Teacher transculturalism and cultural difference: Addressing racism in Australian schools

Niranjan Casinader
Monash University, Australia: *niranjan.casinader@monash.edu*
Lucas Walsh
Monash University, Australia: *lucas.walsh@monash.edu*

ABSTRACT

The increasing cultural diversity of students in Australia's schools is one of the salient changes in education over the last 30 years. In 2011, nearly half of all Australians had one or more parents born overseas, with migration from China, the Indian subcontinent and Africa increasing during the early 2000s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). However, despite these long established patterns of exposure to a multicultural environment, the incidence of racism experienced by children in Australian schools remains highly problematic. Recent research has shown that around 70% of school students witness or experience some form of racism (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan & Taouk, 2009). This paper argues that, although the reasons for this persistent marginalisation of cultural difference are multivariate, the background attitudes of teacher educators cannot be ignored. It posits that, in line with recent research (Casinader, 2014), the development and awareness of transcultural modes of thinking in educators, which are inclusive and reflective of different cultural approaches, are essential for modelling an educational environment for students in which cultural difference is accepted and prized, and not held up as a point of separation. It is also argued that such a transition will be facilitated only when the existing monocultural reality of the Australian teaching profession) is acknowledged and addressed.

Keywords: racism; Australia; transculturalism; schools; teachers

INTRODUCTION: THE BROADER CONTEXT OF RACISM IN AUSTRALIA

The increasing cultural diversity of students in Australia's schools is one of the salient changes in education over the last 30 years. In 2011, nearly half of all Australians had one or more parents born overseas, with migration from China, the Indian subcontinent and Africa increasing during the early 2000s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). However, despite these long established patterns of increasing exposure to a multicultural environment, the incidence of racism experienced by children in Australian schools remains highly problematic. The depth of this experience has been complicated further in recent years by a shift from a form of racism based on notions of racial superiority to one founded on attitudes of anti-diversity (Habtegiorgis, Paradies, & Dunn, 2014, p. 186).

It is now acknowledged that the concept of racism is a complex phenomenon. In essence, however, it can be defined as '…a phenomenon that results in avoidable and unfair

inequalities in power, resources or opportunities across groups in society…[that]…can be expressed through beliefs, prejudices or behaviours/practices and [that] can be based on race, ethnicity, culture or religion' (Paradies et al., 2009, p. 7). It can be inflicted in a variety of forms, including insults, deliberate actions to make someone feel excluded, mistrust, disrespect and sometimes physical violence towards those from ethnic or cultural backgrounds that are different to the locational norm. It can also be either intentional or unintentional, an expression of dominance of one group over another. It is important to note, though, that racism is not necessarily confined to one ethnic group. Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan and Taouk (2009, p. 44) found that 54.6% Anglo-Saxon Australians reported being subjected to racist treatment, although this group also had the smallest percentage of members reporting such experiences in the first instance.

Nevertheless, significant differences emerge between the experiences of Anglo-Australian young people and those of their non-Anglo migrant, refugee or Indigenous peers. Young migrants who have been in Australia less than five years are six times more likely to report being exposed to racist incidents. Second or third generation migrants are four times more likely to report a racist experience than other young people, and young women from migrant backgrounds were among the worst affected. Young Indigenous Australians reported fewer racist incidents than peers from migrant backgrounds, but experienced more pervasive forms of racism in everyday life (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan & Taouk, 2009). Migrants are often the targets of racist behaviour and attitudes. Markus (2013) has found that two-fifths of migrants who arrived in Australia in the past decade had been discriminated against because of their race. Over 40% of recent arrivals from a number of Asian countries report experiences of discrimination over the last 12 months. When asked whether Australians are "kind, caring and friendly people" recent arrivals ranked this attribute last on the list on of presented options.

