know whether you saw [the sign on] the door, but offering our school's resources and activities for culturally diverse times of the year is very important. There's the children's festival that's on at the town hall, and recently there was an Eid festival for the Lebanese community, so you make your school available to the community.
Although these activities may outwardly appear to represent a tokenistic approach to cultural diversity, (Richardson, 2010) argues that it is these types of events that provide the platform for families to come into the school and get involved, while also providing a platform for schools to engage with culture and cultural diversity more deeply.

**Support Staff and Staff Development are Critical to the School’s Capacity to Engage With People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds**

Participants identified practices relating to staff learning and support as another area of success. In contrast to other Australian research indicating that some schools place high demands on teachers with cultural or language skills (Santoro & Reid, 2006), many participants indicated that they employed support staff who were from the local community or who spoke the major languages represented in the school in order to reduce the burden on other staff and to help build connections between the community and the school. Participants made a number of statements about this, for example:

> We have a number of education support staff that we've employed that are of Turkish, Lebanese, or Arabic origin so that we're able to assist people, some of the families that don’t have much English at all. So they're able to assist with interpreting for them, but also enable us to recognise where they're coming from when we're talking - when we're having discussions or meetings.

**Partnerships, Services and Professional Development Increase the Capacity of Schools to Support Students and Parents**

In addition to the employment of support staff, referring parents to external services and the local city councils was seen as an important way to increase support for families and increase resources available to the school. For example, one participant said:
[The local city council] have been great. They're really supportive. They've got a lot of things that they offer. There's a bilingual storyteller at the moment over there, working with the [school] playgroup.

Participants also supported professional development, which helped build confidence and skills in staff so they could engage more effectively with diverse parents and students. This included induction programs for new teachers, ongoing training within the school, and special events hosted outside of the school. Principals demonstrated that they were often quite proactive in this area with one participant describing a professional development activity which involved taking their school staff to a play which depicted the experience of people living in Bagdad in the last 10 years. This participant described the benefits of this activity as follows:

Some of our parents have told that story but for them [the staff] to hear it, it had major impact, because suddenly they felt they really understood some of our parents more.

So it's a new understanding and it was a great opportunity.

Some Additional Points Regarding Practices

The findings from the interviews with principals provide new insight into the practices employed by schools in culturally diverse contexts. Participants indicated that they thought that the practices that their schools did employ were effectively meeting the needs of their school community and it was interesting to note how the participants’ perceptions broadly aligned with the principles set out in national and state standards (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014a; Ministerial Council for Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) and other research on successful school leadership in culturally diverse contexts (Demie & Lewis, 2010; Demie, 2005; Demie et al., 2008). Specifically, the principals valued on engagement with parents and the community, the recruitment of staff
from the community, a strong inclusive ethos, and the development of language skills in students.

The principals within this study also employed practices in addition to those recommended in the standards and literature. Some principals discussed taking extra steps to link families to supports in the community or running additional programs aimed supporting parents socially. There was also a strong sense of social justice in the leadership stance of some of the participants as they discussed their concerns for the wellbeing of newly arrived families although the term “social justice” was not used. Participants also strongly emphasised resource management as a critical practice. Collectively these practices illustrated that schools in highly culturally diverse and low socio-economic areas may need to be very innovative in their development of practices which appear to benefit from strong school leadership.

While participants did not discuss approaches to integrating cultural diversity into the curriculum, they did endorse the use of cultural days and other dedicated events to enhance learning about culture. The approaches that participants discussed could be conceptualised as superficially similar to Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) human relations approach to cultural diversity, with the emphasis on food-based activities and the focus on teaching about similarities and differences. However, participants also expressed a strong concern for the wellbeing all of the members of their school communities and appeared to use the human relations-like practices to engage more closely with their school communities. The apparent discrepancy between the use of human relations-like practices and the broad endorsement of social justice needs to be carefully considered given that research has shown that while people may subscribe to ideals of social justice and fairness they may have difficulty implementing these in practice (Tatto, 1996). As a result, it is difficult to conceptualise the approach(es) discussed by principals within Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) model but it does
appear that the participants were endorsing and applying many practices in line with the research literature.

Summary

The interviews conducted with principals supported some findings from previous research and also revealed new insights. Participants were deeply concerned with the wellbeing of their school communities and were typically highly proactive. The findings within this chapter highlight the substantial influence that community demographics have on school leadership as well as on the overall functioning of schools. The primary impact appeared to be the challenges created for school leadership and the high level of school resources that participants had to allocate to areas affected by these challenges. These schools demonstrated the importance of engaging with the school community, taking a proactive approach to supporting people from diverse cultural backgrounds, continuing to look for innovative practices that match the characteristics of the school community, and building on typical school practices (such as cultural days) to promote community engagement.
Chapter Eight

A Synthesis and Discussion of the Findings from Parents, Teachers and Principals
This chapter provides a synthesising analysis of the discussions which took place in the parent, teacher and principal focus groups and interviews. The analysis covers three key areas: attitudes and beliefs relating to culture and cultural diversity, challenges and practices. Summaries of the challenges and practices are presented in Table 8.1 and Table 8.2 respectively, and these will be referred to throughout.

**How Culture and Diversity is Understood by Members of School Communities**

Three themes were identified in the discussions with parents, teachers and principals about culture and diversity. These were: conceptualisations of culture and cultural diversity, attitudes towards other cultural groups, and racism.

**Conceptualisations of Culture and Cultural Diversity**

Participant discussion indicated that although there were differing constructions of culture and diversity across the focus groups, many participants appeared to construct culture in terms of observable behaviours and practices, particularly in the parent and staff focus groups. Other aspects of culture, such as values and beliefs, were identified but were not discussed to the same extent as behaviours and practices. Participants also saw cultural diversity as primarily relating to differences in the observable practices of groups. In describing their stance on culture, many participants in all three groups drew heavily on their personal experience and staff indicated that their pre-service teacher education had typically not covered culture in detail.

Although there is limited research on the ways in which members of school communities conceptualise culture, existing research does suggest some reasons why the conceptualisations of culture described above may predominate in Australian schools. Liddicoat (2004) analysed four influential policy documents central to the ongoing

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1 The National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco, 1987); The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (Department of Education Employment and Training, 1991); The National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Strategy (Council of Australian Governments, 1994); The Profile for Languages other than English in Australian Schools (Australian Education Council, 1994).
development of language-in-education policy in Australia and elements of his analysis may provide explanations for the constructions of culture identified. First, he noted that cultural education in Australia was a subset of language learning, an observation that largely holds true today despite significant changes to the Australian curriculum. Second, he concluded that there was not a clear conceptualisation of culture in these documents and the conceptualisations of culture and language were not distinguished clearly. Third, he concluded that the policies equated learning about culture with learning factual information about \textquotedblleft people, places and things, and had a strong emphasis on artefacts\textquotedblright{} (where \textquotedblleft artefacts\textquotedblright{} refers to \textquotedblleft arts or intellectual traditions and as practices in terms of behaviours, attitudes and values\textquotedblright{}, p. 303). Fourth, he concluded that the lack of clear conceptualisations of language and culture led to problems teaching culture and made it difficult to implement the policy. While the position of culture and cultural diversity in the curriculum appears to have improved somewhat since this analysis (see, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2015a), the current research does suggest that there may be a focus on factual cultural information and that education about culture is not clearly positioned within the school curriculums.

A tentative conclusion from these findings is that the difficulties relating to addressing culture appear to be perpetuated through a lack of teacher preparation and the approach to education about culture recommended in the guidance to schools. Members from both the staff and parent focus groups reported difficulty discussing aspects of culture relating to beliefs and values with their students/children and reported instances in which children had difficulty negotiating situations with other students involving cultural difference. Given that education about cultural differences appeared to focus on the acceptance and tolerance of differences without deeper engagement, in line with the guidelines provided by DET and in the Australian Curriculum, it is not clear how students would develop the skills and
intercultural competency necessary to overcome the issues that parents and school staff raised or the incidents of racism described by students within these schools (Freeman et al., 2012).

Based on the above discussion it appears that a number of changes could be suggested. First, as many previous researchers have suggested (for example, Sleeter & Owuor, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), there may need to be greater emphasis on culture in teacher education. Second, the Australian Curriculum and state level guidance might be improved by more clearly defining culture and how culture can be integrated into the curriculum in a way that facilitates engagement with values and beliefs. Third, schools may have a role in educating school staff and parents about culture. Cultural days and other culturally based activities could be purposefully framed as opportunities for all members of the school community to deepen their understanding of culture, with the intention of creating an environment in which children and adults can learn about culture and cultural diversity together.

**Attitudes Towards Different Cultural Groups**

Participants across all three qualitative studies discussed their attitudes towards acceptance of the cultures of groups with less representation within their schools. Discussion of this topic was most prevalent in the parent focus groups but also occurred in the staff focus groups and, to a lesser extent, in the interviews with principals. As discussed in Chapter Five, many English speaking parents appeared to endorse the strategies of multiculturalism or melting (Berry, 1997). Staff appeared to predominately endorse the melting pot in relation to cultural values relating to education. It is important to restate that research (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987) has found that incompatible acculturation standpoints can contribute to acculturative stress and subsequently poorer mental health outcomes (Berry, 2005), which may be occurring with the endorsement of the melting pot stance by some members of the community and the desire expressed by parents in the non-English speaking focus groups to
retain their own culture. Both parent and staff focus groups indicated that their schools as a whole adopted a multiculturalism approach, which was also supported by the findings from the interviews with principals.

**Conceptualisation and Understanding of Racism**

Another area in which participants’ understanding of culture and diversity appeared to have an impact was in relation to racism. Most participants appeared to construct racism as a form of bullying or as a behavioural problem, and did not make reference to ways in which students might construct difference or understand culture and race. Further, although participants discussed the importance of teaching students about acceptance and tolerance, they did not link a lack of acceptance or tolerance to racism. This separation might be explained by the view that many staff and parents appeared to endorse that the students in their schools were too young to be prejudiced or racist. A notable number of staff and parents appeared to view prejudice as something that required higher cognitive ability than primary school children possessed, in contrast to literature indicating that young children are aware of race (Hirschfeld, 2008). From this perspective it may be logical to link teaching about acceptance and tolerance with general bullying, rather than with racist behaviours. As noted earlier, despite the racist behaviours observed and experienced by students within the schools participating within the larger project (Freeman et al., 2012), participants did not identify racism as a problem within their schools, although some participants did acknowledge that it occurred. This may also explain why staff and parents were very concerned about student wellbeing but did not appear to value their schools engaging with cultural diversity more deeply in the school curriculum.

This finding has important implications for the way in which research on racism in school communities can be understood. As noted earlier, race-based incidents were reported within the schools featured in this project, a finding that is consistent with studies of the prevalence
of racism in Australia (Greco et al., 2010). Researchers (Solomon et al., 2005; Aveling, 2007) have argued that staff and principals can have a lack of awareness of racism or deny its presence because it would be uncomfortable to acknowledge and because it conflicts with their beliefs about privilege in society. This research project highlights that despite many people within the studies indicating concern about racism in general, they may not have been prompted to reflect on their constructions of racism, culture and diversity, or if they have reflected on it, they may have chosen to categorise race-based incidents as a form of bullying, perhaps due to concerns that exposing it might increase students’ awareness of it and subsequently its prevalence.

Although the schools within this study were able to address racism and issues relating to culture and diversity it appears that this is not an easy process and that there may be room for improvement. The findings of this project indicated that the participants drew heavily on elements of Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) humanistic approach and, to a lesser extent, on the multicultural education approach, and rarely discussed the development of identity or the elements of social justice focused on addressing power imbalances. It is important to mention that all participants, particularly parents, were very positive about their schools and their schools’ capacity to meet their needs and the needs of the students. However, it also seems plausible that some of the challenges these schools experienced, such as resolving conflicts of needs or difficulties with parent engagement, might be reduced were the school as a community to engage more deeply with culture and cultural diversity.

**School Challenges Relating to Cultural Diversity**

In the discussions with principals, school staff and parents there were extensive discussions of challenges. This section presents a summary (see Table 8.1) and discussion of the challenges identified by parents, school staff and principals within the whole school model presented in Chapter Two (see Figure 2.1).
Table 8.1

*Parent, Teacher and Principal Perspectives on Challenges Schools Encounter as They Work to Support People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds Analysed Within the Whole School Approach to Cultural Diversity Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Context</th>
<th>Parents reported</th>
<th>Staff reported</th>
<th>Principals reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The characteristics of the school communities are associated with challenges. These characteristics include:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High cultural diversity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High linguistic diversity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changing school populations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High transience</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High numbers of new arrivals</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High numbers of students and families who have experienced trauma</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A low income community</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Families who can be isolated in the community</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole school vision and approach</th>
<th>Parents reported</th>
<th>Staff reported</th>
<th>Principals reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school’s contextual characteristics are associated with challenges within the school communities, which include:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unfavourable economies of scale within the schools</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Competing needs in the school communities</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Additional planning needed for the allocation of resources (particularly in relation to high transience)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These challenges are associated with issues for school leaders:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are limited school resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decisions about resource allocation can be difficult, e.g.,</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Difficulty deciding which second language(s) to offer</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Difficulty deciding whether to offer religious education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy and guidelines</th>
<th>Parents reported</th>
<th>Staff reported</th>
<th>Principals reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current government policy does not supply schools with enough resources to meet all school needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School ethos and environment

The high number of cultural groups in the school can be associated with:
- Relatively low visibility and/or recognition of smaller cultural or religious groups within schools

### Student support and development

The new cultures present in the school and the high numbers of students who have experienced trauma are associated with challenges, including:
- Increased behavioural issues (such as aggression and swearing) amongst students
- Bullying and racism (perceived to be at low levels) possibly increasing

Increased transience, language barriers, and trauma experience are associated with:
- Disrupted student learning
- A need for greater student support, including:
  - Language support in the classroom
  - Cultural support, as the students adjust to Australian culture
  - Counselling and psychological support (relating to trauma and difficult home environments)

There may be difficulty identifying which students need additional support

### Staff training and development

Cultural and linguistic diversity in the community can:
- Limit the capacity of staff to engage with all parents
- Cause difficulties when staff have a limited knowledge or understanding of the experiences of new arrivals

Student transience can:
- Be frustrating and stressful for teachers

There may be issues with the pre-service training and professional development that staff have received relating to cultural diversity:
- Not all staff received training in cultural diversity in their pre-service education
- Opportunities for professional development can be infrequent, not comprehensive enough or informal

There may be a lack of resources relating to cultural diversity available to staff:
- No existing information packs or guidance on
Parents reported | Staff reported | Principals reported
--- | --- | ---
different cultures and religions (particularly for cultural and religious groups with small populations within the school)

### Curriculum and pedagogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Parents reported</th>
<th>Staff reported</th>
<th>Principals reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural activities (such as cultural days) may be run infrequently or on an informal basis</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools may not have a clearly defined set of processes and practices regarding educating about culture and cultural diversity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools may find it difficult to increase the engagement of some parents in the education of their children</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Parent and community engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Parents reported</th>
<th>Staff reported</th>
<th>Principals reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents may experience challenges adjusting to Australia:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - They may have difficulty adjusting to Australian culture</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - They may lack confidence engaging with Australian schools</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - They may lack knowledge about the services that Australian schools offer</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There may be differences between school staff and parents’ attitudes and beliefs:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - Different cultural beliefs about disability, parent involvement in the school and in children’s education at home</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - Different beliefs about which languages the school should teach</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - Different beliefs about which (if any) religious education classes the school should teach</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - Different beliefs or needs relating to the amount of parent engagement in the school, which may relate to cultural beliefs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High cultural and linguistic diversity is associated with communication barriers:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - Language barriers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - Parents may lack literacy in their native language</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - Staff may be reliant on access to staff with language skills to communicate with parents</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many parents experience barriers to engagement with the school:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - Limited time to engage due to work</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - Limited numbers of staff fluent in the parent’s language</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>  - High transience can limit the capacity of parents to engage</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectively, the preceding challenges can significantly</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents reported  | Staff reported | Principals reported
---|---|---
inhibit engagement between parents and schools, and requires ongoing effort and resources from the school to improve

**Partnerships and services**
Not discussed as challenges

**Monitoring and reporting**
Academic outcome measures may not capture student progress given the high levels of cultural diversity, transience, and limited prior education of many new arrivals

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**School Context**

When discussing challenges within their schools there was a clear consensus amongst participants that the characteristics of their school communities created significant challenges for their schools as a whole. These characteristics, presented in Table 8.1, included: the highly culturally and linguistically diverse nature of the schools; the high transience, changing population demographics including high numbers of new arrivals; and, the relatively high numbers of students and families that had experienced trauma. Participants in the school staff focus groups also commented that families in their communities were typically low income while principals also noted that some new arrivals were at greater risk of being isolated in the community.

