Cultural and linguistic diversity: Issues for schools

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The Context: multicultural Australia

- Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world.
- Since 1945, 6 million immigrants, including 600,000 refugees, have settled here.
- 23% of the population is overseas born and 25% of the Australian born have one or both parents born overseas. Of the overseas born, 25.4% are from UK, 8.7% from NZ and 5.7% from Italy.
- 16% of all Australians are of language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE). In NSW, 25% are LBOTE. 24.8% of the NSW population was born overseas.
- About 42% of all overseas born immigrants settle in NSW. 40% of all overseas born immigrants settle in the Sydney metropolitan area.
- The government’s immigration target for 2006 is 140,000 immigrants and 13,000 refugees.
- 8,000 of the 13,000 refugees will be African. The majority of African refugees settle in three local government areas in Western Sydney: Auburn, Blacktown and Holroyd.
Across the total Australian school population, about 25% of all students are LBOTE.

In NSW in 2005, 27% or 203,378 students from a total enrolment of 741,578 students in public schools were LBOTE.

- In South Western Sydney Region, 62% or 79,381 students were LBOTE.
- In Sydney Region, 47.8% or 40,821 students were LBOTE.
- In Western Sydney Region, 34.1% or 34,280 students were LBOTE.
- In Northern Sydney, 36.5% or 29,130 students were LBOTE.

Over 50% of all students in Australia identified as needing English as a Second Language are enrolled in NSW public schools.

96% of all ESL students in NSW are enrolled in the Sydney metropolitan area. In 2005, there were 66,026 ESL students in primary schools, and 19,039 in secondary schools.

There were 745 schools with ESL programs, taught by 1,700 ESL teachers.
In 2005, there were 6,690 new arrivals, including 1,533 on ‘refugee’ visas.

In South Western Sydney Region, there were 2,744 new arrivals, including 977 refugees, enrolled in 166 schools. Across the State 719 schools had new arrivals.

Primary school new arrivals enrol in their local schools.

Secondary new arrivals enrol for up to four terms in one of fourteen Intensive English Centres or the Intensive English High School. There is only one IEC outside the Sydney metropolitan area. In 2005, 1,900 secondary students enrolled in IECs. The New Arrivals Program is Commonwealth funded.

Currently, the largest IEC is at Holroyd High School. At the end of Term 2, there were 246 enrolments in 22 classes, of which 20 classes were special needs classes. Most of these students were refugees. 148 of the students in the Holroyd IEC in Term 2 were Afghan.
Holroyd High School

- Rapid change in demographic 1995-2006, from 25% LBOTE to 78% LBOTE.
- 22% of students in Years 7-12 in Australia less than three years.
- Approximately 40% of students in Years 7-12 are of recent refugee background.
- 156 students currently on humanitarian or refugee visas.
- 60% of students in Years 11 and 12 and 32% of all students in the IEC receive Youth Allowance.
- In 2005, 182 students in the IEC and 141 in Years 7-12 received support from the Student Assistance Scheme. In 2006 to date, 196 students have received Student Assistance support.
- The school has been in Priority Schools Program since 2001.
Issues for schools like Holroyd

- English language proficiency
- Literacy and numeracy
- Cultural literacy
- Lack of educational background and interrupted education
- Low expectations
- Off standard behaviours and poor social skills
- Poverty and dislocated family situations
- Health issues
- Experience of trauma and mental health issues
- Negative community attitudes
- Resources
What do we do about these issues?

- Schools are responsible for providing appropriate learning experiences for all their students and supporting them in their learning. Schools are also responsible for helping students develop a shared understanding of values and a sense of community. Schools like Holroyd need explicitly to teach cultural literacy, essential for understanding both the school curriculum and Australian society.

- There are three areas of school practice essential to this:
  - Effective learning and teaching
  - Student welfare programs
  - Establishment of a clear set of values, which students can use to negotiate their understanding of both school and the wider society.

- English language learning, and literacy and numeracy are a priority. Without literacy and numeracy skills in English, young people are unable to find appropriate employment, further their study, or integrate themselves successfully into the community.
Teaching, Learning and Student Welfare

- Integrated, whole-school approach to ESL, literacy and numeracy, cultural literacy and student welfare.
- In the IEC:
  - Implementation of the ESL Curriculum Frameworks, teaching English through the Key Learning Areas.
  - Use of PSP funds for direct instruction in reading comprehension and retention, phonic knowledge, fluency in sight words recognition and spelling in beginning literacy classes.
  - Use of PSP funds for excursions to extend IEC students’ understanding and experience of Australian life.
  - Social skills and Settling In programs run by IEC counsellors for selected students. STARTTS counselling program at school for students severely affected by trauma.
- In the high school:
  - Integration support for IEC students enrolling in the high school, and provision of a Bridging Course for senior students to support HSC studies.
  - Strategic ESL program across Key Learning Areas.
Teaching, Learning and Student Welfare

- Stage 5 school developed Board of Studies Endorsed ESL course in HSIE KLA, *Australian Cultural Studies*.
- Employment of additional support teacher and teachers’ aides through PSP for literacy and numeracy programs.
- Implementation of Rainbow Reading program.
- Social skills program for Years 7 and 8 students, including *Rock and Water* for selected Year 7 and IEC boys.
- Work transition programs, Years 9 and 10, and School to Work program.
Values

- Core values of respect and responsibility.
- Explicit teaching of values and expectations, and modelling of ethical practice and behaviours.
- The school’s “ethical connection” with students and their families.
- Making life normal again: building trust and optimism for the future.