However, the nature of racism is keenly defined by locationally specific contexts (Aveling, 2007, p.70; Rizvi, 1993; Gillborn, 1995). In Australia's case, the historicity of its geographical and psychological isolation from its perceived British roots created a '…heritage of belief that Australia [was] properly white nation…' (McLeod & Yates, 2003, p. 32). The legacy of the "White Australia" policy has continued to persist, albeit in more covert ways. For example, McLeod and Yates (2003) have commented on the subtle Australian trope of seeing whiteness as a form of cultural capital (p. 38), a form of advantage within both schools and the economy. As such, this evocation of whiteness as a symbol or bearer of Western civilisation (p. 38) can be seen as the originator of what might be termed the "old" form of Australian racism, which was - and to a certain extent, still is - represented by the perception of Aboriginal Australians as the "Other" by Anglo-Australians (McLeod & Yates, 2003). In contrast, whilst the evidence suggests that most Australians are in favour of tolerance and diversity, the more modern idiom of Australian racism can be characterized by an attitude of anti-diversity in respect of the cultural composition of Australia's population. In this iteration, it is "Asians" who are defined as the "Other" by Anglo-Australians, in which "Asian" is used as a collective "alien" pejorative (Rizvi, 1993) with little regard for the diversity of peoples and cultures encompassed by such a broad term (McLeod & Yates, 2003), particularly by older Anglo-Australians. Younger Australians aged 18 to 24, for example, have been found to be more accepting than the general population of aspects of multiculturalism such as inter-racial marriage, even if, some have indicated a belief that certain groups do not "fit" into Australian society (Forrest, 2009).

In an educational context, one of the more disturbing aspects of this "new racism", in contrast to the old, is its developing visibility. A recent national survey has found that in 2013, 19% of Australians were discriminated against because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religious

beliefs, an increase from 12% in 2012, and the highest level since the survey began in 2007 (Markus, 2013). Other research identifies a deep sense of racism amongst about 1 in 10 Australians (Dunn, Forrest, Babacan, Paradies & Pedersen, 2014). The increasing frequency with which social media has exposed instances of aggressive racism on public transport in the first half of 2014 further suggests that this erstwhile subliminal racism is becoming more substantive.

THE EXPERIENCE OF RACISM IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

A substantial amount of evidence exists that a majority of school students witness or experience some form of racism, with school being a key site in which such discrimination takes place (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan & Taouk, 2009), particularly for migrants from non-English speaking countries. A recent survey of Victorian school students found that more than a third (33.2%) of students reported direct experiences of racism at school, while 22.5% experienced at least one form of direct racism every day (Priest, Ferdinand, Perry, Paradies & Kelaher, 2014, p. 6).

More broadly, a 2009 survey of 698 secondary school students across four states by Deakin University found that 70% of school students witnessed or experienced some form of racism. Overall, 67% of students nominated the classroom, school grounds, or sporting oval as the setting of their racist experiences. Within this cohort, the prevalence of being subjected to racist behaviour is highlighted among students from migrant, non-Anglo backgrounds. More than 80% of students from such circumstances reported at least one experience of racism during their school years (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan & Taouk, 2009). Another study (Priest, Ferdinand, Perry, Paradies & Kelaher, 2014) found that young people born outside Australia are almost twice as likely to experience intolerance and discrimination as those born in Australia, with around four out of five children born in non-English speaking countries experiencing racism at least once a month. The most common form of direct racism in schools is "you don't belong in Australia", with 19.5 per cent of students reporting hearing this directed towards them at least every month. Students recounted their peers excluding them, or not wanting to play with them because of their race, with 14.1% saying they were spat on, pushed or hit (Priest, Ferdinand, Perry, Paradies & Kelaher, 2014).

In line with earlier studies such as McLeod and Yates (2003), the work of Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan and Taouk (2009) highlighted how racism emerges in the ways that young people describe other groups within school environments. Anglo-Australian students, for example, frequently speak in terms of "us" and "them". They also tend to view other groups as homogenous, describing all people from Asian countries as "Asians", without acknowledging any specific country of origin or the cultural and linguistic differences between the numerous nation-states within that geographical region. By the same token, stereotyping on racial grounds is by no means confined to young people from a particular background; some young people from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds, for example, describe students with lighter-coloured skin as "Aussie" or "white", effectively grouping them together as if they were also homogenous entities.

The impact of such racism on the educational prospects and progress of young people can be profound. The research shows that being racially abused affects health and wellbeing (VicHealth, 2009). It can cause tension, anxiety, anger, sadness, a sense of exclusion, fear of being attacked, loss of confidence and self-esteem, diminished sense of belonging, headaches and post-traumatic stress and, on occasion, physical harm. Young people also describe a diminished sense of belonging, whether to the local community or to the school. Racist experiences can also have a negative impact on educational engagement and achievement.

Feelings of fear with regards to school life can, for example, impact on attendance, with flow-on effects to academic engagement and achievement. There is, therefore, a strong imperative for schools to acknowledge and deal with the existence and impact of racism in their environments.