Research has previously identified that contextual variables do have a significant influence on schools. For example, high linguistic diversity, high cultural diversity, low socio-economic status (Demie et al., 2008), and high transience (Dobson & Pooley, 2004) have been found to have an influence on school functioning. However, the current research demonstrates more clearly than past research the extent to which these types of contextual variables impact on the challenges that schools encounter and the practices that are viewed by school communities as effective. These findings also have implications for research on effective schools and leadership, which include school context but do not currently capture
how variations in school context (for example, very high or very low levels of cultural and linguistic diversity) are likely to influence other areas of school practice.

**Whole School Vision and Approach**

School principals provided the most detailed explanations of the ways in which the complex contextual characteristics of the schools led to challenges that impacted on whole school vision and approach. They noted that the characteristics of their schools meant that there were substantially more needs within their school communities that they were striving to meet than in schools with less complex communities. In addition, analysis of statements made by parents and principals indicated that the needs of different groups could at times conflict. For example, decisions about which second language(s) a school would offer could result in some parents being satisfied while others could feel that their needs were not being met. The complexity and diversity of needs also indicated that schools could often have unfavourable economies of scale in relation to resource allocation, as there could be small groups of students or families with high needs, and that more time was required by school leadership to plan how to best allocate resources.

The apparent outcome of this increased complexity appeared to be a focus on managing cultural diversity, with less emphasis on engaging with culture and cultural diversity. That is, the complexity and high level of needs meant that school communities were expending considerable effort trying to support all members of their community and did not have adequate resources to engage with culture and cultural diversity on a deeper level. This was further reflected in discussions of vision and philosophy with principals that suggested that they did not have a clearly defined vision or approach, as recommended in the research literature (Day & Sammons, 2013; Sleeter & Grant, 2009), despite being very concerned about the outcomes of people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
Policy and Guidelines

Challenges relating to policy and guidelines were not frequently discussed by participants. A lack of school resources was the most frequently mentioned topic related to policy, with participants identifying that currently schools did not appear to have adequate resources to meet the needs of all members of their communities. This issue was further complicated by the need for schools to have a minimum number of students receiving funding in order to have adequate economies of scale or, in some instances, to receive funding for those students.

In addition, despite the availability of a number of resources on parent engagement (such as, Opening the School Gate: Engaging CLD families in schools, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2006, and Building Bridges: Creating a culture of Diversity, Mansouri, Jenkins, Leach, & Walsh, 2009) these were not mentioned by participants and their responses suggested that they may not be aware of them. Given the amount of guidance available to schools and the lack of reference to policy and guidelines within interviews and focus groups, future research could explore how aware principals and school staff are of guidance, how these documents are perceived (for example, whether they are helpful) and if there are any barriers associated with accessing or implementing them.

School Ethos and Environment

Participants were generally very positive about the ethos and environment within their schools. The challenge identified by some participants, and articulated most clearly by the Aboriginal social club group and school staff, was that small cultural, religious, linguistic and Aboriginal groups within the schools might be less visible and receiving less recognition and support than larger groups within the schools. This issue was highlighted, as previously discussed, by the lack of discussion about smaller groups in many interviews and focus groups. Participants also noted this issue was compounded by infrequent cultural events (for
example, NAIDOC week, an annual week-long celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, was not celebrated at one school because it fell in the school holidays) and an often informal approach to addressing culture in classrooms, discussed further in the curriculum and pedagogy section.

**Student Support and Development**

Participant discussion indicated that there was a general perception that the community complexity and recent changes in community demographics had resulted in the current student body requiring greater support than in previous periods (for example, 10 years ago). From a perspective of wellbeing outcomes, the increasing prevalence of students with experiences of trauma and Middle Eastern cultural backgrounds was seen by some participants, in each of the groups, as contributing to behavioural issues, such as aggression and bullying, and also to increases in racism, findings that all reflect those identified in previous research (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Brown et al., 2006; Taylor, 2008). In regard to academic outcomes, high transience, language barriers and trauma experiences were associated with disrupted student learning and a greater need for student support (such as language, cultural and psychological support). Interestingly, staff also noted that it was not always easy to identify which students were in need of greater wellbeing or academic support.

**Staff Training and Development**

The primary finding relating to the training and development of staff within this study was that many staff reported a lack of pre-service education and informal or infrequent professional development relating to cultural diversity. This is a critical finding for two reasons. First, as identified in the literature review, research has established that some teachers have unhelpful beliefs about other cultural groups (Castro, 2010; Milner, 2005; Solomona et al., 2005; Yeung, 2006) and that these beliefs can be difficult to change without
training (Frye et al., 2010). Second, both international (e.g., Tato, 1996) and Australian (e.g., Jorgensen (Zevenbergen), Grootenboer, Niesche, & Lerman, 2010) research has identified that, although teachers may endorse social justice and inclusiveness, they can have difficulty implementing practices that reflect these beliefs. Discussion with principals and staff indicated that schools were concerned with these issues. Principals stated that they tried to employ people who would suit their schools and endeavoured to provide staff with ongoing professional development opportunities and support. However, some staff indicated that they still felt that these options were not sufficient and, given that there have long been calls for improved teacher training regarding culture and cultural diversity (Banks & Banks, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Sleeter, 2001), a new approach may need to be taken to address this issue.

Another key challenge relating to staff was the additional stress that many staff were under within the school communities in this project. There were greater teaching demands, particularly when teaching students with limited English and staff did not always feel prepared when they started work. Principals commented on the additional workload within culturally diverse communities and the burden that this placed on them. These findings seem to support the notion of diversity-related burnout, introduced by Tatar and Horenczyk (2003). Their research focused on teachers and identified that they experienced stress related specifically to cultural diversity. One of the causes of the increased stress in culturally diverse schools they identified was that as classes become more heterogeneous the work load increased, as do the teachers’ personal and emotional involvement with their students (particularly if they are involved in helping new students integrate socially and academically), a finding which is supported by the results of this project. However, in addition to the findings of Tatar and Horenczyk, the present project also suggests that the characteristics of the community (including culture and language diversity, lower socio-
economic status, trauma and refugee experience, as well as high transience) can be associated with stress for parents and principals.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

In contrast to the emphasis placed on creating a positive space for people from diverse backgrounds, there was remarkably little discussion of culture or diversity in the curriculum. Parents indicated that they thought that core subjects, such as mathematics and English, were very important but did not speak much about teaching about cultures and did not indicate that they wanted more coverage of this area. The lack of discussion of education about culture and cultures was noted in discussions with both school staff and principals. Teachers indicated that they considered there to be some coverage during cultural events or days, and a small number mentioned class activities that did explore this. Overall, however, there was a paucity of discussion on this subject in interviews and focus groups with the exception being the members of the Aboriginal social club who identified a need for a greater emphasis on culture in the curriculum. This is potentially a significant issue as demonstrated by the emphasis placed on clearly addressing culture and cultural diversity in the curriculum in both the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2015a) and research (Banks & Banks, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2009). Indicating that coverage of culture and cultural diversity is critical to the development of intercultural competency, the capacity to engage with concepts of race and culture, and for individual identity development.

An important consideration when interpreting this finding is that the discussion within this research project was open ended and did not focus specifically on the school curriculum. As a result, participants may not have associated “supporting cultural diversity” with curriculum based activities and the schools may have been covering this topic to a greater extent than discussion suggested. Another possible explanation involved the extensive challenges that these schools experienced. Developing and implementing a curriculum
focused on culture and cultural diversity requires resources and participants identified that these schools had limited resources, were sometimes not able to offer language subjects and were focused on developing student competencies in core subjects. A further area of research may be to explore how principals and school staff in Australia do position education about culture and cultural diversity in the curriculum.

**Parent and Community Engagement**

Discussion relating to parent and community engagement was extensive and analysis of participant discussion of this area identified that parents, teachers and principals held similar views about the issues that schools were facing. The main challenge that was identified by participants was that a significant ongoing effort was required by schools to develop and maintain parent engagement. Previous research has identified that, in general, parents from diverse cultural backgrounds are more likely to encounter a greater number and a greater magnitude of challenges than other parents (Turney & Kao, 2010). These include: language barriers (Rah, Choi, & Nguyên, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2010), a lack of time to engage, and different expectations about the role of parents in relation to the school (Rah et al., 2009). A novel finding from this study was the extent to which school staff and parents believed that many parents did not engage due to fear or apprehension and future research could explore whether this belief is correct.

The difficulty in developing engagement was also linked to additional challenges including: staff members’ lack of clarity regarding the purpose of parent engagement, the need to educate parents about some Australian norms once they had engaged (for example, attitudes towards students with disabilities) and difficulties involved in supporting the parents with high needs. These findings draw attention to the broader role that schools can have promoting Australian values and supporting the wider school community, in line with the development of schools as locations for the development of social capital, mental health and
physical health (Crosnoe, 2004; Folland, 2007; Phongsavan et al., 2006). The findings also provide further evidence of the potential benefit of developing schools as community hubs (Sanjeevan, McDonald, & Moore, 2012). In addition, the challenges identified by the participants within this study also highlight that difficulties in the development of parent engagement frequently relate to school or staff factors, rather than simply to parents, supporting the recent developments in the research on “hard-to-reach” parents.

**Partnerships and Services, and Monitoring and Reporting**

It was notable that virtually no challenges relating to partnerships and services or monitoring and reporting were identified in the analysis of discussions with participants (although associated practices were discussed as will be covered in a later section). The exception to this was the comment made by some principals that the current national monitoring system for student academic outcomes might not capture the progress that students were making due to the disrupted education that many students experienced.

**Conclusions Relating to Challenges**

Through the triangulation of participant discussion, a wide range of challenges relating to the complex and culturally diverse nature of their school communities were identified and many were discussed by at least two different categories of participants. Interestingly, most of the challenges identified by participants were practical in nature and related to a whole school vision in which all students and parents were supported which entailed catering to a wide range of needs within a context of limited school resources. Challenges relating to defining a school vision, such as Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) social justice multicultural education approach, relating to educating about and for cultural diversity were not discussed. As a result, challenges appeared to be linked more closely with supporting people from diverse cultural backgrounds rather than educating for cultural diversity.
School Practices to Support People From Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

School practices were a major subject of discussion in all focus groups and interviews. This section presents a summary (see Table 8.2) and discussion of the practices identified by participants within the whole school model presented in Chapter Two (see Figure 2.1).
Table 8.2

Parent, Teacher and Principal Perspectives on Effective School Practices to Support People from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds Within the Whole School Approach to Cultural Diversity

Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole school vision and approach</th>
<th>Parent reports</th>
<th>Staff reports</th>
<th>Principal reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School leadership was sensitive to, responsive to and supported:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parent needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school had a visible approach to cultural diversity:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School leadership prioritised supporting people from diverse cultural backgrounds</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A whole school approach was employed</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school promoted inclusiveness</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School principals were viewed as effective leaders:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School principals had clearly defined personal values</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School principals personally lead engagement with people from diverse cultural backgrounds</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy and guidelines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school had clearly defined anti-bullying policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school had zero tolerance for racism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School ethos and environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school promoted a positive, warm and welcoming culture and ethos:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school community was welcoming to all people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school promoted positive values (respect, tolerance, belonging and acceptance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school had signs in community languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school employed culturally responsive staff:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff were welcoming, approachable, and had a positive and proactive attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From diverse cultural backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From the local community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• With language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff sought to learn from their students (about culture and religion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole school approach and support for cultural and religious events:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adjusting the school calendar for cultural or religious events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE SCHOOLS

- Offering culturally sensitive food options at school events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student support and development</th>
<th>Parent reports</th>
<th>Staff reports</th>
<th>Principal reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school employed support staff:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school employed staff and support staff with language and cultural skills in the classroom</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school had Koorie (Aboriginal) education officers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school had student support programs:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school had access to a language school</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school had a new arrivals and/or a transition program</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Programs for students and families (for example, KidsMatter)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school supported students observing religious practices:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rooms set aside for prayer or fasting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff training and development</th>
<th>Parent reports</th>
<th>Staff reports</th>
<th>Principal reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support staff:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The schools employed staff who can support the teachers and school leadership</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support programs for staff</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There were regular staff/team meetings for staff in which they could discuss issues they encountered related to culture</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school had an induction program for new teachers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentoring and buddy systems</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-service education and professional development relating to cultural diversity:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some at university</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some formally at the school</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some informally at the school</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some through external services coming to the school</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum and pedagogy</th>
<th>Parent reports</th>
<th>Staff reports</th>
<th>Principal reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school built on general practices</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school had a clearly defined values program that addressed culture and incorporated teaching about similarities and differences</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school employed culture specific practices</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school ran cultural days and festivals</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school integrated cultural diversity into the curriculum:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Show and tell that covered cultural backgrounds</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some religious and second language education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school offered second languages</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some classwork on Aboriginal history and coverage of aboriginal history in the curriculum</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent and community engagement</th>
<th>Parent reports</th>
<th>Staff reports</th>
<th>Principal reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication with parents:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language support (interpreters and staff)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent reports</th>
<th>Staff reports</th>
<th>Principal reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The school translated letters and newsletters</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school endeavoured to use face to face invitations with parents</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school organised times to read out the school newsletter in languages other than English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitating parent engagement and communication through food based practices</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The school offered opportunities for parent and community engagement:

- Parents could be involved in the classrooms: ✓ ✓ ✓
- Parents could be involved in excursions: ✓
- Parents could be involved in incursions: ✓ ✓
- Parents could be involved in school councils: ✓ ✓ ✓
- The school created community spaces to facilitate engagement with parents and the school community (e.g., community gardens or having school facilities available to community groups): ✓ ✓ ✓
- The school was being developing as a community hub (e.g., offering playgroups in community languages): ✓ ✓ ✓
- Multicultural days and weeks: ✓ ✓
- School concerts and art shows: ✓

The schools offered parents support:

- Internal (e.g. parenting skills programs, computer classes, English classes, play groups, and after school programs for students): ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
- The school sought to link families together when appropriate: ✓ ✓ ✓
- The school sought to link parents with external services as needed (e.g. Foundation House): ✓ ✓ ✓
- The school offered additional services to parents such as Maternal and Child nurses, psychologists and paediatricians: ✓ ✓ ✓
- Programs and services were offered in community languages: ✓

### Partnerships and services

**Building school capacity:**

- Networking with the community and external services such as Foundation House, Family Services and Anglicare ✓ ✓ ✓
- Involvement in the National School Partnership ✓
- Seeking external funding and support ✓ ✓

### Monitoring and reporting

**School leadership sought to identify school and community needs:** ✓ ✓ ✓

- School leadership sought the perspectives and opinions of parents
  - The school used parent surveys ✓ ✓
  - Principals spoke directly with parents ✓ ✓
- School leadership were aware of the school demographics ✓

Some schools used the Koorie Education Learning Plan (KELP; a
Whole School Vision and Approach

Collectively participants indicated that they felt that their schools were employing practices at a whole school level that were effectively supporting people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The central facet of the vision and approach endorsed by participants appeared to be the positioning of the schools as places in which people from all backgrounds were welcomed. Relating to cultural diversity on an individual level this appeared to translate into welcoming and supporting all students but placing less emphasis on engaging with their cultural identity. Participants indicated that schools primarily took a stance similar to Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) human relations stance towards culture and cultural diversity which focuses on teaching acceptance and tolerance but does little to address social inequalities. While research places greater emphasis on engaging with culture and identity (Banks & Banks, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2009), the approach described by participants is in line with the AusVELS and DET guidance (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014b; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2014a). Regarding specific leadership practices, participants indicated school leaders had clear personal values and personally directed the approach their schools took to culture and cultural diversity.

Policy and Guidelines

Practices relating to policy and guidelines were infrequently discussed. Most references to practices grounded in policy and guidelines focused on addressing issues of bullying and racism. Participants across all types of groups noted that their schools had a zero tolerance policy for racism which was perceived to be very effective. This was also

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discussed in relation to the schools having clearly defined anti-bullying policies, which were consistently enforced. Researchers have commented on the limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of school anti-racism policies (Greco et al., 2010) and the current findings do not clarify the effectiveness of such policies. It may be that school policies are necessary but not sufficient for schools to effectively address racism or, alternatively, they may actually lead to some complacency as school principals and staff believe they have an effective practice in place.