ADDRESSING RACISM: THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

Mansouri, Leach, Jenkins & Walsh rightly argue that school is '…a place where students should expect to be able to learn from teachers who are educated about racial and cultural issues…' (2009, p.100). However, it can be argued that there has been a tendency for Australian educators, and schools, to view racism more as an institutional concern rather than an individual one, a perspective that can be equally ascribed to approaches taken by research studies in the field (for example, Aveling, 2007). This has led to an emphasis and belief that the racist attitudes of individuals within the school can be addressed through institutional measures such as school-based policies and programmes, in which the role of school leaders is seen as being pivotal. A study of Western Australian schools (Aveling, 2007) commented on the problems that resulted from principals tending to be reactive rather than proactive in dealing with racist incidents (p. 82), as well as issues arising from a belief that racism was encompassed by general policies relating to student behaviour, and that therefore the issue did not require priority status. It was not '… recognized in its multiple manifestations but [was] simplistically subsumed under the rubric of "bad behaviour"…' (Aveling, 2007, p.75), suggesting a fear and reluctance to acknowledge racism as an existing phenomenon in the school environment that demanded attention.

The difficulty with this institutional emphasis as the basis for school racism is that it does not acknowledge that institutions themselves are created and operated through the values and actions of individuals, whether these be school leaders, teachers or students. The choices or policies that institutions enact are made by individuals - that is, people - whose own decisions are framed on the basis of their own values and attitudes. Change in an institutional approach to racism must therefore be predicated on shifts in the attitudes and beliefs of the individuals who comprise that institution.

This de-emphasis on the individual nature of racism in Australian schools helps to explain one of the major effects of racist behaviour on those affected, and also suggests one possibility for how racism might be addressed in the school context in the future. Aside from the physical and psychological effects, there is a matter of trust related to racism - or to be more specific, a disturbing lack of trust - between the victims of racism and those around them, even those that students might expect to be their helpers and protectors. As reported in Markus (2004), only 31% of recent arrivals indicated that "people could be trusted" in contrast to the proportion in the national survey at 45% (Markus, 2014). The Deakin University study of students mentioned above also found that young victims felt a loss of trust in the world as a whole. One boy, Robert, who was born in Montenegro stated: ' "All I know is I don't trust no-one, even if you're my closest friend, I trust my dad and my mum and my two sisters, but I don't trust no-one. Cause everyone can do the dirty on you, so I don't trust no-one." ' (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan & Taouk, 2009, p.80)

In part, such evidence as to relationships between students and teachers helps to explain responses of the students concerned. In the Victorian survey, one in 10 students reported that they thought their teacher did not think they could do something about racism because of their cultural background (Priest, Ferdinand, Perry, Paradies & Kelaher, 2014). The study by Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan and Taouk (2009) found that just over half of students would report racism to a teacher, while less than a third would approach their school counsellor. In

addition, teachers often inadvertently reinforce stereotypes that compound feelings of exclusion. These can occur unintentionally through classroom talk in which the cultural characteristics of student's background are highlighted in ways that are intended to be celebratory, but instead "mark" the otherness of the students concerned. Exclusion is a common form of racist behaviour by teachers, with 16 per cent of students in the study describing recurrent examples of being overlooked or ignored in the classroom. In other instances, teachers can be overtly racist towards students, treating them differently from other students either within or outside the classroom. Teachers may also be complicit in racist behaviour, such as by tolerating exhibitions of racism in the classroom by other students.

The role of teachers in mitigating racism and nurturing the benefits of cultural diversity is complex, but a pivotal one in the school environment. As Mansouri, Leach, Jenkins & Walsh (2009, p. 8) suggest, 'Schools as social sites have the potential to either perpetuate or shift cultural prejudices and barriers. To ensure that a school is an inclusive environment, practical strategies can be implemented'. Being the frontline of interaction between the institution and the student experiencing racial negativity places school staff members at the forefront of any actions that need to be taken in building the trust that students often see as being absent. However, the establishment of such a relationship depends ultimately on the approach taken by individual teachers, and, in particular, their ability to demonstrate an "openness" to cultural difference, whatever form that may take. This readiness to fully accept, and not just to be tolerant of, visible and unseen manifestations of cultural and ethnic difference, is fundamental to addressing issues of racism within schools. It is this capacity that tends to be absent in the Australian context, no matter how inadvertent it may be. Although the reasons for this unconscious marginalisation of cultural difference are multivariate, the background attitudes of teacher educators cannot be ignored. In line with recent research (Casinader, 2014), the development of transcultural dispositions of thinking within educators, and their ability to be aware of the similarities and differences between their own and those of their students, thereby enhancing their capacity to be inclusive and reflective of different cultural approaches, is essential for modelling an educational environment for students in which cultural difference is accepted and prized, and not held up as a point of separation.