School Ethos and Environment

Participants were very positive about the practices that their schools were employing to develop and promote a positive, warm and welcoming school environment. Participants cited their schools’ efforts to be welcoming to all people and to promote positive values. There was general consensus that the staff who were employed were a big factor in the success of schools in this area. Participants identified that staff often had positive and proactive attitudes and were often recruited from the local community, from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds and were excited to work in a school with a culturally diverse population. Staff and principals also identified that their schools endeavoured to approach cultural diversity with a whole school approach, adjusting their school calendar for religious or cultural celebrations and endeavouring to be considerate of the needs of the school community in all of their practices. The findings presented here appear to reflect the position taken in research and international education policy (Graham, 2012) that school ethos is an important starting point for effective education although there are few references to school ethos within DET guidance.

Student Support and Development

Participants identified practices relating to student support and development as both effective and very important in the efforts of schools to support students from diverse cultural
backgrounds. Support staff who were available to teachers in classrooms when students had limited English language skills were seen as critical by all participant categories. Participants also identified support programs that their schools had access to as being effective with some participants, particularly principals, indicating that they thought that access to language schools and the use of transition programs for students with limited English language skills were critical to effectively supporting these students academically. Participants further identified that they supported students in the observance of religious practices by setting aside rooms for prayer or fasting. Overall these findings suggest that it was in the domains of supporting the wellbeing people from diverse cultural backgrounds and educating students from diverse cultural backgrounds (rather than cultural education) that the current practices employed by schools were helpful.

Staff Training and Development

Access to support staff and support programs was seen as critical to staff training and development by participants. School staff and principals identified that having access to staff with cultural and language skills assisted teachers and the school to engage and support students and families. Participants also identified that having regular team or staff meetings was a good way for school staff to access support if there was an issue relating to culture or language with which they were having difficulty. These meetings were also coupled with induction programs and mentoring or buddy systems that were used in some schools, to support staff members. Staff members and principals also indicated that when professional development relating to cultural diversity was offered that they found it very helpful, particularly in regard to learning about different cultural groups and the experiences of students and families within their schools. Taking the findings relating to both challenges and effective practices together, it appears that the practices that schools did have in place
were helpful but also not always adequate pre-service education may also not be effectively preparing teachers to enter culturally diverse schools.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Practices relating to curriculum and pedagogy identified by participants as effective differed across schools and interestingly, appeared to be grounded in efforts to support the wellbeing of students and parents rather than in efforts to educate about culture. Participants identified that their effective curriculum and pedagogical practices were typically grounded in their school ethos and values programs, with a strong focus on teaching students about similarities and differences between groups with the apparent goal of increasing social cohesion. The main practice that schools used to educate about culture appeared to be cultural days and festivals and participants described liking the ways in which they brought the whole school together and how enjoyable students found these events. Participants also identified other practices such as “show and tell”, some classwork, language education, and occasionally religious education as addressing culture.

As previously discussed, the approach employed by schools to educate about culture and cultural diversity appeared to be similar to Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) humanistic approach. That is, the practices were focused on sampling the food, clothing, music, art and dances from different groups with an emphasis on accepting differences. It is important to note that this approach aligns with the guidance provided by DET. In addition, participants, particularly principals, also noted that they used these types of practices to support other goals, such as parent engagement, and as other researchers have noted (Richardson, 2010) these practices can form the platform for deeper engagement with culture. The clearest example of both of these additional uses of these practices was in the use of food. Staff and principals, particularly those engaged directly in their school’s efforts to increase parent engagement, noted that for many parents of diverse backgrounds food created a common
Parents also indicated that they enjoyed food based activities often felt very comfortable participating in activities centred on food. The implication from this discussion was that engagement practices built around simple activities that are common across the community can be highly effective tools for developing engagement and meeting needs.

**Parent and Community Engagement**

Practices relating to parent and community engagement attracted a lot of discussion from participants. Participants indicated that school principals and staff put a substantial amount of effort into developing and implementing practices to improve communication engagement with parents. Access to support staff with language skills was seen as critical to this, with these staff often having responsibility for developing these practices. Participants indicated that the traditional practices of translating letters and newsletters as well as hiring interpreters for meetings and other events were effective ways of communicating with parents but were not without problems. The most effective communication and engagement strategies included talking newsletters (in which school staff went through the school newsletter at a weekly parent session in community languages) and face to face discussions and invitations (for example, talking to parents as they picked up their children). As previously noted, food based community events were also seen as particularly effective, with participants identifying that making events food based often meant that parents felt more comfortable coming into the school. This created a platform from which school staff could start a dialogue with parents whom they had not been able to contact consistently through other means. Participants indicated that their schools tried to develop further parent engagement through the communication practices identified. Comments made by principals indicated that they tried to create opportunities for parent engagement by encouraging parents to get involved in the classrooms, go on excursions with students, participate in incursions
In addition to engagement, participants emphasised that another key goal of improved communication with parents was to improve the capacity of the schools to support the parents themselves. Participants identified that parent support was seen as an important way of indirectly improving student outcomes and also improving the wellbeing of parents. To this end, participants stated that parent groups targeting the needs of the parents within their school communities (such as computer or English classes) were very effective. In addition, schools often acted to link families with external services depending on parent needs (for example, Foundation House for families that had experienced trauma) or, when resources were available, brought services into the school, such as nurses, psychologists or paediatricians.

Participants, particularly principals, indicated that their efforts to support parents and increase engagement in the school were beginning to coalesce with an increased focus on making their schools spaces for community engagement. This included having community spaces (such as gardens), bringing more services such as playgroups into the schools, and running events, such as multicultural days, in ways that drew the whole community together. Participants indicated that these were seen as ways to facilitate all of the goals of improved student outcomes, improved communication with parents, improved engagement with parents, and improved parent outcomes.

Overall, the emphasis that schools were placing on parent and community engagement was striking. As noted in Chapter Two, DET guidance does cover the engagement and support of parents but does not prioritise it to the same extent as the participating schools in this study appeared to. In addition, the practice that appeared to be most effective for the engagement and support of parents from diverse cultural backgrounds
appeared to be the employment of multicultural liaison officers or aides who were recruited from the local community, spoke the community languages, were culturally competent and were very proactive in their attempts to develop engagement. Given the reported success of these staff, it appears that similar schools, particularly those with a small number of cultural groups with high representation within the school, may benefit substantially from this approach.

**Partnerships and Services**

Linking and forming partnerships with external services was another area that was not discussed extensively but was seen as an important way of building school capacity to support students and families by participants. Staff and principals both mentioned Foundation House and Family Services (part of the Victorian Department of Human Services) as services with which their schools engaged and which were beneficial to the schools. Principals indicated that efforts to gain external funding (for example, grants) and support from the government and other sources were also very important practices.

**Monitoring and Reporting**

Participants indicated that monitoring and reporting was used in a number of different ways within their school to support cultural diversity. Participants identified that school leadership sought to identify school and community needs through parent surveys and through direct consultations with parents. Participating parents also noted that school leadership appeared to monitor changes in the school composition which, while not explicitly discussed, was reflected in staff focus groups and interviews with principals. Participants from the Aboriginal social club also commented that their schools used the Koorie Education Learning Plan (KELP; a tool used to help set goals and monitor outcomes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) with students and that this was helpful but other
participants did not reference practices relating to monitoring and reporting as being effective.

**Conclusions Related to Practices**

As with the discussion of challenges, participants identified a wide range of practices which were seen to help schools effectively support cultural diversity. Many of the practices discussion related to student support and development, specifically the support of wellbeing and education of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as parent engagement and support. Interestingly there was relatively limited discussion of many of the other domains of school practice.
Chapter Nine

Teacher Perspectives on Parent Engagement: A Quantitative Investigation
Introduction

This chapter presents the results of a quantitative pilot study that investigated factors that affect the capacity of schools, via their staff, to engage with parents from different cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this study was to build on the findings of the qualitative study presented in the previous four chapters and offer another perspective on the issue of parent engagement. As such, this chapter is presented separately from the previously discussed findings in this thesis.

One of the most discussed topics within the parent and staff focus groups as well as the interviews with principals was engagement between schools and parents. As discussed in the previous chapters, parents, staff and principals said that they would like to increase parent engagement in their schools. However, participants also indicated that there were some challenges and barriers that they were encountering that made increasing engagement difficult. The two primary issues that were identified were language and cultural barriers between parents and school staff. The present study aimed to explore the area of parent engagement with parents from different cultural backgrounds in greater detail, focusing on language and cultural barriers as perceived by school staff.

The Importance of Parent Engagement

As was discussed in Chapter Two, the importance of parent engagement is widely recognised in educational policy and research within Australia. For example, the Victorian “Guidelines for managing cultural and linguistic diversity in schools” (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 2001) state that “…building effective relationships with parents… is key for improving student learning and the success of schools in a diverse community”. The importance of parent engagement is also reflected in Catholic school guidelines that stress the importance of supporting and engaging with parents and families to improve outcomes for students (Catholic Education Office, 2010).
Research has established that the type of engagement that parents have with schools is important for different outcomes. From the perspective of improving student academic outcomes, it is parent engagement in learning at home that is most strongly associated with positive academic outcomes, rather than engagement with the school (Harris & Goodall, 2008). In regard to the cultural and identity development of students, Australian research has found that for minority cultures older adults often have a significant role in the maintenance and development of their culture (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2007), suggesting that engaging parents with the school may be important for the development of students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Challenges Associated With Parent Engagement

Schools can encounter challenges when attempting to engage with parents. As discussed in Chapter Two, these challenges do not always relate to parents being uninterested in engagement but can also include organisational factors (e.g., their cultural sensitivity) and factors outside control of parents (e.g., their access to transport) (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2010). In addition, past research has identified issues with communication (language and cultural barriers) and service setting as the primary organisational factors (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2010; Crozier & Davies, 2007). That is, support services and staff may not understand the culture of the families they are trying to engage with, may have unhelpful beliefs about the culture of these families and may not speak the language of these families. This suggests that understanding how school staff perceive cultural and language barriers may help identify why schools and parents have difficulty engaging.

How School Staff Understand Culture and Cultural Barriers

Within the research on schools, concerns about teacher and staff beliefs about cultures and multiculturalism have been widely documented. Researchers (Crozier & Davies, 2007) have found that when teachers and schools do not understand the culture of parents they are
trying to engage with they can have a tendency to pathologise parent behaviour and attribute difficulties the school encounters as being a problem of this culture. Australian research (Santoro, 2007) has also identified that teachers in training often have simplistic understanding of the cultures of their students and have a limited understanding of how their own identities are constituted.

The reasons for unhelpful beliefs about culture have also been explored. As Castro (2010) argues, although new teachers may have had more exposure to other cultures than previous generations of teachers this does not necessarily translate to improved beliefs about other cultures since “mere exposure to culturally diverse situations may reinforce stereotypical thinking, especially in the absence of critical reflection” (p. 10). Castro further argues that teachers are often not provided with the training necessary to develop critical reflection skills necessary to develop their cultural competence. An interesting contrast to Castro are researchers (Hedges & Lee, 2010) who argue that through greater training in culturally diverse settings (community placements for teachers in training) students are able to develop deeper understanding of school-family partnerships and diversity. The authors of that research argued that it was the placement that prompted self-reflection and subsequent shifts in beliefs and understanding. However, the validity of this conclusion is unclear as students self-selected for the study and the method of data collection, a focus group in which students discussed their experiences, may have acted as a space for self-reflection, which may have led to the deeper understanding of issues relating to cultural diversity, rather than the placements.

Some of the reasons for unhelpful beliefs among staff may be found in the way in which staff are trained and the school environments that they are exposed to. For example, a lack of effective teacher education relating to culture has been identified in many western countries (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014; Sleeter, 2001) and Australia has been found to be no
exception to this. For example, Australian research (Hickling-Hudson & McMeniman, 1993) has identified that coverage of multiculturalism and culture in university curricula for teacher education is tokenistic. In addition, school culture has been found to have at least some influence on positive or negative views towards multiculturalism (Horenczyk & Tatar, 2002). As a result, this research demonstrates that there are concerns about how teachers understand and engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and also suggests that further research in this area is necessary to understand why difficulties with parent engagement may be occurring.

**How School Staff Understand Language Barriers**

Compared to the research on staff attitudes regarding culture, there has been substantially less research on how school staff view or work with language barriers. Consideration of the existing research and the results of focus groups and interviews within this project suggested that language barriers can be broken down into at least two components. First, when staff cannot speak the language of students or families in their school it creates a practical barrier. Staff are forced to rely on a third party, often interpreters, other staff, parents or students, in order to communicate and if such a party is not present effective communication may not be possible. Second, staff may have unhelpful attitudes about people who do not speak the mainstream or national language.

In regard to both language barriers and unhelpful attitudes, there is limited research into how they impact on parent engagement in schools. There has been some research into the ways in which teacher language attitudes impact on students that is suggestive but the results of this research have been mixed. For example, some research (Byrnes, Kiger, & Manning, 1997) has found that teacher attitudes towards different language groups do differ and these attitudes are improved with formal training on how to teach students from linguistically diverse backgrounds, greater experience, and greater overall teaching education.
In contrast to this, some research (García-Nevarez, Stafford, & Arias, 2005), using a different measure of language attitudes, found that, while second language ability of teachers improved their attitude towards students’ second languages, more experienced teachers had a more negative attitude towards students’ second language. Research has also found that teachers may have a generally positive attitude towards students learning English (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Reeves, 2006), but there is significant variability across staff. Given the focus on students and attitudes in this research it is unclear how parent engagement is affected by staff language attitudes or how engagement is affected by using a third party as an interpreter and more research is needed in this area.

**Aims**

Collectively the research on cultural and language barriers indicates that much remains to be investigated. Characteristics of staff, their education, professional development and school environment may all impact on their cultural and language attitudes. In addition, it appears likely that cultural and language attitudes may have some influence on the difficulties that staff have engaging with parents. As a result the aims of this pilot study were to investigate teacher perspectives on parent engagement by:

- Investigating whether factors such as education, professional development, cultural and linguistic heritage and school environment are associated with teacher attitudes towards other cultures and language groups.

- Investigate whether teacher attitudes towards other cultures and language groups are associated with teacher beliefs and attitudes about engaging with parents.

To address these aims this study consisted of a survey covering teacher demographics, experience, beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives on engaging with parents. There was a specific focus on language and culture across the survey, with background questions addressing the cultural and linguistic heritage of participating teachers while the beliefs and
attitudes measures focused on beliefs about cultural and linguistic diversity. Perspectives on engaging with parents were measured through four scenarios regarding engaging with parents with differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The four scenarios covered engaging with: a parent who did not speak English and who was from a different cultural background through an interpreter (the interpreter scenario), a parent who spoke limited English and who was from a different cultural background (the limited English scenario), a parent who spoke English and who was from a different cultural background (the other culture scenario), and an Anglo-Australian parent (the Anglo-Australian scenario). The first three of these scenarios were designed to act as a measure of cultural and linguistic difference (from high to low) with the Anglo-Australian scenario acting as a control condition.

The content of the survey supported the operationalization of the aims into five hypotheses, with two primary hypotheses (1.1 and 1.2) and three secondary hypotheses (2.1, 2.2 and 2.3). The five hypotheses were:

1.1 Greater cultural and linguistic differences between the participant and the parent presented in the engagement scenarios would be associated with less positive perceptions of engagement, meaning less positive emotions about engaging with the parent, lower perceived self-efficacy in engaging with the parent and lower perceived preparedness for engaging with the parent. Specifically, it was hypothesised that the interpreter scenario would be associated with the most negative perception of engagement, meaning the most negative emotions, least perceived self-efficacy, and lowest perceived preparedness regarding engagement with the parent presented in the scenario. The limited English scenario would be associated with the second most negative perceptions of engagement, the other culture scenario would be associated with the second most positive perceptions of engagement and the Anglo-Australian scenario would be associated with the most positive perceptions of engagement.
1.2 More positive beliefs about different cultures and language would be associated with more positive perceptions of engagement with parents in the interpreter scenario, the limited English scenario, and the other culture scenario.

2.1 Greater levels of experience and training would be associated with more positive beliefs about different cultures and languages.

2.2 Greater levels of teacher experience and training would be associated with more positive perceptions of engagement with parents in the interpreter scenario, the limited English scenario, and the other culture scenario after controlling for perceptions of engagement with Anglo-Australian parents.