The subtleties between the notions of open acceptance of cultural difference - versus tolerance of it - have been played out in the myriad and often superficial ways in which schools choose to deal with issues of racism. In many cases, but not always, such initiatives have been, and still are, based around the teaching of Languages Other Than English (LOTE), centred around such activities as using student customs of religion and diet to generate discussion (seemingly ignoring the possibility that such students may be seeking to minimize their visibility), having school welcome signs in different languages, doing "aboriginal painting" in class, celebrating NAIDOC by painting snake banners, and having international food days (Aveling, 2007; Santoro, Reid, & Kamler, 2001). However, events such as Harmony or International Days are of limited value as symbolic activities unless they are embedded in ongoing practices that develop "school culture", pedagogy and curriculum in ways that are responsive to different cultural dispositions of thinking. In addition, the "Western" models of education that are applied in Australian schools, together with their underpinning curriculum and teacher pedagogy, need to both acknowledge and respond specifically to culturally differentiated styles of learning, communication and behaviour.

School educators often focus on the external signifiers in their exploration of culture in the classroom, tending to avoid some of the key perspectives that underlie a particular conception of living, especially the thought processes and perspectives that generate the complex psychological maze of a particular cultural perspective. In spite of the existence (until recently, at least) of an official government policy of multiculturalism in Australia, the focus

in teaching about culture has remained steadfastly assimilationist in character when applied to Australian society, and unerringly simplistic when investigating a way of life in another place. How often do schools and teachers use resources and a perspective in the classroom that convey only one side of life, focusing on ''traditional notions of culture, without ever fully acknowledging the ways in which that life might have altered or adapted to the imperatives of the modern era? Instead, cultures are treated as static entities rather than the living organisms that they are in reality" (Said, 1993). In this "fast-food approach" to cultural awareness and multiracial acceptance, the emphasis is, anecdotally speaking, to "learn bits of their language, look at their religion and traditional clothing, try their food: that's it, kids, we've done Vietnam".

WAYS FORWARD: TRANSCULTURAL DISPOSITIONS AND SYSTEMIC CONSTRAINTS

The concept of cultural dispositions of thinking (Casinader, 2104) posits that '… people from the same culture display some consistency in their conception and/or enaction of a thinking skill…' (p. 147). It also argues the process of globalisation is leading to a conflation of these different cultural dispositions within individuals who are more exposed to the impacts of globalisation, thereby creating the transcultural disposition of thinking, in which educators display an '…ability to adapt and modify the conception and enaction of thinking skills to suit [a] particular cultural environment…' (p. 152). The end result of this enlarged capacity is the ability and natural tendency to be overtly inclusive of cultural (and racial) difference.

But the capacity of this approach to achieve widespread change in teaching will continue to be delimited by the broader policy environment and the signals that this environment sends about the role of schools and systems in addressing racism. The low incidence of transcultural dispositions of thinking amongst Australian teachers is not only evidenced by the superficiality of antiracism programmes referred to earlier. It can be seen both at the systemic, policy level and the way in which the notion of racism in schools has been perceived. The development of cultural dispositions in teaching has been, to a significant extent, framed and shaped at the systems level.

Systems imperatives play a powerful role in shaping the prevalent values that underpin Australian schooling and the curriculum (Walsh & Black, 2010). Aspirational policy documents such as the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, which identifies a need for '…Australians…to become 'Asia literate', engaging and building strong relationships with Asia…' (MCEECDYA, 2008, p.4), are keystones to substantive initiatives introduced in values education. If Asia literacy is about equipping young person with capabilities, knowledge and understandings of the region (Kirby, 2009), then it is equally relevant and pertinent to develop teacher capacities for openness towards difference and the evolution of a transcultural perspective.