2.3 More positive perceptions of the school climate and level of support would be associated with more positive perceptions of engagement in the interpreter scenario, the limited English scenario, and the other culture scenario after controlling for perceptions of engagement with Anglo-Australian parents.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from two sources. First, three of the six schools participating in the qualitative study presented in the previous chapters agreed to participate (two government and one Catholic) and second, teachers undertaking postgraduate study through the University of Melbourne also agreed to participate. From the previously participating schools, 37 staff (31 female, 6 male) participated in the survey while 15 teachers (12 female, 3 male) from the postgraduate program at the University of Melbourne participated.
The Survey

The survey for this study was administered online through the Qualtrics website (http://www.qualtrics.com) and is presented in full in Appendix D. The survey comprised three sections as follows:

Demographics and extent of teaching experience. A series of questions covered demographic information relating to the participants’ gender, age, country of birth, religion and languages spoken. Teaching experience was assessed by asking participants to report the total number of years teaching experience in their current school and to provide an estimate of the percentage of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds within their school. Participants were then asked to report their experience prior to their current school and estimate the degree of cultural diversity within their school(s) by assigning one of four ratings (0-10%, 11%-30%, 31-50% or 51%+ of students from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds). Finally participants estimated the total number of hours of tertiary education and professional development they had received relating to cultural or linguistic diversity as well rating the amount of training they had received relating to working with interpreters on a four point Likert scale from none (1) to a high amount (4).

Beliefs and attitudes. The second section of the survey presented a series of questions designed to measure the participants’ multicultural beliefs, language attitudes, amount of support they were provided with in their school as teachers and their school climate. These measures were based on existing measures or were created for the survey.

Positiveness of teacher cultural beliefs. The measure used for multicultural beliefs was based closely on the Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale (TCBS; Hachfeld et al., 2011) with the wording of some items adjusted for the Australian context and with emphasis added to highlight the focus of each items. The new scale was named the Adapted Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale but will be referred to as the “cultural beliefs scale” from this point.
The original TCBS is a 10-item scale that measures multicultural beliefs that are argued to be important for teacher cultural beliefs. Table E.1 in Appendix E set out how the items were changed and includes an additional item included to capture beliefs about parents. An example item is, “1. In the classroom, it is important to be responsive to differences between cultures.” Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale, rated from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Items can be combined for a total score as well as subscale scores, with higher scores representing more positive beliefs about other cultures. Hachfeld et al. (2011) found that the two factors were supported by a principal components analysis and established that the scale had good construct validity by exploring the relationships between the two subscales and measures of prejudice, attitudes towards pluralism and acculturation, and authoritarianism. Hachfeld et al. (2011) also found both subscales to be reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .75$ for multiculturalism and .78 for egalitarianism).

**Positiveness of teacher language attitudes.** The measure used for language attitudes was inspired by the Language Attitudes of Teachers Scale (LATS; Brynes & Kiger, 1994). The LATS is a 13-item scale that is designed to measure three factors: language politics, language support and limited English proficiency tolerance. The scale used in this study was named the Teacher Language Attitudes Scale (and which will subsequently be referred to as the “language attitudes scale”), with the name intended to convey that the new scale is independent of the LATS. During the development of the language attitudes scale, it was decided that the first subscale in the LATS, language politics, would not be used. The items created for the language attitudes scale were loosely based on the items in the remaining two subscales of the LATS (limited English proficiency intolerance and language support). Eight items were created, with four covering language attitudes towards students and four covering language attitudes towards parents. Of these eight items, four covered attitudes regarding intolerance and four covered support, resulting in a 2x2 matrix of questions addressing
students vs. parents and intolerance vs. support. Higher scores on the language attitudes scale are intended to measure more positive beliefs about other language groups. The following is an example of an item, “3. I believe that teachers should make special time to help students learning English”. The language attitudes scale is presented in Appendix E in Tables E.2 and E.3.

**Amount of teacher support and the supportiveness of the school climate.** Teacher support was measured using five questions asking participants how many support staff of different types they had access to. This included general support staff and then staff that provided cultural and linguistic diversity support (for example, English as a Second Language teachers). Supportiveness of the school climate was assessed using an eight item scale, with four items exploring support from colleagues and four exploring support from school leadership. An example of an item is as follows, “I can always seek help from my colleagues”. Each item was assessed on a five point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), with higher scores on the school climate measure representing more positive ratings of school climate.

**Teacher perspectives on engaging with parents.** Participants read a series of four scenarios relating to communicating and engaging with parents. The first scenario asked participants to imagine communicating with a parent who did not speak English (or another language that the teacher spoke) and who was from a cultural background different to their own with the support of an interpreter (referred to as the interpreter scenario), the second asked participants to imagine speaking to a parent from a cultural background different to their own who spoke limited English and who did not speak another language that the teacher spoke (referred to as the limited English scenario), the third asked participants to imagine speaking to a parent from a cultural background different to their own who was fluent in the participant’s language (referred to as the other culture scenario), and the final scenario asked
participants to imagine speaking to an Anglo-Australian parent fluent in English (referred to as the Anglo-Australian scenario). It was intended that the Anglo-Australian scenario would act as a control condition based on the finding (Thomas & Kearney, 2008) that Australian teachers tend to be most comfortable with the people with whom they are most familiar and the expectation that teachers would be most familiar with Anglo-Australians.

Participants were asked to rate their perceptions about engagement with the parent described in each scenario, including how positive the emotions they would feel would be during engagement with the parent, how self-efficacious they perceive themself to be in the scenario, and how well prepared they perceive themself to be to engage with the parent. For example, an item that was reverse scored was “This interaction would make me feel stressed”. Items were rated on a five point Likert scale (strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5). All eight items were summed for an overall outcome rating, referred to as the positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents scale, with higher scores indicating stronger beliefs in the teacher’s own positive emotional response, competence, effectiveness, and preparedness.

The section concluded with an open-ended question asking participants why they thought that parent engagement was important.

Procedures

Ethics approval for the project was applied for from La Trobe University, The University of Melbourne, the Catholic Education Office - Melbourne, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Once ethics approval was obtained schools were approached and invited to participate and opportunities to present the project to students from the University of Melbourne were discussed with staff running postgraduate training at the University of Melbourne. Principals were provided with information about the survey
Staff were given a short talk about the project during a weekly staff meeting at each of the three participating schools. They were provided with an information sheet (Appendix G) about the study, which provided the information necessary to access the survey online, and were invited to complete the survey at their convenience over the following four weeks. Staff were told that the current study was an extension of the previous qualitative project that their schools had participated in and that it focused on engagement between staff and parents with an emphasis on culturally diverse contexts. Due to the ethical requirements set out by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (the department responsible for research in primary schools in Victoria), participants from the schools were not compensated directly but their school was provided with a Coles-Myer voucher (a major retail chain) worth $150.

For the recruitment of postgraduate students, a presentation was made in five postgraduate classes. Postgraduate students were given a short talk about the study and the opportunity to ask the researcher about the study and the prior qualitative project. The postgraduate students were told that the current study focused on engagement between staff and parents with an emphasis on culturally diverse contexts. Students interested in participating were provided with an information sheet about the study (Appendix H) and with the necessary information to find the survey online.

Participants were able to access the survey via a link provided on their information sheets with staff members from the participating schools and postgraduate students being directed to separate surveys. Participants in both surveys were not asked for any identifying information in order to maintain anonymity. Prior to the commencement of both surveys, participants were presented with a short summary setting out the purpose of the research.
project and the contents of the survey. This section also contained an electronic consent form that participants were required to complete before proceeding. The two surveys were the same with the exception of the final section that provided an additional link to a separate survey for postgraduate students which allowed them to enter into a prize draw to win one of six Coles-Myer vouchers worth $50.

**Data analysis.** A total of 45 staff members from the three schools participating in the earlier phases of this research project and 20 students undertaking postgraduate training at The University of Melbourne completed the survey. Following removal of cases with high numbers of missing cells and cases which were completed by staff members who were not teachers there were 37 teachers and 15 postgraduate students with complete or adequate data for analysis (total n = 52). The breakdown of age and gender of each of these groups are presented in Tables 9.1 and 9.2.

Table 9.1

**Participant Gender Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate students</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.2

**Participant Age Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>18-20</th>
<th>21-30</th>
<th>31-40</th>
<th>41-50</th>
<th>51-60</th>
<th>60+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scale scores and subscale scores were calculated. High variability was observed in the measure of experience in culturally diverse schools and responses from participants from the three participating schools (for which the level of cultural diversity was known) suggested that participants may have had difficulty accurately rating the level of cultural diversity present in their schools. As a result, cultural diversity experience scores were calculated by assigning an ordinal score from one to five based on the pentile the score fell in.

Cronbach’s alphas were calculated for all scales and are shown in Table 9.3. Internal reliability was considered to be adequate with the exception of the Language Attitudes Scale ($\alpha = .55$). The decision was made to continue using this scale but to be conservative when interpreting analyses using this scale.

Table 9.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural beliefs scale</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language attitudes scale</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate Scale</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of engagement scale (Interpreter scenario)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of engagement scale (Limited English scenario)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of engagement scale (Other Culture scenario)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of engagement scale (Anglo-Australian scenario)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variables were checked for normality of distribution. Outliers were detected in four variables and each outlier was replaced with a value .1 outside the interquartile range. These variables were the cultural beliefs scale, hours of education relating to cultural diversity, hours of professional development relating to cultural diversity, and support staff in the school. Skewness and kurtosis exceeding z-score of 3.30, $p < .001$ was detected in four variables. These were transformed using either a square root (hours of education relating to cultural diversity, hours of professional development relating to cultural diversity, and support staff in the school) or reverse square root (cultural beliefs scale) transformation
PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE SCHOOLS

(Pallant, 2009; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The median and interquartile ranges are given for skewed variables before transformation in Appendix I. Statistical analyses were performed on transformed variables.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

As data were drawn from two samples, preliminary analyses were conducted to determine whether the two samples could be combined to form a single data set. Chi-square tests were conducted for the gender and age variable\(^3\) of the two samples and both indicated that there were no significant associations between sample and gender, \(\chi^2 (1, n = 52) = .11, p = .74, \phi = -.05\), or age, \(\chi^2 (5, n = 52) = 2.23, p = .82, \phi = .21\). Given this result, the two samples were combined for subsequent analyses. Descriptive statistics for the primary variables within this study are presented in Table 9.4, Table 9.5 and Table 9.6.

Table 9.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(M)</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
<th>(Mdn)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of study</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours of training relating to cultural diversity(^{ab})</td>
<td>29.70</td>
<td>62.49</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience</td>
<td>16.18</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours of professional development relating to cultural diversity(^{ab})</td>
<td>28.15</td>
<td>38.94</td>
<td>17.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of available support staff(^b)</td>
<td>14.50</td>
<td>10.73</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate scale(^c)</td>
<td>34.96</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural beliefs scale(^{ac})</td>
<td>48.87</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>49.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language attitudes scale</td>
<td>33.98</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>34.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\) outliers removed. \(^{b}\) square root transformation. \(^{c}\) reverse square root transformation

\(^3\) Age was broken into six categories, as shown in Appendix D
Table 1.5

*Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scale Descriptive Statistics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of engagement scale (Interpreter</td>
<td>30.60</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scenario)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of engagement scale (Limited English</td>
<td>27.69</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scenario)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of engagement scale (Other culture</td>
<td>32.00</td>
<td>5.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scenario)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of engagement scale (Anglo-Australian</td>
<td>33.61</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scenario)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9.6

Proportion of Responses in Each Rating Category for the Four Parent Engagement Scenarios and Mean Score of the Averaged Items for Those Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario (Item #)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree %</th>
<th>Disagree %</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree %</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Strongly Agree %</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter scenario</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - stressed&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - enjoy</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - competent</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - effective</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>25.0</td>
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<td>21.6</td>
<td>19.6</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
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</table>
Main Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1.1. Perceived outcomes when engaging with parents will differ with parent characteristics. To test the main hypothesis that cultural and language barriers would be associated with participant ratings of the positiveness of their perceptions of engagement with parents, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. Mauchly’s test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, $\chi^2(5) = 14.57, p = .012$. As the Greenhouse-Geisser estimate of sphericity was greater than .75 ($\varepsilon = .83$) the degrees of freedom were corrected using the Huynh-Feldt estimates of sphericity (Field, 2009). The ANOVA using the Huynh-Feldt correction indicated significant differences between groups, $R^2 = .337, F(2.62, 130.75) = 25.443, p < .001$. Post hoc tests showed that all groups were significantly different from all other groups ranging from $p = .04$ (the interpreter scenario compared to the other culture scenario) to $p < .001$, as shown in Table 9.7. The means for each group, shown in Table 9.8, indicated that the limited English scenario was considered the most difficult, the interpreter scenario the second most difficult, the other culture scenario the third most difficult and the Anglo-Australian scenario the least difficult. This result partially supported the hypotheses that scenarios would be rated from most difficult to least difficult, from scenario one to four.
Table 9.7

Parent Engagement Scenario Comparisons on the Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement

With Parents Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>1.57</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<td>-2.44</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>.59</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>-2.86</td>
<td>-4.14</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
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<td>-1.57</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-2.68</td>
<td>.81</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-5.92</td>
<td>-7.60</td>
<td>-4.25</td>
<td>.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other culture</td>
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<td>0.07</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
<td>-2.70</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>.55</td>
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<td>Anglo-Australian</td>
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<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.55</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.8

Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scale Means by Scenario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter scenario</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Limited English scenario</td>
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<td>5.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Culture scenario</td>
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<td>5.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Australian scenario</td>
<td>33.61</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Interpreter scenario: No English/other culture/interpreter, Limited English scenario: Limited English/other culture/no interpreter, Other culture scenario: Fluent English/other culture, Anglo-Australian scenario: Fluent English/Anglo-Australian culture. Higher scores represent more positive perspectives about engagement.

Hypothesis 1.2. More positive beliefs about different cultures and language would be associated with more positive perceptions of engagement in the interpreter scenario, the limited English scenario, and the other culture scenario. Hierarchical regressions were used to assess the second main hypothesis that the cultural beliefs scale and language attitudes scale would be associated with participant ratings of the positiveness of their perceptions of engagement with parents for the interpreter scenario, the limited English scenario and the other culture scenario after controlling for the Anglo-Australian scenario. Before conducting the hierarchical regressions a correlational analysis was conducted to
preliminarily assess the relationships between the variables and to establish whether multicollinearity was present (see Table 9.9). Three hierarchical regressions were then run with the Anglo-Australian scenario ratings entered at step 1 in each regression and at step 2, on the interpreter scenario, the limited English scenario, or the other culture scenario was entered as the DVs in the regression. Table 9.10 presents the three regressions.


### Table 9.9

*Correlations Between the Cultural Beliefs Scale, Language Attitudes Scale and Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents (PPEP)*

**Scenario Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cultural beliefs scale&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Language attitudes scale</th>
<th>PPEP (Interpreter scenario)</th>
<th>PPEP (Limited English)</th>
<th>PPEP (Other Culture)</th>
<th>PPEP (Anglo-Australian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural beliefs scale&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.52***</td>
<td>-.47***</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.53***</td>
<td>-.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language attitudes scale</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEP (Interpreter scenario)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEP (Limited English)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEP (Other Culture)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEP (Anglo-Australian)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*<sup>a</sup> outliers removed. <sup>b</sup> reverse square root transformation, negative coefficient indicates a positive association

*p* < .05 level. **p** < .01 level. ***p*** < .001 level.
Table 9.10

Hierarchical Regression Results of the Cultural Beliefs Scale and Language Attitudes Scale Predicting Scenario Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Interpreter scenario</th>
<th>Limited English scenario</th>
<th>Other culture scenario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 PPEP (Anglo-Australian scenario)</td>
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<td>.12*</td>
<td>.44***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 2 Cultural beliefs scale *</td>
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<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language attitudes scale</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>-.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>.56**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Negative coefficients on the cultural beliefs scale and positive coefficients on the language attitudes scale indicate that more positive beliefs about other cultures and linguistic groups. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. *Reverse square root transformed variable used.

With the interpreter scenario positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents (PPEP) rating as the dependent variable, in step 1 the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP ratings accounted for 21.4% of the variance, $p = .001$. When the cultural beliefs scale and language attitudes scale measures were entered at step 2, they explained an additional, and significant, 11% of the variance in the interpreter scenario PPEP rating. In this final model, the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP rating and the cultural beliefs scale, but not the language attitudes scale, were both statistically significant (representing a positive association between both measures and the DV, as the cultural beliefs scale was transformed via reverse square root), with the cultural beliefs scale having a beta value of -.39. The total variance explained by this final model as a whole was 32.4% (see Table 9.10).