At a larger scale, and in another example of the current paucity of transcultural thinking, the articulation of multicultural policy in recent decades has been inconsistent in the signals it sends about cultural diversity in Australia, particularly in relationship to migration. Multiculturalism began as policy related to accommodating the cultures of first generation migrants while seeking to promote integration of second and third generations around a set of norms and civic values aligned with a loosely imagined concept of Australian citizenship (Walsh & Leach, 2007). The Whitlam government's termination of the White Australia policy in 1975 (Bradford, 2007) marked a change in thinking about cultural diversity in relation to immigration. Where White Australia policies extending back to 1901 had actively restricted "non-white" immigration to Australia, from the mid-1970s, a more nuanced

understanding of those undergoing the settlement process became evident in immigration policy. A corollary of this was greater recognition of the rights of ethnic groups to cultural maintenance within a broader spirit of cultural pluralism (Galbally, 1978 and Cox, 1996). Over the next two decades the development of multiculturalism policy was characterized by greater recognition of the benefits of cultural diversity as a significant part of contemporary Australian life (for example, see Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989). Multiculturalism developed on the basis of principles such as the right of all citizens to express their own culture and beliefs and the obligation for them to accept the right of others to do the same, and the right to equality of treatment and opportunity free from discrimination on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, location, gender or place of birth (DIC, 2009). These policy movements provided a potentially fertile ground for the development of transcultural thinking; however, recent policy shifts have arguably served to constrain possibilities for the development of this thinking at a systems level.

In recent years, references to multiculturalism in Federal Government policy have faded and arguably even been challenged as a basis of contemporary Australian society. The Howard Government's national values framework sought to articulate culturally specific notions of discipline, identity and values (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). This values agenda capitalized '…on perceived divisions in Australian society…' by employing the comparative pejoratives of terms such as "Australian", / "unAustralian", "us" and "them" (Clark, 2006, pp. 107-108). Whilst the Rudd/Gillard Government promoted a more outward looking view, particularly in relation to Australia's place within the Asian region, notions of social inclusion were fairly hollow and instrumental in nature, and the current Abbott Government has returned to the language of the Howard era, arguably in an even more strident fashion. Even though the inclusion of intercultural understandings in the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum represents a future positive at a federal level, the guidelines are still far from inclusive of differing cultural dispositions of thinking (Casinader, 2014).

State educational policies since the mid-1990s have to some extent filled this policy vacuum by recognising and promoting the benefits of cultural diversity in school life (Walsh & Black, 2010).But in practical terms, it has largely been left to schools to address the daily challenges of racism borne out of cultural diversity. Nevertheless, the restrictions of a cultural disposition of thinking that has held fast to older Euro-centric traditions in the face of an increasingly culturally diverse Australia has diminished the scope and impact of measures that schools have put in place. In a recent study, Walton et al. (2014) identified three types of underlying cultural messages from teachers in antiracism programmes directed at creating an egalitarian atmosphere of 'shared humanity' amongst children that programmes sought "to minimize difference and focus on individual qualities and skills needed to succeed in mainstream society': a 'distributive-justice, color-blind' orientation that acknowledges 'individual racial, ethnic and cultural differences'; a 'procedural color-blind' approach that actively dismisses the relevance of these differences; and a 'colormute' orientation that focuses on removing any discussion of race and racism at all" (p. 114). Only the first of these was seen to have any effect in countering racism, and it is the openness in the acceptance of difference within this approach that shows the seeds of transcultural dispositional thinking.

This general evasion of racism, or an unwillingness to confront it directly, may be due to Anglo-Australians perceiving racism to be a more extreme act that is found only outside Australia (Aveling, 2007). There are certainly parallels to be found in the moral righteousness expressed by the current government in its demonisation of asylum seekers, who by their very non-whiteness, are easier to declare as being the "other" as they are from "over there". Perhaps unexpectedly, such tendencies also seem to be found in academic studies that are aimed at investigating and critiquing racism in education, albeit in a far more subtle form,

and however inadvertent it may be. For example, studies such as Santoro, Reid and Kamler (2001) focus clearly on the experience of Australian teachers born overseas, often working in the area of LOTE, see such examples as personifying the racism experienced by teachers in schools. The fact that there may be Australian-born teachers who are also "non-white", or from ethnic backgrounds outside the Eurocentric sphere, is rarely considered explicitly. To a degree, Santoro (2005) marks a point of difference, as the study looked at the experiences of school educators teaching students from a different cultural background to their own, but even this did not identify Australian-born teachers from non-European heritages as a specific focus.