With the limited English scenario PPEP rating as the dependent variable, after controlling for the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP rating, the cultural beliefs scale and language attitudes scale did not contribute further significant variance, $R^2$ change = .021. In
the final model neither the cultural beliefs scale nor languages attitudes scale were statistically significant while the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 14% (see Table 9.10).

With the other culture scenario PPEP rating as the dependent variable, in step 1 the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP ratings accounted for 44.3% of the variance. When the cultural beliefs scale and language attitudes scale measures were entered at step 2, they explained an additional, and significant, 11.8% of the variance in the interpreter scenario PPEP rating. In this final model, the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP rating and cultural beliefs scale were both statistically significant, the cultural beliefs scale having a beta value of -.41 (with positive associations between these variables and the DV. The total variance explained by this final model was 56.1% (see Table 9.10).

These results partially supported the hypotheses that the cultural beliefs scale and language attitudes scale would predict positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents ratings of the scenarios exploring engagement with parents from non-English speaking or non-Anglo-Australian backgrounds. The cultural beliefs scale was a significant predictor of ratings in the Interpreter scenario and in the other culture scenario but not in the limited English scenario. In both scenarios in which the cultural beliefs scale was a significant predictor, more positive beliefs about culture predicted higher positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents’ ratings. The language attitudes scale was not a significant predictor of ratings in any of the scenarios.

Secondary Hypotheses and Analyses

To assist with the testing of the remaining hypotheses a correlational analysis of the variables within these hypotheses was conducted. The results of this correlational analysis are presented in Table 9.11.
Hypothesis 2.1. The cultural beliefs scale and language attitudes scale would be predicted by experience and training. A hierarchical regression was used to explore the secondary hypothesis that the cultural beliefs scale and the language attitude scale would be predicted by measures of experience and training.
### Table 9.11

**Correlations Between Age, Years of Study, Years of Teaching, Perceived Cultural Diversity Experience, Hours of Cultural Diversity Training, Hours of Professional Development and Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents (PPEP) Scenario Scores**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Years of study</th>
<th>Years of teaching</th>
<th>Perceived Cultural Diversity Experience</th>
<th>Hours of Cultural Diversity training&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Hours of Professional Development&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>PPEP (Interpreter scenario)</th>
<th>PPEP (Limited English)</th>
<th>PPEP (Other Culture)</th>
<th>PPEP (Anglo-Australian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>.33&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>.29&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.32&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.10</td>
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<td>.61&lt;sup&gt;***&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</table>

<sup>*</sup><sub>p < .05 level, **p < .01 level, ***p < .001 level.</sub> <sup>o</sup><sub>outliers removed, <sup>b</sup> square root transformation, <sup>c</sup> reverse square root transformation, negative coefficient indicates a positive association</sub>
The cultural beliefs scale was examined first. As identified in the correlational analysis shown in Table 9.11, hours of cultural diversity training ($r = -.05, p = .767$) and hours of professional development ($r = -.18, p = .232$) were found not to be correlated significantly with multicultural beliefs and were therefore not included in the planned regression. As age was correlated significantly with both years of teaching and perceived cultural diversity experience, it was entered at Step 1, explaining 14.5% of the variance in multicultural beliefs (see Table 9.12). Adding years of teaching and perceived cultural diversity experience measures accounted for an additional .06% of variance, which was not statistically significant. After entry of years of teaching and perceived cultural diversity experience at Step 2 the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 20.5%.

Table 9.12

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Cultural Beliefs Scale Scores From Years of Teaching and Perceived Cultural Diversity Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived cultural diversity experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that no variable correlated with language attitudes, other than age and multicultural beliefs (see Table 9.11), a regression was not run to explore whether language attitudes were predicted by measures of experience and training. Given the results of the correlational analysis it was concluded that the hypotheses that multicultural beliefs and language attitudes would be predicted by measures of experience and training was not supported.
Hypothesis 2.2. Greater levels of teacher experience and training would be associated with more positive perceptions of engagement in the interpreter scenario, the limited English scenario, and the other culture scenario. Hierarchical regressions were used to explore the hypothesis that scenario positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents ratings would be predicted by training and experience, shown in Table 9.13. The variables used as measures of training and experience were years of study, total years teaching, perceived cultural diversity experience, hours of training in cultural diversity and hours of professional development relating to cultural diversity. Three hierarchical regressions were conducted with the Anglo-Australian scenario positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents rating and age entered at step 1 in each regression to control for the participants’ ratings of their ability to interact with parents from English speaking/Anglo-Australian backgrounds) and for the influence of participant age.
Table 9.13

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents Scenario Scores in the Interpreter, Limited English and Other Culture Scenarios From Years of Study, Years Teaching, Perceived Cultural Diversity Experience, Training in Cultural Diversity and Hours of Professional Development in Cultural Diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Interpreter scenario</th>
<th>Limited English scenario</th>
<th>Other culture scenario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2\Delta$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$R^2\Delta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEP (Anglo-Australian scenario)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of study</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total years teaching</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived cultural diversity experience</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours of training in cultural diversity</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours of professional development in cultural diversity</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.52***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$n = 52$ for all scenarios

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

With the interpreter scenario positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents (PPEP) rating entered as the dependent variable, measures of training and experience explained an additional 32% of the variance in ratings, after controlling for the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP rating and age. In the final model the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP rating ($\beta = .40$), perceived cultural diversity experience ($\beta = .52$) and hours of education in cultural diversity ($\beta = .20$) were statistically significant (Table 9.13). The total variance explained by the model as a whole was 54.4%. This indicated that higher PPEP
ratings for engagement with Anglo-Australian parents, perceived cultural diversity experience, and hours of education in cultural diversity predicted higher PPEP ratings in the interpreter scenario.

With the limited English scenario PPEP rating entered as the dependent variable, measures of training and experience explained an additional 18% of the variance in ratings, after controlling for the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP rating and age. In the final model the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP rating ($\beta = .33$), age ($\beta = -.48$) and hours of education in cultural diversity ($\beta = .33$) were statistically significant (Table 9.13). The total variance explained by the model was 30.8%. This indicated that higher PPEP ratings for engagement with Anglo-Australian parents, age, and hours of education in cultural diversity predicted higher PPEP ratings in the limited English scenario.

With the other culture scenario PPEP rating entered as the dependent variable, measures of training and experience explained an additional 7.8% of the variance in ratings, after controlling for the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP rating and age. In the final model the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP rating ($\beta = .63$) and perceived cultural diversity experience ($\beta = .40$) were statistically significant (Table 9.13). The total variance explained by the model as a whole was 52.2%. This indicated that higher PPEP ratings for engagement with Anglo-Australian parents and higher perceived cultural diversity experience predicted higher PPEP ratings in the other culture scenario.

These results partially supported the hypotheses that the measures of training and experience would predict the positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents ratings in the three non-English speaking or non-Anglo-Australian background scenarios. Measures of training and experience were significant predictors for the interpreter scenario PPEP rating and perceived cultural diversity experience was a significant predictor for the interpreter scenario PPEP rating and for the other culture scenario positiveness of perceptions of
engagement with parents rating, while hours of education in cultural diversity was a significant predictor for the interpreter scenario PPEP rating and for the limited English scenario PPEP rating.

Supplementing the findings in this section were participant reports of the amount of training they had received regarding working with interpreters (presented in Table 9.14) which was not included in the regressions. This revealed that more than 50% of the participants had never received training relating to working with interpreters.

Table 9.14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>A small amount</th>
<th>A moderate amount</th>
<th>A high amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 2.3. More positive expected responses to engaging with parents would be **predicted by school climate and support**. Hierarchical regressions were used to explore the hypothesis that positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents ratings in the three non-English speaking or non-Anglo-Australian background scenarios would be predicted by more positive school climate and greater teacher support. To assist with the testing of these hypotheses a correlational analysis was conducted, shown in Table 9.15.

Three hierarchical regressions were then run with the Anglo-Australian scenario positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents rating entered at step 1 in each regression to control for the participants’ ratings of their ability to interact with parents from Anglo-Australian backgrounds; these are shown in Table 9.16.
Table 9.15

Correlations Between School Climate, School Support, and Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents (PPEP) Scenario Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School Climate&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>School Support&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>PPEP (Interpreter scenario)</th>
<th>PPEP (Limited English)</th>
<th>PPEP (Other Culture)</th>
<th>PPEP (Anglo-Australian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Climate&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.32&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Support&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEP (Interpreter scenario)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.50***</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEP (Limited English)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEP (Other Culture)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.67***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEP (Anglo-Australian)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*<sup>p</sup> < .05 level, **<sup>p</sup> < .01 level, ***<sup>p</sup> < .001 level.  a outliers removed, b square root transformation, c reverse square root transformation, negative coefficient indicates a positive association
Table 9.16

Hierarchical Regression Results of School Climate and Teacher Support Predicting Positiveness of Perceptions of Engagement With Parents (PPEP) Scenario Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Parent engagement scenario</th>
<th>Interpreter scenario</th>
<th>Limited English scenario</th>
<th>Other culture scenario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>$\Delta$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher support</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.45***</td>
<td>.45***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

After controlling for the Anglo-Australian scenario PPEP ratings, neither school climate nor teacher support were significant predictors in the interpreter scenario, the limited English scenario or the other culture scenario, as shown in Table 9.16. These results therefore did not support the hypothesis that school climate and support could predict scenario ratings.

Discussion

The broad aim of this study was to investigate teacher factors influencing perceived ease of engagement with parents. This aim was addressed through two sets of main hypotheses and four sets of secondary hypotheses.

Main Hypotheses

The first main hypothesis investigated how the positiveness of teacher perspectives about engaging with parents differed with the characteristics of the parents they were engaging with. The results indicated that teachers reported having the least positive perception of the interaction (in the form of low emotional experience, effectiveness,
competence, and preparedness) in the limited English scenario, followed by the Interpreter scenario, and then the other culture scenario, with the Anglo-Australian scenario being the most positively rated scenario. The descriptive statistics indicated that participants were over three times as likely to report feeling underprepared in the limited English scenario (50%) compared to the Anglo-Australian scenario (14.7%), and over twenty times as likely to report believing that they would not be able to achieve a good outcome for the limited English scenario (10.8%) compared to the Anglo-Australian scenario (0.50%). Together these results strongly suggested that participants did find differences in culture and language to be meaningful barriers.

It also showed that participants found it easier to work with an interpreter than to communicate with a parent with limited English without an interpreter. Despite the statistically significant differences between the positiveness of teacher perspectives about parent engagement, the results also indicated that overall teachers participating in this study were confident in their ability to engage with parents.

The second main hypothesis was that teacher cultural beliefs and language attitudes would predict the ratings of positiveness of teacher perspectives about parent engagement in each scenario. Correlational analysis indicated that the cultural beliefs scale was correlated with ratings in three scenarios but not in the limited English scenario while the language attitudes scale was not correlated with any of the ratings of positiveness of perspectives on parent engagement. After accounting for participant perspectives on engagement with Anglo-Australian parents, when both the cultural beliefs scale and the language attitudes scale were entered, only the cultural beliefs scale was a significant predictor of ratings of perspectives of parent engagement in the interpreter and other culture scenarios. In both of the scenarios in which the cultural beliefs scale was significant, more positive cultural beliefs predicted more positive beliefs about parent engagement. These results support the research
indicating that beliefs do affect teacher behaviour in schools (Pajares, 1992) and the finding that these beliefs can also associated with parent engagement is a new finding.

It was not clear why cultural beliefs would be less influential in the Limited English scenario. It may be that the challenge created by communicating with a parent with limited English with no support from an interpreter superseded the importance of cultural beliefs. That is, teacher’s cultural beliefs were no longer important in this scenario because of the serious challenge posed by the language barrier. It may also have been that there are other important factors, such as the cultural group that participants thought of in the scenario, that were not analysed or other factors that moderate or mediate the relationship between cultural beliefs and engaging with parents with limited English and different cultural backgrounds without support. Unfortunately the sample size precluded a more nuanced analysis of this result.

Secondary Hypotheses and Analyses

The additional secondary hypotheses and exploratory analyses looked at additional relationships thought to be important. The first of these was the hypothesis that beliefs about culture and language attitudes would be predicted by experience and training. However, neither experience nor training was significant in the final model for the cultural beliefs scale or language attitudes scale. Therefore, the results suggested that training and experience did not have a substantial impact on the cultural beliefs and language attitudes of the participants in this study. There may be multiple explanations for this finding. For example, participants in this study were either in the process of seeking additional training at a postgraduate level or had sought work in culturally diverse schools. This might indicate that as a group they may be more motivated to engage in training, more motivated to engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and, as a result, already had more positive cultural beliefs and
language attitudes irrespective of training, a conclusion supported by the high average score on both the cultural beliefs scale and language attitudes scale.

The second set of additional analyses tested the hypothesis that positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents ratings across the three non-English speaking or non-Anglo-Australian background scenarios would be predicted by the measures of training and experience, and these were indeed significant predictors across all three scenarios. This prediction was partially supported with hours of education a significant predictor for the ratings of positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents in the interpreter and limited English scenarios, and perceived cultural diversity experience a significant predictor for the ratings of positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents in the Interpreter and other culture scenarios. An explanation for this is that, given that the variance explained by training and experience differed substantially across the scenarios, from a high in the Interpreter scenario to a low in the other culture scenario, it may be that training and experience are more important for different types of challenges, with hours of education in cultural diversity more important for language differences and perceived cultural diversity experience more important for cultural differences. However, this explanation does not account for why perceived cultural diversity experience was not a significant predictor in the limited English scenario.

The third set of additional analyses tested the hypothesis that the positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents’ ratings across the three non-English speaking or non-Anglo-Australian background scenarios would be predicted by school climate. However, school climate and teacher support were not significant predictors of positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents ratings in any of the scenarios. This is an interesting finding given the research in student literature indicating that there is a strong relationship between student ratings of school climate (where measures of climate often focus
on the degree to which students feel supported) and their social experiences (Khoury-Kassabri, 2011). The issue here may have been a ceiling effect, in that participants consistently rated their schools highly on the school climate measure indicating that they did feel supported but this also reduced the variability and subsequently the predictive power of the analyses.

**Future Directions and Limitations**

The key findings of this study indicated that the teacher and school factors examined were associated with teacher perceptions of engagement with parents and that the strength of this association could vary with the characteristics of the parents. This study is also one of the first to investigate teacher and parent engagement and the factors that influence engagement, such as training, experience, support staff, beliefs about cultural diversity and language attitudes. In addition, very few studies have focused specifically on culturally diverse contexts, exploring the perspectives of staff in highly culturally diverse schools. This research also adapted and developed a number of scales, such as the cultural beliefs scale and positiveness of perceptions of engagement with parents scale, that had good internal reliability and can be used to support further research in this area.

From a practical standpoint, the results of this study identified that a lack of training specifically covering engagement with parents and working with interpreters was an area in which schools could improve practice. Participants indicated that they were very happy with the level of support they received and rated the climate within their schools highly but most identified a lack of training with interpreters and preparation for engagement with parents. The results therefore suggested that teachers may benefit from more training focused on working with interpreters and engagement with parents. This could include information on the importance of engagement, typical barriers that teachers may encounter, the barriers that members of the community may face when engaging with their school and guidance on
processes of engagement. In addition, the DET has a free 30 minute DVD and workbook that together form “Talking in tune: A guide to working with interpreters in schools” which is available for download on their website\(^4\) and aims to help prepare teachers and other school staff members for successful communication with parents through an interpreter.

The primary limitations of this study were the small sample size, difficulty measuring cultural diversity experience, and poor internal reliability of the language attitudes scale. The small sample size meant that the results of the study must be treated as exploratory and any conclusions drawn from this pilot study are tentative and require further research. In addition, given the nature of the sample, teachers undertaking further training and teachers in highly culturally diverse schools, care needs to be taken when generalising to teachers in mainstream schools. Regarding experience, as discussed in the method, the differences between participant estimates of their school’s diversity and the known level of diversity in their school suggested that participants may have difficulty providing accurate estimates of this information. This cast doubt about the validity and reliability of this measure. In addition, this also raised questions about the accuracy of participant estimations of training and professional development relating to cultural diversity which also varied highly, even for participants of similar ages and years of teaching.

The language attitudes measure used within the current study was problematic. Although the self-report methods are typical for studies in the research literature and the languages attitudes measure was developed from an existing scale, the low internal reliability suggested that it was not a valid measure of language attitudes. Therefore caution needed to be taken when interpreting analyses involving this measure. Given the lack of existing language attitudes measures and insufficient resources to formally develop a language

attitudes measure for the current project, it is not clear how this could have been avoided. As a result, in the future better measures of language attitudes should be developed.

Future research needs to replicate this research in a larger more representative sample and could extend the findings of this research in a number of areas. Research could explore teacher perceptions of other types of engagement scenarios or take a naturalistic approach. This could also be extended to a more comprehensive examination of factors affecting engagement. Revisiting language attitudes, its influence and measurement, appears to be important given the difficulty that many teachers reported having with language barriers. Researchers could also investigate the perspectives of parents on engagement in culturally diverse schools more closely. Finally, drawing together some of the preceding recommendations, pairing naturalistic observations of teacher and parent interactions with individual interviews and quantitative measures of attitudes, with both teachers and parents, may be revealing.

Conclusions

This pilot study identified a number of novel findings about parent-teacher engagement and the findings suggested that cultural and language barriers may have an impact on teachers’ beliefs about engagement with parents. Engaging with a parent through an interpreter was considered the most difficult situation and many participants indicated they had never had any training in working with interpreters. Multicultural beliefs were a significant predictor of ratings of positiveness of teacher perspectives about parent engagement in two scenarios, while language attitudes were not a significant predictor of these ratings. However, it was not clear whether this was due to language attitudes not being as important to engagement or to issues with the measure of language attitudes employed. Training and experience were found not to have much impact on scenario ratings or multicultural beliefs and language attitudes while the measures of school climate and support
were also not found to predict participant scenario ratings, which may have been the result of a ceiling effect.
Chapter Ten

General Discussion
This project investigated how schools supported cultural diversity in the context of a complex school community. The main aim was to identify the practices that schools employed and the challenges that they encountered as they sought to support cultural diversity. This was further supplemented in the first study by an investigation of the constructions of culture and attitudes towards other cultural groups that parents, teachers and principals held. The second study built on the first by investigating the challenge of parent engagement from the perspective of teachers. That study aimed to identify how characteristics of the teachers and characteristics of the parents influenced teacher perceptions of parent engagement.

The first study investigating principals, school staff and parents, identified a number of novel findings. First, regarding constructions of culture, it was identified that many members of the school community drew on conceptualisations of culture based on visible practices and behaviours. It was also identified that many participants (excluding those parents from the parent community language groups) primarily expressed attitudes towards other cultural groups in line with Berry’s (1997) melting pot or multiculturalism stance, with the school as an organisation also endorsing the multiculturalism stance,

Second, regarding challenges, participants identified that the characteristics of their school community; diverse languages and cultures, high transience and frequent experiences of trauma, meant that members of their community often had complex needs that could be difficult for schools to meet. A novel finding was the extent to which this diversity created challenges for schools, with significant challenges identified across all areas of school functioning. In addition, while schools placed a clear emphasis on supporting the wellbeing of people from diverse cultural backgrounds and educating students from diverse cultural backgrounds, there was limited discussion of the place of culture or cultural diversity in the curriculum. Although this reflects the Australian Curriculum and DET guidance, in the
context of the constructions of culture, attitudes towards other cultural groups and beliefs about racism, this finding emphasises the need, identified in existing research, to further encourage school staff to engage with culture and cultural diversity.

Third, regarding practices, it was identified that schools tailored practices to suit the needs of their culturally diverse communities. The main area of focus was parent engagement with participants reporting the use of community liaison officers as highly effective. Participants also stressed the development of a welcoming school ethos as a foundation from which to support students and parents. Despite the significant efforts made by schools to support cultural diversity, it appeared that some of their efforts may have been complicated by a lack of staff training in culture and cultural diversity during their tertiary training.

The second study identified that both parent and staff characteristics had an impact on staff perceptions of parent engagement. Regarding parent-staff characteristics, it was found that staff found language barriers to be the most significant challenge followed by cultural barriers. Regarding staff characteristics, the key finding was that more positive beliefs about other cultures were found to be associated with more positive perspectives on parent engagement.

Together these results are promising in that they reflect a generally positive attitude towards people from different cultural backgrounds. However, the findings seem to suggest that there may be a tendency to position culture as a managerial problem rather than as something that is a fundamental part of understanding who we are as individuals and as communities. Thus the cultural identity of students and adults in schools may be being silenced and the support of culture and the development of cultural identity as components of school ethos and as tasks of school communities may continue to lie dormant in the face of
well-intentioned pragmatism. Given that the perspectives offered by participants are likely to be those of the most engaged this appears a worryingly plausible possibility.

**Implications and Future Directions**

This research has important implications for three areas. First, there are important implications for research that looks at cultural diversity in community or school settings. Second, there are implications for school policy aimed at cultural diversity and wellbeing; and third, there are implications for the ways in which schools can understand and engage with cultural diversity. Each of these will be addressed in turn.

**Australian Education Policy**

The clearest outcome relating to school policy in Australia from this research is that members of culturally diverse and financially disadvantaged school communities do not believe that current funding is adequate to meet the needs of those within their schools. Participants also noted that in order to receive government funding or for the school funding to be effective for a particular population, there were requirements for a minimum number of students within the funding group. An example of this was funding for Aboriginal students which required a minimum number of students in order for the school to receive targeted funding. This policy was considered unfair to minority groups.

The second major implication of this research relates to national and state education policy and the preparation of teachers for culturally diverse schools. Historically school policy may have contributed to members of school communities having difficulty conceptualising and engaging with cultural diversity. Given that school policy in Australia has recently changed with the introduction of the Australian Curriculum, additional research will be needed to assess the impact of this new education policy on the ways in which culture and cultural diversity are approached within schools.
This research also suggested that teacher preparation for culturally diverse schools needs to be improved. Most teachers indicated that they felt underprepared at commencement in their schools. Although teachers had received some training relating to culture and cultural diversity, the training they had received had not prepared them for the cultures they encountered in their schools. Discussion also suggested that many schools relied on informal training to help staff develop cultural competency. The findings of this research suggested that continued emphasis on helping teachers engage in a self-reflective approach to culture would be helpful and that an additional focus on some descriptive information about cultures that teachers are likely to encounter might help develop competencies.

Were an increases to school resources and changes to teacher training to occur it would be very interesting to determine if this did address the practical difficulties experienced in highly diverse schools and also if it created an opportunity for schools to approach culture as more than a managerial concern. This might clarify whether the perceived lack of resources is a true barrier, of which the removal creates the ‘space’ necessary for a new growth in cultural responsiveness or if the perceived issue of resources has merely been obscuring a larger problem with the approach to culture within Australian school communities.

**Formal School Practices**

Given the ongoing difficulties with racism and the poorer health and wellbeing outcomes for some groups in the community, it is clear that more needs to be done to address these issues and that schools have the potential to play a powerful role in this effort. An effective change that schools might be able to make in this area is to take a greater role in engaging with cultural diversity. Schools could shift to not just teaching students more about cultural diversity but also to taking a role educating the school staff and parents about cultural
diversity. The benefits of this could be significant. First, staff and parents would be more equipped to help students engage with cultural diversity. Second, adults have greater capacity to deal with the complexities of difference and concepts of social construction and a more immediate benefit might be observed. Third, developing staff and community capacity in this area could increase their capacity to adapt to the arrival of new cultural groups in the future.

In addition, other schools might benefit substantially from learning about the challenges and effective practices of highly culturally diverse schools. Events like cultural days and multicultural festivals can be a foundation for exploring culture beyond observable practices. In addition, schools might benefit from a more formal or structured approach to practices relating to cultural diversity. For example, staff induction might be improved though an introduction to the cultures present within the school. In addition, students might benefit from a more structured approach to learning about culture and cultures. Third, effective practices do not have to be complex. This project has suggested that practices do need to have the support from school leadership, have adequate staff resources allocated to them, be pursued on a long term basis, and be tailored to the needs of the school community.

**Future Research Directions**

The current project has significant implications for current and future research. First, there is currently limited literature on how people in Australia make sense of culture and cultural diversity. Although research on constructs such as acculturation are important for making sense of the ways in which people respond to people from different backgrounds, more research is needed on understanding how people understand culture and how this might contribute to peoples’ attitudes towards others. Additional research in this area could explore this area within the framework of social identity theory, specifically, how perceived threat from other groups influences attitudes towards those groups. Second, the present project
suggests that schools do not appear to be applying the social justice approach to multicultural education discussed by Sleeter and Grant (2009). More research is needed on ways to move schools, particularly those in Australia, towards this while also acknowledging that the type of approach schools adopt can vary depending on the specific aspect of culture or diversity being addressed. In addition, there is currently limited research on the ways in which culture and cultural diversity is addressed in the Australian Curriculum. The current project did not address this directly and more research is needed to properly assess the education Australian students receive.

One of the major findings within this project was the nature and the extent of difficulty that teachers and parents experienced in engagement. This research complements the research on hard to reach parents and hard to reach schools and extends the research to the Australian context. In addition, the current research indicated that engaging with parents from diverse cultural backgrounds and working in a culturally diverse school in general, can contribute to the stress and workload that teachers face. This finding, as well as the finding that parents and principals in culturally diverse schools, particularly in low SES areas, face high demands, suggests that more research into the ways in which culturally diverse contexts increase demands and the impacts of these demands is warranted.

**Implications for Theory**

The findings of the current research also have implications for theory. First, the findings regarding beliefs about culture and attitudes towards other cultural groups suggest that school effectiveness models may benefit from the addition of school community member attitudes and beliefs, as these are likely to influence school culture, ethos and priorities (e.g., whether a language class should be offered). Second, models of school effectiveness (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Mulford & Silins, 2011) need to account for both the change in
existing school tasks and the presence of additional school tasks in schools with highly culturally diverse school communities.

**Strengths and Limitations**

This project had a number of strengths that differentiates it from existing research. Cultural diversity has not received much attention in school-based research, particularly in an Australian setting, and the present project is one of the few to explore cultural diversity in a highly diverse context. This project also investigated aspects of cultural diversity that have rarely been addressed in schools. Specifically, it focused on the challenges and practices relating to cultural diversity and the support of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, while also indirectly eliciting data on school community members’ perspectives of culture. In addition, this project is one of the few to investigate parent engagement in culturally diverse schools with a focus on the ways in which cultural diversity can influence parent engagement.

Methodologically the present project also had a number of strengths. The triangulation of parent, staff and school principals’ perspectives added a robustness and depth to the findings presented. The qualitative studies included a relatively high number of participants across a range of schools further strengthening the validity of the findings. This was also supplemented by the wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the participants and the inclusion of an Aboriginal focus group.

The research project was also subject to some limitations. Students within each school were not investigated in the present thesis. However, they were covered as part of the larger project from which this thesis draws. The schools conducted recruitment of staff and parents on behalf of the research team. This may have resulted in selection bias, with the most engaged parents in the school community or staff and parents that the school thought would be suitable for the focus groups being selected, rather than a representative sample,
this must be considered when interpreting the findings. In addition, the specific characteristics of the schools in the present study (for example, the demographics, SES, and levels of transience) mean that the findings from the current research may not generalise to schools with different characteristics. To address some of these problems and to extend the research presented in this thesis on group differences between parents, staff and school principals, additional research employing systematic quantitative methods is likely to be helpful.

The methodological approach employed in this research project also needs to be considered. While the focus group format can help generate a variety of perspectives it can also limit the depth of some responses and potentially silence or limit the responses of participants who do not feel comfortable in that setting. This also highlights the reliance on self-reports, and future research may benefit from a focus on direct observation. It was unfortunate that the research team did not have the resources to offer more focus groups in community languages and this may have resulted in some members of the community, potentially those in the least visible groups, not having their voices heard. Nonetheless, the fact that a variety of linguistic groups were represented was an advance on most previous research.

**Conclusion**

This thesis explored the ways in which cultural diversity affects and is understood in Australian school communities. Interviews were conducted with principals while focus groups were conducted with staff and parents. An additional study exploring teacher-parent engagement was also conducted. Together these sources presented a vivid picture of the ways in which adults in school communities conceptualise cultural diversity, the ways they think about people from other cultural groups, the challenges that they have observed and the practices they perceived as effective. Future research should extend the current research
through the use of larger samples, quantitative methods and the development of new measures.
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Dear Principal,

This letter invites you to participate in a research project being conducted by Ms Elizabeth Freeman (Principal Investigator), Dr Kylie Smith and Ms Margot Trinder of the University of Melbourne in partnership with Professor Eleanor Wertheim and research students, Michael Gurr and Amy Antcliffe, of La Trobe University. This research project is funded by the Collier Foundation and relevant university and education systems ethics approvals have been obtained.

The title of the project is *Enhancing Relationships in School Communities: Talking Culture*

Through the *Enhancing Relationships in School Communities: Talking Culture* project, the research team is investigating how teachers, parents and children think about culture and cultural diversity in Australian schools. The aim is to understand how teachers, parents and children think about culture and cultural diversity.

*The project will run during 2011. We would like you to participate as follows:*

**Leadership:**
- Yourself or your nominee to participate in a key informant interview (30-40 minutes) that will be audio recorded and will cover questions such as:
  - What issues of cultural diversity do you currently face in your school?
  - What do you think your school is doing well to support respect for cultural diversity?
  - What could your school do better to promote learning about racial, ethnic cultural or religious diversity amongst staff? Among parents? Among students?
  - What are the barriers to implementing changes in your school?

**Staff:**
- Some staff will be invited to take part in focus groups (45-60 minutes) that will be audio recorded and/or to complete surveys (20 minutes). The focus groups will cover questions such as:
What racial, ethnic, cultural or religious groups do students in your classroom come from?

What issues of cultural diversity do you currently face in your school?

What do you think your school is doing well to support respect for cultural diversity?

What do you think your school could do differently?

The survey will include questions that cover:

- Demographic information
- Training received in cultural awareness or diversity practices;
- Your school’s practices relating to race based discrimination and diversity;
- Your school’s social environment
- Some general questions about your school

**Students:**

- Students at your school will be invited to take part in focus groups and/or complete surveys.

The **focus groups** will be for students from all age groups, will last for 45 to 60 minutes and will be audio recorded. The children will be shown props, such as different-looking “diversity dolls”, and asked questions such as the following:

  - Do you know anyone who looks like this doll? Can you tell me about them?
  - What do you think might make this doll happy at school?
  - What might make this doll feel sad at school?
  - Sometimes this doll thinks school is not fair for them. I wonder why? Do you have any ideas?

The **student survey** will be for students in grades 3-6. We will ask them to complete a short survey to find out how they think their school supports and values people from different cultural groups. The survey will take approximately 30 - 45 minutes to complete. The kinds of questions asked include rating statements like “I am relaxed around people from other cultural groups” on a three-point scale: most times, sometimes, not much.

**Parents:**

Some parents at your school will be invited to take part in focus groups (60 - 90 minutes) that will be audio recorded. The focus groups will cover questions such as:

- What racial, ethnic, cultural or religious groups do students in your classroom come from?
- What issues of cultural diversity do you currently face in your school?
- What do you think your school is doing well to support respect for cultural diversity?
- What do you think your school could do differently?

We invite you or your representative to identify key cultural groups in your school and then to identify and invite appropriate parents to participate in the focus groups. The
researchers will support you or your nominee to talk to the parents about the project and read plain language statements and consent forms. We will also provide translated materials or interpreters where necessary. Parents will be offered a $20 gift voucher to thank them for their participation.

**Are there any risks involved?**
This project poses minimal potential risks to participants, however, discussion of issues around cultural diversity can be a sensitive topic for some people. In the unlikely case the participants become distressed they can speak with the program facilitators or researchers at the time or can contact the researchers at the numbers above to discuss their concerns. Ms. Freeman, Ms Trinder and Professor Wertheim are psychologists and would be able to support or refer participants to appropriate local government or non-government services.

**How will confidentiality be protected?**
We intend to protect the confidentiality of all responses to the fullest extent, subject to any legal limitations. In this type of project, it is normal to give names of schools that have taken part. We would like to seek your permission to use the name of your school in the final report. If you would prefer some comments to be off the record, you can indicate this during the interview or by requesting to review the interview transcript for this purpose. If, for any reason, you choose for your school not to be named, we would refer to your school by a pseudonym and remove any contextual details that might reveal the school’s identity. However, please note that due to the small number of schools and teachers involved in the project it is possible that someone may be able to identify your school or the teachers and students involved. You have the option of being referred to by your name or by a pseudonym in any publication arising from the research.