It is this last concern that needs to be highlighted as one of the main reasons why transcultural dispositions of thinking have been slow to develop within the Australian teaching workforce. As far back as the late 1990s, writers such as Troyna and Rizvi (1997) were decrying the Anglo-whiteness of the Australian teaching profession as a barrier to the addressing of racism through education. It is telling that the last three published comprehensive studies of the characteristics of the Australian teaching profession (Dempster, Sim, Beere, & Logan, 2000; McKenzie, Kos, Walker, & Hong, 2008; McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon, & Murphy, 2011) have all emphasized the dominance of Australian-born teachers in the workforce, with the United Kingdom being the most represented as the birthplace of teachers born overseas. However, aside from comments on the severe under-representation of Indigenous Australians in the profession, no questions were asked as to the cultural and ethnic background of teachers, regardless of where they were born. This has been yet another reflection of the afore-mentioned "Western" attitude, or assumption, that such factors were unimportant in the context of Australian education, and therefore not worthy of research. Such situations reinforces the tendency towards invisibility of cultural difference in Australian schools, or, at the very least, its reliance on Eurocentric cultural stereotypes. As evidenced by the school experience of one of the authors, it was not so long ago that some schools in the Australian State of Victoria were employing a widely-accepted extension activity in which, as part of their geographical study of market users, students went to Queen Victoria Market in Melbourne and determined "ethnic background" purely by looks.

RETHINKING THE FRAME

The need to develop teaching practice that responds to different cultural dispositions of thinking becomes all the more important in light of the culturally diverse make-up of Australia's young people. Indigenous young people account for 3.6 per cent of people aged 15 to 19, and fewer than three per cent of all people aged 20 to 24. One in five young Australians were born overseas, and one in five speaks a language other than English at home (Muir et al., 2009, p. 12). And yet, Australian schooling has never properly recognized and reflected the country's rich culturally diverse make-up in its curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Walsh & Black, 2010).

Developing and harnessing transcultural dispositions in teachers can only go so far without a whole-school philosophy that is open about the cultural composition of its students and staff, and prepared to critically engage all stakeholders in the educational process. Charters and mission statements can establish the importance of diversity in a school (Mansouri, Leach, Jenkins & Walsh, 2009, p. 7). But again, these kinds of statements are only as valuable as the ways in which diversity is dependent on the level of knowledge and understanding of culture by teachers, which is then reflected in curriculum and pedagogy. Where embedded and holistic approaches to building cultures of diversity within schools are found, with teachers playing a pivotal role, good practice provides teachers with the skills to explore, challenge

and develop informed opinions on complex issues and notions such as multiculturalism, social justice and identity. This requires teachers to have, as a corollary, a knowledge and understanding of culture alongside a critical awareness of the cultural dispositions of thinking, and, in turn, necessitates schools and systems fostering opportunities for such competencies and capacities to flourish.

Consequently, it is not surprising that the lead recommendation of one recent study argued for greater professional development for all school staff, whether teachers, school leaders or administrative. Culturally effective pedagogy and general school practice is 'open, relevant, flexible and contestable' (Mansouri, Leach, Jenkins & Walsh p. 12). It is inclusive, participatory, and responsive to student feedback on an ongoing basis. Recognition by teachers as to how different learning styles are culturally informed, and how to actively use this in classroom practice, is central to this approach. Teachers need to be encouraged to reflect on how the content taught in their classrooms is culturally conditioned to be responsive to different learning styles, and conducive to embracing and engaging the diversity inherent in Australian society (Mansouri, Leach, Jenkins & Walsh, 2009, p. 11). In schools with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) student populations, parent involvement is also important in harnessing teachers' knowledge and understanding of culture in ways that would open the possibilities for encounters with difference beyond the school gates. The educational expectations held by some CALD parents '…are sometimes based upon an entirely different educational structure and curriculum, and often a poor understanding of the Australian education system…' (Mansouri, Leach, Jenkins & Walsh, 2009, p. 9). Perhaps most importantly of all, students need to be encouraged to celebrate and maintain their own heritage and culture as a point of self-confidence in difference (Walsh and Black, 2010). For that to occur in an atmosphere of trust, transcultural critical analytical skills and literacies need be fostered amongst teachers, enabling them to not only engage with students, concepts and alternative points of view as a basis for enriching individual perspectives, but also to engage with diversity inherent in their communities and society.

But to foster this environment requires an interrogation of the background attitudes of teacher educators. They enframe possibilities for the development and awareness of transcultural modes of thinking in educators that are both inclusive and reflective of different cultural approaches. Transcultural modes of thinking are essential for modelling an educational environment for students in which cultural difference is accepted and prized, and not held up as a point of separation. In order to harness and develop such a cognitive approach, however, there must be an initial recognition within educational policy that such a cultural bias is inherent in the Australian teaching profession (Santoro, Kamler & Reid, 2001), and needs to be confronted as a systemic challenge.

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