**How will I receive feedback?**
Once the study is finished we will produce a report to provide the results to the school community. The results from this project will be made public, in order to contribute to policy and scholarly debates on cultural diversity in education, via national and international journal papers, conference presentations and book chapters. Findings will be disseminated to professionals in courses for teachers and psychologists, and professional development activities and journals.

It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences, published in research journals or written up in student masters or doctoral theses. The original data will be kept securely in the University of Melbourne for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed. Unidentified hard copies and data files on password-protected computers will also be held at La Trobe University for data analysis during that time.

**Can I withdraw from the study?**
Your school is invited to participate in this research. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You can also request that any identifiable data you have provided be withdrawn up to one month after the completion of your participation in the project. Withdrawing from the research study will have no effect on your relationship with the researcher.
Where can I get further information?
Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please contact either:
Elizabeth Freeman Ph: 8344 0973 or Margot Trinder Ph: 83440991
Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

Further use of data
Data collected from this project will also be used by Ms Amy Antcliffe, undertaking Masters in Clinical Psychology at La Trobe University, and by Mr Michael Gurr, undertaking a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at La Trobe University, in the completion of their theses.

How do I agree to participate?
If you would like your school to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it in the reply paid envelope provided (no stamp needed). We will then contact you to arrange a time meet to discuss the next steps for your school’s participation.

This project is funded by the Collier Foundation.
Yours sincerely,

The ERIS team.

Ms. Elizabeth Freeman
Dr Kylie Smith
Ms Margot Trinder
Prof. Eleanor Wertheim

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University of Melbourne
La Trobe University
Department of Education
Catholic Education Office

HREC No.
HREC No.
HREC No.
HREC No.

Date ____

PLS Version 2
Appendix B

Study 1: Staff Plain Language Statement

PROJECT TITLE:
Enhancing Relationships in School Communities: Talking Culture

This letter invites you to participate in a research project being conducted by Ms Elizabeth Freeman (Principal Investigator), Dr Kylie Smith and Ms Margot Trinder of the University of Melbourne in partnership with Professor Eleanor Wertheim and research students, Michael Gurr and Amy Antcliffe, of La Trobe University. This research project is funded by the Collier Foundation and relevant university and education systems ethics approvals have been obtained.

We would like to invite you to participate in this project because you have valuable experience and knowledge to share.

This project aims to understand how teachers, parents and children think about culture and cultural diversity.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to be involved we will ask you to participate in one or both of the following:

a) attend a focus group discussion with other staff at your school. Focus groups will last for 45 to 60 minutes and will be audio recorded. The kinds of questions we will ask include:
   - What racial, ethnic, cultural or religious groups do students in your classroom come from?
   - What issues of cultural diversity do you currently face in your school?
   - What do you think your school is doing well to support respect for cultural diversity and intercultural understanding? What makes that important to do?
   - What do you think your school could do differently? How could that be accomplished?

b) complete a 30 minute survey. The topics covered include:
   - Demographic information
   - Your degree of training in cultural awareness or diversity practices
Your opinions on your school’s practices to deal with race based discrimination and diversity
Your opinions on the social environment of the school; and,
Some general questions about your school

**Are there any risks involved?**
The risks of being involved in this research study are minor. However, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable talking about certain topics related to culture. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to and may withdraw consent to participate if you feel uncomfortable at any time. You may speak with the researchers about any concerns raised for you in the study. Ms. Freeman, Ms Trinder and Professor Wertheim are psychologists and would be able to support or refer you to appropriate local government or non-government services.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**
We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, subject to any legal limitations. However, given the small size of the focus group, it is possible that other participants will be able to identify you. Your name and contact details will be kept in a password-protected computer file separate from any data that you give us. This will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers, for example, in order to know how to contact you to provide you with the final report. In the final report, quotes given by teachers will not include your name or any identifying information. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym (a false name).

Once this project has been completed we will produce a brief summary of the findings to report back to the school. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences, published in research journals or written up in student masters or doctoral theses. The original data will be kept securely in the University of Melbourne for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed. Unidentified hard copies and data files on password-protected computers will also be held at La Trobe University for data analysis during that time.

**How will I receive feedback?**
Once the study is finished we will send you a brief summary by email. We will also produce a report to feed back the results to the school community. It is also possible that the results will be published in academic journals and/or presented at academic conferences. However, at all times your identity will be protected and the researchers will refer to you with a false name in any report.

**Will participating or not participating in this project have any other consequences?**
Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate will not have any effect on your employment and/or relationship with the school.

**Can I withdraw from the study?**
Yes. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You can also request that any identifiable data you have provided be withdrawn up to one month after the completion of your participation in the project. Withdrawing from the research study will have no effect on your relationship with the researcher, or the school.
Where can I get further information?
Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please contact either:
Elizabeth Freeman Ph: 8344 0973 or Margot Trinder Ph: 8344 0991. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

Further use of data
Data collected from this project will also be used by Ms Amy Antcliffe, undertaking Masters in Clinical Psychology at La Trobe University, and by Mr Michael Gurr, undertaking a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at La Trobe University, in the completion of their theses.

How do I agree to participate?
If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it in the reply paid envelope provided (no stamp needed) or returning it to your school. We will then contact you to arrange a time for the focus group.

This project is funded by the Collier Foundation.
Yours sincerely,

The ERIS team.

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83440991
9479 2478

HREC No.

PLS Version 2
Appendix C

Study 1: Parent Plain Language Statement

PROJECT TITLE:
Enhancing Relationships in School Communities: Talking Culture
This project aims to understand how teachers, parents and children think about culture and cultural diversity. We would like to invite you to participate in research project because you have valuable experience and knowledge to share.

The project is being conducted by Ms Elizabeth Freeman (Principal Investigator), Dr Kylie Smith and Ms Margot Trinder of the University of Melbourne in partnership with Professor Eleanor Wertheim and research students, Michael Gurr and Amy Antcliffe, of La Trobe University. This research project is funded by the Collier Foundation and relevant university and education system ethics approvals have been obtained.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to be involved we will ask you to attend a group discussion with other parents from your child’s school and possibly other schools in the area. The group discussion will last for 60 to 90 minutes and will be audio recorded. The type of questions we will ask include:

- How many of your children’s friends are from different racial, ethnic, cultural or religious groups? What racial ethnic or cultural do these friends/ come from?
- What issues of cultural diversity do you currently face in your school?
- What do you think your school is doing well to support respect for cultural diversity and develop inter-cultural understanding?
- What could your school do better to promote learning about racial, ethnic cultural or religious diversity amongst staff? Among parents? Among students?

Are there any risks involved?
The risks of being involved in this research study are minor. However, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable talking about certain topics related to culture. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to and may withdraw from participation if you feel uncomfortable at any time. You may speak with the researchers about any concerns raised for you in the study. Should you require further assistance following participation a list of counselling services is provided below.
How will my confidentiality be protected?
We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, subject to any legal limitations. However, given the small size of the group, it is possible that other participants will be able to identify you. Your name and contact details will be kept in a password-protected computer file separate from any data that you give us. This will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers, for example, in order to know how to contact you to provide you with the final report. In the final report, quotes given by parents will not include your name or any identifying information. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym (a false name).

Once this project has been completed we will produce a brief summary of the findings to report back to the school. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences, published in research journals or written up in student masters or doctoral theses. The original data will be kept securely in the University of Melbourne for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed. Unidentified hard copies and data files on password-protected computers will also be held at La Trobe University for data analysis during that time.

How will I receive feedback?
Once the study is finished we will send you a brief summary by email. We will also produce a report to feedback the results to the school community. It is also possible that the results will be published in academic journals and/or presented at academic conferences. However, at all times your identity will be protected and the researchers will refer to you with a false name in any report.

Will participating or not participating in this project have any other consequences?
Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate will not have any effect on your on your child’s education and/or your relationship with the school. To thank you for your participation, you will receive a $20 Coles Myer gift voucher.

Can I withdraw from the study?
Yes. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You can also request that any identifiable data you have provided be withdrawn up to one month after the completion of your participation in the project. Withdrawing from the research study will have no effect on your relationship with the researcher, or the school.

Where can I get further information?
Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please contact either: Elizabeth Freeman Ph: 8344 0973 or Margot Trinder Ph: 83440991
Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

Further use of data
Data collected from this project will also be used by Ms Amy Antcliffe, undertaking Masters in Clinical Psychology at La Trobe University, and by Mr Michael Gurr, undertaking a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at La Trobe University, in the completion of their theses.
How do I agree to participate?
If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it in the reply paid envelope provided (no stamp needed) or returning it to your school. We will then contact you to arrange a time for the focus group.

This project is funded by the Collier Foundation.

Counselling Services
Centrelink – Personal and Family Counselling Services: (ph. 13 1794) is available to the general public who need assistance with individual or family counselling.

Victorian Aboriginal Family Counselling Service: (ph. 9403 3300) offer individual child/adult counselling and family counselling for Indigenous Australians.

Foundation House (ph: 9388 0022) is The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and they have counselling services for individuals and families from refugee backgrounds.

Multilingual Family Counselling Services: (ph. 131 202) is able to provide families from different linguistic backgrounds with individual and family counselling services.

Yours sincerely,

The ERIS team

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The University of Melbourne
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Phone: 8344 0973
University of Melbourne
HREC No.
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PLS Version 2
Appendix D

Study 2: Survey

Project Title: Enhancing Relationships in School Communities: Talking Culture

Aim of study:
This project aims to understand how teachers think about culture and cultural diversity.

Survey completion:
The following survey takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. It covers:
- Demographic information,
- Your degree of training in cultural awareness or diversity practices and experience in culturally diverse schools,
- Your opinions on culturally and linguistically diverse students and parents,
- Your opinions on the social environment of the school; and,
- Some questions about engaging with parents in your school.

Each school participating in the study will receive a $150 book voucher as an acknowledgment of the school’s participation.

Confidentiality:
We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, subject to any legal limitations. The data will be grouped so that individual schools or teachers will not be identified in findings. Your name and contact details will not be recorded.

Any data that is collected will be stored securely at La Trobe University while the study is underway. Unidentified hard copies and data files on password-protected computers will also be held at La Trobe University for data analysis during that time. The original data will then be kept securely at the University of Melbourne for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

Where can I get further information? Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please contact:
Elizabeth Freeman Ph: 8344 0973

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated!

I consent to taking part in the study described above:
- Yes
- No

[Progress bar] 0% [100%]
At which school do you currently teach?

Which year level(s) do you currently teach? Tick all that apply.
- Prep
- Year 1
- Year 2
- Year 3
- Year 4
- Year 5
- Year 6

How many years (full-time or part-time) have you taught in your current school?

Approximately what proportion of your current school's student body speaks a language other than English at home?

Have you ever worked as a teacher in a school other than your current school?
- Yes
- No
At which school do you currently teach?

Which year level(s) do you currently teach? Tick all that apply.
- Prep
- Year 1
- Year 2
- Year 3
- Year 4
- Year 5
- Year 6

How many years (full-time or part-time) have you taught in your current school?

Approximately what proportion of your current school’s student body speaks a language other than English at home?

Have you ever worked as a teacher in a school other than your current school?
- Yes
- No
How many years (full-time or part-time) had you been a teacher before you taught in your current school?

How many of these years were spent in schools in which:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Students Spoke a Language Other Than English at Home</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>35</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10%</td>
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<td>11-30%</td>
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<td>31-50%</td>
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<td>More than 50%</td>
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</table>
The next two questions may be difficult to answer, please give your best guess.

Approximately how many **hours** of your tertiary education addressed cultural and/or linguistic diversity?

Approximately how many **hours** of additional professional development on cultural and/or linguistic diversity you have had?

**How much training** have you had on **working with interpreters** in the school system?

- None
- A small amount
- A moderate amount
- A high amount
Please indicate the option that BEST reflects your opinion in relation to the following statements. Please tick ONE column for EVERY statement listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the classroom, it is important to be responsive to differences between cultures.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>It is important for children to learn that people from other cultures can have different values.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respecting other cultures is something that children should learn as early as possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In talking to parents who have a different cultural background than I do, I believe it is important to be considerate of cultural differences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When meeting with parents of cultural backgrounds different from my own, I believe it is important to spend more time than with other parents trying to understand and empathise with their perspective.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with cultural diversity should be taught in teacher training courses.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When meeting with parents from different cultural backgrounds, it is important that teachers make sure that the particular cultural needs of these parents are being met.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools should aim to foster and support the similarities between students from different cultural backgrounds.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the classroom, it is important that students of different origins recognize the similarities that exist between them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When there are conflicts between students of different origins, they should be encouraged to resolve the argument by finding common ground.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Children should learn that people of different cultural origins often have *a lot in common*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| If a parent has limited English it is primarily their *responsibility* to engage with the school. |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|                   |          |                            |       |               |

| Teachers are *too busy to help* students in the classroom with limited English. |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|                   |          |                            |       |               |

| I believe that teachers should *make special time* to help students learning English. |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|                   |          |                            |       |               |

| Teachers should make an *extra effort* to engage with parents with limited English. |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|                   |          |                            |       |               |

| Students with limited English will *not be* as successful as other students. |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|                   |          |                            |       |               |

| Students with limited English are just as important as other students. |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|                   |          |                            |       |               |

| Parents with *limited English* are *better off avoiding* coming to school activities. |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|                   |          |                            |       |               |

| Parents who have limited English still *deserve respect* from teachers. |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|                   |          |                            |       |               |

Approximately how many staff members of each of the following types do you have access to who assist you in interacting with students and parents.

<p>| Support staff who assist you in interacting with students and parents, such as teacher aides, liaison officers, and others. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many staff members of this type do you have access to?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Aides that provide <em>cultural support</em> (for example, Multicultural Education Aides or Cultural Liaison Officers). |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many staff members of this type do you have access to?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| ESL teachers or aides that provide <em>language support</em> (for example, Language Support Officers). |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many staff members of this type do you have access to?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| External staff with expertise in cultural diversity or language (for example, staff from Foundation House or a language centre). |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many staff members of this type do you have access to?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Other staff members that support you in your work with culturally and linguistically diverse students? Please describe. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many staff members of this type do you have access to?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please indicate the option that BEST reflects your opinion in relation to the following statements. Please tick ONE column for EVERY statement listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My <em>colleagues</em> are <em>supportive</em>.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can always <em>seek help</em> from my colleagues</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have <em>good relationships</em> with my colleagues</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can always <em>seek help</em> from school leadership</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a <em>good relationship</em> with school leadership</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leadership is <em>supportive</em></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school <em>supports</em> my work with culturally and linguistically diverse students.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school <em>helps me communicate</em> with culturally and linguistically diverse parents.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please read the following scenarios and respond to the questions that follow each.

Your school would like to see parents become more engaged in their children's education and in the school community. Your school has decided to address this issue by asking some teachers and staff to speak to parents who have not had much contact with the school previously.

These staff members will be asked to talk to parents one-on-one about the parent's expectations and beliefs regarding their involvement in the school and their children's education. The goal is to encourage parents to engage more with the school and their children's education. It is also hoped that this will be an opportunity to find out if parents in the school have any needs that are not being met by the school.

You have been selected to take part in this program and have been assigned four different parents to speak to.

These parents are each presented separately on the following pages.
Parent 1:

Please specify a language spoken by a parent of one of your students that you do not speak:

Please specify the cultural background of this parent

Please now imagine that you will be meeting with a parent who speaks the language that you have specified above and who does not speak English. You will be communicating with them through an interpreter.

Please answer the questions below about how you would feel and what you would think about engaging with this parent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This interaction would make me feel stressed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This interaction would probably be enjoyable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I would have the intercultural competence to engage with a parent in this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I would engage with the parent effectively in this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not feel competent dealing with this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be able to interact with this parent in a supportive manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My training has adequately prepared me for this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like more training to help me talk with this parent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent 2:

Please specify a language spoken by a parent of one of your students that you do not speak (it can be the same language as you identified in the previous question):

Please specify the cultural background of this parent:

Please imagine that you are now meeting with a parent that speaks the language you have specified above. This parent only speaks a little English but enough that an interpreter will not be used.

Please answer the questions below about how you would feel and what you would think about engaging with this parent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This interaction would make me feel</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stressed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probably be enjoyable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I would have the intercultural competence to engage with a parent in this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I would engage with the parent effectively in this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not feel competent dealing with this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be able to interact with this parent in a supportive manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My training has adequately prepared me for this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like more training to help me talk with this parent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent 3:

Please specify the cultural background of a parent of one of your students that is different from your own:

Please imagine that you are meeting with a parent from the culture you have specified above who speaks fluent English. Please answer the questions below about how you would feel and what you would think about engaging with this parent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This interaction would make me feel <strong>stressed</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This interaction would probably be <strong>enjoyable</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I would have the <strong>intercultural competence</strong> to engage with a parent in this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I would engage with the parent <strong>effectively</strong> in this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would <strong>not feel competent</strong> dealing with this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be able to interact with this parent in a <strong>supportive</strong> manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My <strong>training</strong> has adequately prepared me for this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like more <strong>training</strong> to help me talk with this parent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent 4:

Please imagine that you are meeting with an Anglo-Australian parent who was born in Australia, who has parents born in Australia, and who is a native English speaker. Please answer the questions below about how you would feel and what you would think about engaging with this parent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This interaction would make me feel stressed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This interaction would probably be enjoyable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I would have the intercultural competence to engage with a parent in this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I would engage with the parent effectively in this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not feel competent dealing with this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be able to interact with this parent in a supportive manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My training has adequately prepared me for this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like more training to help me talk with this parent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thank you for completing the survey. If you have time, please complete the questions below. Otherwise please click the link at the bottom of the page which will submit the survey and provide information on receiving feedback about the results.

What are reasons you would give for why engaging with parents in schools is important?

Comments that you would like to bring to the attention of the researcher:

Thank you for completing this study, your participation is greatly appreciated!

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this study you can enter your email address below. Please click the button at the bottom of the page to submit your survey.

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey. Your response has been recorded.
Appendix E

Changes to the Cultural Beliefs Scale and Language Attitudes of Teachers Scale

Table E.1

*Changes From the Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale to the Adapted Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original scale</th>
<th>New scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1: multicultural beliefs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. In the classroom, it is important to be responsive to differences between cultures.</td>
<td>1. In the classroom, it is important to be <strong>responsive to differences</strong> between cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is important for children to learn that people from other cultures can have different values.</td>
<td>2. It is <strong>important for children</strong> to learn that people from other cultures can have <strong>different values</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Respecting other cultures is something that children should learn as early as possible.</td>
<td><strong>3. Respecting other cultures</strong> is something that <strong>children should learn</strong> as early as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In counseling parents who have a different cultural background than I do, I try to be considerate of cultural particularities.</td>
<td>4. In talking to parents who have a different cultural background than I do, I believe it is important to be <strong>considerate of cultural differences</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. When meeting with parents of different cultural backgrounds, I spend more time trying to understand and empathize with their perspective.</td>
<td>5. When meeting with parents of cultural backgrounds different from my own, I believe it is <strong>important to spend more time</strong> than with other parents trying to <strong>understand and empathise</strong> with their perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dealing with cultural diversity should be taught in teacher training courses.</td>
<td>6. Dealing with cultural diversity <strong>should be taught in teacher training</strong> courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 2: egalitarian beliefs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 (new item). When meeting with parents from different cultural backgrounds it is important that teachers make sure that the particular cultural needs of these parents are being met.</td>
<td>7. Schools should aim to foster and support the similarities between students from different cultural backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Schools should aim to foster and support the similarities between students from different cultural backgrounds.</td>
<td>8. Schools should aim to <strong>foster and support the similarities</strong> between students from different cultural backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. In the classroom, it is important that</td>
<td>9. In the classroom, it is important that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
students of different origins recognize the
similarities that exist between them.

students of different origins recognize the
similarities that exist between them.

9. When there are conflicts between students
of different origins, they should be
couraged to resolve the argument by
finding common ground.

10. When there are conflicts between
students of different origins, they should be
couraged to resolve the argument by
finding common ground.

10. Children should learn that people of
different cultural origins often have a lot in
common.

11. Children should learn that people of
different cultural origins often have a lot in
common.

---

Table E.2

The Language Attitudes of Teachers Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1. Language Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. English should be the official language of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Local and state governments should require that all government business (including voting) be conducted only in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. To be considered American, one should speak English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Parents of non- or limited-English-proficient students should be counseled to speak English with their children whenever possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 2. LEP Intolerance

| 8. Having a non- or limited-English-proficient student in the classroom is detrimental to the learning of the other students. |
| 11. At school, the learning of the English language by non- or limited-English-proficient children should take precedence over learning subject matter. |
| 6. The rapid learning of English should be a priority for non-English-proficient or limited-English-proficient students even if it means they lose the ability to speak their native language. |
| 10. Most non- and limited-English-proficient children are not motivated to learn English. |
| 13. Non- and limited-English-proficient students often use unjustified claims of discrimination as an excuse, for not doing well in school. |

Factor 3. Language Support

| 2. I would support the government spending additional money to provide better programs for linguistic-minority students in public schools, a |
4. It is important that people in the US learn a language in addition to English. A

9. Regular-classroom teachers should be required to receive pre-service or in-service training to be prepared to meet the needs of linguistic minorities, a

5. It is unreasonable to expect a regular classroom teacher to teach a child who does not speak English.

‘a’ denotes reverse scoring

Table E.3

The Teacher Language Attitudes Scale

New items

1. If a parent has limited English it is primarily their responsibility to engage with the school.

2. Teachers are too busy to help students in the classroom with limited English.

3. I believe that teachers should make special time to help students learning English.

4. Teachers should make an extra effort to engage with parents with limited English.

5. Students with limited English will not be as successful as other students.

6. Students with limited English are just as important as other students.

7. Parents with limited English are better off avoiding coming to school activities.

8. Parents who have limited English still deserve respect from teachers.
PROJECT TITLE:

Enhancing Relationships in School Communities: Talking Culture

Dear Ms/Mr…………………..

This letter is to thank you for your participation in the Enhancing Relationships in School Communities (ERIS): Talking Culture project in 2011 and to inform you of the final stage of the project.

Participation in the first stage of the project from students, staff, parents and principals was excellent and revealed very useful information about how schools are supporting cultural diversity effectively. We have circulated the report from the first stage of research (focus groups with staff, parents and students) to all the schools that participated, the State and Catholic education systems, as well as groups involved with multicultural education.

This project would not have been possible without your involvement and support so we would like to extend to you our sincere thanks.

With the completion of the focus groups and interviews we will now be conducting the final stage of the project in 2013, which involves an online teacher survey that continues to explore how teachers and schools support cultural diversity and which investigates some of the findings from the focus groups and interviews. We hope to discover more information about the experiences of teachers who work with parents from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and those that do not, and how teachers view the training and support they have received in these areas in the past and currently. We hope that this information will be of use in guiding teacher training, professional development and support at a systems, as well as school, level.

We would be grateful for your continued support in the promotion of the survey among your staff. High teacher participation is vital for the accuracy of findings from the survey. The online survey is available at [weblink to be inserted]. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.
The areas covered in the online survey include teachers reporting:
- demographic information
- degree of training in cultural awareness or diversity practices and experience in culturally diverse schools
- views of working with culturally and linguistically diverse students and parents
- perceptions of support received for their work, particularly in the area of cultural diversity; and,
- views on engaging with parents in your school

To acknowledge the continuing participation of your school in the study we will be offering a small contribution to the school of a $150 book voucher.

Are there any risks involved?
The project poses minimal risks to participants however, in the unlikely case the participants have any concerns they can contact the researchers at the numbers below. Completion of the survey by teachers is voluntary.

How will confidentiality be protected?
We intend to protect the confidentiality of all responses to the fullest extent, subject to any legal limitations. The data will be grouped from all schools so that individual schools or teachers will not be identified in findings. However, if as previously agreed, you would like your school to be acknowledged in the further reports arising from the research, we will include your school in our list of acknowledgements.

Unidentified hard copies and data files on password-protected computers will also be held at La Trobe University while data analysis is underway. The original data will then be kept securely at the University of Melbourne for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

How will I receive feedback?
Once the second stage of study is finished we will produce a further report to provide the results to the school community. The overall findings from this project will also be disseminated to participating schools, groups involved with multicultural education, State and Catholic education systems and may be published in national and international journal papers, conference presentations and book chapters. Findings will be disseminated to professionals in courses for teachers and psychologists, and professional development activities and journals. Data collected from this project will also be used by Mr Michael Gurr in the completion of his thesis.

Can I withdraw from the study?
The participation of your school in this phase of the research is completely voluntary. Due to the anonymous nature of the data collection it will not be possible to for teachers to withdraw their responses from the research study after the survey has been submitted.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please contact Elizabeth Freeman Ph: 8344 0973.
Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

Yours sincerely,

The ERIS team

Ms Elizabeth Freeman
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Ph: 8344 0973

Dr Kylie Smith
The University of Melbourne
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Ph: 8344 4084

Prof. Eleanor Wertheim
La Trobe University
E: e.wertheim@latrobe.edu.au
Ph: 9479 2478

University of Melbourne
HREC No. 1136010

Catholic Education Office
HREC No.
Department of Education
HREC No.

La Trobe University
HREC No. 1136010

Date 30/4/2013

PLS Version 2
PROJECT TITLE:

Enhancing Relationships in School Communities: Talking Culture

This letter invites you to participate in a research project being conducted by Ms Elizabeth Freeman (Principal Investigator), Dr Kylie Smith of the University of Melbourne in partnership with Professor Eleanor Wertheim and doctoral student, Michael Gurr, of La Trobe University. Relevant university and education systems ethics approvals have been obtained.

This project aims to understand how teachers think about culture and cultural diversity.

The current study is the second stage of a larger project in which focus groups were conducted in your school and five other primary schools in Melbourne’s north in 2011 and, in which, teachers, student and parents, and principals were interviewed. The focus groups and interviews provided useful insights into how schools effectively support cultural diversity and areas in which they could improve.

The current project builds on the insights from the first project to explore how teachers experience and support cultural diversity. The findings of this project will help schools continue to support cultural diversity as well as teachers that interact with students and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds.

We would like to invite you to participate in this phase of the project because you have valuable experience and knowledge to share. We are interested in the views of teachers who work in a range of different settings from very culturally diverse, to less diverse.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to be involved we will ask you to complete a 30 minute online survey. The topics covered include:

- Demographic information
- Your degree of training in cultural awareness or diversity practices and experience in culturally diverse schools
- Your views on working with culturally and linguistically diverse students and parents
- Your perceptions of support received for your work, particularly in the area of cultural diversity; and,
- Your views on engaging with parents in your school

Each school participating in the study will receive a $150 book voucher as an acknowledgement of the school’s participation.

**Are there any risks involved?**
The risks of being involved in this research study are minor. However, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable answering questions about certain topics related to culture. You may choose not to complete the survey or contact the researchers if you wish to discuss any issues raised by the survey.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**
We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, subject to any legal limitations. The data will be grouped so that individual schools or teachers will not be identified in findings. Your name and contact details will not be recorded.

Any data that is collected will be stored securely at La Trobe University while the study is underway. Unidentified hard copies and data files on password-protected computers will also be held at La Trobe University for data analysis during that time. The original data will then be kept securely at the University of Melbourne for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

**Will participating or not participating in this project have any other consequences?**
Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate, or not, will not have any effect on your employment. Due to the anonymous nature of the data collection it will not be possible to withdraw from the research study after the survey has been submitted.

**How will I receive feedback?**
If you wish to receive a brief summary of the research when the study has been completed you will be able to email a request to m.j.gurr@students.latrobe.edu.au and you will be placed on an email mailing list to receive a summary report. This email address will also be included at the end of the online survey.

**Reporting of findings**
The overall findings from this project will be disseminated to participating schools, groups involved with multicultural education, State and Catholic education systems. The findings may also be published in national and international journal papers, conference presentations and book chapters and to professionals in courses for teachers and psychologists, and professional development activities and journals. Data collected from this project will also be used by Mr Michael Gurr, undertaking a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at La Trobe University, in the completion of his thesis.

**Where can I get further information?**
Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please contact either: Elizabeth Freeman Ph: 8344 0973

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

**How do I agree to participate?**
If you would like to contribute to this research, please access the survey, available online at [http://tinyurl.com/culturaldiversitysurvey](http://tinyurl.com/culturaldiversitysurvey)

Yours sincerely,

The *ERIS* team.

Ms Elizabeth Freeman  
The University of Melbourne

Dr Kylie Smith  
The University of Melbourne

Prof. Eleanor Wertheim  
La Trobe University

University of Melbourne  
HREC No. 1136010

Catholic Education Office  
Approval No. GE11/0009 1707

Department of Education  
Approval No. 2011_001158

La Trobe University  
HREC No. 1136010

Date 30/04/2013  
PLS Amended Version 1
Appendix H

Study 2: Plain Language Statement for Student Teachers

PROJECT TITLE:

Enhancing Relationships in School Communities: Talking Culture

This letter invites you to participate in a research project being conducted by Ms Elizabeth Freeman (Principal Investigator), Dr Kylie Smith of the University of Melbourne in partnership with Professor Eleanor Wertheim and doctoral research student, Michael Gurr, of La Trobe University. Relevant university and education systems ethics approvals have been obtained.

This project aims to understand how primary school teachers think about culture and cultural diversity.

This project is the second stage of a larger project in which focus groups were conducted in primary schools in Melbourne’s north and, in which, teachers, student and parents, and principals were interviewed. The focus groups and interviews provided useful insights into how schools effectively support cultural diversity and areas in which they could improve.

The current stage of the project aims to build on the insights from the first stage to explore how teachers experience and support cultural diversity. We are seeking to expand the number of teachers who take part in this stage of the project to teachers working in a range of schools around Victoria. We are interested in the views of teachers who work in a range of different settings from very culturally diverse, to less diverse.

It is anticipated that the findings of this project will help all schools continue to effectively support cultural diversity as well as teachers who interact with students and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds.

We would like to invite you to participate in this project because you have valuable experience and knowledge to share.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to be involved we will ask you to complete a 30 minute online survey accessible from the weblink provided below. The topics covered include:

- Demographic information
- Your degree of training in cultural awareness or diversity practices and experience in culturally diverse schools
- Your views on working with culturally and linguistically diverse students and parents
- Your perceptions of support received for your work, particularly in the area of cultural diversity; and,
- Your views on engaging with parents in your school

If you choose to complete the survey you will have the opportunity to enter into a prize draw to win 1 of 6 $50 Coles-Myer vouchers. In order to enter into the prize draw you will need to enter your personal details separately from the survey, via the link provided at the end of the survey, so that we may contact you after the draw. This contact information will not be linked to your survey responses.

**Are there any risks involved?**
The risks of being involved in this research study are minor. However, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable answering questions about certain topics related to culture. You may choose not to complete the survey or contact the researchers if you wish to discuss any issues raised by the survey.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**
We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, subject to any legal limitations. The data will be grouped so that teachers, or their schools, will not be identified in findings. Any data that is collected will be stored securely at La Trobe University while the study is underway. Unidentified hard copies and data files on password-protected computers will also be held at La Trobe University for data analysis during that time. The original data will then be kept securely at the University of Melbourne for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

**How will I receive feedback?**
If you wish to receive a brief summary of the research when the study has been completed you will be able to email a request to m.j.gurr@students.latrobe.edu.au and you will be placed on an email mailing list to receive a summary report. This email address will also be included at the end of the online survey.

**Will participating or not participating in this project have any other consequences?**
Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate, or not, will not have any effect on your relationship with the researchers or your university. Participation, or not, in the study will not impact on your results. Due to the anonymous nature of the data collection it will not be possible to withdraw from the research study after the survey has been submitted

**Reporting of findings**
The overall findings from this project will be disseminated to participating schools, groups involved with multicultural education, State and Catholic education systems. The findings may also be published in national and international journal papers, conference presentations and book chapters and to professionals in courses for teachers and psychologists, and
professional development activities and journals. Data collected from this project will also be used by Mr Michael Gurr in the completion of his thesis.

**Where can I get further information?**
Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please contact:
Elizabeth Freeman Ph: 8344 0973

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

**If you would like to contribute to this research, please access the survey, available online at** [http://tinyurl.com/teachersurveyCD](http://tinyurl.com/teachersurveyCD)

Yours sincerely,

The *ERIS* team.

Ms Elizabeth Freeman
The University of Melbourne

Dr Kylie Smith
The University of Melbourne

Prof. Eleanor Wertheim
La Trobe University

University of Melbourne
HREC No. 1136010

Catholic Education Office
Approval No. GE11/0009 1707
Department of Education
Approval No. 2011_001158

La Trobe University
HREC No. 1136010

Date 30/04/2013

PLS Version 2
Appendix I

Median and Interquartile Range Scores for Non-Normal Variables

Table 24

*Median and Interquartile Range Scores Prior to Transformation for Hours of Education Relating to Cultural Diversity, Hours of Professional Development Relating to Cultural Diversity, Support Staff in the School, and the Cultural Beliefs Scale*

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<th>50</th>
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<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
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